

Not All of African-American Problems Attributed to Racism

by Jerry Garner

Some years ago, an African head of state was called upon by a delegation of prominent African-Americans. During his stay, the Black-American leaders began reciting to him their long list of grievances. The visiting statesman waved a weary hand and said, "I am aware of current events. I know everything you are telling me about what the White man is doing to the African-American. Now tell me, what is the African-American doing for himself?" This same question applies today when one examines the social and economic predicament facing millions of African-Americans.

What are Blacks doing about the high unemployment rates among both adults and youth? What is being done to address the problem of drug and alcohol abuse in Black communities throughout the nation? What is being done about Black-on-Black crime? What are African-Americans doing to create a solid economic base in their own community?

Despite gains made by African-Americans as a result of the civil rights revolution, the majority of African-Americans still live in a sea of poverty in the wealthiest country on this planet. In fact, looking at the situation today, one will see that the majority of African-Americans are in worse shape today than their counterparts during the 60's.

According to recent reports:

- The economic gap separating most Blacks from most Whites remains as wide as it was a generation ago.
- Joblessness among African-Americans is double that of Whites; for Black youths the situation is even worse.
- Half of all Black children today live in homes headed by women, most of them crucibles of a new generation of poverty.
- Teen-age pregnancy continues at disproportionately high levels among Blacks—in 1980 the rate for Black women aged 15 to 19 was 100 births per 1,000 women.
- While high school completion rates have climbed, nearly half of all Black 17-year-olds are illiterate.

Basically, there are two main reasons (besides White racism) which account for continuing social and economic disintegration of many African-Americans. They are the failure of African-Americans to form a viable economic infrastructure in their communities and the lack of networking among different segments within the Black community.

Dr. Booker T. Washington made the following statements concerning the social dilemma facing African-Americans: "No people ever got upon its feet and obtained the respect and confidence of the world which did not lay its foundations in successful business enterprises. Although business and commerce do not embrace all the interest of our people, we believe that without a solid economic foundation, it is impossible for any race of people to make enduring, or much permanent progress in the world."

An example of what Washington was speaking of is the rapid progress made by Asian-Americans. After only one generation in this country, Asian-Americans are now a model minority. They have the highest median family income in the nation: \$22,713; Whites \$20,835; and approximately \$18,000 for African-Americans.

Furthermore, Asian-Americans have the largest percentage of high school graduates; Asian-Americans have the lowest unemployment rate of any ethnic group in the U.S. and are more likely to have a college degree.

For many Asian-Americans, the traditional American dream of economic opportunity and political freedom has become a reality. The main reason for their success is due mainly to their developing a strong network among themselves and a viable economic base within their communities.

According to labor department figures, African-Americans earn more than \$200 billion annually. And of this amount, they spend \$170 billion on goods and services, yet they spend less than 7 percent with Black-owned businesses, resulting in the majority of Black consumers' money leaving the commu-



Portland Black owned Business.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

nity in which they live.

This non-support by African-American consumers of Black-

owned establishments is one of the reasons why Black-owned businesses don't survive and why some

African-American entrepreneurs seldom expand their business operations. The lack of economic development has resulted in millions of Blacks not being able to fulfill the American dream of owning a home, of financial security, and of education for their children.

The failure of African-Americans to help themselves economically contributes to the high rate of joblessness in Black communities and the number of female headed households. If Black consumers spent more of their money with African-American-owned businesses, the unemployment rate for Blacks could be reduced.

The logic behind this is simple. When they (Black consumers) spend their money with Black establishments, they create jobs and businesses. Small business accounts for 80 percent of all jobs in the U.S. However, Black-owned firms employed less than two-tenths of 1 percent of the labor force, although African-Americans account for 13 percent of the population.

High joblessness among African-American males contributes to the increase in the number of households headed by Black females and the number of Black babies born out of wedlock. African-American females don't get married because the marriageable men aren't there. Many Black women come to the realization that an uneducated, unskilled, and unemployed African-

American male is a liability, not an asset.

Besides this, Black Americans must do a better job of networking among themselves in an effort to solve the many problems facing their race. Other ethnic groups work closer with each other for the betterment of their own. During a recent interview I conducted with a social activist in Northeast Portland, I was told by the person that it's very difficult to get Black organizations to work together in an effort to address the problems facing Black Portlanders.

Unless vital segments of the Black community cooperate hand-and-hand in coming up with organized strategies to confront the issues concerning Black-Americans, the problems will continue to get worse.

Furthermore, parents and educators must strive harder to instill the importance of education and training for African-Americans. Without a good educational background or skill, nobody, regardless of race, can compete in the general economy in a highly technological society.

Finally, African-Americans who are successful should spend time with young underclass Black youths serving as positive role models—something that many Black youths who live in urban Black ghettos seldom see. All too often African-American children see undesirable

individuals in their neighborhoods—pimps, drug dealers, users, and prostitutes—as role models.

A good example of this was the recent funeral of a convicted heroin dealer, Felix Mitchell, in East Oakland. Mitchell made millions of dollars by selling heroin to poor African-Americans. Despite being a merchant of death, more than 1,000 people cheered as a carriage drawn by two horses pulled away, carrying Mitchell's body in an intricate bronze casket.

A national program should be created to pair disaster-bound African-American youngsters with middle-class adults who can help them develop the academic and attitudinal basis for escaping the underclass. Unless Black-Americans start doing more for themselves, Black communities will disintegrate to the point of imminent collapse.

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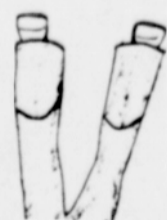
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\$10,000	\$10,000	\$216.17	10.97%	\$ 9,000	\$194.55	10.99%	\$ 8,000	\$172.93	11.02%
\$14,000	\$14,000	\$302.63	10.90%	\$12,600	\$272.37	10.92%	\$11,200	\$242.11	10.94%
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