

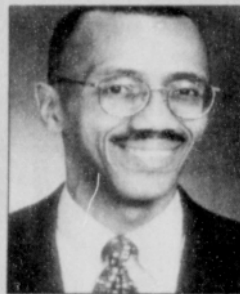
OPINION

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America's Unnatural Disaster Sinking into a depression

BY PHILLIP JACKSON

My aunt, who is a "young" 80 years old, told me recently that "Black people are in trouble!" She told me that black people have not been in this 'bad of shape' since we left the cotton fields of Georgia and Mississippi." She reminded me that the "Great Depression" wasn't that bad for black people because we had hope for a better life. "Today," she says, "Many black people have no hope."



Many black people in America are living in social and economic conditions not much better than those just after slavery ended. They are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than other Americans. In some communities, the unofficial unemployment rate of young black men is upwards of 50 percent. Recent figures from the Pew Memorial Trust found the net worth of black families has dropped in sharp contrast with the net worth of white families.

The incarceration rate in America is unacceptable with about one million black men behind bars. In stark contrast, only about 600,000 black men are in college. The prison rate dangerously undermines the learning power and economic potential of the black community. And few opportunities exist for black men released from prison to legitimately support themselves and their families.

The racial academic achievement gap is also growing. In 2002, black American males only had a 41 percent high school graduation rate. Today, the average 12th grade black student has the reading and math scores of the average 8th grade white student. Uneducated black students become the unemployed, homeless, incarcerated and government-dependent adults of tomorrow.

These and other factors have created an "unnatural disaster" for black people in America that equates to the negative social and economic force of 100 Hurricane Katrinas!

Black people have sunk into a structural depression where we will not emerge even as the economy improves. And worst of all, no

plan exists to address any of these problems. Without a long-term vision, comprehensive planning, effective leadership, talented and creative management and immediate action, the black community, as we know it, might not survive this unnatural disaster.

For the black community to save itself, it must look to itself while working with government, the faith-based community and corporate America to create and manage a viable plan. The black community, with help from people of all ethnicities, must start immediately doing the work necessary to fix these problems.

The most important work we can do, with the support of the government, the faith-based community and corporate America, is to rebuild the black man into a father for his children, a husband for his wife, a provider and protector for his family, an employee, an employer and a contributor to the economy and a builder of his community.

Without viable black men we cannot consistently create good families. Without good families, there will be few strong communities. Without strong communities, there can be no effective institutions for transmitting positive culture. Without a positive culture, there is no framework for the proper education of children.

Without the proper education of a people, there is no economic base. All of these deficits leave many black communities exactly where we are today — in the heart of this unnatural disaster!

Every black person and black family in the United States needs to create and work an effective life plan. Black communities must create communal plans to ensure our future and to help our families plan for the future. Without a comprehensive, systemic and strategic survival plan, black people as a whole will never thrive and might not survive.

As my aunt said, "We are in trouble!" And it is only by doing the "work" to ensure our survival that black people can stop this unnatural disaster. We must become the change we seek.

Phillip Jackson is founder and executive director of The Black Star Project of Chicago, a program designed to help children and students realize their educational potential.

We must become the change we seek.

Why Don't We Feel the Economic Boom?

Reality different than Bush spin

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

President Bush and his staff kicked off the New Year by traveling the country and singing the economy's praises. Vice President Cheney and several other high-ranking staffers repeated the same mantra, "the economy is strong, unemployment is down,

stopped looking for work altogether or those who are underemployed and barely earning enough to feed their families.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, almost two-thirds of the American people think the economy is "fair" or "poor" and nearly 60-percent think it's getting worse. And they're not far off the mark: the median household income has fallen for 5 straight years, meaning the average family has taken a pay cut for 5 years in a row. Family debt has risen over 35-

The African-American community especially is disconnected from this so-called economic boom. The unemployment rate for African Americans is just under 11-percent, more than double that of whites. Nearly 25-percent of African-Americans are poor, compared to 8.6-percent whites and 9.8-percent of Asians.

Clearly, there's a huge gap between what people's pockets and bank accounts are telling them and what the President would like us all to believe. Per-



The American people have had enough deception and public relations spin to take them through three presidents.

Americans are richer and we can thank tax cuts for it all."

It's too bad most Americans don't view the economy through the same rose-colored glasses. In fact, many people around the country are no better off — some are actually doing worse — than they were five years ago, when Bush took office.

The reality is that the U.S. has only 1.3-percent more jobs than it did in March 2001, when the recession began. And, while the unemployment rate, currently at 5-percent, is low, it's still higher than it was in 2000. And the number doesn't take into account people that have

percent in the last four years and the personal savings rate is negative for the first time since World War II. Through it all, families have had to fight rising health care and housing costs. With less money coming in and more money going out, families are struggling.

Not surprisingly, America's poor have only gotten poorer. And more people have fallen into the ranks of poverty. The number of people living below the federal poverty level has increased by more than 5 million in the last 5 years and the child poverty rate increased since Bush first took office.

haps the president is doing with the economy what he did with the Iraq war: telling people what he wants them to believe and hoping they buy it.

The American people have had enough deception and public relations spin to take them through three presidents. It's time for the Bush administration to start dealing in reality. Maybe they'll then be able to come up with a plan that makes American lives better, and not just on paper.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Letter to the Editor

Hurtful Medicaid Reforms

Imagine this: Mom, dad or an elderly loved one, diagnosed with Alzheimer's, comes to live with you.

Under the recently passed Medicaid "reforms" by our officials in Congress, your elderly loved one can not receive Medicaid or any public assistance unless they can

produce a passport or a birth certificate. There are no exceptions even in this type of circumstance of mental impairment.

Should you try and ask where these documents might be, do you think your loved one is capable of telling you? That is how incredibly impossible this new Medicaid over-

haul is going to be for families and our loved ones.

This draconian legislation makes it even tougher for our most vulnerable population to access services that are rightfully theirs.

Tanesha White,
Oregon Action Health Care Committee



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