

About Black America

Written by Phillip Jackson
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With No More Cotton to Pick, What Will America Do with 40 Million Black People?



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What will America do with 40 million Black Americans now that there is no more cotton to pick? Even in states like Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, Black people are no longer involved in the planting, growing or harvesting of cotton. Nowadays these tasks are performed by White and Latino men and women. They drive machines that plant and pick the cotton while millions of Black men in the south are unemployed since transitioning from slave labor to surplus labor. And although picking cotton is not the most desirable job, for Black people in America, there is no more cotton to pick.

Our American economy was built on the backs of Black slaves who were initially brought to America to work in the cotton, tobacco and sugar cane fields. America's dilemma today is what to do with 40 million Black American descendants of those slaves who were shipped, as commodities, to American shores 400 years ago for their economic value yet whose heirs today are deemed of no value to America's economic mission. While America might have once considered shipping Black Americans back to Africa, today that option is neither practical nor palatable.

Let's imagine that when Black Americans mimic the actions of some White Americans—get a good education, steer clear of the criminal justice system, work hard and do everything that society says is necessary for one to succeed in America—their labor market value and family wealth would approximate that of similar Whites, right? Wrong! A University of Chicago study¹ reports that resumes with White-sounding names like Emily and Brendan got twice as many call-backs for job interviews as resumes with Black-sounding names like Lakisha and Jamal, even though they had the exact same credentials. And a Pew Trust study

² shows the average White family has 13 times the wealth of the average Black family: \$141,900 for Whites versus \$11,000 for Blacks.

A Princeton University study³ reports that White felons are just as likely to be employed as Black people who have no felony convictions, so being crime-free does not give Blacks any advantage even over White felons. A recent study by Young Invincibles reports that White high-school dropouts are just as likely to have a job as Blacks who attend college, and they are wealthier than Black college graduates. And a college degree means nothing when it comes to employment discrimination. The Center for Economic and Policy Research reports the unemployment rate for Black college graduates is twice that of White college graduates.

If you are Black in America, being educated, hard-working and crime-free ensures nothing. Black unemployment and the deprivation of Black wealth in America are structural, systematic and intentional. Having one, two or ten college degrees won't change the structural nature of

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Black unemployment, discrimination against even the best and brightest Black employment candidates nor the pernicious racial wealth gap.

The American economic system seems to do just fine with the planned abysmal education of Black children, the massive unemployment of Black adults and the hyper-incarceration of Black men. In fact, the stock market recently reached a new high. This current employment discrimination/wealth deprivation may be the most recent form of planned racial control to replace the old American systems of Slavery, The Black Codes, Convict Leasing and Jim Crow, along with modern-day Mass Incarceration. And it might be more effective than any previous form of racial control.

Almost anyone from anywhere in the world can come to America to achieve their dream, but most Blacks who live in America—educated or not, crime-free or not, hard-working or not—will not be able to acquire minimal wealth or to get jobs even sweeping streets, cleaning toilets or picking cotton. Living in America has become a nightmare, not a dream, for many Black Americans. Obviously, the magical formula for economic success in America is to have white skin. It has been this way for at least 400 years, and--barring a breakthrough--will likely remain for the next 400 years regardless of how much education Black people achieve.

And now that our Northern cities have tired of their Black populations, much of America is “getting out of the Black-people business.” Neighborhoods that used to be “Black Belts,” like Harlem in New York City, Bronzeville in Chicago and much of Washington, D.C., have gone upscale, and, as a result, most Blacks cannot afford to live there. Social programs and human infrastructure have disappeared. So it is out of our urban centers and back to the rural South for many of us. This time, however, we will not be allowed to even pick cotton because there’s no more cotton for Black Americans to pick.

If Black America is to survive (and there is no assurance that it will), the initial five keys to transforming our economic and social problems include:

1) Rebuild the Black family. Every major problem in the Black community, including poor education, massive unemployment, senseless violence, hyper-incarceration, lost spirituality, low-quality housing options and high mortality rates, can be traced to the disintegration of the Black family. The Black family was systematically destroyed during slavery, with the sanction of the government, to benefit the American economic system. The devastating effects of the annihilation of the Black family abound today.

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2) Provide Black boys with strong, positive Black men as mentors, role models and, particularly, a connection to their fathers. Black boys, like any other children, imitate and become what they see. It is critical, therefore, that Black children see strong, positive Black men. Social programs and public policies of the 1950s through the 1980s discouraged Black men from being in the lives of their children.

3) Control the negative peer culture and the electronic media that propagate and glorify images of Black boys and men as violent, irresponsible and uncaring human beings. Either Black people will control the media that we consume or the media will control us. Modern media has put Black America on a trajectory to its own self-destruction.

4) Understand that we live in a world where Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine (STEMM) are “king.” If we are to survive, (and the **IF** is real), it will be because we understand and powerfully equip ourselves for this new world. Black people must teach Black children accordingly.

5) Control our economic fate by mastering the principles of entrepreneurship, business development, management, finance, accounting, advertising, marketing, manufacturing, construction, technology, agriculture, saving, investing, banking, tithing and inheritance, and teach these principles to our children.

We must control our economic fate. This is the only way that Black people can remain viable in America. Unless we, Black people, quickly respond to the changes in our world, even some of our cousins on the continent of Africa will not want us. And we will truly be “a lost tribe” wandering the world without a home. We must realize that we live in an “Educate or Die” country and an “Educate or Die” world! There is no middle ground. With no more cotton to pick, what will America do with 40 million Black people? Or better yet, what will 40 million Black people do in America to ensure our own survival? And when will we start?

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www.blackstarproject.org , for donations click here: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/blackstarproject?code=Website%20Top>

1 U of C Study - <http://www.chicagobooth.edu/pdf/bertrand.pdf>

2 Pew Study - <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>

3 Princeton Study - <http://ac360.blogs.cnn.com/2008/08/09/study-black-man-and-white-felon-same-chances-for-hire/>

About the author of this article (previously published by the *Sri Lanka Guardian*): Phillip Jackson is the founder and executive director of [*The Black Star Project*](#)

in Chicago. This organization is a philanthropic entity intended to encourage and support young people in academic development through community and parental involvement. Jackson is an American politician who worked in human services at the Chicago Office of Management and Budget (1994) before being part of the Chicago Public Schools as director of intergovernmental affairs in 1995 (where he has also served as chief of education) and the Chicago Housing Authority (which has an annual budget of over \$881 million)

as CEO in 1999. Jackson has been active with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago, operating as CEO. Jackson is the recipient of a Chicago Cares "Power of One" Leadership Award and the 2003 Illinois Fatherhood Initiative's Father of the Year.

Jackson is a graduate of Roosevelt University and National Louis University. He received a BA in philosophy and a certificate in education, respectively.