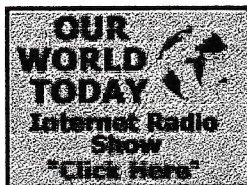




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Black Talk



Lets Look Inward For Solutions

12-12-01

By Byron A. Ellis
Guest Contributor

It was interesting to read Mr. Anthony Asadullah Samad's article, "Decoding "Ghetto Logic:" The First Real Step To Decoding Racism." He made some salient points on decoding (discerning) the intentions of others. Particularly, how some individuals (regardless of ethnicity) behave when they endow themselves with superiority complexes. Likewise, when people endow themselves with inferiority complexes they perceive that they and others like them are inferior. And, those that do not perceive superiority or inferiority complexes will, of course, behave differently.

It is, therefore, our mental frames (subconscious beliefs) that propel us to behave in one form or another. Hence, our ability to achieve is, in part, contingent on our worldview. Thus, if we formulate inferior mental frames that limit our vision, we limit our progress and will act as inferior. Therefore, we often constrain ourselves, and those around us, with preconceived limitations.

One constraining factor is our environment, the negative climate that we allow in our communities. Today, many of our communities are not conducive to intellectual growth or cross-cultural expansion, because we have yet to understand the benefits of investing in human capital. Our lack of understanding is not a failure of the "system," it is our failure: a painful failure of leadership.

Therefore, rather than seeking to blame the "system," we must look inward and ask the right questions. In doing so, we may be able to develop the appropriate networking capabilities that will guarantee a better future for the upcoming generation and the nation. Moreover, our success will create vicarious reinforcement in the younger generation. Since, they learn by observing what adults do, or fail to do. In essence, observational learning is important in altering behaviors. Experiments by social learning theorists have shown that we acquire new skills or information, and alter old behaviors by watching others.

Our environment expands only when we nurture it and it contracts when we do not nurture it. Unfortunately, we have not nurtured it as much as we should. There has been a disproportionate focus in the political arena and little attention on urban economics. That is, as a community, we have not seriously assessed the allocation of black human capital

and how society distributes goods and services among urban citizens. The lack of focus on scarcity may be due to lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge, however, is not an excuse for wasting human capital.

Thus, it is also important to decode the messages, visions and goals of urban leaders. Since, anyone can encode messages that are not in the best interest of the community. In fact, blaming the system, or construct, for urban problems is not in the best interest of the community. It lulls the community into a climate of helplessness. Consequently, it is incumbent on each individual to decode every message, regardless of the source.

Thus, we must decode messages from those that purport to be urban leaders, and from those that don't. More importantly, however, we must decode their ability to raise (diminish) the standard of living in urban areas. Hence, it is paramount to measure their progress in achieving stated objectives. In essence, those things that urban dwellers hope for, leaders must facilitate them within a reasonable time frame.

Urban leaders should be able to demonstrate their contribution to improvements in the stock of housing, in lowering the unemployment rate, in raising the quality of public education, in building robust financial institutions. Moreover, they should provide a yearly account of their leadership. For instance, they should be able to account for the number of housing stock replenished or added due to their leadership. Similarly, they should be able to brief the community on steps that they implemented to reduce the unemployment rate, to improve high school graduation rates and entry and retention of urban high school graduates into colleges, and to increase the access to financial institutions.

If urban leaders cannot facilitate community benefits then they should not purport to be leaders. In many instances, individuals purporting to be leaders lack the wherewithal to lead. Thus, they perform a disservice to the community. These leaders also use coded language to maintain their status at the expense of those who they claim to represent. Nonetheless, it is wrong to put all the blame on these leaders, since urban dwellers are responsible for influencing, and ensuring that, the leaders continuously improve the standard of living of the individual and the community.

Clearly then, we all are responsible and accountable for the collective progress of the Diaspora. And, it is wrong, in this day and age, to blame others (system or construct) for what we have failed to deliver.

Our challenge is to appropriately diagnose the present barriers that prevent central city residents from attaining higher living standards. And, collectively develop and implement strategies that will overcome the challenges and capitalize on the available opportunities.

How do we start and what model should we use? The best way to start is with existing community institutions, such as civil rights organizations. Unfortunately, their resources and wherewithal appears to be limited. Furthermore, it may behoove us to discard entrenched institutions and old philosophies and establish a new structure with new leaders that are accountable and prone to deliver.

The model should be similar to the one introduced by Marcus Garvey with modifications. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican born orator inspired millions of blacks worldwide with his vision of economic and cultural liberation. In the early 1900s, he promoted economic and cultural independence of blacks. Thus, his vision is one of the better models for global liberation. Moreover, it concurs with Gary Becker's (1993) view that "in a world with constant return to scale in production, two segregated economies with the same distribution of skills would completely bypass discrimination, and they would have equal

wages and equal return to other resources, regardless of the desire to discriminate against the segregated minorities."

Therefore, we must also strive to overcome dissonance behaviors. For instance, urban dwellers consume news (media) that is psychologically harmful. The mainstream news media is an industry that seldom portrays urban dwellers as valuable citizens. Clearly, an industry that uses few blacks as editors and columnists cannot reflect the concerns of blacks. Yet, blacks continue to consume news that ignores them. Why not support the media that reflects the interest of urban dwellers? Moreover, if urban dwellers support the black media, there would be a transfer of advertisement expenditures from the mainstream media to the black media. In essence, a wealth transfer would occur.

Furthermore, communication is a powerful weapon; it helps in the process of thought creation. It helps us to understand and decipher issues. It will assist us in the process of implementing strategies that will improve the allocation of urban dwellers in the production of goods and services and distributions of goods and services to central city residents. Moreover, the black media is a vital link in developing a dialogue between members of the Diaspora

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