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Black Talk



Self-Reparation Methodology

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Guest Contributor

Some social scientists believe that individual choices and opportunities determine behaviors. For instance, they indicate that our choices are a function of our preferences or tastes. Moreover, they indicate that our choices are not independent of how society allocates resources. Thus, it is the interaction between what we would like to have and what we can afford that determine our choices.

Preferences are those subjective things that we would like to do, the exchanges that we are willing to make. Opportunities are a system of laws and property rights imposed by states and the federal government that determines the potential opportunity set of each individual. It is, in essence, our limited budget.

Opportunities, however, were not available to blacks during slavery and the Jim Crow periods. Thus, states and the federal government fashioned laws to prevent blacks from freely exercising choices and capitalizing on opportunities. And, these laws curtailed the accumulation of generational wealth formation for black Americans.

According to economists, the notion of substitution and trade-offs are critical to the concept of value in economics. The concept of substitution is our willingness to exchange goods or services to get more of other goods or services. Clearly, under state sponsored slavery and the Jim Crow exclusionary laws, blacks were not able to experience the notion of substitution and trade-offs and, hence, the concept of economic value or wealth formation.

Americans, and the world, are aware of the atrocities that the states and federal government sponsored against blacks during slavery and the Jim Crow periods. Nonetheless, some white Americans do not believe that the perpetrators should repair the terror that deprived blacks of their labor income and potential investment opportunities. They excuse the terror by claiming that they did not participate in it. Thus, they refuse to recognize that the institutions that sanctioned slavery and Jim Crow laws are still in existence. Nonetheless, these institutions remain accountable for their misdeeds and we should not allow them to evade their responsibility. Therefore, the Diaspora should continue to pursue this accountability through American and international courts.

Others claim that it is not possible to assess the loss of black labor income and investment opportunities due to slavery and Jim Crow laws. In doing so, they attempt to deny that economic opportunities are observable. However, historical archives document wages, prices of goods and services, and available investment opportunities during slavery and the Jim Crow periods. Hence, we can quantify the forgone wages, and investment opportunities, of black Americans during such barbaric periods.

The other argument that some whites often use is that the states and governments do not have the funds to compensate blacks for the physical and psychological terror imposed on black citizens. Clearly, this is a bogus argument. Congress, at their whim, provides funds to bail out commercial entities, to provide retroactive tax breaks to fortune 500 companies, they fund arms for foreign governments, and so on. Thus, funding is available; it is the value that whites assign to black Americans that prevent the states and the federal government from undoing their evil deeds.

Nevertheless, states and the federal government have a moral obligation to remedy the economic and psychological costs that they imposed on black Americans. Although, providing individual compensation may be difficult, it is certainly possible for the states and the federal government to create a climate within black communities that enhances economic growth. For instance, funds can be set up to revitalize decaying housing structures and to provide skill training (electricians, plumbing, carpentry, etc.) to community resources for the upgrading. Likewise, the fund can be used for developing trade and commerce within the revitalized neighborhoods; for improving the delivery of education and skill training; and for establishing prison based distant learning education programs.

Clearly, in an integrated society such programs will not only benefit blacks, but will help others as well. Additionally, when we increase the income potential of citizens, we enhance the demand for goods and services. Thus, such action contributes to a vibrant economy and will reduce the rate of imprisonment and recidivism. Nevertheless, the value system of most whites prevents them from treating others as they treat themselves. Therefore, it is unlikely that whites will view such funding approaches as socially beneficial.

Hence, the Diaspora has an obligation to repair itself. Thus, blacks must begin to understand, and shed, the psychological cost that the terror of slavery, Jim Crow laws and discrimination imposed on them. Moreover, they must openly discuss the observable (assimilation) and unobservable (denial of African heritage) consequences of oppression and uncompensated black labor.

One way of reversing the black psychosis, the denial of African heritage, is to understand the current available choices and how they can improve the standard of living. For instance, school age children, and even adults, can trade leisure for education. Likewise, adults and children can trade consumption for savings, and hence investment. More importantly, we must not only understand the benefit of education and savings, but we must be able to see tangible results of our efforts.

Thus, although slavery, Jim Crow laws and current day discrimination continues to affect us, we can through our collective effort (self-repair) limit and even eliminate the effects of oppression. Therefore, we ought not to invest limited resources in unproductive endeavors.

We should collectively save and invest in the economic revitalization of black America, the West Indies and Africa. We have the power and the talent; all we need is the will.