

Original Paper

Transformation of Urban Black America into a Free Enterprise System

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Abstract

This article presents personal reflections on a vision to move the Blacks in America from a state of despair to one of prosperity. It is a bold attempt to present the experience of 50 years of activism, teaching, and writing on the subject. I have a clear vision of how the community, local government, and the university can join forces in a social and economic development project that would help poor Blacks form and own “tenant Organizations” and make them “Stockholders,” through carefully planned and executed cooperation. It is a real game changer in the lives of the American Blacks since the days of Black Wall Street.

Keywords

Social Economic Development, Political Power, Organizing, Cultural Self Esteem

1. A Bold Project

America continues to excavate, burrowing and driving the country, into the deepest, darkest, and most frightening economic abyss ever experienced, while pushing downward, like a “bulldozer,” the “African urban American,” into a fierce, deeper “economic depression,” and state of desperation. This comes along with an ongoing, unimaginable, racially impactful episode of COVID-19. The, inordinate, effect of the Corona virus on Blacks, is the result of the fact, that Blacks were not planted in the comparable, rich soil, of “American equity.” And this was simply due to “pigmentation,” alone. Having been sown, firmly, and contemptuously, in “social in justice,” Blacks were a natural “harvest” for the Virus, having been “locked out” of the natural “pool” of riches, that would have been the natural reward of a quality education and work history, based on merit. Blacks have worked in every institution, imagined in this country, all of which, were designed originally, for Black exclusion. This is called “Institutionalized Racism.” The “Institution of Slavery,” was set, in place long ago, while America was

wrestling with how to corrupt and “wrap systems” around it. “Systemic Racism,” is just a saying, to opt out the abhorrence, to the charge of “guilt,” of the original reason, for committing this Siamese, “original Sin.” This conscious intent, to consent human beings to “unconscionable separation from family, and forced labor,” under the rationale that Blacks were not human, so they would not to be assailed as racist. Those who “liberally” consented, to that which is inordinately wrong, and still cling to it, find the use of “Systemic,” rather than “Institutionalized Racism,” better camouflage, and makes them less complicit. And this, mind you, while flaunting publicly, and continuously, the greatest “economic breach of promise,” ever publicly announced, and openly reneged—“social and economic equality to all.” This injustice is now an open secret, exposed to, and blatantly apparent, before the whole world. This, affront, and mind you, regardless to the historical and highly visible contribution made by Blacks, the forced abandonment of a Continent, and homeland, Africa, to forge the establishment, that undergirds the economic “base line” of this great nation. The Gross National Product (GNP), was established, sustained, and maintained by their loss of country and primary family, and awesome loss of “blood and sweat and tears.” “Black slaves,” were the labor and the “bedrock” of this mighty Republic.

Yet, the longer, lower and deeper America continues to dig into this depth of misery, it hears constantly, a rap on the floorboards, beneath, Black Americans, stretching, scratching, reaching and searching for a place of entry, even to the knowledge of previous discomfort, and the experience of rejection, known to be inside. Still, wretched and unsheltered, and still on the outside of any modicum of economic equity, the door of entry, to this known calamity of abandonment, inside, is yet sought, as a place of refuge, as there is no other place for economic shelter. We are the lost, abandoned, detached, undeserved “immigrants” within. And, indeed, once unwillingly brought inside, even after 400 plus years, even yet, at the lowest place of economic entry, we still presume to assume the highest burden, with this immodest entry, that we might collectively, somehow, slow down and stop this fall into oblivion, and to right size this society, to one of political equity, and sanity, and save us all. Youth, along with ages of all other generations, and people of all hues, are in the streets today, marching and shouting, “Black Lives Matter.” This is Part II of the Civil Rights Movement. It is another approach, to confront the “conscience” of America. I was in that march, with a similar shout, but different slogans, some 50 years ago. The havoc, social fallout, ramifications, and ripple effects are reminiscent of what I recall, in that pursuit of our gallant confrontation, of the “conscience,” of America. To reach this illusive “conscience,” one must bypass the protector and defender of it, the “pocketbook,” “Free Enterprise,” which is on full alert and on guard against heavy “pigmentation.” And that “purse,” once opened, does not do so unless, the prospect of belief, is, that the rewards will be ever more abundant. The hard reality is that “Free Enterprise” has a “calloused conscience.” I give my full sympathy, energy, expertise to today’s effort, of the movement, and I truly believe the confrontation will take us farther down the “tracks” each time, but not to the “station,” where we hope to arrive, “economic equality.” That will take real perseverance and political power.

The African American must realize that he/she is, “standing on the board,” of the “Monopoly Game,” which is “Free Enterprise,” and you cannot win by getting in the game late, certainly, not 400 years too late. So, you must either change the way the game is played, or play the game a different way, or not play the game at all. We have no choice, option, to survive, so we must play in a way that we collectively use, and focus our own resources, strategically, and as well placed as possible, in our own best interest. Whether this is right or wrong is not the great argument of our time. What we do know is that the way the game is being played now, in this non-egalitarian society, there is “no possible win”, or parity position for us.” Like you, I have listened to and heard the “old Black Community Sages, of my time, of, whom I am now one, say, “just keep on living,” with the following admonition, “you can’t beat a man at his own game, or tricks.”

We have been experiencing and will soon realize, within the decade, that the largest economic shift of wealth in America will have taken place, since Reconstruction, after the Civil War. Only this time “pigmentation and military victory” will not be the exclusive reason for the decision for “the privileged” to excel, and for such disbursements to be made. But you can be certain, that “color” will play a prominent role. The argument of “class” will be along these lines, “Who will get the best, of the, worst,” that is, of the leavings behind, in the battle for social class positions. And no, there will be no “Reparations.” And, with the disproportionate status of “poor, near poor,” reaching into higher and higher percentages, into the total population, of every ethnic group, society will become very unbalanced and unstable, socially and politically. Thus, in this awkward and unhealthy imbalance, the highest income populations, will be those who will have relative economic comfort. This “elite” group will not be working for money but will “have their money working for them.” They will occupy the highest ten percent income group of all Americans, and will be elevated beyond reach of the masses, as we approach the status of a “caste society.” While this is not a new phenomenon, the ranks of the powerful and wealthy, will be almost impregnable for entry. This will be established, achieved, and secured by the fact that we are eliminating, via the “digital revolution,” more jobs and workspaces for people, than can be accommodated, for potentially new work entrants, and those jobs that are lost in attrition (Peters, 2017). And, because of “remote work,” and the “ripple effect,” which follows afterward, there will be lesser need to promote the sustainability of large spaces, offices, and other supportive services and resources. The people who are now placed on “furlough,” will soon, unfortunately, find themselves permanently on “AWOL”—Absent With-Out Leave, but potentially permanently locked out of employment. Many of whom will ultimately receive “Dishonorable Discharges,” from their workplaces, declared unneeded and unfit for production, due to their surplus skills and “excess hands on board.” This will be the consequence of surplus labor, and the desire to create exuberant wealth, for the “people who are using money to make money,” for the company or organization, from which they were formerly hired and associated.

The only resolve, to make this adjustment, correction, “to bridge the broadening economic gap,” between the poor, near poor, and those rapidly falling into poverty, is, and will be, the greatest issue

facing America (Woolf, Johnson, & Geiger, 2006). Yet we risk widening the gap. This “gap” looms so frightening, in the very near future, in a decade or two, from now, when the situation of poverty becomes so painfully extreme, that it is a challenge to the “social mooring” of the system. There must be political change, or a change of the “social perspective,” to bring about social equity. The latter has been a long hard and tried, “tug of war” proposition. Many people have marched, and shoes worn low and bare, flags flown, slogans printed, hearts swollen and broken, to bring about change for “social parity.” And such does bring “petite and marginal changes,” but not the realization of substantive progress.

The only point of leverage that can bring equilibrium to the Political, Social and Economic structure is the simple acceptance, and implementation, of “full representative democracy.” Two factors are of great urgency for this “peace, parity, and prosperity,” for all to take place, is the operationalization and acceptance of “equal justice.” Not for the quieting of any “special aggrieved group,” but as the “social healing salve,” for a nation. This must be the solution, now, and in a hurry. A continuous delay, of the treatment of this cancerous malady, and the intermittence of challenge and avoidance, of this promise, will exhaust the nation, harden positions to the refusal to participate in its own best interest and salvation, and bodes ill for the nation. Not to achieve this purpose, is to burst a ground swell of “damned up rage, anger,” and the “desire for revenge.” Such a punitive delay leads only to the protracted, parcel correction, of wrongs, and it gives greater reason to question the sincerity of such future commitment and honest intent. And, when a hand is extended, or offered from a position of power, only to maintain power, with an option of, “take it or get lost,” it will be summarily rejected with disdain. Recall, a similar such offer was made to our indigenous brothers.

2. End of the Majority Group—Beginning of the Minorit—Minority Groups

In less than a quarter century from now, there will be “no majority group” in America (Poston & Sàenz, 2019). All ethnic groups will be of minority status. But the Latin American and African American groups will simply represent one third of the total population. While these populations are currently less organized and manpowered groups, coming to the “bakery,”—the “System” as we know it—with baskets asking for bread, they will soon come to acknowledge, and keenly recognize, that the “bakery” is in their community. The battle will commence soon, openly, between these two ethnic groups, as they will be set opposed, one to the other, over the “leavings” in this society. This will be the strategy of “the haves,” to maintain their status and power. This is the story of another time, not to be visited here.

These two populations could—formulate their own political party—form their own Political Planks and assert their own needs and demands. They could support, or withhold, likewise for leverage, the meeting of their demands, as opposed to “being taken for granted,” and assumed to have no political clout or “home of their own,” to negotiate and “showcase “their grievances. This is a different approach from “pleading” or bargaining for a “splinter” in the “Platform,” of the Democratic Party. Together, they can seek and demand “Social Justice” from the “apex, “of the Political Structure. The process in

doing so can be to “clear up,” or “clean Up,” the social injustices bereft of “Institutionalized racism,” which bleeds into all other Institutional structures like leukemia, carrying all the same “filthy racial infirmities”—inequities and social injustices. Racisms the foundation, which begets poverty, upon which all other such injustices are erected, and it is that upon which the “system depends,” to keep other disenfranchised groups disorganized, scattered and fragmented, in demands of their rights, as it rations out, its presumed allotments, of convenient and situation ally acceptable rights to others. This could/would be a future strategy of the system, that will and can be the backup, as it parlays the often-feigned, suggested promise, of incremental “good will”. This extended offer, which lags, eons, years, in limbo, seeking the appropriate adjustment, the hoped-for discharge of “egalitarianism,” which, now, is highly suspect by “people of color”.

3. While Impatiently Waiting for Egalitarianism

Since “African Americans” cannot stand around, on one hope and then another, watching and waiting for social justice, while our socioeconomic life sinks, into a near breathless level, or a level that barely permits us to exist above that of breathing, we know that charity cannot, and will not, sustain us. We must do what we must do, to sustain and survive, both “hope and health”. I believe, not only will poverty penetrate African American families to a point of desperation, but it will make us tread upon the lowest echelon of our moral Self-Esteem (Kirkland, 2016). Communities and City Governments, for the dominant numbers of poor African Americans, are, themselves, economically unstable and collapsing, “under water” (Fullilove, 2016). We reside in partially abandoned, socially distraught, forsaken and forgotten residential areas. We are compelled to dwell in a food desert, the most commodity depleted, segregated and poverty devastated urban areas,” and they are becoming even more poverty bleak, and barren over the years. This being so, the area can be, and is easily condemned and “confiscated,” gentrified, and held hostage, for whatever newly federal program designed and disguised to confiscate them. This is all to the benefit for tax breaks, for the wealthy, those using governmental money—our tax money—to make money, by using such “boondoggle” and shipping us out of our “last frontier, “urban America”.

4. What is the Work ahead for African Americans?

The “goal” is to engender hope, pride, and the entrepreneurial industry, throughout the Black Urban area, by organizing and establishing a “Community Council,” to make the urban area, a Community Environment, one that is economically viable, stable, safe and minimally sustainable for its residents. Through this process there will be multiple establishments of venues, commercial enterprises, and corporate ventures that will create work and generate other such enterprises, some distant, that could serve as “entrepreneur satellites,” in outside areas to flourish. This will generate and encourage the prospect of inclusiveness, and a general, *es spirited corps*, that all are members of society, and are upwardly mobile, forward thinking, and moving progressively in a predominately “Black Integrated,”

Community (Kirkland, 2020).

This “New Frontier, I have written about for years,” is the “urban core” of “anywhere Black urban America,” from which the African American is being eased out, pushed out and ‘coned out,’—(deluded to think)—to search for the greater “green pastures, of suburbia” (Kirkland, 2020, 2016). This “New Frontier” will ultimately become the “Last Frontier,” for Blacks as it become the home of the numerous white university graduates—and the so called “white pioneers”—of the last and the next decades, who cannot find employment, or housing or entertainment to accommodate their taste, style or cost of living.

5. Packing up and Leaving the Wealth and Opportunities behind in Cities

All that is required for profitable wealth, is that Blacks amass, the combined African American capital, that is being left behind, within the “Black Ghetto,” and harness their mental prowess, amongst themselves. Simply to purchase and lay claim to the “wasteland”, of empty and broken-down houses in any city, bereft to its non-industrialized base, and to build a Housing/Holding Corporation—single houses and apartments, and commercial enterprises. Such a Corporation could sell or hold property from the advantaged position of a Mortgagor, or that of a Mortgagee. This can be done now because there are, yet, enough African Americans left in cities to create, nearby, residential, physical presence, and they present fear of fiscal loss to other such white Venturesome entrepreneurs, but not for long. They could, with the help of Black elected officials, now in political office, with equal vision, purchase back land, properties, and rehabilitate and rent and recycle the money into a Holding Corporation/s. The goal will be to select good tenants, have them form a “tenant Organization,” and make them “Stockholders,” in the Cooperation. Within three years, or such limited time, the capital flowing from the Holding Cooperation/s would permit the building of other venues. Private owners, and the Community Corporation, would be Stockholders to all affiliated. Tenants would be the ones responsible for the socialization of their children, the up keep of the “New Town in Town,” or area, and would police themselves and those “moving in,” or passing through the area. They receive “dividends” based on their ‘mutual investment,’ and such a people would empower the community. They would scrutinize, police, and support its own efforts, with the capital outflows of the investment and timely maintenance; the community would exemplify “bragging rights,” for the residents, as it flourishes civilly, politically, and economically. And would invite and command the upkeep of the neighborhood and community.

6. A local effort with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at the Helm: A Vision

Initially, there will be a Grant-Investment Disbursement for the first phase of this Bold Venture. Targeted areas, initially, would include such areas like Ferguson, Missouri and East Saint Louis, Illinois. The former, because it is the “national epitome” for social unrest and “Institutionalized Racism,” the latter being that its a city with great dysfunction of political and economic systems. The social morass serves as an example that what can be accomplished there, with such formidable obstacles, is arguably

achievable anywhere in America. Virtually, any city east of the Mississippi River with a population of one hundred thousand (100,000), will find an equivalent of East Saint Louis population, “encamped,” imbedded within its midst.

What will make this a unique approach is that there will be a designed, implemented and followed up plan, via study and research, a process for emulation. This is a process that can be evolved from the University, in consort with professional and lay experts in Social Economic Development practices. This will be a unique, “Town and Gown,” marriage, whereby the founder of this Social Work Approach, at the outstanding Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, is known for his expertise in organizing, group work/dynamics, will work in conjunction with a combination of other renowned selected scholars, of other university disciplines. Additionally, business, architecture, and the like disciplines will engage in, and help orchestrate, African American urban residents, in this unheralded path to Free Enterprise and a “Quasi Sustainable” community.

7. The Community Council

This will be the most unique technique in organization development ever undertaken. The “Core members” of the Community Council will be selected, as the unit to consecrate the foundation upon, of which there will be a consummate number. The Chief Consultant—Social Economic Developer—will approve the original members and help the “Core” group plan the structure for the creation of the full elected Council.

The Community Council will be organized with the assistance of the Chief, Social Economic Developer Consultant, and other consultants to formulate a five-year plan which be presented formally to the Community-at-Large.

Details of the Community Council-purpose—goals—structure-representation of community areas present—how the whole community is envisioned to become “stake holders” and “stockholders” will be disseminated. The concept of Stockholder is unique as it delivers what it implies, benefits/dividends, to the people, as a result of their entrepreneur endeavors, which will be products of community planning and efforts in sustaining and protection (Kirkland, 2020).

The similarity of community process, goals and processes end here. The undertaking of this process is all inclusive. There is the recognition that there is a process of inclusion—those longing to do and be better off—which addresses the need of having—owning—belonging—hoping—and mutually sharing, that is essential for re-socialization, of the oncoming generation to understand the essence that Community is co-equal to Family, and the realization that “The Community is the Womb of the Family”. This is made evident and is manifest in community provision and protection. To embrace this reality, and to exercise it in community living, changes the interactions and ethics of a people, and the reinforcement of such principles, changes the generations that are to follow.

8. The Community is Alive—Dying—or a Dead Bird

The translation of a people from a day to day—paycheck to paycheck—survival to existence—changes the hopes, aspirations for self and children and neighbors. This in turn leads to enhanced Self-Esteem, hope, and self-discipline, the transformation of community discipline and self-policing, of both criminal wrong doings and illicit and immoral behavior. Furthermore, this translates into ambition, school attendance and achievement, the condemnation of crime by community, and the welcoming of police involvement as invitees, with expectation for equal service, protection, and respect, as that provided all other communities. These police officers will be known by the population, who will have been involved in their training, and are expected to “protect” the community not to “patrol” to “control” it. The two wings of a viable/good community are “economic sufficiency” and “moral discipline,” one begets the other in support, or as one wingtips and falls downward, so does the other wing uplifts—as so does the bird—to stay on even keel—in homeostatic balance, as so does the community.

9. Proposed University Support

For the community to be adept in furthering—implementing—evaluating—the Social Economic Development processes—classes will be taught—as required—to small “selected” groups of city participants, including those in the Community Council—and they will receive certificates of participation and completion of the course with the University.

The General Community Council is the heart of the community—I have described how it is developed in my paper, social work—the other face of social work (Kirkland, 2020). There are three elements of that group essential—it consists of:

- (a) Clergy/Religious
- (b) Merchants/residents and
- (c) Committee members of the Community Council

The three will function as “The Group of the Whole”. The function of this Full body is to keep notice of the agenda and priorities of the City Council, and grade how well the appropriate needs are addressed and resolved. They are to meet in concert, one week prior to the Official City Council meetings. They will be ready with a copy of the respective City Council’s agenda, and/or their own. They will state what they would prefer as the resolve and their position on matters and observe how their opinions correlate with those decisions of the Council. They will note how the matters were voted on and review the Council members’ decisions or positions, in consideration of such for future general elections.

This General Community Council is augmented by seminars by the university in Social Economic Development. They are to select and/or approve citizens from the Community for seminars in Social Economic Development Certificate. Seminar classes structured by the university, as designated, to community residents regarding Social Economic Development processes and procedures and will be

held in designated Community Sites. Approval for attendance is given by the General Community Council to individuals who will meet as small groups of citizens, representative of community.

Some features of the curriculum include:

- One credit hour is assigned for attendance for 15 hours class attendance
- Community Youth who are aged 18 to 25 can qualify for a one-credit hour (free) class study at the university -after receiving three certificates from participants of the seminar and,
- Must otherwise qualify, according to university specifications

Selected community members for the Social Economic Development Certificates are—for example Barbers, Hairstylist, Clergy, Church Congregation Members, and Merchants in the seminars—and are enabled to understand the processes of Social Economic Development, and to gain greater understanding/assistance to the Social Economic Development processes in community. The university will issue each graduate a certificate and the cumulative total of five certificates collected by any city resident and can enable the individual to receive the right to compete for a three-credit university class, if qualified.

The process of Social Economic Development is to be initiated by City Governments, and is to be supported and scrutinized by the, “Community at large,” under the leadership of the Community Council. The Community Council is to be an influential guiding force in follow up and follow through of activities planned and implemented by City Government.

10. Conclusion

I have taught, and published nationally, for over 50 years, that Blacks in America were being pushed out of the urban core, by both “bodacious” and “subtle” means. To this end, Blacks are being resettled in, and beyond suburbia, and exurbia, enrooted to rural America. This is a journey in reverse, returning to where they have come from, near rural and rural America, many years ago, back to their geographical origin (Falk, Hunt, & Hunt, 2004). Only this time, without livestock to feed or eat, and not the possible means of making a living. Similarly, in lifestyle, to those who are currently there, who are white, who are wrestling with the challenge of economic survival. This may sound incredible, that such a situation could possibly occur, but like the “old Black sage,” referenced earlier, has said, in his prognostications, of looking down the road, at our troubled social justice future, you “just keep on living.”

In a multicultural, multiethnic society, one is aware of what happens to anyone in a society happens to all; the prospect for such an eventuality is not rare, history is the great judge of such situations. But when one is in also called, “progressive society,” whereby, the question has been asked, on multiple levels, from that of the “Civil Rights Movement,” to thitherto,” Black Lives Matter,” the same question of caring, about the “inordinate” impact, of the incident of COVID-19, “on “people of color,” is asked continually and unanswered positively, “am I my brother/sister’s keeper.” At every juncture, and turn on sustainability, the question is met and silently answered with silent indifference. This is a “dry run” on

human value, and compassion and repentance to the resolve of social justice “hangs in the balance.” Thesis especially true of those who have the means and power to bring “right” out of “wrong, and those with similar power, “only wait and watch.”

A non-egalitarian society is one, in which, ethnically different groups are aware that they must negotiate for “first class citizenship.” Should a wholesome, “healthy society,” ever materialize and be achieved, than those who are so engaged, seriously, in self-help, are not penalized for initiating their collective self-effort. They are fully enveloped into the “whole healthy society.” They are rewarded for their extra effort and contribution that they bring back, into the collective whole. And should the prospect of equity be forestalled, intentionally and/or permanently, the disadvantaged groups, while lessened in economic status, are heightened in their “cultural stature of Self-Esteem.” And they are not dismayed, nor denigrated, by their stamina of continuance, in their “collective cultural achievement.” And what if the “ole Black Sage,” is correct, and we have “just kept on living,” the gain, in no wise, cannot be erased.

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Notes(s)

Note 1. I have described both the “dynamics” and “dilemma,” which faces African Americans in urban America (Kirkland, 2016; Kirkland, 2020). I pose the Social Worker as a Social Economic Developer—recognizing that the basis for change, of the “economic” situation, is paramount—I call

this—“The Other Face of Social Work”—because the emphasis is accentuated on the self-delivery of “Economic Development,” as the priority, but not to the exclusion of the delivery of basic Social Services—while the emphasis is on the former, they are to be used interchangeably, but they are required jointly and collaboratively.