

## **Is Black Leadership Failing African Americans?**

A press release published December 2, 2009, on *The U.S. Census Bureau* website titled *Facts for Features* paints a dismal picture of the state of Black America. From decade to decade, the statistics that define the state of Black America remain largely unchanged, cementing African Americans in the unenviable position of being labeled the poorest performing racial group in America. The pattern should cause every African American to contemplate the efficacy of Black leadership.

I define a Black leader as an influential African American who views African Americans as a special interest group and works solely to achieve African-American advancement. One should not assume, however, that every Black person who leads is, in fact, a Black leader. Some African Americans, by virtue of their position, are forced to embrace a broader agenda, since their constituency is broad and diverse.

If leaders are responsible for outcomes, then one must conclude that blame for Black America's failures rests at the foot of Black leaders. Unlike Jewish leaders and leaders of other minority groups, Black leaders err by adopting an episodic approach to problem-solving rather than a proactive strategy that includes short- and long-term plans. Too often, the Black agenda is "tossed and driven" by those who agitate and provoke, and too often leaders consistently fail to leverage strategic opportunities. They elect instead to devote attention to acts that have no long-term strategic benefit, such as contesting the vicious use of the "N" word or a display of the Confederate flag flying in a state capitol.

Every effort Black leaders undertake should focus on measurably improving the lives of a critical mass of African Americans, as confirmed by key indicators. But first, Black leaders must determine the validity of key indicators to ensure they accurately portray African Americans' relative position to other racial groups. For example, unemployment statistics do not provide a true depiction of the disparity in employment between African Americans and other racial groups because the statistics do not consider incarcerated African Americans or African Americans who have given up on finding gainful employment.

So in addition to deciding upon a set of key indicators that will be used to measure leadership effectiveness, Black leaders must adopt a two-pronged approach to advancement: First, they must strengthen their defensive posture so they can protect gains realized and preserve existing Black power structures. Too many of the advancements ushered in by Dr. Martin Luther King during the '60s Civil Rights Revolution have been lost because African Americans failed to launch counterstrategies to stave off policy attacks. The policy attacks have eroded the effectiveness of affirmative action and other programs aimed at ensuring

equality.

Second, leaders must develop a national uplift strategy in the form of a coordinated, focused, national plan designed to enable more African Americans to pursue betterment from a position of strength. That plan must include an ample supply of new paradigms. For example, African Americans must stop relying upon others to educate their children. Instead, education in the Black community must become a communitywide initiative rather than state-dependent. The state has never successfully educated African American students, so why do African Americans continue to look to the state for solutions?

Finally, African Americans must demand more from their leaders. Often, African Americans are confused by African-American leaders who act in their interests on one issue and take a hostile position on another. If leaders do not *consistently* take the right stand, we must conclude they are against us. We should remove their power and cast them into retirement by refusing to offer support or to show up when they call.

There are a myriad of other issues that should top the national Black agenda, including policies to end election fraud, which is prevalent in low-income African-American communities with high illiteracy rates; pursuit of one-rate-for-the-state insurance policies; policy revisions that eradicate disparities in local, state and federal contracting; and improved judicial equity with respect to criminal and civil matters. Black leadership must engage also in strong messaging to remind all Americans that the Black agenda of “systemic equality” is the American agenda.

African Americans buy books and pay exorbitant fees to attend dinners so we can bask in the presence and speeches of Black leaders. With respect to leadership, it is time for quid pro quo: We’ll continue to lend support to Black leaders if we start getting what we need.

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