

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

Black Unemployment Has Not Improved

By Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

When unemployment numbers were released on Friday, commentators reacted joyfully. Alan Krueger, who heads the White House Council of Economic Advisors, described the creation of 247,000 jobs as a victory because the predictions were that the economy would only generate 170,000 jobs. Unemployment rates went down to 7.7 percent, while predictions were that they would drop to 7.8 percent. Some might call this good news, but many might wonder who is affected by this good news.

A deeper examination of the unemployment data shows the disappointing reality that African American unemployment rates remained level, at 13.8 percent. Meanwhile, White unemployment rates fell to 6.8 percent and the rate for White men dropped to 6.3 percent. The racial disparities in unemployment rates are not new, but it is hypocritical to celebrate a drop in White unemployment rages, without noticing or mentioning the stagnation in Black unemployment rates.

More than new construction jobs were generated last month, but since Black unemployment rates remained level, that suggests that African Americans are not being brought into that industry (if at all) at the same rates that Whites. Implicitly, these data make the case for continued affirmative action, especially in well-paid jobs. In times of economic hardship, those hiring are inclined to look after their own instead of spreading the jobs around. And recent data suggests that

African Americans enter the labor market with a shallower rolodex than Whites. Fewer contacts mean fewer job opportunities.

Whose employment situation has improved? The number of long term unemployed remained level at 4.8 million people who have been unemployed for 37 weeks or more. To be sure, this is a drop from the 39 weeks of a year or so ago. Still, the situation for some of the unemployed has simply not improved. One of the reasons that the unemployment rate dropped is because 130,000 people dropped out of the labor force because they could not find jobs.

Eight million people work part-time for economic reasons. They would take full time work if only they could find it. The number of “marginally attached” workers stands at 2.4 million. If underutilized workers are included, the unemployment rate is 14.3 percent for everyone. If the relationship between underutilization and reported unemployment is the same for African Americans as for Whites, then the real unemployment rate is 25.5 percent, or almost a fourth, for African Americans. That’s alarming, yet as I watch televised reports on Black unemployment rates, this is unmentioned.

Black unemployment rates are at more than Depression levels, which ought to be completely unacceptable. It is not. Yet few are paying attention to the plight of the unemployed, underemployed, or out of the labor force Black worker. The White House and others love to talk about all of us being in the same boat. Yet some are hanging onto the board by their fingernails, and others are drowning. And some are struggling to

row. Others are riding relatively smoothly through this recession, watching their situation improve.

CEA Chairman Krueger says the data from this employment report suggests that we are well on our way to economic recovery. From my perspective this recovery is neither robust nor inclusive. In order for this recovery to be fully celebrated, every sector of Americans should see their material conditions increase. They’ve increased for some. What about the others? Where are their advocates?

Too many African American leaders are asleep at the wheel when it comes to the employment situation. Unemployment rates become a line in their speeches, not a lode for their leadership. High unemployment rates explain why so many African Americans, at the economic margins, don’t support civil rights organizations. They are asking what’s in it for me.

What if huge numbers of unemployed people were mobilized? What if, in their economic misery, some rose up and demanded that Congress and others pay attention to their situation? To watch the situation of Whites improve, while Black unemployment rates remain the same, suggests that the vision of a post-racial society is extremely unrealistic. African American people are bearing a disproportion amount of pain in the current employment situation. Black people are starving, and it seems that no one, not even civil rights advocates, will act on their behalf.

Court Misses White Racial Entitlement

By Rev. Jesse Jackson
TriceEdney Wire

In oral arguments before the Supreme Court on the Voting Rights Act, Justice Antonin Scalia slandered the act as a “racial entitlement,” arguing, “whenever a society adopts racial entitlements, it is very difficult to get out of them through the normal political processes.” So, the right-wing justice intimated, the conservative “Gang of Five” on the Supreme Court had every right to step in and overrule the 98 senators who voted unanimously to reauthorize the act (including the senators of every state and jurisdiction required to seek pre-clearance of any changes in their voting laws).

The justice proved once more that he is not a neutral arbiter of the Constitution but a right-wing activist with an agenda to enforce. Deference to the popularly elected Congress and president is, apparently, only when they do what Scalia considers to be proper. When they choose to reauthorize a Voting Rights Act that has protected the rights of millions and transformed America’s democracy since its passage in 1965, Justice Scalia thinks the court should negate their act, since he somehow considers protection of the right to vote a “racial entitlement.”

Scalia’s racial taunt has received the scorn it deserves. It makes

more sense to apply his reasoning to the real “racial entitlements” that still scar our nation.

For example, a recent study by Brandeis University revealed a stunning increase in the wealth gap between whites and blacks in America. The gap tripled between 1984 and 2009. In 2009, the median wealth (the difference between what you own and what you owe) of a white household was \$113,149. The median wealth of a black household was \$5,677.

Why the difference? The study found five contributing factors. First, whites were more likely to be homeowners than blacks, often because their families are more able to help with down payments. Black families who worked for 200 years in slavery and 100 years in segregation had less ability to accumulate wealth.

Second, whites made more income than blacks, even for comparable work.

Third, blacks are twice as likely to be unemployed as whites, and, with less of a family cushion to rely on, more likely to deplete their savings when unemployed.

Fourth, whites are five times more likely to inherit money, and their inheritance averages 10 times as much. Again, this surely is in part a

legacy of our scarred history.

Finally, whites are more likely to have a college education than blacks. Blacks are more likely to find advanced training difficult to finance. They are more likely to graduate with debt, and their average debt on graduation is greater.

The wealth gap is, in Scalia’s words, a “racial entitlement.” Only this entitlement favors whites, not blacks. As Scalia wrote, “whenever a society adopts racial entitlements, it is very difficult to get out of them through the normal political processes.” That’s why it took a Civil War to end slavery, and to amend the Constitution to guarantee equal protection of the laws. It took the sacrifice of lives and limbs in a civil rights movement to end segregation, and to pass the Voting Rights Act to provide minorities with an equal right to vote. On economic inequality, the promise of 40 acres and a mule for freed slaves was broken. Dr. King marched on Washington to redeem a “canceled check” marked “insufficient funds.”

If Scalia is right, “the normal political processes” won’t solve this racial entitlement. Nor, for that matter, will the right-wing Gang of Five on the Supreme Court.

The Rich Are Treated Differently

By George E. Curry
NNPA Columnist

F. Scott Fitzgerald got it right when he said the rich are different. We are witnessing that in the sequester fiasco and we heard it in another form last week when Attorney General Eric H. Holder offered an asinine reason for not prosecuting bankers/gangsters known as banksters.

Testifying before Congress, Holder said, “I am concerned that the size of some of these institutions becomes so large that it does become difficult for us to prosecute them when we are hit with indications that if you do prosecute, if you do bring a criminal charge, it will have a negative impact on the national economy, perhaps even the world economy.”

Holder is not the Secretary of Treasury. While he, like all of us, might be concerned about the economy, that’s not his area of responsibility. His job as the nation’s chief law enforcer is to enforce the law. And that should apply to banksters like it applies to gangsters. But, as we know, the rich and institutions they control are treated differently.

This variation of banks being “too big to fail” is essentially telling us their CEOs are “too big to jail.” If banks are too big to fail, we should remind ourselves who allowed them to grow that large. Each time big banks gobbled up smaller ones like ATMs suck in your check deposit, they had to first win approval from the federal government. That is the same federal government that bails them out when they get in trouble and the same federal government that now whines that their CEOs are too big to jail. Try explaining that to a first-time, non-violent drug user who is rotting away behind bars.

Even in clear-cut cases of gangster behavior, there is a double-standard. Take the case of HSBC, which signed a \$1.9 billion settlement

with the U.S. after CEO Stuart Gulliver acknowledged the bank’s failure to catch at least \$881 million in drug trafficking money that was laundered through the institution’s accounts. Officials admitted their bank had facilitated illicit financial transfers on behalf of rogue nations, including Iran and Libya, as well as Mexican and Colombian drug cartels.

Their punishment? A fine that equaled 11 percent of last year’s profits and a promise to do a better job of monitoring their accounts. And they avoided criminal prosecution.

Like other banks, HSBC will continue to benefit from American taxpayers underwriting its deposit insurance.

Senator Elizabeth Warren [D-Mass.] observed, “It has been almost five years since the financial crisis, but the big banks are still too big to fail. That means they are subsidized by about \$83 billion a year by American taxpayers and are still not being held fully accountable for breaking the law.”

The \$83 billion a year Warren referred to represents the amount taxpayers pay in insurance to make sure U.S. bank deposits are guaranteed.

Think about that. Banks are profit making entities yet the public pays their insurance. Does anyone else pay for your homeowner’s insurance? Health insurance? Car insurance? So why should the public share in banks’ expenses, but not their profits? It is yet another example of the rich and their powerful institutions being different?

Contrast that different treatment with what’s happening in our nation’s capital.

In the never-ending game of chicken, Republicans are threatening yet another budget showdown. They are adamant that whatever comes out of the ongoing sequester and deficit debates, all cuts must come from the

spending side, including Medicare and Social Security.

Although President Obama has used strong, protective language in his State of the Union and inauguration speeches, he has a tendency to cave in when negotiating with Republicans – and that has many Democrats worried.

Obama and his advisers have already stated that they are amenable to a “grand bargain” whereby the White House and Republicans will reach an agreement on budget cuts.

So far, 107 of the 200 House Democrats have signed a letter to the president threatening to vote “against any and every cut to Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security benefits – including raising the retirement age or cutting the cost of living adjustments that our constituents earned and need.”

In the alternative, they want the grand bargain to “rely on economic growth and more fair revenue-raising policies to solve our fiscal problems.” Those policies should include putting an end to subsidies for big businesses and raising the taxes on the wealthiest Americans.

Speaking on CNBC last week, House Speaker John Boehner said, “Listen, we’ve got a structural spending problem that has to be addressed. The president’s sequester is in effect, and it will be in effect until there’s an agreement on cuts and reforms that put us on a path to balance the budget over the next 10 years.”

But none of those cuts and reforms on the patch to a balanced budget involve touching the banksters or the rich. After all, as well all know, they are different.

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The State Of Equality And Justice In America: The Urgency Of Now Must Be Taken Seriously

By Rev. Dr. C.T. Vivian
TriceEdney Wire

We must take the urgency of now very seriously. Not just because of the pending 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, but because the future of America’s people; especially those who have been long oppressed, depends on right now.

Since the beginning of this country, the one thing that has never been fully decided is who will truly determine this nation’s future? Will it be America’s truly wealthy - the 1 percent who can decide every political and economic move in the richest and mightiest country in the world? And who, with the economic 1 percent of Europe and Asia, could take over every major decision in this global world? Would it be them or would it be “We the people”?

It is clear by studying recent events; coupled with patterns of history, that the democratic principle of “We the people” is constantly endangered by plutocratic mindsets, those who are often controlled by greed and quests for power. Plutocracy, according to Webster, is one, “Government by wealthy people”; two, “A society governed by wealthy people”; or three, “A ruling class whose power is based on their wealth.”

I caution that America could succumb to this social mindset - if we do not continue to stand guard using our democratic powers of “We the people” to the fullest. Take the last presidential election, for instance. Mitt Romney, in his derogatory comment about the so-called “47 percent” of people who he claimed “are dependent upon government,

who believe that they are victims” and who “pay no income tax” - appeared to dismiss nearly half of American voters. He even said, “... and so my job is not to worry about those people. I’ll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.”

These derogatory comments appeared to signal a move to exclude people of a certain social status. Moreover, it appeared as a move to keep the concept of “We the people” alive while denying it in practice. What would have or could have happened had he prevailed?

It is important to note that throughout history, struggles for equality and justice in America have continued to move from victory to setback and from setback to victory. In fact, about every 30 to 35 years, there’s a new movement in this country. The civil rights movement was the last one. The one before that was the labor movement. Somewhere between 35 and 40 years, there’s always a new people’s movement. This time, it’s the continuation of the civil rights movement, which includes the movement on behalf of the poor.

At the blessed age of 88, I recall the degradation of segregation and Jim Crow. I struggled for justice through the freedom rides and alongside Dr. King. I marched on Washington on August 28, 1963 and I was there to ultimately rejoice at the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And then we suddenly found ourselves mourning upon the assassination of my dear friend and brother, Dr. King, in 1968. He was only in Memphis for the cause of the sanitation workers, the poor, the struggling, and the oppressed who were

suffering unequal wages and working conditions.

Fast forward, to see America elect and then re-elect its first Black president nearly 50 years later is reason to rejoice. And yet even President Obama’s inaugural speech called for honest labor wages that “liberate families from the brink of hardship.”

This is a clear reason that we must continue to march to the polls as well as to take up our banners and plead our causes. We must win our battles in the basic old-fashioned way that it has historically worked - with non-violent direct action protests, coupled with the vote. In doing so, our movement will continue to grow.

A newsman once asked Dr. King, “How many members do you have?” When Martin answered, the newsman retorted, “Well that doesn’t represent much of Black America”. But then Dr. King said something that is so very relevant in the 21st century. He said, “We don’t operate through membership. We operate knowing that if we’re right, people will follow us.”

The state of equality and justice in America is a continued struggle for the poor despite all of the strides America has made. The urgency of now is to maintain the power and sanctity of the vote, which has become the greatest power held by the poor. As Dr. King said, if we do what is right, others will follow us. This is the power of “We the people”.

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