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Did ah ask you for woik?: The Black Student, the Concept of “Career" & Self-Entrepreneurship: Which Road?

Abstract

For some time now, four year institutions have been circulating the myth that education equals a job upon graduation. Along with this myth, the university system makes it appear as if this equation works across the board, for minority graduates as well as majority group members. A third prong of the falsehood is that a job or a career is the ultimate goal. Very little mention is ever made of self-sufficiency or entrepreneurship. In this paper, we present a community-based model of economic development that revolves around minority students starting their own businesses rather than opting for graduation and then beginning the hunt to "look for a white boss to adopt them.”

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In the early days of Hollywood there was a stereotyped character named Stepin Fetchit who played roles demeaning to blacks. He was the lazy, shiftless black person that white people found palatable. In one movie a white man comes up to him and says, "I have good news for you, boy. I just got you a job raking leaves and caring for the farm." Stepin Fetchit took off his hat, scratched his head and asked the white man, "Did ah ask you for woik?"

This presentation offers the theory that the myth of "career" or the promise of "jobs upon graduation" is an attempt to steer the Black and Latino student toward moderation, what one scholar called, "Creating a house n----- class of petit bourgeois blacks" - much like Stepin Fetchit.

By omitting the option of "doing for self," the system provides itself with an ongoing collection of willing "thralls" readily seeking what they perceive to be lifetime employment.

It will be established that another government strategy was to create a greater class disparity in Black communities. In order to avoid giving Blacks real employment equality and to avoid the threat of losing government contracts, many corporations hired a few token blacks in lower or middle management positions, or in professional capacities. This system of token hiring was sanctioned by the government.

Built into equal opportunity guidelines were loopholes which permitted corporations to satisfy equal employment by hiring a few token blacks. Thus, companies could maintain racist hiring policies while receiving government money. Even those companies that blatantly ignored the guidelines had little to worry about since the government took no great pains to enforce the guidelines it had set up. The government, in conjunction with private industry, waged a massive campaign to convince the world that black people were moving up in the world.

In addition to the propaganda value that government and private industry derived from this new drop of highly visible corporate Negroes, there was a whole group of black people who perceived themselves as having to take in Amerika. These new corporate blacks were very different from their middle class predecessors who had almost unanimously lived, studied, worked or owned businesses in black communities. These new middle class blacks were more estranged from the black community, often opting to live in white areas.

Another area where the ' door' was opened to black people was in agencies that traditionally served to oppress and repress black people. Blacks were hired as police officers, sheriff officers, prison guards, FBI agents, etc. And since many of these agencies had been all-white, or almost all-white, many saw the integration of these agencies as great progress. All this did was further divide the Black community and to create a group of black people whose continuous prosperity depended on the continued repression of black people. (Shakur, no date)

Disruption and denial of unity in the Twentieth Century Slave Society is made all the more easy by the philosophies of "do your own thing," "rugged individualism" and "each to his own." These doctrines permeate black communities all over America and negate any potential for long-term unity (not short-term unified responses to something white people do) among the masses.

We contend that higher education plays a major role in all of these concerns.

Presenters

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