

Long-term plan for black america

[Business](#)



The economic nationalism of Booker T.

Washington, which relied on business ownership to provide the means for group advancement, represents the classic capitalistic approach to economic development. Throughout the twentieth century, there have been a number of approaches suggested for improving the economic viability of African-American communities in the United States. Given the economic discrimination and oppression by institutions in the larger society, many social theorists and urban economists have argued that African-Americans should use their segregated social circumstances to build a separate and autonomous economic base within their own communities. The shared experience of social segregation, employment discrimination, and minority status would provide the rationale for the development of cooperative enterprises that would advance the economic conditions of the entire black community. Business ownership is seen as the economic engine for the community development process.

economic development through the promotion of entrepreneurship exalts individualistic efforts and predicts the eventual “trickle down” of benefits from the capitalists to the workers. Washington assumed that since entrepreneurship has worked successfully for many other Americans by bringing economic and social advancement, it should do the same for African-Americans. entrepreneurship is assumed to have immense powers. economist Sol Ahiarah, a latter-day proponent of Washington’s economic philosophy, argued that “by owning [businesses] and . . .

controlling their means of livelihood blacks can solve most of their own problems and even be immunized against racism" [Ahiarah 1993, 18].

Business ownership was promoted as the means for community revitalization. For me as for young black man the plan has been an attractive one because it corresponds with the prevailing capitalistic ethos in American society. Many policymakers have been so persistent in their reliance on entrepreneurship that alternative approaches were rarely considered. Washington's economic development proposals were a response to the legal segregation of that era.

He promoted appeasement and political accommodation-these were the hallmarks of his ideological position. His overall objective was self-sufficiency, and he was considered the leading advocate of economic nationalism in the black community [Butler 1985, 65]. To Washington, the development of black entrepreneurship within the confines of the segregated black community was the most viable route to economic stability and equality. The economic development of the black community would be proof to the dominant white society that African-Americans were equal [Blair 1977, 10]. The Washington approach and the Mondragon share only two common characteristics. First, both were designed to serve an ethnically oppressed people.

Second, each is touted as a means for achieving group advancement. Unlike the Mondragon, which makes social development essential to economic development, Washington's entrepreneurial focus was only implicitly tied to broader social concerns such as group advancement. To Washington, the primary issue was individual economic advancement. equality, and indeed

<https://assignbuster.com/long-term-plan-for-black-america/>

independence, would be achieved as individual blacks proved their ability to survive in the American capitalist environment. Washington believed that blacks would achieve their civil rights only after they had established an economic base [Thornburgh 1969, 11]. Washington's entrepreneurial focus benefitted a small group of individuals.

The propensity to be elitist contrasts with the intentions of the founders of Mondragon, who were distrustful of elite control. Unfortunately, Washington's elitist approach reduces the positive impact that business development can have on the wider community and the likelihood of group advancement [Wallace 1993, 46]. In his analysis of Washington's economic program, social theorist Harold Cruse concluded that this approach " would not have gone very far in alleviating the economic disabilities of the black rank and file in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors" [Cruse 1987, 92]. As an economic development strategy for the black community, entrepreneurship is a simplistic approach. It focused solely on economic issues, while the other conditions endured by blacks were to be gradually attended to through the process of trickle down.

...