

# What Are Black Americans' Goals and Will They Be Realized During the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

by

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In the fall of 2002, I presented a commentary entitled “African-Americans Reaching Their Goal in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” At the start of this 2007 New Year and three years after the release of that commentary, let’s review what was said then and assess our progress.

What we know from the original commentary is that the likelihood of success in any endeavor increases as planning for that endeavor increases.

The 2002 commentary suggested that, if Black Americans concurred that full integration into the American society was the goal, then it was important to plan a strategy for achieving that goal. As a starting point, the recommendation was that Blacks seek to achieve parity with the “average” American in three areas by 2020: (1) Per capita income (a measure defined as total money income for a group spread evenly across all members of the group); (2) educational attainment; and (3) voter participation.

On the first count, data that are available on the Census Bureau’s Internet Web site reveal that Blacks lost ground in achieving per capita income parity with the nation since the release of the original commentary. In 2002, Black per capita income, adjusted to exclude the effects of inflation, was 66.7% of that for all Americans. By 2005, that ratio had fallen to 66.4%.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of educational attainment, it is noteworthy that Blacks increased their level of educational attainment faster than the general population from 2002 to 2005. While the percentage of Blacks relative to Whites who were 25 years or older in 2002 and who held at least a high school diploma stood at 93.6% in 2002, that percentage increased to 95.2% by 2005. Similarly, the percentage of Blacks relative to Whites who were 25 years or older and who held Bachelor Degrees stood at 63.7% in 2002; that ratio rose to 63.8% in 2005.<sup>2</sup>

As for Black voting parity, two Census Bureau documents show that the ratio of reported Black voters as a percentage of Black citizens to overall reported voting as a percentage of all citizens increased from 91.8% for the Congressional elections of 2002 to 94.0% for the Presidential election of 2004.<sup>3</sup> Although this analysis does not match perfectly the 2002 to 2005 period of analysis for per capita income and educational attainment mentioned above, it shows that Black Americans made progress on the political participation front during the period under study.

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<sup>1</sup>The underlying inflation adjusted per capita income data are from Census Bureau Web pages:

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/p01ar.html> and <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/p01b.html>.

<sup>2</sup>The underlying data for these calculations are available from the *2007 Statistical Abstract of the United States* at the following Internet Web site address: <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/07s0214.xls>.

<sup>3</sup>The data underlying these statistics were obtained from Census Bureau reports *Voting and Registration in the November Election of 2002/2004*. These documents are located at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-552.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>, respectively.

Some might say that “two out of three ain’t bad.” However, others would argue that income and wealth trump educational attainment and political participation. Consequently, the fact that Blacks made progress toward achieving educational and political participation parity, but lost ground in achieving per capita income parity is disconcerting.

What is the reason for the latter outcome? This is the type of question that Black leaders should be asking and trying to resolve. Black leadership, which is quite often represented by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL) appear to be unable to address these types of questions adequately.

In fact, a visit to the NAACP and NUL Internet Web sites will reveal that neither organization reflects a set of long-term (25, 50, or 75-year) goals for Black Americans. The latter fact may help explain why Black Americans appear to continue to discuss and fight the same battles over and over again. We all know too well that it is possible to travel in circles when you are without a proper roadmap. It may also explain why Blacks experience limited progress or even decrements in our efforts to achieve parity with national averages in crucial areas such as income.

Hence the reason for rephrasing the question that was posed in 2002, “What are Black Americans’ Goals and Will They Be Realized During the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?” Isn’t it time that we find answers to these questions in 2007?

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