

“A New Vision for an Old Problem and an Old Solution”

by

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A new vision for an old problem, even when old solutions are involved, can be like a bright morning star rising in the distance across the ocean. In this case, the old problem is too many Black males in the U.S. criminal justice system and the related high unemployment rates, while the old solution involves looking to Africa.

Make no mistake about it: Three out of four Black males (or more) are involved in the U.S criminal justice system. Once in, they are branded for life. Often, this leads to very poor prospects for landing a decent job—assuming that they ever receive offers to work. This outcome is evidenced by the alarmingly high unemployment rate for Black males ages 45-to-64. As a product of a jail sentence, or having lost a manufacturing job to workers overseas, Black males in this age group have slim hope for a traditional working life in America. A July 2006 article in *Business Economics* by John E. Silvia makes it plain that, even if the U.S. economy grows at a fast pace, prospects for the return of lots of good manufacturing jobs is a myth.

What’s a brother to do? Know history! Forward leaning and independent minded Black Americans, including personalities such as Denmark Vesey in the 1800’s, called for Blacks to return to Africa. Why not resurrect that call? Today, many African nations are experiencing a variety of adverse outcomes, including health and economic crises. Suffering from the vagaries of HIV AIDS and slow economic growth, many African nations are in need of a new source to help turn things around. African slaves served as the answer for a struggling America four-hundred years ago. Now it is time for Black Americans to consider returning to Africa to help rebuild the nations there.

The African work force, which has been, and is being, lost to AIDS, other diseases, and civil wars, can be replaced, in part, by Black males and their families who cannot find work in the U.S. because of their criminal backgrounds or the movement of jobs overseas.¹ The wasted knowledge and skills possessed by Black males of U.S. manufacturing processes can be used successfully in manufacturing processes in African nations. The wages might be lower in Africa, but so is the cost of living. Most importantly, an opportunity to work, to help build nations on the continent, and to be treated with dignity and respect for your contributions to your community, serve as excellent motivation for a decision to relocate to Africa.

How can we take advantage of this opportunity? Black business leaders need to find the courage and resources to: (1) Identify manufacturing business

¹ Remember that the Georgia Colony in the U.S. and the continent of Australia experienced their early development and growth from an influx of prison populations from Northern Europe.

opportunities in African nations; (2) negotiate with African nations for the return of Black males and their families who want to work and build communities in nations on the continent; and (3) lobby the U.S. government to sponsor the return to the continent of those Black males (and their families) who wish to do so, while continuing to enjoy the right to travel freely back and forth to the U.S.²

This would be a win-win situation: Black males would experience an opportunity to work, grow, and build families and communities in a respectful environment; the U.S. government would experience a reduction in its jail population and its unemployed labor force; and African nations would experience an injection of new energy and strength from their U.S. cousins who know what it means to build a nation from scratch into modernity.

This new, or at least updated, vision of how to address the problem of Black males in the U.S. criminal justice system and the related high unemployment rate is worthy of due consideration. Man lives by the sweat of his brow. Isn't it better to work than not to work? Moreover, isn't it better to work, to be appreciated for, and to enjoy the benefits of, the work that you do than to work, not be appreciated for, nor enjoy the benefits of, the work that you do?

Consider that the time is right for Black males to have a new vision and to stop being blinded from the opportunity that is Africa as we look east into the sunrise toward it. Rather, we should go and help build a strong and better Africa, and place the U.S. at our back as we look west toward it in its sunset.

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² Reparations would serve as great source of seed capital for investing in Africa.