



“The Marriage-Job Paradox”

The 18th century philosopher/economist, Adam Smith, developed a flawed but useful concept that has come to be known as the “Diamond-Water Paradox.” Smith points out that, while water is an essential good for humans and has a high use value, it has a relatively low transaction value. On the other hand, diamonds (jewels), which have a high transaction value, have little value in practical use.

Although Black Americans continue to change our purchasing patterns, we continue to reflect the diamond-water paradox in certain aspects of our acquisition behavior. For example, we often make very large investments in constructing churches, which have little practical uses except during Sunday worship, but we invest little to construct operating facilities for businesses that could be used every day and could serve as a great source of jobs.

As another somewhat related example, during 2008, Black American households, on average, spent \$1,983 on apparel products and services (clothes) according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Expenditure Survey. At the same time, we spent only \$47 on reading materials (books). Without making comparison with other ethnic groups in the U.S., it seems that we could have spent relatively less on clothes, which have a very low-level function, and spent relatively more on books, which serve as a great source of knowledge from which enormous benefits can be derived.

However, an important paradox that we wanted to discuss is the “Marriage-Job Paradox.” It is not precisely parallel with the Diamond-Water paradox, but it has similar implications. In our youth, family members, friends, and even strangers express great interest in our occupational aspirations. They ask, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Individually, we spend a considerable portion of our formative years trying to identify an answer to that question. Then we go off to the college or university to study and spend tens of thousands, and sometimes hundreds of thousands, of dollars to reach our occupational goal.

We are fortunate when we reach our occupational goal. But, despite its importance, a “job” is not as important as our most cherished human relationship—our marriage. Yet, how often do family members, friends, or strangers query us concerning who we intend to marry? How often do Black American parents communicate with their young adults concerning the science of selecting a marriage partner? How many young adults read at least one book on selecting a marriage partner before making their selection?

You will probably agree that choosing a marriage partner is the most important decision that a person ever makes. It seems logical that an important ingredient to a successful life for a man or a woman is to have a good partner. Even if you are successful in reaching your vocational goal, if your marriage fails, then that failure will, at least for a time, affect your job performance, disrupt your wealth creation efforts, and can turn your life topsy-turvy.

Yes, we often spend considerable amounts on a wedding, but how much do we invest in learning the science of partner selection? Even if we invest months or years in getting to know a prospective partner, how many of us learn in advance how to conduct the process in order to ensure that our final decision is fool-proof?

Just two or three generations back, arranged marriages remained in vogue. But with the coming of television and movies with strong “love” themes, we got away from that practice. We exchanged a kiss or sex test for the wisdom of the elders. Consequently, for that and other reasons, Black marriages, the Black family, and, most importantly, Black children are suffering today.

As young adults head off to colleges and universities in August, we urge that, in addition to purchasing all of the required paraphernalia for their new life on campus, you consider gifting to them a good book on the science of selecting marriage partners. Better yet, set aside time with your child to transmit the keys to a successful marriage. Given your knowledge of marriage and of your young adult, you may also be able to offer some advice on the type of marriage partner that may be best suited for him/her. Even better yet, send your young adult to Grandpa or Grandma and let them provide instruction on selecting a suitable mate.

To be truly successful, one must be successful in all dimensions of our multi-dimensional lives. To help ensure such success, we need to undo the “Marriage-Job Paradox” by investing early and often in our youth’s knowledge of the science of selecting the correct partner for marriage. When we do this, then our investments to help our youth qualify for, and capture, the correct job will be truly successful.

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