



BlackEconomics.org

“Black Americans: Happy with Life in US”

A Report Brief

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by

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Despite the well-known income inequality, double Black-White unemployment rate gap, very wide White-Black wealth gap, persistent racial discrimination, apparent maltreatment by police forces and biased incarceration practices, and other political, social, and economic ills, Black Americans appear to be quite comfortable with US life.¹

This fact may appear anomalous because the media is laden with reports about Black demonstrations of the “BlackLivesMatter” variety, headlines that include the words “Race” or “Slavery Reparations,” and endless talking heads on news programs that feature confrontations on Black issues.

However, when considering the reality of American life, one could surmise that the media is simply using politically- and socially-charged Black issues to attract audiences and, as a result, advertisement dollars.

Why do we say that Black Americans are satisfied with our plight in America?

From an economic perspective, as we have noted elsewhere, the top 60% of Black Americans households have incomes that are over 90% of the income of the median White household.² Although income does not translate necessarily into wealth (the median White household has at least 12 times more wealth than the median Black household), Blacks seem quite satisfied with our purchasing power and our ability to satisfy our physical desires. Moreover, the nation’s social safety net permits Blacks who are in

poverty to enjoy a very high standard of living compared to those in poverty elsewhere on the planet.

But there is one critical economic factor that, in our view, stands out from among many other factors that signals Black acquiescence with life in America—no matter how painful the media portrays it to be. That economic factor is how Black Americans use time.

One definition of economics is “the study of the distribution of scarce resources.” One thing about which we can all agree is that time is a scarce resource. Therefore, how we use our time can be viewed as an economic factor.

What does time use have to do with Blacks being happy with life in America? The answer to that question lies in how we use our time compared with how Whites use their time. The one “freedom” that we have is how we allocate our time. Consequently, if we were unhappy with our lot in the US, then one should be able to differentiate how we use our time compared with Whites’ time use. If we were unhappy with life in America, then we would exhibit certain time-related lifestyle patterns to express that discontent.

Specifically, one would expect Black Americans to: (1) Work longer/harder to attempt to undo income inequality; (2) sleep less in an effort to develop strategies for resolving political, social, and economic ills; (3) engage more in obtaining education in order to become more knowledgeable in order to level life’s playing field; (4) reflect

¹Black American political, social, and economic conditions are highlighted typically in the Urban League’s annual report that is entitled, *State of Black America*. See the 2015 version of this report at

<http://soba.iamempowered.com/> (accessed September 24, 2015).

²The author discusses this topic on pages 29-30 of *A 3rd Freedom*; a 2015 BlackEconomics.org monograph.

lower television/movie consumption than Whites in order to work to improve our plight in the country; and (5) move from inaction to action by spending less time engaged in religious/spiritual activities.

Fortunately, there is a high-quality data source that captures time use in the US; i.e., the *American Time Use Survey (ATUS)*, which is developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor.³ We use this resource to explore Black versus White time use.⁴

Because of the notorious double Black-White unemployment rate gap, we do not believe it appropriate to focus heavily on differences in the average number of hours worked by the Black versus the White population.⁵ However, we look closely at the other four aforementioned time use variables: Sleeping; obtaining education; television/movie viewing; and participating in religious/spiritual activities. Table 1 (see page 4) provides the results of our analysis.

Table 1 shows that the Black American population slept an average of 9.07 hours per day, while the White population slept an average of 8.68 hours. The two-related 95% confidence intervals indicate that these estimates are different on a statistically significant basis; i.e., there is no overlap in

the confidence intervals. Therefore, Black Americans sleep about 0.4 hour more each day than White Americans.⁶ On balance, one would not think that this lifestyle pattern is indicative of Black Americans putting forth significant effort to overcome adverse conditions.

On the other hand, Table 1 reveals that when it comes to obtaining education Black Americans may be actively seeking to improve our lot. Black Americans spend an average of 0.56 hours obtaining education per day, while Whites spend just 0.32 hours. These estimates are different in a statistically significant way. In other words, Blacks spend about 0.24 more hours a day engaged in obtaining education. If education is the road to overcoming barriers, then Black Americans show signs of using this avenue to improve our lot.

Table 1 also shows that Black Americans spend an average of 3.42 hours per day viewing television and movies (for non-religious purposes), while Whites spend just 2.78 hours on this activity. Again, these estimates are different on a statistically significant basis. In our view, this 0.64-hour difference in television/movie viewing time is inconsistent with Black Americans using time wisely to scale political, social, and economic hurdles in the US.⁷

³The *ATUS* is available at the following Internet address; <http://www.bls.gov/tus/> (accessed September 22, 2015).

⁴We use the 2014 *ATUS*, which reflects, *inter alia*, 1,685 Black respondents and 9,176 White respondents.

⁵Table 1 indicates that the Black American population worked an average of 2.78 hours per day, while the White population worked an average of 3.31 hours per day. The two related 95% confidence intervals indicate that these estimates are different on a statistically significant basis; i.e., there is no overlap in the confidence intervals.

⁶It is worth noting that Akshat Rathi has published a July 19, 2015 article that builds an argument that this

“sleeping” outcome is driven by the fact that Black Americans have more long than short “extreme sleepers.” See the article and a discussion of the Black-White health gap and sleep at the following Internet address; <http://qz.com/457026/can-sleep-explain-why-black-americans-die-younger-than-white-americans/> (accessed September 23, 2015).

⁷It might be argued that, because online computer use (excluding games) may be a substitute for television/movie viewing, this analysis could be improved by considering these two activities (television/moving viewing and online computer use) jointly. However, this is not a strong argument for two reasons. First, computers are used for many activities that are dissimilar to watching television/

Finally, Table 1 reveals that Black Americans spend more than twice as much time (0.27 hours per day) on religious/spiritual activities than Whites (0.13 hours per day)—with no overlap in 95% confidence intervals. This indicates that Blacks continue to rely on faith more than action to improve outcomes. History tells us that this is vacuous behavior. Yet, as Malcolm X so aptly described the situation, Black people continue to build and worship in churches, while Whites build factories and increase their wealth.

Based on these results, we conclude that Black American lifestyle patterns with respect to time use do not reflect discontent with our lives in the US. On the contrary, we appear quite satisfied with outcomes, and seemingly do not use our time to combat aggressively the adverse conditions that we face. One argument against this conclusion is Black Americans' focus on education. However, the favorable difference in time

spent on education is more than offset by the additional time that we spend sleeping, viewing television/movies, and participating in religious/spiritual activities.

This conclusion is buttressed by the fact that, while we hear often and loud about Black Americans' discontent with US life, we never seem to organize ourselves effectively to take meaningful action to attack the important issues that we complain about. Consequently, there is ongoing and repetitive debates about issues that never seem to get resolved.

This is not to say that Black Americans may never become truly discontented with our plight in the US. However, if and when we ever reach that point, one may be able to identify the onset of that discontent by observing a change in our lifestyle patterns as signaled by selected time use activities.

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movies. Second, and most importantly, the 2014 ATUS data indicate that Black versus White computer use is nearly identical (0.21 hours per day for Blacks

versus 0.22 hours per day for Whites—with overlapping 95% confidence intervals).

Table 1.—Comparison of Black-White Time Use from the 2014 American Time Use Survey

Activity	Black American Time Use					White American Time Use				
	SE*	Average Hours Per Day (Population)	95% Confidence Interval		SE*	Average Hours Per Day (Population)	95% Confidence Interval			
			Bottom	Top			Bottom	Top		
Working	0.137	2.780	2.511	-	3.049	0.053	3.310	3.206	-	3.414
Sleeping	0.087	9.070	8.899	-	9.241	0.028	8.680	8.625	-	8.735
Obtaining Education	0.071	0.560	0.421	-	0.699	0.021	0.320	0.279	-	0.361
Television/Movie Viewing	0.110	3.420	3.204	-	3.636	0.047	2.780	2.688	-	2.872
Religious/Spiritual Activities	0.028	0.270	0.215	-	0.325	0.006	0.130	0.118	-	0.142

*--Standard error.