



BlackEconomics.org®

“Is Mississippi Configured for Black Self-Determination?”

There are three scenarios for Black American self-determination: (1) Diaspora to the African Continent or elsewhere; (2) evolve one or more new and separate “self-determined” territories in the US; (3) self-determine in place—i.e., in currently occupied areas of influence mainly in US metropolitan areas. These scenarios are quite disparate and are just the tip of the iceberg when envisioning a workable strategy. There are a tremendous number of moving parts to consider when entertaining any of the above-listed scenarios.

Mississippi is at the center of this self-determination envisioning process. It represents the US state with the highest proportion of Black Americans in the population. In July 2021, Black Americans comprised 38 percent of Mississippi’s nearly 3.0 million population.¹ More importantly, Mississippi is a state that has experienced the attempted overt operationalization of self-determination through action by the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PGRNA), which is ongoing today.² Moreover, the PGRNA shares a vision for self-determined Black Americans that was espoused by the Nation of Islam and its founder Elijah Muhammad who argued that Whites should give Blacks some of the land that we helped them obtain.³

Recently, the State of Mississippi and its capital city, Jackson, were under the spotlight after flooding ravaged parts of the city and created horrendous conditions for its residence due to the extended unavailability of potable water. Mass media coverage of this event piqued our interest in Jackson and Mississippi and this Analysis Brief presents our cursory research results.

The following are selected statistics and related information that may help us answer the question: “Is Mississippi configured for Black self-determination?”

- Based on information on about 52 percent of Mississippi State Government employees in 2021, about 39 percent were Black (African American).⁴

¹See Census Bureau Quick Facts; <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MS> (Ret. 102522).

² See Dan Berger (2018), “Free the Land!’: Fifty Years of the Republic of New Afrika,” African American Intellectual History Society; <https://www.aaihs.org/free-the-land-fifty-years-of-the-republic-of-new-afrika/> (Ret. 102622)

³ See Elijah Muhammad (1965), *Message to the Black Man in America*, Secretarius MEMPS Publications, Phoenix, p. 161.

⁴ Data on about 52 percent of Mississippi State Government employees are from the Mississippi State Personnel Board (28 percent, <http://www.mspb.ms.gov/about-mspb/mspb-annual-report-and-budget.aspx>) and from the

- Black Americans comprise 82.5 percent of Jackson, Mississippi’s population.⁵
- The proportion of City of Jackson employees, who are Black, is 87 percent (Jackson is the largest city in Mississippi).⁶
- Jackson’s Public School System employed 4,248 employees during 2021, 89.2 percent of whom were Black.⁷
- Only three states ranked significantly lower than Mississippi on a 2022 eighth grade mathematics assessment; and only one state ranked significantly lower than the state on a 2022 eighth grade reading assessment.⁸
- During the first quarter of 2022, the Mississippi Black unemployment rate (6.9 percent) was more than twice the White unemployment rate (3.1 percent).⁹
- The most important Mississippi industries by employment are: *Trade, transportation, and utilities; Government; Manufacturing; Education and health services; Leisure and hospitality; and Professional and business services.* They account for 72.0 percent of Mississippi’s 1.2 million employed persons in September 2022.¹⁰
- The most important Mississippi industries by level of output (gross state product (GSP)) for 2021 were: *Government; Manufacturing; and Finance, insurance, and real estate.* They accounted for \$61.7 billion or 58.0 percent of the states \$106.3 billion GSP.¹¹
- Mississippi had 39.9 thousand employer establishments in 2019, and 222.0 thousand nonemployer establishments in 2018. Black Americans owned about 3.0 percent of Mississippi’s employer firms, and about 32.2 percent of the state’s nonemployer firms.¹²

Without considerable quantitative or qualitative analysis and given traditional perspectives on what would be required for an upsurge of “Black Power” and self-determination, Mississippi does

Mississippi State Institution of Higher Learning (24 percent, http://www.mississippi.edu/research/downloads/fast_facts_2122.pdf). The remaining about 48 percent of Mississippi State Government personnel is accounted for by community colleges (7 percent), the governor’s office and legislative branch (less than 1 percent), and public school teachers (41%). We were unable to obtain timely employment statistics by race for this 48 percent of State of Mississippi Government employees.

⁵ See Census Bureau Quick Facts; <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jacksoncitymississippi/PST045221> (Ret. 102522).

⁶ The statistic on the proportion of City of Jackson employees who are Black was derived from data provided by the city’s Department of Human Resources, which showed October 2022 employment of 1,496 across 16 departments; 1,301 of these employees were classified as African American. These data were received by email message on October 21, 2022 and are available from the author upon request.

⁷ These statistics were derived from a 2021 EEO-5 Report that was provided by the Jackson Public School System via an email message on October 4, 2022. The email message is available from the author upon request.

⁸ See 2022 National Assessment for Education Progress “Report Card” results on the eighth-grade mathematics and reading assessments; <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/> (Ret. 102622).

⁹ These statistics are from the Economic Policy Institute; <https://www.epi.org/indicators/state-unemployment-race-ethnicity/> (Ret. 102622).

¹⁰ These data are from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; <https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/mississippi.htm#eag> (Ret. 102622).

¹¹ These data are from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis; <https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gdp-state> (Ret. 102622).

¹² These data are from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census’ Annual Business Survey program: see <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Owner%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ABSCS2018.AB1800CSA01> for statistics on Mississippi’s employer establishments and see <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ab1800%2a&tid=ABSNESSD2018.AB1800NESD01> for statistics on the state’s nonemployer establishments (Ret. 102622). These are the latest available statistics.

not strike one as a very favorable prospect. It is true that the national press has cited Mississippi State Government as a likely source of discrimination against Jackson for blocking funds to the city.¹³ However, it is not transparent that Mississippi’s Black population has acted forcefully to gain a fully representative foothold in the state’s political dynamics or at the local level—with Jackson being an exception.¹⁴ The governor, lieutenant governor, president of the senate, and speaker of the house of representatives are all White. Blacks represent about 28 percent of the state’s senators and about 33 percent of the state’s house members. Only one of the state’s nine supreme court justices is Black. Therefore, Blacks are underrepresented, or not represented at all, in all three branches of state government, and they are unable to prevent the just-mentioned racial discrimination.¹⁵

While Jackson has a nationally known Black mayor and Blacks appear to control the political and educational systems in the city, their ability to produce excellent results appears lacking. As already noted, racial discrimination at the state level may be blocking financial resources that would enable the city to thrive.

More specifically on the economic front, Mississippi’s key industries and firms are not well-aligned with the trajectory of the broader US and global economies. None of the important industries by employment size or output is tightly linked to innovative STEMAIR fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, artificial intelligence, or robotization). Interestingly, this might be favorable in a self-determination context because it is widely reported that Black Americans are weak in STEMAIR fields. On the other hand, there is an underrepresentation of Black ownership of employer and nonemployer enterprises. It goes without saying that it is nearly impossible to mount an effective self-determination effort without a solid economic base. As an additional potential headwind against Black self-determination in Mississippi, expected future climatological conditions in the state due to Climate Change do not bode well for success.

This is very much a selected and partial analysis of conditions in Mississippi that might facilitate Black self-determination. While there is no doubt that the high proportion of Black Americans in Mississippi’s population creates possibilities for self-determination, there are many other important factors that do not signal an easy road to success for Black American self-determination efforts in the state. Yet all of these observations can inform a strategy to achieve self-determination in Mississippi—should a decision be made to continue pursuit of such an effort. But before making that decision, we must not forget that the untold blood of Black Americans (the most notable being Emit Till, Medgar Evers, and James Chaney) has paid the price for Mississippi land. Also, we should ask: “Will it be favorable for us to build our future on land that is filled with this blood?”

B Robinson
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¹³ See Daniel Trotta (2022), “U.S. EPA Opens Civil Rights Probe into Mississippi Capital’s Water Crisis,” Reuters, October 20; <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-epa-opens-civil-rights-probe-into-mississippi-capitals-water-crisis-2022-10-20/> (Ret. 102722).

¹⁴ Besides Jackson, none of the remaining top five Mississippi municipalities by population have Black mayors.

¹⁵ For information about the racial makeup of Mississippi’s executive, legislative, and judicial branches, visit <https://www.ms.gov/government/government-branches> (Ret. 102722).