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## **“What Do Black Americans Know About Climate Change?”**

On August 9, 2021, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its [Sixth Assessment Report](#).<sup>1</sup> The report is nearly 4,000 pages long, but one does not have to read the entire report to obtain clear insights concerning the world’s climatological future.

Why should Black Americans, or anyone for that matter, be concerned about climate change? While actual or nearly “unprecedented” climate events are already occurring today around the world due to global warming, those of us who are of a “certain age” may not be alive to experience the severe future crises that are predicted in the report. However, younger generations stand to experience the severe impacts of climate change.

In simplest terms, we are all engaged in a challenge to survive and be represented—at least genetically—on Earth when humans finally solve great life mysteries through science. Climate change is likely to play a significant role in determining who will be represented at the end. What we know is that the world’s global socioeconomic system is producing two classes of people: (1) Those who have resources to escape a variety of

impending crises—including climate change; and (2) those who do not have such resources.

If one reads the lead 41-page “Summary for Policymakers” in the report, then one can form a solid view of how climatic conditions have evolved over the past 170 years, and how they are likely to evolve through the end of the current century. The forecast is based on five scenarios that reflect global temperatures rising 1.5 degrees Celsius or higher above the average Earth surface temperature that prevailed during 1850-to-1900. The report issues a clear warning that adverse climatic results are in the offing no matter what humanity does now concerning stabilizing or reducing greenhouse gases. It predicts disastrous results if humanity does nothing or does too little.

In the foregoing, we refer to “humanity” broadly. But let us be factual. The Modern European or Western World is the primary responsible party for climate change. History is clear concerning who initiated and promulgated the “Industrial Revolution,” especially the carbon-fueled combustion engine innovation that has driven “development” on the planet and an accelerated buildup of greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere. It can be argued that

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<sup>1</sup> The report is titled, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*.

non-Western World nations provided significant amounts of carbon energy for this development—especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, most of the climatological problems that are now at the world’s doorstep would not exist had those who controlled (and now control) the global economy adopted alternative strategies for development.

Haste made waste. The rush to profit precluded consideration of alternative innovations that would have been less destructive for the environment. Clearly, “green” energy forms have always been at hand. On the other hand, developed nations, emerging market economies, and developing economies may be able to innovate the world away from catastrophic climatic disasters in the years ahead.

As part of the US economy, Black Americans have made our own minor contribution to greenhouse gas formation. But we may plead ignorance. While Byron Allen’s company, Entertainment Studios, may own the Weather Channel and Al Roker serves as NBC’s weatherman, Black Americans generally have a miniscule role in, and knowledge about, the meteorological, climatological, and atmospheric sciences.

No Black Americans were included among the US’s six drafting authors or five contributing authors of the “Summary for Policymakers” already mentioned.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Integrated Postsecondary

Education Data System (IPEDS) reports that over the five years leading up to 2019 (the most recent year for which data are available), the US produced an annual average of just six Black Americans with academic (bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral) degrees in the meteorological, climatological, and atmospheric sciences.<sup>3</sup> Of course, we must remember that possessing degrees in these fields does not guarantee employment in the fields.

But, in this case, ignorance is not bliss. Humanity’s future is at stake. An untimely death by heat stroke, by fire, by freezing, by hurricane, by tornado, or by flash flood or coastal storm surge drowning may be in your future due to climate change. Death will have no escape clause for those who are ignorant of climate change.

Therefore, we urge all Black Americans to become familiar with climate change science and the outcomes predicted in the IPCC report. We should plan to benefit economically from efforts to thwart climate change, and we should prepare to preserve our future despite climate change. One day it will be too late to ask: “What do you know about climate change?”

B Robinson  
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<sup>2</sup> See page SPM-1 of the report (PDF counter 2).

<sup>3</sup> See the “Data USA: Meteorology” webpage and the panel on “Race and Ethnicity by Degree Awarded” (click on the years 2015-2019);

<https://datausa.io/profile/cip/meteorology> (Accessed on 081021). The IPEDS data are tabulated and visualized by the Deloitte Company.