



**BlackEconomics.org®**

## **“Headline Thoughts No. 12: Economists, Athletes, and Emigres”**

### **Introduction**

“Headline Thoughts” (HLT) are intended to reflect our contemplations of, and conclusions about, recent and important media headlines or other Black American (Afrodescendant) socioeconomic developments. HLT No. 12 includes the following four components: (1) Why Economists?; (2) Why Philly?; (3) Redirecting Sports Efforts that Produce Excellence; and (4) Losing our Youth?

### **Why Economists?**

During January 2-4, 2026, the world’s premier association of economists—the American Economic Association (AEA)—conducted its annual Meetings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Also, Black economists, who are members of a separate, National Economic Association, could be found in Philly this weekend at the AEA Meetings. At these Meetings in Philly, economists engage in a very wide variety of lectures, presentations, and discussions on a surprisingly long list of topics—some of which seem odd/strange to the uninitiated. These topics and the economists who engage them produce a certain mystique about economists; especially Black economists. We use the following the three bullets to clarify and highlight selected reasons for this mystique:

1. While the perimeters of most fields of study are well-defined and are adjusted only when significant innovations occur, the economics field is ever expanding because almost all, if not all, aspects of life involve economic engagement and economists continue to incorporate these previously excluded aspects of life into their field of study.
2. Economics is, by far, the most mathematically grounded social science. Mathematics expresses the truth (is the core language) of our Earth world and the universe.
3. Economists are the only (social) scientists, who confront the challenge of optimizing different outcomes in one equation: e.g., at the/ microeconomic (firm/household) level, profits (net income) or saving are to be optimized, while ensuring that costs are reduced to their optimal or lowest level; and at the macroeconomic (aggregate/national) level, output levels and growth rates are to be optimized, while ensuring that inflation is held to its optimal or lowest rate.

These unique challenges have caused many to label economists as the “high priests” of society. However, during the 2024 US Presidential Campaign there were rumblings that economists would be displaced from their vaunted role and relieved of their lofty title by emerging technologies (artificial intelligence and robotization). Yet, this has not occurred, and there is an increasing

expectation and realization that as in earlier such instances of arising innovation, new innovations generate new and different economic engagements that can only be absorbed into the field of study by new and cutting edge economic research—this is research that the emerging technology is not designed to perform. This is not to say that new technology will have absolutely no effect on economists, just that the early announcement of their demise is likely premature and a false-positive finding.

### **Why Philly?**

This HLT component follows naturally from the first, but it does not feature an enquiry into why the AEA, NEA, and other groups of economists met in Philadelphia this weekend. Rather, it asks: “Why has Philly served as the birthplace of some of the nation’s most important Black economists?” An appetite-whetting short list of Philly Black economists includes:

- Sadie Alexander (1898-1989).—The Black American to receive a terminal degree in the economics field from the University of Pennsylvania (UPENN). Also, she earned a law degree from UPENN. Using her dual academic backgrounds, she litigated, lectured, and acted in a variety of capacities to raise awareness among Black Americans concerning the true nature of our socioeconomic conditions, which motivated concomitant action to produce relative improvements in the Black American condition.
- Walter Williams (1936-2020).—A native of Philadelphia, who was a product of the city’s housing projects; a highly valued mentor who promoted a conservative “bootstrap” or “do for self” perspective on life; and one of the most important economic thought leaders in the nation on Black American and non-Black issues.
- Bernard Anderson is a Philadelphia born economist, who served in leadership roles in academia (University of Pennsylvania); in government (US Department of Labor and City of Philadelphia); in the private nonprofit sector (National Urban League); in the private corporate sector (EConsult Solutions, Inc., and United Bank); and on several important corporate boards of directors.
- Nina Banks.—An economics professor at Bucknell University, who unearthed the heretofore hidden story of Sadie Alexander as the first Black American to earn a doctoral degree. Also, she has helped to found important conferences and organizations built around gender and race/ethnicity concerns.

While the question posed at the outset of this HLT component has not been researched sufficiently to provide a definitive answer, the economics literature is replete with findings that cultural capital is an important and sometimes causal contributor to economic outcomes. In this case, Philly, *inter alia*, is the nation’s “cradle of democracy,” even with all of its warts. Jessie Jackson reminded nearly two million Black men and the world during the Million Man March in 1995 in Washington, DC that the nation’s original sin (slavery) produced the “crack” in the Liberty Bell. We believe that Philly possesses a storied and somewhat twisted “democratic” political tradition. Also, several important historical events occurred in Philly that had great economic import for the nation. In combination, these two outcomes produced a culture that lodged in the hearts and minds of young Black Americans during their formative years. Consequently, a sufficient number of young Black Americans developed an underlying thirst for economic knowledge that ultimately produced important Black economists.

The evidence is that the four economists named in this HLT component all researched, published, and lectured on topics tightly linked to government's (democracy's) failure to yield its promise. At the same time, we would be greatly remiss if we failed to mention W.E.B. DuBois groundbreaking research that culminated in publication of *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. It is safe to argue that, if we consulted the scholarship of each of the four Black economists cited, we would not have to search far before identifying references to *The Philadelphia Negro*. Therefore, we conclude that Philly's culture and the great work of the great Black scholar, W.E.B. DuBois are seemingly sufficient reasons why Philly has produced such great Black economists.

### **Redirecting Sports-Related Efforts that Produce Excellence**

In the current confluence of runups to selecting annual NCAA Football and NFL champions, the fact that NCAA Basketball season is well underway, and that March Madness is around the corner, we cannot deny two important facts: (1) Black males play significant and oversized performance roles in these sports; and (2) observation of football and basketball games bely their complexity. For basketball, players must study offensive and defensive strategies. For football, players usually operate on just one side of the ball (either offense or defense), but both sides have numerous plays to memorize by rote with several potential variations on each play. None of this touches on the pre- and in-season conditioning, including weightlifting, plus special nutritional regimens.

There is no doubt that at the college level, while academic course loads may be adjusted for the intense effort required of athletes during a sports season, most college athletes today are able to manage a slightly lighter course load during their season of play, along with a variety of other duties and responsibilities. Some players even have burgeoning families in tow.

An important question to pose is: "If Black athletes can perform excellently under the aforementioned conditions, then is it too tall an order for would-be Black athletes to render excellent performances when athletics is off the table and when would-be players only confront high-level academic programs?" The obvious answer is "No:" It is not too tall an order!

Importantly, we believe that it is just a matter of time before the profitability of college sports may wane and force their abandonment; thereby, leaving certain athletes no other choice but to redirect their energy toward performing excellently in venues beyond athletic fields. Better to begin now and halt the seeming over investment in athletics, get ahead of the change, and begin to project excellence in other fields that may offer even greater promise and higher upsides.

### **Losing Our Youth?**

This HLT component is to invite thorough consideration of outcomes that are likely to result from a new social media fad: "I Live Here" that is becoming increasingly pervasive on YouTube.com and other important social media spaces. The patented "I Live Here" social media submission presents a citizen/resident of the United States (US) explaining what occurred when they emigrated to another country. The "huge upside" to this emigration is always that the cost of living is lower than in the US; that employment is available; that life is easier; that the lifestyle is more enjoyable than in the US; and that any potential language barrier can be easily mitigated.

Our overarching concerns about this fad is that Black American youth appear to be overrepresented in the social media submissions and, in certain cases, these youth reflect more vulnerabilities and less analytical judgment than non-Black American youth, who also decide to emigrate. To conclude this HLT No. 12 and to provide a cautionary warning for those Black American youth who may entertain following the fad, we offer the following seven points:

1. Black Americans have often cast ourselves in the role of the Biblical Hebrews, who ultimately diaspora. The diaspora was of long duration before a homeland was forged for the Jews after World War II. Our youth should ask whether the diaspora to which they are contributing may help produce a similar history for Black Americans.
2. We invite Black American youth to consider scholarly literature from BlackEconomics.org and other sources that imagine alternatives courses of history other than a long duration diaspora before reassembling as a nation state.
3. The current US socioeconomic climate is increasingly weighted against Black Americans—especially those who might be especially motivated to emigrate.
4. After emigrating, there is no guarantee that conditions will not change in the US that may render reentry nearly impossible should a return be required.
5. A rigorous assessment of wellbeing under the two scenarios ((1) remain in the US; or (2) emigrate) is heavily weighted toward remaining in the US because no matter how the attitudinal pendulum on Race swings in the US in the near term, there is always some nonzero probability that it will swing in the other direction at some future point due to Black Americans' action to influence the swinging.
6. We should never forget that Black Americans are long-standing creditors to the US Government and its non-Black citizens. In our view, it would be anathema to ignore or relinquish one's right to the assets we hold in the form of Reparations by responding to a fad.
7. It is a foregone conclusion that Black American emigrees in toto will be relegated at or near the bottom of the socioeconomy in countries to which we emigrate for the same reasons that we currently occupy that position in the US today. The difference is that, in the US we have a history of forcing change based on historical facts. There is no such leverage point in other nations.

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