

Stop Economic Segregation

Written by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., NNPA Columnist
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One of the most insidious forms of racial discrimination and injustice is the growing manifestation known as racially motivated “economic segregation.”

Across the United States during the eight years of the Bush administration between 2001 and 2008, banking and mortgage companies were systematically deregulated.

Black Americans, in particular, were disproportionately targeted and segregated for subprime, high interest mortgages and housing loans that were far beyond acceptable lending practices. The result was massive financial devastation and loss in the Black American community with the highest foreclosure and bankruptcy rates in the nation. Today, Black Americans are still reeling from the housing crisis coupled with a debilitating unemployment rate beyond 14 percent.

But we are entering into a questionable period of American history and politics when it is not popular or politically correct for those who have been targeted for exploitation, discrimination and economic injustice to speak out publicly for fear of being perceived or mischaracterized as mere irresponsible “victims” or “freeloaders” in our national society. What former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney said about the 47 percent of Americans, who in his view do not pay taxes and who see themselves as “victims,” is only touching the surface of the serious economic and social realities for millions of Americans. The real controversy goes way beyond the revelation of what Romney exactly said with malice and bias in those private moments before his wealthy

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supporters in Boca Raton, Fla. What should be deeper at issue is why Black Americans and other people of color in America are economically segregated and discriminated against in the U.S. economy?

Economic segregation is the deliberate premeditated targeting and separation of people based on race, class or on some other social factor that denies equal access to economic opportunity and justice. Decades ago there were many unjust public policies and laws that attempted to justify education segregation. The Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that separate and unequal public schools were unconstitutional. Economic segregation, like education segregation, is a violation of civil rights and should also be declared unconstitutional. "Redlining" is not a new phenomenon when it comes to systematic racial discrimination in the housing marketplace. The 1968 Fair Housing Act made it a federal law for sellers and landlords not to discriminate against buyers and renters.

Yet, it is important to note the recent proactive work and progress of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) concerning the economic impact of the housing crisis on Black America. During the Annual Legislative Conference of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) held in Washington, D.C., NAREB sponsored a forum on the "State of Housing in Black America." NAREB President and CEO Julius Cartwright emphasized, "It is urgently important that we mobilize and take action to address the myriad of critical issues that we have identified documenting housing-related disparities for African Americans across the nation."

Now that there are emerging signs exhibiting a gradual recovery in the U.S. economy, from the depths of a recession, it is important for Black Americans to challenge and confront the lingering financial disparities and negative economic dispositions that have been unfairly imposed on Black Americans and others. This is not about just crying out about what is wrong with the economy. We have to always be vocal without apology. We do, however, have much to fight for, and that is the economic recovery, development and sustainability of Black communities.

For all of these reasons, we have to pull the "sheets" off the systemic segregation and discrimination wherever it may be found in the marketplace: housing, manufacturing, financial services and banking, environmental exposure disparities, imports and exports, or in other economic sectors. There is so much opportunity today to rid our communities of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. But it will require further struggle, focus and taking every chance to reinvest and to rebuild our families, communities, educational institutions, and businesses. We need to raise up a new generation of freedom fighters and entrepreneurs who are neither afraid nor ashamed to call out and fight discrimination and economic segregation in

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all of its forms.

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