

The Declaration of Independence tells us that “all men are created equal”; however, that's only when African Americans are not considered in the equation, sounds about “white”? Countless moments in history have shown inequalities in economic policy, which has left black people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. A hierarchy insistent on the belief that black people should be able to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, but provided them with no means for elevation. Between failed economic plans to falsifications given by former presidents, the United States of America only seems to know how to issue broken promises. The world's richest nation manages to come up empty-handed when it comes to advancements for African-Americans.

The post-Civil War plan, more widely known as “Forty Acres and a Mule”, is an early example of one such broken promise. On January 16, 1865, Union General William T. Sherman, moved by the efforts of Black ministers from Georgia, issued “Special Field Order 15”. The order directed the distribution of 40 acres to freedmen; the Union army also gave away some of their mules. Hannah Pack, an NFU communications director, discusses the aftermath of this wartime order. She writes “President Andrew Johnson - who had owned slaves and publicly shared his beliefs of white supremacy - overturned the order before the end of the year and returned the land to the slaveowners and traitors who had originally owned it”. The rescission of this order deprived black families of land, leading them to sharecropping. Landowners allowed former slaves to rent land in exchange for a portion of the produced crops. Essentially, as an Equal Justice Initiative article notes “..white landowners hoarded the profits of Black Workers’ agricultural labor, trapping them in poverty and debt for generations”. Black people were never truly given the chance towards economic independence due to a lack of income, land, equality, and effective economic policies.

The impact of this unsuccessful plan still echoes throughout our present-day economy. On August 19, 2016, former President Donald Trump lied about reforming the black community while degrading black voters during his campaign speech. He urged African Americans to support him with the assurance that he'd reduce unemployment. Trump announced "It is time to get our country back to work, and that includes an all-out effort to help young African-Americans get the good-paying jobs they deserve". A CNN politics article quotes Trump saying, "You're living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58% of your youth is unemployed - what the hell do you have to lose?". Trump dares to question the African-American community on loss while completely removed from our struggle, we have so much more than monetary value to lose. Following his time in office, both the racial wealth and wage gap have increased. According to Vanessa Williamson, a reporter for Brookings press, all the 400 richest American billionaires have more overall wealth than all 10 million African-American households combined. To add on, a Newsom press article reveals that the unemployment rate for white Americans fell from 4.8% to 4.5%, while the unemployment rate for Black workers rose to 8.8%. The Black unemployment rate has always charted as the highest among all other races. We are experiencing the prolonged effects of years of inequality and broken promises. We have been deceived and disregarded, sold the idea that the American dream is available to everyone but has never truly been accessible to the black community. We have paid in blood, labor, and turmoil to simply be here, the dream didn't come as part of the purchase.

"Harlem", a poem written by Langston Hughes depicts the repercussions of having a dream deferred. "Does it stink like rotten meat?", he asks. I began to question the sour stench of inequality seeping from my community, the implications of injustice have become a murky shade

of disappointment. “Or fester like a sore”, he wonders. I felt the system ooze promises unkept, the current state of our communities a byproduct of inequity. “Maybe it just sags like a heavy load”, he suggests. I sensed my dream for the economic mobility of my home city succumbed to their confinements of false hope. Lastly, he asks “*Or does it explode?*”. I’m outraged, my yearning for change has been preyed on. The American dream has shown to be just as hollow as America’s promises.

What is the solution to hopelessness? Another economic plan? A new president’s promise? Sheer effort from Black people? Quick fixes have failed us before and they’ll fail us again. First and foremost, a foundation of trust needs to be built. After years of despondency, effective communication between the government and the people is critical for change. Dismantle the status quo, a system where Black voices are centered in the lawmaking process needs to be implemented. The policies created specifically for our communities should be determined by us, and not by our white counterparts. And an increase in the art for racial justice is needed, the black community must be reminded that we aren’t alone in having our hopes dashed. A new awareness of the Black struggle will force white people to examine injustice they would have otherwise ignored. Most importantly, unity must be the driving force behind everything. We, as the black community cannot expect change if there is division amongst ourselves.

The inner workings of a system that relies on economic inequality continue to plague our society. Promises have been made and they’ve been broken, policies have been created and they haven’t been upheld. The American dream is in for a rude awakening. A dream deferred cannot be slept away, it will eventually demand what it is owed. Wake up America!

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