

Reflecting on Triumphs, Successes and Progress of the Black Diaspora in America

By Rosemarie P. Linton

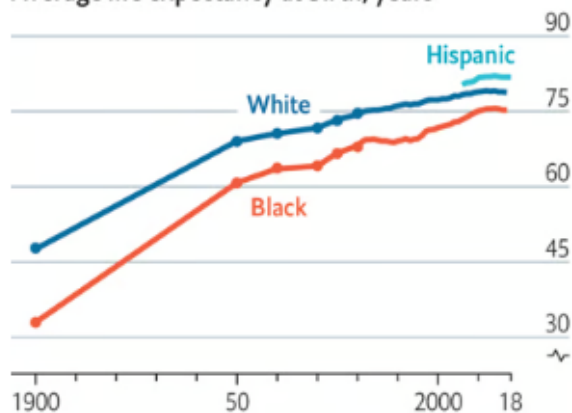
At the Black History Celebration at Roosevelt High School on February 10th, 2023, I quizzed the audience on who was the first female millionaire in the United States. A student correctly answered Madame C. J. Walker, an African American, who resided in Irvington, New York, in the early 1900s, just 3 towns up the Hudson River from Yonkers and who founded the Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company. She is famous for the hair care products developed especially for black women. Then I questioned now which African American currently a billionaire now has a residence in Westchester County? After giving a clue, another student correctly answered Jay-Z (Shawn Corey Carter) who as the founder of Roc Nation, acquired his wealth from diverse businesses he started soon after achieving great success from various album releases.

Yes, indeed there have been triumphs, successes and progress in the African American community in the past 100 years. We see these improvements in life expectancy, in education, in household income, in career opportunities, and in government. Around 1900, a white American had a life expectancy of 48 years whereas a black American's life expectancy at that time was only 33 years! By 1950, the 15 year gap narrowed to 8 years with life expectancy reaching 61 years for African Americans and 69 for white Americans. In 2017, this disparity reduced to just 3 ½ years, 75.3 years for African Americans and 78.8 for white Americans (Source: Centers for Disease Control). As life expectancy has increased for the Black population, so has educational attainment. Since 2000, the number of African Americans over 25 years old with a bachelor's degree has nearly doubled from 15% to near 30% (Source: National Centre for Education Statistics).

Live long...

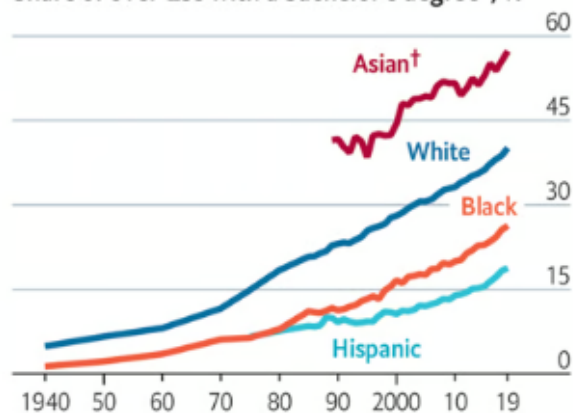
United States, by race and ethnicity

Average life expectancy at birth, years



Sources: Centres for Disease Control;
National Centre for Education Statistics
The Economist

Share of over-25s with a bachelor's degree*, %



*Share with four or more years of college for years before 1993
†includes Pacific Islanders

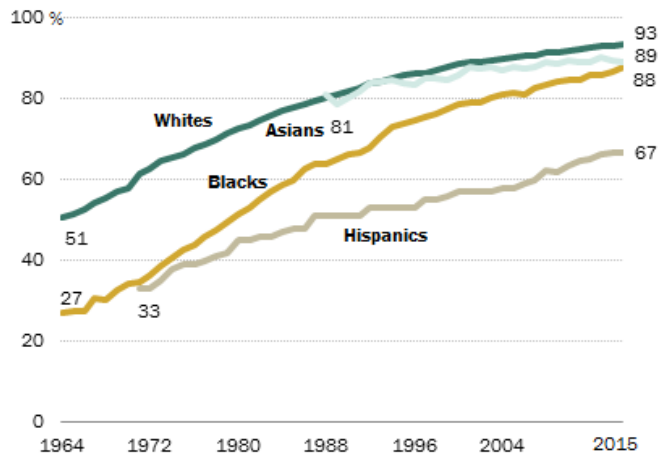
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1940 is when the United States Census Bureau started collecting data on educational attainment. At that time, only 7% of Black Americans had a high school education compared to a 24% nationwide average. Seventy-five years later, in 2015 the rate of Black Americans attaining a high school diploma was 88%, a 71% increase.

Black-white high school completion gap narrows; Hispanics lag behind

% of U.S. adults ages 25 and older who have a high school diploma



Note: Whites, blacks and Asians include only those who reported a single race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown. Data for whites, blacks and Asians from 1971 to 2015 include only non-Hispanics. Data for whites and blacks prior to 1971 include Hispanics. Data for Hispanics not available prior to 1971. Data for Asians not available prior to 1988. Asians include Pacific Islanders. Prior to 1992 those who completed at least 12 years of school are classified as high school graduates. For 1992-2015 those who have at least a high school diploma or its equivalent are classified as high school graduates. Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 1964-2015 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (IPUMS)

"On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites are Worlds Apart"

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We have seen glass ceilings crash within the government sector right here in Yonkers with the election of Lakisha Collins Bellamy as City Council President and Tasha Diaz as majority leader of the City Council. Andrea Stewart Cousins, also from Yonkers, became the first African American woman to hold the post of New York Senate Majority Leader. Since January 2021, Kamala Harris has been serving as the first female African American Vice President and we all can recall the triumph for the Black community when Barack Obama was elected President in November 2008. Coinciding with President Obama's second term which ended in January 2017, median household income for African Americans in several major metropolitan areas increased by over 20% (Source: Brookings - American Community Survey).

TABLE 1

Many metro areas experienced strong increases in Black household incomes

Large metro areas with statistically significant change in Black median household income, 2013-18

Metro area	Black median household income, 2013 (\$2018)	Black median household income, 2018 (\$2018)	Change, 2013 to 2018 (%)
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	43,316	59,083	36.4
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	44,318	57,980	30.8
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	39,677	51,148	28.9
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	46,036	58,424	26.9
Jackson, MS	31,274	38,908	24.4
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	34,160	41,612	21.8
Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	30,944	37,666	21.7
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	36,660	44,583	21.6
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	45,097	54,456	20.8
Richmond, VA	41,964	49,813	18.7
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC	39,400	45,308	15.0
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	46,799	53,632	14.6
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	44,209	50,306	13.8
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	43,410	48,697	12.2
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	36,989	41,181	11.3
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	39,645	44,004	11.0
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	32,539	35,656	9.6
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	70,010	74,978	7.1

Source: Brookings analysis of American Community Survey data

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Many years ago, the employment opportunities available to Black Americans was quite limited. However, this is not the case today in 2023. The exciting and most encouraging news is that there is no limit to what the students of the upcoming classes of Yonkers Public Schools can achieve. This is progress! The programs that Dr. Edwin Quezada, the Assistant Superintendents, and the Trustees have worked so hard to put in place, with the support of Mayor Spano and our local politicians, is to help you excel in your studies. In addition to what you learn in the classroom, I encourage all students to do above and beyond what their teachers assign for homework. Go to our wonderful Yonkers libraries and read more than what has been assigned to you. Work on extra math problems to make sure you understand all the concepts so there will be no surprises on entrance examinations. Take advantage of all the extracurricular activities your school offers. Take on leadership roles in those after school programs. If you are not sure what you want to do as a career, start researching various types of careers based on your academic strengths. Be serious about your education and do your very best. Always strive to get As. An excellent education opens doors to better health, better housing, higher paying jobs, and overall better well-being. Our founding fathers stated in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable; that all men are created equal and independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Becoming a millionaire or billionaire may not be the objective, please know that money surely is not everything, but it is good to know that we live in a country where anything is possible if you have a dream and work hard towards achieving that dream. III John 1:2 “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”