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After Her Ferguson Speech, What Hillary Clinton Needs to Say to Black People

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September 1, 2014 | Posted by Nick Chiles

Tagged With: black and white wealth gap, Black Homeownership, former secretary of state hillary clinton, income gap, income inequality

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Presumed presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton finally weighed in on the Michael Brown slaying in Ferguson, Missouri, by slamming inequities in the criminal justice system. Though many wondered why it took her so long, her probing commentary on the systemic racism was hailed by many observers.

If Clinton really wants to cement her status as a future champion of Black America, there's yet another issue she needs to address that has had an enormous impact on the lives of Black people: income and wealth inequality.

When it comes to the difference between the wealth of white households and Black households in the United States, the numbers are devastating.

A comprehensive 2013 study by the Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University found that the median wealth of white families in 2009 was \$113,149, compared to \$6,325 for Latino families and \$5,677 for Black families. Researchers at Brandies traced the wealth of 1,700 families from 1984 to 2009 and found that over that 25-year period, the total wealth gap between white and African-American families nearly tripled, increasing from \$85,000 in 1984 to \$236,500 in 2009.

The total impact of this gap can't be overemphasized. A family's wealth affects every aspect of that family's life: dictating the quality of the neighborhood the family can live in, which affects the quality of the schools the children attend, which affects the likelihood the children will attain a college degree, which affects the family income and wealth all over again in an unending cycle. It also gives the family a financial cushion in case of emergency or job loss, which affects the stress in the household, which impacts the likeliness of a couple being able to weather the storms and stay together.

White families already earn about \$2 for every \$1 that a Black and Hispanic family earns, according to a study by the Urban Institute. The Great Recession made the gap infinitely worse, with Hispanic families

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losing 44 percent of their wealth between 2007 and 2010 and Black families losing 31 percent.

In comparison, white families lost 11 percent of their wealth.

These numbers say everything about the racial tensions that currently exist in America. When a community explodes like Ferguson after the horrifying killing of an unarmed Black teenager by the police, it is years of palpable frustration exploding to the surface — a frustration fed by the statistics cited above.

Clinton is certainly aware of these unconscionable numbers. Her family business is the Clinton Foundation, which she runs jointly with her husband and daughter and the foundation states prominently on its website that its purpose is to “create **Translate »** purpose to improve global health and wellness, increase opportunity for women and girls, reduce childhood obesity, create economic opportunity and growth, and help communities address the effects of climate change.”

Surely she’s stumbled across the vastness of the wealth gap that exists in her country and she knows how devastating it is for Black and Hispanic people.

So as she gears up for a presidential run that will lean heavily on the support of African Americans (and Latinos), she should be preparing a multi-faceted plan that will directly address closing this gap. One of the primary ways this can be done is tackling the biggest perpetuator of the gap — home ownership.

When the Brandeis researchers set about to break down the various factors that contribute to the yawning race gap, this is what they found: Years of home ownership accounted for 27 percent of the gap, the largest portion; average family income accounted for 20 percent; even with similar college degrees, whites make more money, which accounted for another 5 percent of the gap; how much wealth a family started with in 1984 (largely due to family inheritance) accounted for 3 percent of the gap; unemployment contributed 9 percent of the gap.

Clearly, any major effort to close the gap must confront the huge difference in the rates of home ownership — while 74 percent of white households own their homes, the number is about 45 percent for Blacks.

“Homeownership is an even greater part of wealth composition for black families, amounting to 53 percent of wealth for blacks and 39 percent for whites,” the Brandeis researchers wrote in their report. “Yet, for many years, redlining, discriminatory mortgage-lending practices, lack of access to credit and lower incomes have blocked the homeownership path for Africans-Americans while creating and reinforcing communities segregated by race. African-Americans, therefore, are more recent homeowners and more likely to have high-risk mortgages, hence they are more vulnerable to foreclosure and volatile housing prices.”

What can Clinton tell us she plans to do about all of this? She can tell us she’s going to institute much stronger mortgage and lending policies and more strictly enforce fair housing policies so residential segregation and redlining no longer give white homeowners greater wealth opportunities than they do to Black homeowners.

As for the persistent problem of income equality, she can start by pushing to raise the minimum wage, something President Barack Obama has been pushing for years. In addition, she can push to enforce equal pay provisions and strengthen employer-based retirement plans.

The point is that most of the wealth gap is due not to any failures on the part of African-Americans but to policies that reinforce systemic racism and keep the deck substantially stacked against African-Americans and other people of color. As president, Hillary Clinton needs to let us know that she will work hard to fix the deck.



About Nick Chiles

Nick Chiles is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author. He has written or co-written 12 books and won over a dozen major journalism awards during a journalism career that brought him to the Dallas Morning News, the Star-Ledger of New Jersey and New York Newsday, in addition to serving as Editor-in-Chief of Odyssey Couleur travel magazine.

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Steph Garland · Follow

The democrats are no better than the republicans! I'm very afraid if what lies ahead!

Reply · Like · 4 · Follow Post · September 1 at 3:16pm



John Turner · Stony Brook University

I'M WITH YOU STEPH. DON'T KNOW IF I WANT TO VOTE ANYMORE. HILLARY WONT GET MY VOTE. THESE CLOWNS TAKE TURNS PLAYING GOOD COP BAD COP. FOR EXAMPLE HOW THE HELL IS HER HUSBAND AND PAPA BUSH SUCH GOOD FRIENDS ALL OF A SUDDEN?. AND WE ALL KNOW PAPA BUSH'S HISTORY AND BACKGROUND.

Reply · Like · 1 · September 2 at 6:50pm



Will Rock · Top Commenter

Just a micro second of reality. What has voting for the POTUS ever done for black people? ever? Don't vote and see what changes. It's all symbolic.

Reply · Like · 3 · Follow Post · September 2 at 12:42am



Ted Andrews

Will, you are right about voting, however, voting must be use by Black folks to our advantage. Vote strategically to obtain specified objectives. Always vote strategically! Voting as a bargaining chip...

Reply · Like · Edited · September 2 at 3:42pm



Ted Andrews

Mercedes-Benz Certified Pre-Owned Vehicles with Unlimited Mileage Warranty +2.99% APR. Includes a silver SUV image and a 'VIEW OFFERS' button.



To all the Black folks who visit the Atlanta Black Star, I must tell you, DO NOT trust Hillary Clinton if she decides to run for US Presidency, she is an extremely RUTHLESS person. She will sellout Black folks in a heart beat.

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Bwire Vincent · [Follow](#) · [Top Commenter](#)

Politicians don't create jobs; Blacks need to stop over depending on the white man. Instead of Hollywood, why not join people like Tyler Pery to create their own? What's wrong with working with the likes of Roland Martin to have their own CNN, to broadcast news that represent the Black man positively, for a change? Why fight over minimum wage, when you can join hands and start your own Walmarts, MacDonald'ses, GE, GM etc? We need to start hearing of Black owned banks, Hospitals, manufacturing industries, independent professionals etc. Instead of looking down on Black people from Africa and the Caribbean, why not work with them? Yes, they are still taking baby steps, but they are doing it with pride - because they know that they ran the show. The American Black man is still a slave, that's the sad fact. Those Cadillacs, weaves and Rolexes go a long way in proving the point.

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Bob Hobbs Jr · [School of hard knocks](#)

BTW....Hopefully you all know the GOP pays people to troll on minority and progressive sites to spread misinformation. Kind of like the comments of Ted Andrews, Byron Anderson, and Steph Garland! Don't fall for the right wing BS! YOU KNOW WHAT HER HUSBAND AND SHE DID FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY WHEN IN OFFICE!

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Ted Andrews

Bob, thank you for reminding reader about individuals who do troll specific websites in an attempt to create confusion. However, I am not a troll for the GOP or DEMOCRATS. What I said about Hillary is the honest true. This can also be said about a number of Republican candidates also. They all do not do work for the American people. I'm suspicious of them all.

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Bob Hobbs Jr · [School of hard knocks](#)

THIS STORY IS RIDICULOUS! All the way back when she was first lady she spoke on the "VAST RIGHT WING CONSPIRACY" and their agenda! Not to mention several time subsequent she has spoken on wealth inequality! SMH....This article makes the author look uninformed!!!

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Bryon Anderson · [Top Commenter](#) · [Grant High School](#)

If any black folks votes for Hillary Clinton then you have not done your history on her relationships with Blacks

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