

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

October 1, 2009 - Issue 344

[Home](#)

The Other Pittsburgh at the G-20 Meeting African American Leadership By Dr. Ron Walters, PhD BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

Just before the G-20 nations met in Pittsburgh September 24-25, I was the keynote speaker at an Urban Summit hosted by a community group, the Community Empowerment Association. This African American city-wide organization felt it important enough to sponsor a meeting that would draw people from other cities to highlight issues of importance to those who were hurt the most by policies of the G-20 nations and previously the G-7.

President Barack Obama spoke to the G-20 Summit gathering on September 24 and in his opening remarks told of his conversations with close advisers and others who marveled at the transformation of Pittsburgh from a working class industrial steel town to a City with a diverse economy, led by a high tech sector. This is a sign that Pittsburgh is now connected to the global economy which creates winners and losers among the work force in many communities. The loss of industrial jobs eliminated the livelihood of many African Americans that were located in that sector of the economy and who were unable to make the transformation to the high tech economy.

Globalization tends to create high-wage jobs in the tech sector that needs financial services, computer and other kinds of technology. One of the problems Blacks faced during the high-tech boom of the 1980s was that when those jobs jumped from 14.4 million in 1996 to 22 million in 2006, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reported that Blacks benefitted only marginally. In 2000, only 6.4% of Blacks were in the computer and electronic manufacturing sector and 7.9% in information services and data processing, 5.2 in professional and technical services. So, few Blacks were ready for those jobs.

The CEA brothers and sisters took me on a “walk in hood” down one of the busiest streets in the Black community, filled with people going about their ordinary business. This took me away from statistics into reality, and as I stopped and talked to people face-to-face it became clear that whether they were in hair salons or barbershops, in food stores or restaurants, or just hanging out on the corner, the degree of unemployment was rife. The building of a tech economy in Pittsburgh had passed them by.

For many of these people the competition for low-wage jobs also made life difficult, because globalization fuels immigration and many of the jobs that would have gone to them have been absorbed by the incoming immigrant population. Attendant to this was the difficulty they expressed in obtaining help from unions whose application requirements also included the question of whether or not a person had a felony status.

The other surprising thing was how many of the African American males I talked to have a felony status. They explained how difficult it was, once they had come out of prison, to get started living like a normal person again, because they were prohibited from access to public housing, many kinds of jobs, finances for education, loans for start-up businesses and the like. One barber I met said he obtained his training in prison, but conference attendees from other states said you cannot even get a barbers license if you have a felony status.

A few days later, at the Congressional Black Caucus annual Weekend, I was pleased to hear that some of its members were proposing legislation that would roll back some of these laws put in place during the Newt Gingrich era as a punishment system for Blacks who they believed were responsible for most of the crime in America. But this will be a hard fight because so many politicians, Democrat and Republicans, are tied to the notion that a harsh punishment system will deter crime, but there is little evidence for this. Indeed, since 2000 crime has been going down, while incarcerations rates have skyrocketed.

This is the other Pittsburgh, symbolic of places all over the country where globalization has wrought the exclusion of Blacks from the workforce – but few have written or spoken about it. Instead, solutions move from Reagan trickle-down economics under Republicans to Keynesian trickle-down economics under Democrats, both of which are inadequate. The excluded also need change they can believe in with a roll back in repressive laws and a second Stimulus Package aimed directly at the bottom of society.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest book is: [*The Price of Racial Reconciliation \(The Politics of Race and Ethnicity\)*](#) (University of Michigan Press). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Walters.



Let your voice be heard
The call is free

Powered By
Google voice

[Click Here](#)

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO **bc** NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT **bc**

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved