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Enslaved People *Built That* Nafsi ya Jamii By Wilson Riles BC Columnist

Where are U.S. economics headed? Before we can truly know where we may be going, we must know where we have been and where we are now! That is a basic concept in path-finding. All other things concerning the landscape through which one moves may change but the points where one has been and where one stands in the present are fixed – or can be fixed in the mind. The history of the path through these points tells of straight lines, curves, angles, and stories of how obstacles and barriers were surmounted. Therefore keeping reasonably accurate records and making measurements of those turns and twists is important. Given that all of us have the same destination of “freedom” and economic prosperity based on just opportunity and equitably compensated effort for all residents of the U.S., **path finding** (at this moment) requires answers to the question of what has been the history of U.S. economics in relationship to individual effort and government involvement.

With the issue of U.S. economic history, Wikipedia begins with the following true statement: “The **economic history of the United States** has its roots in European colonization in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.” From that point on Wikipedia – reflecting the popular miasma and false mythology about U.S. economic history – obfuscates and bends the truth. There is an early “bow” to the truth of war, stolen land, the importation of pandemic diseases, the corruption of local indigenous ways with alcohol, and the development of dependency on goods manufactured thousands of miles away. But in listing causes for U.S. economic success, the exploitation of stolen land and the near genocide of First People inhabitants are unspoken, assumed virtues.

The enslavement of black people and the stealing of their labor are subsumed in a description of "entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to investing in material and human capital." It takes no mental effort to know that Europeans **in Europe** were no less entrepreneurial or less industrious than the European colonizers **that arrived on U.S. shores**. The difference was stolen land and stolen labor. It is **falsehood** to attribute U.S. early economic success to **entrepreneurial spirit**. This inaccurate view of the past is still fixed in too many minds and was the background of the Presidential campaign tiff about "**You didn't build that.**"

The major crux of that tiff had to do with the recognition of the role of government, which was the actual intent of Obama's misconstrued statement. History is clear that government played a major role in U.S. economic "success." From the very beginning, these colonial exploration efforts were sponsored and sanctioned by European government powers, including the Vatican. This exploitation would not have happened without governmental involvement. Through the patronage of monarchs and republics, private companies were issued corporate **charters**. "These chartered companies go back into the medieval period. Chartered companies enabled States to use private resources for exploration and trade beyond the means of the limited resources of the treasury, which is a liberal form of indirect rule." The charter "document set out the terms under which the company could trade; defined its boundaries of influence, and described its rights and responsibilities." Much of the early U.S. business "success" was due to growing tobacco, rice, and indigo for export and trade: that avenue for business would not exist without governments and their navies. At **no time** in the economic history of the U.S. were the government and businesses – beyond the size of very small farms – independent actors achieving their goals separately. "**No, you didn't build that by yourself, ever!**"

Over the years, there did develop small farm and small business enterprises all over the country that were locally self-sustaining; these were the folks who were the focus of the Jefferson Democracy movement that opposed what government did for the large businesses and corporations. The New England states, which were fed by these local enterprises and did not grow crops for export, benefited from the construction of slaving ships, whaling, rum production (which led to the textile industry), and the various publically supported kinds of mills. New England governments subsidized roads, bridges, inns, and ferries. All of this derived from and depended in major part on stolen land and the stolen labor of enslaved people in the South.

The invention of the cotton gin made "cotton king" and exploded the economics of slavery and international trade. The Federal government expanded exploration West with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and military campaigns against the indigenous land holders. States and local governments continued to subsidize roads and waterways such as the Cumberland Pike and the Erie Canal. Following the lead of Alexander Hamilton, Government stepped in to create banks and currencies that favored standing armies and big business. Railroads, steam ships, and other efforts expanded government's involvement in the U.S. economy. **Missing, is the evidence for an "American Exceptionalism" based on the self-made, independent corporate entrepreneur!** Everywhere we scratch the historical surface it seems that government is there picking winners and losers and sanctioning horrendous oppression and injustice.

The government was paying its bills with land grants; giving out the land that its armies had stolen and the land that Jefferson had illegally purchased from France. The U.S. had doubled in size thanks to the Haitian slave Revolt. The **Louisiana Purchase** was the acquisition by the U.S in 1803 of 828,000 square miles of France's claim to the territory of Louisiana. That territory "contained all of present-day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska; parts of Minnesota that were west of the Mississippi River; most of North Dakota; most of South Dakota; northeastern New Mexico; northern Texas; the portions of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado east of the Continental Divide; Louisiana west of the Mississippi River, including the city of New Orleans; and small portions of land that would eventually become part of the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan." The U.S. paid \$11,250,000 plus cancellation of debts worth \$3,750,000, for a total sum of less than 3 cents per acre for the Louisiana territory. The slave revolt in Haiti and an impending war with Britain led France to sell the entire territory to the U.S. It was not France's to sell; the lands belonged to indigenous tribes.

The rest of the nation was acquired, also illegally, from Mexico because of slavery. Mexico, after it threw off the Spanish colonizer, had outlawed slavery. The Underground Railroad also went south and Mexico refused to extradite runaway slaves. The Alamo was an attempt by slave owners and slave traders to steal Mexican land and convert it to slave territory. When this failed, a war with Mexico was instigated and the defeated Mexicans were forced in the **1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** to give the U.S. the Rio Grande boundary for Texas, the ownership of California, and a large area comprising New

Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado. Mexico had failed to conquer the tribes in much of this area but with the formerly enslaved black troops, the Buffalo Soldiers, the U.S. eventually did so.

The rapid economic development following Union government expenditures during the Civil War laid the groundwork for the modern U.S. industrial economy. By 1890, the USA leaped ahead of Britain for first place in manufacturing output. Lincoln's Treasury Secretary, Chase, monetized and capitalized the U.S. economy. The capital from stolen lands and stolen labor was concentrated, centralized, and made available to mostly Republican business tycoons. The Gilded Age followed, followed by the Depression, followed by The New Deal and World War II. The rest is wrinkles on a theme and is within the ken of living baby-boomers today.

Of the 6.5 million immigrants who survived the crossing of the Atlantic and settled in the Western Hemisphere between 1492 and 1776, only 1 million were Europeans. The remaining 5.5 million were African. The U.S. transported and enslaved approximately 1/5 of this number but hung on to this horrendous institution the longest. To relegate the impact of slavery in the economic history of the U.S. to vague references is unacceptable. But to attribute the economic "success" of the U.S. largely to "entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to investing in material and human capital" is unforgivable! ***Stolen land and enslaved people built that!***

[Note: Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to "The Soul Community"]

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, *Wilson Riles*, is a former Oakland, CA City Council Member. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Riles.



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