

Filling the Unemployment Quagmire

By Akosua K. Albritton

NYS Dept. of Labor's Preliminary Area Unemployment Rates monthly report for April 2013 puts the state's rate at 7.8%, which is the state's lowest level since March 2009. NYC's rate (all 5 boroughs) for April was 7.7%. This is down from 8.5% since the preceding month. These figures strongly suggest that the local economy is bouncing back from the "Great Recession".

Digging deeper reveals where high unemployment persists. The Bronx County's rate is 10.5% and Kings County's is 8.4%, followed by Queens, Richmond County, and New York County at 6.9%, 6.7%, and 6.5%, respectively.

Census 2010 and historic residential patterns show that the Bronx is the home of most Hispanics and Brooklyn having the highest number of blacks in the City. Could it be that NYC blacks and Hispanics experience higher unemployment than other New Yorkers? Unfortunately, this is the case.

April 2013 figures for NYC Human Resources Administration's three cash assistance programs count 363,991 recipients where most reside in Brooklyn (36.8%) and the Bronx (32.5%). The case heads, regardless of residence, are primarily black (46%) and Hispanic (42.3%) for these programs. White and Other are cumulatively a distant 11.67%.

What accounts for the high unemployment? "Lack of education makes them unemployable", asserts Michelle George, Brooklyn Community District 8 Manager. This district covers Prospect Heights, northern Crown Heights, and Weeksville. "Their high school dropout rates are higher than whites and the types of jobs that 'lack of education' affords—fast food and retail—[this population] doesn't want". Workforce One Centers are dealing with this aversion by preparing Workforce One members for such employment. Their clients include Home Depot, Lowe's, Victoria's Secret, Hale n' Hearty, and Burger Shack.

Glen Ettienne, owner of Delux Gallery Natural Hair Salon, in Clinton Hill, contends media exposure shapes young black and Hispanic life decisions. "The people who own the press

understand that we're followers. 50% can't think for themselves. In owning the press, they can sway the public". Ettienne believes the music industry is another influencer. "The original rap music was conscious rap that lifted us", Ettienne opines. "So the record executives had the musicians change their lyrics. Now nobody raps about going to college, respecting your brother, or raising your child. "It's drive a nice car", "get, the money", "get the bitches".

Others observe that neither public schools nor parents are adequately presenting the breadth of career and occupation options that youth could consider. There are black businesses that admirably weather the current economic climate. **Black Enterprise's** Industry Leaders lists include many local enterprises. Kristal Auto Mall, Uniworld Group, Inc., the Brooklyn-based advertising agency, Carver Federal, with branches in three boroughs, Valentine Mfg, in Hauppauge, and Prime Access, a marketing company need mentioning.

Where there is no apparent work people must make work. One recession-proof industry is food and beverages. Lowell Hawthorne turned one Caribbean cuisine restaurant into a franchise called **Golden Crust Caribbean Bakery & Grill**. Franchising resulted in not only a business for Hawthorne and his co-founder but businesses and employment for 120 franchises.

Franchising can be an expensive proposition. **Golden Crust** franchisees invest between \$173,000 and \$564,000 to operate the moneymakers. There are franchises that require much lower cash outlays. Janitorial franchises are within reach of moderate income households. The investment ranges between \$1,500 and \$55,000. JAN-Pro Cleaning Systems with 10,414 franchises in the US counts 2,675 franchises owned by black executives. Investment is from \$3,145 to \$50,130. Returning to attitudes, blacks and Hispanics must rethink what is worthy work and how to build wealth, if the community is determined to solve the unemployment quagmire.