

LEGACY'S LYRIC

An invitation to listen to the state of
Black Wealth



BLAVITY.ORG FOUNDATION

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ABOUT BLAVITY.ORG



photo credit: Telly\$Vision

Our founders met in college, where they gathered in the cafeteria and discussed everything. They used the term “Blavity” (Black + gravity) to describe the force that attracts Black people and fuels their conversations. In 2014, the seeds planted by those discussions sprouted into Blavity Inc., an authentic and unapologetically Black digital media company. From the beginning, they shared and amplified the voices of exceptional multi-cultural content creators from all over the world. Blavity Inc. developed **Blavity.org Foundation** in parallel, sharing the same economic imperative to create prosperity alongside justice. Founded in 2021, Blavity.Org Foundation, Inc.’s sister organization.

Blavity.org is bringing together the ecosystems of organizations, corporations, and businesses to bridge our efforts in full service of the Black wealth creator – the Black entrepreneur. Our goal is to create space and opportunities for us to collectively work toward Black liberation. Our mission generates the connection platforms needed for Black businesses to know each other exist, learn, and go back into the fight in partnership.

Our work wraps around those points of collaboration to provide unconventional tools, spaces of authentic connection, and empowerment, creating generational shifts around how the story of entrepreneurship is experienced, told, and passed down.

As an organization rooted in preserving Black culture and tackling the three most tangible forms of inheritance – wealth, stories, and trauma – we take a unique approach. **We are a landing place for everyone, we raise others up, and put everyone on.** We respond to the needs of the sub-groups of our entrepreneurs, like mompreneurs and women. **Our research is rooted in the language and cultural philosophies of the Black community.**

Blavity.org’s programs connect the dots to build constellations of Black entrepreneurs who leave equipped with the belief that our liberation is on the other side of our collaboration.

Growth Fellowship: A six-month educational and community experience guided by experts in business, operations, communications, events, and marketing, this fellowship program provides up to 15 Black entrepreneurs with the necessary tools to grow their businesses and contribute to building generational wealth among Black communities. Each entrepreneur receives a \$10k grant.

Black Gravity Spaces: Unexpected events in unique spaces bring together Black communities. Black Gravity spaces aim to broaden communities of Black entrepreneurs and create connections and access to resources in an exclusive, distinctive, comfortable environment.

Storytelling: Leverage network for collective thought leadership, research, and entrepreneurship storytelling through collaborations with notable experts and entrepreneurs and special projects highlighting untold Black entrepreneur stories.

Blavity.org is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization separate from Blavity Inc. corporation.

Blavity.org Mission

Our mission is to support Black entrepreneurs to achieve generational wealth through education, storytelling and Black Gravity.

Blavity.org Vision

We envision a world where all Black people thrive.

MEET OUR TEAM



TAMYRA GORDON

Executive Director

ASHLEY BEATTY

Program and Operations Manager

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jeff Nelson
Board Chair, Blavity Inc. Co-Founder & COO

Morgan DeBaun
Secretary, Blavity Inc. Founder & CEO

Aaron Samuels
Treasurer, Blavity Inc. Co-Founder

photo credit: Getty images

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Blavity.org partnered with academics to make this vision a reality. By partnering with Black academics, we marry our expertise in promoting Black entrepreneurship through storytelling, their expertise in promoting Black entrepreneurship through empirical research, and our shared value in education.



MATTHEW JACKSON, PHD

“This is a really exciting opportunity to take my work from behind the paywall of academic journals and apply it directly to my community. And I love being able to pair the narratives coming from our music with data and resources to amplify the opportunities for our future.”

Dr. Jackson is an assistant professor of Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles. His work focuses on the psychology of success in entrepreneurship, STEM, and education. Dr. Jackson has conducted research and evaluation for the CSULA LEEAF entrepreneurship advancement program, as well as for the Blavity.org entrepreneurship fellowship. He has served as a principal investigator or evaluator for multiple grant-funded research projects on diversifying STEM education and careers. He has also been an invited speaker on the topic of data collection for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Dr. Jackson serves on the board of the Western Psychological Association.



MARLA PARKER, PHD

“It’s the combination of culture, art, and intellect for me. It’s rare to have an opportunity to examine entrepreneurship in such a dynamic and innovative way and it’s super exciting! I’m honored to be part of creating a meaningful bridge that can bring deeper insights.”

Dr. Parker is a tenured professor at California State University, Los Angeles in the Masters of Public Administration program where she studies and teaches in the areas of STEM policy, public management, social entrepreneurship, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. She’s also the Co-Founder and Co-Director of the LEEAF program on campus, which supports entrepreneurial advancement within communities of color through technical assistance, professional development, and research. She is the Founder and Principle of Sounding Board Solutions, which offers consulting services in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as leadership development.

WHY MUSIC?

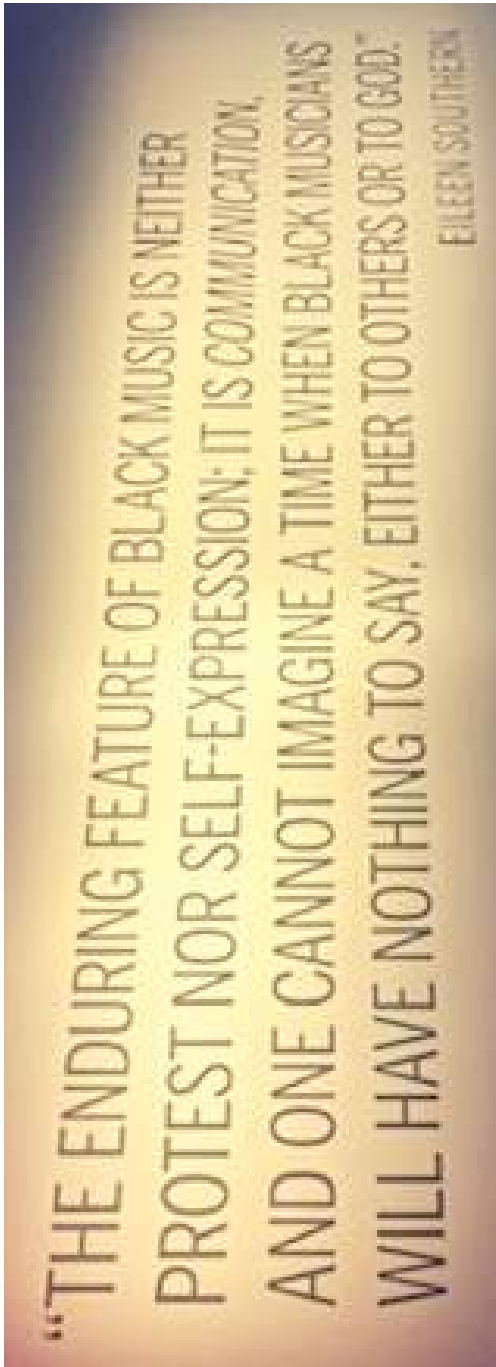


photo credit: National Museum of African American Music

Music in the Black diaspora and culture is not merely for pleasure. It has acted as a northstar, facilitated healing, nurtured growth, provided an escape, reaffirmed personal and collective power, imparted wisdom, and served as a vehicle for truth-telling.

In the specific context of Black American empowerment, music has and continues to be the primary tool to critique capitalist systems; re-imagine a liberated and powerful future; re-examine our relationships and responsibilities to one another; and, of course, provide an avenue to transform socio-cultural capital into financial capital. **Black stories and music go hand in hand.** When Black people were prevented from learning to write, we sang, we created, we quilted, we braided, we imprinted our stories through secret embraces.

There are few things that connect us to each other in the way music does. Ever wonder why you can remember every lyric to songs but can't remember something you just read? Music and lyrics have connecting and convening power. You feel it, you hold it, it lives in you.

WHAT IS LEGACY'S LYRIC?

A note from the Executive Director

The lyric of the Black person isn't untold: it's ignored, demonized, and exploited.

Legacy's Lyric is an invitation to listen.

It's an opportunity to closely align capital, access, and impact to the Black story. Black people don't need their stories retold - they need them heard, authentically.

Once a year, Blavity.org will release a new chapter of stories told by the Black artist, voted on by the Black community, alongside partners bold enough to sit in Black liberation work as accomplices.

Legacy's Lyric is alignment of art and liberation for the amplification, access, and generational impact of the Black community.

We don't own the rights to any of the music featured. We did not edit any language or remove uncomfortable words. We share in full authenticity and align with the holistic message of stories told in the ways they were written by the artist.

At Blavity.org, we want to encourage different thinking and engagement in Black liberation. We thank you in advance for listening.

Tanyra Gordon



For many African Americans, music and faith are deeply intertwined. Music expressed hope—first for freedom from bondage, later from oppression and inequality. It sprang from the depths of one's soul, soaring upward towards an ever-sought, divine "higher ground."

The religious music of African Americans has always aimed to ease the burdens of life while also celebrating life and the endurance of a people. The path from hymn to spiritual to gospel has often been challenging, reflecting changes inside and outside of diverse churches and denominations. Yet, from open fields and camp meetings to storefronts and houses of worship, core beliefs and values have remained constant. Across the spectrum of African American congregations, individuals found shelter, support, and the unifying strength to carry on. As brothers James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson's composition put it so evocatively in the early 1900s: "Lift every voice and sing/Till earth and heaven ring."

photo credit: National Museum of African American Music

"Anything human can be left through music, which means that there is no limit to the creating that can be done with music."

NINA SIMONE

INTRO

Structure of Report

THIS REPORT IS ITSELF A SONG OF LIBERATION.

A song of reflection, a song of empowerment, and a song that is a harbinger of a new path forward.

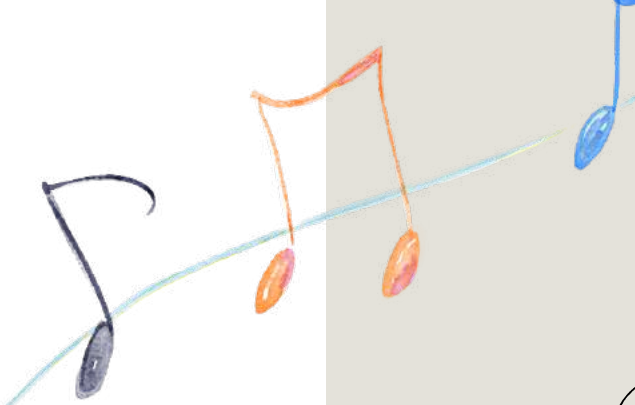
Liberation can be likened to a collective sound of instrumentals and vocals where multiple distinct parts work together to create a harmonious song. There is no harmonious, holistic liberation through one pathway. As such, this specific report examines liberation with a focus on economic and wealth building dynamics by connecting it to other critical dynamics, including but not limited to: self-determination, identity, collective action, systems, institutions, and wellbeing.

EVERY IS A SONG YOU CAN LISTEN TO

In keeping with the music theme, the report is organized into chorus, verse, and outro sections.

Chorus	Executive Summary and Approach
Verses	Major Themes
Outro	Conclusion and Moving Forward





CHORUS

Executive Summary & Approach

The report is divided into three main verses (i.e. themes) discussing critical dynamics of Black American economic empowerment from a past, present, and future perspective, each with representative lyrics from the genres of hip hop, R&B, soul, house, or gospel – all of which have been distinctively birthed and shaped by Black American experiences and identity; and each possessing a unique, rich sound that tells our story from a personal perspective. Our approach was to identify key lyrics from poignant songs exemplifying the following themes and then to curate research in support of the messages conveyed.

Verse 1 **Emerging Critical Moments.** Black wealth building cannot depend upon fixing broken systems, especially ones beyond repair, in this new era. Opportunities, must be collectively created and identified.

Verse 2 **Grinding, Hustling, and Making It.** Thus far, Black economic liberation has required an intense focus, strength, and work, which has gotten us far; but a new paradigm shift requires us to go from grinding to thriving.

Verse 3 **From Worry, Stress, and Conflict to Abundance.** Wealth building must include wellbeing in order to transition from a deficit approach to wellbeing to one that is life-sustaining and nurturing.

Outro **Moving Forward.** What does a new paradigm shift look like that includes constant, uninterrupted economic liberation?

Overall, the threads woven in each section recognize that while generations of systemic economic oppression of Black Americans largely stem from policies, practices, values, and norms that were intentionally established to disarm and disenfranchise, there is hope. A power resides in the Black hands, feet, minds, hearts, and voices that have fueled the fortunes of others in the nation. Each new generation offers the opportunity to jettison instruments that no longer serve and create new ones; birth voices that break previously voiced barriers; and remix the successes of our ancestors into a vibrant future for ourselves and our descendants.

Verse 1

EMERGING CRITICAL MOMENT



(Re)Claiming Collaboration & Innovation

To compete in competitive emerging industries, while transcending the barriers against us, collaboration is a tool we cannot ignore. Collaboration has long been known to support economic growth.

Developing social capital, which is the cultivation and exchange of resources via relationships, elevates economic sustainability in that it can lead to other critical types of capital, facilitate sharing of resources and information, and provide the socio-emotional support necessary for economic resilience. It is suggested that developing strategic intracommunal social capital (i.e. social capital developed within communities for specific gains) can be particularly critical for economic liberation in the Black community. Such strategies are especially useful in light of how long-standing capitalist systems have focused on individual success and provided little antidote to the predatory practices that have stymied large-scale Black economic success.

Collaborative economic approaches – particularly cooperatives – are part of Black heritage for not only wealth attainment, but also the political power and community cohesiveness necessary to create and sustain economic equity. While there was a boon of larger-scale, Black-led cooperatives starting in the mid 19th century through the 1970s, many have since dissolved and the growth of new ones has slowed. Key factors such as shifting demographics, gentrification, increased focus on sole proprietorship, limited scaling of business to include employees, and limited access to capital can present serious challenges to embracing what was a powerful tool for socio-economic liberation for the Black community. However, critical lessons from successful co-ops in the past offer important lessons for economic liberation in new era of opportunity.



photo credit: Vickipedia

Lyrics

“It’s been a long, long time coming.” - Sam Cooke, [A Change Is Gonna Come](#)

“I told ‘em, please don’t die over the neighborhood / that ya mama’s renting...” - Jay-Z, [The Story of OJ](#)

[Nipsey Hussle](#) said, “These songs are spirituals that we swam against the waves with...”

Takeway

In order to protect what is innately ours - resilience, creativity, innovation - then we must think of our wealth just as holistically. Look at what we created under the worst of circumstances (i.e. inventions crafted by those enslaved) and imagine what we’d create under fuller circumstances.



GRINDING, HUSTLING, & REIMAGINING IT

Verse 1

Lyrics

“I bank with One United, I stream my music from Tidal, I stopped seeing people with melanin as a rival...” - [Draze, Building Black Wealth](#)

“Celebrating every day, no more public housing. Thinking back on my one-room shack.” - [Notorious B.I.G, Juicy](#)

“I give you the game, go back to the turf and give it right back.” - [Kendrick Lamar, Nipsey Hussle, Dedication](#)

The Gift & The Curse

The Gift

In the face of great obstacles, Black Americans developed a hard working mentality around economic liberation. From Bone Thugs-n-Harmony proclaiming “Gotta grind, gotta get mine” on 1st of Tha Month to Kendrick Lamar’s goal to “match the grind with precision” on The Heart pt 2, a common refrain has permeated the culture for decades: hard work is the bare minimum, and we may well need to do more than others simply to survive, much less to thrive.

This deeply held value is a powerful motivator, a response to stubbornly held racial stereotypes of laziness and disbelief in documented discrimination from outside the community. This motivation has served to slowly lift Blacks out of poverty. Black poverty rates have declined from 34% in 1970 to 21% in 2018. However, the constant grind mentality has its drawbacks.

The Curse

A grinding mentality evokes images of persisting in a struggle from paycheck to paycheck, a hustle that never ends. Endless hard work may be the descriptive norm (how things are), but not the prescriptive norm for our community (how things should be). For example, the imagery of the constant effort of grinding is at odds with passive income. Building wealth passively through property and other financial investments is a critical element of financial independence that is often overlooked in discourse, and inaccessible in practice.

Our work of reimagining Black economic liberation should integrate our existing WORTH and WORK ethic with more education about the most profitable financial practices. We ignore this advice at our own peril. Research shows that simply trying to soldier through the difficulties of our current capitalist system, while enduring the reality of racial discrimination, produces enough stress to shorten Black lifespans. We can’t ignore our mental and physical health in pursuit of economic liberation. When Nas rapped, “I never sleep, ‘cause sleep is the cousin of death,” he offered exemplary bravado but poor health advice. We want Black people to live long enough to enjoy all that they have worked for.

“Without a collective identity, it’s every man for himself”
- Nipsey Hussle



Grinding All My Life - Nipsey Hussle
Who Detached Us - Nipsey Hussle

Verse 3

FROM WORRY, STRESS, & CONFLICT TO THRIVING & ABUNDANCE

Blackness is a complex identity that has been shaped by forces within and outside our communities. Part of its complexity includes an internal friction and tension that can sometimes emerge in the pursuit of economic empowerment. The fact that fewer Blacks relative to other groups have and are reaching the higher ranks of wealth accumulation remains alarming; but it is not uncommon for more socio-economic accumulation to be perceived as distancing oneself from the community, not being in solidarity, or simply not being "Black enough." This is especially true if those who have "made it" are not viewed as tangibly using their privilege to support the community.

As such, there can be an individual-level, psycho-social tax attached to Black economic liberation that requires community members to negotiate and renegotiate their identity as being "Black enough." More specifically that tax may include some degree of guilt, stress, and pressure as one sees themselves as having overcome while others remain behind. **Thus, it is imperative for emerging narratives of Black economic liberation to include a healthy balance that elevates community building without eschewing individual-level success or placing undue pressure on any individual to carry the responsibility of liberation alone.**

Lyrics

"None of my fears can go where I am headed."
- [Beyonce, Mood4Eva](#)

"And forever be in debt and that's never a good thing/ So the pressure for success can put a good strain /On the friend you call best, and yes it could bring/ Out of the worst in every person, even the good and sane." - [Jay Z, Black Republican](#)

"...I am really the one, the one that gets to heal our generational relationship to wealth, I don't have to burn out for that coin." - [Toni Jones, Yay Coins](#)

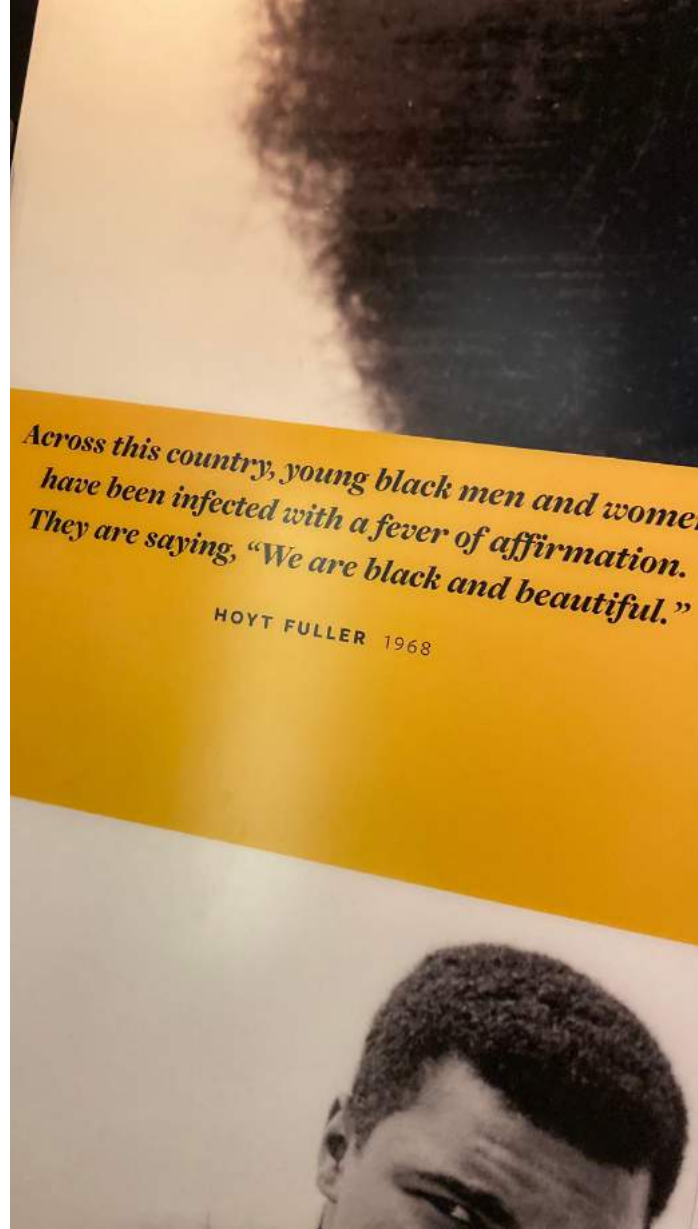


photo credit: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture

Takeaway

These songs are not just anthems that prepare us emotionally to navigate the world. They document our history, our challenges, and our paths forward.

Combating these barriers means disrupting the current economic models with deeper collaboration and greater self-sufficiency as a community. Economic self-sufficiency has always been part of the liberation framework for Black people. The current window of opportunity carries a sense of urgency to mitigate oppressive old patterns in order to sustain the dreams of past generations and create, for the first time, a legacy of uninterrupted growth across Black communities.



Just as a musical artist may develop a story arc across multiple albums, this report discusses important realities from the past and identifies current critical inflection points in the Black economic empowerment path, but it remains to be seen what occurs in this journey as we enter a new paradigm shift. **What may we finally hear that we never heard before? What considerations may emerge after we really listen to the culture that is so often appropriated and exploited? What will the subsequent albums be? What new songs will be sung?**

"our liberation will come from our collaboration"

- 1. Listen to our music to engage or compliment the learning you're doing about Blackness and wealth**
- 2. Consider other ways to learn and participate in Black wealth - Black creatives have led conversations and advocacy of this for years and should be included in conversations about what's next**
- 3. Invest in organizations willing to think differently and do it together; our liberation will come from our collaboration:**
 - 1. Blavity.org Foundation**
 - 2. Walker's Legacy Foundation**
 - 3. The Highland Project**
 - 4. Dreamville Foundation**
 - 5. Hire Black Now**

And if you want to explore more research, check out our list of references in the reference appendix!

photo credit: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture

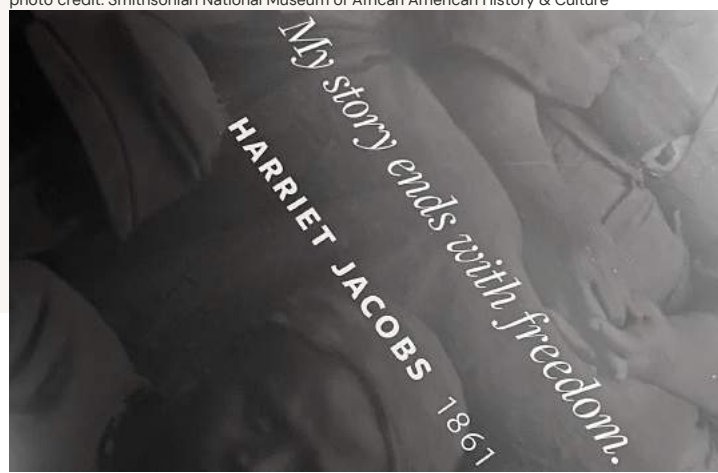




photo credit: Flickr

Legacy's Lyric is a report by Blavity.org, a non profit investing in the Black entrepreneurs.
It is an invitation to listen to Black stories of wealth and legacy.

Once a year, we will release a new chapter of narratives by Black creators for Black wealth creation.
Listen, learn and share.

PLAYLIST



BONUS TRACK

[You Won't Break My Soul - Beyonce](#)



Source: Picryl

APPENDIX

- Analysis | New data shows how 'great replacement' overlaps with other racial fears. (n.d.). Washington Post. Retrieved May 27, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/24/new-data-shows-how-great-replacement-overlaps-with-other-racial-fears/>
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photo credit: Telly\$Vision

LET'S GET IN TOUCH

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