

**“Have you witnessed an Economic Lynching, survived one, or
participated in one?
How can you stop one?”**

Testimony on Economic Lynching in the U.S.

By:

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Drawing from oft-repeated Article 5 of The North Atlantic Treaty, an attack on one member in a community is an attack on the entire community.

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them [...] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked ...
Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949

Black Americans live a daily battle for air and advancement—a rupture between the description of an even-handed Land of Opportunity and the realities of the Land of Opportunity. This document introduces the term economic lynching, describes its heavy toll, recounts two historic economic lynchings, and presents concrete ideas for a way toward a remedy.

I write in 2019's *Civil Rights Baby: My Story of Race, Sports, and Breaking Barriers in American Journalism*¹ that literal lynching has gone underground. I am mistaken. The public police execution of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, eviscerates that statement. Pleas for his life by the black father go unheard while white officer Derek Michael Chauvin and two other Minneapolis police officers pin him to the pavement for nine minutes, twenty-nine seconds. A fourth officer stands lookout. The fatal and choreographed acts in daylight illustrate the rigid insistence on the part of some in the U.S. on holding a person down and keeping a person down until the end of his life. The nonchalance displayed by the officers while committing the literal lynching awakens, for some, the brutality of what I term an economic lynching.

A literal, physical lynching and an economic lynching share the following points:

- * Intentionally dismissing a person's pursuit, whether for air or advancement; erasing him
- * Choking him off from his aspirations
- * Enlisting others who may be powerless to rebel, based on a power hierarchy



Economic lynching is the sister crime of the disturbing scene in which Mr. Floyd succumbs in the grip of the perpetrators in a literal lynching. Inarguably, President Theodore Roosevelt, American professional sports leagues, American newsrooms, and other Establishment institutions have carried out economic lynchings, as I detail in this document.

In the Grip of an Economic Lynching

When I began writing *Civil Rights Baby* in 2014, I created the term *economic lynching* to convey the intentionality and coordination of the crime, and the devastating effect on the person who is pinned. Economic lynching occurs in daylight, like the murder of Mr. Floyd. It, too, occurs with nonchalance as seen on the faces of the police officers in Minneapolis. The feigned nonchalance—a decoy—signals to onlookers that nothing extraordinary is going on here. They're handling their business as they are known to do. Indeed, they are carrying out their routine when committing an economic lynching.

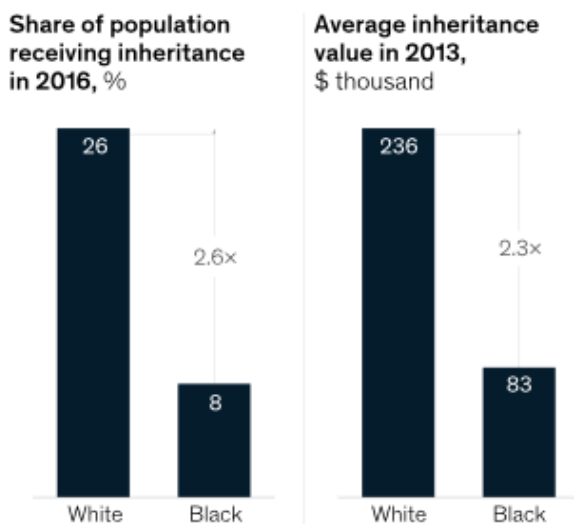
¹ The new edition of *Civil Rights Baby* was released in 2021.

Recognizing that economic conditions contributed to Mr. Floyd's death, ten United States senators put forth a College Athlete Bill of Rights within three months (in August 2020) as one measure to address the expanding black-white wealth gap.²

Economic lynching of a career forces the survivor into reconstructing a working life of some form—usually from a lesser position, from a flat-footed starting point. With an interrupted income stream and (often) a decision to disinvest from property or homeownership, the survivor of an economic lynching is cut off from a crucial pillar of wealth creation.

Exhibit 4

Black families begin with lower endowments of equity capital because of differences in rates of inheritance.



Source: "2016 survey of consumer finances," Federal Reserve Board, September 2017, [federalreserve.gov](https://www.federalreserve.gov); Jeffrey P. Thompson and Gustavo A. Suarez, "Exploring the racial wealth gap using the survey of consumer finances," Federal Reserve Board, August 2015, [federalreserve.gov](https://www.federalreserve.gov)

Economic lynching brings another drop-off in wealth-accumulation because of the interruption in contributions to retirement accounts and the benefit of dollar-cost averaging with consistent payments into financial portfolios. This financial blow will sting the survivor in later years.

The possibility of creating intergenerational wealth, or enhancing it, disappears with stop-and-go careers, due to economic lynching. Whether the dismissed worker is a head-of-household or a household of one, any lost paycheck reduces the financial fruits the worker could pass on to cherished people or cherished causes.

Thus, economic lynching succeeds. The machinery functions as effectively as rope knotted into a noose. (Exhibit 4, McKinsey.com)

Recent articles and research delve into the subject of white workers with less education matching or out-earning black workers with bachelor's degrees. Additionally, the question

is asked why black workers file 25-percent of the EEOC claims though they compose 13-percent of the U.S. working population.

* *America's highest-paying jobs have the worst Black-white salary gaps* by Dan Kopf and Ana Campoy, Quartz, Aug. 3, 2020

* *The economic impact of closing the racial wealth gap* by McKinsey & Company authors Nick Noel, Duwain Pinder, Shelley Stewart III, and Jason Wright, Aug. 2019

* *The unexplainable, growing black-white wage gap* by Eleni X. Karageorge, Nov. 2017

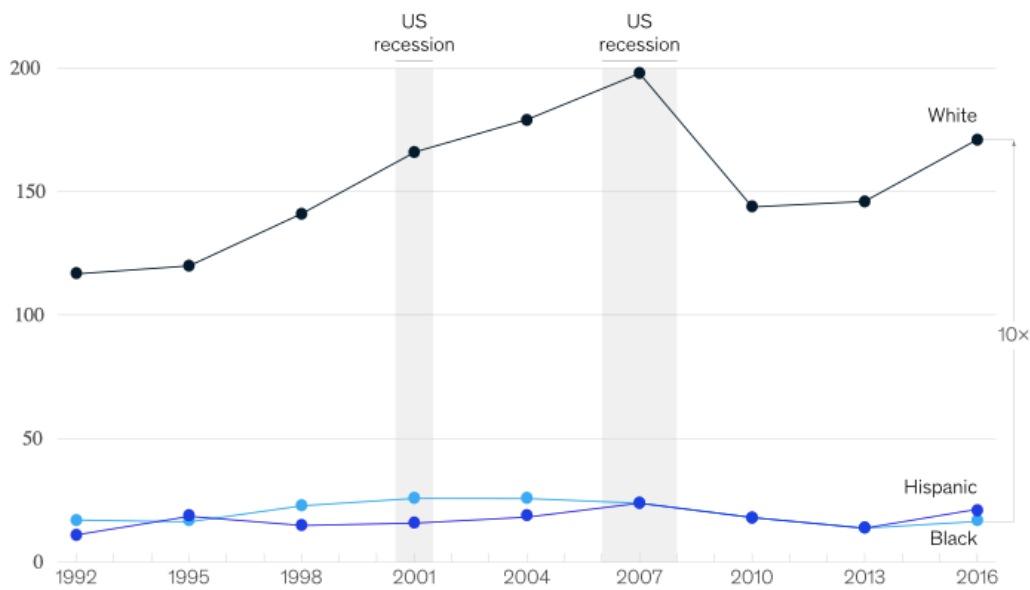
² I link Mr. Floyd's murder in May 2020 to the movement on the College Athletes Bill of Rights that ten senators signed on December 17, 2020. The existence of the measure opens the door for university athletes to earn money from their own name, image, and likeness (or NIL). Read about this in *Civil Rights Baby: My Story of Race, Sports, and Breaking Barriers in American Journalism*, 2021.

Civil Rights Baby gives some explanations. As an exposé, my memoir focuses on my economic lynching from U.S. television after twenty-one years of service, and two prestigious awards.^{3 4} Carefully retold episodes illustrate the rigid insistence (referred to above) that exists on the part of some inside my newsrooms, but other business environments churn out the same results. Within each of them, decision-makers strive to and succeed in ending advancement, financial gains, and wealth-building for the person in the noose. (Exhibit 1, McKinsey.com)

Exhibit 1

There is a wide and persistent gap in wealth between white and black families.

Median family wealth in 1992–2016 by ethnicity/race, \$ thousand¹



¹2016 dollars.
Source: "2016 survey of consumer finances," Federal Reserve Board, September 2017, federalreserve.gov

Three excerpts from *Civil Rights Baby: My Story of Race, Sports, and Breaking Barriers in American Journalism*

Fighting the Invisible (from the introduction)

The fact remains that most of the resistance I received during my twenty-one years on American television came from white men.

Some used underhanded, malicious tactics to prevent me from advancing in my field. Even when I complained to superiors about the practices and presented what I believed to be proof, I continued to receive the mistreatment. The same happened to other African

³ The author received the Michele Clark Fellowship of the RTNDF in 1989.

⁴ The author shared in the NATAS Regional Emmy for Special Events coverage presented to KDFW TV-Dallas, Texas, 2001.

American female reporters in my circle, including those who worked in other cities and states. In some cases, the bosses perpetrated these actions and seemed to operate with one goal: to block the path of black females in their world.

Return of the Noose (from the introduction)

Dictionaries employ stark language to define “lynching,” using expressions such as “extrajudicial mob action” or “execution without legal authority.” Dictionaries, though, do not explain the reasons for lynching. Based on my research, in many cases people in America’s history lynched not because a person had committed a crime but because a black person had achieved a measure of success—and someone was jealous of that success.

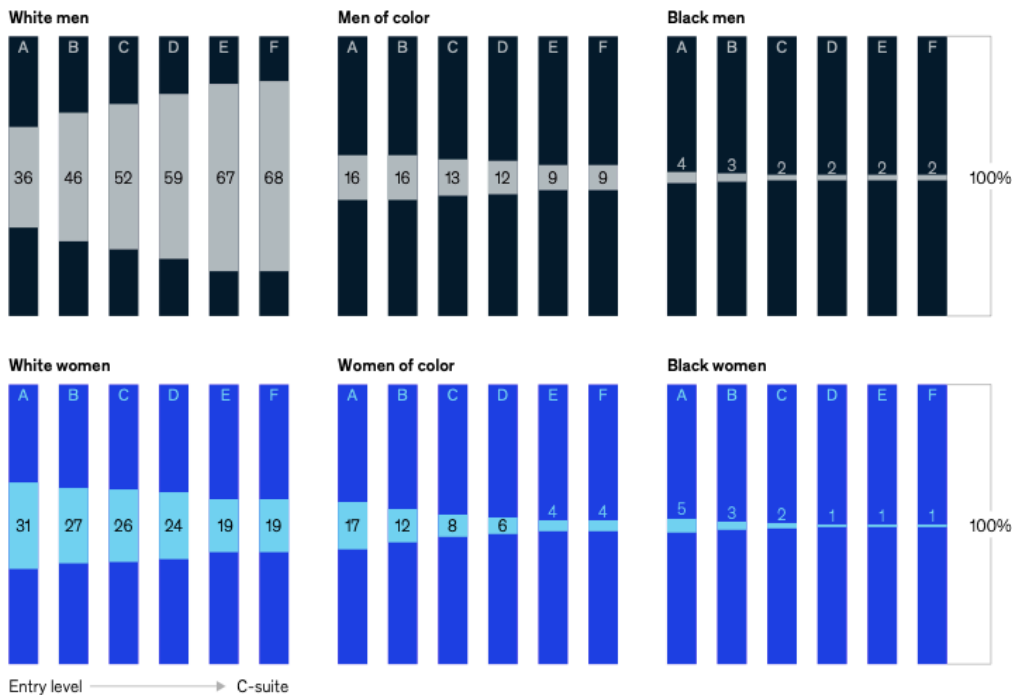
Of course, in my career experience, no one tried to execute me. Instead, at more than one television station between 1986 and 2009, someone tried to kill my dreams. Someone executed judgment against me without first finding out what I knew and what I was capable of doing in my field. Not a literal lynching, true, but an act I believe was born of the same type of jealousy that inspired this shameful legacy. Hence, an *economic* lynching.

Exhibit 5

The pipeline to highly compensated executive roles sheds professionals of color, especially black professionals, at every level.

Share of professionals by role category, %¹

A Entry-level professional, B manager, C senior manager/director, D vice president, E senior vice president, F C-suite professional



¹From study of 279 North America-focused companies. Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.
Source: *Women in the Workplace 2018*, joint report by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, October 2018, womenintheworkplace.com

Chapter 38 Great Stories, Bad Reporter?

More than once, I would think, with disbelief: ‘At what point in my career did I become such a substandard journalist? Was it before or *after* someone decided I was good enough to earn \$90,000 a year?’ ... Whether sitting on family couches with Dallas sports figures or viewing Wimbledon championship platters (won by Maureen “Little Mo” Connolly) on [her] family book case, I had the impression I was offering something meaningful to the KDFW Fox 4 viewers. I remained confident I could win over the decision-makers, believing that the arc would bend toward job justice for me. (Exhibit 5 above, McKinsey.com)

Theodore Roosevelt economically lynches black military men, including 6 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients and Buffalo Soldiers, in 1906.

The Theodore Roosevelt Center's text (below) summarizes the Brownsville (Texas) Incident.

President Theodore Roosevelt discharged without honor the entire regiment of 167 men, despite the fact that all the soldiers asserted their innocence. Roosevelt did not expel the white officers, who attested that the [black] soldiers had been in their barracks at the time of the melee in town. No military trial was ever held.

President Roosevelt's dismissal of the innocent soldiers is usually considered his worst mistake as president. The men lost their careers, salaries, pensions, and military honors.

In 1970, journalist John Weaver scrutinized the evidence and interviewed those still living. He concluded that the white citizens of Brownsville had misled earlier investigators and that the soldiers were innocent of the charges against them ... [I]n 1972, Congress reversed Roosevelt's order of dismissal and made restitution to the soldiers.⁵ (Source: Theodore Roosevelt Center)



Some of the dishonorably discharged black infantrymen had fought alongside Mr. Roosevelt at the battle of San Juan Hill.

“That dishonorable discharge kept me from improving my station in life,” former soldier Dolsie Willis told *The New York Times* in 1977. “God knows what it did to the others.”

Barred from the military, Mr. Willis (1886-1977) shines shoes and sweeps floors in a barbershop in Minneapolis for work. He is the only soldier alive to receive a payment of \$25,000 sixty-six years after the injustice. The widows and families of the other 166 men also receive restitution and honorable discharges under President Richard Nixon.

⁵ <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Encyclopedia/Race-Ethnicity-and-Gender/The-Brownsville-Incident.aspx>

Lt. Col. William Baker (Ret.), whose grandfather served in the regiment, writes *The Brownsville Texas Incident of 1906* to tell of a “classic denial of justice to black people.”⁶ Some of the men had invested twenty years in military service, but see it wiped away. The 167 black military families face the era of physical lynching and Jim Crow segregation from a weakened financial position.

NBA player wins title with Michael Jordan and earns \$1,100,000 over two seasons; but \$0 the next year

Economic lynching in sports happens swiftly, but lingers. Shooting specialist Craig Hodges visits President George H.W. Bush in October 1991 as a member of the reigning NBA champ Chicago Bulls. He calls out racism, militarism, and economic exploitation in a letter he writes and plans to deliver to the president. Mr. Hodges believes that sharing his views leads to exclusion from the NBA, in other words, his economic lynching. (Mr. Hodges’ statements follow; transcribed from an interview given to BookTV in 2016.)

We wrote letters to the president in elementary school, so why shouldn't I do that as a man, seeing that this is an opportunity.

[My letter] asked him to consider the issues of the disenfranchised, the poor, and knowing that oftentimes the scales are unbalanced when foreign policy is concerned. We can give billions and billions and billions for fighter jets, for military movement, but when can we do something for poor people? Basically piggybacking on Dr. King's Poor People's Movement.

President Bush never responds to Mr. Hodges’ letter, but the teams of the NBA do.



I got a response from the league by telling me you can't play anymore. To me, that was kind of shocking. Having won two World titles and two consecutive three-point shooting titles and not being able to get a job was crazy to me.

I know the impact that it had on my life and the effect it had on me, financially, as far as my family [...] But this being your career and within the context of that, other people have more power than you have. ~ Craig Hodges

At age 31 in 1992, Mr. Hodges is out of the NBA and misses out on untold millions as free-agency spending sprees begin. In 1995 players seventh and eighth down on rosters routinely earn in excess of one million a year. He launches a \$40-million lawsuit in 1996, calling all 29 team owners of the time “co-conspirators” who blackball him for being an outspoken black man. He loses the case on the technicality of filing four years after the alleged crime, instead of within two years.

⁶ The full title of the book 1974 book is *The Brownsville Texas Incident of 1906: The True and Tragic Story of a Black Battalion's Wrongful Disgrace and Ultimate Redemption*.

Thirteen years after being released as a player, Craig Hodges returns at a lower pay scale as an assistant under his former NBA coach, Phil Jackson, in 2005.⁷

Other high-profile athletes against whom leagues or institutions collude and, therefore, economically lynch:

- * Major league baseball player Curt Flood, after 1969 season
- * NFL and Super Bowl quarterback Colin Kaepernick, after 2016 season
- * New York Athletic Commission and other boxing-sanctioning boards, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit block boxing champion Muhammad Ali from competing, April 1967

Conclusion: Two possibilities to end economic lynching

Presenting black or minority-group people in fair portrayals in movies and in daily news reporting can counter the “othering” that greases the path of economic lynching within institutions (government bodies, sports leagues, work environments across all industries). Fear, based on not knowing the “other,” opens the door for mistreatment.

Trendsetting journalist Belva Davis, at age 78, tells me in 2011 that her professional objective is to protect from extinction black women journalists over the age of 40. One way to do it is to put Mrs. Davis' life story, a communal autobiography⁸, on the silver screen: from her Depression-era birth in Louisiana and her family's move to California in the Second Great Migration to her award-winning radio and TV career despite the manmade obstacles. It's a remarkable lived experience. Wide-release storytelling about it could unlock the same empathy as the book and film blockbuster *Hidden Figures: the American Dream and the Untold Story of Black Women Mathematicians*.

In addition to Mrs. Davis' *Never in My Wildest Dreams*⁹ memoir, three other revolutionary African American women journalists could be game-changer protagonists in book-to-screen adaptations. The four projects would chronicle, in a memorable way, the last one hundred years of trials, triumphs, self-searching, and self-determination of people in the African American community.

* *Alone atop the Hill*, Alice Dunnigan's autobiography¹⁰ about being the first Black woman credentialed to cover a U.S. president (Truman). Carol McCabe Booker is the book's editor.

⁷ Full title *Long Shot: The Triumphs and Struggles of an NBA Freedom Fighter*

⁸ Author Marita Golden coined the term communal autobiography.

⁹ Full title *Never in My Wildest Dreams: A Black Woman's Life in Journalism*. (Mrs. Davis, born 1937-)

¹⁰ Full title *Alone atop the Hill: The Autobiography of Alice Dunnigan, Pioneer of the National Black Press*. (Mrs. Dunnigan, 1906-1983)

* Biographer James McGrath Morris' *Eye on the Struggle: Ethel Payne, the First Lady of the Black Press*. Ms. Payne (1911-1991) pushed President Eisenhower to answer questions on civil rights before the mainstream white press and electronic media did.

* *My Civil Rights Baby*¹¹ extends the unique perspective of a black woman journalist, who, from 1982 forward, interviews or interacts with luminaries of her time (Muhammad Ali, Rosa Parks, President Jimmy Carter, James Brown, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and Tiger Woods) while facing down an economic lynching and an ouster campaign.

Another solution is doing interior work in revelatory trainings, such as *Listen to Others as you would have them listen to you*®. This unique program succeeds because people at all levels of the employment tree or within a family participate on equal footing to learn how to empathize. In addition, they learn how to express their concerns and receive empathy from others.

This *Listen to Others*® method can help anyone who desires to speak in a manner to be heard on-the-job or in personal interactions.

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Comments about Nita Wiggins' Testimony on Economic Lynching in the U.S.:

“Nita Wiggins drives to the heart of the economic impact of racism in black communities with her piece about ‘economic lynching.’ The visual image the term evokes makes this fiery call to conscience and to action a must-read.”

—The Honorable Pamela L. Spratlen, *U.S. Ambassador (retired)*

“When you start to be successful, be careful. White people will come after you.”

—Kathleen Dameron, *Leadership trainer, specialist in Afro-centric healing and somatic therapy*

“Nita Wiggins' deep dive into Economic Lynching is a must for everyone to address and understand. We, as a nation, should not ignore what has been occurring right in front of our eyes for decades. The deliberate generational economic and social binding placed on people of color should be called out for exactly what it is; lynching. History is told by the winning team which, more often than not, becomes a divisive tool of dismissal that buries the voices of those that we need to hear most.”

—Todd Brown, *Ph.D., creator of the “Inspire Project” and U.N. Sustainability Ambassador (2019)*

¹¹ Nita Wiggins (born 1964-)