

A Path To Economic Freedom - The Rev. Damon Lynch Iii Reveals How Community Building Can Create Success For Cincinnati's African American Neighborhoods At A Recent Community Issues Forum

(by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

Poverty continues to grow in Cincinnati, and African-American residents comprise a high percentage of its poor. At a Zoom Community Issues Forum on February 11th, the Rev. Damon Lynch III, Pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church, described how a community building process can lead to economic success for this city's African-American neighborhoods. Invited to speak about his new publication, "Becoming Joshua," Lynch outlined for his audience, the economic community building techniques that he advances in his booklet.

Subtitled "A Path To Economic Freedom," Lynch's booklet lays out a case that only economic development organized by neighborhood residents can lead to actual advancements for the people living in that area. This collection of his sermons and writings builds on this theme with biblical teachings and examples of African American history. Pastor Lynch began his Forum presentation by explaining the booklet's title "Becoming Joshua."



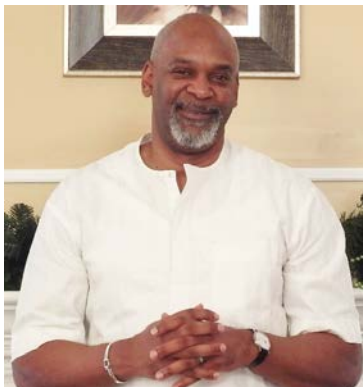
BECOMING JOSHUA

A Path to Economic Freedom

By the Rev. Damon Lynch III

Moses, he explained, freed the Jews from Egyptian bondage, while Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, and many other Black leaders played this role in this country to first end slavery and then to abolish legal segregation and the loss of Civil Rights that were established after the Civil War. Joshua, on the other hand, had the task of leading the Jews into the promised land to establish a good life. That, according to Lynch, is the kind of leadership that is needed in African American neighborhoods today in order to create safe, healthy, economically successful communities.

Both in his booklet and in his Forum presentation, Lynch gave examples of failed initiatives to build economically secure African American communities. Slavery and imposed legal segregation not only created huge obstacles, he stressed, but they left ongoing emotional damage and scars. He pointed to several examples of earlier African American neighborhood success stories such as the Kenyon Barr area in Cincinnati's West End that were disrupted and declined due to government interventions.



Lynch also described how recent economic initiatives in Cincinnati that lacked neighborhood approval or involvement often ended up hurting the residents within these development areas. His prime example is Over-the-Rhine. Before moving to Roselawn, New Prospect Baptist Church served OTR. For over two decades, Lynch witnessed how so-called renewal efforts forced the displacement of more than half of this neighborhood's low-income population. Instead of an integration process that mixed income groups, upper income housing took over certain sections of OTR, and the new shops and restaurants were definitely established for

a new clientele. Schools closed, and Washington Park was redesigned for the new white gentry residents. Although heralded as an economic success story, the initial residents were the big losers.

The model that Pastor Lynch advocates for building successful African American neighborhoods requires residents to be involved and in-charge of all developments. Thus, the term "community economic development" rather than simply economic development. Only with this kind of control can residents be assured that the projects will benefit them either through employment or from the services that they bring to the neighborhood.

Pastor Lynch also advocates finding an economic niche that will bring economic success to a neighborhood. At present, his church is utilizing solar panels as a way to begin to make his neighborhood a success story in its use of solar energy. To date, New Prospect has installed 352 solar panels with the aim of reducing energy costs, and Lynch is promoting this process as a way to make solar energy a community economic development initiative for Roselawn residents. He is also promoting the concept of community funds, a community health plan, a community safety plan, and a community education plan. All of his efforts are geared toward making African American neighborhoods economically self sufficient.

As Pastor Lynch emphasized, the mission of forging paths to economic freedom for African American communities must move from vision to reality by first building communities within Black neighborhoods and then by cultivating allies to assist in these efforts. He urged Forum attendees to read "Becoming Joshua" and to contact him with their thoughts and suggestions. For a copy of the booklet, call 429-2158. Or, you can simply download a copy of "Becoming Joshua" by going on-line to restorcommons.com.

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