

Missing the Point - Being a Squeegee Worker as a Career Choice

Tuesday, July 19, 2022



Squeegee Worker Champion, Baltimore's Mayor Brandon Scott

Baltimore was my father's city. It's where he grew up, worked at his mother's small neighborhood diner and went to Poly where he played on the football team wearing a helmet that was nothing more than a simple leather cap.

For me, it was the city where, as a little kid, I had my first commercial transaction. It was on a hot summer day when my father gave me some change and waited in the car while I ventured, all by myself, into a store to buy a cherry snowball, turning back only once for reassurance. Not incidentally, Baltimore was also where I had my first kosher hot dog wrapped in grilled baloney, with mustard and relish. Maybe not low fat, but nonetheless delicious. I still make them that way all these years later.

It wasn't a perfect city, although it seemed that way. It certainly never occurred to me that it wasn't a safe place to hang out with my Dad. And with my Mom too on days when she put on her best "house dress" and drove us all the way from Annapolis to go to the department stores like Woodies, the Hecht Co., Hochschild-Kohn and Stewart's that drew shoppers to the downtown from all over the area.

There was a palpable sense of promise that emanated from that city – a confidence that you would somehow end up better off than where you started, a good feeling about the future of Maryland's greatest city. That was a while ago and a whole lot has happened since then.

In any case, you don't have to be a resident of Baltimore to feel awful about what's happened to the city – to miss the way it used to be and to be disappointed by the city's continuing failure to realize its potential. It's hardly breaking news. Baltimore is on a downward trajectory. At best, it's going nowhere fast.

If you think I'm being a tad harsh, as proof positive of this continuing decline I'll point out the obvious. Baltimore just made the national news because a squeegee worker killed one of his clients. In self-defense or not, that isn't the point. It would be fodder for late night comedy if it weren't true and indicative of so many more profound problems.

In today's Baltimore, being a squeegee person is a recognized job that can earn the more enterprising professionals as much as \$200 a day.

\$200 day, five days a week, is \$4000 a month, \$48,000 a year, tax free. That's roughly the equivalent of \$54,000 per year gross income, before Federal income taxes – which is a couple thousand dollars *more* than the median (middle) *household* income in the city. Sure, the job is not without its shortcomings to say the least but, for some, it pays more than half the people in the city are making.

It's no wonder that that many Baltimoreans, many with considerable promise were they otherwise employed, choose "Squeegee Worker" as their vocation. ...Or crime, which can be way more lucrative for those who choose that particular career path.

Make no mistake about it, being a squeegee worker – or a criminal – in Baltimore is as valid a career choice for those who go that way as choosing more traditional vocations is for the rest of us. Self-employment as a squeegee worker is not irrational. Unfortunately, for too many Baltimore City residents, it's just the opposite in that squeegee worker or criminal are the most intelligent choices they can make given their circumstances.

City government could, of course, change the context in which these career choices are made, but is incapable of doing so. Mayor Scott, in particular, lacks the knowhow, the initiative, the patience and leadership to improve the economy in which people in his city choose a career path – or have it chosen for them by circumstances pretty much beyond their control.

The other day, according to WBFF (Fox 45), Mayor Scott "described squeegeeing as panhandling, which he says is protected by the Constitution." To which, with all due respect, I say, "**What?!**" That's the best he can come up with? How clueless can the duly elected Mayor of a major city be? Wow.

Talk about missing the point. The problem, Mayor Scott, isn't constitutionality. The problem is that the City of Baltimore doesn't offer its residents the education and

training and legitimate job opportunities they deserve and so desperately need to maximize and realize their potential.

“...protected by the Constitution”?! Unbelievable. Would someone who knows what he or she is doing please start running for Mayor now, to replace Mr. Scott before he aspires, once again, to even higher office?* ...If you'll excuse me now, I need to personally Windex some stuff off my windshield because there aren't any squeegee people in my suburban neighborhood to do it for me, all candidates for said positions having qualified for way better jobs.

**Mr. Scott ran, unsuccessfully, for Lt. Governor in 2018 on a ticket with Attorney Jim Shea.*

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