How will African American people improve our situation in 2013? Right now, we have higher unemployment than any other population in our nation, less wealth, higher school dropout rates, and more crime in our communities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that African American communities had twice the number of negatives and half the number of positives in our country. While the numbers may have shifted somewhat, it is still true that we are more likely to experience negative consequences (teen pregnancy, incarceration, crime) and less likely to experience positives (college graduation, high net worth).

Those of us who focus on public policy will look at past discrimination and ways it manifests itself in the present. We will look at the way race-neutral public policy has a racial impact (for example, changing the terms of the Parent Plus loan hits wealth-poor, credit-challenged black families disproportionately). We will suggest ways to close gaps, some of which may include ways that government investment, such as job creation and job training, can help close these gaps. And we will be right.

Whether or not we fall off the fiscal cliff (negotiations are taking place even as I write this), the focus on the level of debt our nation faces suggests that tax reform will reduce tax deductions, some in ways that may increase income inequality, and that spending cuts are imminent. Many of these cuts will be in social programs and educational spending. Again, some of these cuts will widen, not narrow, the wealth and income gaps.

What does this mean for Black America in 2013? Pretend that it is Groundhog Day, if you saw the movie. The protagonist wakes up every day to the same day when everything happens the same way. If you keep doing what you have been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting. For Black American this means that if we keep looking external without looking internal,

not much will change for black people.

Yes, it will change for some of us. Those who are educated, middle class, well networked and disciplined are likely to find significant opportunities in our stagnant economy because even stagnant economies churn and create new opportunities. But it won't change much for those who are less educated, working class, unnetworked and undisciplined, or some combination thereof. Education, networks, and discipline can be fixed. But few have an interest in fixing these things in Black America except for Black Americans. So what are we going to do?

Susan Taylor has been a passionate advocate of mentorship in the African American community. She began the work when she Editor-in-Chief at Essence Magazine and left the magazine to expand her reach in that area. She continues to advocate mentorship and to teach us how to be mentors. Her work supports education, networking and discipline.

Similarly, in Southeast Washington, DC, Cora Masters Barry leads the Recreation Wish List Committee and works with the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center to nurture more than 150 young people (full disclosure - I am treasurer of the Wish List Board) year-round. Students are trained in physical fitness through tennis, and are encouraged in their academics through learning. Most board members have hands on relationships with our young people, who are held to the highest standards. Again, this work supports education, networking and discipline.

Most historically black colleges do the same thing, bringing corporate partners to campuses and exposing students to the many ways they can access employment opportunities. In many cases, the entire campus offers students engaged mentorship. Education, networking and discipline.

When people tell the story of the American Dream, they talk about the many ways that hard work will help someone transcend class. They talk about hard work. People, who earn the minimum wage, work hard. People who make ends meet on public assistance, work hard. It's not just about hard work. It's about hard work and the hook up.

A corporate leader who is a wonderful friend once said that she could use her position to hook up women and African Americans who needed a hand up. She also indicated that the hook up could help individuals, but we also, and always, need a hook in to public policy decisions that

affect our nation.

That means we need a seat around every table where public policy is being made, whether on issues of race, or on issues that seem race-neutral. We should be talking about the deficit, about tax reform, about government spending. We should be talking about international affairs, about world areas of conflict, about our fluctuating currency. As long as we live in this flawed nation, all issues are Black issues.

Even with the hook in, we need to offer the hook up. That means embracing or mentoring a child. That means providing an opportunity to someone who is unemployed. That means supporting education through contributions to colleges, but also by providing help to individuals. It's the same hymnbook we've been singing from for more than a century. Now we need to sing with more energy.

Things won't change in Black America unless some of us do. We need to both hook in and hook up!

Dr. Julianne Malveaux is a noted economist and president emeritus of Bennett College for Women.