I grew up in a household where going to college was a foregone conclusion. My father and mother were both college graduates. My father, Justice Thomas R. Jones, had gone to college and law school and was among the first African-Americans to get an advanced degree in international law. My grandfather, Thomas S. Jones, had been a schoolmaster in Barbados and, despite virulent racism, became one of the first black podiatrists in the United States. So we didn't have a choice.

I still vividly remember my sister Peggy coming home from Hunter High School after doing poorly on a Latin exam and my mother and father informing her that she would have to consider dropping out to go to work. Her scream could have been heard all across Brooklyn.

I was a product of a family that had clearly taken sides in the struggle that had taken place in the black community 50 years before between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington as to how black advancement should proceed. Du Bois believed in "the talented tenth," the creation of group of black intellectuals and professionals who would lead the race to full equality. Washington sought to create a group of highly skilled mechanics and trades people who would over time emerge as worthy of acceptance in American society. With Barack Obama’s election and the unprecedented success of the black middle class in virtually every part of American life, one could say that Du Bois's vision won "hands down."

But a new reality has emerged in the aftermath of the "Great Recession," with unemployment rates still at crippling levels -- 8.3 percent for the nation and 9.3 percent for New York City. And with unemployment rates for blacks at a 14.1 percent, we may have to seriously consider revisiting part of Washington’s vision for those within the black community who didn’t get to go through the stratosphere in terms of professional, academic, and economic achievement.

The theory was that getting a high school diploma and attending college, either four year or even a community college, was a sure ticket into the middle class. But, in the wake of the Great Recession, it’s becoming more and more evident that while college educated people have fared better, the results are much more mixed in terms of pathways to economic security, particularly for African-Americans.

I was particularly struck by a recent report by Andrew Sum, professor of economics at Northeastern University, which found that nearly half of all recent college graduates are either malemployed (working a job that doesn’t need a college degree) or unemployed.

As soon as I read that report, I went back to research that we’ve done at the Community Service Society, and our findings are, if anything, much worse than the national data. In a report some years
ago on security guards in New York City -- some 63,000 of them -- at the time only earning $10 per hour, with no vacation, health insurance, or sick days off, over a third had either some college or a bachelor's degree. In a follow-up report, our preliminary findings indicate that number has jumped to 50 percent, but with only a modest increase in the hourly wage to $12.

In my mind, this doesn't indicate we should give up on college for everyone, but it does mean we have to be very careful about what pathways we’re sending young people down which don't lead to gainful employment. This is particularly true for African-American and Latino young people in school who are often steered into courses which avoid rigorous math and science instruction -- and into softer areas which very well may only at best lead to a low-wage job and, at very worst, no job at all.

Mayor Bloomberg recently mentioned that he feared that the lousy outlook for work for the college educated could lead to civil disorder. In my view, a generation of black and Latino young people who do everything right and get through college and still can't find work with better than subsistence wages are going to be even angrier.

This post has been edited from it's originally published form.