

Point of View

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CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

AFRICAN AMERICAN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

One of the highest priorities now facing the African American community is the necessity to define explicitly long term economic empowerment goals and to develop and implement a strategic plan to effectively reach those goals. One matter that has caused great concern has been the lack of a concerted national effort to really deal responsibly to the economic injustices of American racism.

There is no magic formula to economic development. During the last thirty years there have been numerous efforts by civil rights and other organizations to launch various economic development projects and programs at the local and regional levels. But the truth is that most, if not all, of those efforts have been an effective long term economic development strategy that involved massive numbers of African Americans since the time of

Marcus Garvey.

Again, this is not to belittle the good work of many organizations that are presently attempting to make a contribution toward the economic uplift of the African American community. The point here is to simply state the obvious: "All of the present efforts within and external to the African American community to enhance overall economic empowerment appear to be insufficient to meet the economic needs of the African American community."

While there are increasing examples of tremendous individual economic success or in some cases the success of African American owned companies, there is still a growing economic disparity between the majority of African Americans and other Americans who have not had to endure the vestiges of abject racial discrimination and economic exploitation. To be

sure, we are not advancing a justification for "hand-outs or crumbs from the table of the wealthy." To the contrary, we are emphasizing what we believe will be a major responsibility for the future of the Civil Rights Movement.

Economic justice must be demanded, yet, we must do more than just make a rhetorical demand for economic progress. Institutionalized poverty is a moral insult amidst a society where economic opportunity is mitigated by race and class. 1993 needs to be a year of sober reflection and strategic planning by all communities seeking a greater sense of economic justice. In particular, the African American community and all those national and local organizations working to enhance the condition of the people most marginalized and exploited must band together like never before.

As more and more predic-

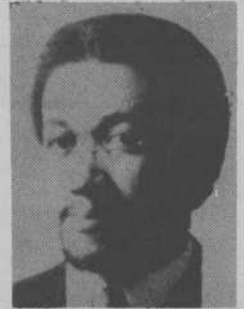
tions are being made concerning an early upswing in the economy of the United States, will the economic lot of the African American community also improve? History has shown that the socioeconomic conditions of the African American community have not always improved at the pace of economic growth for the nation as a whole. The trickle down theory has not worked to the benefit of the majority of thirty million African Americans.

First, African Americans must invest in the uplift of the community not for the short term but for the long term development goals of the entire community. The economic infrastructure of the African American has to be literally reconstructed to meet the new demands of the present historical moment.

Some of those who are advising President-elect Clinton on economic matters have routinely

referred to investment as "creating something that will add to the economy's ability to produce later on." Too often the African American community is viewed only as "taking from the economy" rather than "contributing to the economy." But what those who would economically discriminate against the African American community do not fully understand is that the spending of the African American community is more than a 300 billion dollar a year economic force in the nation's economy.

The problem is "spending" is not the same thing as "investing." We must invest not just in



BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS, JR

BANKS and other financial institutions. Our highest priority ought to be to invest all that we can in our youth: financially, educationally and spiritually.

What are our long term economic goals and how are we going to achieve those goals? These are the questions that must be answered if we are to be serious about fulfilling the dream of true African American economic empowerment.

TO BE EQUAL

WASHINGTON'S EDUCATION AGENDA

By John E. Jacob

In the past, presidents have talked the game of education reform while slashing federal support for schools and packaging school choice programs as a panacea for what ails American education.

That hasn't worked.

The schools are still in deep trouble. They aren't educating enough of our children, and they are especially failing to educate poor children.

Bill Clinton must lead the charge for education reform if he really wants our schools to play their part in making the American economy competitive in the demanding global marketplace.

His best chance for success in reforming American public education lies in shaping policies that radically improve the school performance of minorities and the poor, and delivering the resources that can make those policies work.

But if that is to work, he'll also have to change the mindset of educators and public alike that says intelligence is fixed at birth and unalterable.

The federal government can

be a positive force for change if it targets its policies and its resources.

One such area is the vital one of pre-school education.

Study after study has shown that Head Start and other learning programs for disadvantaged preschoolers work.

The children come to school better prepared than those denied the experience, and the positive effects tend to last.

Despite that, Head Start never got enough funding to include all eligible children, nor have enough resources been available to ensure that all programs are of the highest quality.

So a priority of the new Administration's education policy should be to ensure that every disadvantaged child has access to quality pre-school learning based on a belief that every child can learn.

A second area for targeting the children most at risk of failure is to beef up supplemental education programs.

Right now, the federal government spends about \$6 billion on grants to local school districts under Chapter One of the 1965

Education Act.

That War on Poverty program is supposed to improve the basic academic skills of poor children.

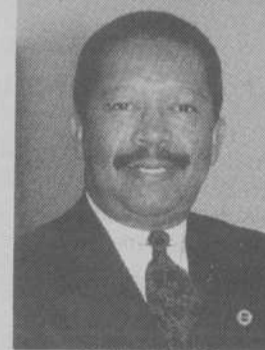
But a recent report by a prestigious group of civic leaders, the "Commission on Chapter One," has called for a thorough overhaul, long supported by educators and children's advocacy groups.

The Chapter One program needs to go beyond often ineffective remedial work to provide the tools to help those children excel.

Chapter One grants should come with clear guidelines based on the concept that all children can excel academically. Schools should be required to set high standards and more funds should be funnelled into schools with large concentrations of poor children.

Chapter One grants should also encourage parental involvement and give incentives for states to tie health and social services to schools serving eligible students.

And the emphasis should shift from rote drill in the basics



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to making sure those youngsters acquire the math, science, and analytical thinking skills the modern economy requires.

Finally, Washington should target its spending on education research to determine ways to change curricula and teaching methods so that schools can more effectively educate poor children.

Perhaps as important, we need research and experimental programs to destroy the myth of innate ability and to chart the effect on academic achievement of parental involvement, after-school programs, and other supportive activities.

Schools may be run locally, but the federal government can set a new agenda for American education by targeting those most in need, thus helping to reverse the decline of American education.

POLITICAL POINTS

Due to the convening of the 1993 session of the Nevada Legislature, POLITICAL POINTS by Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams will not run in this week's Sentinel-Voice.

However, Assemblyman Williams will have a complete update on committee hearings for readers in next week's edition.

In addition, Williams can be heard on KCEP Radio, FM-88, everyday, beginning Monday, January 25, at 6:50 a.m. and 5:50 p.m.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

This is in response to the article by R.K. Brown in your January 7, 1993 edition of "The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice."

It is obvious to me that R.K. Brown has been "brainwashed" by the left wing liberals of this country with their revisionist tactics of attempting to re-write history and destroy our educational institutions. To take taxpayers money and waste it on

the so called "Black History" month is an outrage. I don't see Asian groups lobbying for a "Yellow" or "Asian History" month. Instead they concentrate on the things required for success like family values, morality, mathematics, science, and language studies. If you want your children to learn about their heritage and their past you can teach it in the home and you can (See Letter to Editor, Page 4)

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