

Government reparations needed for past ills

Special to Sentinel-Voice
Black America's political and civil rights leaders are anxious for President Clinton's announcement and initiatives regarding "race relations" in America.

The people who professionally feed at the Federal Government trough, in the name of black America, are looking to him for direction on "mending but not ending" Affirmative Action and Set-Aside programs.

These leaders' public position is that these types of government programs will help African-Americans gain more access to mainstream society and capture the "American Dream" that has eluded the majority of us for 400 years.

But, before those of us among the nation's black masses allow these short-sighted protectors of the status quo to lead us into another round of these failed programs, let's take a look backwards to go beyond Affirmative Action and assure that we all get paid our just due.

Think about it, all your life you've heard of the forty acres and a mule our forefathers were to receive during the Reconstruction Period for their enslavement.

If we all looked back at America, and its government's actions toward us for centuries, you'd have to wonder, "Why is it that our politicians and civil leaders will beg for continually watered down versions of affirmative action when we are still due our Reconstruction compensation, plus 130-years of interest?"

This government's retreat from affirmative actions toward us is not a new thing. In 1877, in a Washington hotel, the Wormsley — which ironically was owned-and-operated by a black man — assembled in a smoke filled room with Rutherford B. Hayes, were some of the most powerful politicians of the

time. Hayes was seeking to become the 19th President of the United States and this time period was in the second decade of a system of reconstruction which had been set in motion in 1865 to reverse over 300 years of slavery, oppression and degradation of blacks.

The meeting's discussion, like the modern day Clinton meeting, centered on the political and economic future of black America.

To win the election, Hayes needed significant votes from the South, so in this meeting he, and the other political leaders struck a deal that if the South voted for him the troops sent there to oversee Reconstruction processes would be pulled.

When Hayes won the election the government reneged on its promise of redress for the five million newly freed slaves, and Reconstruction programs were replaced with Jim Crow laws and conditions.

The Federal Government, whom our forefathers had hoped would help them in their reclamation efforts, was the leader in the next 100 years of severe discrimination against blacks sanctioned by tradition and legal enforcement.


The concept of the Federal Government forfeiting the estates of leading rebels and dividing their 394 million acres of land, giving forty acres to "each adult and freeman" was passed along to a government agency called The Freedmen's Bureau, which like affirmative action, was a failure in its structure and application.

The Freedmen's Bureau was to prepare the ex-slaves for life as free men and was authorized to take over abandoned and confiscated land in the Confederate States.

This land was to be divided into 40 acre tracts and rented to freedmen for three years. After

Business Exchange

By William Reed,
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the lease expired the land could be sold to the renter for 16 times the yearly rent. The Freedmen's Bureau was staffed by ex-Union officers, and many of them plundered it for their

own profit. Not only did our great-great grandparents not get 40 acres and a mule from it, the Freedmen's Bureau helped many southern states wipe out their war debt to the Union.

The Bureau's reparations were so complete to the oppressors that former slave owners were paid for "relief from debts owed for slaves."

Shouldn't black Americans still be looking to the Federal Government for the value of our 40 acres and mule?

One thing for sure, we should stop looking to our prime traditional oppressor for anything less than our legitimate claim for just reparations.

For those who beseech Clinton for "discussions about race," U.S. history shows that politics does have value, but

only to politically protect those economically strong, Government can sometimes be our ally, but it has proved time after time it can never be our salvation.

Perhaps it can be our partner, but never our panacea. In reality, what the mass of blacks need from Clinton and the Congress is a re-affirmation of reparations payment plan.

Isn't it about time we all got really paid and stop our "leaders" from grinning and skinning while asking for piecemeal handouts that are sure to be taken back in the not too distant future?

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wish to become professionals, entrepreneurs and/or politicians.

- Creating mechanisms that will assist black women who are "in transitional" experiences.
- The examination of human rights violations of Africans in the Americas and their effects.

"If we don't stand up and say loudly that we have had enough, nobody's going to do it," she said.

Penni Roberts writes for the Philadelphia Tribune.

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