

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Commercialization creates dilemma

The holiday Dr. Maulana Karenga created 31 years ago to help Blacks connect with their African heritage, is in danger of having its true meaning drowned out by commercialism.

Blacks en masse are angered by the new Kwanzaa stamp recently unveiled by the U.S. Postal Service and have blasted Karenga for "selling-out" and the postal service for profiting off something designed for Blacks.

Do they have a right to be angry? According to history, yes.

Hats, shirts and other clothing bearing an "X" circulated chiefly among Blacks after the Spike Lee movie about Malcolm X the slain civil rights activist and black power proponent. But capitalism came "a'creepin."

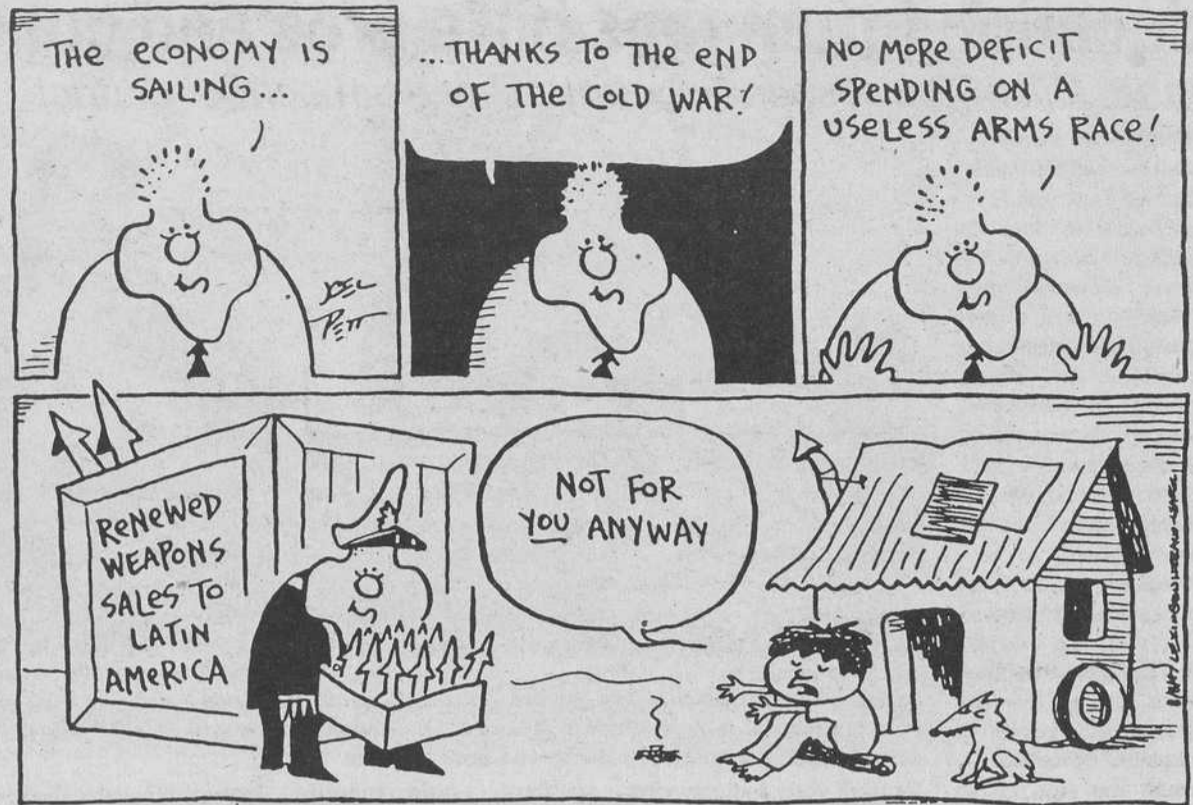
Soon the black street vendors pushing the "X"-adorned clothing, which were designed to instill pride in blacks, were muscled out of the profits by the bigger retailers. It wasn't long until other races began sporting clothing with the "X," many of whom probably did not and do not have more than a cursory knowledge of Malcolm. And inevitably, Kwanzaa-themed toys, cards, games and other items popped up.

Herein lies the dilemma. Should Blacks fight to keep the holiday sacred, safe from the tentacles of capitalism. Or should we strike those who would soil the sanctity of the holiday, doubtless that Black retailers would miss out on a piece of pie they so rightfully deserve and other blacks would be discouraged to try and take a bite of the pie.

Said Dr. Conrad Worrill: "It is part of our struggle for liberation ... to defeat these forces who are attempting to dilute and disrupt the real significance of Kwanzaa ... But that doesn't mean we shouldn't struggle against a capitalistic venture controlled by the forces of the white corporate world."

Worrill urges Blacks to remind themselves of Kwanzaa's seven principles. Umoja stresses unity; Kujichagulia encourages self-determination; Ujima teaches collective work and responsibility; Ujamaa espouses cooperative economics; Nia symbolizes purpose; Kuumba promotes creativity; and Imani preaches faith.

We will have to use each of these principles, applying, with care, a thoughtful approach to protecting our beloved tradition from being soiled by commercialism.



Advertising apartheid affecting minority press

By Linn Washington, Jr. Special to Sentinel Voice

The American Psychological Association voted in 1991 to stop accepting military advertisements in its magazine.

Association members voted to approve this advertising ban because of the U.S. military's policy of barring the admission of homosexuals.

While the APA voted to oppose a policy it considered discriminatory, the fact that its members-only magazine had military advertisements in the first place exposes an insidious form of institutional racism called advertising apartheid.

You generally don't see military ads in black-owned newspapers like those belonging to the National Newspaper Publishers Association member papers. The NNPA represents the historically Black Press and reaches more than 12-million readers weekly.

You don't have to be an expert on the intricacies of advertising to readily understand that among the 12 million readers reached weekly by NNPA papers are a sizable percentage of persons who are in the target market for military recruiting ads.

Surely there are more potential military recruits among NNPA readers than those scanning the pages of the American Psychological Association's members-only magazine.

In September 1992, then-Philadelphia Congressman Thomas Foglietta responded to a request from NNPA member Hugo Warren, publisher of the Philadelphia New Observer, confirming Warren's suspicion that the black Press was being systematically shafted by

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advertising apartheid.

The U.S. Department of Defense, Foglietta's letter stated, "is ignoring the law" by refusing to "award five percent of its advertising contracts to minority-owned media outlets."

In fiscal year 1992, according to the congressman's letter, only "3.6 percent of all magazine ads were published in African-American magazines" while "almost no" ads were sold to minority-owned radio. The Black Press was blacked out.

Although not mentioned in Foglietta's letter to Warren, the U.S. military's recruitment advertising budget during FY92 totaled \$129.1 million. You don't need a Ph.D. in economics to understand the insulting slice minority media received from the military's mega-bucks advertising budget.

Recently NNPA and the nation's Hispanic newspaper publishers announced the

formation of a joint campaign to fight the advertising apartheid that left them with less than one percent of the \$670 million the federal government spent in 1996 to promote government agencies.

Asian-American publishers have also announced their intention to join this unique coalition that seeks to crack the apartheid practiced by the U.S. government and its contracted ad agencies.

Ad revenue is the economic life's blood of all media.

Black and other minority-owned media are ravaged by advertising apartheid that deliberately excludes them from the billions spent annually on advertising by public agencies and private corporations.

Excluding minority media from federal advertising dollars is a form of taxation without compensation.

Further, big ad agencies are fleecing the federal government by exclusively

placing federal ads with White-oriented media. Studies show that minorities in urban areas are not reached by ads placed in mainstream media that is desperately concentrating on serving the suburban market.

The irrefutable evidence of advertising apartheid explodes the claim that institutional racism is dead.

Those self-proclaimed supporters of a 'color-blind society' should eliminate advertising apartheid instead of dismantling affirmative actions programs designed to end institutional racism.

Linn Washington is a professor of Journalism at Temple University.

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