

COMMENTARY

Onus on blacks to utilize their buying power

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

To no-one's surprise, the latest data on Black buying power in the United States shows that it continues on an upward spiral.

Who knows where or when it will taper off?

Now at \$469 billion, Black buying power and the potential economic strength therein is at an all-time high. So, will someone tell me why we are still crying broke? Why are we begging others to do for us, when we could be doing for ourselves? Why do we continue to languish in economic never-never land, thinking our problems will be solved if only we are accepted, if only we achieve a "color-blind" society or elect more Black politicians?

With \$469 billion — enough money to be one of the largest nations in the world — we are a national and international "basket case." And the reprehensible fact is that we continue to spend as much as 95 percent of that \$469 billion with businesses other than our own.

What are our children and grandchildren going to think about our stewardship of their futures? Will they look back and be embarrassed to admit that we were their parents? More importantly, will they be so economically ill-equipped for their futures that sheer survival will be their number one priority? I sincerely hope not.

But hope alone will not take us where we want to go. We must act. Each of us must do what we can to achieve economic empowerment in our families, our communities, and in this country. Sitting around intellectualizing the issue will not do it. Concentrating on social issues will not do it. Focusing solely upon political solutions will not do it. An economic war must be fought with a big economic weapon — our \$469 billion.

Doesn't it make sense for Black people to pool their resources and work to help one another just as every other group does? Isn't it smart for us to help ourselves first before we concern ourselves with everyone else's problems? To stop being so "inclusive-minded" with everyone other than our own brothers and sisters?

I think you would agree that Black people, with our tremendous economic resources, suffer from a collective psychological malady that makes us maintain the economic status quo in the United States.

We virtually boycott our own businesses; we spend 95 percent of our income with non-Black businesses. And, we continue to believe the Rasputin of all myths: The White man's ice is colder and we allow our children to "brand" themselves with logos and names of White mega-millionaires who hold Black people in disdain. That says a great deal about who we are and where we are headed, that is, if we do not change. We must change the way we do business — NOW.

Economic empowerment is the most important issue facing Black people today. Booker T. Washington warned us in 1912; Marcus Garvey followed his lead, and many more brothers and sisters since then have sounded the alarm. If we fail to heed the messages relating to Black economic empowerment, we will surely seal our economic fate in this country and around the world. It will not be a pretty picture. After you read this article, please make a commitment to get involved with economic empowerment in the Black community, and follow through on that commitment.

If we rise up, as Marcus Garvey exhorted us, resolving to cooperate with one another and do for ourselves, our economic manifesto will be clear. Our struggle will be easier, and the powers we face will concede to our demands. However, if African-Americans choose individuality over collectivism, yes a few of us will "make it," but we will go down in history as a paradoxical people; a people who, with all of our wealth and knowledge, acquiesced and continued in economic oppression. And the blame will rest squarely upon our shoulders. The onus is on us.

James Clingman is founder and executive director of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.

A VOICE FROM THE HILL

Injustice down on the farm

By George Wilson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In spite of denial by some, there are very few African-Americans who can't trace their roots back to a farm. Now, current actions by the U.S. Department of Agriculture threaten to put African-American farmers in the same category as dinosaurs. Blacks say that the USDA forecloses on farms owned by African-Americans at an accelerated rate, delays the issuance of certain types of loans and generally, makes life miserable for African-Americans who earn their living from the land.

John Boyd is a third generation farmer who raises poultry and some grains on his farm in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. Boyd also heads the National Black Farmers Association. During a conversation he carefully outlined the plight of African-American farmers and the lack of activity on the part of the Agriculture Department in coming to their aid. "Our struggle has been with the Department of Agriculture's discrimination in its lending practices. We, in the National Black Farmers Association, believe that there is a 1500-case backlog of complaints against the

USDA, with 163 occurring in the state of Virginia. To my knowledge, only one of these complaints has been resolved.

"We protested in front of the White House and the Secretary of Agriculture declared a moratorium on foreclosures. However, they have not adhered to that decision. The Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Agriculture stated that there have been over 1000 foreclosures since December. Myself and others are being forced to wonder when the Department of Agriculture's going to do right by black farmers?"

According to Boyd and others, in 1940 there were approximately one million African-American farmers. In 1997, that figure was down to 18,000. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission has indicated in a report that if the current land loss continues, black-owned farms will be extinct by the year 2,000 — Just two years from now!

As we get closer to spring, most farmers are planting their crops. Unfortunately, too many African-American farmers are still waiting for checks from the Agriculture Department. If it takes its usual six months or more to fully process loans, blacks farmers will suffer more damage from bureaucracy than bad

weather or insects could ever do.

The plight of African-American farmers has a profound effect on all of us. In addition, history has taught us that a landless people is indeed a powerless people. It is a frightening prospect to think that there could be a day where African-Americans no longer have a hand in producing the food we consume.

Members of The National Black Farmers Association are not sitting on their plows. They have returned to Washington to once again press their case to the Agriculture Department and others who would listen and take action. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, African-American employees at the Agriculture Department and others showed their support.

There was also a special guest, a fully dressed mule symbolizing the animal our ancestors walked behind for free to feed this nation.

African-Americans deserve and have earned the right to keep their land. We owe black farmers our full support in this endeavor.

George Wilson is a 16-year correspondent for the American Urban Radio Network.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

PGA's 'you must walk rule' archaic, skirted disabilities act

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Prior to last night's revelation by the Professional Golfers' Association, the PGA had duck-hooked one out of bounds in its campaign to deny a handicapped man the right to compete.

Golfer Casey Martin has a hereditary leg ailment that makes him unable to walk a full 18 holes, or usually more than 7,000 yards. He had asked for permission to use a golf cart in PGA-sponsored events. Trapped in the despotism of custom, the PGA has said no, citing a "walk" rule that antedates the building of golf carts. Martin sued in federal court, charging that the PGA was punishing him in violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The PGA had relented only to the extent of allowing Martin to use a cart in two tournaments in the second-level Nike tour. In the first, completed recently in Lakeland, Fla., Martin showed that he may not walk well but he has one helluva golf game. He won by one stroke at 19 under par.

Did the cart provide Martin with an advantage that allowed him to win? I remember the 1964 U.S. Open, when I watched Ken Venturi on the 36th hole of the final day, struggling to victory in near exhaustion. On any such brutal day, a cart would be a great advantage. But on a cold, windy day, riding a cart might be a disadvantage.

The PGA had argued that Venturi's chance ordeal is part



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of the game. Nonsense! If stamina, strength and endurance were truly part of the contest, players would be required to tote their own bags. But golf has never been a cousin of boxing, where the last man standing is the winner.

There is no advantage so great that it justifies denying golfers such as Martin a reasonable chance to earn a living — not when an archaic rule could be changed to everyone's advantage.

The PGA has already acknowledged that skill at striking and putting the ball is what matters by allowing all on the senior tour to ride carts. So it made sense for them to abandon the "walk" rule and allow anyone who qualifies for any PGA tour to choose whether to walk or ride a cart.

Congress passed the Americans With Disabilities Act that requires businesses, football and basketball stadiums and many other places to be accessible to the disabled. To have a disabled person barred from a federal building or a golf tournament by rules that say "you must walk" is grossly unjust to the disabled. And it cheats the whole of society by depriving it of the fruits of the talents of the disabled.

I'm not interested in seeing Casey Martin walk. I just wanted to see him play golf. The PGA thought the better of sticking to its archaic ways and made it possible for Martin to compete with the best players. I'm glad that the courts didn't have to enlighten the PGA about what fairness requires.

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