

COMMENTARY

# Decision sours 25th anniversary of FCC race ruling

John William Templeton  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What a present for my 25th anniversary as a Black journalist — a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has invalidated the Federal Communications Commission's policy requiring broadcasters to actively recruit people of color and women for employment.

I'm one of the "FCC babies" spawned out of a policy that resulted from the case of WLBT-TV in Jackson, Miss., the first station to lose its license to a community challenge. The station had used openly racist language and failed to meet the needs of its entire population, particularly its African-Americans.

Once the FCC extended its ruling to the entire broadcasting community, the far-sighted Tony Brown, host of PBS' Black Journal, began the Howard University School of Communications in 1972.

Simultaneously, I was hopping off a bus to begin my studies at Howard, unaware of this development.

By the second semester, I was in that first freshman class

of the School of Communications, fortunate to be indoctrinated in Brown's simple five-word credo: "Communicate to educate to liberate."

In April 1973, I wrote my first professional story for the All-African News Service about Lee Elder's fight to gain admission to the Masters golf tournament. That Tiger Woods went into the past Masters as the favorite caused me to reflect on a quarter-century of following that credo.

Without that FCC policy, I would not have had the opportunity to watch the Watergate story unfold from inside the newsroom of the *Washington Post*; I would not have been the first Black intern at WBTV-TV News in Charlotte; I probably wouldn't have investigated the CIA and military intelligence with John Marks and Victor Marchetti for *Harper's Magazine*; and I would not have learned about science writing from the *Washington Post's* Vic Cohn and the *New York Times's* Nancy Hicks Maynard.

One vignette demonstrates what a difference the policy

can make.

About a month after starting at WBTV, I answered the phone in the newsroom to take a call from a lady whose son was at Stonewall Jackson Training School in Concord, a place where some kids from my neighborhood had gone. I was able to convince news director Bill Ballard and anchor Bob Inman to let me go undercover into the school as a volunteer.

During two weeks there, I saw young Black men being placed in cages in the ground and other abuses. One day, I returned with cameraman Eddie Hollifield and before we returned home, the state juvenile corrections commissioner and the camp commander were resigning.

But the most fulfilling part of my career has been to walk in the footsteps of great Black journalists — men and women who had repeatedly put their lives on the line in the fight against racism. Sam Yette, Wallace Terry and Chester Higgins were Howard journalism teachers.

The *Washington AFRO-American's* Art Carter

convinced me to work for the Black press. AFRO executive editor Moses Newsome and Richmond AFRO editor Ray Boone honed my skills. In grad school at UNC-Chapel Hill, I did my research through oral histories of men like the *Journal and Guide's* John Jordan and the *Atlanta World's* C.A. Scott with Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett of the *San Francisco Sun Reporter* as a research advisor.

After succeeding Boone as editor of the Richmond AFRO, I had the honor of preparing the first centennial edition in the history of the Black press. That meant reading the editorials of John J. Mitchell, founder of the predecessor paper *The Richmond Planet* and a stout foe of lynching and Jim Crow.

Those folks didn't back down — lessons that stood me well when, at the *Winston-Salem Chronicle*, we challenged North Carolina banks about not having a single branch located in a Black neighborhood in 1979.

After we convinced Mechanics and Farmer's, a Black bank, to place a branch

in east Winston-Salem, suddenly a Wachovia branch materialized across the street.

A decade later, many were astounded when I took on Andrew Grove, chief executive of Intel, after he wrote that "Black organizations" were not "workplace-related," in my role as editor of the *San Jose Business Journal*. Our dueling columns went on for more than a month. It was simple. John Mitchell would have spoken out.

Today's Black leaders and many journalists like to do the "moonwalk," sliding backwards while appearing to move forward. I was blessed to be nurtured by those who knew the intractability and tenacity of White supremacy.

For 10 years, it has been obvious that an instant replay of the 19th century has been unfolding.

Professor Yette had predicted it 25 years ago. Unfortunately it has not been obvious to those of us who are doing the oppressor's work for them. More importantly, it has been invisible to those of us who have been "skinning and grinning" our way through the

relative good times — convinced that it won't end.

It's time to wake up and smell the ashes of legislation upon the fires of torched churches.

As frustrating as it is to see hard-won battles overturned by people who lack a sense of history, I have the mandate of my role models to work even harder — to reach out to young people, to give to them as was given to me.

Spike Lee's "Four Little Girls" demonstrates that when children are energized, change happens.

The same thing occurred in South Africa. Today our children are being turned against us. That's why we're sliding backward while appearing to go forward.

This is what I have to tell the young people, and any adults who will listen: Civil rights are meaningless without power and knowledge. One person can make a difference, but it takes a whole people to sustain change.

Acquire the knowledge to gain power.

John William Templeton is executive editor of "Griot."

## Reparations not novel, and maybe not needed

By Ray Willis  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Talk of reparations for African-Americans to combat hundreds of years of oppression won't die.

There are many reasons why.

Just look at what happened to several other racial and ethnic groups who were wronged. Some groups were compensated.

Japanese-Americans, confined to internment camps and slapped with restriction on their freedom during World War II, were given \$22,000 each as a settlement for being held in captivity during the war.

Similar reparations were given to the so-called "comfort women," Asian females who were forced into prostituting themselves to Japanese soldiers while during World War II.

Some Jewish concentration camp survivors are receiving pensions from the German government.

And Native Americans were given land — reservations — free college tuition and many other inducements having been stripped of their land.

Reparations is not a novel idea. Reparations are an admission of guilt and responsibility. But no one wants to accept responsibility for enslaving our ancestors. To do so would be an embarrassment to the dominant culture in general and to persons who enjoy superior status in every facet of American life.

And it's for those reasons we will never receive what is actually owed us in the form of reparations.

Only President Clinton, who has a special sensitivity and who was raised around blacks, seems willing to publicly admit white responsibility for the enslavement of our forefathers.

I have one white friend whom I speak with candidly on issues like reparations. During a recent discussion with him on this topic he said his forefathers were from Europe and didn't even own slaves. So why should he admit guilt for something neither he nor his ancestors, were responsible for?

Try as I might, I couldn't convince him that what he was

saying didn't matter. Why? Because the privilege of being white benefits everyone who is white. It makes no difference whether or not your forefathers owned slaves. Even now, simply being white is an advantage in our society. And that's a holdover from slavery.

While some may argue that black people should be compensated for the misery our ancestors had to endure as slaves, I don't necessarily agree. I prefer to focus on the here and now. Even today, we are not perceived, or in many cases, accepted as equal. A black person's worth is considered less than that of a white counterpart.

We must first erase the stigma of race. That can only be accomplished by changing the perception that we are less than equal. It's not about reparations; it's about erasing the artificial barriers which keep us from being perceived as equal.

No, I don't have all the answers. But I think the solution must lie within us, not outside of our race.

To know is to grow. Until next time.

### Carl Rowan's Commentary

## Taxes ain't that bad; have paved life's way

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I'm paying more taxes today than my Pa ever dreamed anybody could squeeze from a poor boy from Tennessee. And I'm as happy as a brown bear at a salmon run.

If you think I'm nuts to rejoice at paying a lot of taxes, think also of two alternatives:

1) I could be working at the minimum wage at one or two of the grubbiest jobs in America, yet still be unable to truly support a family. I would be waiting for Uncle Sam to send me a small check as an Earned Income Tax Credit.

2) Or I could be unschooled and untrained enough to be jobless and needing charity in this hate-the-poor "welfare reform" era, with no real reason to file a tax return.

A lot of the money that I'm sending to the feds I think of as interest on the 1946 GI Bill investment that enabled me to attend a great Ohio college, Oberlin. So I trust that some of my 1998 tax dollars will enable another generation of needy youngsters to know the liberating force of learning. I pay still hoping that somehow we can convince this society that it is more elevating for all of us to spend more on schools than on prisons.

And I'm writing this ode to taxes outdoors in the April sun, feeling strong and sassy, because somebody's tax dollars made possible the medical research and training that gave me



CARL ROWAN

the blessing of survival from a couple of nasty trips to the hospital.

Sometimes I bemoan the size, the intrusiveness, the inefficiency of the federal government. Then I think of things like our massive civil and criminal justice systems. We could still have justice by posse

and mob, or wait around for weeks for the circuit judge, but I prefer the big, complex, speedy system, whatever its cost.

Paying colossal local taxes, as I do here in D.C., is a lot less palatable when you know you have a bad mayor and a bloated bureaucracy.

But someone still has to pay for a decent public school system, and traffic lights and garbage pickups. Just as you value the sense of security that you get from financing the Pentagon, so you know that to feel secure in your home, or on your streets, you have to pay for a police force.

I notice that some of the loudest grippers about taxes are the people who enjoy most of the good life in America.

They are the first to lecture the down-and-out about how nothing worth having comes really free.

Well, they can bitch today without any harmonizing from me. I just say, "Uncle Sam, I hope I'm fortunate enough to write you a bigger check next year!"