

## COMMENTARY

# If we are so smart, why are we so far behind?

By James Clingman, Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I am quite concerned about the fact that though, according to George Fraser, Black people have accumulated some \$5 trillion in intellectual capital since 1968 and have achieved tremendous individual acclaim at the most prestigious institutions in the land, most Black intellectuals remain in their ivory towers and simply speak or write about economic empowerment.

It seems to me that with all of our intelligence and knowledge we should be much further along in this country when it comes to our collective economic status.

Why aren't we?

Surely we can figure our way out of our current economic situation. After all, our forefathers and mothers figured it out and many of them had very little formal education. So, what's our problem? Is it that we still have not adopted a local and national strategy for the economic advancement of our people? Several have been offered.

T.M. Pryor, author of "Wealthbuilding Lessons of Booker T. Washington," details a

plan that entails pooling our resources.

Dr. Claud Anderson, author of "Black Labor, White Wealth," offers a strategy for vertically integrated business development.

And, Tony Brown, author of "Black Lies, White Lies," promotes an economic strategy centered on technology.

And there are several others who are advocating financial and entrepreneurial strategies for Black economic empowerment.

What more do we need? Why won't we adopt one or more of these positions and move forward? Could it be that some of us are more concerned about our individual status than our collective economic status? Are some of us allowing our egos to supersede our common sense?

We have Black professors of economics, financial experts and tremendously successful businesspersons who could, if they were so inclined, lead our people out of the doldrums of economic despair. So, why are we still locked into second-class status and moving swiftly to third-class?

My contention is that we are constrained by a psychological barrier — placed among

us by White people with third grade educations — that we are simply unable to tear down.

Despite all of our capability, intellect, and our economic resources we languish at the bottom of the economic heap in this country. Folks, that has to be psychological because it is so illogical. It makes absolutely no sense, especially when we have been shown the way by so many of our brothers and sisters.

According to a recent PBS documentary narrated by Henry Louis Gates, W.E.B. DuBois was disenchanted by his so-called "Talented Tenth" because they saw their achieved economic, intellectual, and political status as an end rather than a means. In other words, they failed to reach back to those less fortunate and take care of our race, as DuBois had envisioned.

Noted author Harold Cruse suggests that Black people who represented the Talented Tenth in the civil rights and intellectual leadership have led the Black masses toward dependency and expropriation not toward self-reliance and economic freedom.

If we are so smart, why are we so far behind? I think we have fallen prey to the

elitism that runs rampant through our communities. I think we have succumbed to the brainwashing of those who would have us remain dependent. And, I think we suffer from a psychological malady that, if not cured, will keep Black people at the bottom of the economic heap for years to come.

Oh sure, individuals among us will continue to hold themselves up and be held up by others as paragons of success. But, what will that matter if we as a collective body of people continue to digress — or even maintain the status quo?

We are too smart to allow this situation to continue. Does it make sense for poor Black people to continue to parade after their affluent leaders seeking more political positions, more jobs in major corporations and more sensitivity classes? Those are not the outcomes we should seek for economic empowerment. Ask yourself: If our actions of the past 40 years have not achieved economic empowerment, why are we still following them?

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

## Racial reconciliation plausible if accompanied by reparations

By Akwasi Evans  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Racism is the theft, abuse, neglect and denigration of others and their resources for selfish, reedy, ungodly purposes. Racism is not a clean little convenience, it's a dirty little sin.

Near the end of 1998, I served on Austin, Texas Mayor Kirk Watson's panel of community leaders seeking racial reconciliation. During our two-day workshop we spent hours working on conflict resolution and a few minutes talking about racial repair. We did not deal with semantics, which I believe is the foundation of any philosophy on reconciliation.

Realistically, there is no racism anywhere in the world because there is only one race in the world and that is the human race. What prevails in America and throughout much of the world is cultural chauvinism. Chauvinism in the sense that its practitioners have the prejudicial belief in the innate superiority of their particular group. In America the superiority of Whites is accepted as the natural order. For most of this country's history it has been mandated, codified, institutionalized and surreptitiously taught to generation after generation.

Now as we approach a new millennium and natural forces around the world are challenging such chauvinistic assumptions, basic survival is now motivating the ruling minority to move back into the human family, instead of towering above it.

White people have always been a minority. It was only through force, greed, murder, rape, theft and self-centeredness that they made themselves the majority power holders.

In South Africa where Whites are approximately five percent of the population, they held absolute rule for over a century. In the world, where they are approximately six percent of the population, they are the reckoning force in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, Antarctica and the Americas.

Now with the technology of the 21st century in our hands, people around the world are waking up and addressing what is

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happening to them and to others.

When a Rodney King is beaten in Los Angeles by the police, people in Tokyo and Moscow know of it within days, if not hours. When a James Byrd is beaten, dragged, decapitated and murdered in Jasper, Texas, people quickly find out about it in Rome, Roanoke and Rwanda. When a President Sani Abacha and a Chief Abiola die mysteriously in Nigeria, a simple citizen in Switzerland, Soweto or Chicago is swiftly informed. We have entered an age where information is power and that power is not easily constricted to a small inner circle as it once was.

We have reached a point in time where racism is becoming a detriment to the racist and for the sake of his progeny, he has to seek reconciliation.

Being rhetorical, I say that it is the victims who now need to define racism and to propose the forms of restitution that lead to reconciliation.

Racism, contrary to what the Webster dictionary says, is not the belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic stock. It is intentionally doing harm and wrong to others because they are different. Racism is cheating and making rules that say it is fair when the charlatan is powerful and the exploited is weak. Racism is cowardice, in the face of competition, where might is substituted for right.

If America is to approach racial reconciliation in a sincere attempt to heal its festering wound of cultural colonization, then Whites have to acknowledge that they are indeed inflicting damage upon others based upon the amount of pigmentation they display. Blacks have to admit that they have tamely submitted to something that was anathema to their very spirit.

This is not to exclude other ethnicities, but this sensitive issue is the primary domain of people who have incorrectly accepted the labels of Black and White.

When is the last time you saw an actual "White" or "Black" person? The ruling minority invented those labels to more easily distinguish the level of exploitation meted out to the various cultures they zealously rule. And like demigods, they conditioned the people through reward and punishment to believe it.

They allow White kids to go to college while Black ones are sent to prison. They promote Whites to heads of corporations and put Blacks on welfare. It has all been a devious game.

We should have pity upon the neo-racists, for their deeds are their own undoing. They have distanced themselves from the family of man, placing themselves above all others and leaving themselves at a greater distance to fall. They are falling and their efforts at maintaining the status quo are failing.

Where do we go from here?

There can be no racial reconciliation without reparations. People were stolen from their homeland, their labor was usurped, their dignity stripped, their rights denied and their hopes squashed. Still they endured and now they must be paid. You don't go into a man's house, rape his wife, abduct his children,

ransack the premises, take all his possessions and later pretend it never happened. It not only happened, it still continues.

How we reconcile is open for mediation, but the discussion will be mute without agreement on some form of reparations.

I know how hard it must be for people still pretending to be White to admit that they have benefited and are still profiting from the defrauding of others. Black people need to wake up to this glaring imbalance. Whites may convince themselves that they are not actually racist, but they cannot deny that they are supporting institutions that uphold the inane assumption that European preeminence stems less from force than from manifest destiny.

Ultimately, we are one race and our complimentary cultures are capable of reconciling. We are a wounded people in need of healing. We are a Godly people living under satanic rule, but we have a savior.

For Christians, it is obviously Christ, for Muslims it may be Jihad; for agnostics it could be justice, but for the survival of humanity it has to be the honest owning of our history and the determined intent of our present to make our collective future better.

When White folks invented racism they unleashed a monster that they themselves must help to destroy. Like Dr. Frankenstein, they must accept the error of their experiment and work with the rest of us to dismantle their sinister laboratory.

Racism is the White Man's Burden and the 21st century is when he must bear it. He would be wise to start early.

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