

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Agenda needed to tackle police abuse

A protest last week to ratchet up pressure on the Metropolitan Police Department to address police misconduct aroused a stream of emotions, as well it should have.

The rally, sponsored by several community-oriented groups, touched on the "epidemic" of police abuse plaguing the nation's police departments and highlighted a local incident between officers and several black pre-teens.

Last month 12-year-old Parrish "Pookie" Young was injured for allegedly resisting arrest. Young and a friend were play-fighting in the street over a can of Pringles potato chips when they were warned by a female motorist to stay out of the street. Two officers — one dressed in plainclothes and driving in an unmarked car — allegedly told the boys to get their "black asses" out of the street and called both "niggers." A witness said Young's arm was broken when police handcuffed him.

The incident was the latest in a string of local abuse cases that include offenses like murder — former officer Ron Mortensen is life in prison for killing 21-year-old Daniel Mendoza — assault — the videotaped beating of a coin thief and allegations of inmate abuse by corrections officers — abuse of power, coercion, filing false reports. The list goes on.

Incidents in Riverside, Calif., Pittsburgh, New York, Detroit and elsewhere in which police shot, beat or killed African-Americans "under the guise" protecting and serving bolstered the group's message resounded: Let's stop the sickness before it spreads.

But what's being done to find a cure for this sickness?

Rest assured, the police aren't going to take the necessary steps to find a remedy. It's obvious that pre-screening and sensitivity training aren't working, but don't your breath for funding to beef up the procedures.

Given the recent report lauding Sheriff Jerry Keller for sound fiscal management of the city's largest police force, it's unlikely the town's top gun will take a scalpel to the cancer.

The creation of a true citizens review board was and is still a promising step toward instilling impartiality into policing the police. Though recent rulings have defanged the blueprint designed to help — and attempts will likely made to further weaken its potency as it moves through bureaucratic hoops for approval — it might be citizens' best ally against partisan Internal Affairs rulings.

Part of the solution is creating a workable agenda, with the help of lawmakers and law enforcement amenable to the cause of police oversight and present the plans to governing bodies. Another part is defining a plan of attack, be it an all-out media blitz highlighting the problem, learning about the Freedom of Information Act and what documents are available for public perusal, along with other actions.

It's clear that protests and rallies, while successful in some instances, are the end-all. Talk needs to be followed by action, serious action.



Black farmers: You call this reparations?

By James Clingman, Jr. Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) — A group of Black Americans were recently introduced to the world of reparations federal government-style. Black farmers finally achieved a settlement in a case that began in 1983 during the Reagan administration (which was also the same year the U.S. Office of Civil Rights was disbanded). The lawsuit was filed because federal officials unfairly denied loans and subsidies to them.

Awaiting final approval in March, the protracted lawsuit against the United States Department of Agriculture, has resulted in 3,000 Black farmers getting "tax-free" payments of \$50,000 each. Their government debts, which average \$87,500, will also be "forgiven" as part of the agreement.

But, before we celebrate, let's do the math. The farmers will get \$50,000 for 14 years (1983-1997), which comes to just under \$3,600 per year. Divide that by 2080, the number of "normal" working hours of an individual per year, and we get a whopping hourly wage of \$1.73. Man! What a deal!

So, this is what reparations are all about. Black farmers, who work much more than the normal eight-hour day; who have been discriminated against by the government for 14 years and probably longer; who have been literally driven out of business because of rising costs and insurmountable debt, are being paid \$1.73 per hour. If this is reparation for Black

people, we are in deep trouble.

President Clinton said the settlement was an important step in "ongoing efforts to rid the Agriculture Department of discriminatory behavior and redress any harm that has been caused by past discrimination against African-American family farmers." I'd say it's a very small step, a baby step in fact, when it comes to repairing the damage done just since 1983.

Some Black farmers, even after having their government debt forgiven, still owe money to private banks and finance companies. One said he owed an additional \$42,000. Well, after his reparation payment from Uncle Sam he should have just enough money left to get him in debt once again.

Black farmers have suffered tremendously over the years while many White farmers and mega-farming corporations have benefited greatly from government subsidy programs and the like. With this settlement Black farmers will continue to suffer - or, as many have done and are still doing, leave the farming business all together, unless we decide to help.

Black people spend millions of dollars each year on food. Black farmers have been going down the economic drain for years. What's wrong with this picture?

According to the Harvest Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank founded by Dr. Claud Anderson, Black farmers once owned millions

of acres of land. Now they own about 400,000 acres.

Echoes of Booker T. Washington's admonishment to his people to be producers rather than consumers ring so true. We are buying most of our food from someone other than Black farmers who are steadily being driven out of business by the government.

Many of us will walk by a Black-owned grocery store to get to one owned by a non-Black. And, those of us who own stores will not seek ways to support Black farmers by seeing that, as much as possible, our products are purchased from them.

I am not saying that nothing is being done, but it is not enough. We eat too much food in this country for our farmers to be going out of business. I understand that there are economies to consider and new technology in farming that must be instituted in order to compete. But, who do we think was first to devise "new economies" and "new technologies" in farming at the turn of the century? Can

you say, Dr. George Washington Carver?

So, was the recent settlement really reparations for Black farmers? I don't think so. What they got was a slap in the face. What can they do you ask? Why don't we change the question and ask what we can do. Here are a few ideas: Take the time to write to your Congressperson. Look at ways in which your community can support Black farmers by buying their products. Create vertical businesses in the food industry that, in turn, create jobs not only in farming but also in trucking, storage, processing, distribution, warehousing, and retail.

What else can we do? Support one another much more than we do now. Our economic destiny depends upon it.

James Clingman, Jr. is the founder and executive director of the Greater Cincinnati African-American Chamber of Commerce and author of the book, "Economic Empowerment or Economic Enslavement - We have a choice."

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