

COMMENTARY

# More tough debate on the vouchers debate

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
A recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* by Matthew Miller, which speaks to the political standoff that has kept vouchers unavailable to 99 percent of urban schoolchildren, sparked my interest. Vouchers and charter schools have been two responses to the crisis in public education. The grassroots popularity of these two reforms grows out of the fact that these initiatives provide parents and communities with a way to "opt out" of the existing arrangement in favor of trying new approaches to meet local educational needs and preferences. Vouchers would partially privatize the public school system by giving parents vouchers equivalent to what it costs the state to educate

children in the public schools and use them to send their children to whatever school they wish. This proposed innovation has brought about a politically polarized debate, particularly insofar as parents — across the socio-economic spectrum — have responded eagerly to the voucher opportunity. According to Miller: "Bill Clinton and most leading Democrats oppose them, saying we should fix existing public schools, not drain money from the system. Teachers' unions, the staunchest foes of vouchers, are among the party's biggest donors, and sent more delegates to the 1996 Democratic National Convention than did the state of California. Republicans endorse vouchers as a market-based way to shake up calcified



bureaucracies, but they generally push plans that affect only a few students." In fact, Miller notes, if you add the numbers of those children who currently are enrolled in voucher programs (74,000) with those in charter schools (about 200,000), the proportion comes to only 0.5 percent of schoolchildren in the whole country, meaning that the school-choice debate is taking place "at the margins." At this rate, for all the fuss,

it's hard to imagine that any impact could be made on the skills and life chances of students stuck in our worst public schools. The sensible first step, says Miller, would be a much bigger road test. "Let's take three or four big cities where we agree the public schools are failing, raise per-pupil spending by 20 percent, giving urban schools the resources they would need to achieve funding equity. But we'll

implement this increase by way of a universal voucher system that finally gives every child a choice." Miller reasons that a progressive hand is needed to pursue the benefits of vouchers without risk to the poor. "Given the disastrous state of many urban schools," he points out, "the Democratic Party should be the natural home of this progressive influence. It is not, because teachers' unions loom larger in Democratic fundraising and campaigns" — and these unions are aghast at any notion of privatization. The Republicans, on the other hand, do not have a sufficient record of support of disenfranchised communities to be counted on to address the voucher issue with sensitivity to

making it work for Black and other poor communities. So where do we go from here? How do we create the environment to have a depoliticized dialogue on how to revitalize our moribund educational system? As an independent and as the education team leader of the National Reform Party, I take very seriously the willingness of parents at the grassroots to challenge such venerable institutions as the public school system and the unions. Who can be trusted to make vouchers work? Parents and the community. The unions, the political parties and the education professionals are going to have to find a way to support them if vouchers are going to have a shot.

## Carl Rowan's Commentary

### Clinton's lasting legacy one of failed initiatives, promises

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
Whatever else the historians say about President Clinton, they surely will note his penchant for engaging in acts of futility. He came into office with a grandiose plan for altering the health-care system in America. That industry and its lobbyists shot him and first lady Hillary down. A couple of years ago, he started something called "the initiative on race," naming a special panel to tell us how to cope with the bigotry and hatred that constitute this country's greatest social problem. But a timid Clinton kept the panel on such a tight leash that its members could not say all that needed to be said, let alone do something positive. So all that "initiative" did was convince many paranoid white supremacists that the federal government had turned against the white race. Now Clinton is on a four-day tour of Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, an Indian reservation and the impoverished areas of St. Louis and Los Angeles, exhorting big business to put investments and jobs into these areas. The president acts as if he is unaware that for almost two decades this country has wallowed in contempt for the poor, and that he has fed that contempt with his welfare reform and other policies. The people with investments and jobs have been made to believe that the poor whites in Appalachia, the Native Americans on the Pine Ridge reservation, the blacks in the Watts section



CARL ROWAN

of Los Angeles, are the way they are because they want to be that way. Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., says this Clinton journey is "too little, too late," raising the question why he waited until the seventh year of his presidency to show such concern for the poor. The president's aides are quoted as saying that he had to cement the fortunes of the middle class before trying to lift the lives of the 35 million Americans who are mired in poverty. The idea is to use \$1 billion in federal subsidies to induce the private sector to invest about \$15 billion in these pockets of poverty. The first hurdle is getting the Congress to appropriate that \$1 billion in incentives. Then we'll see if corporate America really believes that these islands of need are places to be mined for profits. Clinton says investing is "the right thing to do," but there is no reason to believe that morality will bring big business to the rescue of these long-deprived people. A laid-off medical supply worker in Appalachia said to Clinton: "Lyndon Johnson was here in '64, but all the things he was talking about haven't reached down to the people here." You don't have to be very cynical to think that 40 years from now the people of the area will recall Clinton's visit with the pathetic realization that the fruits of this economic boom never quite trickled down to them.

## Redefining, instilling positivity in the 'black market' concept

*James Clingman*  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
I never thought I would see the day when the Black Market would be referenced in a positive vein. Did you? Well that day has come. Everyone, it seems, is discovering the black market these days and the president of the United States is leading the way. Clinton is touring the country, visiting places like East St. Louis, Watts, and even Appalachia, (although the media would make you think there were no Black people living in those hills and hollows) suggesting that marketers rethink the concept of the black market. I have heard corporate executives refer to the black market as the "new emerging market" or the "new urban market." They are rapidly positioning themselves (again?) to take full advantage of this new phenomenon. Two questions: Since when has the black market been a new market? How can a market that ranks somewhere

between the eighth and tenth largest economy in the world be an emerging market? It seems to me that this "new emerging" market has been here for quite some time. So what's all the fuss about? Why are so many folks suggesting that now is the time to take a look at the Black Market? I believe this notion of "discovering" Black people and their spending capacity is yet another foray into the world of economic trickery. It is based on diversionary tactics by those businesspersons who have exploited the black market for years and want even more from it now. It is insulting for some to suggest that we, Black people, with our \$500,000,000,000, comprise an emerging market. Corporate marketers have known for many years what our spending habits are, what we prefer to buy, when we buy the most and how we make our purchases. They have known for quite some time that the black market is

the prime market for their products and services. They are well aware that they can create advertising and marketing campaigns that will garner billions of dollars from our pockets ... with minimal reciprocity on their parts. Believe me, corporate America knows. And, to suggest otherwise is a mere sham. The problem is that we do not have a full awareness of these facts. The other problem is that those of us who do have the facts do little to change the situation. So now we see another marketing and public relations campaign being rolled out that makes us think someone in corporate America is listening to the people in Watts and East St. Louis. The Watts riots were in 1965 folks. Why has it taken so long? Don't be hoodwinked into believing these people are now interested in our economic well-being. They are interested in what they have always been interested

(See Market, Page 16)

## Boycott

(Continued from Page 10)  
audiences earn about 29 percent less revenue per listener than stations that air general market programming. People of color should back away from advertisers who won't play fair and who sponsor shows that exclude them. Maybe only the time-honored tactics used

in the nearly yearlong Montgomery bus boycott can save blacks from becoming invisible in the nation's media. Dr. Barbara Reynolds newest book, "No, I Won't Shut Up: 30 Years of Telling it Like It Is," can be purchased by sending a check for \$17.95 plus \$4 postage to 4806 St. Barnabas Rd., Suite 598, Temple Hills, Md. 20757.

### WE ACCEPT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send your letters to: Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice, 900 E. Charleston, Las Vegas, NV 89104 or fax to 380-8102

All letters must be signed and contain a daytime phone to be verified for your protection.