

## COMMENTARY

# Black farmers still fighting for reimbursement

**James Clingman**  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
"Get land and lie on it."

Those were the words of Booker T. Washington as he admonished his people toward ownership of the most valuable commodity in the world.

Washington went on to tell his people, "You go to town with your pockets full and your wagons empty and return with your wagons full and your pockets empty. You must go to town with your wagons full of your produce and your pockets empty and return with your pockets full and your wagons empty."

This was one of the most basic principles anyone could proclaim. It made sense then and it makes sense now.

As we see Black farmers still struggling to retain a smidgen of what once was theirs, and as we witness them in their fight to maintain some level of economic dignity,

Washington's words remain clear.

Black farmers heeded those words, despite having their land stolen from them, being denied loans from the government and being patted on their heads with a ridiculous monetary offer to kiss and make up with the United States Department of Agriculture.

Black farmers took the risks and stayed the course. Now, what are we going to do to assist them in their fight for economic justice?

According to leading expert Dr. Robert D. Bullard, Black farmers owned over 16 million acres of farmland in 1910. Ten years later, some 925,000 Black farmers tilled the soil and fed our people and other people as well. Now we have fewer than 17,000 Black farmers who own less than three million acres of land.

In case you did not hear

about the proposed settlement offered to Black farmers in March, it was an insult to them. The farmers are still fighting for an equitable end to a long and hard fought battle with the USDA that saw years of blatant discrimination against them and their families.

The sad footnote in this case is the specter of billions per being spent on food by Black people in this country every year. Add that to the mere 19 Black-owned supermarkets in this country and you will see a picture of irresponsibility, complacency and downright dependency by Black people on others for the very basics needed to sustain life.

This scenario also presents an opportunity, as most problems do. As we always say in this column, if we would pool our resources and establish more supermarkets and support them, of course

we could take a huge chunk out of our problem.

Additionally, if we would develop vertical businesses in the food industry, similar to what Dr. Claud Anderson has been telling us for years, we could create more jobs for our people, and we could support our farmers by buying their products. Now that's as simple as it gets folks.

We're talking about food, something each of us must have. Of course, this will also work with other items like fish and chicken. Anything we eat, we should be able to provide it for ourselves. It's pretty scary to think that someone else controls our food supply. It's also pretty sad that we could not, if pressed to do so, feed our own children.

That is why the Black farmers are so vital to Black people in general. They are the ones who own most of the land, and since no one is

making more of that valuable commodity we must see to it that they are able to hold on to what they have and get more if they can.

Some may say farming is passe, and no one wants to do it any more. Well, until eating becomes passe and goes out of style we had better have a few Black farmers to rely upon to grow our food.

We should take a lesson from the REACH Program in Meridian, Miss., which, since 1977, has been practicing what many of us only preach about. Members of the Christ Temple Church, under the leadership of Bishop Luke Edwards, pooled their food stamps, bought peanuts and sold them on the streets. To date, REACH owns 4,000 acres of land, a hog farm, 1,000 head of cattle, an auto repair business, a construction company, three motels, four restaurants, a kindergarten-through-12th-

grade school with dormitories and (wouldn't you know it?) a supermarket. REACH is taking care of business, and one of the main ingredients in its success is land ownership.

In an exclusive interview of a Black farmer conducted by Bullard for the Environmental Justice Resource Center, Gary Grant of Tillery, N.C. had this to say when asked how we can help: "I would like for Black institutions and Black people to believe that Black farmers know what is needed. Second, I would also like them to contribute financially, morally, physically and spiritually. Third, we need to begin a massive education program with our children of the importance of owning land."

Grant also seemed to echo Washington when he said, "Land ownership is economic" (See *Farmers*, Page 13)

## Carl Rowan's Commentary

### Gates' donation ensures his legacy as millennial philanthropist

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

I have tried to think of a single act of charity that equals in social and economic impact the decision by Microsoft chairman Bill Gates to give a billion dollars over the next 20 years for college scholarships for minority students.

The only thing comparable that I can think of was the

1913 decision by Julius Rosenwald to set up a fund to provide grants for the construction of schools for Negro children.

By 1932, more than 5,000 such schools had been built in some 900 counties in 15 states, including little Bernard school in McMinnville, Tenn., which I attended from kindergarten through high school.

Without Rosenwald's brave and generous grants, many thousands of black kids of my time would have had absolutely no school to attend. I now marvel, as I speak across America, to run into distinguished black professionals who got their basic education in a Rosenwald school.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Rosenwald changed the future of black America and began the foundation for the civil right movement that would come a half-century later.

Bill and Melinda Gates, the world's richest couple with a net worth of at least \$90 billion, will influence America's future and the future of race relations profoundly with a gift that will push this society further toward equality of opportunity.

"This country is in an incredible time period," Gates has said.



CARL ROWAN

"The advances in technology are really quite breathtaking. Is everybody getting a chance to benefit? The answer is really no."

In their way, the Gateses are as brave as Rosenwald was, because they are financing opportunities for minorities at a time when a national anti-affirmative action fever says

it is politically impossible to give anything to minority Americans that is not also given to the white majority.

Already, the Gateses are being criticized in letters to editors and other forums for not making these scholarships available to poor whites.

It seems not to matter that recipients of Gates' "Millennium scholarships" must be both needy and academically deserving.

Ironically, this grant also has drawn attention to the complaint by a few blacks that he owns more of the nation's wealth than all blacks put together.

My view is that in this social and economic system, Gates is entitled to every nickel that he owns, and that he ought to inspire blacks and others to gain the special skills and knowledge, and engage in the entrepreneurship, that will increase their wealth.

Some may think Bill Gates' legacy will lie in computers and incredible software.

I say that for another millennium his legacy will be manifest in the thousands of "Millennium scholars" whose lives flowered because of his vision and generosity.

## Busing's end welcome sight in push for educational equality

*By Lee Hubbard*  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

When a federal court judge recently ruled that busing be ended in Charlotte, N.C., the wheel that began 28 years ago came full circle.

Judge Robert D. Potter ruled that busing was no longer necessary since all "the vestiges of past discrimination" had disappeared. It was in 1971, in the Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) Board of Education case, when the U.S. Supreme Court authorized busing as a remedy for racial inequalities in schools.

"The Mecklenburg decision made it so that schools would not be racially identifiable," said Dr. Robert Smith, a political science professor at San Francisco State University. "The court said that schools had to have the same percentages of Black and White students in the district."

So, if a school district was 80 percent White and 20 percent Black, each of the schools in the district had to have similar make ups. Civil-rights activists saw busing as a way for black children to receive educational opportunities in an integrated and a fully-funded public school.

So, they brought pressure through protests and lawsuits for school systems to implement busing. At the time, civil-rights activists felt busing was a move up, but history has proven them wrong.

Busing has been a failure.

As busing swung into high gear, many White parents saw it as a threat to their children's education. Many of them pulled their children out of the system and began sending their children to private schools, or they moved from the cities to the suburbs in what became known as "White flight."

In 1971, before busing began in Boston, 60 percent of the city's public schools were

White, with minorities making up the rest of the student population. Today, the Boston school district is 18 percent White and 82 percent minority.

While busing was seen as a way to integrate schools, the opposite happened. While many point to busing failures, they rarely factor in the other side of the debate. Many Blacks hated busing. They felt it was thrust upon them by the courts, politicians and civil rights leaders who were more interested in integration than providing an excellent education.

Although they wanted their children to have the same resources as White students, they did not see busing as a solution.

"Busing is a bankrupt and suicidal method — based on the false notion that Black children are unable to learn unless they are in the same setting as White children," said the concluding statement at the famous 1972 Black Power conference in Gary, Ind.

The Black activists who opposed busing at the Black Power conference were called "Wallace sympathizers" by the traditional civil rights community because George Wallace, who was running for president at the time, opposed busing. But the attitudes displayed at the Black Power conference grew within the community as the problems of busing became apparent.

In practice, Black students had to deal with most of the burdens. They were the ones who were shuttled to schools in strange neighborhoods, while Whites were rarely transported out of their communities. But the real reason busing was unsuccessful was that it failed to address the most important factor in education: the parents.

"Busing took parents out of the educational process when it took the child out of the community," said Dr. Nathan Hare of the (See *Busing*, Page 13)