

COMMENTARY

Black economic wealth should be at forefront of agenda

James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In my book, "Economic Empowerment or Economic Enslavement - We have a choice," I discuss the notion of our people being asleep and each time the alarm goes off we roll over and push that snooze button. Well we've all heard the saying, "If you snooze, you lose."

That saying could not be more appropriate than it is today when it comes to Black people — my people. Claud Anderson, author of "Black Labor — White Wealth," has been traveling the length and breadth of this country for the past seven years telling us that we had better wake up and smell the coffee.

He warned us at every turn that we had only a few years left to establish ourselves economically. He has literally shed tears during some of his presentations at the stone-cold facts regarding Black poverty, inequity, and the collective economic position

of Black people in this country.

Anderson begged us to awaken from our deep sleep and get busy building vertically integrated businesses that would create jobs for our people, help feed our people, help our people to become more self-sufficient, and build wealth in our neighborhoods.

He told us that if we did those things we would then — and only then, have real communities.

I remember hearing him at a lecture in Cincinnati in 1997 when he warned that Black people had only two and a half more years, at best, to get it together.

He said that by then we would be faced with the stark reality of social, demographic, and economic changes unlike any we had ever seen in this country.

It was sad that we have been in this country since the early 1600's and worked to build these United States to

what they are today, Anderson told us.

But, there we were in 1997, having virtually marched in place for the last 40 years.

Are we still marching in place? Please, there's no need for you to answer that. Many of us are still slumbering, rolling over and hitting that snooze button on the alarm clock, saying let me sleep for just a while longer.

Well, now we have slept too long.

Anderson's prediction has become a reality. Black people are being surpassed by not only by people whose first language is Spanish, but also by Asians and Native Americans.

Nothing against our other ethnic brothers and sisters; they are simply taking care of their business and, as the kids say, "I ain't mad at 'em." That's all we have been trying to get our people to do.

That's all Anderson has been talking about. He told

us that we would soon find ourselves on the outside looking in at someone else's economy.

In case you have not been keeping up with the latest news, you are in for a rude awakening (no pun intended).

One network dedicated at least one half its 30-minute prime time news program to the rising tide of Latinos in this country.

When asked if Latinos were moving toward the "mainstream," Peter Jennings said they are already in the "mainstream."

During the feature, individual Latinos referred to themselves as having been discriminated against and treated unfairly, especially since 1960, in this country. They suggested, with conviction, that they deserve to be recognized for their achievements, that they were sick and tired of being treated unfairly, and they are determined to take their rightful place in this country.

(Sound familiar?)

In addition, Geraldo Rivera recently did a show on the influence and affluence of Hispanics in this country, citing their rise to the top in many areas of endeavor.

And finally, there was a meeting — an economic summit — in New York recently during which several Hispanic leaders came together to discuss economic empowerment.

Forty years of discrimination and Latinos are making their case, and backing it up by working together toward a common economic goal rather than making a beeline to the nearest political office.

Black people have been in this country ten times as long. What do we deserve for the discrimination we have suffered?

Where are our reparations for our free labor?

When will Peter Jennings say Black people are already in the "mainstream?"

And what are we willing to do to gain our rightful place in this country?

Have we sought political gain rather than economic strength to our own detriment?

We are sleeping while others are passing us by — albeit, in some cases, with the aid, assistance, and encouragement of the majority.

That's exactly what Anderson has been saying would happen. Please keep in mind that he never said anything against others doing what they are supposed to do economically. Rather, he always told us what we should do. Too bad we did not listen — and act upon his message.

Question: How will we respond?

We must carve out niches in those industries in which our consumption is dominant. We must learn to own and control the entire business chain — from the natural (See *Blackonomics*, Page 18)

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Who could defend the 'marriage tax'?

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — Who could ever defend a tax code that forces a couple who gets married to pay more income taxes than they were paying as individuals combined?

Someone who believes in a progressive system under which people are taxed according to their ability to pay, that's who!

The argument can be made — and in fact has prevailed in this country for years — that a marriage household with \$80,000 a year in income is able to pay more than two \$40,000 households combined. Each \$40,000 household is barely scraping by, maneuvering just beyond the poverty line. But a combined \$80,000 household is middle-classish, with substantial disposable income.

But "ability to pay" is fast giving way to the powerful argument that "the marriage tax" is immoral in that it tells couples they will be better off financially if they just "shack up" rather than wed, with the wages of sin adding up to a couple of thousand dollars a year.

So Congress, in a bow to "family values," would have banished the marriage tax long ago, but for one fact: Many Republicans who are trying to abolish it insist on larding on cash bonanzas for the rich that have nothing to do with the morality of sex within wedlock.

Most Americans seem not to know that 41 percent of married couples not only pay no "penalty" but get a tax "bonus" for being married. A man who earns \$200,000



CARL ROWAN

a year who marries and has a non-working wife gets a \$60,000-a-year tax savings. The "marriage penalty" bill passed in the House recently by 220 Republicans and 48 Democrats not only would continue to allow such bonuses but would extend them in some cases.

"We unabashedly help the stay-at-home moms," boasted House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, R-Texas. So there is a social agenda behind this measure.

These marriage "bonuses" make the tax breaks in this bill add up to \$182 billion, which makes it so costly that it will run into trouble in the Senate and could be vetoed by President Clinton, if it passes there.

Some Democrats are saying that Republicans are using "family values" as an easy excuse to move piece-meal to give fat cats the tax goodies they were prevented from giving when President Clinton blocked their mammoth tax-cut scheme last year. Democrats are insisting that Republicans must agree to protective measures for Social Security and Medicare, and/or prescription drugs for the elderly, in exchange for this "pro-marriage" gift.

As is always the case with any tax measure, political gamesmanship is a big part of this deal. Democrats know they run the risk of being labeled "anti-family," so they must be very careful in opposing abolition of the "marriage tax." That's why they're working hard to make Americans understand that the issue is not as simple as it appears to be at first blush.

Woolfolk recorded plight black Alabamans

Special to Sentinel-Voice

It is African-American History Month, a time when all Americans, not just African-Americans, can celebrate and learn more about the many and varied contributions of African-Americans to this nation.

Until we all come to know those contributions, we who are African-Americans will continue to be seen as outsiders, as people who are favored to be here.

Too often, our history has been erased as in the case of the Tulsa race riot, which was all but erased from the collective memory of Oklahomans and all Americans.

In other instances, our African-American children do not know the stories of the people upon whose shoulders they stand.

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

The people of Birmingham, AL are determined that future generations will know their own history and know of the many sacrifices which African-Americans in Birmingham and throughout the South made.

Thus, in the 1980's Mayor Richard Arrington put together a committee to develop the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Odessa Woolfolk became the head of that planning

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



committee.

Odessa Woolfolk was born and raised in Birmingham.

Her mother was a school teacher and her father a craftsman.

A product of the Birmingham public school system, she went to nearby Talladega College and then returned to her hometown as a teacher herself.

Eight years later she moved to upstate New York and spent time at Yale University, the University of Chicago and Occidental College in Los Angeles while earning her master's degree in urban studies.

In 1972 she returned to the University of Alabama at Birmingham. When the mayor tapped her to lead the planning for the new museum, she agreed, believing that "Birmingham needed to not run away from the issues that had been so crippling to us in the past," adding, "we needed to accept our history as history."

And we had to show

people we were better than our history."

Indeed, the history of Birmingham is an important one in the struggle of African-Americans for freedom. Many blacks came to that industrial city in the early days of the 20th century to work in the steel industry and it soon developed a significant black middle class.

During the 1950's and 60's they formed the nucleus of the civil rights movement which threatened Bull Connor and others in power who were determined that blacks would stay segregated.

There were so many bombings of African-American homes and churches during those days that the city became known as Bombingham.

And it was in Birmingham that white supremacists struck only weeks after the 1963 March on Washington, bombing the 16th Street Baptist Church and killing four little girls who were (See *Woolfolk*, Page 18)