

COMMENTARY

Influential Blacks need to make lasting impact

James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The May 2000 edition of Ebony Magazine features a new list of the most influential Blacks. I am always interested in seeing this list because I am intrigued by the notion of influence versus power.

I like to see which Black people are being portrayed as the "movers and shakers" of our time. And I always look through the list to find the people who are most influential — and leading the way — when it comes to economic empowerment.

Two things struck me as I looked through the list. One thing was the absence of certain people; the other was the very first person featured in the story. I will start with the latter. The newly appointed Chairman and CEO of Avis Rent A Car, Barry Rand, truly one of the highest ranking Blacks in corporate America for years, heads the list of "100+ Influential Black Americans."

So what's the problem, you say? Well, most of us know what happened to Avis last year. It joined a long list of companies that got caught with their discrimination showing and had complaints filed against it for disparate practices against Black patrons. You have heard it so many times before with Revlon,

Coca Cola, Texaco, Denny's, Comp USA, so I will not repeat the story.

The problem is this. The companies in question, and we know who they are, always seem to successfully recapture the business of Black consumers by hiring a Black person, doing commercials and other advertising campaigns featuring Black people, and giving Black consumers "deals" to return to their stores by offering apologies and discounts.

Avis was caught. Shortly thereafter, we see Mr. Rand's picture in USA Today as the new man in charge. We also begin to see, as I did recently, television commercials featuring Black counter clerks and Black satisfied customers doing business with Avis. This same scenario has happened so many times it's almost comical, and it would be if it were not so sad.

Please do not misunderstand this message. I am proud of Rand and his accomplishments. I hope he will turn his new company around and use his "influence" in a way that will trickle down to the masses of Black people. I hope and trust he will be a leader who will use his influence to educate Black people, to economically empower Black people, to publicly speak out for Black people, and to assist Black people in our quest for

psychological and economic freedom. And this is not a request solely for Rand; I hope all of the "100+ Most Influential Black Americans" will do the same.

The article's lack of Black men and women who are promoting economic empowerment — full time, for the masses — was also quite striking.

Again, nothing against those who are featured, many of who have done quite well with their personal economic empowerment. They are well deserving of the recognition they received. But, don't you think that on any list of most influential Blacks we should see a few Black people who are leading the charge for collective economic empowerment?

Why do we not see Dr. Claud Anderson, author of Black Labor White Wealth, and a nationally influential leader and educator? Anderson has hundreds of thousands of followers and subscribers to his economic empowerment strategies. His principles of "powernomics" and his educational forums have influenced millions of Black people across this country. Why do we not see him on the list? Or on television shows like Oprah, Montel, and Tavis?

Where are Al Wellington and Ken Bridges? These two gentlemen have influenced thou-

sands of Black brothers and sisters from coast to coast with their establishment of the MATAH Network. They have demonstrated leadership in the fight for collective economic freedom. Have you seen them on any list?

Others obviously missing from the list of most influential Black people were George Fraser, Brooke Stephens, Tony Brown, Julianne Malveaux, and Magic Johnson.

These and others are dedicated to empowering our people economically, which is second only in importance to our spiritual empowerment. We need a list for them too. Our people need to know who these people are and what they are doing. Our people need to know there are men and women working everyday on their behalf vis-a-vis our collective economic future, our children's future.

Why do we seem so disinclined to promote our brothers and sisters who are leading the charge for economic empowerment for the masses of Black people?

I beg those who are most influential in Black media to please uplift our brothers and sisters who are fighting for economic freedom for Black people. They are indeed influential, but they must, no we must, be able to transform that influence into power.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Aged denied vital home health care

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — While the nation debates the need for Medicare to pay for prescription drugs, America's ailing elderly are being denied the home health care that many desperately need.

And many aged people who need sustained care are being forced to spend long, costly periods in hospitals and nursing homes. Or they are dying.

That is the message from the Congressional Budget Office, which reports that Medicare spending on home health care has dropped from \$17.5 billion in 1997 to \$9.7 billion in 1999, a drastic cut of 45 percent.

This reduction in home-care services is an unintended result of Congress' 1997 slashing of payments to home-care agencies for people who are too sick or disabled to leave their homes for health care. Home-care agencies have responded by refusing to accept patients who need long rehabilitation periods from say, a stroke, or who have chronic, long-term conditions like diabetes.

Many home-care agencies are also rejecting people who do not have at least one close relative who can help give care.

The result of the 1997 payment cuts by Congress is that Medicare is "saving" four times what Congress projected — but at the expense of suffering and deaths by the sickest of the aged, including the blind. Some 3.6 million people received Medicare home-health-care services in 1997, but the figure dropped to 3 million last year, meaning that some 600,000 very sick or disabled patients had to resort to hospi-



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tals or nursing homes or go uncared for.

"The Medicare home-care cutbacks have been far deeper and more wide-reaching than Congress ever intended," Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, told *The New York Times*. She is leading an effort not only to rectify this unintended denial of services to many aged, but

to prevent an additional 15 percent cut in home care that is scheduled for next year. Her bill has 24 Republican and 14 Democratic sponsors already, so it is possible that the Congress will act on home-care long before it resolves the dispute over prescription drugs.

Home health care has long been one of the most popular Medicare benefits. But home-care agencies are saying that they cannot enough money to stay in business on the pay schedules adopted by Congress in 1997.

The "savings" Congress envisioned are on one hand larger than was expected, but on the other hand illusory. Many communities are finding large backups in hospital beds of elderly patients who don't want to be in hospitals, but know that if they go home they will not get proper care and will likely die. So Medicare pays far more for hospitalization than it would have for home care.

This is just one more example of unnecessary suffering by the sick elderly because the politicians keep screwing up, or deny care in misguided efforts to save someone or some insurer a few bucks.

Congress ought to be as quick in 2000 to correct this home-care mistake as it was to make the ill-conceived cuts in 1997.

Choosing between pluralism, separatism

Rainer Spencer
Sentinel-Voice

Decades after the end of the civil rights movement it seems that black Americans are still dealing with two approaches to their situation in America.

These two approaches are pluralism and nationalism. You might at first suppose that pluralism is the same as integration, but this isn't the case.

Whereas integration might be seen broadly as the fitting-in of Afro-Americans into American society such that they become relatively indistinguishable from anyone else, pluralism involves the distinct maintenance of a black presence or black consciousness and the related idea of a unified black community operating within the dominant society. You might think of integration as the old melting-pot theory and pluralism as the salad bowl theory. In the pluralism model, each group that makes up the whole retains its distinctive flavor, texture, and identity.

Although pluralism is not the same as integration, it does, however, still assume that the basic American social, political, and economic structure will remain. Pluralists intend to operate as a distinct black element within the American system as opposed to withdrawing from the system.

Therefore, pluralists would be interested in participating in the American political system, for instance. The key for them is black control of black interests—black-owned businesses in black neighborhoods, black politicians representing black voting districts, black community control of schools in black neighborhoods. It means participating in the American system as a distinctly black entity, and controlling the things that are yours.

Pluralism is distinguished from nationalism, which involves withdrawing in some significant way from the American system. This is the meaning of nationalism—a separate black nation either within the borders of the United States or established outside of it.

For many years, the Nation of Islam—however implausibly—took the position that black Americans should be re-settled outside the United States, and that the American government should pay the cost.

Not surprisingly, nationalism is often seen quite correctly as a rejection of the mainstream society. Generally, nationalists want to separate themselves as much as possible from the dominant society, and would gladly move away if they could.

Of course, the question may then be raised as to whether or not nationalism amounts to racial segregation, the very thing that so many people suffered though the civil rights era trying to stop.

Is there a real difference between whites passing laws that say blacks cannot socialize with them, and blacks choosing on their own not to socialize with whites? Yes, one form of segregation has the force of law behind it and the other does not, but do the two forms differ in terms of each being a rejection of the other group? Some people attempt to answer this question by arguing that when blacks separate themselves from whites, they are doing something positive, rather than having something negative like segregation imposed on them by others.

But is this response really adequate? Nationalism may differ from segregation from the black perspective, but that isn't really the issue. The real issue is whether black nationalism from the perspective of whites differs much from white supremacy from the perspective of blacks.

In other words, how different are the implications of a whites-only school in Birmingham in 1955 and a blacks-only academy in Detroit in 2000? Is there really any difference at all, or can either one be justified in a democratic and racially tolerant society? As we move into the 21st century, we will have to consider such issues, and we will have to ask some hard questions that as of yet have not really been adequately dealt with.