

OUR VIEW

Tis the Shopping Season

They call it "Black Friday." It's the day after Thanksgiving and it's known in America as the busiest shopping day of the holiday season, if not the entire year. Retailers pine for this day, knowing that free-spending shoppers can help erase memories of the cash-register doldrums of prior quarters. Shoppers also love Black Friday, mainly because of all the deals—retailers with visions of profits dancing in their heads drastically cut prices to get them in the door. While the majority of African-Americans are caught up in the Christmas shopping rush, we'd do well to put the plastic back in our wallets and think. Yes, think. About how we're spending the billions we're forking over at malls, outlets, flea marts, stores and online. About how those billions, if directed toward black-owned enterprises, would help us reach this economic plateau so many activists talk about, the same plateau Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of.

Fact is, thousands upon thousands of people celebrate Kwanzaa. Yet mainstream stores and name-brand chains carry few of the items needed to commemorate this African-American holiday. That's part of the reason Kwanzaa hasn't caught on as a commercially viable holiday—though that was never its true intent. Another reason is that Kwanzaa has yet to gain a strong foothold in the collective black psyche. That's why stores that traffic exclusively in Kwanzaa-related items struggle. We don't support our own.

Which highlights the Kwanzaa of cooperative economics. Share and share alike. Reciprocate black dollars. Joe Williams III wrote about how blacks do just the opposite—spending money in a Eurocentric, assets-make-me-better fashion—in a column on Afrocentricnews.com.

"The major problem is that Black-shopping sprees (spending money) is a brief escape from the reality of racism and poverty, an escape from the every day pain of life, something on the order of the lottery scam. In a society void of authentic culture and meaningful spirituality, the most significant expression is material goods, how many toys can we amass. So, doing this consumer holiday trap, black people will give presents such as cars, gold, diamonds, furniture, cellular phones, computers, CD's, cologne, and fine wines. Many Blacks will try to outspend each other for friends, family, and co-workers. However, the largest recipients of this season will be the children. Millions of dollars will go down the economic tubes on toys, many toys that won't last until New Year's Day, but in many instances, it will take six months or more to pay the bills...

"We must move beyond the concept of making other communities rich and famous of our hard earned money. We must make our blood, sweat and tears work towards our own interest, for our own benefit."

Williams highlights what we can do to be economically proactive: open bank accounts for children, buy black history pictures for wall decorations or books by black authors for reading, make hand-crafted gifts for family and friends, give subscriptions to black newspapers and magazines, send black Christmas or Kwanzaa cards and tell family and friends that the best holiday gift is to develop cultural awareness.

Best thing of all, you can start empowering your community today. There are hundreds of black-owned businesses in the valley, providing nearly every product or service you can think of, from photography to Afrocentric portraits, cards to cars, food to floral works. The Black Business Directory is a great resource, as is the Urban Chamber of Commerce. But it's not enough to find them, spend money with them. Economic empowerment is always in season.

P O I N T O F V I E W



On performance, pilfering and schools

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

My people, since you have chosen not to take my word over the past several years about what is taking place in the Clark County School District, maybe you will take the word of the "Man!"

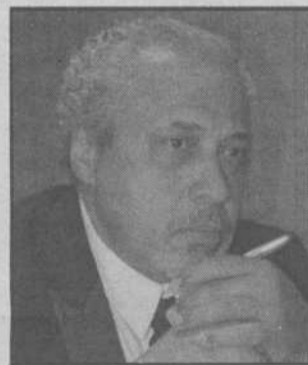
Repeatedly I have written the Clark County School District (CCSD) was essentially spending money like a "drunken sailor on shore leave" with no real public oversight. Yet, I have been unable to generate little or any concern from stakeholders directly impacted by the educational product that CCSD is producing.

To my knowledge, only three groups in our community are waging attempts to hold CCSD accountable. The Urban Chamber of Commerce, Westside Action Alliance Korps-Uplifting People (WAAK-UP) and the interest group wanting to form a local chapter of Rainbow/PUSH. All have publicly called for independent investigations to be conducted of how the CCSD is managing its affairs.

Not one fraternity or sorority has spoken out on the state of affairs in the CCSD.

In spite of obvious signs present for years, in terms of reporting annual declines in academic performance and demands for increased funding, the broader public has not demanded accountability on the part of the board of trustees and superintendent.

The public has recently been provided a double dose of reality. Academic performance continues its course



LOUIE OVERSTREET

on a downward spiral and allegations continue to surface that public funds are being stolen. Maybe impacted stakeholders will finally take steps necessary to hold the district accountable for how it is managing the business of public education in Clark County.

The federal "No Child Left Behind Act" requires school districts nationwide to report on a number of categories that address academic and performance-related measures. The first report by the CCSD, if you know the state of its affairs was not surprising, contained a number of damning statistics. Over 50 percent (147) of all schools were identified as not showing "adequate yearly progress."

More alarming is the fact that 14 schools have failed to show progress for a second consecutive year. These schools have been designated as "needing to improve." Parents of children in schools on the needing to improve list such as Carson, Lynch, Ronnow and Tate have the option of sending their children to schools that are not on the list.

On top this — over half

our schools not showing academic progress — the public just learned what I already knew. CCSD is awash with money. It is, however, playing fast and loose with its accounting practices.

It was recently reported that nearly a half-dozen schools — you can bet it's a lot more — was messing up money to the tune of six figures in the accounting of just one school. The superintendent's explanation was that the people responsible were either incompetent or knowingly mishandled money. (Without clear explanation, this could be read to mean they are thieves.) Is the school superintendent a genius or what?

What's amusing about the superintendent's assessment is that it is one of convenience. If past deeds are predictors of future actions, then do not look for the CCSD to do anything to stop pilfering. The prime reason for this is hands of central administrators are not clean when it comes to playing it straight with public funds. I have appeared before the board of

trustees to point out examples where the district was using capital funds to fund operating expenses. This is a no-no practice for the use funds designated by voters.

CCSD, among other things, is using bonded capital funds to purchase hundreds of automobiles for use by administrators who are not involved with the development bond earmarked for new schools. This is another no-no.

In early 1999, I informed the board that it was going to have a \$100 million annual maintenance shortfall due to the fact schools were being built where there was no consideration given to how these schools were going to be maintained over their useful life. Rather than deal with this problem as an operating budget matter, CCSD is currently pulling a sleight-of-hand trick, using bonded capital to fund permanent maintenance positions once the new schools open.

Also, it has been reported that due to the lack of proper inventory controls, theft of

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