

C O M M E N T A R Y

My role in championing the 1964 Civil Rights Act

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Civil Rights Act 1964 was one of the most important pieces of legislation enacted during my life. And if I had any doubt about that, those doubts would have been quickly erased recently when I came across two complaints that I had filed in 1965 with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.



GEORGE CURRY

But that's getting ahead of the story.

The story begins in Tuscaloosa, Ala., my hometown. Similar stories can be told by millions of African-Americans that grew up in the Deep South during the 1950s and 1960s. In my case, it began in 1965 when I saw my mother (Martha L. Brownlee) standing on the front porch of our housing project crying because neither my stepfather — whose eyes were glued to an NBA basketball game on television — nor one of my uncles — who, according to my Big Mama, would lie if you looked at him hard — would take Mama back to church for an afternoon program. I told my Mama that day that I would work that summer and save up enough money to purchase us a car. I did, buying a 1960, green, Corvair. I taught my mother to drive that summer and accompanied her to take her driver's test.

At the time, I was 18 years old. And I had known from two years earlier, when I obtained my license, that when driver's

tests were administered at the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse, Blacks had to wait until every White person, young and old, had been waited on before they could take the exam. We were segregated on one side of the room. I knew all this but it affected me more when I saw my mother subjected to this humiliation.

Emboldened by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, passed a year earlier, I filed a complaint with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Dated August 23, 1965, my complaint stated: "The Alabama highway patrolman, Officer Skinner, discriminates in the seating arrangements of persons desiring to take the examination for driver's license. This month he practiced discrimination when my mother went to take her written exam, giving preference to the White applicants regardless of the time or order they entered the room. On that same day, he asked a Negro man to move to the other side of the room (Tuscaloosa County Courthouse)."

I also filed a complaint against my hometown newspaper, The Tuscaloosa News. Later in life, I would always tell people how ironic it was that fresh out of Knoxville College in Tennessee, I could get a job with Sports Illustrated, the largest sports magazine in the world, yet couldn't land a

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Are Black leaders asleep at socio-political wheel?

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As a serious student of leadership, I'm not one to jump on Black leaders unnecessarily and I have often chastised those who do so. And it's quite possible that I have missed something, but I've noted a disturbing quietness among my Black leaders.



RON WALTERS

Contrast this. When Bill Cosby publicly railed against some negative behaviors of the Black poor, our leaders jumped up and threw their arms around him. But when Ronald Reagan was lionized as a "fair" and "effective" leader and John Kerry, running for the Democratic nomination for president, offered the vice presidential spot on the ticket to a Sen. John McCain, Republican — no one says a word. What's going on?

Like almost everyone else in the Black community — except our leaders — I have denounced the media and White leaders, Democrat and Republican, for making Ronald Reagan something in death that he wasn't in real life. I have pointed out that in real life, he was somewhat like Jim Jones, the fanatical cult leader who convinced his followers to drink Kool-Aid laced with cyanide. Reagan was good-looking, genial and a polished communicator who was very optimistic, but the substance of what he communicated and the nature of his

optimism was devoted to a most mean-spirited and vicious attack on the quality of life of Blacks and the poor.

Black leaders do not control the media and are routinely ignored by them. However, real leaders also make it difficult for the media to ignore them by creating events and opportunities for the media to cover. Jesse

Jackson, Sr. is a master at this. But while this was occurring, Rev. Jackson was "out-of-pocket," touring West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky in the hills of Appalachia, trying to draw the attention of political leaders to the plight of the poor of all colors, as a way to jump-start the discussion on poverty in general. That still leaves a lot of other leaders who fought the Reagan policies and who know his damaging record to the Black community yet they were quiet.

While we were witnessing the Ronald Reagan festival, John Kerry was quietly offering the second spot on his ticket to a Republican, John McCain. Those who sell newspapers and run television stations have been salivating at this combination as the dream ticket for some time. Also, public opinion polls have had these two as high as 14 points ahead of Bush and Cheney.

It also represents a continuation of the politics of convergence between the Demo-

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Entrepreneur wants Blacks to get on financial bus

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In an article sent to me on the Internet, written by Yolanda Young, some astounding information was disclosed regarding the spending habits of Black consumers.

Young said, "These are tough economic times, especially for African-Americans, for whom the unemployment rate is more than 10 percent.

"Alarming, rather than belt-tightening, the response has been to spend more.

"In many poor neighborhoods, one is likely to notice satellite dishes, expensive new cars and nice new clothes.

"The only area where Blacks seem to be cutting back on spending is books; total purchases have gone from a high of \$356 million in 2000 to \$303 million in 2002."

Rosie Milligan, owner of Express Yourself Books, Milligan Books, and publisher of dozens of Black authors, including yours truly, initiated the "Get on the Bus Black Business Tour."

Rosie decided to rent a bus and take consumers on a tour of Black-owned businesses, but she did not stop there. She stopped at various stores and encouraged the folks on the tour to actually go inside the businesses and make purchases.

I can hear some of you saying, "That's a shame. Why did she have to 'take' Black people to Black businesses to get them to

shop with their own people?"

Well, Rosie is a whatever it takes kinda sistah. Too often we sit back and decry the disconnect among our people when it comes to what I call "doing business while Black," but we seldom do anything about it. I initiated the Blackonomics Business Forum in my hometown, an effort to develop partnerships between Black business owners and Black consumers in order to get to know

one another, to respect one another, and to trust one another more. These kinds of relationships create more business among our people.

The Get on the Bus Tour is something that can be done all across this country to encourage and sustain a habit of buying Black. I remember a similar campaign in Oregon after the Million Man March. As for the buses or vans, we don't have to (Or, should I say we "should not have to"?) rent them.

There are thousands of buses and vans at our churches. So start your own Get on the Bus Black Business Tour today and start supporting your brothers and sisters a whole lot more than we do now.

As for Rosie Milligan, she is an example of a person who is dedicated to doing what is necessary for our economic growth and survival. She is an innovator, a motivator, an



JAMES CLINGMAN

instigator, an agitator, and a facilitator. She does her work in the spirit of unity and with the understanding of good stewardship, grounded in her spiritual beliefs.

She is a strong Black woman who loves her people, and she puts her resources on the line everyday to back it up.

Rosie is also a woman of many talents. Not only is she involved in the book selling and publishing business, she is the author of more than a dozen books, a lecturer, a health consultant, family counselor, and if push comes to shove, she can always fall back on her nursing degree.

She produces the Black Writers on Tour event every April in Los Angeles and is working on bringing the event to the East Coast as well. For more information go to www.milliganbooks.com or call her at (323) 750-3592.

The fact that Black people are spending more when the rest of the country is spending less, as the Young's article indicates, suggests that we have much work to do on our spending habits and our consumer education. It is also indicative of the fact that we have a great deal of disposable income, as we know all too well.

So, with that in mind, it would be wise for

Black people not only to increase our spending with Black businesses, but also to reverse that negative trend we see in our book buying. We cannot afford to decrease our reading, especially of books and other publications that will empower our people.

I am told that Black book stores are closing all over this country at an alarming rate, much of which can be attributed to the lack of support by Black consumers who desperately run to save a dollar by buying their Black books every place except a Black book store. Although many use a dollar's worth of gasoline to get to the other folks' stores in the process of running away from their own.

If our book stores close, it is no one's fault but our own, so let's make a conscious effort to support these repositories of Black culture and other information written by our learned brothers and sisters.

So, how many more Rosie Milligan's do we have out there?

We could have thousands of Get on the Bus Tours if many of us who talk about the lack of support of Black businesses, would take the same initiative she took.

Maybe Spike Lee will make a movie about this as well. Millions of Black consumers going to thousands of Black owned stores; he could call it "Get on the Bus Redux."

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