

Can Black people build school buildings?

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

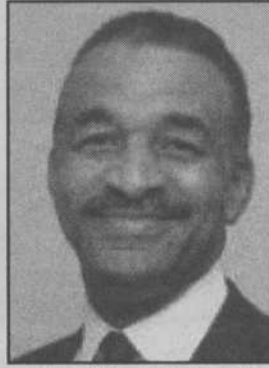
You bet they can! Although I have always known the answer to that question, I was so excited when I received my copy of the *Toledo Journal* the week of May 11, 2005, and read the following headline. "A First: Black Prime Chosen to Build TPS School." The Toledo Public Schools administration has selected a Black-owned firm, JL Judge Construction Services, to build the Robinson Middle School as part of that city's \$823 million "Building for Success" school construction program. Billions of dollars have been allocated and are currently being spent on new schools buildings all across the State of Ohio, and what Toledo has done should be duplicated by more Ohio cities.

This is not the first time Toledo has stepped out in the development and construction arena and done something "nontraditional." I also read in 2004 issue of that publication about a Black firm getting a piece of the development action on Toledo's waterfront construction. Notice I said "development," not a "subcontract." I do understand there are still bridges to cross in Toledo, as I also keep up with the Toledo Black Chamber of Commerce and its fearless effort to monitor and advocate more Black business involvement in the public school building program. They have a way to go, but at least they are making progress, especially when you compare it to what is happening just 200

miles south of Toledo in Cincinnati, Ohio, the economic apartheid capital of the state.

Cincinnati is also in the midst of a billion dollar school building project. Of course, just like the development on the "Freedom Banks" of the Ohio River, where Black developers were denied the opportunity to bid on the \$800 million project, Black owned construction firms are not building individual schools. They have to subcontract to get a piece of the action. You know, be certified and all of that nonsense. It would be great if a Black company just stepped out of the box and competed against the White-owned companies that always get the prime contracts — and won — as JL Judge did. Yes, it would be nice, but it seems Black folks just 200 miles south of Toledo are very different; they would rather settle for subcontracts and 20 percent "aspirational goals" set by the Public School administration, goals that are never met.

The Judge bid was just under \$7 million, beating out two other bids submitted by White-owned firms that "have been getting plenty of the construction project's business," according to the *Journal* article. JL Judge Company competed and won, and the board voted 5-0 to award the contract to this Black firm, headquartered in Detroit. If that does



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not excite you, you must be jealous. But that's all right. Maybe it will make more Black companies compete for the 80 percent rather than settle for a promise of 20 percent, which is never achieved.

Here is the real kicker. You've heard the term "economic inclusion," right? Well, in Toledo's program, as in most other inclusion programs, the goals are virtually never met and sometimes even ignored by prime contractors, mostly because there are no teeth in the agreements; there is no hammer, no real negative consequences for failing to meet the goals. I have a very good feeling the JL Judge Company will meet and even exceed the goal of just 20 percent economic inclusion for "minorities" — and I believe a significant number of those "minorities" will be Black. You want to solve the economic inclusion problem? Award more prime contracts to Black-owned firms. Stop playing these games and stop lying to taxpayers about not being able to find Black folks who can develop and build.

What the folks in Toledo have done is great. Of course, we need more. After all, as the article pointed out, most of the students who will attend the Robinson Middle School are Black. Why shouldn't Black people have an opportunity to participate? — not only in

voting for the school levies but in the wealth generating activities that take place after the levy is passed. Can you imagine? Billions in construction being spent in the State of Ohio and you can probably count on one hand the number of Black developers and builders who play a significant decision-making role in the process.

Moreover, Black people walking through their own neighborhoods can only peer through the construction fence at White developers and their employees building schools for Black children and taking their paychecks home to their communities every two weeks. Billions are being spent, and Black folks are getting a pittance. That is usually the case when it comes to public projects.

So I give my kudos to Toledo for a first step in what I hope will become a trend for Black owned businesses. The only way this unfair and unjust system will be changed is by Black companies challenging the status quo, by preparing ourselves, and by going after the "Whites only" 80 percent of the projects and not accepting the "minorities only" 20 percent. We fought against "Whites only" toilets, "Whites only" water fountains, and "Whites only" serving counters. Why aren't we willing to fight just as hard against "Whites only" construction programs?

What's wrong with us today? Many of our contractors settle for crumbs from the

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in turn, loan it to a White client to develop a White neighborhood and not the Black neighborhood that they are domiciled in. In the Bible, in the eighth chapter in the book of Samuel, the people demanded a king. So, the Lord told Samuel that he would give them a king, and when they cried for him to take the king away because of all the wrong he had done to them, the Lord would not hear them. We need to be careful what we demand and ask for — and from whom we ask it of or make our demand.

The Black baby-boomers began to focus on their individual accomplishments and lost sight of the continuing struggle for equality for us as a people, and as a result have contributed to the moral and spiritual bankruptcy we see today. There is still time to turn the tide, but not by believing, as Barack Obama said, and local community leaders stated last month, "Civil rights is our next battle." We have all of the democracy and civil rights we're going to get. We can go to any school, any store, any hotel, participate in any sport etc.

Our battle is and always has been economic empowerment, and if our leaders, who are supposed to be the best of the best, don't recognize that, then we are still in a world of trouble. Recognize the psychological brainwashing when you see it. This is a capitalistic society, period. Money rules! It provides capital for Black businesses that employ Black people, which gets them off of the streets, out of gangs, off drugs and shows them how to start more Black-owned and operated businesses by taking the entrepreneurial spirit that's ingrained in them any way (drug dealers and gangs are businesses, albeit illegal ones) and, instead, focuses that spirit in a positive direction. Using that same community-destroying behavior, when turned positive, could build Black schools

where we could adequately educate our children. It's the answer to all of our problems.

The other area we have failed in is the church. The Black church has aggregate resources in excess of \$50 billion deposited into White institutions. The collective body of our churches has the economic influence, the captive audience and the community-wide credibility to be able to influence African-American wealth and morality all across this country. The church is uniquely positioned to address not only the moral issues of African-Americans but all of the economic issues, also. The Black church has a long history of building wealth through land ownership and education. This knowledge can be transferred to increase Black business ownership and homeownership opportunities for church members by providing down payment assistance and putting money in Black financial institutions, which would then lend the money to Black businesses. The church could integrate economic empowerment into the message of salvation and help play a major role in raising Black people from poverty to prosperity.

Jesse Jackson teaches young Blacks to exclaim, "I am somebody." But the crucial question becomes, "Just who are you?"

We are the village, and as the village, we have to propel our youngsters to a place where their response is more specific and committed: "Because I am somebody, I waste no opportunity to better myself. I respect my body by not polluting it with drugs or promiscuous sex. I conduct myself responsibly. I value not only my life but the life of others. I am accountable. I am available to serve others, as well as myself."

It is the doing of these good things, and not the mere saying of good words, that teaches our children—and reminds us, too — that one is truly somebody who has to be reckoned with.

Frank Wills is real hero of Watergate scandal

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The revelation that W. Mark Felt, the former No. 2 person at the FBI, was the "Deep Throat" figure that helped Washington Post reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward unravel the Watergate scandal, has reopened old political wounds. Supporters of Richard M. Nixon, who resigned in disgrace rather than face certain impeachment, accuse Felt of being a traitor. Others have hailed him as a hero. However, the real hero of Watergate was Frank Wills, an alert Black, \$80-a-week security guard who discovered the burglary at the hotel-office complex overlooking the Potomac River.

After reporting to work on June 17, 1972, for his midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift, Wills was making his rounds around 12:30 a.m. when something caught his eye. In an interview years later with the *Augusta Chronicle*, he recalled, "A piece of tape was on the door; the catch on the door was taped back. I removed the tape, because at that time it really wasn't unusual." After making his rounds, Wills went across the street to the Howard Johnson hotel where he had a serving of orange juice. When he returned to his 6th-floor rounds at 1:55 a.m., he paused.

"There, the same door had been re-taped the same way," he told the newspaper. "Something sort of alerted me about that. Just a feeling, you know."

Wills telephoned Washington, D.C.,



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police. And when they arrived, officers shut down the elevator, blocked access doors and climbed six flights of stairs until they came to the door that had been re-taped.

"We discovered a door had been forced open with a crowbar or something," Wills said. "That door led directly into the Demo-

cratic office, the DNC office." He noticed a silhouette of a man. "The (police) asked the person in the shadow, 'Who is that? Come out.' I was searching for a light switch. When we turned the lights on, one person, then two persons, then three persons came out and on down the line," Wills told the *Augusta Chronicle*.

In all, five men were apprehended: James W. McCord Jr., Frank Sturgis, Bernard Barker, Virgilio Gonzalez and Eugenio Martinez. They had broken into the offices of the Democratic National Committee three weeks earlier to plant electronic eavesdropping equipment and had returned to repair it.

Nixon's press secretary, Ron Ziegler, tried to dismiss the break-in as a "third-rate burglary." But it quickly became clear that it was much more than that. One of the burglars, James McCord, identified himself as a CIA agent. Another burglar, Bernard Barker, carried on him the phone number of E. Howard Hunt, the chief of security at the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

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