

# Group alleges 'Jim Crow' alive, well at Ford

By Bankole Thompson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DETROIT (NNPA) - Racism is still alive and it is rearing its ugly head at Ford Motor Company, according to a claim brought against the automaker by a citizens group called the Coalition for Corporate Justice and Equal Opportunity.

The group is charging Ford with discriminatory practices against African-American workers at several of the automaker's plants and within its staff functions.

"If William Clay Ford Jr. is a man of integrity and honesty as he said he is, I don't think he will want a negative rating on his leadership," said the Rev. Kenneth Flowers who heads the group. "We want to find out which supervisors are acting in a racist manner against Black workers."

Flowers said employment data are "distorted and altered," on a regular basis to disadvantage Blacks, even if such measure violates accounting rules.

"White employees with fewer credentials earn more pay than African-Americans with credentials doing the same job," Flowers said. "High achieving African-Americans receive low performance reviews while less achieving Whites receive top achiever status."

Jackie Gilchrist, a Black woman who works for the automaker as a customs specialist said despite earning a B.S. in engineering, an MBA and a law degree, it took a while [12 years] before she was promoted. At that same time, Gilchrist said two White workers with only high school diplomas were promoted before she even got considered.

"Names of Black workers are missing from the list of promotions," Gilchrist said.

Sometimes subordinates who openly criticize and refuse to follow instructions from Black supervisors are often rewarded by promotion, the group charged.

"When you look at the papers, you see a parade of African-American executives. They do not represent African-Americans within the ranks," Gilchrist said.

Tracy Flags, Marilyn Patterson, Vinnie Newson — all African-American women working for the automaker — are also suffering a similar fate according to Flowers.

"I got involved in this because of her [Tracy Flags]," Flowers said. "This is nothing personal. It is about racism and inequality."

"The steel walls of racial discrimination are still solid," Rev. Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, during a re-

cent rally to galvanize petition signers. "We must realize that equal opportunity and corporate justice can be realized in this case."

Adams, who supports the group said, "We are going to be relentless, determined and successful because this nation will never become secure until everyone is secure."

Flowers said he wants

**"We want to find out which supervisors are acting in a racist manner against Black workers."**

maintained in petitions and protest letters the group sent to the company's board of directors.

"As a Ford Motor Company board member with fiduciary responsibility, I request your direct action to end all acts of race, gender and age discrimination," the petition letter stated.

Detroit City Council President Maryann Mahaffey

—Rev. Kenneth Flowers  
Coalition for Corporate Justice and Equal Opportunity

Ford to devise a new policy for selecting eligible individuals for promotion because Blacks are reportedly harmed by the current system.

"We want Ford to set up a measurable review policy that is objective and not subjective," Flowers said. "We have asked for a community review committee to check these supervisors."

Those demands are con-

is also concerned about the allegations of discrimination at Ford.

"This discrimination is not only going on in Ford but also in places of government," Mahaffey said. "But if we are to end discrimination, we have to organize."

Earlier this year, 11 employees charged that since 1997 the automaker has engaged in unlawful employment practices at its

Sharonville and former Batavia, Ohio, facilities, the Associated Press reported.

"The complaint seeking class action status alleges that Ford selected Black employees at a much lower rate than it did with White employees for its apprenticeship training program," the Associated Press said.

In Detroit, attorney Carl Edwards, who is representing some of the aggrieved Black workers, is waiting to see if there would be a response from the board of directors before the consideration of a class action suit.

"Jim Crow, gender discrimination is not dead at Ford," Edwards said. "What sent me to law school is that people united will not be defeated."

Edwards went further, "Bill Ford Jr.'s great grandfather [Henry Ford] was a racist. He supported Hitler."

Edwards said Henry Ford's book, "The Protocol of Zion," alluded to the notion that there was a conspiracy by the Jews to rule the world.

"People united will never be defeated," Edwards said at the rally held at Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church.

"A 10-year African-American male contract employee received an e-mail November 30, 2004, from his White manager that said: 'You listen to me, nigger, you will never receive a pay increase at Ford as long as I'm manager,'" Flowers said.

Kathleen Vokes, legal news public affairs manager at Ford's Detroit office, said she is not aware of the allegations.

"Any allegation that Ford management condones insulting or demeaning language or discriminatory behavior in the workplace is untrue and offensive," said Jerree F. Martin at the office of public affairs. The company takes all claims of harassment and discrimination seriously and is committed to investigating and taking corrective action when appropriate."

Bankole Thompson writes for the Michigan Citizen.

## Company's demise study in failure

By Christian Morrow  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

PITTSBURGH (NNPA) - Tredessa Dalton is a case study — literally — in what should not happen to a business. When M.B.A. candidates from the University of Pittsburgh studied her BP gas station at the intersection of Frankstown Road and Robinson Boulevard in Penn Hills, they pointed to four things businesses need to avoid. Dalton could not avoid any.

"They said: you can't lose your customer base — East Hills (housing community left during renovation); you can't impede customer access — they begin road construction right in front of the station," she said. "Don't lose extra income — Penn Hills tells all the vendors, artists, shoe, shirt and hat vendors they have to leave the lot, and then competition — two Get Go stores — open within a mile."

The gas station, one of the most visible Black-owned businesses in the area, closed June 13.

Even in the face of a colossal collapse after only 18 months of ownership, Dalton, a Pittsburgh native who owns a highly successful janitorial business in New York City, can still laugh.

"It wasn't anybody's fault, I guess. But I'm not dead yet," she said. "Whatever you do, keep going. People in business have to know that."

Dalton said the six months of repairs to Frankstown Road and Robinson Boulevard, which blocked both entrances to the station and forced motorists to avoid the intersection, began almost immediately after she purchased the business and consumed all her capital.

The loss of the vendors, however, was the biggest blow. "I kind of feel I let the community down," she said. "They attracted people. It was a gathering place; it was unique with books, paintings, incense and clothes unique to African-Americans. The community needs something there."

In a move born from desperation, Dalton sold gas at cost to try to generate customers for the convenience shop. Not only did it not work, it damaged her ability to purchase additional fuel.

She was put on pre-pay status with BP, but could not generate the \$40,000 required to purchase two weekly tanker loads. She received her last fuel in April. From then on, it was a spiral of diminishing returns.

The state lottery shut her off for non-payment, cigarette and snack vendors went unpaid, and customers vanished.

Jim Tarply, who worked at the station for 10 years, said the selling of gas at cost was the station's swan song.

"It was too much Mother Hubbard. One week we're out of milk; the next week there's no regular gas, or maybe no premium," he said. "But (Dalton) didn't really understand the business. You only make \$800 on every \$20,000 you spend in fuel. You need \$35,000 in store sales."

Nancy Maricondi, executive director of the Petroleum Retailers and Auto Repair

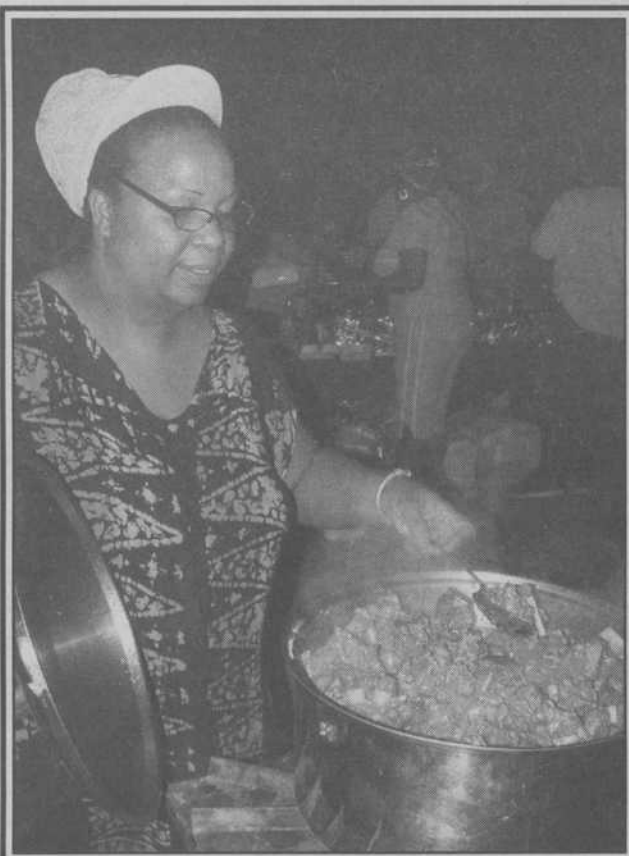
Association, said it can be a vicious circle.

"At best, there's a five-cent margin on a gallon of gas, and credit cards can eat that up," she said. "You need the store sales, but if they don't come in for gas, they don't buy at the store."

Dalton said she is not dead yet. She has a group of young African-American men willing to buy the store, and whether BP approves of the sale or opts to tear the station down, she will open another business.

She said, "I'm going to do what I was planning to do when I bought the gas station."

Christian Morrow writes for the Pittsburgh Courier.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

### GOOD FOOD, MON

Checking on a fresh pot of curry goat, Margot Tyrell of The Reggae Café, prepares her favorite dish for the hungry listeners of the Reggae in the Desert Concert at the Clark County Amphitheater earlier this month. Tyrell says the smells of island-style cooking will permeate the air this weekend during the 4th Annual Caribbean Festival at the Sammy Davis Jr. plaza at Lorenzi Park.

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