

Banking knowledge key for Black success

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

To Samuel P. Golden, ombudsman in the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, nothing more graphically illustrates the shortcomings of the banking industry's efforts to reach people of color than the case of Joe Guillen, a professional baseball player.

"Last month, the *Washington Post* reported a purse-snatching of the sort that is regrettably too common and routine on the streets of our big cities," Golden said in a speech at the Urban Financial Services Coalition's annual convention in Dallas. "However, this incident warranted press coverage because Jose Guillen, a player on the Washington Nationals baseball team, was impacted by the robbery. Per the newspaper, Mr. Guillen's 24-year-old girlfriend had just finished cashing his paycheck and wiring some of the proceeds back home. Almost before she knew what happened, a thief made off with the cash."

Warming to his subject, Golden said, "There are two remarkable aspects to this story. First, Mr. Guillen reportedly earns \$4 million a year playing baseball; his weekly salary check was \$12,000. Secondly, when the purse was snatched, his girlfriend was emerging not from a bank, but from a local check-cashing establishment.

"So, I ask you: If a person well paid even by major league baseball standards — some-

one with the best agents and technical advisers at his disposal — chooses to rely, nonetheless, on a local check casher, despite their notorious fees and security risks, what does it say about the barriers that still exist between the banking system and millions of Americans, especially those whose first language is not English?

"In other words, if financially-prominent individuals haven't been persuaded to use direct deposit and regular banking services, is it any wonder that millions of others of lesser means and sophistication continue to rely on storefront money service businesses?"

Hispanics are expected to double their presence in the U.S. over the next 50 years, making up a quarter of the nation's population. The Census Bureau projects that shortly after 2050, Hispanics, Blacks and Asians will constitute more than 50 percent of the population, making Whites a minority in the U.S. population for the first time.

"The question is, how well prepared is the banking industry for this sweeping change in our national demographics?" Golden asked. "Judging by the *Washington Post* story, the answer would seem to be, not as well as it needs to be."

Golden pointed out that people of color



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are over represented among the 10 percent of households that are "unbanked," meaning they do not have regular accounts at federally insured institutions.

"It is precisely those households that rely inordinately on check-cashing establishments, rent-to-own outlets, pawnshops, and payday lenders to conduct their basic

financial business. In so doing they pay a heavy price, not only in fees and potential loss due to theft, as Mr. Guillen discovered, but also in the credit histories that these households are not building through integration in the mainstream financial system."

In addition to under serving the so-called fringe banking customers, Golden said financial institutions might be hurting themselves with their "incredible shrinking grace period." He continued, "And, always, the fees: late fees, over limit fees, and balance transfer fees that seem to go only in one direction. That would be the same direction people's blood pressure goes when they see that the outstanding balance on which they have been paying 15 percent APR is now going to cost them 32 percent because they were a few days late in paying an electric bill."

Golden, an African-American, told members of the coalition that because they are

Black, they have a special obligation to argue against practices that could, in the end, harm both the industry and people of color.

"While the bank's reputation with its customers is a priceless asset, it is also a perishable one," he reminded them. "I would argue that real leadership consists not only in recognizing that fact, but, even more, becoming an advocate for it."

The Urban Financial Services Coalition, formerly known as the National Association of Urban Bankers, for years had a good age mix among its members. Now, largely because of numerous mergers and acquisitions that led to many older bankers retiring early or accepting buyouts, the association's members tend to be younger, many of them in their 30s. And the younger trend may continue if banks continue to alienate their customers.

"We have long contended that some consumer banking practices walk a dangerous tightrope between what's impermissible and what is merely shortsighted, injudicious, and inadvisable," Golden said. "This reminds me of the saying I heard from my Dad — 'pigs get fat, but hogs get slaughtered.' Your retail customers should never be viewed as a feeding ground. While overreaching for short-term gain is understandable, excessive greed for profits, at any cost, is never wise."

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Black strength melts inside U.S. melting pot

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What will it take for Black people to stand up against centuries of unfairness and mistreatment? I know we're tough and can take a lot of abuse, but c'mon brothers and sisters, we don't have to continue proving our toughness by submitting to and even participating in the destruction of our own people.

Where is Chancellor Williams when we need him most? Have we not been hurt severely enough? Are we still waiting for the crucial blow that will finally make us fight back? Well, the longer we wait, the less effective we become, and the smaller and more insignificant we become as well.

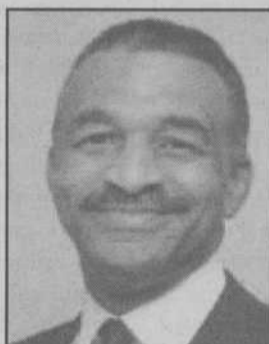
This melting pot thing has definitely played us for chumps. Every other group is doing its thing by building wealth for themselves. Black people are busy melting away, soon to become invisible and a "non-people" as Albert Cleage told us we would become if we continued down the yellow brick road of social integration without an economic foun-

ation.

We are engaged in silly discussions about Democrats and Republicans, as if we have any say in what happens politically in this country, and as if the rulers of these parties care about what we think. They put us in political trick bags by inviting us to their parties and allowing us to run for office only after we have pledged allegiance to one party or the other, again, as if that means anything in terms of real political power for Black folks.

Some of our Black politicians are so scared of offending their White handlers that they never put forth any agenda that is pro-Black. In some cases they are even ashamed to be Black.

They seek our votes and move into their plush secure political offices, while we melt away in a society that has two things on its mind: money and power.



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The silly Black electorate goes along with these do-nothing politicians, both Black and White, by falling into the trap of endless and mindless dialogues about issues that mean absolutely nothing when it comes to the economic well-being of Black people. We engage in high-brow political conversations, again, as if our rhetoric will change things, and as if we have real political power in the first place.

We wrap ourselves in the agendas of others and subvert our own interests for the silliest and flimsiest of reasons. For instance, in Ohio, the discussion is now centered on the governor's race. Like our neighbors in Pennsylvania, we are faced with a political choice between a Black Republican and a White Democrat, the Blacks being Ken Blackwell and Lynn Swann, respectively. I can't imagine what the rationale is in Penn-

sylvania for electing Lynn Swann, who said George Bush is the "most qualified and most credible candidate to fulfill the role as president of the United States." But in my hometown of Cincinnati, the rationale being promulgated in support of Blackwell is, "Let's make history." That's what they said about Doug Wilder. How are you Black folks in Virginia doing these days?

Black people should have had enough of just "making history" by now. Heck, Condoleezza made history, y'all, but what have we gotten from that? You would think Black people could come up with a better reason than that to elect a governor. Another silly political platform is gay marriage. What in the world does this issue have to do with the economic uplift of Black people? Nothing. But we will vote for someone simply because they espouse a Constitutional amendment that defines marriage.

Newsflash! To all of you Black Right-wing religious zealots, all of you empty-
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sion or anxiety or early deviant behavior. The most disturbing thing about binge drinking is that most of the young people don't even realize that they are binge drinkers. In one study, 91 percent of women and 78 percent of the men who were frequent binge drinkers considered themselves to be moderate or light drinkers.

Binge drinking has some very severe consequences. Alcohol poisoning — a severe and potentially fatal physical reaction to an alcohol overdose — is the most serious consequence of binge drinking. When an individual consumes an excessive amount of alcohol, the brain is deprived of oxygen. The struggle to deal with an overdose of alcohol and lack of

oxygen will eventually cause the brain to shut down the voluntary functions that regulate breathing and heart rate.

Alcohol poisoning is exhibited by a number of symptoms, including vomiting, unconsciousness, cold, clammy, pale or bluish skin and slow or irregular breathing (less than eight breaths a minute or 10 or more seconds between breaths).

Some of the secondary effects of binge drinking are behavioral, including insulting or humiliating others who are not binge drinkers, pushing, hitting, or assaulting them. About 54 percent of students who are not binge drinkers reported they have taken care of a drunken student; 68 percent were interrupted while studying and 25 percent of

women experienced an unwanted sexual advance.

In summary, as we send our children off to college and while we are raising them during their teen years, we must pay attention to their ways and habits and have some idea as to where they are and what they're doing. As the fall semester begins, parents can use this important time to help prepare their college-age sons and daughters by talking with them about the consequences of excessive drinking.

All of the researchers suggest that the first six weeks of the first semester are critical to a first year student's academic success. Because many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of college, the po-

tential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with the successful adaptation to campus life.

The transition to college is often difficult and about one third of the first-year students fail to enroll for the second year.

During these first weeks of college, parents can stay involved by inquiring about campus alcohol policies, calling and talking to their sons or daughters frequently to inquire about roommates' habits and living arrangements.

And finally, not to be morbid, parents should discuss the penalties for underage drinking and driving, as well as how alcohol use can lead to date rape, violence, academic failure and even death.