

King papers saved—but not by Blacks

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The 7,000 items in the papers of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have been saved from the never, never land of dissemination and destruction by the leadership of Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta.

David Redden, vice chair of Sotheby's, the house that was to auction the papers, which were estimated to bring between \$15 and \$35 million, contacted Mayor Franklin to ask if she could arrange a pre-auction deal, and she replied, "I can fix this."

She then proceeded to use her formidable persuasive powers to contact SunTrust Bank and arrange a \$32 million loan that was supported by financial heavy hitters in the Atlanta area, such as Home Depot, Coca Cola and others.

Perhaps they were not called, but still I wonder why large White corporate interests were the saviors of the personal papers that chronicled and explained so much of the thinking of Dr. King behind the actions that led, substantially, to freedom of us all. Surely, philanthropists don't always have to be called

when they note a project that requires their assistance or which they cannot avoid for want of conscience and commitment to an objective close to them.

So, why did Blacks of financial substance not step up when it was clear that the King papers stood in jeopardy of being spirited out of the province of the Black community and scattered to the wind of those who had merely financial or prurient interests? I have this image of Oprah Winfrey, a billionaire, speaking at the funeral of Coretta Scott King, now arrayed against the massive silence of her pocketbook in the hour of need.

The question has been raised so many times as to why those who have been outstandingly successful in our community have so little race consciousness, so little commitment to place their resources at the disposal of the heritage which they profess to value?

Perhaps, they believe that the culture that has allowed them to be successful, and that



RON WALTERS

will continue to allow them to do so, will not permit such expressions of allegiance and fidelity to the cultural legacy of the Black community, which are sometimes anti-theoretical elements to the dominant culture.

Perhaps that is true, but one hopes for the time when they are courageous enough to test that proposition and to use their financial resources to insulate themselves against the vulnerabilities they perceive.

For now, Morehouse College, Dr. King's alma mater, is the recipient of the papers, but the King family retains copyright and those who would use them must clear the hurdle of approval for various projects. This is both a blessing and a curse, because in the past the King family has had a difficult relationship with researchers who have pursued legitimate and often outstanding scholarship on the life of the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King in particular.

I think, not only of first-rate historians Taylor Branch, but David Levering Lewis, whose early volume was extremely useful in its detailed description of the movement, but who was not allowed approval of the King family in putting his work together.

However, it is a positive step in that it is a final check on projects that may not be in keeping with the legacy of Dr. King, such as those who would use the research for purely financial motives.

In any case, this may be a first step, since from my experience, the papers will need substantial vetting by the institution — not only now, but in the future in order to make them available to scholars and to keep them preserved in an adequate manner.

That will require opportunities to raise other funds and then, one hopes, that those who did not step up the first time will do so in the future.

In fact, understanding that this is not a "one shot deal" they could do so now; that is, if they have the consciousness to do so.

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Honda picks racist 'sundown' factory site

By James W. Loewen
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Even before Honda announced Greensburg, Ind., as the site for its new factory, National Public Radio was on board: Adam Davidson on "All Things Considered" said Greensburg "could be a movie set for an ideal American small town." In its announcement, Honda continued the accolade, saying Greensburg provides an "outstanding community of people."

Honda left out a key word. Greensburg is an "outstanding community of White people." That's because Greensburg is a sundown town — an all-White town that for decades was that way on purpose. Sundown towns derive their name from the fact that many of them, in-

cluding dozens in Indiana, posted signs telling Blacks not to "let the sun go down on you" while inside their corporate limits.

In 1906, Greensburg's White residents drove out most of its Black population. By 1960, the entire county, which had boasted 164 African-American residents in 1890, was down to just three, all female. In the 2000 census, Greensburg still had only two Black or interracial households among 10,260 residents.

As I show in my book, "Sundown Towns," the only way that a town that large could stay all-White for decade after decade is with enforcement — formal or informal.

While Honda was choosing its site, its executives had

to have noticed the racial composition of Greensburg and Decatur County. Similarly, the management of Krispy Kreme Donuts had to have noticed the racial composition of Effingham, Ill., in 2002, when it chose that town, 180 miles west of Greensburg, for the factory that now makes most of its donut batter. Before 1950, Effingham posted the notorious sundown signs, and while they came down by 1960, the town's policy did not change. African-Americans were prohibited beyond the railroad station and bus station.

As of 2000, Effingham had 44 African-American residents, so perhaps it is putting its sundown past behind it. One can only hope so, because as far as I can tell,

Krispy Kreme has made no attempt to humanize Effingham with regard to race relations. Hopefully, Honda will. Otherwise, the 2,000 jobs it will bring to Greensburg will be for Whites only (and perhaps Mexican-Americans).

Surely, Honda owes the

nation — and not just Blacks — a statement telling why it chose Greensburg, despite (or because of?) Greensburg's racial past. Honda should also disclose how it plans to make its workforce look like America, while locating in a town that, for many decades, kept out

Black America. And NPR might explain how a sundown town can be an "ideal American small town."

James W. Loewen is a sociologist and author of "Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism" published by The New Press.

Signing statements strip citizens of their civil rights

By William Fisher
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NEW YORK - Last March, Congress passed tough legislation requiring Justice Department officials to report on how the FBI is using the USA Patriot Act to search homes and secretly seize papers.

But when President Bush signed the measure into law, he added a "signing statement." The statement said the president can order Justice Department officials to withhold any information from Congress if he decides it could impair national security or executive branch operations.

Late last year, Congress approved legislation declaring that U.S. interrogators cannot torture prisoners or otherwise subject them to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

But President Bush's signing statement said the president, as commander-in-chief, can waive the torture ban if he decides that harsh interrogation techniques will assist in preventing terrorist attacks.

These are but two examples of more than 100 signing statements containing over 500 constitutional challenges President Bush has added to new laws passed by the Congress — many times more than any of his predecessors.

While he has never vetoed a law, many constitutional scholars say the president is, in effect, exercising a "line item veto" by giving himself authority to waive parts of laws he doesn't like.

The practice has infuriated members of Congress in both parties because it threatens to diminish their power. They consider it an assault on the notion that the Constitution establishes the United States' three branches of government — legislative, judicial and executive — as equal.

Further fueling congressional anger is Bush's defense of his National Security Agency's "domestic eavesdropping" program, in which the president claimed he could ignore a 1978 law prohibiting wiretaps of U.S. citizens without "probable

cause" and a warrant issued by a court.

The NSA program was revealed by The New York Times last December. Since then, newspapers have disclosed other secret programs, including amassing millions of domestic phone call records and examining perhaps thousands of financial transactions in an effort to track and interrupt possible terrorist activity.

A member of Bush's own party, Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, opened hearings on the subject this week. He said, "The real issue here is whether the president can cherry-pick what he likes."

And the senior Democrat on the committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, said, "The president hasn't vetoed any bills, but basically he has done a personal veto. He has said which laws he will not follow and... put himself above the law, even the same law he has signed."

The hearing is part of a continuing effort by many in (See Constitution, Page 13)

Clingman

(Continued from Page 11)

Who knows the answers to those questions? We will just have to wait and see, but I suggest we prepare ourselves for even tougher times. We are in the midst of something we have never witnessed before. The greed among the Bushites is off the charts; the value of a U.S. soldier's life is at an all-time low. We have spent nearly a trillion dollars in Iran and Afghanistan, much of which cannot be accounted for, or it was doled out in no-bid contracts to Halliburton and other corporate thieves. All of this and we cannot, or will not, provide the armor needed by our troops on the battlefield. Can you imagine having to solicit money from citizens to buy extra padding for our soldiers' helmets? How sad is that?

I don't know what Condi's next move is going to be, but I do know that we are in a big mess, much of which is caused by her two-fisted, cowgirl swagger around the

world. We could attribute her behavior to her association with the biggest buffoon ever to hit the political stage, but I think she's too smart for that.

Maybe it's the way George holds his arms out as he walks, as though he's about to draw down on someone. Maybe it's his West Texas, rolled-up sleeve, plain-talkin' drawl that keeps her interested. Could it be his childlike characteristics that bring out Condi's motherly instincts? Maybe it's his cowboy boots that turn her on so much.

Face it Condi, contrary to "Fitty Cent's" claim that George Bush is a gangsta, ya boy is a punk, a spoiled brat, a scared bully who sacrifices the lives of young soldiers to strut his stuff on the world stage and then hide behind the skirts of a sister. Maybe you should consider a divorce, Condi.

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