

# Biggest Ford issue—Black dealerships

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Who would have thought that Ford Motor Co., the legacy of that great American Henry Ford, would be heading deep "south" in the profit and loss arena of the automobile industry? Ford is almost synonymous with Americana, especially Black Americana.

The founder, Henry Ford, was a great friend of Black scientist and entrepreneur George Washington Carver. He admired and supported Carver so much that when the entrepreneur died, Ford had Carver's childhood home moved to his Dearborn Museum. It stands there today. That friendship has led to very generous and continuous support of Tuskegee Institute by the Ford Foundation.

Ford Motor Company also led the way in Black employment among corporate America. Blacks in Detroit, Cleveland and other auto cities prospered through steady employment and opportunity. There are hundreds of thousands of Black middle-class families that can speak of Ford with pride and gratitude.

That has translated into college education and opportunities that were totally elusive to Black masses before the rise of Ford Motor Co. and other entities of the same ilk.

Today, Ford is getting beat up badly from competition. While the automobile industry is healthy per se, American-born companies

are missing the wants and needs of American consumers. Ford has done the worst in this area. It is selling fewer cars, closing plants, releasing employees and losing money at record numbers.

This is terrible and will require Ford to become ever dependent on that steady customer base it is used to — Black America. It is the Black dollar that is approaching nearly \$1 trillion annually that may determine whether Ford survives or not. The future of that legacy of partnership is at risk.

Ford, during the last few decades, has been less than a partner or friend to Black dealers. The complaints have been consistent and, in fact, growing more and more. It is time for this company to return to its roots and begin treating Black dealerships with a level playing field and compassion.

Mel Farr is a good example.

Football legend and successful entrepreneur Mel Farr was on a roll with the Ford Motor Co. Many dealers had complained about disparate treatment of their customer base by Ford Motor Credit Corp. This credit company was the primary financier for purchased autos. If you couldn't get the majority of your customers approved by them, you



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weren't going to close many deals.

The adverse treatment of Black customers would have a devastating impact on the sales of a Black-owned dealership. We lost a lot of Black dealerships because of this, and there have been many discrimination claims because of this choke hold by auto credit companies.

Mel had a brilliant idea. He went to Wall Street and formed his own auto financing entity to sell his cars. The alternative was successful — too successful for Ford. The relationship they had with Mel and his 11 auto dealerships soured to the point that Ford "pulled the rug from under him."

Today, the nation's best known Black auto dealer is out of business. He is banned for life from owning a Ford dealership. In fact, and so cruelly, his two sons are also banned for life. That is how they treated their "star." Think about the other Black dealers.

Ford has consistently put new Black dealers out into the "boonies." These rural and mostly White markets have less of a chance for success versus an urban market. The odds are stacked against the young Black entrepreneur from the beginning.

The National Black Chamber of Com-

merce has formed a committee to look into this to determine how much of a racial pattern there is. We believe it is shocking and intentional.

We have also learned that Ford doesn't fully share its financial information before closing a deal with a prospective Black franchisee, which is counter to FTC Federal Trade Commission regulation. They also block new franchisees from having their attorneys and accountants review the purchase contracts prior to investing in the dealership with Ford.

There are many other peculiar happenings that Ford has laid on Black dealers that amount to the lack of success. We are going to add all this up and come to a final conclusion. If that conclusion equates to what we initially perceive — discriminatory practices against Black entrepreneurs — we will demand change.

Change will help level the playing field and increase the chance of success for upcoming Black dealers. It will also ensure that the long legacy of partnership with Ford and Black America is not spoiled and lost forever.

In these troubled times Ford had best "recognize."

Harry C. Alford is the Co-Founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

## NAACP in limbo—but how low can group go?

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Since writing "Black Organizations for Sale," which dealt with the Cincinnati Chapter of the NAACP, I have received many emails and phone calls informing me of similar issues plaguing other chapters, i.e., corrupt officials, "fixed" elections, fraud, deceit, misuse of funds, and the one common thread of corporate control via sponsorship of NAACP events. It is a shame that Black people cannot, or will not take a collective stand against this kind of behavior inside the NAACP.

What we saw on the national level 15 years ago and since must have been just the tip of the iceberg. Money being misused, hanky-panky among staff members, and other things we heard about the national office seem to have filtered down to the local level, at least in the cases with which I am familiar.

Before you get too bent out shape, let me say that I am absolutely certain that an overwhelming majority of NAACP members are doing the right things and working very hard for the organization. So, please, don't take this as an indictment of everyone therein.

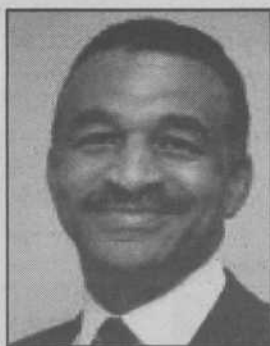
Nevertheless, we need to clean house, get

rid of the corruption, jettison the refuse, and take a stand against the misdeeds within the NAACP, that is, if we want it and other Black organizations to survive and thrive.

With that said, let me give you an update on the Cincinnati NAACP Chapter. (By the way, I was one of the vote counters and have first-hand knowledge of what took place.)

It's been eight weeks since our election, and despite incontrovertible evidence of violations by the current officers and obvious collusion by NAACP state officials; despite that evidence being sent by an attorney to the national office for resolution; despite literally hundreds of phone calls, emails, and written communications to state, regional, and national NAACP officials; and despite the 30-day response period in their own by-laws, it has been 60 days — and still the Cincinnati chapter is in limbo.

We have not sworn in the president, which should have been done the first week of January, after our election on October 28. We are



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stuck in a quagmire replete with so-called meetings in which no more than five or six people from the old administration, three of whom are "preachers," make every effort to control the 200 or so other members who stand behind the obvious winner of the presidential election. We need to get him installed and get on with the business at hand; and Lord

knows Black folks have a lot of business at hand in Cincinnati.

Our December meeting, the first 10 minutes or so chaired by the former president who refuses to concede the election, and her cronies, all five of them, was orchestrated to adjourn without voting on anything. That's right — anything.

They came in with a plan so elementary, if it were not so sad, it would be hilarious. The former president first informed us that she did not have a roster, so there could be no voting at the official meeting of the NAACP. She then started to threaten to adjourn the meeting because people were upset, and rightfully so, at the fact she had no

roster. Ten minutes later, she said she would accept a motion to adjourn which, by design, was immediately offered by one of her "preachers." Then, all five or six of them walked out of the meeting. The 200 of the rest of us carried on with our meeting.

Think that was bad? You ain't heard nothin' yet!

The January meeting was highlighted by the parliamentarian, also a "preacher" and part of the cabal of the past administration. He began to make motions and "substitute" motions to approve the 10 minutes of official written minutes from the previous meeting, rather than the subsequent recorded minutes from the entire meeting that took place after they left. Of course his motion, when finally voted upon, was overwhelmingly defeated.

Then, the "preacher" who is also the chaplain of the local chapter, after giving the opening prayer, stood up and had to be restrained as he threatened to "pull out my gun" and start shooting some folks.

His threat was against a sister, no less, the same as it was against a female, during the previous meeting. The sister called the police to take the "preacher" out of the meeting. Can you believe that? First we pray, and then we shoot. How low can they go?

Even more distressing is the fact that our national office has not intervened in this fiasco we have in Cincinnati, the site of its 2008 national convention. It is also insulting, if you ask me. It quite graphically shows their interest is not in the people of this chapter as much as it is in the convention perks they will receive. As I always say, peel back enough layers on these kinds of issues, and you will find money.

I am sure many of you reading this article have been or are going through your own local NAACP battles, waiting on the national

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instruct women on how to protect themselves — and what to teach their daughters to help them avoid this disease.

And how about women speaking up in the churches we disproportionately populate, so that HIV education and testing occurs in all of them?

We can demand increased spending for comprehensive AIDS education and insist that our children be taught how to protect themselves.

As the number of Black Americans living

with the disease rises, we can fight for increased funding of care and treatment.

We can leverage our influence against corporations whose advertising dollars fund TV shows and videos whose stereotypical and hypersexual images shape the sexuality of young Black men and women, encouraging them to make risky choices.

We can demand that the government address the connection between the wholesale incarceration of Black men, where IV-drug use and anal sex take place, and high infection rates among Black women in the com-

munities to which they return.

Black women shouldn't expect anyone to throw us a lifeline. Already, we've waited on others for too long; we have to save ourselves. It is time for Black women to organize a mass movement to ending the AIDS epidemic. We are calling on every Black woman in America to be a leader, and we are calling on those leaders to lead.

The responsibility is ours.

Jewell Jackson McCabe is the founder of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women an advocacy organization.