

'Spreading the gain' vital to economic uplift

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In Dr. Martin Luther King's "Mountaintop" speech, he noted that Black people, in our quest for economic reciprocity, should "spread the pain" by withholding our dollars from various companies and by refusing to purchase certain products.

It seems that part of his message has gone unheeded as Black people continue to struggle for parity, equity, and fairness in this country. Wouldn't it be great if folks simply did the right thing for the right reason all the time?

I know, I know, my idealism is showing. It would now be much easier for us if we had started and sustained a "spread the pain" campaign back then. Since we did not, let's look at what I call "Spreading the Gain" in 2008.

Georgia State Rep. Winfred Dukes from Albany, N.Y., invited me to speak at the annual African American Business Enterprise Day in Atlanta. It is always refreshing to hear and to see politicians not only talking about economic empowerment but also facilitating and actually doing the work of economic empowerment. Brother Dukes is one of those action-oriented advocates who make every effort to effect positive change when it comes to the economic uplift of Black people.

The theme of the meeting centered on the importance of Black business owners doing business with other Black businesses, something I have advocated for years via this column.

Brother Dukes and those in attendance understand the importance of the continuous movement of the Black dollar among Black people, for as long as it is possible. A major

part of that movement is from Black business to Black business.

I call it "Spreading the Gain." It is important for consumers — not just Black consumers, but especially Black consumers — to support Black-owned businesses. Let me say it before you do: not because they are Black, but because they are good at what they do.

Also, consumer support is vital to the growth of any business, and the more we support our own businesses the larger and more viable they will become.

If there is nothing wrong with other groups doing this — and there isn't — please don't come up with the same excuses for not offering your support, the same way you provide support to the businesses of others.

The second leg of the Black dollars' journey is between and among Black businesses, which always need to restock, retool and reproduce. Imagine the exponential effect of more Black businesses seeking out other Black businesses from which to make their purchases. That Black dollar we talk about circulating and recycling would multiply many times over.

The third leg of the journey is related to business growth/expansion and job creation. Mutual, concentrated and collective support of Black businesses create the opportunity to hire more employees, among who could be your children or grandchildren.

The cyclical effect of Black dollars will surely increase Black economic empowerment while instilling pride among Black



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people. It will also cause us to be more conscious of where our money goes, what is done with it, and how we can do even more with the resources in our possession.

A final thought, and back to the importance of politicians and public administrators like Rep. Winfred Dukes. Black people control a great deal of money in the public sector. We have high-level jobs that give us management authority over billions of dollars. We oversee the purchasing of supplies and professional services, and we dole out contracts for construction and other municipal necessities.

Black folks are on school boards and sit as superintendents over school systems in which the vast majority of the students are Black, similar to the urban centers over which many Blacks have political control. With that kind of scenario repeating itself all over this country, why are so few Black companies being advantaged by it?

I have noticed that many Black public administrators and many Black politicians, even though they are "large and in charge," are reluctant or afraid to do whatever they can to help Black businesses get contracts.

Unlike Winfred Dukes and those attending his meeting in Atlanta, many Black folks in those high-level jobs never even speak about supporting Black businesses, much less do anything to encourage and assure that support.

What a sad commentary for our people. Why? White public administrators channel the resources under their control to their

White constituents all the time. We have seen the results of it in the Disparity Studies, sometimes called Croson Studies, which have been done in various municipalities across this country.

In those reports, we can see statistical and anecdotal evidence of discrimination and "good ol' boy" networks among purchasing agents and administrators. Yes, it's illegal, well supposedly; but it's done, nevertheless.

I am not suggesting we do anything illegal, but I am saying that Black public administrators should look for every opportunity to support Black businesses and make certain they are not discriminated against by their subordinates.

The same thing applies to Black folks who manage private not-for-profit organizations, such as the Urban League, Community Action Agencies, SCLC, and the NAACP, and let's not forget those money pits known as Black church organizations.

Business-to-business support is vitally important to the progress of Black people in this country. Please take your cue from State Rep. Winfred Dukes and his cohorts in Georgia.

Theirs is a glowing example of what can be done with resources, some of which emanate from Black people via our tax dollars. Theirs is the model of consciousness and commitment necessary to move us forward.

Theirs is the beacon that will guide us to a brighter collective economic future. Thanks so much, Brother Dukes, for "Spreading the Gain" among Black people.

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black economic empowerment book series.

Help (Clinton) trumps hope (Obama) every time

By Dr. Barbara Reynolds
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Never before has the political clout of African-American women been so crucial as in this presidential race, when women make up as high as two-thirds of registered Black voters. Black women voters are the primary reason why Sen. Barack Obama pulled Oprah and Sen. Clinton garnered Maya Angelou and the majority of the Black women in the Congressional Black Caucus in their respective camps.

As expected, Sen. Barack Obama trounced Sen. Hillary Clinton in the Chesapeake Trifecta of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

With most of my Maryland and D.C. friends beating the drum for Sen. Obama, I tried to join the parade. Usually, I am a drum major, leading momentum, but not this time.

Like many African-American women, I have struggled with the dilemma of selecting a Black man or a White woman to go against warmonger Sen. John McCain. My problem was that both Sens. Obama and Clinton are darn good.

Finally, I voted for Sen. Clinton. My first reason was that as seductive as Obama's mantra of hope, the Clintons legacy of help

is more substantive and stronger.

Hope, by definition, is not based on facts. It is an emotional expectation. Things hoped for may or may not come. But help based on experience trumps hope every time.

How do you abandon someone like Hillary Clinton, who at every opportunity worked for causes benefiting the poor, especially children? Her work began in her early days with her mentor Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund and at Yale Law School, where she pursued children's studies. Early on her stated life's goal was to be a "voice for America's children."

Look how different things would be that before any policy, rather foreign or domestic, could be advanced, the fate of our children would be the first consideration, a value that I believe Clinton would bring to the table as president.

Under Bill, this nation championed diversity. With Bill and Hillary as first Lady in the White House, Black unemployment declined, small business loans to African-Americans doubled, there was strong support for affirmative action and more Blacks in his Cabinet and in high positions than ever before. In addition, Hillary made history by selecting a Black woman, Maggie Williams, as her chief of staff. To offset plummeting election returns, Williams has been promoted to head her campaign staff.

In fact, during the Clinton years, the na-



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tion experienced the longest economic boom in history: unemployment dropped from 7.5 percent to 4 percent, the Dow Jones Industrial Average of stocks rose from 3,200 points to over 10,000, and the federal budget rose from a quarter-trillion-dollar deficit to a surplus of nearly that much.

Now, since one Clinton cleaned up the first mess created by Bush I, why not let another Clinton clean up the mess created by Bush Light — and why not a woman?

Traditionally, I have sympathized or cast my lot with the "underperson," the one needlessly being picked on or ridiculed. Media treatment of Sen. Clinton has been degrading.

Much of the news media have gone bonkers over Sen. Obama, pandering and refusing to ask tough questions, while intensely — and sometimes nastily — grilling Sen. Clinton. Pundits continue to stress that Clinton is "polarizing," and that 41 percent of voters say they won't vote for her, as if to cement a self-defeating prophecy.

When the Clintons were in office, I worked at the executive levels of journalism. It was overwhelming to see how many White men, even liberals, detested Hillary; not only because she is a woman, but because she did not play it safe and took on controversial issues, such as trying to win healthcare for the more than 44 million people who can't afford it. She lost the fight, but it took courage to start it, and I believe she deserves another

chance to win it.

Atty. James Walker, a law professor at the University of Connecticut, explains the disparate treatment this way: "In light of issues like the Don Imus firings, neither politicians nor the press want to go near anything racist. The public environment has been sanitized toward political correctness, but there are no holds on sexism. That is why there can be open season on Sen. Clinton."

"Hillary is getting the benefit of Bill's baggage, his dirt from the Monica Lewinsky scandal. But Obama is getting a clean slate because of the guilt recently brought to the forefront of how America has treated Blacks. That means an easy walk for Obama and the opposite for Sen. Clinton," Walker said.

I also find it troublesome that so many influential Republican conservatives are professing their love for Sen. Obama. When people who are my enemies become friends of my friends, I am just naturally suspicious.

For example, I remember how Republican Bill Bennett was excoriated on his national radio show for inferring that if Black women had more abortions that would reduce the crime rate. Bennett, no friend of Blacks, is now in love with Obama. I wonder why?

In any event, Sen. Obama, tall, brilliant, handsome, with a wonderful wife and a message of hope would make a good president, but I embrace Clinton because, at the highest levels, they have helped make life better for African-Americans. My vote for Hillary in the Maryland Primary was my way of saying "Thank you."

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pressionable IQs and have been blessed with the talent of the written word. God is good to all of us.

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