

PHOENIX OP-ED, Continued

The System Was Broke, So He's Fixin' It

By Patricia Smith-Deering
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Back in the late '70s, MCI decided that AT&T had an unfair advantage in gaining marketshare in long distance telecommunications. As a result, universal telephone service affordability fell by the wayside, Ma Bell was broken up into a number of Baby Bells, and what hadn't been "broke" was fixed. The decades-old Bell System monopoly - regulated though it had been - ceased to exist.

While it literally broke my heart at the time because I was a corporate manager for the system, in many ways the resulting competition proved beneficial. There was more focus on newer technology and increased service.

When the media broke the news that Clarence Johnson has been given the go-ahead to operate Golden Eagle Taxi Service, I was reminded of Ma Bell and her babies. This time, however, I cheered at the entrance of a little

competition for the transportation monopoly that has existed in this city for at least two decades.

Growing up over four decades ago in Winston-Salem, I remember that it was a Twin City in more ways than one. Black folks traveled from East Winston to the downtown area on buses operated by Black-owned Safe Bus Company and switched to the back seats of white-owned City Coach Lines to go to work in white homes across town. Catching a cab meant calling Black-owned Harris or Camel City taxis. Blue Bird Cab Company limited its operation in the Black community, when you could get a cab to come at all.

As times changed and Blacks made civil rights' gains, like the big fish swallowing the little fish in nature, the Black-owned bus company disappeared - as did the cab companies. Now, the Winston-Salem Transit Authority manages the bus service, and privately-owned Blue Bird runs the city's

taxicab service. Or I should say ran until Johnson took that oh-so-necessary step to break that monopoly.

Kudos, Mr. Johnson! For decades, the talk in the Black community has been about the dire need for economic development. For that same period of time there have been sporadic attempts with mixed success. Thank you, so much, for throwing a little curve in the game that this city's power-mongers have been inspiring. But, you're going to have your hands full with some of the heat you'll be taking from your own, yes, the Black community.

We can be extremely counter-productive when a fellow Black seeks to move ahead. Some Blacks are ready conspirators with those in the so-called majority community who can't afford real economic progress in the Black community. A hard row to hoe? You've got it. But, if it's any consolation, you've got my vote - as long as Golden Eagle is a professional, competitive, customer-oriented business. That's

no more no less than is expected of any business.

Some of the drivers - Black and white - with Blue Bird don't view Golden Eagle as a threat because of the few cabs that the company will begin its operation. Maybe so. But, not one of those Blue Bird drivers who were willing to voice their opinions was critical. They suggested, however, that with competent drivers willing to hustle hard 24 hours a day, seven days a week keeping the needs of their customers in mind, Golden Eagle can put a dent in Blue Bird's trade and grow to be a very serious threat.

Just for old times' sake, a lot more than people will be riding on Golden Eagle Taxi Service. It will be one of the most public efforts at Black entrepreneurship and economic development that has come along in a while. Since our young people need all the role models they can get, Mr. Johnson, you're in a perfect situation to show them how to get things done - the old fashioned way.

When The Good Guys Lose, So Does The Black Community

By Anne Myles
Phoenix Staff Writer

Children are born imitators. From their earliest days in the world, you can see the effect that people and the surrounding environment have on even the most infirm child. That's why the way life is depicted with the heroes and villains clearly defined - role modeling - is critical.

That's where the media - whether print, radio, or television - can become so very important. Years ago, vice and virtue were easily identifiable because bad guys wore black, good guys wore white hats and always emerged victorious. Then came the time when good and bad were relative to a given set of circumstances, everything was in shades of gray, and life - both real and in the media - was seen through mixed reviews and endings.

Role models for Black youth have become increasingly more significant as reality seems to change. The good guys don't always win. And when the bad guys do, no guidance is provided to show the importance of a moral, ethical victory over victory by force and violence. Sadly, the credibility of some Black role model suffers as the "Do as I say do, not as I do" philosophy reveals people who

have feet of clay."

There are those who are raised up as community leaders, supposedly positive examples, yet send mixed messages to Black children. Those exemplary Black citizens and neighbors seem to make all the right overt moves to be involved and "give something back to the Black community." But, children, as they grow older, also become keen listeners as well as observers. You know - monkey see (and hear), monkey do. The children watch and learn from the duplicity of their "role models."

When a Black man calls himself doing good business by stepping on the backs or necks of customers, employees, or even competitors, children watch and learn, especially when it's Black on Black.

But, frequently, it's those very people being "helped" who are being browbeaten, humiliated, worked long, arduous hours for low pay, and otherwise abused much as their slave ancestors were. And just as it often happened on the plantation, the one wielding the whip is a Black man, worse than any white overseer could ever have been because the "brother" has some point to prove.

We put ourselves up as the good

guys, mistreated from the day our Black ancestors were wrenched from the shores of Africa and brought to this country by the bad guys - white land and slave owners. But, truth be told, we have become as devious as our captors - lying, stealing from, cheating on, killing, and otherwise victimizing each other.

As we blame genocide, racism, and the rising number of socioeconomic and political ills that plague our community on the evil slavemasters' descendants, our children see smoking guns in our own Black hands. What used to be considered "getting by" until you can do better has become "getting over" on whoever gets in the way.

What is needed among the statistics being collected on Blacks in these harsh economic times are figures that show the number of Blacks who are: homeless because a family member, friend, or associate didn't repay the money that was obtained using the homeless person's former residence as collateral or who didn't pay salaries or other monies owed as critical income; the number of Blacks who depend on handouts from white charities as their more affluent Black brothers and sisters clamor for more social

programs; and the number of Black drug users whose addiction came from their own people, not willing to do an honest day's work.

There are many more examples, but you get the idea. The point is, we all know what time it is. Like Bush's response to his own neglect of domestic problems and the recession, we blame everyone else. Meanwhile, our children hear that message and see what we do to each other. So, our future now hinges on those who can't read or write, but can handle high-powered weapons, concoct elaborate drug networks in their teens, and perform complex interactions that - put to legitimate, ethical, moral use - would make the community proud.

But, don't blame our children for the mess we helped make and sustain. Let's stop wringing our hands and bemoaning the condition of our children. We, each of us, are the first role models that our children see, whether we're parents, teachers, business people, or just neighbors. If we give others what is their due without excuse, our children will follow our lead. That should not only be our New Year's resolution, that must be our legacy.