

UNTIL JUSTICE Rains Down

ARE OUR CHURCHES DOING ENOUGH?

By Rodney Sumler

Publishers Note:

Our country is at war to liberate the oppressed people of Iraq. It's ironic that the first American military personnel to die was a Black American fighting for freedom for another people in another country, while young Black Americans in Winston-Salem are in a state of war themselves. Independence High School students are the victims of budget cuts and a war on educating black young. Carver High School athletes are fighting North Forsyth athletes; Lift Academy is history and Vision Works is under fire; drug abused and immoral behavior are acceptable by too many and unemployed blacks/homelessness is on the rise.

As I entered my office to prepare this publisher note, I walked through five young black males at 10 am entertaining each other with rap lyrics, downtown Winston-Salem in the Arts District. Someone needs to declare war against ignorance - academic and economic as practiced by people who look like me (skin color) throughout our sick, wicked country.

Jesus is the answer. But the greater response in the physical word to ensure economic justice for black people can be found in US; how we educate our children; how we honor and worship God and where we spend our money. The solution to all our problems is in the black church. The church is the greatest of our assets for self help, love of self and love of others. This is a reprint of an article written 12 years ago:

Without question, the black church is the most powerful, functional and tangible institution in the black community.

The black ministers, by and large, are doing a fantastic job dealing with the spiritual needs of the community. For years they have been the backbone of the community, the very heart of the spirituality that has allowed black folk to be able to persevere in this country.

Yet, when it comes to the whole man, we have somehow not been as sophisticated in dealing with the economic and political aspects. If we look at the individual from a wholistic standpoint, we need to consider not only the spiritual but also the educational, economic, political and psychological perspectives.

In doing so, we would realize that we have to make great strides in overcoming the obstacles that are placed in the way of our people by society. The black church is everything to black people and all that many of our people have. Therefore, every facet of the black experience should be influenced by the black church. Our ministers should continue to provide the lead for their congregations - - but it should be expressed in more ways than the spiritual.

When we look at the overall picture, black folk must be able to accept the positive and work on those areas where help is needed. Loving God first, then one's self, are the suppositions on which Agape Love are based upon and the Christian Church is founded upon.

If that is the case, black folk and black churches need to learn to control their economic destinies. Self-love and self-determination can only be made manifest when we selectively spend our dollars and direct more of our dollars toward blacks.

The way some churches spend their dollars does not follow the theory of self-love and determination. We are quick to point out the inadequacies of black businesses, yet we promise to love our brethren that dwell among us. We ought to practice that love by helping ourselves.

Blacks, unlike any other ethnic group in this country, have a tendency to question anything that is black. As many of us saw in the recent television trial portraying Thurgood Marshall and the

Separate But Equal court cases, many of our people during the 1950s found everything black to be inferior to that of whites. Although we have made great strides since then, some of us have not changed in the way we view society. We don't give our fellow blacks a chance to prove themselves. Not only that, we make no effort to seek out qualified blacks.

According to local statistics there are more than 350 black churches in the greater Winston-Salem metropolitan area. With that in mind, we know that collectively, the black church has a tremendous amount of assets. If we created a scenario in which one-half of those churches collected \$2,000 a week in offering that would mean deposits of some \$350,000 into local banks each Monday morning. If we carry the scenario further and say that the larger churches sometimes take in an excess of \$5,000 weekly, we're looking at more than \$500,000 per week being deposited in local banks.

Those figures may not be a true indication of the economic clout of our churches, but a good argument could be made for it — and those numbers are mind-bobbling. We often talk about the need for others to do something for black folks, but with the economic clout of churches, we could really determine our own economic future.

Yet, black businesses, individuals and some churches with good credit still have difficulty obtaining loans to build churches, start businesses and reinvest money in the black community.

Even worse is the fact that some black churches refuse to do business with blacks. Many cite the shoddy workmanship and poor business practices of some black businessmen. Yet we haven't taken measures as of yet to solve the problem. Perhaps if we trained some businessmen in the black church we would solve the problem. If we can't train them in the church, perhaps we can offer scholarships under the stipulation that the individual come back and start a business in the black community that is funded by the church. Or perhaps we can establish apprenticeship programs with the "more qualified" white contractors who receive the hundred thousands or millions of dollar contracts from black churches.

If there is a problem finding qualified blacks to do the jobs, we should look at finding a solution to it rather than dwelling on the problem.

Far too often we expect white folk to set the example for us. We expect the city, state and federal government to set quotas or levels of minority participation in awarding business to contractors. Why can't the church set the example and set its own goals for hiring black contractors?

Blacks would have an opportunity to have an 80-100 percent level of participation in projects being done by the black church. That would equate to more dollars being reinvested in the community and in the black church.

Take the argument to some blacks and you'll get the out-dated reply that "I earned this money so I can spend it anywhere I want to". But when you look at other ethnic groups you see that the individual considers his brothers and sisters and the decision he or she makes in life are relevant to his or her group experience. But as blacks, we tend to be fair with everyone else except blacks in business. Taking it a step further, how can we expect our children to surpass our accomplishments if we don't put the things in place to allow for their growth and development in business?