



Yuletide Greetings

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Winston-Salem, NC 27108
Telephone: 336-923-0019
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Substituting Holidays For Holy Days

By: James Clingman
Guest Columnist



This year, as in years gone by, we will see Black people run to the malls and department stores to spend a large part of our half trillion dollars on gifts and other items in the name of Christmas. Prior to that, our people rushed to those same outlets on the day after Thanksgiving to do the same thing. And then next Easter, we will once again spend millions on clothing, eggs, and chocolate. All of this will be done in the name of holidays.

While everyone seems to get into the act of buying during the holidays, my concern is, of course, centered on the purchasing habits of Black people. Why? Because we are the primary targets of the marketing campaigns and spend more of our disposable income during these "holidays" than other consumer groups in this country. In addition, I am concerned because we can least afford to keep spending our money the way we do.

More importantly, Black people, as religious as we claim to be, have allowed our Holy Days to be turned into holidays by greedy retailers. We sit back each year and allow them to ratchet-up their sales campaigns, extend their hours of operation, and even play on our sympathy when they do not meet their sales forecasts during Christmas. And, boy, do we more than make up for it during those after-Christmas sales.

I wonder what would happen if the merchants would do the same kinds of sales campaigns during Ramadan or Hanukkah. Do you think they would get away with it? I don't. Outrage by Islam and Jewish groups would be the order of the day. The merchants would undoubtedly be severely punished by these groups as they withhold their dollars from the offending stores thereafter.

As Black people look for ways to make an impact, to gain economic reciprocity, to increase our leverage, and to level the playing field, the answers are right in front of us. All we have to do is refrain from our conspicuous consumption during the holiday season. If we must spend money during that time, why not set up our own bazaars in which Black vendors and other Black business owners can sell their wares and services? That way we would be killing two birds with one stone. Bringing back the respect we have lost for our Holy Days; and redirecting a portion of our tremendous spending toward one another.

Now that's the very kind of action that would warrant a brand new holiday. It would surely be worth celebrating the day that Black people finally decided to make a drastic change in our economic destiny. What better time than this Christmas? We could end the year on a high note and begin the next year on an even higher note by rallying our consumers and by using our dollars as the economic weapons they are. Talk about Ujamaa—it would be a fantastic celebration!

Let's face it. The only way for Black people to make a real move toward economic power in this country is to withhold our dollars from others and direct them toward our own economic efforts, such as business development and business support. We cannot afford to continue being the victims of economic exploitation; we cannot allow our children's future to be mortgaged; and we must not get mired in credit card debt, especially if we want to move beyond our current status as the biggest and most generous consumer segment in the world.

In Cincinnati (or Cincinnati-apathy, as I call it) where I live, our group, the Black United Front, has called for economic sanctions against the downtown businesses. We have a Black-owned shopping center and we are asking our people to shop there. We are also seeking vendors and other businesses to bring their sales items to the mall and sell them there. I would love to see Black people give 100 percent support to this effort, like the brothers and sisters did in South Africa prior to the fall of apartheid, but I kind of doubt it. Here in Cincinnati-apathy, one of the largest plantations in the country, many of our people are content with their positions and their status, and they are afraid that if they make waves they will not get that extra ration of biscuits from the massa.

But, that's alright. If we get 50 percent participation, I will be happy. We must put an end to the exploitation of our people and our Holy Days. Get a movement started in your city and help change the economic situation in which we find ourselves.

This Christmas, please make it a point to change your purchasing habits. You owe it to yourselves. You owe it to your children. Please don't end up owing it to the merchants. Let's return to our Holy Days. Enough with the "holidays."

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