

The Charlotte Post

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Economic empowerment: A few words to the wise

By James Clingman
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

"Now is the time — not in some far-off future, but now is the time — for us as a race to prove to the world that we have the ability and the inclination to do our part in owning, developing, manufacturing and trading in the natural resources of our country. If we let these golden opportunities slip from us in this generation, I fear they will never come to us in a like degree again. Let us act before it is too late, before others come from foreign lands and rob us of our birthright."

Those words were spoken on Aug. 21, 1912, by Booker T. Washington. He was speaking to the National Negro Business League in Chicago, Ill. Haunting, ironic, prophetic? How would you characterize these words? From any direction, we can see that we are at least 75 years behind when it comes to black economic empowerment.

Washington pleaded for his people to work together. He begged for solidarity among black people. He admonished against what has now become a reality for many African Americans — economic apathy and disinterest. The gravest insult and most dramatic display of his warnings against the futility of merely seeking political offices without economic undergirding can be found in Tuskegee, Ala.

I recently spoke with a friend who had spent some time in Tuskegee last summer. She described a town with little or no economic infrastructure — a town whose residents must travel to other towns for medicine and other vital needs. Tuskegee, where it all began for Booker T. Washington; Tuskegee, where the philosophy of economic self-sufficiency was nurtured everyday, now serves as a monument, in name only, to the principles that Washington espoused.

Sad to say, many other cities are no better off. Lost somewhere in our zeal to integrate, having access to the economic resources of others, is our own economic plan for survival. We have ignored the

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—Booker T. Washington

words of Washington and many before and after him, and we are steadily making his dire prediction come true. To some people Washington's ideas were radical; to others his talk of black economic unity was threatening. Some people believe his untimely death, at 58, was contrived in some way. Some believe he was simply murdered. Whatever the case, Washington spoke words that are eerily haunting and foreboding, even more today than in 1912. He warned us that unless we take responsibility for our own economic destiny we will surely miss out on the opportunities that exist in this country. We have already allowed most of our land to slip away from us, as the Native Americans. And you know what happened to them.

Our access to this country's natural resources is limited, as Washington predicted it would be if we did not act. Our concentration on gaining high office and being able to spend a "dollar at the opera" blinded us to the fact that we must build our own economic foundation first before we take on other efforts that will not help our community as a whole. Even today, as in Washington's time, some of our people do not want to hear those words. Needless to say, even today some people are still threatened by the prospect of economic unity among blacks. I do not plan to meet the same demise as Booker T. Washington, but I must continue to exhort my brothers and sisters to move toward economic unity. Unity, not to the exclusion of anyone else, white, red or yellow, but unity that includes all African Americans.

When asked in 1907 what black people need most, Washington replied, "Solidarity! We need as a race to learn to pull together. Civilization in any people is to a large extent the ability of the individuals of that people to combine their efforts for the good of the whole; it is the ability, while holding fast to individual differences of opinion and sentiment on minor matters, to be able to put these differences in the background whenever it is necessary to unite for the benefit of the whole community or the whole state."

If we do not learn to work together, to trust one another, to agree to disagree and still be friends and, more importantly, to pool our resources, Washington's "before it's too late" prediction will one day soon reverberate throughout our communities, across this nation, and around the world.

JAMES CLINGMAN is editor of the Cincinnati (Ohio) Herald.

Tomorrow's Martin Luther Kings

Bernice P. Jackson



On January 15 we once again celebrated the birthday of a great American and citizen of the world, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many school children recited his I Have a Dream speech given at the 1963 March on Washington and we paid tribute to a great religious and moral leader of our lifetime.

But in the course of remembering Dr. King's life, it's important to remember that

when he came into the nation's limelight as a leader of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 he was only 26 years old. As the civil rights movement showed here in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement did in South Africa, young people are often in the forefront of social change.

Who, then, are the future Martin Luther King Jr.'s in our time? Who are the young people who are working for justice for their people? While the media often ignore the stories of young people working for positive change, the good news is there are many young people who are about the business of justice for all. Here are

the stories of just two of them.

Angela Brown

Angela Brown is the only American winner of the Reebok Human Rights Award, an international award honoring young human rights activists working on the front lines for social change. We in the Commission for Racial Justice are especially proud of Angela because we have watched and encouraged her from age 14, when she organized young people around education and voter registration.

A child of the civil rights movement, she has been involved in the environmental justice movement from its inception and Angela now works with the Southern Organizing Committee and Greenpeace in organizing young people across the South around environmental justice issues. Her successful work helped to prevent the installa-

tion of a PVC plant in Wallace, La. and a hazardous waste incinerator in Noxubbe, Miss. She is also an assistant pastor at Saint Delight UCC in Louisburg, N.C.

To today's young people, Angela Brown says, "Our generation is faced with a continual epidemic of drugs, the culture of violence, the sin of racism, the pain of miseducation, the divisiveness of class, and the indecisiveness to truly end sexist oppression. As young people we cannot continue to aid in these kinds of environmental atrocities. It is our human right all over this world to work, live and play in a healthy environment. I hope all people, but especially young people, will hear my call to struggle and demand their human rights."

Justin Deegan
Justin Deegan is an Arickara/Sioux from the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. Currently a student at the University of North Dakota State University at Fargo, Justin's Indian name is We Cha Sha Nahzin, which means "Standing Man" in Dakota Sioux, a name given to him by his father who taught him that "when a man falls down, he must get back up again."

Justin was named North Dakota Indian Student of the Year in 1994 by the North Dakota Indian Education Association and was selected for Who's Who for three consecutive years. A natural leader, Justin has served as National vice-chair for UNITY, the United National Indian Tribal Youth organization. UNITY believes that as Indian youth their members can make changes through their 12 inter-related goals -- Unity, Spirituality, Family, Heritage, Health, Environment, Sovereignty, Mental, Service, Education,



"I am convinced that...we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing oriented' society to a 'person oriented' society"
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

violated. And, like Martin Luther King, we must be prepared to put our bodies on the line to struggle for the realization of our vision and our dreams.

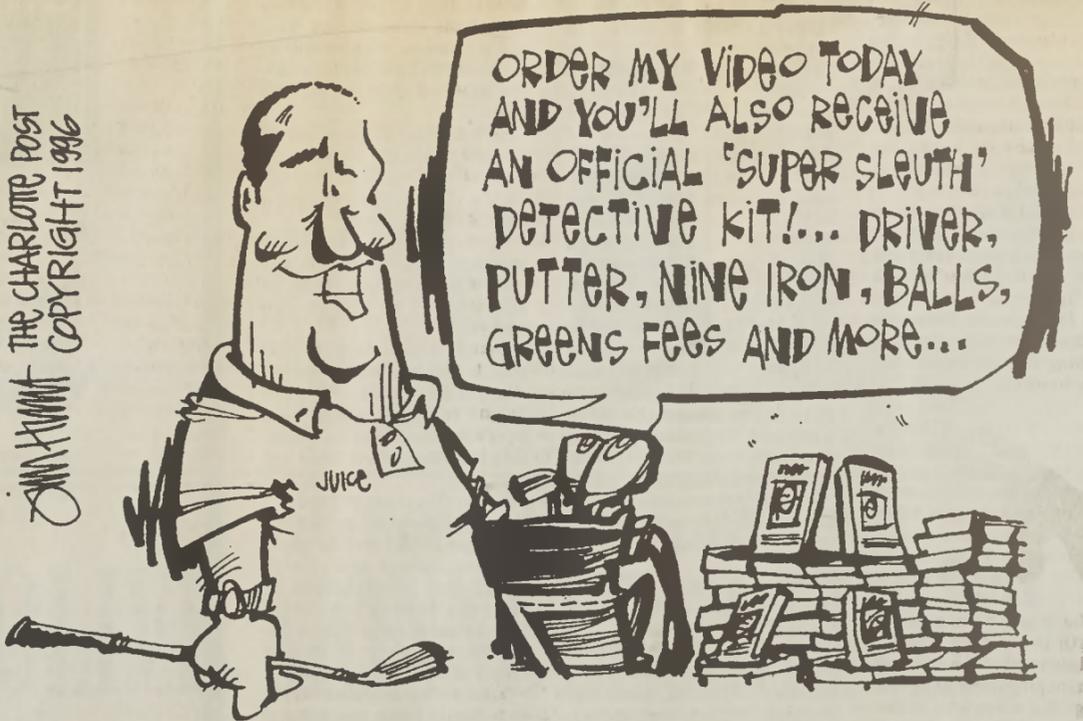
The recent general strike and turmoil in France demonstrates that somewhere in the world there are working people who are unwilling to accept the demands of the corporate elite that the safety net for poor and working people and the middle class be dismantled to protect the competitive position and profitability of the bankers and bosses, shareholders and bondholders and the captains of commerce and industry. Similarly, in the Chiapas region of Mexico, the indigenous people have revolted to resist the destructive impact of NAFTA and other international and national policies being imposed on them by an undemocratic and corrupt government. The Zapatista Liberation Front is determined that there will be a new day, a new society for indigenous people into the 21st century. They are not prepared to accept the status quo, to suffer and die.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Black people, people of color and poor and working people must be equally determined to become

ungovernable in the U.S. in defense of the basic human rights of the vast multitude of people who are being victimized by the Contract on America. As Martin Luther King once put it, "true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that the edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring." We must offer a vision of social transformation, of a radically changed society where social and economic justice and genuine democracy are essential to the very fabric of the nation.

It is that vision which will enable black people, people of color and poor and working people to rise above the constraints of our current circumstances to struggle for the dawning of a new day. It is that vision, the capacity to imagine and dream that things can be different that will energize the apathetic and indifferent to forge a peoples movement that will create a new tomorrow. In the face of formidable odds we are challenged to choose life over death.

RON DANIELS is an activist and writer from East Elmhurst, N.Y.



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Physical and Community.

An athlete and scholar, Justin is also a Sunday School teacher in the church which his mother pastors in Bismarck. He says, "I have become more aware of education for myself and for other Indian youth. I realize it is a tool for us to become more prosperous and spiritual. Throughout my journey I have dedicated myself toward protecting our environment and being drug/alcohol free." One of Justin's role models is Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and he hopes to one day be elected to public office and serve in Washington.

Justin Deegan and Angela Brown are just two of our future Martin Luther King, Jr.s. I think Dr. King would be proud.

BERNICE P. JACKSON is executive director for the Commission for Racial Justice.