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Financing our own oppression

By James Clingman.

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Have you kept up with the progress of the reparations movement as it pertains to getting firms that benefited from slavery, such as insurance companies and banks, to pay reparations to the descendants of slaves? The argument is that since those businesses gained much of their wealth from financing and insuring the ships and other instruments of oppression utilized during the most heinous treatment of a people in history, they should also pay reparations.

From what I understand there are several well documented cases, put together by top-notch legal experts, that will make significant progress toward reparations when they come to court. Some are also calling for boycotts against the companies involved if they do not voluntarily admit their involvement and compensate black people for obtaining their wealth on the backs of our ancestors.

That's not bad idea as far as I am concerned. I spent a little time with Conrad Worrill on two occasions during the past six months, and I am thoroughly impressed with his knowledge of the reparations movement and his focus on bringing it to fruition. He is doing righteous work and we should support him and all of those, including our dear elder, Robert Brock, who have fought and continue to fight for what is right.

As I was reading an article in Cincinnati Magazine, titled, "The Baptist Economy," which noted the "wild-eyed glee" with which city officials and the virtually all-white Cincinnati Convention and Visitors' Bureau looked at the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., it occurred to me that Black people, and in this case, black churches, are financing the oppression of Black people as well.

You may have read my column, "The Rest of the Story," where I discussed the Baptist Convention deciding to come to Cincinnati despite being asked to stay away because of the Cincinnati boycott against travel and tourism to this city. When I read the piece in Cincinnati Magazine, I was even more assured that my assessment was absolutely correct: It's always about the money; and we are financing our own oppression.

Done under the tired mantra of "racial healing" the Baptist convention will bring \$21 million dollars to a city in which oppression continues to run rampant. The only healing will be financial, and that will be for the oppressors. Vanessa Williams, the new spokesperson for the National Underground Railroad "Freedom" Center, came to town and said it was good that the Freedom Center was "built by black hands" and was a symbol of healing, which are more statements that not only are incorrect but also would make the ignorant person think all is well in Cincinnati. I wonder how much her compensation is.

Black leaders and black folks in general should stop financing the oppression of their own people. But since it seems they are not ready to stop this kind of madness, I think we should implement the same tactics against them that have been brought against the insurance firms and the banks. They financed the oppression of black people, and now black organizations are financing the oppression of black people. Why should we have a double-standard? Don't you think that because everything is about money, especially for many of our so-called black leaders, we should seek reparations from our own organizations as well?

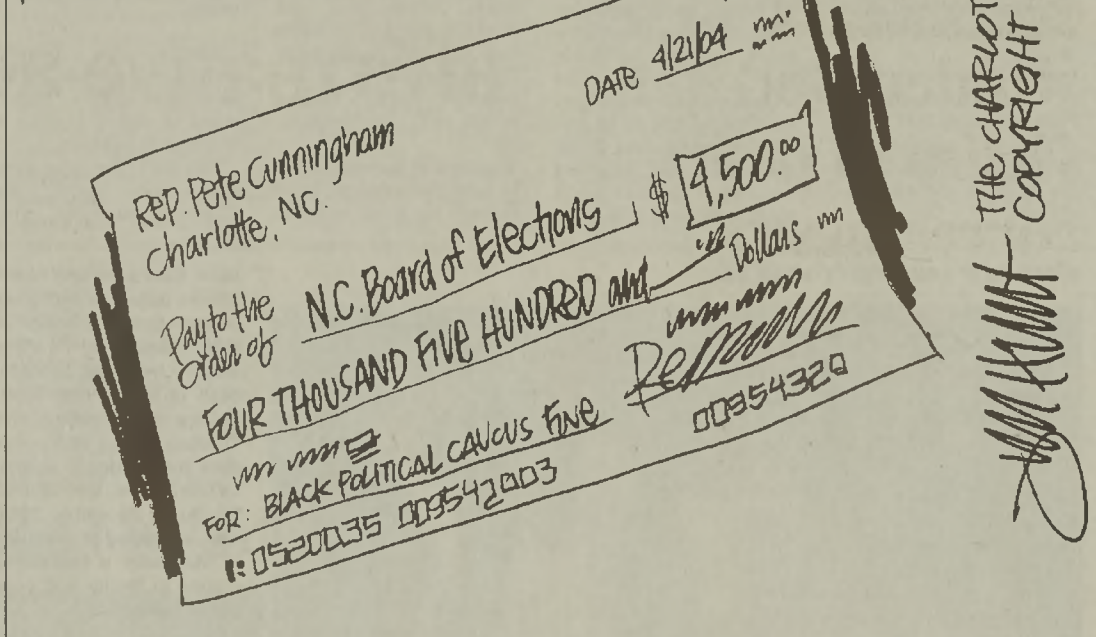
Crazy, you say? I don't think so. How can we ask for recompense from white-owned companies and not seek it from black organizations that continue to finance our oppression by committing black dollars to cities where black people are oppressed? Turnabout is fair play, and in the case of hundreds of millions of black tourism dollars being looked upon with "wild-eyed glee" by white-dominated convention centers that get much of their funding from black tax dollars, our acquiescence to calls from our organizations (and local black politicians) to go against boycotts is unconscionable. Despite the horrendous treatment of our people, both economically and otherwise, all over this country, we continue to mimic the overseers and the crumb snatchers of the past, selling out for a few dollars, hotel suites, and banquets.

Yes, we must seek reparations from anyone and any company that benefited from the misery of black folks. We must support Brother Worrill in any way we can, and we must never give up. During a retrospective on Harold Washington's mayoral tenure earlier this year in Chicago, I heard Worrill say, "Yes, our initial lawsuit was denied, but that's just the beginning." He went on to ask, "Do you know how long it took for Black people to gain the victories of the past? Do you know how many lawsuits had to be filed to remedy other wrongs against us? This is just the start and we will continue to fight no matter how long it takes."

The same attitude must be applied to these sell-out Black organizations that do nothing but help hold us down. Their leaders are interested in two things: Money in their pockets and not offending those who give it to them. They will continue to finance our oppression, just like the financiers during slavery, if we don't hold them accountable for the dollars we give them.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.

I WONDER IF THEY'LL TAKE A CHECK?!!!



Uptown giveaway, CMS blame game



DON REID

You sure can't blame Spectrum Properties for asking the city for \$9 million to help build an entertainment complex on the old convention center site.

After all, the city has given your tax money to many companies over the years, including McDonald's Restaurant and Hotel on Beatties Ford Road, Time Warner Cable, Johnson & Wales University, Bank of America Stadium, Rooms to Go, Convention Center Hotel, not to mention the millions lost on the failed retail project, CityFair and \$300 million for the uptown arena.

Spectrum is holding private meetings with elected officials and the city is doing a big shell game with your money. It works like this: The banks provide \$50 million to help with arena financing with the understanding that the city will repay the banks with city property or cash from the

sale of city property. The old convention center property is given the banks, for \$14 million, in part payment of the \$50 million loan. The banks then sell the old convention center to Spectrum Properties, who now ask the city to contribute \$9 million to assist in developing the site.

If the city council accepts this deal, the city will, in fact have received only \$5 million for the old convention center...\$14 million from the banks less \$9 million rebate to Spectrum, equals \$5 million! In the early 1990's, we were told that a new convention center would pay for itself by bringing events and people uptown...it didn't. We were then told, that building parking and a convention center hotel was the answer to poor convention center attendance...it wasn't.

Now we're told that biggest complaint from bookers of events at the convention center is not having something to do at night and on weekends, thus the need for an entertainment complex...and your money to build it. The uptown power structure has spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the uptown area, while the politicians

have ignored the rest of us. Road construction and maintenance, water run-off, crime prevention, sidewalk construction, garbage collection and other basic services have taken a back seat to uptown investment, mainly forms of entertainment. If the free market had been allowed to determine its value and use, the old convention center site could have been sold and developed years ago. When it comes to the big money issues, our town is controlled by the uptown power structure and our weak-kneed mayor and city council do not have the will or the courage to resist. There is no reason to believe that this deal will be any different...Spectrum will get the money and you will take the risk and get the bill!

You just knew it had to happen. The race card is now being played in the controversy about where to spend school construction money. Rev. Casey Kimbrough of Mount Carmel Baptist Church supercharges the racial rhetoric by charging that shifting of construction money from low income center-city areas to the suburbs "is like robbing hungry children to feed those who have

plenty." His charge, which is patently false, immediately transforms the argument from common sense and reason to one of emotion, division and fear.

If Rev. Kimbrough is looking for someone to blame, he need like no further than recent school boards, dominated by blacks and liberals, which used race as the chief factor in deciding school locations, size, expansions and repairs. If, instead of integration, education had been the chief aim of our school system, the savings would have more than paid for the repairs to old schools and the construction of schools in the areas of growth.

Sadly, school board policies have contributed to the dropout problem and the graduation of thousands who can barely read and write. I would be interested to know just how much money it is costing the taxpayers to augment the education of these students failed by the system, at CPCC.

DON REID is a former Charlotte City Council member and founding member of Citizens for Effective Government, a conservative watchdog group.

Life through the eyes of white folks



BILL FLETCHER

I think that what struck me was her smile. You must receive these flyers and postcards all the time. On one side is an advertisement. On the other side is a picture of one or two people who have been missing.

The other night I happened to look down at the mail and saw the picture of a very pleasant smile. I stopped and decided to read the information. It appears that this woman, and I assume her son, have been missing for nearly one year. I cannot remember ever hearing anything about them in the national or local media. No surprise to you, the reader, they are both black.

I have written about this before, back during the disappearance and national coverage of Chandra Levy, but once again we witness the stark contrast in the manner in which black life is viewed by this society compared to white life. A few weeks ago a white college

In America, equal weight is rarely given to issues that impact African Americans

student's disappearance and recovery became, for several days, a national news story. Let's leave aside that it appears that the entire disappearance was a charade. Think about the events unfolding on this planet: the Middle East is in flames; ethnic cleansing is taking place in the western part of the Sudan; the U.S. economy remains sluggish with the bizarre contrast of some job creation along with increased unemployment. Yet the media has time to focus on the disappearance and recovery of a white college student from Madison, Wis., but cannot find the time to call our attention to the disappearance of Marcia and Nicholas Candela.

It is not only that there is a different value put on white life compared to black life and that the media insists that we see the world through the eyes of white people. To put it another way, if something is not seen by white people or through

the eyes of white people, for all intents and purposes, it is not seen. Thus, the regular disappearance of black women and children, in some cases apparent runaways, in other cases, kidnappings, enslavement and murder, is simply not relevant as far as the media is concerned. It is happening to a population that seems to be viewed as only relevant when it is rioting or entertaining, not when it is suffering.

It is not only a matter of disappearances that make one consider this. The Washington Post recently ran articles on South Africa, 10 years after the end of apartheid. The articles could have been collectively entitled "South Africa as seen through the eyes of white people." It was fascinating that the entire post-apartheid era was interpreted largely through the experiences of white people. It was as if the black people were background to the real

story. The failure of establishment institutions to appreciate these two interrelated problems is as much an obstacle to the fight for equality and an end to racism as is the destruction of affirmative action. The devaluing of the black experience and the elevation of the white viewpoint and experience undermines the possibility for the civilizing of U.S. society. Instead, it perpetuates the marginalization of Black America and the view of us as the perpetual "other," to be treated eternally with suspicion, distrust and, indeed, hatred.

Let's look for Marcia and Nicholas Candela. Perhaps in searching—and hopefully finding them—we can also discover whether humanity has regained a foothold in the USA.

BILL FLETCHER is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center formed to raise awareness in the United States about issues facing the nations and peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. He also is co-chair of the anti-war coalition, United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org). E-mail him at bfletcher@transafricaforum.org.