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Gerald O. Johnson CEO/PUBLISHER
Robert L. Johnson PUBLISHER/GENERAL MANAGER

Herbert L. White
EDITOR IN CHIEF

So much for gas-out days in U.S.

By James Clingman
SPECIAL TO THE POST

May 19 was Gas-Out Day. What's next? A Gas-Out Week? Maybe an entire week of not purchasing gasoline by millions of consumers might raise the eyebrows of the oil barons, but I doubt it will get much more than that. The guys and girls who control the oil are greedy crooks, plain and simple. But then, what does that make us? Suckers?

What does it say about people who have been so accustomed to relatively low gasoline prices that we are willing to buy gas-guzzling vehicles, some of which resemble Bradley Fighting Vehicles and luxury ocean liners? What does it say about us if we continue to drive our vehicles on meaningless trips, too lazy to walk or ride a bicycle or a motor scooter instead? Yes, the oil barons have their faults, and plenty of them, but who's buying their oil?

Of course, "This is business," as Nino Brown said. Sure, it's not fair; it's not ethical; but it is business, and we must look at it that way. Not buying gas for one day, as you may have noticed, does nothing to change the situation in which we find ourselves. Consumers who are upset about the price of an item or commodity must not only change their behavior, they must also sustain that change. One day ain't gonna get it y'all. (Sorry for the bad grammar, Bill Cosby.)

What would you do if you were selling something and folks kept buying more of it, regardless of how many times and how high you raised the price? We love our cars, in some cases they are our gods, and we love to ride. The bad thing about it is that we buy the most expensive vehicles, the heaviest vehicles, and the lowest fuel-efficient vehicles. Thus, we demonstrate every day, via our proclivity for the finer things in life, especially our cars, that we are willing to pay whatever the price is for gasoline. So, what do we expect from greedy, money-hungry oil barons?

Do I believe the price of gas is manipulated? Of course, I do. I wrote an article a few weeks ago titled, "The Great American Oil Slick," which discussed those beliefs. But dealing from a purely economic perspective, you know, supply and demand, it's not so much about the crooks who are stealing from us each time we fill up, as it is about us, the consumers, who demand more and more gas regardless of the price. We are literally telling those about whom we complain that we are willing to fatten their coffers even more, as long as they keep supplying our demand.

What do we do? Well, we can change our penchant for military defense vehicles in our driveways, and do some downsizing of our own. The auto dealers have sold us a bill of goods by manufacturing a car/truck mutation called an SUV, and convincing us it is safer and will make us feel respected, powerful, and invulnerable. They make vehicles that will pass everything on the road except a gas station, we line up to buy them, and then complain about the price of gasoline. Does that make any sense?

Downsize; get back to basics. Cut down on unnecessary trips; walk, if you can. Do whatever it takes to decrease your demand for this precious fuel, not just for one day, but for the rest of your life. You may also want to petition your state government to cut back on the taxes they attach to a gallon of gasoline, which in some cases is as much as 40 percent.

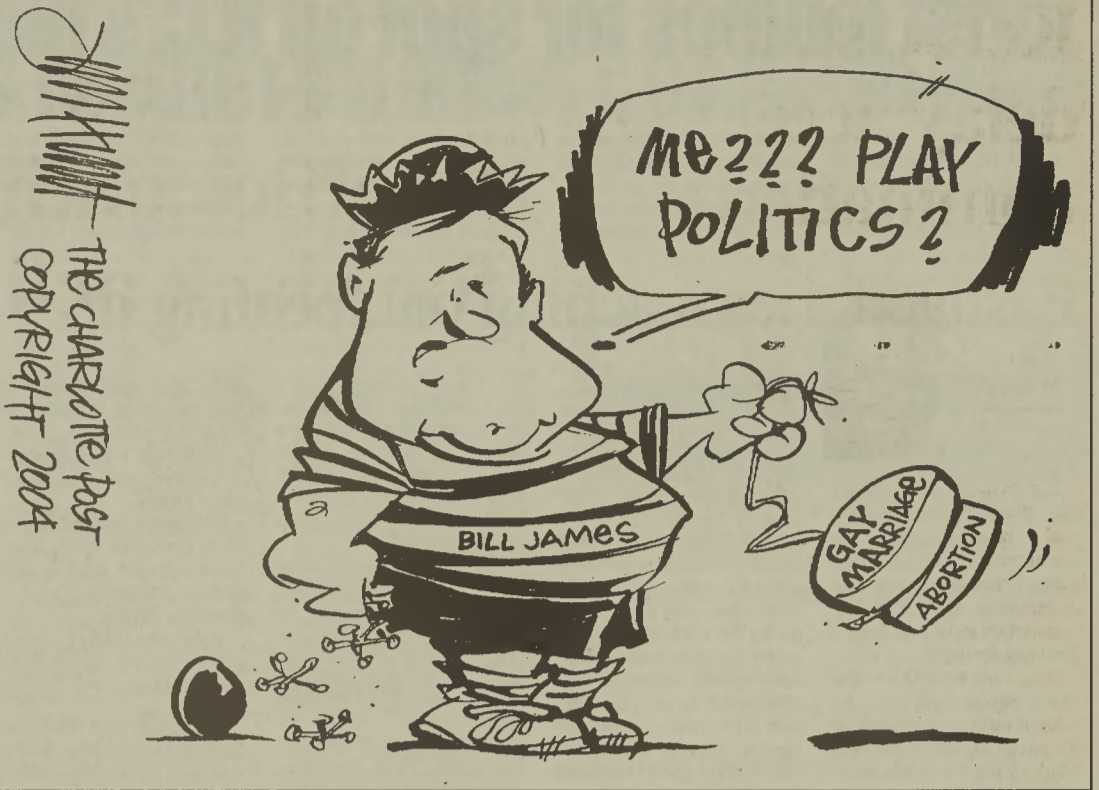
Check this out. When a few terrorists "attempted" to destroy an oil depot in Iraq, before the day ended, despite their being killed and not one drop of oil being lost in the process, the price at the pump immediately went up about 15 cents per gallon in my area. On the other hand, when the Saudis recently agreed to increase oil production, immediately, to help lower the cost of gasoline, prices did not decrease. In fact, on the same news report "experts" said consumers would not likely see a price reduction until after the "peak driving season," about two months after the Saudi concession. What's up with that?

Bottom line: We know what's going on with this gasoline thing. Why do you think our "vice" president would not disclose his discussions with his energy buddies such as Ken Lay of Enron, et al? Why, despite the close relationship between Daddy Bush and the Royal Saudi Family, are we paying through the nose for oil? Why do the major automobile manufacturers continue to resist doing what they have known how to do for many years: raise the fuel efficiency of their vehicles? Why are we not exploring and exploiting other energy sources? We haven't we built an oil refinery in this country since the 1970s? Why? Why? Why?

Because of the greed and lust for more money by the oil crooks, and the U.S. consumer's insatiable appetite for and dependency upon gasoline, that's why. I have a feeling it also has something to do with petrodollar hegemony versus the euro, but I'll save that for another column.

As we "sucker consumers" ponder our next move, we may want to go back to our Economics 101 notes and review the information on "Elasticity of Demand" before we call for another Gas-Out Day.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African American Studies department, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald Newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce. He hosts the radio program, "Blackonomics," and has written several books. Contact him at www.blackonomics.com or 513/489-4132.



Bill Cosby wasn't totally wrong

GEORGE E. CURRY



It's been more than two weeks since Bill Cosby created a stir with comments that seemed to demean "the lower economic" African Americans that he claims are willing to pay \$500 for sneakers but not half that amount for educational tools.

Cosby said, "These people are not parenting. They are buying things for their kids — \$500 sneakers for what? And won't spend \$200 for 'Hooked on Phonics'... They're standing on the corner and they can't speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk: Why you ain't? Where you is?... And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. And then I heard the father talk... Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads... You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth."

Ironically, a week after Cosby shocked everyone at a 50th anniversary celebration of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in

Washington, D.C., "60 Minutes" did an anniversary piece on the "I Have a Dream Program" in which benefactors make an early commitment to poor, inner-city youth by agreeing to pay for their college education if they do well in school.

What the program showed was that the people in the very neighborhoods that Cosby derided in his comments can do well in school, in college and in life, if they are inspired, provided tutoring and other educational assistance. In most cases, the students scored high on national tests, excelled academically and, after graduating from college, fulfilled their childhood dreams.

Rather than wasting so much time criticizing Bill Cosby's criticisms, let's take just the tutoring aspect of the "I Have a Dream" program and see how we might use that to impact the lives of millions. While only the Bill Cosbys of the world have the financial means to adopt an entire classroom and pay for everyone's college education, that doesn't mean the rest of us are powerless.

We all have talents that we can use to teach and inspire our young people, most of whom will not benefit from a "I Have a Dream" program. In a real sense, if many of us would devote time to regu-

larly tutoring students, we could have an even larger impact on young people than the "I Have a Dream" programs around the country. Ultimately, that's far more beneficial than the endless discussion about Cosby.

You couldn't tell it from the media coverage but Cosby's comments were made in the larger context of our needing to reclaim our community. He said, "I am talking about parenting. It is time for us to turn the mirror around. We have to take back the neighborhood."

In Washington, Cosby deplored the glorification of the gangster lifestyle, with the fancy clothes and cars, scantily-clad women, and money derived from illegal activities. On that point, Cosby is correct.

This is the only time in our history that hoodlum behavior — whether it's dress, language or lifestyle — has been glorified by African Americans. Look back at photographs from the civil rights protests in the 1960s and you'll see men wearing suits and ties and women in high heels, knowing that cops were likely to physically attack them. It was a matter of dignity, a matter of pride. It was saying that even though Southern rednecks did not view us as first-class citizens, we viewed ourselves

that way — and we dressed, acted and carried ourselves accordingly.

Approximately 72 percent of all rap music is sold to whites. So black youth are simply conduits to reach rebellious white kids. But when the rap music stops for good, those same white kids will often go on to join their father's company or be given a job by a friend of the family while many African Americans remain unemployed and perplexed. Our young people utter phrases such as "Know what I'm sayin'?" because often, we do not know what they are saying. Sometimes I wonder if they know what they are saying. Furthermore, if I already know what they're saying, they don't need to tell me again.

This may sound like I am being unduly harsh on young people. I am not. But I know that the world will be harsh on them and the best thing we can do is to prepare them for that world — with our dress, with our language and by example.

And that's what I think Bill Cosby was saying, even though he chose his words poorly. In this case, I think I do know what he was sayin'.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Keeping wireless numbers helps all

By Michael K. Powell
SPECIAL TO THE POST

"What's in a name?" There was a time when the right name signaled status and good breeding. In today's high-tech society, a better question might be "what's in a phone number?"

Nobody knows the answer to that question better than America's business people — from the smallest mom-and-pop organization to the largest corporations. Before a meeting can be set up or a sale made, the customer has to make that first call. That is why memorable numbers are sought after and millions are spent on advertising to drum phone numbers into the consumer consciousness.

As the use of mobile phones has increased, the inability to change carriers without changing phone numbers has emerged as a major problem. For a business user, making the change may involve anything from changing business cards, letterhead, and directory listings (multiply those costs by the number of employees involved) to aban-

doing expensive "branding" campaigns and a reservoir of consumer "good will" to start from scratch in building customer associations with a new number.

Faced with these costs, it is not at all surprising that some wireless users may have stayed with a carrier despite dissatisfaction with the service simply to avoid the expense and hassle associated with changing their telephone numbers.

All of this changes on May 24. Last fall, the Federal Communications Commission set a deadline for wireless carriers serving the country's 100 largest markets to upgrade their networks to make telephone numbers portable. On May 24 that requirement applies to the rest of the country, extending to rural and small market enterprises the same benefits enjoyed by their urban counterparts.

Increasingly, we live in a world of virtual transactions where technology shrinks the space between buyer and seller. In this environment, the ability to retain a phone number while switching wireless carriers gives companies control over an increasingly important part of their corporate image — their digital identity. Number portability benefits not only companies that switch carriers, but also those who remain loyal. Transferring control of a number from carrier to subscriber reduces the carriers, leverage in retaining customers tempted by the competition. Better yet, portability encourages carriers to take better care of their customers to ensure they are not tempted in the first place. That benefits everyone.

The new requirement has its roots in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, where Congress directed the FCC to adopt rules enabling consumers to keep their telephone number when they switch from one provider of traditional, wireline telephone service to

another. Given the explosive growth of wireless communications, the Commission put wireless carriers on notice six years ago that the rules would apply to them as well, and established a deployment schedule. That staged roll-out schedule makes portability available nationwide this month.

Where wireless number portability is already available, over 3 million people have taken advantage of it by switching from one wireless carrier to another. I am one of them — and am happy to report a seamless transition. While it is difficult to predict whether the level of demand for portability in smaller markets, it is critical that rural and small market enterprises have this capability. Making a switch is not nearly as important as the freedom to do so, which strengthens the subscriber's ability to negotiate with service providers for things like lower prices, improved quality of service, and better coverage.

MICHAEL K. POWELL is chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.