

# On Being An Enabler An Expertise of White with Black

By: Paul Dawson Carre' (HB)

For most of my professional life, some fifty years or so, I have worked for the white establishment, people high up in business, banking, philanthropic institutions, government (local, state, and federal), and higher education, most of the significant colleges and universities east of the Mississippi.

At the same I have lived in a black world, white with black, a rare and unique life event, one that has awarded me the insight and the expertise — the access, leverage, and power — to be an: Enabler, a middleman, a broker, if you will, for black folks and black institutions, helping them get what otherwise they could not get: personal and professional resources — money, credit, health, housing, justice and leverage. And access to what most white folks have access to: OPM: Other People's Money.

Over this life, I have not advertised my self-appointed status as an "enabler." I just did it whenever and wherever I could for some splendid black folks, old and young, educated or not, female and male, with, for the most part, splendid results for them and their communities.

In Washington, D.C., as special counsel to the Federal City Council, that all-white business power structure, we helped put together housing in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood, mass transit (Metro) for all of that urban area, affordable transit through all of the black neighborhoods and business opportunities in all of Southwest Washington as well as good housing.

In Baltimore, MD as special counsel to the Greater Baltimore Committee, another business power center, we helped get business credit on the private side for small black businesses and better access to health care, with emphasis on preventive medicine and most important, good nutrition.

In Cleveland, as special counsel to The Philanthropic Institutions (55 of them), we persuaded the biggest banks in town

to form and fund what came to be known as "The Five-Bank Committee," essentially a no-nonsense resource for black folks to secure good market-rate and subsidized housing in Hough and Fairfax and East Cleveland, the three black neighborhoods around University Circle. And through Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, Sinai Hospital, and all the other institutions there, we helped get better jobs and health and justice and entertainment and education for black families.

In Boston, as special counsel and as Professional Trustee for the Boston Plan, a joint venture for some 155 philanthropic institutions, we helped get better access to all the Harvard Institutions in the Fenway and the Back Bay, helped stop Harvard from building an atomic energy steam plant next to significant black neighborhoods and advised the mother church (The First Church of Christ, Scientist) how to work with black neighborhoods in securing such basics as housing, health and security.

In Texas, Palestine, to be exact, in East Texas for a year, pro bono, we lived with some black families, some 300 individuals, who also lived in Tyler and Marshall and Austin and Dallas and San Antonio and elsewhere, to do what no one else had helped them do, develop their own resources — properties passed down to them from generation to generation (natural gas, oil, lakes and streams, forests, arable land, all of that and more) — undeveloped for lack of investment cash, denied blacks by white-owned banks all over Texas, in fact, an economic style all over the South.

I used my own access to the white establishment, powerful people and powerful places, to get real help, the talk and the walk, University of Texas at Austin, The Junior League, The Dallas Morning News, The U.S. Department of Justice, The U.S. Department of Commerce, The U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development, as well as Texas State Government to seed catfish ponds, furnish fertilizer, deliver Ersatz Farm Equipment, like tractors and plows and garden tools.

It all worked like a charm. Those good black families learned how to develop and manage their own properties and enter into the market place for a substantial profit. Even the youngest of them had a seat on both for-profit and not-for-profit entities overseeing all of this.

Two events I shall never forget, perhaps to say that professional "enablers" do live and work at risk, to wit:

Living as I did with the principal black family in Palestine, a rotten little railroad town, I was of course noticed by other black families (all black neighborhoods have keen eyes and ears) until Ella Mae Jones, matriarch and colleague, got a desperate call from one of her own neighbors, asking, "Who is that 'white devil' living over there with you?" A question Ella Mae, ever resourceful, answered by taking me to church, there to be introduced and quizzed by a place with no white faces, and, later on, a place where I, not the black pastor gave the sermon, Yes, entitled: "On Being White With Black."

After church, I joined in with everyone for catfish, chicken, ribs, hush puppies, corn on the cob, greens and watermelon. That's eating!

The other event was not so appetizing, but surely as instructive, to wit: I had been in Palestine almost nine months, doing my thing with these lovely black families, when I got a call from the lead white banker to have lunch at one of his all-white clubs, where over a Jack Daniels, he said to me, in the presence of a few of his cronies: "Mr. Carre' (he pronounced it incorrectly) "We know what you are doing here and we don't like it. You are a 'Nigger Lover' and we don't want you here in Palestine."

I said to him and his pals at that lunch table: "Mr. So-and So, I've never

met an intelligent banker, and I do not expect to, surely not here in east Texas. You let these black families deposit a little cash for their Christmas funds, but you refuse to help them help themselves, help their families, help their neighborhoods, and whether you see it or not, help you in the long run."

"I may, in fact, be 'A Nigger Lover,' but you sir are a white-ass, red-neck father, as stupid as a door knob."

After lunch (and another Jack Daniels), I called the Governor, a fine republican I had known in Washington at Defense, the Agent-in-Charge of the FBI at Dallas, The U.S. Justice Department and a few others to complain that these Palestine racists had abused my Civil Rights and threatened me. That call was heard all over Texas. I had no more luncheon invitations from white bankers.

At Christiansted (St. Croix/United States Virgin Islands) as Special Counsel and Chairman (Pro Bono) to the Solitude Farm Families Funds, I convinced them, all seven of them, to include black economic development as one of their principal philanthropic goals, along with Women's Economic Development, the health sciences, libraries, private higher education, independent education and small creatures, a special fund, almost unknown in philanthropic circles which makes gifts to individuals.

Being an "enabler" was not my idea. I got that from my client and friend, the late Whitney M. Young, Jr., who as Executive Director of The National Urban League hired me to help out with what he called "Project Enable," an indigenous self-help enterprise in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhoods of Brooklyn (New York). Thanks to "Whit" and my own experiences I am now convinced that anyone who cares enough about good cities and good communities, black and white can learn how to be an "enabler."

"Love is the only force capable of transforming  
an enemy into a friend."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

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