

'Minority' Programs Keep Us Fighting Over 15 Percent

By: James Clingman
—Guest Columnist—



You have probably heard the term "economic inclusion" being bantered about lately, so here's another question while we're at it. Who is doing the including? Who are they including? How does a public project, or one funded with public dollars, come under the authority of a White contractor or developer who, in turn, has the right to "include" a certain percentage of "minorities?" Why is it that White men, for the most part, are always the ones doing the "including" and "minorities" are always the ones being included, to the tune of an average of 15 percent of the pie?

What about the 85 percent of the contracting, the employment, the development and the tourism dollars? Who gets that? And, what entitles them to get it?

Isn't it amazing that we continue to fall for the games people play on us? In Cincinnati, Ohio, my hometown, a disparity study (Croson Study) stated very clearly that Black people and other groups had been discriminated against via city contracting opportunities. What happens? Well, the city council voted to implement a "race-neutral" program, laced with a few small percentage goals, to make up for past discrimination. Mind you, the problem was based on race, but the solution was race-neutral.

We have all sorts of "minority" programs that call for goals, aspirations, good intentions, hopes, wishes, and have encouraging words attached to them. However, they all center on a relatively small percentage of a particular project; that 15 percent (a little more in some cases) is designated for a so-called minority group. Now check this out. The designated minority group, sometimes comprising as many as five or six individual groups, collectively, often has greater numbers than the so-called majority that is given the

right to "include" minorities in public projects.

Does this make sense to you? Does it make sense for Black people to, first, allow ourselves to be called "minorities," and then allow a group of White men to dominate and control our tax dollars to the point that we end up fighting for 15 percent? Why are we competing with other groups for the "minority" share of our tax dollars and allowing the other 85 percent to escape into the hands of White men?

Maybe we should look at the percentages of population or the aggregate number of "minorities" in various areas, and base our economic inclusion efforts on that. Once again, I draw your attention to my hometown. We are building the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center for more than \$100 million. The "goal" for minority inclusion is 25 percent. The Black population is nearly 50 percent and Hispanics and Asians comprise between 5 percent and 7 percent.

First of all, the last time I read my history, the players in the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati, Ohio, were Black folks and White folks, not "minorities." I never learned about a Chinese person swimming or walking across the Ohio River, or a Latino person, or a person from India or Pakistan participating, either by running from slave-catchers or helping slaves escape. That being the case, why then are "minorities" the focus of the Freedom Center's Economic Inclusion Program?

And where is the rule that says White men and women must always be the ones who determine how much everyone else will get? The same thing applies when it comes to other minority programs. Black people are the ones who were discriminated against, but everyone else has stepped up to get the benefits of our pain and suffering. We're gettin' played, y'all!

While we are scrambling to get our share of the 15 percent allotment, others are getting the 85 percent without the slightest problem. And to make it even worse, Black people have to comply with so-called minori-

ty set-aside regulations and horrendous "certification" programs to get a share of such a small piece of the pie. How can you call me and treat me "special" and make me jump through five hoops to get a contract, while White men don't have to jump through any hoops, yet they get the lion's share of public funds and development opportunities? They keep our attention diverted toward 15 percent and they get away with 85 percent in the process.

I can hear the detractors now, saying, "What about the fact that Black people do not have the professional and business capacity to perform even if they were given a greater percentage?"

While it's true there are far too many Black businesses whose annual receipts are far too low, that fact makes the case for more "access" to opportunity, information, education and capital. It makes the case for Black businesses to form partnerships, mergers, and alliances to capture a larger share of the proverbial pie. It makes a case for those in control to spend some of the 85 percent on the things that will enhance the opportunities for Black business development. (Maybe that's what George Bush means by that nonsensical term "affirmative access," no doubt following in his father's footsteps, or missteps, when he coined the term, "a thousand points of light.")

Brothers and sisters, let's stop fighting over a share of 15 percent set aside for "minorities," and start fighting for more of the 85 percent.

(James E. Clingman, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies department and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African-American Chamber of Commerce.)

Summer programs at the Old Salem Children's Museum

Winston-Salem, NC- Parents can now make their summer plans at the Old Salem Children's Museum.

The summer workshop, "Puppets and Prestidigitation," will teach children, nine years and older, how to make puppets and perform a puppet show. The workshop will run June 16-20, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., and will cost \$20. Registration for the class is required and spaces fill early.

The Summer Puppet Series this year will run June 23-August 1. Puppet shows will be performed daily, Monday-Friday, at 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. The cost of the show is included in the \$5 Children's Museum admission and is free to Kater Klub members.

The Old Salem Children's Museum is located in the Frank L. Horton Center in historic Old Salem. For registration or more information, call (336) 779-6150.



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He who wins souls is wise. Proverbs 11:30