

MELODY MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



## Lesson in collective economy

The Nguzo Saba or "The Seven Principles of Blackness" has the potential to be a powerful tool in our continuing quest for true liberation. Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith are the values of Kwanzaa and, if practiced diligently, will assist us in re-creating our communities.

Focusing on Ujamaa - Cooperative Economics - we must understand that no sweeping changes in the current opportunity structure for African Americans can be made without an economic base. The need to learn the economic lessons of our history is evident in the way we mis-manage our institutions, particularly those charged with providing liberation leadership. Far too many black institutions depend upon white philanthropy to exist.

The list of African American organizations which are economically beholden to EuroAmericans includes historically black colleges and universities, as well as civil rights organizations. The very institutions which, by virtue of their professed missions, should be financially independent to be effective, end up compromising their missions because of the desperate need for operating funds provided by corporate America and white philanthropic foundations. Financial compromises leads to compromised leadership.

Kwanzaa is an economic statement when we observe Ujamaa - Cooperative Economics. As we move into the 21st century, the necessity to learn, understand and internalize the power of our collective economic resources will make the critical difference in our attempt to raise our collective self-esteem, demand respect and reconstruct our communities. When we make the conscious effort to spend our dollars within our community, as well as withhold our dollars from those who do not respect us as a people, we are practicing Ujamaa - Cooperative Economics. No one should have to tell you not to fill-up at Texaco, rent a car from Avis, buy products at Circuit City or any other establishment which discriminates against black people.

In her "Last Will and Testament," Mary McLeod Bethune wrote, "As long as blacks are hemmed into racial blocs by prejudice and pressure, it will be necessary for them to band together for economic betterment."

Kelly Miller, the first dean of law at Howard University, once said, "Black people buy what they want and beg for what they need." Clearly, we must financially support our various institutions and businesses and hold them accountable to both quality and the interests of our race, e.g., making sure that black colleges and universities rigorously teach black history to our young people.

Practice Ujamaa. It is a racially correct action with empowerment potential. We must stop being indiscriminate consumers of goods and services and understand our collective economic power - \$400 billion yearly - and act like we know. After all, money, financial stability and the politics of economics are serious business. It is indeed time for African Americans to take ourselves, our money and our race seriously.

# NAACP money spent on clothes and services

By John Minter  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Kelly Alexander Jr. spent an average of \$3,000 per month of N.C. NAACP funds on purchases ranging from intimate apparel to clothes, according to copies of bank records obtained by The Charlotte Post.

Alexander, former president of the N.C. NAACP, made purchases at Victoria Secrets and the J. Peterman Company, a clothing firm in Kentucky. The Victoria Secrets catalog purchases of \$106.25 and \$57.19 were made in on Nov. 19, 1991. The J. Peterman purchases - \$144.40 and \$114.40 - were made in December 1995 on the NAACP's Visa credit card.

Alexander wrote checks for \$1,000 and \$900 to then-NAACP executive director Mary Peeler in January 1995 and March 1995, respectively. A \$300 check was written in February 1995 to Veda Perry, who worked for the state chapter out of the an office in the Alexander Funeral Home.

In October 1993, a check for \$1,525 was written to Uniglobe, a local travel agency, and a check for \$450 was written at the same time to Alexander Limousine.

A Visa card transaction of \$134.56 was made to Paradise Island Ltd. in Nassau, Bahamas on Oct. 17, 1993. And a \$99 Visa transaction was made at The Spectator Ltd. in London on April 8, 1991.

A check for \$500 was written on Nov. 29, 1993 to Kelly M. Alexander Inc.

The spending, much of it for restaurants and hotel bills, was the subject of an audit by the national NAACP, which suspended Alexander in May. He resigned last month after the

national NAACP board gave him 30 days to justify the spending and provide other financial records.

Alexander could not be reached for comment and national and state NAACP officials said they could not discuss financial records.

However, according to bank statements from an account Alexander maintained at the Merrill Lynch investment house, Alexander spent freely from a fund he said was set up as a holding account for state NAACP money.

The organization's former treasurer, James Florence, also maintained a bank account for the organization at United National Bank in Fayetteville. Florence was authorized to pay bills for the state NAACP from that account.

When asked about the account in July, Alexander said it was set up in 1989, after he became N.C. NAACP president and held about half of the state chapter's fund each year until it was needed in the regular operating accounting.

More than \$700,000 flowed through the account over the last seven years. Although there were periodic transfers of funds to the operating account controlled by Florence, Alexander also wrote checks and made Visa purchases from the account.

Other examples of Alexander's spending since Jan. 1, 1995 include:

- \$462.92 per month to Kaiser Health Plans. They apparently paid for a joint health plan for NAACP and Alexander Funeral Home employees. Those payments continued until state board members questioned the arrangement in the fall of 1995. Afterwards, the Kaiser pay-

ments were split into one payment of \$315.44 and another of \$147.48.

- Atlantis Travel was paid \$886 in May 1995.

- NTC Travel, located in Midtown Square, was paid \$4,735.60 in July 1995, \$958.50 in August 1995 and \$636 in November 1995.

- Brisbane Academy, where Alexander's son once attended school and he is a board member, received a \$200 check in April 1995.

- A Visa purchase in January 1995 at Barnes & Nobles bookstore totaled \$163.45.

State NAACP board members said they were unaware of the Merrill Lynch account was being used for regular expenditures until a new board was elected in October 1995.

Questions about that account and other financial matters led to Alexander's suspension and the subsequent audit. An authoritative audit could not be made because financial records such as canceled checks and minutes approving expenditures were not made available to the auditors.

Acting N.C. NAACP president Melvin Alston, a Guilford County commissioner, said the organization's president is not authorized to spend money directly and that checks should be written by the treasurer.

Alston said he could not discuss details of the financial records.

But Alston said he wished national NAACP officials would resolve the situation with Alexander as quickly as possible.

"We are disappointed in the national dragging its feet on this," Alston said. "They assured us something would happen in December, when they gave him 30 days to answer the complaints."

"We haven't heard anything. If Kelly hasn't done anything

wrong, he needs to be cleared. It is unfair to Kelly and his family and it is also unfair to the state conference. We are in a state of limbo."

William Penn, the national

NAACP director of branches, said Tuesday he could not comment about the Alexander situation because it was an internal matter and an investigation was in progress.

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## King leads the way

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King's parents, George and Cathryn Pace, broke barriers when custom dictated otherwise. When Cathryn was fired from her job as a maid for owning a new car, she found new work. And the couple didn't back down from their dream of owning a restaurant.

"I was blessed with good upbringing and a father who gave us the strength to do the right thing all of the time," King said. "Otherwise, it is just too much to think about. You'd go crazy."

Immigrants from South Carolina and Alabama, the Kings left the South in search of opportunity for their children. They found it in Ohio.

King's sister, Janis, owns a clothing store. Her brother George Jr. is a Cleveland city prosecutor. The restaurant that King's family built, the Red Onion, has served the best hamburger in Cleveland for more than 30 years. King, who's divorced, passed that spirit to her own children. Daughter Kara, a graduate of Atlanta's Spelman College, is doing advanced studies at UNC Charlotte. Son Rhett is a sophomore business major at another Atlanta school, Morehouse College.

King is the first to admit she's a fighter.

She held her ground when told by instructors at nursing school that she would never finish. Instead of leaving, she went on, not only becoming a registered nurse, but the first black elected president of her class - twice. She rose from RN to a hospital administrator.

King's ascension to the top position at United Way took many by surprise.

"Well, the United Way traditionally has been a male-dominated white organization," said Madine Fails, president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League. "Her selection for the position is a testament to the diversity of the community. She exhibits leadership by example. She feels that the United Way has not always been diverse enough in the community. She practices diversity internally. She has set a positive tone for the organization."

Indeed, one of King's goals is to increase the diversity and responsiveness of the nation's foremost non-profit organizations, which locally funds everything from Consumer Credit Counseling Services to United Family Services.

"Being in this position makes you schizophrenic," she said with a laugh. "I have multiple customers, so to speak. I have the black community, the white community, the Hispanic community - all of those people. My job has to be appealing to everyone in order to do what is that I have to do. I have to respond to corporate America, but I have to be just as responsive to the black community."

The one thing King refuses to be is "extracted" from the black community. She went through that when she was a nurse.

"I worked in a hospital where you had less than 1 percent black registered nurses," King said. "So the black people were technicians, nurses aides, dietary. They didn't lump me with my black co-workers. I was like the exception. I had to always remind them that I am not an exception."

King made it a point to always eat with other African Americans to show them and others that she was just another sister with the same problems and concerns.

"In spite of who I am," she said, "at the end of the day I am still a black woman. I am dealing with the all things that black folks deal with that other folks would probably look at me and be shocked that I would be experiencing those things."

King's blackness not only presents a challenge in her private life, but professionally.

"I have to know more about so many different things," she said. "The circle has so many different things. I have to not only solve the problem but think about how I solve the problem, to make sure how I solve the problem is politically correct to the rest of the community. It is not just about going in, any place on either side and solving the problem. It's how I will be perceived. Will I be looked on some negative basis for making a decision? Will I be seen as aggressive or assertive? You're thinking about all that."

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