

Collective work for same goal

Mature people take on the responsibility

MELODYE MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



The work of Ujima - Collective Work and Responsibility - is the work of a mature people, doggedly seeking equality at the turn of the millennium. The work of building and maintaining our community together, making our sisters and brothers problems, our problems and solving them together, has become a most arduous task. Or, as influential organizer and activist, T. Thomas Fortune has said, "We have taken on no child's play..."

When it came to the spirit of collective work and responsibility, there was a time when the most talented and gifted of our people thought about nothing else. That was the time of abolitionists, underground railroads, anti-lynching campaigns and normal schools. Those times produced the intellectualism of the Harlem Renaissance, the music and poetry of jazz, the steadfast determination of the Civil Rights Era and the defiance of the Black Power Movement. The unintended result was a tragic misinterpretation of integration: abandon your own and join with others (who do not want to join with you).

The impact of this historical misstep has been felt across black America. Where we once knew and understood the lessons of our history, we've forgotten. Where we once had a clear understanding of who the enemy really is and how we must stay connected to each other for complete liberation, we've lost it. Where we once owned and supported businesses within our communities, we've abandoned them. Today, most black communities now depend upon outsiders to service our most basic needs, from groceries to shoe repair, from dry cleaning and laundry services to the education of our children.

We desperately need to operationalize the concept of Ujamaa, Cooperative Economics: "To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together." Karenga's words are not new. In her "Last Will and Testament," Mary McLeod Bethune wrote, "As long as [African Americans] are hemmed into racial blocs by prejudice and pressure, it will be necessary for them to band together for economic betterment." For a people who generate over \$400 billion dollars a year, we ought to be doing better. So why aren't we?

The obvious answer seems to be the most overlooked. Until we make a conscious decision, individually and collectively, to learn, understand and internalize the lessons of our history, we will continue to repeat the mistakes, add on new ones and, ultimately, change nothing.

Our priorities and the way we spend our money are clear indicators of the problem. For example, did you know that the "blaxploitation" film, "Boyz n the City," made over \$17 million, while the historically accurate (and relevant) movie "Rosewood," just barely made \$2 million? Think about it.

Review board called for

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review by the Public Safety Committee, would make Charlotte the first N.C. city and one of about 70 U.S. cities with independent review panels. The General Assembly would have to approve any board.

A change in the proposal called the "Cannon Amendment" would allow the board to make its recommendation to the city manager, who would have the authority to discipline or fire officers. Under current law, the chief of police can recommend officers be fired, but the Civil Service Board must vote to confirm termination. That addition, Cannon believes, could help win support among critics who fear any board's decisions could be colored by politics.

"Now that I have something tangible, the overall support is going to be different beforehand," he said.

Calls for an independent panel first surfaced three years ago when Windy Gail Thompson, an unarmed black motorist, was shot and killed by Officer Mark Farmer during a stop for suspected drunk driving. Those demands were renewed last year when another unarmed African American, James Willie Cooper was shot and killed by white Officer Michael Marlow.

Under Cannon's proposal, the board would investigate complaints ranging from the use of deadly force to verbal and physical harassment. Don Reid, chairman of the Public Service Committee, has said he'd consider a board that only reviewed incidents of deadly force.

Acknowledging that the majority of Charlotte-Mecklenburg officers are professionals, Cannon said a citizens panel would be the best way to ensure police are held responsible for their actions.

"Officers who are doing a good job need not be watching over their shoulder," he said. "If 99 percent of officers are doing their job, what this would do is work to correct the behavior of that 1 percent."

City council has turned away attempts at a review panel before. Mayor Pat McCrory said after the Cooper shooting that the city has enough boards to investigate police and another panel would be a waste of money and time. In addition to police clearing Marlow in the Cooper shooting, District Attorney Peter Gilchrist also said Marlow acted properly. A U.S. Justice Department investigation into possible civil rights violations is pending.

"I've always stated that we do have a review board right now," McCrory said in December.

"The city council has reviewed previous cases in addition to our community relations department. Maybe the question should be 'Is there a need for another review board or another investigation.' At this point, I haven't seen the rationale for five investigations versus four."

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Business execs speak up

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ty believes is important to our future - from quality streets to quality social services to quality cultural development."

A date for the forum will be announced soon. The Urban League effort will be coordinated by Joe Martin, corporate affairs officer at NationsBank; Henry Doss, senior vice president for marketing at First Union; Peter Keber, senior vice president at NationsBank and a former Mecklenburg Commissioner, and Madine Fails, president of the Urban League.

Fund gets a record donation

Money for scholarships

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