

BLACKONOMICS

Controlling the money

"Let me issue and control a nation's money and I care not who writes the laws."
- Mayer Amschel Rothschild.

I often wonder if most Black people in America really understand the across-the-board impact economics has on our daily lives. Or, have we just been beaten down so badly that we have fallen into a state of apathy when it comes to our collective pursuit of economic empowerment? The above quote by Rothschild always reminds me of the kind of nation and world in which we reside. It also makes me even more aware of Black folks' economic position in this country, and our lack of emphasis on what's really important vis-à-vis real power.

What are the messages being given to Black people by many of our leaders? Well, they run the gamut from "civil rights" to "voting rights" to "gay rights" to "immigration reform" to someone calling one of us or all of us a name we don't like. Many unsuspecting Blacks are riled about issues that do not and will not affect us one iota when it comes to being able to obtain power for ourselves; and we

spend an inordinate amount of time caught up in nonsensical discussions that only keep us from devoting ourselves to self-empowerment.

Maybe we are simply unwilling to "pay the cost to be the boss," as B.B. King likes to say. Or, maybe the "cost of doing business" is just too high for us. Maybe we just want to continue to buy everything and anything other folks make and distribute rather than do those things for ourselves. Maybe we are just content to be the primary consumers in this nation.

The engine of the U.S. economy is fueled by consumption, which is 70 percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and that does not include purchases of new housing. Our current GDP is more than \$15 trillion. Do the math and see how much is being spent on goods and services.

Doesn't it make sense for Black people to be producing and selling much more than we do presently? With an aggregate annual income of more than \$1 trillion, we could carve out a few niches in the business world and make a veritable killing.

When we look at per capita GDP by country, interestingly, we see that Liberia ranks among the lowest in the world. Why? Well, I have writings from Booker T. Washington to the officials in Liberia and Haiti warning them to be independent and to take full advantage of their land and natural

resources by maintaining ownership and control over them. He admonished them not to allow foreigners to buy their land and use it for their own economic advantage. Unfortunately, they did not follow Washington's advice, and Liberia ended up signing 100 year leases on its rubber tree plantations to Goodyear, and Haiti, now the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, failed to control its beautiful island and turn it into a primary tourist attraction.

We are so hung-up on meaningless and powerless political discussions, and instead of mimicking even the smallest measure of what Rothschild said, we obviously keep thinking the politicians are going to take care of us. But they keep telling us things that will not move us forward economically. When it comes to economic advocacy, where is our voice in Washington?

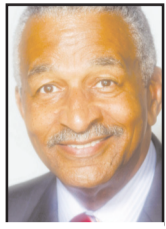
Let's be honest. Over the past 50 years, Black people have cast millions of votes. We have helped elect thousands of Black public officials - and White ones, too. In 2012, Black people voted at a higher rate than other minority groups and by most measures surpassed the White turnout for the first time. What has that gotten us, as it pertains to what Rothschild said? Suppose for the past 50 years we had cast our "little green ballots," as Booker T. directed us, to build our own economic

infrastructure and support system. Had we done that, we too could say it does not matter who "writes the laws;" we would be true political power-brokers.

Take reparations, in whatever form you support. What politicians in D.C. are seriously advocating for what Louis Farrakhan called, Reparatory Justice? John Conyers' bill has been languishing for decades now. The president says he does not support reparations for Black people, so where does that leave us? How about the political talking heads on TV? Are they devoting a serious amount of time talking about economic empowerment for Black people, or are they just trying to get us to vote a certain way?

Wake up, Black folks! The cost of doing business requires commitment and sacrifice. The Rothschild's were ruthless and unethical, but they knew that economics runs politics. We can build an ethical and moral economic foundation, but we have to jettison our current way of thinking and take on an economic mindset.

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James Clingman

CURRY'S COMMENTS

Republicans are veteran hypocrites on the VA

If you let the Republicans tell it, President Obama is directly responsible for the fiasco at the Veterans Administration. But they don't tell you that fresh off of Memorial Day parade appearances, they are responsible for scuttling legislation that would have expanded benefits for the nation's 22 million veterans and their families.

A measure backed by Obama would have lengthened the period veterans are eligible to receive health care from the VA from five years to 10 years after deployment. The bill also would have allowed the VA to open 27 new health facilities, expand medical and dental care, make more veterans eligible for in-state tuition at public universities, repeal the recent cut in cost-of-living adjustments for new enlistees and extend a program that provides care for veterans with mild to severe brain injuries.

More than 20 military organizations - including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Wounded Warriors Project and Disabled American Veterans - supported the bill.

William A. Thien, commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, submitted a letter saying, "This legislation is the most comprehensive veterans' legislation to be introduced in decades. It contains many of the VFW's priority goals, which will implement, expand and improve both health care and benefit services to all generations of veterans and their families."

Senate Bill S.1982, known as the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, was favored on Feb. 27 in the Senate 56-41. But the measure fell four votes shy of the number needed to overcome a threatened GOP filibuster.

Every Democrat voted for the bill and only two Republican Senators - Jerry Moran of Kansas and Dean Heller of Nevada - voted for the measure.

Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, the ranking Republican on the committee, said: "We have veterans dying from long waits for basic, necessary tests like colonoscopies. Veterans waiting for their disability claims to be processed know all about frustrations and delays at the VA, and adding more individuals to an already broken system doesn't seem wise."

Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader from Kentucky, accused Democrats of engaging in election-year politics, a charge Senate Veterans' Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) denied.

He told reporters after the vote: "The point of the matter is if we had won today...both parties could have gone out and said we finally overcame all of the partisanship we see here in Washington. This could have been a political winner, if you like, and certainly a public policy winner for both Democrats and Republicans."

More than two dozen veterans groups had supported the measure. According to the

Washington Post, Daniel M. Dellinger, national commander of the American Legion, said, "I don't know how anyone who voted 'no' today can look a veteran in the eye and justify that vote. Our veterans deserve more than what they get today."

According to MediaMatters, the watchdog group, the media failed miserably in letting the public know Republicans were blocking the legislation.

"While mainstream media coverage of the serious allegations of improper practices at certain Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health clinics has been extensive in recent weeks, a bill to expand health care for veterans that was blocked by Senate Republicans in February received little attention," it noted.

"...Based on a LexisNexis search television transcripts from February 26 to 28, the veterans health bill was not covered by ABC World News, NBC Nightly News, or CBS Evening News," the media monitoring group said. "Based on a LexisNexis search of news articles from February 26 to 28, neither the New York Times nor the Wall Street Journal reported on Senate Republicans' obstruction of the legislation that would have allowed the VA to open 27 new health facilities."

The media has also done a poor job describing how proposed budget cuts will impact veterans.

For example, the Republican-led cuts to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, will hurt veterans as well other low-income families, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a Washington-based think tank.

"Nationwide, in any given month, a total of 900,000 veterans nationwide lived in households that relied on SNAP to provide food for their families in 2011, a previous analysis of Census data estimated, a report by the CBPP noted. "...For low-income veterans, who may be unemployed, working in low-wage jobs, or disabled, SNAP provides an essential support that enables them to purchase nutritious food for their families."

"...While the overall unemployment rate for veterans is lower than the national average, the unemployment rate for recent veterans (serving in September 2001 to the present) remains high, at 10.1 percent in September 2013. About one-quarter of recent veterans reported service-connected disabilities in 2011, which can impact their ability to provide for their families: households with a veteran with a disability that prevents them from working are about twice as likely to lack access to adequate food than households without a disabled member."

Republicans need to do more than simply wave the American flag.

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Our continuing conversation on race

Donald Sterling, the disgraced San Diego Clippers owner (thus far), is like the proverbial bad penny: he won't go away. He's still trying to whistle the "I'm-not-a-racist" ditty to anyone who'll listen.

His attempts to obscure the obvious have produced two important results. First,

of course, they've confirmed the accuracy of our first impressions. Sterling has shown that the racial sentiments the world heard first on that now-infamous tape aren't just the one-time ravings of a bitterly jealous old man. Secondly, the racism and sexism he's so bluntly put on display multiple times now has, along with other recent developments, underscored that these forms of bigotry in America, while less powerful than before, are still widespread, and will be for a long time to come.

So, it's important to keep including in our conversation on race Sterling, and the chiseling Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy - whose racist comments helped puncture the notion that he was some sort of hero of the Old West fighting against unjust federal intrusion - as individual examples of that broader point.

And now, we can add Robert

Copeland to that list. Copeland, you'll recall, is the now-former police commissioner of the small town of Wolfeboro, N.H., who was ousted after being overheard in a restaurant loudly calling President Obama that long-time favorite slur of White racists. Subsequently, Copeland bluntly declared in an e-mail to the town's two other police commissioners that "I believe I did use the 'N' word in reference to the current occupant of the Whitehouse (sic). For this, I do not apologize - he meets and exceeds my criteria for such." He did not explain his "criteria."

To their credit, residents of the town of 6,300 (of which, according to reports, about 20 are Black; the state's Black population is about 1 percent) quickly and angrily demanded at a packed town meeting that the 82-year-old official resign - a demand that was seconded by a large swath of local and state officials, and the town's most prominent vacationer, Mitt Romney. They represent the Americans of all backgrounds who don't tolerate the old bigotry, whether it's expressed publicly or privately.

Some would say of Copeland - as what was said of Sterling and Bundy - that he's not merely one individual stuck in the past and that is unseemly 'piling-on' to keep condemning him. They say it distracts from the serious discussion we should be having about the far more important manifestations of bigotry.

Others would use the claim

of the NBA's Maverick owner Mark Cuban that "we're all prejudiced" in different ways and that "before we can help others deal [with] racism, we have to be honest about ourselves" as an excuse to, in fact, do nothing. Tainted though we "all" may be by different biases, many of us don't let whatever biases we may have rule our behavior, and we don't use them as an excuse for inaction when we witness the blatant or subtle bigotry of others - as the overwhelmingly White residents of Wolfeboro, N.H. proved.

Their reaction, as I've said, demonstrated anew that confronting individual expressions of bigotry is important in helping illuminate how entrenched anti-Black racism, and bigotry of all kinds remain in the American system as a whole.

After all, the American system and its institutions are, overwhelmingly, run and heavily influenced by White men; By White billionaires and millionaires, like Donald Sterling, who control vast economic empires and move in the most sophisticated and elite of circles. By White police chiefs, and fire chiefs, school superintendents, politicians, and so on, who, like Robert Copeland, hold responsible positions in their communities and thus help operate the country's governmental and civic infrastructure. And by individual owners of all kinds of businesses, like Cliven Bundy, who are always praised as constitut-

ing the backbone of the country.

Remember that - and then consider the racial malice in each of these men's remarks. Cliven Bundy, on a drive-by past a Las Vegas federally subsidized housing project, sees "enough" of some Black residents there to declare all Black people worthless. Donald Sterling's perverse jealousy of Magic Johnson, who has excelled as an athlete, a businessman and a philanthropist, propels him to charge that Black Americans don't help one another. And, finally, according to Robert Copeland's "criteria," Barack Obama, a former United States Senator and the twice-elected president of the United States, is just a n-.

In the comments of these three men, one can take a long walk back through the America's tragic racial past, and understand better why this month's 60th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* finds more Black children attending segregated schools now than in 1980.

That's part of the evidence that continuing to talk about Donald Sterling, Cliven Bundy and Robert Copeland, and other individuals like them isn't a distraction from America's conversation on race but a central part of it.

Lee A. Daniels is a longtime journalist based in New York City. His latest book is *Last Chance: The Political Threat to Black America*.

North Carolina's children will pay the heavy price for coal ash

There's a scene in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince where the wise and good Professor Dumbledore drinks an emerald liquid, partially to quench a great thirst.

The more Dumbledore drinks this liquid, however, the thirstier, sicker, and more crazed he becomes. I read this scene only a few weeks ago, in order to keep up with my eight-year old son who is transfixed by the Harry Potter series. And, although I try to push this sinister scene from my head, it keeps returning as I read the latest news headlines.

First, there was the January news about the Elk River chemical spill, which resulted in several days of unusable water for 300,000

West Virginians. Next, came February's coal ash spill into the Dan River, a short 56 miles from my house, which is still making front-page news in North Carolina. And now we hear that Duke Energy has illegally pumped wastewater from two coal-ash ponds at its Chatham County plant into the Cape Fear River.

I am neither a scientist nor a politician, so I cannot speak to the larger political landscape or scientific ramifications of these accidents. I can only speak to how this directly impacts North Carolina families. As a mother, one of my primary duties is to ensure that my sons get enough water to drink. But now, every time I fill up my sons' water glasses, I pause and wonder: Is this drinking water safe and clean? Or, am I giving my children water that will make them sick like Dumbledore?

Coal ash contains heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, mercury, and zinc that, when ingested, can cause cancer,

developmental delays and behavioral problems. Over 30,000 tons of this coal ash was released into the Dan River when the storm pipe under one of Duke Energy's closed power plants ruptured. Scientists are worried about the long-term impact of the metals bound to this coal ash on the environment and on wildlife up and down the food chain. Although they do not yet know the full impact of these contaminants, we mothers cannot afford to be taking risks with our children.

The job of parents is to protect our children; the job of elected officials and state regulators should be to protect the American people. Why are the NC politicians not doing their job, when we are working our hardest to do ours? What is the point of having regulatory agencies to protect us, when they have been so under-funded that they are powerless or that their mission statements are changed from protecting the public to protecting polluters?

We have not heard the last of the news headlines about coal-ash contamination in NC waterways. Unless changes are made, we will see more of the same. Duke Energy owns 14 coal-fired power plants in North Carolina; the ash ponds around every single one of these plants contain elements in concentrations above state groundwater standards. Many of these unlined earthen lagoons have dams rated as highly hazardous, and all of the lagoons leak. In Wilmington, the leak from those coal ash ponds threatens to contaminate the wells of nearby residents and they cannot rely on the safety of their water supply. Unless the people of NC demand change, Duke Energy, state legislators, and Governor McCrory will keep the toxic coal ash in unlined lagoons forever.

But, there is hope—we can look to our neighbor South

BURROUGHS

Continued from this page

Carolina for ideas on how to clean up coal ash lagoons. Legal action by the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation, and other local groups has led to a commitment from South Carolina's utilities to recycle their coal ash or store it dry in safer lined storage away from waterways. Let's continue to hold Duke Energy and our elected leaders accountable to ensure that toxins will not leak from coal-ash plants into our water. Gov. McCrory needs to tell Duke Energy to follow South Carolina's lead by mov-

ing NC coal ash away from our drinking water sources.

Each time that Harry Potter magically filled his beloved professor's goblet with clean water, the clean water would vanish so that Dumbledore had to drink the toxic water that made him sicker and sicker. Will our goblet contain the clean water? Or, will it contain the toxic kind? The stakes couldn't be higher.

Jessica Nakell Burroughs is a Durham mother of two and a member of *MomsRising.org*, an on-the-ground and online grassroots organization of more than a million people working to increase family economic security, end discrimination against women and mothers.



Jessica Burroughs

BURROUGHS

Continued on this page