

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

Bring Back Our Girls - Not Just A Slogan

By Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq.
Trice Edney Wire

One of my very good friends often quotes R. Buckminster Fuller, who was the chairman of his university’s design department and who designated himself as a ‘comprehensive anticipatory design scientist.’ Fuller’s most famous design is the geodesic dome, that circular puzzle most commonly associated with Space Mountain at Disney World. As a self-styled futurist philosopher, Fuller is also famously known for his quote, “I am a passenger on the spaceship Earth.”

The personal connection that Fuller makes for himself with Earth is a connection that he makes and accepts for humanity. It is a connection that I have seen firsthand in my travels across the nation and around the world, including my travels to much of Africa. There, I met many incredible people who share the same desires for their families as we do here in America — food, shelter, education, security, peace. Those are the common threads that bind us all.

Our commonalities extend not only to the positive, but to the negatives, too. In the US, as well as on the continent of Africa, there are areas of metropolitan affluence that offer the best that money can buy and areas of poverty in which personal prosperity and security

are tenuous, at best. Common to both of these parts of our world, my assessment is that the lack of opportunity and devastation of poverty result from the neglect of the “haves” who control available resources and who are well-insulated from the effects of poverty.

Despite the problems of poverty or even those of the less affluent, there are few places in the world that would tolerate nearly 300 girls being abducted without massive police and military mobilization to find and retrieve them. I’m fully aware that in many US locations, and around the world, girls have been shot and killed, beaten, raped and have disappeared—never to be found, but not in such large numbers at once and not for the purpose of rape, prostitution and sexual slavery.

Questions loom. What factors influence a seemingly lackluster response to this abduction by the Nigerian government? Why has it not sent out its forces in sufficient numbers to achieve a successful search? If incapable of finding them with its own resources, why has Nigeria not aggressively sought the willing assistance of world governments which have already volunteered technologically sophisticated means to conduct a successful search? Is the failure to find these girls the result of a systemic cultural value that supports the convoluted idea that girls were born to serve at and for the

pleasure of men?

Violence of this nature against women in any location in the world is unacceptable. Governments, organizations or individuals brazen enough to commit or support such acts of gender terrorism should be dealt with in a manner of harshness commensurate with their involvement in that crime. International support against those who engage in stealing, buying and selling girls, or boys, must be the rule rather than the exception. The conscience of “civilized nations” can no longer, and must not be allowed to, ignore or trivialize crimes against humanity that occur in African states.

My organization, the National Congress of Black Women, Inc. has been working tirelessly to call attention to the repeated criminal acts of Boko Haram, and we will not stop until these criminals are brought to justice. We call upon all citizens to make their concerns about this and other horrendous crimes known to their legislators and national policymakers. We pose the question to you that was posed by Bucky Fuller, “If success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do...How would I be? What would I do?”

The Browning Of Public Schools After ‘Brown’

By George E. Curry
NNPA Columnist

This is the 60th anniversary of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawing “separate but equal” schools. And like most major anniversaries, incorrect information surfaces as purported fact, doing a disservice to the accomplishment being celebrated as well as truth itself.

In this instance, some have asserted that because of re-segregation, public schools in the South, where most African Americans live, are more segregated now than when Brown was handed down. That is simply untrue and if you want to read a comprehensive account of what has truly happened in school desegregation over the past 60 years, there is no better source than “Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future,” published by The Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

First, let’s dispense with the nonsense.

“The claims that black students in the South are no better off than they were before Brown, in terms of segregation, are obviously wrong,” the report stated. “They are ten times as likely to be in majority-white schools as they were when the Civil Rights Act passed.”

The 42-page report is packed with illuminating facts about progress made in the wake of Brown and the subsequent retrenchment. But to appreciate the significance of Brown, it is necessary to understand what our schools looked like before the court decision.

“Nine years after Brown, when President John Kennedy called for the first major civil rights act of the 20th century, 99% of blacks in the South were still in totally segregated schools,” the report recounted. “Virtually no whites were in historically black schools,

nor were black teachers and administrators in white schools. For all practical purposes, it was segregation as usual or ‘segregation forever,’ as some of the South’s politicians promised. In the great majority of the several thousand southern districts nothing had been done.”

Actually, there were two Brown decisions. The first, issued in 1954, outlawed segregated public schools masquerading as “separate but equal.” The court ruled that “segregation is inherently unequal” and ordered the desegregation of schools. With no progress after a year, the court ordered in 1955, in a ruling sometimes called Brown II, that desegregation had to be carried out “with all deliberate speed.”

But racial segregation was deliberate and speed was missing in action. In fact, nine years after Brown, 99 percent of Blacks in the South were still in segregated schools.

“President Lyndon Johnson powered the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act through Congress with bipartisan support, and he proceeded to enforce civil rights law more forcefully than an Administration before or since,” the report stated. “After he also led the battle for the largest federal education aid program in American history, the Southern schools changed. Faced with the dual prospect of losing federal funds if they remained segregated, as well as the threat of a Justice Department lawsuit as a result of the Civil Rights Act, almost all the districts began to desegregate. Strongly backed by the federal courts, federal civil rights officials raised desegregation requirements each year. In 1968 the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that desegregation in the historically segregated states must be comprehensive and immediate. By 1970 Southern schools became the nation’s most integrated.”

Nationwide, the percent of Blacks attending majority White

schools has declined from a high of 43.5 percent in 1988 to 23.2 percent in 2011, about the same level it was 1968. This did not happen by accident.

“Throughout the 1980s there was a strong legal attack on desegregation orders, led by the Reagan and Bush administrations’ Justice Departments and, in 1991, the Supreme Court authorized the termination of desegregation plans in the Oklahoma City (Dowell) decision. The decline in black student access has been continuous since 1991,” the report observed.

The report documents the strong connection between segregated schools and concentrated poverty.

“In schools that are 81-100% black & Latino, over three-quarters of the students are also enrolled in schools where more than 70% of the students live in poverty,” it stated. “In fact, half of students in 91-100% black & Latino schools are in schools that also have more than 90% low-income students. This means that these students face almost total isolation not only from white and Asian students but also from middle class peers as well.”

In its recommendations section, the report observes that while education is primarily a state responsibility, the federal government also has an important role to play. Sadly, the report points out, there has not been a major national study on school desegregation, its costs and solutions since Racial Isolation in Public Schools, a report requested in 1967 by President Johnson.

Non-government organizations also have a role to play.

The report stated, “Civil rights organizations need to develop new strategies and legal theories to end the reversal and restart the movement toward a successfully integrated, truly multiracial society, as was done by the NAACP and Howard University in the campaign that led to Brown.”

Watching Comcast And Time Warner On And Off The Screen

By Ron Busby
NNPA Columnist

As much television as Black folks watch, we should keep our eye on the proposed acquisition of Time Warner by Comcast a whole lot closer than anyone else.

You know as well as I that we watch more television than any other demographic and are more likely to get our news from TV than anywhere else. We consume hours and hours of pure entertainment, so much that marketers are targeting Black audiences with an endless stream of reality shows. (That those shows are far from real is beside the point.) Sports, music, and docudramas fill the rest of our mass consumption of television programming, and there seems to be no end to the current trend.

What does this have to do with the Comcast/Time Warner deal? Everything. The Comcast/Time Warner deal, reportedly valued at more than \$45 billion, would give the cable giant Comcast more than a third of all cable homes in the U.S. The fact that the bulk of those customers will reside in 19 of the 20 largest U.S. cities is an indication of the value that Black consumers contribute to making this deal work.

So far, there is no indication that either Comcast or Time Warner has given any thought to the quid pro quo relationship implicit between the new company and Black consumers of they will serve. Besides, no attention has been given to the availability of new,

positive programming. There are no assurances of employment opportunities, or –even worse – very little, if any, discussion of contracting opportunities for Black-owned enterprises interested in doing business with the new company. Surely, any company that can spend \$45 billion to acquire the assets (customers) of another company can figure out a way to carve out opportunities for their largest customer base.

If you need some indication of their awareness of how valuable Black customers are to their deal, TV One, BET, OWN and other content providers targeting Black consumers are not included in basic subscriptions. That means to get the kind of programming Black consumers are hungry for, viewers must upgrade to premium subscriptions. That means a larger monthly cable bill. In other words, if not for Black consumers and the rate we watch television, this deal would be dead in the water.

To be clear, the United States Black Chambers has not taken a position on whether the Comcast acquisition of Time Warner is good or bad for the industry. But there is no doubt in our mind about the value of Black consumers to the deal. We watch more television than any other group. We subscribe to more cable television than any other group. But we probably get less return on our investment than any other group.

This pattern is not limited to cable TV. The same can be said of automobile manufacturing, distilled beverages, clothing retailers and

many other industries. Without Black consumers, many businesses would be flat-lining, or worse, out of business.

Congress is conducting hearings on the proposed merger of the two largest cable television companies in America. Some early opposition focuses on whether the combined companies would be essentially a monopoly. There’s early talk about the new company being “too big to fail,” the negative description that grew out of the recent banking crisis.

But we have heard little, if anything, about companies owned by Cathy Hughes, Oprah Winfrey, Sean Combs and Magic Johnson and others offering African American programming content being consulted.

It would seem that any company that relies as heavily on Black consumers as do cable television companies, that company would work harder to offer content targeting their best customers at the basic level. At the very least, African American companies that produce programming for Black audiences should be treated like the valuable partners that they are to the industry. Without their content output, Black cable subscribers have fewer reasons to stay tuned. And if Black subscribers are not tuned in, there’s no real market for a \$45 billion cable company.

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A Call To End Predatory Small-Dollar Lending

By Charlene Crowell
NNPA Columnist

After waiting for more than a year for a hearing on a bill that would reform how small dollar loans operate, six U.S. Senators have now taken their concerns to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). A May 14 letter to CFPB Director Richard Cordray lays out how rulemaking could accomplish much of what proposed legislation has aimed to do.

Speaking in a united voice, Senators Jeff Merkley (Oregon), Dick Durbin (Illinois), Tom Harkin (Iowa), Tom Udall (N.M.), Richard Blumenthal (Conn.) and Elizabeth Warren (Mass.) said, “Sadly, the evidence shows that these loans trap consumers in a cycle of debt in which consumers end up owing more than the initial loan amount – an appalling practice that exploits the financial hardship of hard working families and exhibits a deeply flawed business model that does not consider borrowers’ ability to repay the loan.”

As sponsor and co-sponsors of the pending Senate Bill 172, Stopping Abuse and Fraud in Electronic (SAFE) Lending Act, the lawmakers urged CFPB to include the bill’s provisions in its rulemaking. Despite being assigned to the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee since January 2013, no hearing has been held on the SAFE Lending Act. Should CFPB embrace the lawmakers’ request, its new rules would achieve many of the same lending reforms.

The letter’s timing is also significant, following a CFPB public forum in Nashville in late March. That event coincided with the Bureau’s release of its own payday research. After analyzing 11 months of borrowing at 12 million storefront locations, CFPB confirmed that the industry relies not on individual borrowers’ ability to quickly repay, but on their inability to repay, resulting in individual borrowers taking out many loans each year.

Additionally, CFPB found that four out of five payday loans are rolled over or ‘renewed’ within two weeks of when the borrower paid off a prior loan. Further, more than two-fifths of payday borrowers who were paid on a monthly basis – most of whom were public benefits recipients, including those on Social Security – had 11 loans in its 11-month study period.

Earlier, research by the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL) found payday borrowers are annually charged \$3.4 billion in fees alone. The typical borrower takes out 10 payday loans in a year at interest rates averaging 391 percent over a year’s time.

Importantly, the Senators urged CFPB to include more small-dollar loans, not just payday, in its reforms.

“Although your authorities may differ from that of the states, one especially critical lesson is that laws should apply not only to payday loans but also to auto title and other consumer loans. This broad scope of coverage has been essential to ensuring that regulating predatory payday lending does not create opportunities for similarly

harmful products disguised in different formats. We urge the CFPB to follow a similarly broad approach for any rules it crafts in the small dollar lending market.”

Auto title lenders take title to the borrower’s car for security rather than direct access to the borrower’s bank account, as payday lenders do. CRL’s recent policy brief highlights these lenders’ routine disregard for borrowers’ ability to repay (<http://lnkd.in/bbEmSVJ>).

By broadly addressing the varied forms of these small-dollar loans, CFPB’s rules would deliver reforms that would benefit consumers who reside in states where payday lending still allows triple-digit interest on debts.

Since 2005, no state has authorized high-cost payday lending. In fact, when voters have been given the opportunity to decide whether to allow or ban triple-digit payday lending, the overwhelming voter sentiment has been against payday. Arkansas, Arizona, Montana and New Hampshire are among the most recent states to ban this form of high-cost lending.

“Predatory payday lending has taken advantage of the fragile financial position of far too many hard working families”, wrote the Senators. “We encourage the CFPB to move as quickly as possible to propose rules that put a stop to predatory small-dollar lending practices, while preserving safer, more affordable alternatives.”