

opinion

Justice is not blind

By JULIANNE MALVEAUX
NNPA Columnist

When racist attitudes, either conscious or subconscious, are combined with the discretionary powers that law enforcement officers have, the result is a differential outcome, with African-Americans more likely to be the targets of “blind justice.”

Most of our politicians and leaders are exploiting subconscious racism, and pandering to explicit racial fears. Even worse, they are rewarded when they say they are “tough on crime.”

Soledad O’Brien documented some of these attitudes in her most recent “Black In America” series. In a telling segment, two young men, one Black and one white, staged the “stealing” of a bike to show how members of the public responded to watching the apparent theft. The young men were dressed similarly – T-shirts, casual pants, caps.

People walked by as the white guy did everything he could to break the lock on the bike, including using



a chain cutter. Within moments of the Black man approaching the bike, white people, one or two of whom called 911, surrounded him. As opposed to the benign response the white guy got, the Black guy was simply assumed to be a criminal.

How does this play out on the streets and with

officers of the law? Police officers use their discretion selectively. A Black man (Eric Garner) selling loose cigarettes is manhandled, arrested, and dies when he is choked and cannot breathe. Most have seen the video by now, and wonder why Daniel Pantaleo was not charged with any crime, even though he used an illegal chokehold on Garner.

During the late 1990s, Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s “stop and frisk” policies resulted in African-American men in New York being stopped more than five times as frequently as Caucasians, even though these frisks led to nothing more than the humiliation of Black men, some simply coming off the subway or walking down the street.

Justice is not blind when police officers use discretion to stop one segment of the population to harshly mistreat and let the other population slide. If police officers wonder why there is antipathy and distrust toward them in the African-American community, somebody needs to tell them that their use of discretion suggests that justice is hardly blind.

Texas Black business: ‘Back to the Future’

By CHARLES O’NEAL

It often seems the only time Black Texans think about Black-owned businesses is when it’s time to complain about shoddy customer service, or the difficulty in finding them conveniently, or their failure to carry preferred brands. Rarely do we equate these perceived shortfalls to the rate at which we patronize these businesses.

It’s actually a pretty simple formula. Support Black-owned businesses and customer service will improve, and they will be able to expand new locations and carry the brands you can’t live without.

This current failure to consider Black-owned businesses has not always been the way Black Texans viewed the critical need to support our businesses. Did you know that the first Black chamber of commerce was started in Dallas in 1926?

Nine years later, in 1935, Houston’s Black business community gave birth to the nation’s second Black chamber, the Houston Citizen’s Chamber of Commerce (now the Greater Houston Black Chamber).

A year later, in 1936, the leaders of the Dallas and Houston chambers – along with business men and women from across the state – met in Dallas during the Texas Centennial celebration and formed the Texas State Negro Chamber of Commerce, the predecessor

organization of the current Texas Association of African American Chambers of Commerce (TAAACC).

Their commitment to the economic future of Black Texans spawned a network of chambers across the state, in big cities and small towns alike.

Their concerns, of course, were not only with profit-making. These visionaries realized that to the extent that Black Texans could stabilize, develop and grow Black-owned businesses, we could employ community residents, maximize our political muscle and significantly improve public education.

Nearly 80 years later these simple goals continue to frustrate those of us in the business of Black business. Twenty-three chambers/business organizations currently comprise TAAACC’s membership while four new chambers are in varying stages of development.

All this activity indicates that – despite the difficulties associated with being Black in business in Texas – there is still strong support for growing Black business with a goal of strengthening employment, political power and educational outcomes.

In a renewed effort to reacquaint Black Texans with their historic connection to business development, the TAAACC and the Texas Publishers Association have committed to doing our part to keep you abreast of issues impacting Black-owned business in our state.

The publishers of Texas’ 26 Black-owned newspapers are still Black Texas’ most reliably trustworthy source of information affecting our lives. Clear, distortion-free communication is absolutely critical to the growth, development and expansion of Texas’ Black-owned businesses and we are elated about the prospects our working together will mean for Black businesses in our state.

Well before the 2020 census, Texas will have the second largest Black population among the 50 states. Pitifully, even in this state’s dynamic economy, Black Texans lag behind in business receipts, political power, employment and educational attainment, even after nearly 80 years of effort to improve these outcomes.

I am optimistic that Black Texans will make the connection between where and how they spend their hard-earned money and the difficulties we continue to experience in other areas.

I know we can, because brave men and women came together in 1936 when no hotel would sell them a room, no restaurant would seat them and they couldn’t try on a suit unless they bought it first. Their answer: have your own hotel, restaurant and clothing store. Seems like the perfect time to go “back to the future.”

Charles O’Neal is president of the Texas Association of African American Chambers of Commerce.