

## Leadership or Pleadship?

Written by James Clingman NNPA Columnist  
Wednesday, 19 December 2012 00:00

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“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” This famous quote from Frederick Douglass brings to mind the predicament of Black folks in this country relative to those upon whom we depend to put forth our demands for political reciprocity. Are they really leading (demanding), or are they simply pleading?”

The term “Pleadship” was `coined by Mr. Kenneth Price, my friend and business associate from the post-Million Man March days. He used to talk about how our so-called leaders were not using our collective leverage to attain the goals we sought; instead, he suggested they resorted to merely “pleading” rather than leading. It looks like the same is true in many circles today.

A quick analysis of the issues, challenges, and problems we face paints a grim portrait of our position in this country and an unattractive view of our children’s future. We are long on rhetoric and short on action, high on emotion and low on involvement, quick to react and slow to get in front of issues that will negatively impact us. And many of our “leaders” are nothing more than “pleaders” kowtowing to the whimsical winds of politics, looking out for themselves only, and trying to make us believe they are “all that” when it comes to their influence.

Nearly two decades ago, I wrote an article titled, “If we are so smart, why are we so far behind?” The same thought can be applied to our current status, especially as it pertains to the dearth of genuine, authentic, and courageous Black leadership. We are still involved with sibling rivalry among our Black organizations and even more so among our “leaders,” as they jockey for position whenever a news camera is around. There is still a lack of what Dr. Ron Daniels calls, “operational unity,” as our “leaders” refuse to work together to achieve an overall goal for Black

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people in this country. I ask the question again, “If we are so smart...?”

Another problem is that Blacks are unwilling, to a large degree, to follow the path of Marcus Garvey and others who advocated and demonstrated the primary importance of establishing and maintaining an economic foundation. We have opted for political empowerment instead, which always begs the question: What is the economic result of our political involvement? Has it propelled us to a position of leadership, or has it reduced us to a position of pleadership?

We continue to discuss how Black folks can be directly advantaged by a Black President, who is now in his second term. We still petition our government for relief from generations of unfairness and inequity. We repeat the same mating dance every two, four, and six years by registering and voting for folks who have absolutely no concern for our economic stability, bringing back to mind the words of David Walker in his famous Appeal. “How strange it is to see men of sound sense, and of tolerably good judgment, act so diametrically in opposition to their own interest.”

Haven't we suffered enough from political shenanigans to finally change the way we select, promote, and follow those who pretend to be “leaders?” We are confused and child-like in so many areas when it comes to our own economic self-determination. To top it all off, we are still trying to find out “Who is Black in America?” It's shameful that in many circles, we don't even know who we are. The “One Drop” rule was imposed by White people, and for centuries it has been the law of the land. Suppose they had said anyone who has one drop of white blood is White. The point is that he who defines you controls you. We must define ourselves and we have an obligation to define our leaders, and assure they are not merely “pleaders.”

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Carter G. Woodson wrote, “Negroes, however, choose their leaders but unfortunately they are too often of the wrong kind. Negroes do not readily follow persons with constructive programs. Almost any sort of exciting appeal or trivial matter presented to them may receive immediate attention and temporarily at least liberal support.” Let that thought marinate on your brain for a moment. Think about some of the folks who are presented to us as influential and, thus, in leadership positions. Dr. Julia Hare distinguishes Black leaders from Leading Blacks; so should you.

Dr. Woodson offers this sobering thought on Black pleadership rather than Black leadership: “No people can go forward when the majority of those who should know better have chosen to go backward, but this is exactly what most of our ‘misleaders’ do. Not being learned in the history and background of the race, they figure out that there is no hope for the masses; and they decide, then, that the best thing they can do is exploit these people for all they can and use the accumulations selfishly. Such persons have no vision and therefore perish at their own hands.”

Black Leadership or Black Pleadership? Not only do we get the leaders we accept; we also get those we deserve.

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