

The 2010 Census: Stand up and be counted

I have a friend who becomes apoplectic when she confronts racial injustice. She believes that all human beings are equal. A few weeks ago, my friend told me that she encountered a traveling vendor who proudly acknowledged that the majority of the vendor's sales were derived from an area known as "Browntown" in Williamsport. The vendor disparaged African-Americans. My friend was shocked and appalled.

My friend, a White woman, had never heard of Browntown. I tried to explain it to her. She was very upset. My friend enjoys life's encounters on a one-to-one basis. She believes in the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". She tries to improve the world one person at a time. In my opinion, she has a microscopic view of the world.

I tend to look for patterns and trends across wide landscapes of social interactions. I look at groups of people. I observe how they migrate and



Richard
James

mingle. I inspect hiring practices, housing and income discrepancies and health care disparities. I have a macro-vision of the world. When our discussions inevitably turn to race relations, my friend and I often bicker. On more than one occasion, it has put a strain on our friendship.

I applaud my friend's efforts to deal with people individually. It is a noble endeavor. Hopefully, the love and respect that she exhibits towards others will become viral and spread across America and around the world.

President John F. Kennedy in 1963, had to wrestle with the widespread racial problem when he said, "This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing

in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right.

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution."

Kennedy's administration faced racial unrest and massive political demonstrations lead by organizations like the SCLC and the NAACP. While individual Whites and Blacks "got along" on a personal basis in everyday common situations, African-Americans, as a group, were desperate for positive change.

That's why statistics are so important. We need a measuring stick to mark our progress. We must examine the big pic-

ture to determine how well we are achieving our ideals. Federal, state and local governments make decisions about policies that affect our safety and economic well-being. We must be counted, tracked, analyzed, categorized and classified to insure equal opportunity under law.

Example: In the HUD 2008 Annual Performance Report for Williamsport Pennsylvania - Consolidated Action Plan Evaluation Report, it was noted that of the 12,219 housing units in the City (according to the 2000 Census), 10,654 were White and 1,276 were Black. The table on page 7 of the report indicated that about half of the housing units identified as White were owner occupied (48.5% owner occupied, vs. 51.5% renter occupied). Black housing units were mostly rented (18.9% owner occupied, vs. 81.1% renter occupied). Eighty-one percent of Black homes were rental properties! Hence, there is almost no equity in the Black community.

The path to personal wealth and prosperity has traditionally

been through home ownership. Such statistics tells us that Blacks in Williamsport must strive for home ownership if they expect to reach social and economic parity. And they will need help.

The 2010 Census is right around the corner. What will the new numbers show? Will Black Williamsporters seek to balance the equation? Will developers, bankers, and bureaucrats work with the African-American community to build more owner-occupied housing? Who will stand up to be counted?

Opponents of government sponsored housing initiatives will scream, "Here we go again! That's what created the current financial crisis!" That argument is specious. My answer to them is, "Let's do it right this time."

James is the publisher of the online newsletter, An African-American Perspective. www.rjamesdesign.net/African-American
