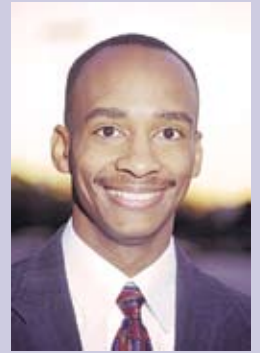


There is a Hole in the Boat

by James E. Payne



A year ago, I was asked to go crappie fishing with some of my law partners. Although not a fisherman, I agreed to enjoy the camaraderie. When we arrived at the lake, I learned for the first time that agreeing to go crappie fishing also included agreeing to get on a boat. Not one for boats, I reluctantly kept my word and we went out into the middle of the lake. After catching my first fish, excitement ensued because I had become a fisherman. While waiting for the next bite, I noticed that the boat was leaking and was immediately alarmed. While not much of a fisherman or a boatsman, it was evident to me that water did not belong inside the boat. This experience compares with what is happening in our community. There is a hole in OUR boat.

We must recognize that there is a hole in our community. Some people in our own communities believe that there is no more racism; that Dr. King's dream has become a reality; and that our justice system is really just. While appreciating the freedom to walk into any department store – why are we followed by store security? Understanding banks are giving some of us loans – why are our rates higher than others that are similarly situated? Seeing that we can complete insurance applications like others – why are we being denied coverage simply because of our zip code? Reading that we represent 13% of drug users, yet we represent 74% of those imprisoned for drug possession – why? The answer is clear. There is a hole in OUR boat.

Once we recognize there is a hole, what should we do? First, we must remember that we are all in this boat together. Can you imagine if, while the fishing boat was leaking, I had ignored the problem because the hole was on the other side of the boat and not under my feet? We do that very thing when we start looking at issues as North side versus South side problems, as poor versus rich, or as Republican versus Democrat.

Wake up Omarosa (as opposed to Kwame), we are ALL in this boat together. If any of us face problems with racial profiling, equal treatment in the courts and unequal pay, it should be a concern for us all. If the boat takes on enough water, everyone in the boat is in danger. Dr. King put it best:

“injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Second, we must act to plug the hole. While we may all scramble to plug the hole on a leaky boat, many of us will not do a single thing to plug the holes in our community. Stop walking around as if everything is okay. Do we really believe a little racism never hurts anyone; a little injustice is fine, or a little hole in our boat should not be cause for concern? Face reality. If there are leaders in our community

who do not support resolving our issues, then they must be called out. When we have the president of the United States refusing

to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding issues of civil rights and civil liberties, we must speak-out.

When our society is willing to spend more money institutionalizing our people than it is willing to spend educating our people, we must say something. Although “speaking truth to power” is not popular, we must recognize there is a hole in our boat and we are all in danger.

Finally, once we have plugged the hole, we must bail out the excess water. Excess water in our boat will not sink us, but it does hamper our progress. There are some who refuse to stoop to bail water, believing their own prominence, power and prestige in the community make them above bailing. However, personal success does not exempt us from our responsibility. More success means more influence, more responsibility and a bigger bucket. With our buckets, we can bail excess water out of our community by voting out elected officials who do not support our issues. When we fail to vote, we take the risk that excess water – undeserving officials – will remain in and continually damage our community. We can further bail the excess water by refusing to support those businesses not interested in being a part of our community. At my house, a young man will not simply blow his horn in my driveway and expect to take my daughter on a date. If he does not have the decency to get out of the car and fellowship with my family, then he does not deserve my daughter's company. We need to stop running to the car every time a business honks its horn. If they cannot come into our neighborhood and commune with our family, they do not deserve our business.

