



## **ECONOMIC JUSTICE SUNDAY**

### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

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#### **I. Historical Documents**

Throughout history, African Americans have defined economic justice in a variety of ways. One underlying theme of these varying definitions has been the demand for access to the means that would afford the opportunity to have a fulfilling individual and, often, communal life, that corresponds to these words in the 1776 Declaration of Independence: “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the Declaration was a political document, but its signers indicated that they also understood that political freedom without economic means was a hollow, partial autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

Overwhelmingly, the ancestors of the majority of African Americans arrived in this country as slaves—economic tools, cheap labor. Even so, African Americans have always sought self-defined economic justice through a variety of self-determining acts. Before Emancipation, some black men worked to purchase freedom for themselves; some

black men worked to purchase freedom for their enslaved wives or children or mothers. Beginning in the nineteenth century, black congregants' collective contributions helped many establish black colleges. This practice continues in the twenty-first century for the sustenance of local charter schools as well as historically black colleges and universities. Those who contribute to schools are likely to cite education as a means toward improved economic choice.

African American efforts to gain freedom, including economic justice, have often been infused with religious language or organized in faith communities. Among the multitude of examples recorded in history, I note one such case from 1969. That marked the year that the Reverend Leon H. Sullivan's OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) became an international enterprise. The first center had opened in Philadelphia in 1964, the city where Sullivan led Zion Baptist Church.<sup>3</sup> Before then, Reverend Sullivan had led over four hundred Philadelphia ministers in boycotts that historian Darlene Clark Hine terms "don't buy where you can't work" efforts.<sup>4</sup> Sullivan's success at these "selective patronage" boycotts, subsequent negotiations for jobs at previously boycotted sites, and the promotion of economic self-sufficiency led to his being named the first black American to be appointed a director on a Fortune 500 corporate board -- General Motors.<sup>5</sup> His ideals were rooted in the humanity of all persons and the dignity associated with their ability to provide for themselves and their loved ones. They evolved into a set of "principles" that helped gain economic and political freedom for black South Africans. The Global Sullivan Principles provide a guide for justice seeking persons working to influence corporations doing business around the world. If endorsed by international corporations, the Global Sullivan Principles encourage them to consider fairness as a mainstay of their operational policies and practices.

### The Global Sullivan Principles

As a company which endorses the Global Sullivan Principles we will respect the law, and as a responsible member of society we will apply these Principles with integrity consistent with the legitimate role of business. We will develop and implement company policies, procedures, training and internal reporting structures to ensure commitment to these Principles throughout our organization. We believe the application of these Principles will achieve greater tolerance and better understanding among peoples, and advance the culture of peace.

Accordingly, we will:

- Express our support for universal human rights and, particularly, those of our employees, the communities within which we operate and parties with whom we do business.
- Promote equal opportunity for our employees at all levels of the company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs, and operate without unacceptable worker treatment such as the exploitation of children, physical punishment, female abuse, involuntary servitude or other forms of abuse.

- Respect our employees' voluntary freedom of association.
- Compensate our employees to enable them to meet at least their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability in order to raise their social and economic opportunities.
- Provide a safe and healthy workplace; protect human health and the environment; and promote sustainable development.
- Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights, and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
- Work with governments and communities in which we do business to improve the quality of life in those communities — their educational, cultural, economic and social well-being — and seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Promote the application of these Principles by those with whom we do business.

We will be transparent in our implementation of these Principles and provide information which demonstrates publicly our commitment to them.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Sullivan died in 2001. The foundation that carries his name continues to promote economic justice by gaining endorsement of the Global Sullivan Principles. Endorsers include General Colin Powell, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, and some of the largest companies in the world including the Procter and Gamble Company, Hershey Foods Corporation, Pfizer, and Colgate-Palmolive.

## **II. A Washerwoman Champions Economic Empowerment for the Poor**

A September 28, 1999, headline in the New York Times drew attention to the death of a woman, unmarried, like the one in our scripture reference. This woman, too, “gave all she had...”<sup>7</sup> In this case, it was a Mississippi philanthropist who just four years before had been unknown outside her local community.

Ms. Oseola McCarty was not a titan of industry, at least not in the sense in which we usually describe the phrase, but she was one industrious woman. She went to school only to the sixth grade; yet, Harvard awarded her an honorary doctorate.<sup>8</sup> She never learned to drive and did not travel the world. Still, the United Nations gave her a medal previously presented to at least two heads of state.<sup>9</sup> She was born during the height of the Jim Crow era. She lived in quiet obscurity, but all of that changed. At age 87 she was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest civilian award in the United States, by Willaim Jefferson Clinton.<sup>10</sup> When Oseola McCarty died, she lay in state under the rotunda of a university that had refused to admit African Americans during most of her lifetime. Ms. McCarty gained such notoriety because she took her coins then, later, her

dollars and she saved and then she gave. The example she set inspired the rich, the famous, and many who were neither.

The world knew Ms. Oseola McCarty by the work she had done for longer than many people live. For more than seventy-five years, she washed and ironed clothing that belonged to citizens in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Years earlier, she gave what she had when she left school in the sixth grade to take care of her ailing grandmother. The locals in town knew her as a washerwoman, but before the end of her life, people around the world came to know Ms. Oseola McCarty as the washerwoman who saved \$150,000 and gave it to endow scholarships for needy students who wanted to attend the local college, the University of Southern Mississippi. News of Miss McCarty's gift prompted hundreds of others to add \$330,000 to the fund that she had begun. Media mogul Ted Turner, the founder of the Cable News Network (CNN), was reported to have credited her example as inspiration for his own charitable giving. He said, "If that little woman can give away everything she has, then I can give a billion."<sup>11</sup> And so he did; Turner pledged to give ten-\$100 million donations (one billion dollars) to the United Nations.<sup>12</sup>

Like her grandmother and mother before her, Ms. McCarty learned to save just a little bit, consistently. When each of them died, they left her whatever they had and she added it to the small sums she had already begun to put away. Trustworthy staff at one of the several banks where McCarty deposited her savings suggested she might want to invest some of it so her money could grow. She did.<sup>13</sup> And, decade after decade, the money grew. But that wasn't all she did. Miss McCarty lived modestly. If she didn't think she needed it, she didn't buy it. With wisdom, in her late eighties, Miss McCarty began to plan for when she would no longer be alive. She wanted to give a portion of her accumulated wealth to her church, some to poor relatives, and the nearby college in her hometown.<sup>14</sup>

One generation of black Americans gained economic justice by staging boycotts of Birmingham department stores and sit-ins at lunch counters across the South. Since then, the mid-twentieth century, many more blacks have sought and gained economic justice by achieving an education that gave them improved incomes and more choices. Some purchased a home; others invested in mutual funds; and a few started businesses. Oseola McCarty took another route. Her, at first meager, savings started a philanthropic revolution that inspired others to take whatever they had to add it the little bit more of someone else. With their combined gifts, students, for generations, will be able to get needed scholarships that lift them to earn an education that can replicate the process. Ms. McCarty was quoted as saying, "I'm giving it away so the children won't have to work so hard, like I did."<sup>15</sup>

The entirety of that September 28, 1999 headline read, "Oseola McCarty, a Washerwoman Who Gave All She Had to Help Others, Dies at 91."<sup>16</sup> Ms. McCarty wanted poor black children in Mississippi to have it easier than she did and she became the change she wanted to see.

#### **IV. Songs That Speak to the Moment**

These congregational favorites remind believers to be co-laborers with God in working for economic justice and to not become defeated in their efforts.

### **I Can Do All Things Though Christ**

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I can do all things through Christ.

I can do all things through Christ.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.<sup>17</sup>

### **I Don't Feel No Ways Tired**

I don't feel no ways tired

I've come to far from where I've started from.

Nobody told me that the road would be easy.

I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me.<sup>18</sup>

## **V. Create a Memorable Learning Moment**

Ms. Oseola McCarty learned the habit of saving as a child. Her story became the basis for children's books. To teach your children to save and to become engines of economic justice, why not consider the following:

- Develop a savings ritual with your child or a group of children at your church.
- Include a trip to the bank as part of their birthday ritual. Make a deposit into a savings account.
- Decide together when and whether that savings account should be tapped for a truly special treat and what they should save for milestones such as educational goals or giving to a needy child in the neighborhood.
- Make clear the connections between the value of money as a tool that goes hand-in-hand with a valued life principle. For instance, you can teach children to save and teach them why they should or should not shop at certain stores or wear certain brands of clothing and shoes. Teach them how to apply the Sullivan Principles. They can learn the principles if they are taught.
- If they are old enough, have your child or a group of children at your church volunteer to assist in a local Economic Justice Campaign. See below for ideas.

## **Economic Justice Actions**

The following list of additional Economic Justice activities comes from Lectionary team member, Michelle Riley Jones.

Your congregation can develop specific plans around these core areas of education and action:

As the energy of the church's God-given message (TRUTH) and God-inspired efforts (ACTION) are connected, imagine the mighty force of life-changing transformation that will roll throughout our communities as God's love and virtue is spread to all people,

through God's people.

### **Educate**

- (a) Bring in a **speaker** (i.e., a local activist) to speak to the local issues of poverty.
- (b) **Living Wage Program.** Educate the congregation and the community on the need for a living wage, giving both the economic and moral arguments for raising the minimum wage. See Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign online location: [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) for more information.

### **Act**

- (a) View the African American Lectionary's "BIG IDEA!" on Homelessness (January 2009) and Economic Empowerment (March 2009), for **examples of innovative church-based programs** that have been implemented to minister to their surrounding communities. All of these programs have been enacted by churches with 600 or fewer members. See The African American Lectionary online location: <http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/bigIdea.asp>.
- (b) **Partner with nearby churches** in a campaign to call on Congress to raise the minimum wage to \$10 in 2010. See [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org) for more information on this effort. Use a period during a Sunday Service to **gather support and signatures** for the \$10 in 2010 Campaign.
- (c) Organize youth in the congregation to get persons to sign the \$10 in 2010 Faith Leaders **Letter to Congress**. Get a copy of letter at [www.letjusticeroll.org/faithletter.html](http://www.letjusticeroll.org/faithletter.html).
- (d) Let Justice Roll. The *Let Justice Roll-Living Wage Campaign* is a fast-growing nonpartisan program of more than ninety faith, community, labor and business organizations who have joined together to raise the minimum wage at the federal level in states such as Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and others.  
Location:  
Let Justice Roll  
Stephen Copley, Chair of the Board  
Phone: 501-626-9220  
Email: [scopley@letjusticeroll.org](mailto:scopley@letjusticeroll.org)  
Online location: [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)
- (e) Arrange "**walking in another's shoes**" experiences (i.e., living on the same budget as someone working for minimum wage; or is homeless – sleeping on the streets or in a shelter).

(f) The Working Poor Families Project (WFPF) was launched in 2002 by national philanthropic leaders who saw the need to strengthen state policies affecting working families in low-wage jobs that provide inadequate benefits and offer little opportunity for advancement and economic security. The national initiative is now supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Joyce Foundation and the Mott Foundation. The WFPF focuses on states because many of their policies and investments critically affect the lives of working families. The WFPF began work in five states and after six years is now active in twenty-four states and the District of Columbia. In each state the WFPF partners with one or more nonprofit organizations to strengthen state policies to better prepare America's working families for a more secure economic future. For more information visit: The Working Poor Families Project, online location:

[www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org).

### Notes

1. Declaration of Independence. Online location:

<http://www.ushistory.org/documents/declaration.htm> accessed 22 November 2008

2. "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world... He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world; For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent." The signers go on to declare their independence from the king for these grievances as well as others. They "mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." Online location: <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/declaration.htm> accessed 22 November 2008

3. "Biography of Rev. Leon H. Sullivan." The Sullivan Foundation. Online location: <http://www.thesullivanfoundation.org/foundation/rev/index.asp> accessed 22 November 2008

4. Hine, Darlene Clark. Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-construction of American History. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994. p. 130

5. Leon H. Sullivan Foundation.

6. "The Principles." Global Sullivan Principles. Online location:

<http://www.thesullivanfoundation.org/gsp/principles/gsp/default.asp> accessed 22 November 2008

7. Bragg, Rick. "Oseola McCarty, a Washerwoman Who Gave All She Had to Help Others, Dies at 91." New York Times 28 Sept. 1999: B14. Online location:

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9903E1DB1F3FF93BA1575AC0A96F958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> accessed 21 November 2008

8. Hightower, Marvin. "11 To Receive Honorary Degrees." The Harvard University Gazette. 6 June 1996. Online location:

<http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/1996/06.06/11ToReceiveHono.html> accessed 24 November 2008

9. Wertz, Sharon. "Oseola McCarty Donates \$150,000 to Southern Miss." University of Southern Mississippi Department of Marketing and Public Relations. 26 June 1995. Online location: <http://www.usm.edu/pr/oola1.htm> accessed 21 November 2008
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Bragg, Rick. "Oseola McCarty, a Washerwoman Who Gave All She Had to Help Others, Dies at 91."
13. "Ted Turner donates \$1 billion to 'UN causes'." CNN. 19 September 1997. Online location: <http://edition.cnn.com/US/9709/18/turner.gift/> accessed 24 November 2008
14. Wertz, Sharon. "Oseola McCarty Donates \$150,000 to Southern Miss."
15. Ibid.
16. Bragg, Rick. "All She Has, \$150,000, Is Going to a University." New York Times. August 13, 1995: B14. Online location: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=990CE3DB123BF930A2575BC0A963958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> accessed 21 November 2008
17. Ibid.
18. Clark, Elberita "Twinkie." "I Can Do All Things Through Christ." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago: GIA Publication, Inc., 2001. #383
19. Burrell, Curtis. "I Don't Feel No Ways Tired." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago: GIA Publication, Inc., 2001. #414

