

From behind the wall



by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

O.S.P. BLACK CULTURE NIGHT [FALL 1977]

It was a taste of Black Honey on Friday night, October 22, 1977, between 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. inside the visiting room of Oregon State Penitentiary, where close to eighty Black faces, clothed in blue denim, gathered to celebrate their annual Fall Black Culture Night.

Without the ingenious, hard-working and dedicated strategy planning of the UHURU Club coordinator, Ray Charles Maple, and program director, Freddie Abraham, this handful of Black men would not have been able to relax those few hours.

Spicy soul music, contributed by Ray Del Clay and his group, featuring Anthony Fatungase on drums, Kenny Earl James on bass, Clay on lead guitar, and their female stylish vocalist, Ms. Arlene Allen, backed by the golden voice of Albert Burrell.

Twice a year the Activities Department, under the direction of D.A. Versteed and his staff supervise these events, which the UHURU Club is allowed to present to a portion of Black inmates, while the larger Black population find themselves being denied or not being able to join the UHURU Club because of the limitation placed on membership. Along with the space allotted them many Black inmates have to remain in their cells when these events

are voluntarily sponsored by our Black Oregon community.

With a growing Black population, 20% of O.S.P.'s total fourteen hundred inmates, it has been stated by not only Black club members, but many other Black inmates wishing to join - maybe someone should submit a proposal to the O.S.P. Activities Department for larger facilities - O.S.P. mess hall - in order that all Black people behind these walls may share in celebrating their culture together. Also to help plan and present a more positive program that would benefit not only this institution but also that of our only State's Black community of Albina, in Portland, Oregon.

Since that community has been publicized as being the most crime infected area in the whole state - and whereas today the Oregon State Penitentiary and the Oregon State Department of Correction has the distinct honor of housing the second largest Black population (Portland, Oregon being #1) - it might allow closer communication for Blacks to generate more togetherness behind these walls, then being forced to remain separated as they've become in many cases. It is a noted fact that our Oregon Black leaders would feel more adherence to come and assist O.S.P. administration and staff in their effort to find avenues to alleviate the mass Black prison build-up, if they were assured of reaching every Black inmate ear. It can almost be predicted if the disadvantaged for Blacks in Oregon continues as it is, along with the large recycling of Black people through these gates, it will not be too many years away that the Black population behind these walls might soar well past 50%.

"No matter how one wishes to look at it," as stated by Dr. Barbara Jackson, October 16, 1977 'Prospective in Black America,' "Let's face it, Blacks today in America are different. They have a different home environment, a different struggle to survive, a different pride to protect and most of all a different culture to understand. And now there comes a different direction that those in our American prisons must travel, for those who are Black and placed in social and civil positions as Black leaders must guide them away from **The Jaws of Self-Destruction.**"

It was only a few years ago, when a new superintendent named H.C. Cupp became the warden of O.S.P. and under his administration he allotted and made many changes. Among those changes he

allowed the Black inmates within this prison to form and develop avenues to learn, teach, practice, live and celebrate their culture. But in 1968, the percentage of Blacks at O.S.P. was very, very small Cupp made it possible for large groups of Black community leaders to partake in helping to establish O.S.P. Black Culture Club, also known as "UHURU".

All men of Black faces with blue prison denims, behind these walls, played some type of part within the sound functioning of UHURU, but as time passes, so does every living thing in life. The visiting room has grown too small, those mere fifty miles seem as though they have grown to a thousand for Black leaders in Portland and Albina to travel (the majority of Blacks at O.S.P. are from those areas) and much communication to build strength with ones Black culture as a mass have been either struck down by rules and regulations, reverse discrimination, lack of concern or population boom. It has never been successful for the blind to ever attempt to lead the blind. There are only a few now who dedicate themselves weekly to instill that Black pride within these walls. Who are considered our community leaders - people such as Calvin Henry, Ron Martin, and John Parker.

Where are these people our families helped into these positions we read about daily in our newspapers when expressing their grievances to City Hall, the County Commissioner, state official, state elective representatives and Governor? Where were you in the Fall of 77 on O.S.P. Black Culture Night? Mrs. Le-Vern Davis was here with six beautiful soul sisters and three concerned Black brothers, modeling the latest fashions to be worn this year by Black people. But these wonderful community Black people cannot do all that needs to be done within this prison for mental and social survival among those of us who live in an atmosphere where a prison number is more important than your family's given name.

It is the young Black prisoner here that really matters. We, who have aged - well. At least give them the chance to grow with the pride of being Black, that pride we older ones were denied in our day. White folks can't teach them that. Department of Correction can't teach them that. H.C. Cupp can't teach them that. D.A. Versteed can't teach them that. And we, who are locked up beside these Black youth have not the record for example setting.

Let not our last Black leaders words die in vain: "I SEE A DREAM - I SEE A DREAM."

Politics seminar subject

"Community and Political Development" will be the topic of the second in a series of public forums sponsored by Portland State University's Educational Center, 4815 N.E. 7th.

The forum will be at 6:00 p.m., November 3rd, at the center.

Panelists will be Bill McCoy, Oregon State senator; Phil McLaurin, acting director of training and employment for the City of Portland; Cal Henry, president of Oregon Assembly for Blacks; and former Oregon State Senator and newly appointed Judge, Betty Roberts.

"The forum will give persons access to public officials who help to shape the policies that exist in their communities," says Lucious Hicks director of the Educational Center.

"Before people can become involved in shaping the policies that affect them they must first understand what those policies consist of. The forum should enable citizens to become better equipped to create, determine and implement policy decisions."

Topics of coming discussions will include strategies for affirmative action and employment (December 1), and community values (January 5).

Author discusses political prisoners

"Carter and Human Rights in Latin America - Myth vs. Reality" will be the topic of a public lecture by Hugo Blanco on Thursday, November 10th at 8:00 p.m. in the Reed College community center. The free lecture is sponsored by the Reed public affairs board and the U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners (USLA).

Hugo Blanco is the author of **Land or Death**, a book on the peasant struggle in Peru. Based on his experiences as a Peruvian worker and peasant organizer, a leader of a massive land reform movement, a political prisoner and exile, he will analyze the Carter administration's foreign policy in Latin America, comparing it with that of past administrations.

USLA is a New York based civil liberties group which works closely with related organizations such as Amnesty International, which won the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts to protect political prisoners throughout the world.

Minority bankers develop strategy

V.F. Booker, President of American State Bank, recently returned from the National Bankers Association, Inc. 50th Annual Convention, held in Houston.

"This was an exceptionally good convention. When I reflect back to my first convention in 1961, the whole thing could be accommodated in one room. There were only 21 minority banks. Now there are 85, and there were about 500 people at the Convention."

"There has been a lot of progress, especially in the minority deposits program. The National Bankers Association has also become more helpful to us because it is now divided into areas and the West Coast has a portion in the board of directors. This insures our region more participation in the programs."

NBA President Robert E. James, of Savannah, Georgia, said the trade association for minority banks will "aggressively pursue" its priority program goals during the next year.

These goals, according to James, include pressuring the Federal Government for significant expansion of the Minority Bank Deposit Program, expanding the deposit program more broadly in the private sector, initiating new management training programs for minority bankers, developing better working relations with other national minority and community-oriented groups, increasing the profitability of minority banks, expanding opportunities for minority graduates in the field of banking.

A record number of more than 300 minority bankers, in addition to corporate and government officials, attended the 50th annual convention of the National Bankers Association in Houston recently.

James, who is president of Carver State Bank and Publisher of the **Savannah Tribune**, said, "We not only reviewed the outstanding service record of minority banks for the past 50 years, but also focused on new challenges facing minority banks."

One of the major concerns taken up by NBA officials in Houston was "the gap between commitments made by President Carter in an April 28th meeting with NBA executive committee and followup performance," according to James. In this regard, NBA officials had private discussions with Ben Brown, Deputy Director of the Democratic National Committee and advisor to the President on minority affairs; William Beckham, Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of the Treasury; and David Moso, Fiscal Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

James said the series of meetings were most helpful to NBA in developing new strategies to "get the Minority Bank Deposit program on the right track."

James, who has served as President of Carver State Bank since 1971, is a 1968 graduate of Morris Brown College of Atlanta and received his Master's degree in Business Administration from the Harvard Business School in 1970.

In a keynote address to the NBA convention, National Urban League Executive Director Vernon Jordan urged NBA and its member banks "to play their part in the minority community's struggle to win national job and urban programs," and pledged the support of the National Urban League for measures that will foster the growth of the minority-owned banking industry.

Jordan called on governmental units at



New NBA President - Robert E. James (left), president of Carver State Bank in Savannah, GA, is congratulated by National Urban League Executive Director Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., upon being installed as the new president of the National Bankers Association, the trade group for the 85 minority-owned banks. The 50th annual NBA convention was recently held in Houston, Texas.

all levels to increase their deposits in minority-owned banks.

The NBA's coveted R.R. Wright Award was presented to Dr. Berkeley G. Burrell, President, National Business League, for "consistent and progressive leadership in community and economic development reflective of the life, of the philosophy and of the achievements of Major Richard Robert Wright, former slave, educator, financier and co-founder and first president of the National Bankers Association."

Burrell urged minority bankers to support efforts to establish a National Economic Revitalization Authority "as a minority controlled, independent agency to coordinate our economic planning." He also said minorities must design and organize their own capital development and venture financing corporations, capitalized with private funds but structured to receive public capital from the proposed Urban Development Bank and other federal financing mechanisms.

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