

The death of Black Creative Genius

Isaac Shamsud-Din, the Portland artist whose murals adorn Northeast Portland buildings with Black history, told Portland Community College art and radio-television students last week that Black creative genius in America is hampered by the continuing racism of the society.

His talk was titled, "Neo-slavery and the Death of Black Creative Genius," a title he said he picked "So even those who couldn't come to hear me today would get the message."

"I used the word neo-slavery because I feel slavery didn't end in this country," Shamsud-Din said. "Young people are victimized by the same problems which victimized us years ago. The feminist movement and the racial problems of today are still here because of the foulness this country started on with racism...how can people talk about the beauty and human things they see?"

Shamsud-Din showed slides of his work. Many pieces are portraits of family members and prominent individuals in the Nation of Islam and those interested in the beginnings of what Shamsud-Din refers to as the Bilalian Art Movement.

"When you see my work you'll see why I'm talking like this," Shamsud-Din said.

Shamsud-Din outlined his life's history as a developing artist and politically committed individual as he showed slides of his work.

He said he grew up in Vanport (one painting depicted adults scrambling for safety from the flood waters of Vanport) and became aware of racism while still a small child.

"I noticed the billboards," Shamsud-Din said. "The visual images on them are always important to understand the times. What I saw was that it was always white folks drinking coke, driving the Chevy and I was a little kid wondering why. White people, grown people, would stare at me. I saw many Black folks who would tuck their head and didn't want anything to do with them. I made up my mind then I would never turn away from any person who stared at me in a hostile way. I looked them in the eye right back."

Shamsud-Din said "I was out of high school before I discovered African art and I was aware of feeling deep in me that that art repulsed me then. I was a junior in high school when I decided to find out about my people."

Shamsud-Din was awarded

scholarships to spend his summers in high school studying art at the University of Kansas. He became involved as a civil rights worker in the south with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, then studied art at Portland State University. A few years later he went to Nigeria where he said he developed an understanding of African art and people.

"The in-fighting of SNCC was characteristic of a racial nature and among volunteer to volunteer," Shamsud-Din said. "It stemmed from the fact that we were raised from a totally different perspective. There was a negative attraction -- where white people wanted to do something for me because I'm Black and vice versa. I told the volunteers that they should go back to their own communities and get the message across to the people of their own economic level at Brandeis and Harvard and the places they came from.

In Arkansas in 1966 people still were stepping off the sidewalks for white folks and going to back windows at bus depots," Shamsud-Din said. "I believe that America's future is going to be based on how she treats her ills. The fear that many white people have of Black people who are creative is that if the Black art excels then it will make my art look small...that adds up to a concerted effort to kill the artistic spirit."

Shamsud-Din asked the audience to consider the years of work put into the civil rights movements in the 1960s.

"Now when I put things into a mural about the movement people looking at it don't even know what took place in the civil rights movement," he said. "Where is the freedom you guys worked for? How's it any different now? Look at what the leaders are saying. Then look at the despair in some people's lives...I use the word hostages because we were brought here against our will. There are people here who would like to go back to Africa, but what do they know about Africa? Nothing...We'd better square things up because you're killing the creativity of Black artists who could do something good."

Shamsud-Din said he is involved now in developing an art project for children called the Bilalian Art Movement in Portland. He lives in Northeast Portland and his work has been sold and exhibited widely including galleries in Portland, Seattle and San Francisco.



ISAAC SHAMSUD-DIN

Clinic elects new officers

The newly elected officers of the Board of Directors for the Center for Community Mental Health were concerned at the recent Annual Meeting held at the Center's Out-patient facility. Board officers were elected for the 1981-1982 program year. Fred Carter, CPA with Lacenthol and Horwath, was elected Chairman; Pam Smith, O.P.S. Blue Sheild, was elected Vice Chairman; and Barbara Alright, owner of Medical Word Processing Center, was elected Secretary/Treasurer. Guest speaker was Judge Mercedes Diez who spoke on the juvenile system.

The Center for Community Mental Health is located in a former residence at 6329 N.E. Union Ave. which was built in the early 1900's. The Center operates programs under funding from United Way, Multnomah County, and the N/NE Comprehensive Mental Health Center. Counseling is provided to persons within the N/NE area experiencing emotional stress and crisis in their daily living. Cooperative efforts in consultation and education are maintained with schools and other agencies.

HOMES FOR RENT

REMCO PORTLAND

1 bdrm, 1 bath, carpet, drapes, garden style apartment, laundry facilities coin-op available, facilities, Rec., room. \$225 NET per month.

2 bdrm, 1 bath, hwd floors, close-in, newly painted, \$295 NET per month.

2 bdrm, 1 bath, separate dining rm, yard, 1 car garage, w-d hook-up, \$295 NET per month.

5 bdrm, 1 1/2 baths, 2-story, completely REFURBISHED, huge close-in spacious. \$350 NET per month.

All homes located in the North/Northeast Area.

297-5575

REMCO PROPERTIES Real Estate Mgmt.

An acre, 43,560 square feet, originally was the area a yoke of oxen could plow in a day.

Memorial Day



War on Black women

(Continued from Page 1 Col 6)

marketplace to accept low paying and unrewarding jobs in order to provide for their families. But work in itself is no guarantee against poverty. 148,000 Black female householders worked in managerial or professional jobs in 1979. Of this group 20,000 women, or 13.8 percent, still were below the poverty level. Again, this percentage was higher than that for Hispanic professional women (10 percent) and for whites (6.8 percent). Out of 430,000 Black women household heads who worked in sales or clerical positions, 106,000 or 24.6 percent were below the poverty line. 219,000 Black women working in private households or a service workers were classified below the poverty level. Three fourths of all Black women farm workers were below the poverty level. The total percentage of Black female family heads who held full-time employment and who were below the poverty line (33.2 percent) was higher than the figures for Hispanic (26.3 percent) and white women (18.9 percent).

The largest categories of Black females living in poverty are, as to be expected, the young and the elderly. More Black females than males (34.1 percent vs. 27.2 percent) live in poverty. 1,646,000 Black females below the age of 16 years are poor, approximately 41 percent of the total number of Black females within this age group (4,012,000). The next age groups

that have significant numbers of Black women in poverty are between ages 16-21 (633,000 females, 36.9 percent of the total age group) and over age 65 (489,000 females, 41.7 percent of the total age group). Once more, Black females across the board are more likely to be poor than women of other ethnic groups. For example, among white females below the age of 16, only 12.2 percent live in poverty. Between the ages 16-21 years, 10.5 percent are poor; over age 65, 15.8 percent are poor. Hispanic women are far more likely than whites to be poor at every age level, but without exception are significantly better off than Black women.

Not surprisingly, Black families with female householders are also generally deeply in debt. For Black families led by females below the poverty line, 213,000 families have an annual income deficit between 1-999 dollars. 225,000 have annual fiscal deficits between one to two thousands dollars; 235,000 families require between two to three thousand dollars. 197,000 Black families headed by females with no husband present sustain annual income shortfalls of \$5,000 and more. Black families in this group have a mean income deficit that exceeds \$3,000 annually, again exceeding the deficits for Hispanic families (\$2,732) and for whites (\$2,697). Buried beneath a mountain of bills, it is small wonder that poor Black women are unable to transcend their impoverishment.



© THE COCA-COLA COMPANY 1981 "COCA-COLA" AND "COKE" ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS WHICH IDENTIFY THE SAME PRODUCT OF THE COCA-COLA COMPANY. BOTTLED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE COCA-COLA COMPANY BY THE PEOPLE IN YOUR TOWN WHO BRING YOU COCA-COLA.