

OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES
by Kathryn Hall Bogle



Echoes of the 1981 White House Conference on Aging keep reverberating. Final drafts of the business conducted there have just now arrived to be accessible to the delegates and other interested persons. And interest is high, for, after all, the conference is scheduled only once in every ten years.

Bobbi Gary, already chairing the Multnomah County Conference and appearing in Lucius Hicks' NAACP Committee on Aging and Housing, was the one and only Black person among 14 appointees making up the delegation from Oregon to the national conference.

Gov. Victor Atiyeh, in making the Oregon appointment, chose names from lists recommended by Bob Ziegen of his own staff and the Rev. Walter McGeddigan.

Mrs. Gary, well acquainted with a number of organizations in the Portland area, is a member of the national AARP, the Older Womens League, the National Caucus on Black Aging and the National Gray Panthers, all dealing with concerns of the elderly. She is also a vice-president of the Portland Chapter of the National Council of Negro Women.

Members of the Oregon delegation, before they left the state, had met in briefing sessions on matters previously discussed in earlier local conferences within the state. Upon their return they found themselves pretty much in accord.

"We thought we had been well prepared," says Mrs. Gary. "The conference opened at the Washington Sheraton with 2,200 persons registered. Later all the delegates were assigned to one of the 14 committees. I was appointed to Committee III called "Older Americans as a Continuing Resource."

"Our Committee comprised 200, but we were soon to discover that committees were hampered and disorganized to exclude those appointed by an earlier administration. It became increasingly difficult to gain a microphone to be heard by even one's own committee.

"I practically seized the mike at one time because I was so eager to get the topic on the floor for discussion. It concerned the need to recognize that Blacks have a shorter life span than persons of the majority race. This fact means that they have a generally shorter time to draw Social Security if they must wait until they are 65 before they can apply for their full benefits.

"One of the positives we noted was that some of the issues that interested Oregon actually reached the



BOBBI GARY

floor and emerged in the final draft. Our committee agreed that elders should be paid enough to pay their expenses for volunteering; we saw the need for a national health plan and we made suggestions for a stable Social Security system.

"Our committee also agreed that elders should be allowed to work in their jobs past age 65 as long as they might like, and that elders be allowed to work part time or be offered training or education in something else they might like to do. There were others.

"Some of the negatives of the conference were very apparent," Mrs. Gary said. "For instance, handicapped persons were badly inconvenienced for access, transportation for everyone was poor, food management and services was sometimes deplorable.

"However, on the whole, I'm glad I had the opportunity to go. We can all only hope that Congress will approve our recommendations and put them into law."

Notes and Vibrations from Washington D.C.—See in *Jet Magazine*, of January 21, that Armstrong Williams has surprised everybody by pulling \$5 million out of Congress for construction for Black colleges over the next five years. No mean feat in these parsimonious times. And Black colleges will also get six per cent of total research grant dollars. They used to get only three per cent.

Richard Douglass, and assistant deputy secretary at the Agriculture Dept. worked with Armstrong to get the farm bill through.

Who is Armstrong Williams? Armstrong Williams is a 22-year-old legislative analyst at the U.S. Agriculture Dept. and this writer was pleased to have the opportunity to

ask some questions of him. Over buffet lunch in the Agriculture building in D.C. a few weeks ago, we got together.

Armstrong was treating at lunch and after he wolfed down a sizeable plate of food (and put far too much sugar in his coffee) he was ready to answer my burning question. Question was: "How come a young Black man like you is interested in Strom Thurmond? And saying Thurmond is a 'changed' man? At least that's what *Jet* said you said."

"It's true. It's true," said Armstrong Williams, pushing aside his empty cup.

"I've known Strom Thurmond for nine years. I've read a lot about him and I wrote to him all during high school. Life is an adventure. I like to explore. I'm interested in myself, too.

"My daddy was reading something one night about Strom Thurmond and it made me sad to think that this man, so powerful, could bring so much fear to Black people, and even to Black girls and boys like me in school.

"Suddenly, I wanted to really know Strom Thurmond and to know why he is thought of as a bigot. So I wrote a letter to him. I asked him why. Well, he didn't answer, as you might have guessed. So I wrote him again. And wrote him again. And again.



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

"No answer. "Everybody in Marion, South Carolina, where I was born and brought up, though I was crazy to keep on writing to Mr. Thurmond. I have seven brothers and two sisters and they finally gave up teasing me about writing to him. My Daddy, I'm sure, had his thoughts, too, but I knew he also believed I should find things out for myself. So I kept on writing. Our family lives on a 250-acre tobacco farm and, I guess writing to someone important like Mr. Thurmond made life more interesting to me. I kept at it anyway.

"I finally met Mr. Thurmond when he came to speak in Marion while I was still in Terrell's Bay in high school. He advised me then to keep in school. I did. I went to college at South Carolina State, a 90 per cent Black school. I was graduated from there in May, 1981 with a B.S. degree in Political Science. Cum Laude.

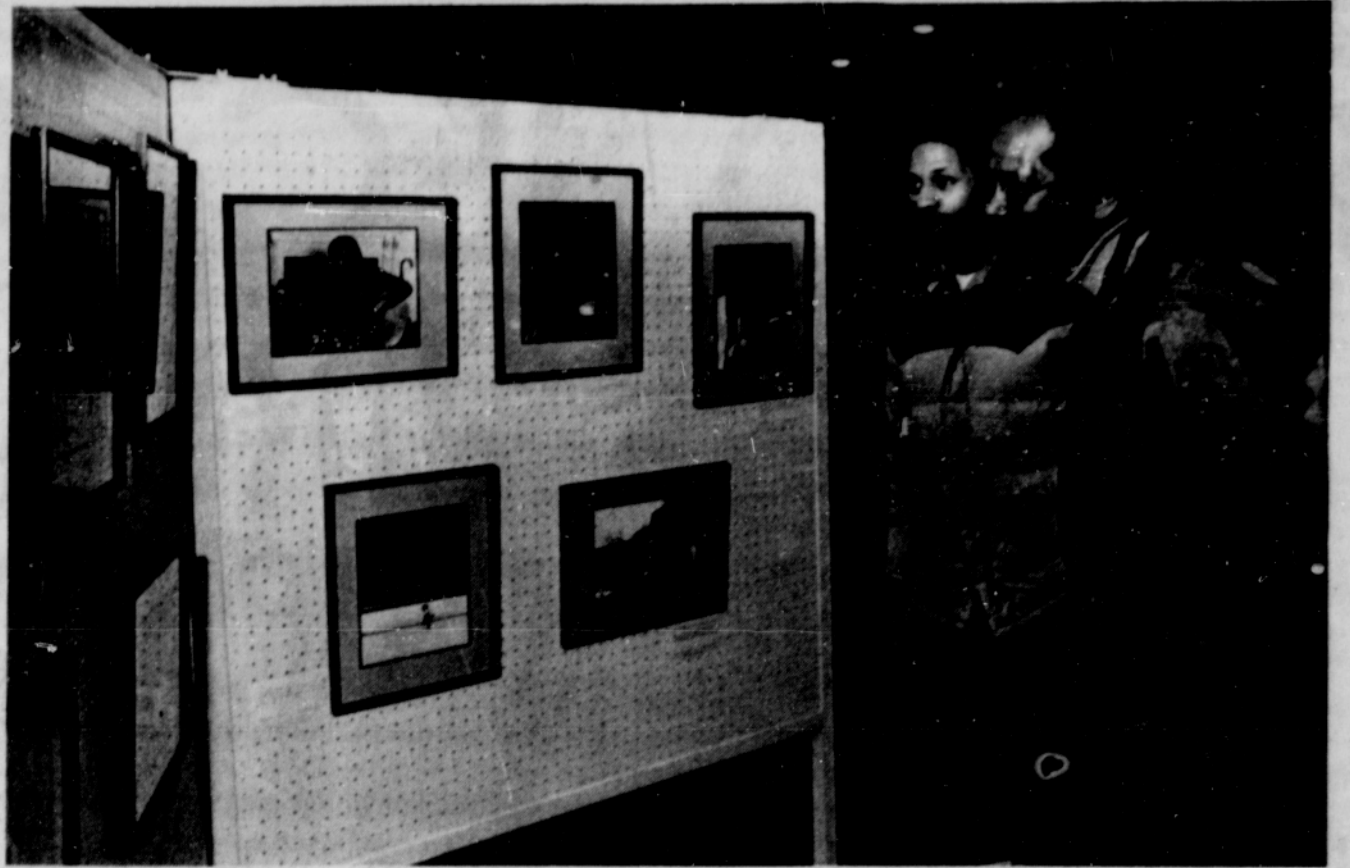
"While I was in college Mr. Thurmond frequently gave me some of his time and really coached me when I ran for and won the office of student body president at SCS. I was graduated on May 10 and on May 11, I received an appointment to work as a U.S. Congressional Aide. From there I became a special assistant to the Director of Congressional Affairs in the Dept. of Agriculture.

"According to others, Mr. Thurmond was a racist, a segregationist. If he has been, I think he is changing and that his wife is helping him to change.

"Did you know that Mr. Thurmond recommended a Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court? He appointed the first Black judge in the Court of Appeals in South Carolina. I know he saved Morris College in Sumpter from going under financially in the last four or five years, and Allen University, too."

Armstrong Williams is now a legislative analyst. After attending Legislative Process Hearing courses on the "hill," he has his sights set on study at Harvard. He wants to know more about agriculture law. "Nothing," says this articulate, ambitious young man, "is impossible with God."

The \$5 million for Black Colleges sounds good for an opener.



Jimmy Robinson and P.C. Peri view photographs of Richard Brown, Observer photographer, at "Snap Decision", an exhibit of

photojournalists from the Portland/Vancouver area.

The show is at the U.S. National Bank Plaza through January 24th.

Neighborhood Meetings

Sabin Community Association, 7:30 pm, Jan. 25, Sabin School, 4013 N.E. 18th.

King Improvement Association 7:30 pm, Jan 26, King Neighborhood Facility, 4815 N.E. Seventh. Discussion of Open Heart treatment program.

Northeast Community meeting with Congressman Ron Wyden to discuss concerns. 10:30 to 11:30 am, King Neighborhood Facility, 4815 N.E. Seventh., Jan. 22.

Portland School Board, 7:30 pm Jan. 25, Blanchard Center, 501 N. Dixon.

Portland/Multnomah Senior Services Division Reorganization Task Force will meet Friday, January 22, 1982, 1:30-4:30 pm, in the Willamette Center, Conference Rooms A & B, 121 S.W. Salmon Street.

The Task Force will be responsible for planning a structure within the guidelines of the Senior Services Division.

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