

EDITORIAL/OPINION

We need more than history

Black History Month is a time for celebration of the heritage and contributions of Black Americans, who have been intimately involved in every facet of American life.

However, this year Black History Month is stained with the highest unemployment rate in recent history. The low point in the economic crises of 1933—The Great Depression—brought an unemployment rate of 25.2 percent. Fifty years later, the rate of unemployment among Black people reached or exceeded that mark. Even more serious, the unemployment gap between Blacks and whites is increasing.

After World War II, the employment gap became conspicuous; Blacks were unemployed at twice the rate of whites. Since 1970, the gap has widened until in 1984, the Black unemployment rate is three times that of whites.

Official figures for December, 1983, showed a white unemployment rate of 7.1 percent and a Black rate of 17.8 percent; two-and-one-half times higher. Among whites 16 years and older, six out of ten were employed, but among Blacks, only half were employed.

Official labor statistics understate Black unemployment. In December, 64.5 percent of the whites 16 and older were counted in the labor force, while only 61.0 percent of Blacks were counted. If these figures were adjusted to count 64.5 percent of Blacks, the Black unemployment rate would be 22.2 percent instead of the 17.8 percent reported. That is 3.1 times the white rate of unemployment.

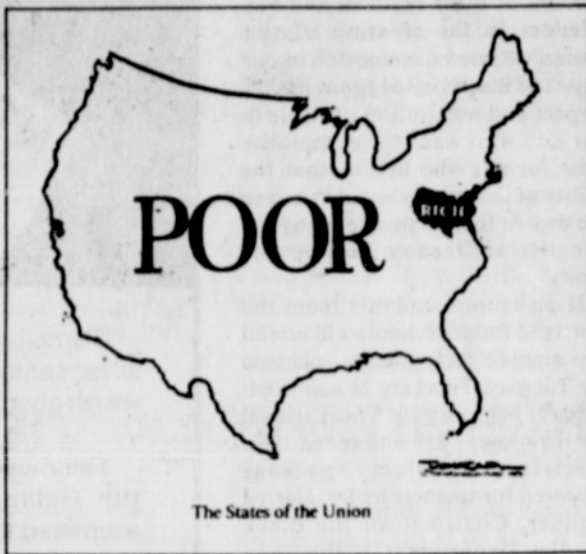
Adjustment of official reporting would show

the Black teenage unemployment at 68.3 percent. This means that two out of every five unemployed teenagers is Black.

The reported rate for Black women was 15 percent, three times that of white women.

This high unemployment rate among Blacks is not accidental; it is perpetuated by employers who refuse to hire Black workers, aided and abetted by the Reagan Administration's all-out attack on affirmative action and its elimination of job training and education funds.

The Black population of the United States has in its hands the power to reverse this trend by organizing, registering, voting for progressive candidates and, above all, defeating Ronald Reagan.



Letters to the Editor

Examine myths

To the editor:

Notice how the dominant news media plays hard on the note, things are getting better largely to please our vanity? On the other hand, consider the big agitation made over pollution and spraying of insecticides, germicides, anti-toxins, etc., until you wonder (if) even electricity isn't contaminated? Of course for growing vice, crime, corruption, etc., they have very little decontaminators. One marvels how a billion Chinese survive without these germicide sprays? One of the biggest polluters is belief in myths inspite of all our education and computers.

Myth is a kind of make-believe such as the myth that there's no myth anymore! A good example of one of our bogus myths is how superior we think we are to, say, the Hindus who let their sacred cows and monkeys devour their scarce food supply while they literally starve to death. Awful! But are we so much better than our make-believe myth infers? How about our great sacred pet-cult with its multi-billion dollar food, medicine, and cosmetic industry; while some thirty-million Americans live below the poverty level? What is the difference but one in degree rather than in kind? Sure, a poor man here is rich compared to

a poor Hindu, but the poor man here feels much more discontented because he knows we have the wherewithal the other lacks. Talk about myth if this isn't a grievous one!

Paul Brinkman, Jr.

Long live democracy!

To the editor:

The Oregonian's reportage on the Sales Tax issue has had many readers concerned about the objectivity of those who gather and comment on this so-called third leg of taxation. The tunnel vision of (the Oregonian) reporters has been more than obvious for endless months; in these dying throes of this big money, bit companies sponsored tax bill, their vision seems to be even more restricted.

Foster Church, of the Oregonian staff, blames "the eroding support of the timber and home building industries, as well as insurance and aluminum interests," for the quandary in which Sales Taxers find themselves.

It would seem to an unbiased observer of our political scene (as a reporter should be) that the recent poll taken by the United Seniors of Oregon, 300,000 strong, who opted against this measure over two-to-one, would make Sales Tax

legislators concerned about their own political () at least a little hesitant about continuing their support.

Also the open opposition of workers in AFL-CIO and other Unions banding together with the Oregon Grange, Fair Share, Tenants Union, and a host of other consumer groups must have been known to the Oregonian reporters. Certainly our legislators knew of this opposition and were aware of the thousands we spoke for.

Perhaps the Oregonian newshawks could be excused for not knowing of the popularity of "No Sales Taxers" who passed out thousands of leaflets at supermarkets against this open raid on ordinary folk's pocket books.

I submit that instead of as the editorial in the Oregonian avers, "the legislators are cowardly," actually our elected representatives are finally being responsive to the voters who elected them.

In my book that is democracy with a small 'd'. Long live democracy!

Russ Farrell
Co-convenor
Portland Gray Panthers

The Observer welcomes Letters to the Editor. Letters should be short, and must contain the writer's name and address (addresses are not printed). The Observer reserves the right to edit for length.

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Racism runs through politics

by Dr. Manning Marable
"From The Grassroots"

Last year I travelled to Boston to speak for Mel King's mayoral campaign. King's subsequent defeat by white candidate, Ray Flynn, reveals the inherent racism inside U.S. politics, and tells us why it is so difficult to obtain progressive change in this country.

Mel King has a very rich history of progressive work within multi-racial movements in Boston. For four years, he was Executive Director of the Urban League of Greater Boston. From 1973 to 1982, King was the State Representative of Boston's Black community, Roxbury, and for other mostly white neighborhoods. King is an unabashed socialist, and in fact, had resigned from the Democratic Party because of its conservative policies.

In 1979's mayoral race, King came in third with 15 percent of the vote. This time around he came in tied for first in the first race, and finished with over 35 percent of the vote in the run-off. I'd like to see any white candidate with Mel's socialist credentials run for mayor of any major U.S. city and obtain over a third of the vote. Thus, in the sense that Mel's running helped to increase the Black, Asian and Latino electorate, and that it forced the eventual winner Ray Flynn to take many positions similar to

King's, the race was a real success.

Why did Mel King lose the general election? Thousands of white liberals and progressives who share his politics capitulated to Flynn, a candidate who had first become prominent as an anti-busing leader. When both were serving concurrent terms in the state legislature, Flynn had voted "yes" for reestablishing the death penalty, for the limitation of abortion rights, and for corporal punishment in schools, while King had voted no. Flynn opposed handgun registration, taxing landlords for violations of the housing code, prohibiting sexual preference discrimination by the state, and increases in state environmental funds. To be fair to Flynn, in the past six years he made a measurable shift to the liberal-left, principally on bread-and-butter issues.

But Flynn tended to skirt the term "racism" in his campaign, declaring that "economic discrimination" is the real problem, and that it affects poor white people in South Boston or Charlestown just as seriously as it does poor Black people in Roxbury. This posture allowed Flynn to pick up the votes of the constituency of a James Kelly, of the racist South Boston Information Center, while holding the allegiance of most white

liberals.

However, an analysis of greater Boston's labor market reveals the reason that thousands of Blacks and Hispanics viewed Mel King's campaign as a significant battle against racism. 22.3 percent of all Black workers in Boston are found in low-paying service jobs, compared to only 8.7 percent of the white labor force. Almost two-thirds of all Black workers (64.2 percent) are in either service, unskilled, semi-skilled, or clerical jobs. Conversely, 38.3 percent of whites and only 19.7 percent of Black employees are either managers, professionals or technicians. Side by side, two distinct political economies exist in the city of Boston; an underpaid labor market for the poor and racial minorities, and a labor market of the white, upwardly mobile middle-to-upper classes. This is the root cause of the racist rhetoric, the anti-busing polemics of the recent past, and the regular outbursts of racist-motivated violence against people of color. White "liberals" who continue to minimize the role of racism as the key for understanding the rise of the Right will never be able to develop ongoing, principled links with the Black movement for equality and self-determination.

From independence to freedom

by Dapo Sobomehin*

Upon achieving political independence in 1960, the diverse peoples of Nigeria were united by an arbitrarily drawn political boundary, a foreign language and a governing apparatus manufactured in Great Britain. Far from perceiving themselves as partners in freedom, the peoples of Nigeria share a mutual empathy akin to that of strangers crushed together in a traffic jam. Since independence there have been five military coups resulting in striking though superficial changes in leadership or governmental form. Poverty is the only constant. Lack of food, water, shelter and health care are the only transcendent social phenomena.

Nigerians have suffered equally under military and civilian oligarchies, and for a brief while, under a constitutional democracy patterned after that of the United States. A sybaritic elite, no matter what its label, cannot be an effective catalyst in deploying the enormous wealth and talents of Nigerians to provide the essentials of life for themselves. Any stable pan-Nigerian government must be an effective coordinator of resources for all of its peoples, and must also serve as an interface with the international community.

Although we in the United States are disappointed by the resurgence of a military regime, we must keep in mind that the developmental stress we have experienced over our more than 200 years of history has for Nigerians been concentrated in a span of less than a quarter century.

There are approximately 100 indigenous cultural groups which now

exist in a state of limbo. They are no longer willing to kindle fires, yet they are unable to marshal the material and expertise to maintain a reliable source of electric light. Doctors, architects, engineers and professionals of all sorts devote their talents to the establishment of their private fortunes, either at home or abroad. As traditional social structures are abandoned, alienation becomes more widespread, leading to apathy among the powerless and a selfish opportunism among the more fortunate. For the past 24 years, Nigeria has been a politically independent nation possessed of valuable natural resources (not the least of which is oil), varied cultural traditions, and an educated manpower. For the past 24 years, most Nigerians have chosen to ignore or misuse these elements of viable nationhood. Callousness and lack of initiative are evident at all levels of social interaction, from lack of self-respect, lack of regard between neighbors, dangerously unsanitary marketplaces, to the massacres of civil war.

The carelessness and corruption of those who have ruled Nigeria have forced the people into these conditions. The blue-eyed colonialists no longer overtly dominate, but the brown-eyed neo-colonialists have created their own brands of suffering. After Nigeria became independent the first men to assume power were ruthless in the pursuit of their private interests. Some of these dictators have since fled to Europe, glutted with gold, sheltered by their Western sponsors who do not understand that they

will be best served by a stable and truly independent Nigeria.

Nigeria must develop a sense of self-reliance, a sense of well-deserved self-respect; Nigeria must value the products created with its own minds and hands and resources. Today, Nigeria exists only in terms of foreign influences. She craves foreign imports and allows herself to be dependent upon the guidance of foreign governments. Nigerians should successfully adapt Western technologies to provide the amenities of life within the context of their own cultures, thus recreating Nigeria as an expression of their own identities. Nigerians need not accept the chaos thrust upon them by a selfish and inept leadership. They must not remain paralyzed in a state of apathy and fear.

The issues of de facto independence and cultural identity are not abstract pieties. Failure to achieve pan-Nigerian unity will result in even further military conflict: breaking of bones and blood vessels and even oil drilling installations. Nigeria is now in a state of transition which cannot be indefinitely maintained. The resolution of its dilemma will determine its future and even now serves as a pattern for the other nations of Africa.

*Dapo Sobomehin has a Ph.D. in Political Science, is a native of Nigeria and works as a Human Relations Specialist for the City of Portland.



Washington Hot Line

by Congressman Ron Wyden

In September of 1983, I voted against the resolution that allowed the President to keep American Marines in Beirut. I did so because I felt they had no defined role and were put in extreme danger without much chance of gaining anything that was worth the risk. In short, they were given a mission impossible.

Unfortunately, my side of the vote did not carry the day, and the President was given a blank check to keep the Marines in Lebanon for 18 months. Now, five months later, the folly of that policy has been made clear—the Marines are pulling out.

Even though it is not under the best of circumstances, the pullout is the proper thing to do. The question we must ask now is "how did we get ourselves into this mess?"

It was my feeling from the outset that we all could endorse the stated goals behind Administration policy—support for a democratically elected government in Beirut and removal of all foreign troops from Lebanon.

It's the means that were in question.

As time went on, I became more and more convinced that sending a couple thousand Marines to the Beirut airport was not the way to go about achieving these goals.

Time and again, at meeting after meeting in the Third District, I was asked to explain just what our boys were doing in Lebanon.

And there was no good explanation.

The Administration seems to believe that our presence there was part of a conflict between west and east, democracies and communism. It's just not that simple.

The fact is that wrangling between east and west is just a small part of what is going on in Lebanon. That major conflict in Lebanon is religious—and has been for centuries.

Given that situation, I didn't think there was much 2,000 marines and the big guns of the Battleship New Jersey could do to reverse it.

That's why I voted against the

deployment of the Marines. That is why I think it is proper that we are now leaving. I only wish it could have been months earlier.

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