

OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES
BY Kathryn Hall Bogle



OBSERVING 39 YEARS of serving the Portland community, the Urban League of Portland marked its annual dinner for Thursday, April 19, 1984. Edwin C. "Bill" Berry came from Chicago to make the keynote address before an audience of 800 persons gathered at the Red Lion Jantzen Beach to celebrate the occasion.

City Council Commissioner Charles Jordan, master of ceremonies for the evening, opened the scheduled program following the invocation by the Rev. Rodney I. Page, executive director of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Greetings and welcome were by Portland's Mayor Frank Ivancie, Multnomah County Board of Commissioners' president, Arnold Biskar, and Richard Kishimoto, retiring Urban League Board Chair. Kishimoto reported a "financially healthy" agency with the 1984 annual audit receiving high marks.

Kishimoto later introduced Donny Adair, the newly elected chairman of the Urban League executive board, who is employed by Emanuel Hospital to conduct business of the hospital's affirmative action offices. Kishimoto also reported that in the 1983-1984 calendar year, the Urban League has served more than 15,000 men, women and children in employment, youth services, senior adult services and community services. He credited Joyce Owens-Smith, program vice-president, for this "challenging task of service to the community."

Freddie Petett, executive and president of the Urban League, praised her staff, members, friends and supporters of the Urban League for their "significant accomplishment—despite the League's limited or declining resources due to continuing cut backs and constrictions on social service funding." Petett acclaimed the achievement of a central Northeast location, the Urban Plaza properties, which will allow the Urban League to consolidate all its programs and activities and will "enhance our service capacity." Petett reminded her hearers that Black Portland is still "stranded in depression-era economic conditions—that Black unemployment remains above 20% while Black youth unemployment measures at a rate over 50%." She drew attention to the many acts of racial discrimination plaguing the city and to the needs of Portland's minority and low-income residents who are too frequently relegated to the lowest priorities of public institutions.

Don Clark, executive director of the Burnside Consortium, a long-time friend of both the Urban League and "Bill" Berry, introduced the keynote speaker as "one of our great Civil Rights leaders, the campaign strategist for the election of Harold Washington, Mayor of Chicago, a great teacher and a great American."

Berry opened his remarks giving credit to three persons who had been on his staff during his 10 years of building the original Portland branch of the Urban League, beginning in 1945. E. Shelton Hill, who later succeeded Berry as executive of the agency, Gertrude Rae and Myrtle Carr, all present, were described by Berry as the first Urban League



Edwin "Bill" Berry, former Urban League Executive gives keynote speech at Urban League Annual Dinner. (l-r) Donny Adair, newly elected Chair of Urban League Executive Board; E. Shelton Hill, retired Executive of Urban League; Edwin "Bill" Berry, Keynote Speaker at Urban League Annual Dinner; Freddie Petett, President, Urban League of Portland; and Donald Clark, Director, Burnside Consortium and long-time Urban League member and volunteer. (Photo: P.C. Peri)

team; small but determined to improve the conditions of Blacks in Portland toward making the city a "place of decency and democracy."

Recalling that he had found much bigotry in Portland with segregation and discrimination a way of life in both the public and private sectors, Berry reviewed the list of 3,000 members of the Urban League at the time of his departure and gave them credit for the continuing growth of the League and its programs. Berry gave plaudits to many present who were charter members and named many who are deceased, but whose efforts are remembered. Calling Dr. De Norval Unthank the "father" of the Urban League, Berry also mentioned Phil Reynolds, Roosevelt Rogers, Dick and Maurine Neuberger, Dave Robinson, Clarence Ivey, Tom Lawson McCall, Helen Catlin, John Whitelaw, Luke Roberts and Mark Smith as having made commendable contributions to the strength of the agency.

Berry noted the progress Portland has made in the current inclusion of Blacks in the various levels of government, in communications, in industry and commerce, but he also warned that "the battle against bigotry has just begun." He said that America is "still a long, long way from the goal and the promise of fair play and equal life chances for all citizens," in spite of what he called "benchmarks in the Black man's struggle in America."

"Racism is deeply embedded in the culture and the way of daily life in these United States—the battle against it will be long and hard," he said.

Berry viewed the job remaining ahead for Blacks as being "to alter (American) culture—which is tough," he warned. "It is so difficult," he went on to say, "because most white Americans practice it unconsciously, out of habit, and not through meanness or intended cruelty. These cultured habits have been with us so long, that they have become institutionalized."

Berry called on the Urban League as a change agent, a leadership agency, an educational agency, a research agency and a negotiating agency—to "agitate" by stirring up interest and support through

speeches and writing to produce changes and to enlist the help of other agencies, public and private, to play a part in this "noble endeavor."

Berry was awarded a standing ovation at the close of his address. The Youthsound Ensemble, accompanied by pianist Janice Scroggins, and directed by Ken Berry of this city, were featured in musical selections during the evening.

ALUNCHEON, ARRANGED by the IBM Corporation, the U.S. Bancorp and the Portland Urban League drew about 50 Corporate executives located in the community to the Lloyd Center Red Lion Inn on last Thursday. The executives came to hear Edwin (Bill) Berry, a special assistant to George Johnson, president of Johnson Products Company of Chicago, speak on "The Corporate Role in Community Affairs." Opening remarks were by Vernon V. Chatman and Freddie Petett, president of the Urban League.

According to Donny R. Adair, newly elected chair of the Urban League's board of directors, most of the executives present at the luncheon had assisted the League in the past and, for them, Berry's address would be an update on the progress of the League. For others, the speech was a "briefing on promotion of corporate citizenship and philanthropy." Introduction of the speaker was by E. Shelton Hill, retired executive of the Portland Urban League. Among those present were representatives of Nike, Safeway Stores, Fred Meyer, Inc., the legal firm of Stoel, Rives and Boley, Silco Construction Co. (which has been engaged to reconstruct Urban Plaza), Emanuel Hospital, Providence Medical Center, Pacific Northwest Bell and Metropolitan Hospitals, Inc. Others present included *The Oregonian*, KGW, and KPTV whose personnel director is Gertrude Rae who had been a part of Bill Berry's team at the start of the Portland branch of the Urban League.

Berry, in part of his speech to the executive group, described to them a fairly new venture undertaken by the Chicago Urban League: the establishment of "Chicago United," an interracial organization of businessmen interested in the improvement of race relations. Many major banks and savings and loans institutions, Sears

Roebuck and others are involving their chief executives in Chicago United, Berry said. At the present, there are about 140 executives loaned to this organization, he said, with their first goal being a reorganization of the Chicago educational system. A second ongoing interest will be the study of philanthropy (how much of the corporate dollar is given in the name of philanthropy and how it has been used). A third, and possibly the core of them all, is the study Chicago United will undertake to discover the causes of discrimination—which they now think of as a symptom of the major disease: racism.

Berry pointed out that in Chicago, the Business Advisory Committee of the Chicago Urban League is made up of presidents of Chicago firms because they have learned that management by the top level executive ensures that "reports are out to really educate the personnel of the company and that the top executive can best keep account of what is going on in his company."

Calling Chicago "the most residentially segregated city in the United States," Berry said, "In Chicago, we know the effect of change will be tough—we know it and we are eager to take it on. In Portland, you can do it too. Justice can prevail. We want to see an America where there is no penalty for the color of the skin. That is all we are trying to do. I guarantee we will settle for no less than that."

While in the city "Bill" Berry lectured on the campus of the University of Portland, speaking to students on "Cultural History" in one class. Political science students heard him speak on "Racial Stereotypes—Their Impact on American Politics," and business ethics students heard Berry's talk on "Minorities in Business in General and Affirmative Action versus Reverse Discrimination."

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As City Commissioner I'd propose free downtown parking on Saturdays. This idea doesn't require spending one cent and would be good for everyone. For shoppers. For businesses. For tourists.

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