

# EDITORIAL/OPINION

## Despite Visual Media Bias, Crack Abuse Isn't Just a Black Problem

The rise in the use of the deadly and destructive form of cocaine known as crack has been well-publicized in both the visual and printed media.

The media's focus on crack, in an effort to educate and warn the public about the danger of the most addictive drug in society, is a good example of what the news profession is all about.

However, the manner in which the visual media has relayed the crack problem to the American public reveals the continuing racial bias within the TV industry.

If one has been paying attention to the major news networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) reporting on the crack problem in this country, the viewer gets the impression that only African-Americans distribute and use the illicit drug.

Each TV network almost always shows African-American husbands, wives, grandmothers, sisters, and brothers being arrested for possession of crack.

Such biased portrayal of African-Americans by the networks isn't new, for TV has continued to present African-Americans in a negative manner. This is due to racism among the networks which prevents African-Americans from becoming TV producers. There are very few African-American producers among the three major networks.

The crack problem in this country knows no social or ethnic boundaries. Crack has captured the nation's ghettos and suburbs. Its users come from all social strata and all walks of life. It is not just an African-American problem, like the visual media would like us to believe.

## Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

Dr. Manning Marable is professor of sociology and political science at Furdue University. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.

### "Black Families and Poverty"

No one doubts that the Black family, and by extension, the entire Black community, is in the midst of a major socioeconomic crisis. Ebony magazine recently termed it "perhaps the biggest crisis Blacks have faced since slavery times." This crisis is characterized by "a series of economic upheavals, exacerbated by an epidemic of hard drugs and structural faults in the American economy, (which) have undermined the social infrastructure of Black America." The statistics speak for themselves: Over 40 percent of all Black families are headed by women, and more than half of all Black children now live in poverty. The poverty rate is 67 percent for all Black female-headed households.

The plight of Black families has led to the revival of the infamous "Moynihan Thesis". First proposed two decades ago, the argument basically declared that the Black family was "pathological", and that Black women were "Matriarchs." Another influential scapegoat theory which is currently receiving critical acclaim has been produced by Charles Murray, author of the book "Losing Ground: American Social Policy." Murray provides an intellectual rationalization for the destruction of social welfare programs. Unlike earlier racist theorists, he doesn't make the error of saying that we Blacks are genetically or culturally inferior—after all, this is the mid-1980s! Instead, he claims that a liberal social policy group since the Great Society programs has made it economically attractive for poor people to become dependent on government handouts. Murray asserts that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) encourages women to have children, and rewards promiscuity and laziness. The result is a declining standard of living for many Blacks.

The central contradiction of Murray's thesis is the simple fact that, as federal government programs have increased, poverty rates overall have indeed fallen. When public programs are cut back—as under Reagan—we have seen direct increase in overall poverty.

What has helped to perpetuate poverty in the Black community in the 1980s? Black low income families have had to bear the bulk of the burden of the Reagan economic agenda. According to the statistics of the Urban Institute, during fiscal year 1985 over 37 percent

of the participants in Employment Training programs were Black Americans; these programs were cut by 38 percent that year. Subsidized housing, reduced that year by 11.4 percent, had 45 percent Black participants. Pell Grants for higher education, cut by 16 percent, had 34 percent Black recipients. AFDC, reduced by 14 percent, had 47 percent Black participants. And Food Stamps, cut by 13.8 percent, had 37 percent Black recipients. These cuts in human needs programs undermined the economic foundations of literally hundreds of thousands of Black households.

Conversely, areas of massive government spending over the past six years have helped to hike Black joblessness. The shift in federal spending priorities from human services to military hardware has lowered job opportunities for Blacks, Hispanics, and other people of color, because these populations are not represented in those firms which receive military contracts. If we use 1980 employment statistics, a shift in one million jobs from educational institutions, social services and health services to firms which are military-related would create a net loss of over 60,000 jobs for Black women and men. The very real, and not hypothetical, shift in such government expenditure has had the net impact of disrupting thousands of Black families' conditions.

Some of the talk about the Black family's crisis is indeed accurate. Black-on-Black crime, spouse abuse, and other manifestations of anti-social behavior are quite real. But at the level of national public policy, there is an attempt to attribute all of the Black community's problems to internal flaws—that Black women are promiscuous, that Black teenagers are all criminally inclined, that Black men are lazy or non-existent husbands, etc. Such an effort, which has recently been advanced by conservative Democrats as well as Reaganites, must be denounced for what it is: an explicitly racist attempt to shift the burden of responsibility to the backs of Black people for the effects of racism. If we had full employment, universal health care, decent and free public housing, most of the Black family's problems would disappear. The "crisis" is essentially a crisis of the system in which Black people find themselves.

# Letters to the Editor

## A Letter to the Community

BUF—Asset or Liability?

To many people the answer to this question is simple, but after a quick glance at who and what the organization is, the question becomes a little harder to answer.

Three individuals, all males, make up the nucleus of the Black United Front (BUF) organization. The trio are Ron Herndon, Rev. Jackson (the two co-chairs) and Herb Cawthorne (the silent partner). Although these three individuals represent the BUF collectively, they tend to operate quite independently of each other. This makes it very difficult to investigate just who said what about whom and which organization they were representing at the time: The Black Leadership Conference or The Black United Front. Or are we to assume that they are one and the same? Is the Black Leadership Conference a front for The Black United Front? The members of groups such as these and The Urban League should examine their allegiance. When they serve in these capacities, are they representing their respective organizations or are they collectively representing the BUF?

Mr. Ron Herndon is the most out-spoken of the trio. At any time that the Oregonian wants or needs a sensational headline, they need only call one person in the entire N/NE section of the city: our very own Ron. Ron has a good way with the press and rises to the occasion. His remarks will, 9 out of 10 times, make the paper. Usually, his comments are taken out of context which tends to change their meanings.

For many years now, people have been using the BUF for their own private wars and hidden agendas. Many of the individuals are not fit to represent themselves as individuals, let alone an organization like the BUF. Local papers and KBOO radio have been the targets for hate propaganda by these individuals. When asked why these individuals use the BUF to hide behind, Mr. Herndon replied, "There are many that think they speak for the BUF, but if Herb, Rev. Jackson or myself does not say it, it was not said by the BUF." Well, that's fine, Ron, but how and when are you going to address this problem which is out of hand? This is a problem in your own camp.

Then there is the great Rev. Jackson. He is the lone warrior. He was recruited by Herb and Ron to add a certain amount of credibility to the organization. He was to serve as a figurehead to bring legitimacy to the organization. Ron did not have it, and Herb certainly did not have it, but "Rev." Jackson, he had a little. So the trio was born and all of a sudden the figurehead started to speak. Ron and Herb tried to control him, but he got loose and is running amuck. At this point, he is the single largest liability within the trio.

On to Herbert Cawthorne. He is a man driven for power. A stint on the school board, and he is ready for City Hall and on to Mayor. Unfortunately, Mr. Bogle broke his political spirit, and he was forced into political exile as Director of the Urban League.

Herb is interested in playing in the majors but is still considered a minor league player. Many felt that his

association with the BUF helped Bogle. That is possible but remember a sexual harassment charge some time ago that involved Mr. Cawthorne. It died and began to resurface just before the City election. This little item may come back to haunt him later.

Herb carries some hidden agendas, also, but most people read his like a book. Herb, you want to be somebody and some day you will.

Our question still remains: Is the BUF an asset or liability?

As an organization, I believe they can regain some of their lost credibility. They must rise to meet the community's challenge for activism and mobilization. There is a major drug problem in the community. Prostitution, teen pregnancy, crime, education and many more problems affect the lives of both black and white in the community. These are problems that need to be addressed now. They are growing day by day, and very few people are trying to do anything about them.

Instead of reacting to a major blow-up, as the BUF has done in the past, why not investigate and bring the problem out into the open first.

The BUF can be a great asset to the community by addressing the problem, not by attacking other members of the community who are also trying to do something. If the BUF can work on providing support and leadership, the community will rally to their aid.

The liability that the Front carries with them is their incredible vendetta against one of the community's most influential political families. Gladys and Bill McCoy must represent all the people in the districts. They care about the community, have raised 7 children in the community, and intend to continue to serve the community. If ever the BUF or any other group or organization wants to look at their records, make comments to them, or have a problem with something they have done, they should feel free to discuss these things openly with them.

**The cheap shots in the press and the back stabbing must stop.** There are too few people willing or able to be active politically in the community. Let's not continue to fling spears from behind trees in order to make points. And let's learn to talk about our differences. We might be coming from different points of view, but we are all looking for the same end: **A better quality of life and a brighter future.**

Let's put things into perspective before we go. If we as a community are going to dig up past, negative deeds by individuals in the community, let's not be selective. Let's look at everybody. But a better suggestion would be not to dig up negative deeds and tear people down, and instead, work to solve our problems together. Remember, they are all our problems.

Is the BUF an ASSET or LIABILITY? It's not such a simple question after all.

A Concerned Citizen,  
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LaVerne Davis, pre-kindergarten—2nd grade coordinator at King Elementary School, helps parents register their children on Tuesday, the first day of school. Photo by Richard J. Brown



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