

METROPOLITAN

A Man of Excellence

by Nyewusi Askari

Part II of II

During my forty-two years of living in America (most of it in the Deep South), I have had the opportunity to meet many African-Americans who epitomized the ancestral definition of "Wise One". Driven by a knowledge of life's true possibilities, they tend to spread magic wherever they go. In our motherland, these "Wise Ones" are profoundly honored and revered. In America, they are much too often ignored, viewed as unimportant, and driven into inactivity. Eventually, they fade into oblivion.

These thoughts and more entered my mind as I listened to Professor Burt highlight his life's journey.

- 1945-1954: Anticipating H&R Block by many years, Professor Burt established the Pacific Business Service with an Income Tax Division that served clients throughout the country; had branch offices (and home solicitors) throughout Vanport City, Oregon's second largest city, until it was flooded out of existence.

- 1966: Won a National Science Foundation Award for The Dalles, Oregon School District; was first in the nation to put an on-line computer education system in an elementary school classroom. In 1969, Portland Public Schools refused Professor Burt's offer to install the system in their classrooms.

- 1969: Wrote a book: "Black Inventors of America" detailing major inventions by African-Americans. The book is currently in use in school systems in their country and abroad.

- 1974-1979: Designed and taught the first government-sponsored and university-accredited Affirmative Action course. More than half of Portland's Affirmative Action Officers for the government and the private sector took Professor Burt's course.

- 1977: Secured a large federal grant to support on-the-job medical education for women and minority students. This program was operated by Portland Metropolitan Steering Committee.

- 1978: Designed exhibits and placed the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Forest Service in the National Convention of the NAACP. This was the first time in its history that the U.S. Department of Agriculture had been an integral part of the National Convention of a major Black organization.

"Subsequent communication and visits with the Forest Service personnel (and Black colleges) around the nation has suggested that the subsequent interaction between this agency and the national conventions of similar Black organizations — a process that followed on the last ten year — has resulted in the direct employment of hundreds of Black scientists, engineers, technicians, accountants, truck drivers, draftsmen, surveyors, etc.," Professor Burt explained. "I think this has to be my best effort to date. May I give due credit here to former City Commissioner Charles Jordan who first introduced me to the Forest Service through Mr. Jetie Wilds, then the Civil Rights Director of Region 6, and to Mr. William Green, his successor. And also to Mr. Phillip Murray who handled the New York end of my contract for the NAACP Convention."

Closer to home, Professor recalled a particular phone call he received back in 1969.

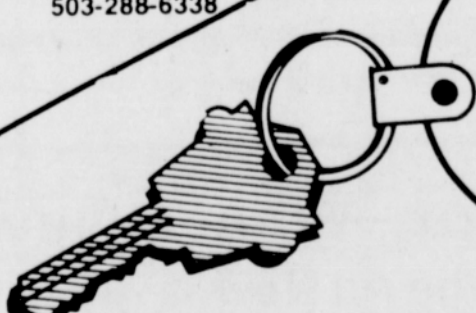
"In late 1969, I received a call from Dr. Stanley Jacobs, internationally known inventor of DMSO, asking me to visit the Lake Oswego Montessori School and demonstrate my techniques. There, I designed and implemented a "Computer Learning Board" for four- and five-year-old children."

"It was a computer program based upon the sequences of daily tasks most likely to be performed by five-year-olds — from getting out of bed, to brushing their teeth, to arriving at school and receiving assignments.

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Photo by Richard J. Brown

Cycles and loops were built into the algorithm such as 'finding bathroom occupied by siblings' and, then, looping back there 'until vacant.' The system worked very well, but, again, I could not get the school system interested."

A new kind of excitement began to gleam in his eyes. "But, I see myself as ready to take advantage of a long series of learning cycles. I am prepared to carry out some innovative, experience-based educational programs and models in the field of science and mathematics. I am talking about national models which can greatly escalate the process of bringing inner-city youth and others up to par and beyond."

"For instance, for the past five years, I have been developing data banks and outlining physical and operational parameters for a new type of inner-city Technology Applications Center that goes far beyond anything being done in the country today. I have incorporated everything I have learned in forty years about interface and interaction between science, industry and education. Integral to the process is the motivational thrust provided by the contributions of African-American and African students and inventors; an expansion of the model I introduced in my book, 'Black Inventors of America'."

Then there was a long silence: a warm silence, a promising silence,

a silence in memory of all the great Africans and African-Americans (past and present) who've enriched our lives (Black and White) with their innovative magic.

Preparing to depart, Professor Burt gave me an assuring smile. "This is not a speculative or dream project, but as evidenced in this interview, an experience-based culmination of proven ventures. I'll tell you what... My former students keep coming by from all over the country to say thanks, and they are from every category of professional accomplishment you can mention. That's where it's at!"

He smiled and then was gone. Hours later, as I continued to absorb the shared magic of his personal journey, I became totally humble. I asked myself, "What manner of a man is this? One so humble, so sharing, so dedicated to the proposition that all children deserve the best of our everything. What manner of a man is this, who, at age 65, took my heart in his hands and blessed it with an inspiration that will live inside of me and my work forever?"

Now I know why Professor Burt smiled such an assuring smile. He already knew what I am still learning: "The more we give, the longer we live."

Thanks, Professor...

United Negro College Fund Benefit

Semper Fidelis Club is having their annual Fall Tea, Autumn Roaring 20's, November 8, 1987, 1:00 to 5:00 P.M. at the home of Mrs. Ernestine Wiseman, address: 5225 N.E. Rodney. Donations from the proceeds will be contributed to the National Negro College Fund.

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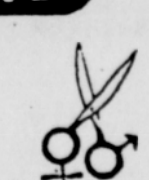
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