

EDITORIAL / OPINION

EDITORIAL

Media in the Wrong

Without a doubt, Catherine O'Hara is a heroine. Saving the life of 7-month-old Denoris McClendon was honorable, commendable and worthy of the highest praise.

To Ms. O'Hara, **The Portland Observer** says, "Thank you for a job well done."

The controversy that surrounded Ms. O'Hara's decision to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a Black child without first thinking about becoming infected with AIDS deserves more attention.

We believe that all persons should be concerned about the AIDS epidemic. We believe that all persons should find out as much as they can about the disease and act accordingly. However, for anyone to suggest that O'Hara should have considered the question of AIDS before considering whether or not to save the life of 7-month-old Denoris is cold and callous.

To create a moral dilemma when there is no need is to invite panic and isolation. To raise the question during the saving of a Black child by a white female borders on racism.

When Channel 2 heard about Ms. O'Hara's heroism, it conducted a viewer call-in poll. The poll asked the viewers whether or not they would help a person in need, if they weren't sure that person was free of the AIDS virus. More than 500 callers said no.

We will never know if these callers said no because of fear or because of the influence of what they saw and heard the morning they were asked to call in their opinion. To date, we can't recall another poll of that sort, although many lives have been saved by men and women who didn't think twice about doing it.

Portlanders should be cautious of such polls. Most merely generate fear and panic among the general population. Portlanders should not allow the threat of AIDS to prevent them from helping others. Portlanders should take precautions to protect their faces and any broken skin when performing such life-saving acts, but they should not have to think twice.

Ask yourself, would you refrain from giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to your neighbor's child just because you were afraid you would catch AIDS? Would you refrain from giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to your neighbor because of the same reason? We must seriously examine our feelings on the issue and make the appropriate decision.

The Portland Observer suggests that citizens who are concerned about this matter contact the American Red Cross or other like agencies. Such agencies will provide all the possible information available on the subject. Currently, some paramedics carry a machine that has replaced the need to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Some doctors suggest wearing gloves, masks and goggles when administering first aid.

However, we urge all Portlanders to follow the example of Catherine O'Hara. Keep an open heart. Keep an open mind. Reach out to those who need your help.

Someday it may be you.

Observer Note: The question of the media's insensitivity in relating the threat of AIDS with the family devastated by death and fire was asked in the presence of most of the local media; yet none of the TV stations, radio stations or newspapers that made this an issue gave any air time or ink to the principled heroine's outrage. **The Portland Observer** commends Catherine O'Hara for speaking out.

Civil Rights Journal

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

The Harassment of African American Leadership

Physical threats against the lives of progressive African American leaders are an ever-present reality in the United States. However, this is not the only kind of attack which they risk when they speak out on the issues. A more veiled but equally insidious attack is the legal harassment of African American leadership. This was re-documented in a study earlier this year, entitled: "Harassment of Black Elected Officials: Ten Years Later." The report was prepared by Dr. Mary R. Sawyer for Voter Education and Registration Action, Inc., a Washington-based research institute.

An earlier report by Dr. Sawyer, conducted ten years ago, concluded: "The higher the level of office or the more outspoken the official, or the greater the influence and power — the higher the incident of harassment [of a Black elected official]."

From the evidence presented in the current study, not much has changed. The weight of the evidence leads Dr. Sawyer to conclude that after much legal maneuvering by local and federal prosecutors, usually via a grand jury investigation, "[An] indictment typically results in acquittal, or in a conviction which is ultimately overturned on appeal — which then receives a three inch announcement on page 17 after the story had been front page, headline news for months on end."

And this is a major point of the study. Black elected officials under attack are not being tried by a jury of their peers. They are being tried in the press by prosecuting attorneys who selectively leak information helpful to the prosecution. Certainly this has been true of the witch-hunt now being carried out by U.S. Attorney DiGenova against Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry. As hard as he has tried — and he's tried very hard — DiGenova can't seem to substantiate any charges against Mayor Barry. Thus, he has stooped to trying Mr. Barry in the press. And papers like

the Washington Post and the Washington Times have been only too happy to oblige.

Some have said, "So, what? They treat white officials the same way. Just look at what happened to Gary Hart." But the differences are context and proportion. Let us remember that the most recent investigations have been mounted against vocal African American politicians by U.S. Attorneys under the Reagan Administration.

The Justice Department's aborted attack against key African American elected officials in the Alabama Black Belt was patently political. These officials, civil rights leaders all, had been instrumental in increasing African American voter registration and participation to one of the highest levels in the nation. They had also been constant critics of the Reagan Administration. Charges against the leadership were either dropped or those charged were eventually acquitted. But vindication came only after a long, financially-draining trial, and after the Justice Department had harassed scores of elderly Black voters.

Another major difference between the investigations of African American and white officials is the disproportionate number of investigations aimed at African American elected officials. There are 490,770 white elected officials in the United States. Of that number only a small percentage are being investigated. In stark contrast, only 6,400 (or 1.5%) of elected officials are African American. Yet when William Webster was FBI Director he admitted that 40% of African American elected officials were under investigation.

This is not a random occurrence. It is a deliberate and systematic scheme to prevent further political empowerment of the African American community. In this nation, when a people are singled out for racial and political intimidation, the result impedes and strangles democracy for all citizens.

The Civil Rights Journal, written by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., is a publication of the United Church of Christ.

Letters to the Editor

Black Cultural Impress

Concerning "Saturday School Report Card" (1-13-88): I'm inclined to believe Black studies are a vital instrument in the determination of the quality of our future. As such, it is not a discipline to be limited to Black children, for they alone will have had direct and continuing exposure to the critical learnings of the Black experience. The formal pedagogic exposure should be for others, for in so critical an endeavor, nothing should be taken for granted. The caucasoid child, whose social experience and whose value constructs have been deliberately contrived in most cases and inadvertently neglected in others, has been excluded from the reality of the Black impress. Hence, the caucasoid child should, at all costs, have the benefit of Black studies at some level in his academic career. Innocent of this experience, he faces the future with a distortion of the past which will seriously compromise his fitness to perform acceptably in the world as it will be.

Whatever the current level of recognition, Black Americans [sic] are a very significant part of the prevailing African [sic] heritage and from the peculiar learning of the Black experience in Amerika [sic]. Therefore, the effort to attempt participatory modification of contemporary culture must continue, for the social order must be progressively humanized. Blacks must continue the struggle to enlarge the impress of the Black experience as a pedagogic instrument in the interest of their own cultural continuity. The future of Amerika [sic] is not

better than the education of her children, and the quality of education is no better than the quality of information we share in getting at the truth.

Looking also at countries which have recently emerged from colonialism does not offer ready-made solutions to the oppression of American [sic] Black people. In each of these cases, the oppressed peoples were the overwhelming majority of the population, while the oppressors were a small minority. In the U.S., the situation is reversed, and the oppressors are the overwhelming majority and the oppressed are the small minority. These differences in numbers, of necessity, call for different tactics.

I'm inclined to believe the question facing Black people is: How can we most effectively teach our children the political facts of life? It is obvious that we can dismiss the media and caucasoid government agencies. There remains three institutions which could be of help in the political socialization of Black children: the family, the peer group, and the church. I believe the weight of this racism has fallen most heavily on the Black male. The Black church can serve the community in a manner that is likely to be of benefit to Black people. It still remains the most durable of Black institutions. A Martin Luther King could not have come from the north because the northern Black church is still searching for its sense of self.

In my travels around the world, I've noticed, in most countries, the schools have been assigned a major role in the politicalization of children. The U.S. differs from most



Along the Color Line

Manning Marable

Educational Genocide

Growing statistical evidence indicates that a type of educational genocide is occurring against Black college students across the country. An examination of recent data illustrates that the gap between the educational opportunities between whites and Blacks has widened severely in the 1980s.

Superficially, it appeared to many observers at first that the educational gains achieved by Black Americans during the desegregation movement of the 1960s had continued into more recent years. For instance, the proportion of high school dropouts for Black youth aged 16 to 19 actually fell from 22 percent in 1970 to 12 percent in 1983. Conversely, Black enrollment in universities, junior colleges, and in professional schools soared. In 1970, only about one in eight Afro-Americans over the age of 25 had finished college. Thirteen years later, Black college enrollment had doubled reaching 1.1 million. Blacks amounted to one tenth of the total American collegiate population, according to the Bureau of the Census. Many Black students were the beneficiaries of affirmative action recruitment programs, which broke down some of the traditional Jim Crow barriers which kept earlier generations of qualified Blacks out of elite, white institutions.

But Blacks who gained admission to such colleges generally were well prepared academically. Indeed, the gap between white and Black college entrance examination scores narrowed by more than 40 points since the mid-1970s.

However, these educational improvements partially masked other more negative trends, which were not fully appreciated until the mid-1980s. In previous years, the cost of a college education did not generally keep pace with the rate of inflation, which had the effect of reducing the real cost of college for some working-class families. But during the Reagan administration, tuition and fees have been much higher than inflation, and the requirements for federal financial assistance have been severely constricted. Grants formerly comprised over two-thirds of all tuition costs for the average Black student. By the mid-1980s, the vast majority of aid was represented in the form of loans not grants, and the total amount of money given was sharply reduced.

Since most Blacks' family income failed to keep pace with inflation, the amount of discretionary income which could be saved for an education also declined. Working-class households earning \$15,000 to \$25,000 annually could scarcely afford to pay even one-third of the tuition, room, and board at most private and many public colleges. Thus between 1980 and 1984, the total number of Black youth in four-year colleges dropped by 3.3 percent, down to 613,000 students. The total percentage of students between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in college between 1975 and

1985 rose for whites, 26.9 of 28.7 percent; but the percentage fell for Blacks, 20.7 percent down to 19.8 percent. Another effective method of viewing the problem is by focusing on the percentage of all high school students who went directly on to colleges. For whites, the college matriculation rate was 51 percent in 1977, and increased to 59 percent by 1984. During the same years, the rate of Black high school students going directly to college plummeted, from 50 percent down to 42 percent. In short, Blacks are graduating from high school in record numbers — but proportionately fewer of them are enrolling into colleges.

The plight of the "disappearing Black student" is particularly critical in graduate and professional level studies. In 1972, there were 21,000 full-time Black graduate students. By 1984, the figure had declined to 18,000 students. This trend was especially apparent in Southern states, where the implementation of college desegregation efforts had lagged under the Reagan administration. According to the research of Black educators William Trent and Elaine J. Copeland, the number of Black graduate students enrolled in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida combined fell from 1,783 in 1976 to 1,345 in 1982. First-time graduate enrollment for Blacks also declined from 1,218 in 1978 down to 757 six years later.

Nationwide, Black enrollment at all graduate schools declined by approximately one eighth since 1980. Black enrollments in management and business schools dropped from 7,511 students in 1980 to 7,330 in 1984, barely 3.6 percent of all business students. Despite increases in Blacks' test scores for medical school admissions, the percentage of Black medical students has also dropped since 1984. In a few fields, Afro-American doctoral students remain virtually nonexistent. For instance, in 1986 only 11 Blacks were granted doctoral degrees in engineering. The total number of Blacks obtaining doctorates in computer science last year was three.

What are the implications of this systemic destruction of Black higher educational opportunity? Colleges and professional schools are prime institutions of socioeconomic upward mobility for millions of Americans — Black, Hispanic, and white. By partially closing these avenues for training, the size of the potential Black middle class will be severely limited. Since the middle class has traditionally produced the leadership of Black America in electoral politics, economics, the clergy, education, and the arts, the ability of this strata to reproduce itself is curtailed. Thus one central racial tenet of Reaganism, which is to move Black America backward to its subordinate status of the Plessy vs. Ferguson era, is well served through this process of "educational genocide."

Dr. Manning Marable is Chairperson of the Black Studies Department, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.

developed countries in that it has a centralized political system and a decentralized educational system in which the politicalization function is very explicit, but the method of achieving that politicalization is not very well defined. The development of "national curricula" in the physical sciences, social sciences, language, reading, etc., provide a means in these decentralized school districts. As a result of the decentralized school system, huge differences exist from one school district to the next. As a result of racism, the Black schools generally receive less of everything than their caucasoid counter-parts. Perhaps the most desperate need in Black schools is for the teachers to believe that the children can learn.

Remember, Sisters and Brothers, the notion of deliberately socializing and politicizing children in this country is not new to the American

[sic] scene. The Jewish people in this country have made excellent use of both full- and part-time schools to inculcate a specific set of values and beliefs. In more recent years the Black Muslims have made a good beginning in developing schools for their members. They have developed a comprehensive educational system to replace the caucasoid-dominated public school system. The Catholic church has found a parallel school system, so expensive that they have been slowly closing down their private school system (particularly in Black areas).

With the help of the Saturday School, Black parents will be able to teach their children that they have a culture, a tradition and a past of which they can be proud. Positive information can have a profound therapeutic effect on young children.

Dr. Jamil Cherovee

PORTLAND OBSERVER

OREGON'S OLDEST AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLICATION
Established in 1970

Alfred L. Henderson / Publisher Leon L. Harris / Gen. Mgr./Controller

PORTLAND OBSERVER

is published weekly by Exie Publishing Company, Inc.

5011 N.E. 26th Ave.

Portland, Oregon 97211

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Distribution

Deadlines for all submitted materials:
Articles: Monday, 5 p.m. Ads: Tuesday, 5 p.m.

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Subscriptions: \$15.00 per year in the Tri-County area.

The PORTLAND OBSERVER — Oregon's oldest African American Publication — is a member of The National Newspaper Association. Founded in 1885. The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York.



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