

EDITORIAL / OPINION

EDITORIAL

Black United Front Commended

The success of the Black United Front's Saturday School Teacher Training sessions demonstrates the potential of Portland's African-American community to pool its talents, resources and creativity to address one of its most serious problems, the education of its children.

Last Saturday's Saturday School kick-off rally and registration brought together more than 70 volunteers, dozens of parents and their children. They came from as far away as Woodburn, Salem, Sheridan, and Vancouver, Washington, from all different neighborhoods, and racial groups, yet they all possessed one fundamental sameness — the desire to do whatever they could to ensure the proper and adequate education of African-American children.

The historical significance of the rally must not be overlooked.

When African-Americans first started their quest for quality education, they did so with little support from outside their community. At that time, Chattel slavery had been shattered, the South was in shambles and the American government was desperately seeking a solution to its "Negro problem".

While the American government fumbled for a solution, African-Americans forged ahead and they made education a top priority.

Portland can be proud that the Black United Front is continuing the legacy left by those early and courageous Black pioneers. The City of Portland and the State of Oregon should applaud all of its citizens who have chosen to partici-

cipate in the creation of the Saturday School.

The Saturday School speaks to what can be accomplished when citizens work together to eliminate serious problems. The African-Americans, whites, and Hispanics who spent four weeks of intensive training in the African-American community in preparation for the School's opening are to be commended, honored, supported and remembered. They have created their own special place in Oregon's African-American history.

We cannot overstate how proud we are of all who have made the Saturday School a reality. At a time when Oregon is experiencing morbid racial tensions, it is refreshing to know that there are citizens who will step forth and work together to create new cultural, social and racial realities.

But more importantly, our children will always be grateful for the creation of this new reality. It will help them to go forth and create new realities of their own.

The Saturday School is about education and excellence. It is about neighborhoods working together. It is about making our community a place where children feel safe and loved.

It is an historical effort by common people — parents, actors, educators, artists, college students, civic leaders, grandmothers, grandfathers, writers, dancers, the unemployed, and students.

Enuff said.

Now it's time for round two. It should be a knockout!

Civil Rights Journal

Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Capital Punishment — Texas Style

Clarence Brandley is a 36-year-old African American. He has been on death row in Texas since February 1981 and has escaped two execution dates by the skin of his teeth, most recently in March of this year. When the Brandley case was presented before Cong. John Conyer's Subcommittee on Criminal Justice earlier this year the Congressman raised the question: can a young Black man receive justice in the small southern town of Conroe, Texas?

That is, indeed, the question. For, evidence presented at a recent judicial hearing indicates that Mr. Brandley's case was handled in a blatantly racist manner. Key evidence was lost or thrown away, there is strong indication of collusion between the prosecutor and the judge, and one of the prosecution's own witnesses has now confirmed the racial overtones surrounding the arrest. He testified that a Conroe police officer said of Brandley before his arrest, "You're the nigger; you're elected."

The case is based on a 1980 assault and murder of a white female student at a high school in Conroe, Texas. Conroe has 45 miles outside Houston. Five janitors worked at the high school. Mr. Brandley was the only African American janitor. At the first trial in 1981 the white janitors provided alibis for one another, but not for Mr. Brandley. In addition, and most importantly, Brandley was tried twice by all-white juries.

The first trial ended in a mistrial because one, lone white juror held out, saying the prosecution had not proven its case. That juror was besieged by thousands of angry telephone callers screaming "nigger-lover" and other epithets. The second trial ended in conviction.

Then, finally, in October of this year, Mr. Brandley was granted a hearing that looked at new evidence in the case. The new evidence is convincing. First, one of the white janitors, John Henry Sessum, has now revealed that he saw another white janitor, Gary Acreman, accost the girl at the high school just before she was murdered. Then, after a photo of Mr. Acreman, the white janitor, was televised, it was discovered that he had been fired from his previous job because of physical harassment of a female employee

and had, in fact, been involved in several such incidents.

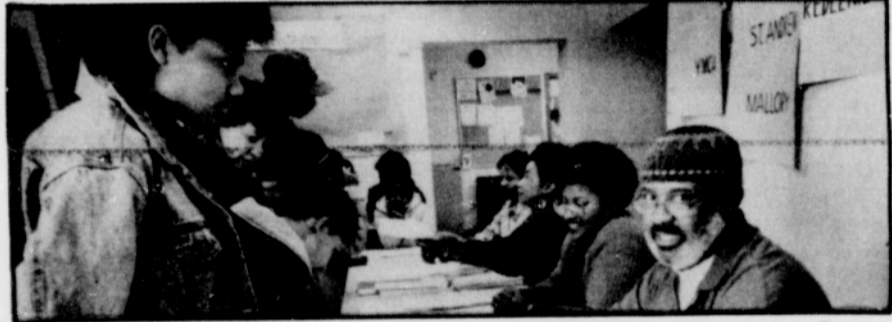
Now, as for the old evidence: it was revealed before Brandley's first trial that certain key evidence was allegedly lost. Then, before the second trial, additional evidence, also essential, was thrown away "by mistake," according to the authorities. In addition, the new hearing showed that Sessums, the white janitor who testified against his white co-worker, was threatened both by Acreman and by the Texas ranger who supposedly investigated the case. And let's look at that investigation.

The investigating Texas Ranger spent 500 hours on the case. But, according to Atty. Paul Nugent, a member of Brandley's defense team, "The Ranger and other investigators were not trying to find the murderer; they were trying to convict Clarence Brandley." Not surprising when you consider that there are 94 Texas Rangers in the state of Texas and all of them are white. Or that, as the New York Times noted, Conroe has "a history of ugly racial incidents."

Both the New York Times and "60 Minutes" have done extensive pieces on the Brandley case. However, it was the crusading Black press of Houston and the unified support of the African American community of the area which first turned the tide. From the beginning, the Coalition to Free Clarence Brandley, including the Black clergy, has supported him with rallies, marches, and daily prayer vigils at the trials.

At the conclusion of the recent hearing, Presiding Judge Perry Pickett recommended a new trial for Clarence Brandley, telling a packed courtroom, "The pervasive shadow of darkness has obscured the light of fundamental decency and human rights [in this case]."

There are now 261 inmates on death row in Texas. And Texas has the dubious distinction of having put more prisoners to death than any other state in the union since capital punishment was re-instituted in 1977. The question is not just whether Clarence Brandley can receive justice but, also, whether this country can morally continue a policy which can so easily put a seemingly innocent man or woman to death.



Registration during Saturday School rally. Photo by Richard J. Brown

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

Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Our African-American organizations keep passing up golden opportunities to buy property or build establishments in N.E. Portland. It is amazing that year after year we keep pumping money into "Hotel Whatever" for "This 'n' That" affair, when the same money pooled could have long ago built a community owned hotel or other establishment. What are we waiting for? When will we learn? Are we going to keep making other folks wealthy with our hard earned dollars that don't even turn over one complete time in our own community? Or, are we going to wake up and buy and build lasting African-American institutions!

Alberta Coleman

The Parable of the Sleeping Lion

Editor:

Once there was a lion who lived in a cage in a wilderness. He did not like living in a cage, but he was put in the cage by his master. He was strong and he used to run free, but now he was in a cage. The master fed the lion food to make him sleep. Soon the lion began to like sleeping. He would sleep all day. Visitors came to the cage and wondered why this lion was sleeping all day. The master had trained the

lion so that he never growled anymore. He just slept all the time. He even had a sleepy look on his face when he was awake. Some people called him sleepy. "Sleepy, wake up," someone said. "Don't bother me," he said, "Can't you see I'm sleeping?"

One day Sleepy's friend, another lion, escaped from the cage next to Sleepy's. Sleepy could have escaped, too, but he was sleeping. And, when he woke up and found the other lion gone, he was very angry. "I'll never sleep again," he said, "I'll never sleep again."

Now, when it came time to eat, the master got angry because Sleepy wouldn't eat the food that made him sleep. Sleepy wasn't a fool! The master couldn't understand his lion. "Eat," the master told Sleepy. Sleepy growled for the first time in a long time. The master jumped back, he was so shocked. The arrogant master got his whip and went into the cage. "Eat," he said, cracking the whip over Sleepy's head. Sleepy growled, turned, ran to the master and began eating him to death.

I cannot overemphasize the importance and the value of education in every avenue of our lives. We can travel as far as our money will go, but our ability to seek and to comprehend knowledge will go as far as our ability to think. In my

The Economic Justice Movement The Media Can't Stop

Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition are changing American electoral politics. The Rainbow Coalition registered two million new voters in 1984, and in 1987 Jesse Jackson held the lead in the polls for over six months. Wherever Jackson travels — to family farmers in Iowa, white workers in Pittsburg, Chicano workers on strike in Watsonville, California, health workers in New York — Jackson's calls for peace and re-investment in America are greeted with enthusiasm.

True, in a society bombarded with racist imagery from the Media, it is not easy to change hearts and minds. But the Jackson campaign and Rainbow Coalition are changing society, arousing the conscience and enlightening self-interest of black and white together. The Village Voice and L.A. Weekly recently published stirring accounts of growing massive white support for Jesse Jackson.

It is the U.S. corporate Media — not the public — that is waging a hostile campaign against Jackson's uplifting candidacy. Day and night — on NBC, CBS, ABC, in Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, The New Republic, The N.Y. Times — the Media repeat one cynical refrain: "Jackson cannot win; Jackson cannot win." The Media claim that Jesse Jackson is by definition unelectable, and Media try unsuccessfully to predict Jackson into defeat prior to the primaries.

Monopoly Media tell us Jackson cannot win because whites are inherently incapable of voting for a progressive black candidate. The Media does not say that white-only elections are bad, or that racism should be opposed. On the contrary, the Media encourages submission to the status quo. The Media take the existence of racism as a normal, acceptable situation and try to blame the people for it.

Media predictions of Jackson's defeat are neither fair or objective. They reflect a conflict of interest between the Corporations, who run the Media, and our right to open elections. After all, why are the Media so adamant to exclude Jackson from serious contention?

Look at NBC. NBC is owned by General Electric, the third largest producer of nuclear weapons in the world, a company that laid off U.S. workers and exports jobs and capital to slave markets in Chile and South Africa. It is obvious that GE and NBC — its mouthpiece — have vested interests in the very policies Jesse seeks to change. If we do not choose our own candidate, a labor candidate, the Corporations will choose their candidate for us. How? Through false prophecy.

An Anecdote About Wartime Propaganda: The present situation in the primaries resembles a work-place before a strike. "You workers are too weak; defeat is inevitable; no one will support you" — all of us know this catechism of management in times of social conflict. Smart workers never base their judgements on prophecies of defeat — hostile predictions that break down hope, reinforce apathy and despair.

Many years ago, I was a switchboard operator in a large hotel. Conditions got bad and our union called a strike. It was my first strike, and the department head kept telling me we could never win. A custodian, an old-timer from Scotland, saw that I was worried. He was a tough man who lost two brothers in World War II, working in the British shipyards. He saw I was full of doubts about our potential and strength.

He told me a story about the War. There was a period, he said, when it looked like Hitler was going to win the war. Hitler invaded Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and won a series of blitzkrieg battles. The Nazi Air Force dropped thousands of fliers behind enemy lines. The fliers said: "Dear soldiers and workers. You are running out of food. Times are hard, and you cannot win the war. If you surrender now, it will be easier. We will treat you well. You have no chance of winning." The Allies fought on; they resisted, not only Hitler's bombs, but Hitler's psychological warfare as well.

Well, I joined the strike (after a story like that, what else could I do!), and we won most of our demands.

Defeatist Hype During Elections: Of course a national election is not equivalent to a war or a strike, but defeatist prophecies can be just as insidious in elections as they are in war.

There are still some working people today who are reluctant to vote for their own candidate — the peace candidate, the full-employment candidate, the labor candidate — Jesse Jackson. They like his programs. They too want to cut the debt-producing military budget, stop the flight of capital to slave markets abroad, and re-invest in productive programs. But the corpor-

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travels around the world, I have come to realize, Racism is an affliction of the collective caucasoid.

Real knowledge begins with knowing that there is nothing unknowable, only things unknown; and that all mysteries are temporary and will eventually be unraveled, not by revelation from on high, but by work, research and struggle below. To know is to begin to take charge of our lives and end the hold mythology has on us. A correct and serious grasp of reality clearly shows that mythology, spookism and metaphysics come from our failure to understand and master nature and society. We need gods because we don't have each other, because we feel alone and alienated and powerless before the artificial majesty of capitalist might. The fact that people only ask their gods for what they can't do themselves or can't do with others and that they turn to their gods for security and solace, proves this feeling of powerlessness and this alienation from each other. This also clearly points to our need to reach out and form real and strong relationships, so that we can give up all Charlie Brown blankets and other illusions of security and solace, and begin to change ourselves by moving to change society. In a word, the demand to abandon illusions about our condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions.

I'm inclined to believe we are social beings, creatures, not of any power in heaven or overseas, but of society and this world; and if we want to change the world, we must remain in it and stay out of the stars. To understand ourselves is

to understand our history, not our horoscope, our class and national situations, nor the nonsense of ghetto assumptions and homespun metaphysical interpretations of reality. To know is to acquire a responsibility to act. If we know the laws of society and yet don't move to apply this knowledge, to actively and audaciously change society, we shirk our responsibility and deserve the fate that befalls us. There is no need knowing the world if we don't move to change it. If we don't practice, preaching is of little use. You who profess to be followers of the man Jesus, should follow the principles he laid down. You who believed in the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., should follow the principles the man laid down. Ten thousand theories cannot save us if we, ourselves, don't dare to struggle, to go against the tide and do as Cabral urged, "act audaciously and with great initiative."

We are dealing with paronic personalities projecting their own distortions, fears and hostilities upon others. Segregation and racial discrimination is practiced by people who do not see life as it really is.

For those who may not understand why I decided to use a Parable, or the Parable, I was only saying, "It is almost a historical axiom that you can only trample on a people so long before that people reach up from the gutters and try to break your neck." Some say that it is a rule or law of physics that when you take something away, something else must take its place.

Dr. Jamil Cherovee