

# EDITORIAL / OPINION

## THE BLACK HEALTH CRISIS

by  
John E. Jacob

Life expectancy for whites continues to rise while that for blacks declined for two years in a row, the first time that's happened in this century. According to federal statistics, the typical newborn white baby can expect to live 75.4 years; the average black infant, 69.4 years, and the gap is growing. Those figures signal a major health crisis among African Americans, one that demands immediate federal action. The report from the National Center for Health Statistics that came up with those figures found a rise in homicides and motor vehicle deaths as major contributors to the decline in life expectancy. That suggests crime and drugs are taking an extraordinary toll on our communities and must be dealt with. The social disorganization caused by deep poverty and discrimination has serious negative impacts on African American health. We know that higher black incidence of heart disease, strokes, and certain forms of cancer have their origins in social causes. And we know that black infant mortality -- double the white rate -- is high because so many pregnant women are poor and do not have access to quality health care. The United States ranks last among the world's top twenty industrial nations in infant mortality, a shameful status that requires beefed-up federal and community programs to discourage teenage pregnancy and to provide health care for disadvantaged pregnant women and infants. It will probably come as a shock to most Americans who think that Medicaid solved the issue of access to health care, to learn that most poor people are not covered by Medicaid. A dozen years ago, it served only about two-thirds of the poor. Today, only a little more than a third of poor people are enrolled in Medicaid. Tightened eligibility requirements and attempts to control costs have made Medicaid a promise, not a reality. So we need national eligibility standards that assure Medicaid coverage for all poor people. Another barrier to access to health care is lack of private or employer-paid health insurance. Some 37 million Americans -- one out of every six -- don't have health insurance. Another 50 million have inadequate coverage -- policies that don't cover major medical expenses. People in low wage jobs do not usually get adequate insurance coverage, although they need it most. Nearly half of all uninsured adults are in the labor force, and most of them earn less than \$10,000. They can't afford to buy their own coverage and they are often ineligible for Medicaid. African American citizens are three times as likely as whites to be poor, so they form a disproportionate part of the uninsured population and of the people in poverty who are denied Medicaid coverage. There's no need to look for exotic explanations of the decline in black life expectancy. Poverty and discrimination increase stress and create situations in which people become prey to illness or to dangerous behavioral patterns. And society's refusal to provide health insurance for the poor denies them access to health care. The result: a public health crisis that needs to go to the top of the new Administration's agenda.

## LETTER TO EDITOR

Your editorial, "Boggling the feathers in the Wings of Love," is riddled with inaccuracies, distortions and outright lies. Please do me, and your readers, the courtesy of printing the truth. OBSERVER LIE: "Recently City Commissioner Dick Bogle made one of his rare official visits to the lower Northeast Sector..." FACT: I spend a lot of time in inner Northeast Portland! My "official" visits include talking at schools, hosting issue-oriented luncheons for pastors, hosting Commissioner's Forums, sponsoring the Commissioner's Mentor Program, working on abandoned housing and meeting with neighborhood citizen groups. "Unofficially," I pray in inner Northeast, shop at inner Northeast businesses, eat at inner Northeast restaurants and attend social gatherings in inner Northeast. If your writer had bothered to check, he would not be displaying his ignorance in this manner. OBSERVER DISTORTION: "...when he created a media event by marching in with television cameras, newspaper reporters and chief building inspectors to witness the padlocking of The Wings of Love..." FACT: I stepped in because human lives were at stake, and as Commissioner of Public Safety, I am charged with trying to prevent the needless loss of life. I did not create the conditions that forced me to close the shelter. Because the Bureau of Buildings had identified 51 separate violations of fire and life safety codes, I would have felt responsible had tragedy struck. OBSERVER INACCURACY: "The reason given for this action was based on the allegation that the edifice was unsuitable for human habitation." FACT: My action was based on the fact that the edifice was unsafe for human habitation. Had your writer shown an interest in the truth and toured the shelter, he would have seen exposed electrical wires dangling near a shower. He would have seen lock hasps on the outside of

the doors, and windows that wouldn't open, making escape impossible in the event of a fire. He would have seen slop buckets in place of toilets. He would have seen an exposed sewer line, and smelled the potentially explosive methane gas. He would have seen 51 code violations! OBSERVER DISTORTION: "This time (the following Tuesday), he had come to remove the padlock, embrace Mrs. Alezine Mayes, Director of the house and to pledge her the full support of his office. Why the sudden change of heart?" FACT: There was no "Sudden change of heart." There was a negotiated agreement under which Mrs. Mayes promised to make all the necessary repairs. I accepted her word on good faith. If she fails to live up to her end of the bargain, Wings of Love will remain closed. The truth is, I did not reopen the shelter to residents, only to plumbers, electricians and other workers. The padlocks were removed for that reason alone. OBSERVER LIE: "On closer inspection, it was found that the Wings of Love was a paradise compared with the Open Heart and Baloney Joe's. Even the chief housing inspector admits that these two shelters would have a difficult time passing a rigorous inspection." FACT: If Open Heart and Baloney Joe's were life-threatening fire traps I would personally close them down, just as I did Wings of Love. In fact, the Bureau of Buildings has torn down more than one Open Heart shelter--the last one just a week ago, when two others were closed for code violations. We did not tear down Wings of Love, simply ordered it brought into compliance with fire and safety codes. This "paradise" your writer speaks of was not fit for human habitation. OBSERVER LIES: "...it would appear that he (Bogle) made several blunders with regard to due process of the law, sensitivity to the needs of the lower Northeast Sector and exercising good judgment as an elected official of all the people of Portland." FACT: Your writer is dead wrong on all counts! (1) The Bureau of Buildings has the authority, under due process of

law, to issue Summary Abatement orders closing down structures with flagrant violation of fire and life safety codes. Mrs. Mayes was issued a Summary Abatement order after failing to make repairs ordered by the Bureau of Buildings, using its legal authority. (2) I displayed sensitivity to human life. To me, that translates into sensitivity to the needs of inner Northeast. (3) I exercised the highest and best judgment an elected official can possibly exercise. I moved swiftly and decisively in the face of an immediate threat to life. Had someone died as a result of my neglect, then I would be guilty as charged. OBSERVER DISTORTION: "Mr. Bogle did not have the right to breach the peace and tranquility of a private institution with an invasion of television cameras and newspaper reporter." FACT: As commissioner-in-charge of the Bureau of Buildings, I had every right to close the place down. Your writer's choice of words, "breach the peace and tranquility," are laughable under the circumstances. As for the "invasion," I did not draw the news media into the issue. OBSERVER INACCURACY: "She (Mrs. Mayes) has every right to seek legal redress. Such an action would probably cost the city so much in damages that the Wings of Love never again would be faced with impecuniousness." FACT: While it is true that we are all free to sue anyone we choose, Mrs. Mayes has no grounds for a lawsuit. She violated city codes. She failed to comply with a legal order to make corrections. Her operation was closed down as a direct result. She agreed to make repairs. Workers were let in to make repairs. What happens next is up to her. So much for "damages." So much for your editorial writer. If the Portland Observer will print an unsigned editorial filled with overflowing with claptrap, surely you will allow that editorial to be held to the light. By printing this letter, you will be doing your readers a great service. Sincerely, Dick Bogle, Commissioner Department of Public Safety

## AFRICAN AMERICANS UNEMPLOYMENT SHOW NO GAINS

WASHINGTON, D.C.--The January jobless rate for blacks, at 12.0 percent, showed little or no movement from December's 11.6 percent, according to the U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The rate also showed little movement from January 1988, when it stood at 12.2 percent. For black men, the January unemployment rate was 10.4 percent, compared to 10.0 percent in December and 10.2 percent in 1988 (seasonally adjusted). The January jobless rate for white men was 4.0 percent. Black women had a jobless rate in January of 10.4 percent, compared to 10.5 percent in December and 11.0 percent in January 1988. White women had a January 1989 unemployment rate of 3.9 percent. Black teenagers had the highest unemployment rate, at 32.0 percent, compared to an 11.7 percent rate for white teens. The December rate for black teens was 29.3 percent. In January 1988, 33.7 percent of black teens were jobless. As a whole, employment rose substantially in January and unemployment was little changed. Both the overall and civilian worker jobless rates were 5.4 percent and have shown little movement in recent months. The number of nonagricultural payroll jobs, as measured by the monthly survey of business establishments, increased by 410,000 in January, after seasonal adjustment. Total civilian employment derived from the survey of households, which has generally shown smaller gains than payroll employment over the past year, rose by 700,000. Unemployment (Household Survey Data) Both the level and the rate of unemployment were little changed in January, at 6.7 million and 5.4 percent, respectively, after seasonal adjustment. These measures have hovered near their present levels for the past several months.

## ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA TO RAISE MILLIONS FOR BLACK EDUCATION

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated has announced the kickoff of a major fundraising drive to support historically black colleges and universities. Janet Jones Ballard (R), president of Alpha Kappa Alpha, and Nan Delany Johnson, the sorority's executive director, display the "AKA Money Meter." The sorority hopes to raise \$4 million by 1990 for 77 colleges are no longer necessary. Statistics indicate that 50% of America's black students graduate from black colleges and universities. By contrast, only 10% of the black students entering predominately white institutions ever graduate. "Historically black colleges and universities have, through the years, made it possible for AKA to exist and for many of our members to receive an education and become productive citizens," said Mrs. Ballard. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, founded in 1908 at Howard University in Washington, D.C., currently has more than 100,000 members in 46 states, the District of Columbia, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Germany, Great Britain, South Africa and South Korea.

## DEATH PENALTY FOR RACIALLY MOTIVATED MURDERS (HOUSE BILL 2432)

Our membership is not one mind with respect to the propriety of the death penalty even if it were administered in an even-handed way, but under the conditions existing in America today, a grossly disproportionate number of African-American and the poor are executed for offenses or under circumstances in which their white and/or wealthy counterparts are spared and often serve minimal periods of incarceration. While we deplore the death of Mulugeta Seraw as a result of a vicious, racist attack, and while we further deplore racist, religious and sectarian violence of all kinds and applaud the efforts of

persons like Rep. Bill Dwyer to fashion legislation which would deter persons from engaging in such violence, we nevertheless oppose the creation of yet another category of capital murder.

Under these circumstances we support the position of Representative Margaret Carter and Commissioner Dick Bogle in opposition to this bill, since we fear that this law, like other death penalty provisions, might be applied unevenly to the detriment of African-Americans and the poor.

Very truly yours,  
THE BLACK LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE  
Ron Herndon, Co-Chair

## CARTER CALLS BILL UNFAIR

SALEM --In an attempt to clarify her stance on a controversial bill that would classify racially motivated murder as aggravated murder, State Representative Margaret Carter, D-Portland, called the idea "a detriment to blacks and the poor."

"While I deplore racist, religious, and sectarian violence of all kinds, I am opposing this creation of yet another category of capital murder," Carter said. "I fear that this law, like other death penalty provisions, might be applied unevenly to blacks and the poor."

Carter voted today against House Bill 2432, which would extend the definition of aggravated murder to include murder committed because of the victim's race, color, religion, or national origin. In Oregon, a person convicted of aggravated murder can be given the death penalty.

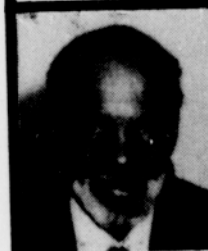
A grossly disproportionate number of blacks and poor are executed for offenses or under circumstances in which their white and/or wealthy counterparts are spared and often serve minimal time in prison, Carter added.

"I applaud the efforts of persons like Representative Bill Dwyer to fashion legislation which would deter people from engaging in such violence," said Carter. "I am opposed to the death penalty in any case, but under these circumstances especially I feel I must oppose this measure."

Carter said she will be supporting a bill, HJR 38, that would abolish the death penalty for aggravated murder and replace it with a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Despite her opposition, House Bill 2432 passed 48-11, and now goes to the Senate.

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## Perspectives



### The Cultural Background For Black History, Part II.

by McKinley Burt

The African Administrative "First" described here last week as an Income Tax structure was echoed in the Smithsonian Magazine for March 1989. A somewhat comedic, but documented article describes the sophisticated procedures established so early on: "Egyptians were born bookkeepers." Interestingly, it is verified here that African innovations of this sort were subsequently copied by the Greeks and then the Romans.

Another "First" was the use of trademarks and labels to identify and control quality in the production of consumer goods. For instance, Dr. Leonard Lesco at the University of California, Berkeley uses his book "King Tut's Wine Cellar" to cite an example in the Egyptian wine industry. "The U. S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would have loved the labels as they contained detailed information on origins, vintage dates, vineyard and vintners...was produced from prehistoric times."

By the same token, the U. S. Interstate Commerce Commission might be interested to learn that the very same Africans pioneered the regulation of inter-region commerce (Sewell, Gardiner, et al). Ancient records reveal that 3000 years ago the thousands of miles of camel caravan routes that connected Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Nubia (The Sudan), Palestine and extended into what is now Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran came under the jurisdiction of a gigantic bureaucracy.

This regulatory agency of the Pharaoh employed hundreds of scribes and bookkeepers to set the standards for the movement of goods, passengers and communication throughout the area.

tariffs were set dependent upon the type of freight and distance traversed. Extra charges were made for dangerous routes with armed guard being furnished. Just as today, a freight agent was required to post his charges in public view along with his permit and to have a minimum of camels on hand at all times. Thousands of rolls of ancient papyri detail such transactions.

It is simply mind-boggling to view the full extent and sophistication of the African administrative structure at a time when the rest of the world was in barbarism. We have this from Barco's "Monuments of Civilization," page 23: "Obviously this great organization and coordination was possible only because there existed an already solidly established state...utilizing so many skilled workers such as these stonemasons in the third millennium, B.C. in Egypt implied the extension of the centralized power...any latent social forces in the country were absorbed in advance." No wonder the less sophisticated Greeks called them Gods.

A well documented enterprise of note in 1800 B.C. was a huge shipyard on the Nile that employed 14,000 workers over three shifts. Records indicate that shift-differentials were paid and that disputes were subject to mediation. As was the case at the Vancouver, Washington shipyard where as a youth this writer worked as a welder, the ancient African complex furnished housing adjacent to the site and bonuses were paid for holidays for offerings to the god who was being honored. Another Department of Navigation maintained the light house on the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and recorded the passage of vessels

To be continued.

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## OPINION