



EDITORIAL / OPINION



by Prof. McKinley Burt

Perspectives

Spring Planting Time: A Well-Planned 'Family Reunion' Can Be A Cash Crop

The family is the foundation of society. And the Extended Family concept, especially, has been a special and significant factor in the African-American experience. Contrary to some opinion, interest in this historic structure did not begin with Alex Haley and "Roots," although his research, publications and movies undoubtedly gave great impetus to the search for a continuity of identity (among as many whites as Blacks—if not more).

And contrary to many other opinions (emphasis on the establishment), a great number of African-American families are alive and well. More importantly, a greater number are quite busy, not only at research of the past, but are actively engaged in revitalizing and restructuring a priceless heritage. What they are about is promoting the Family Reunion concept across the country, well organized assemblages of Kin that sometimes span five generations. It was Carter G. Woodson, the noted Black historian, who said, "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile traditions, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

While I have included a working bibliography at the end of this article, I do wish to introduce some relevant concepts that may prove useful in escalating the social and economic impact of the Family Reunion institution. Further, borrowing a phrase from Emma J. Wisdom, an author listed here, this methodology is "easily translatable to other functions." It has been especially advantageous in building files on this subject, to have access to most African-American newspapers from around the country.

Hitchy Family Reunion (The Oklahoma Eagle, September 1, 1988):

"It all started with Papa George. He was an Alabama grocery store owner, and a cotton gin and a small mill on the 540 acres where he made his final payment in 1907.

Some say he became too big for a Black man in a southern state during the early 1900's.

Papa George Hitchy and his family moved from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, headed for the territory, known now as Oklahoma. The family was Papa George, his wife, Susan, and their twelve children—George Jr., Mervina, Eddie, Pearl, Goldan, Percy, Hayes, Mattie, Fannie, Cora, Roosevelt and Katherine."

This article goes on to describe this first large gathering of the clan, 375 members in all, including those with a surname deviation who were discovered through careful research ("Hyche"). Very important here is the concept of pre-meetings to establish newly identified links, arrange transportation modes (especially children, the handicapped and the elderly). Family patriarchs were consulted ahead for the chronicling the traditions and exploits of the extended clan. Several found that they had crafts or professions in common, and established working commercial relationships.

Schultz Family Reunion (several Seattle and Portland Newspapers, July 1987): "About 100 family members from numerous states including New York, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Texas and California will spend four days, socializing, sightseeing and conducting business at the Seattle Marriott Hotel. Committee meetings to finalize plans for the family scholarship fund as well as other business will be interspersed with banquets, a vocal concert art exhibit by family members, and extensive genealogy display and a dance with music by "House Blend." A trip to the Tillamook village Salmon Bake on Blake Island will end the formal activities on Sunday.

George Shultz, born in Africa around 1810, was brought to America at the age of four. He and his wife, Julia Ann Hawker, had 11 children. The offspring of those children comprise the "His" portion of the family tree. James' second wife who had been married to his brother, Hollis, was the aunt of first wife, Joanna. With their first spouses having died at an early age, James Schultz and Elizabeth Katherine Doolin Schultz married, added five children of their own and treated a total of 16 children. The loving, caring spirit of that big, happy family carries on to this day. Marion Schultz Sutherland, the 1987 National Vice President of the Link, Inc. was the key person in the logistics of the gathering."

There seems to be something for everyone in these expressions of ethnic consanguinity. In the May 5, 1986 edition of "This Week," Maggi White has an excellent and inspiring article on a strong African-American woman, the biological mother of eight who also has adopted. The article, titled "The Plight of the Black Family: Serious Breakdown Leads Women to Build Extended Families," is based upon an interview with Dr. Virginia Phillips, founder of

"Give Us This Day Family Services." Motivated by her own experiences after being widowed and left eight children to raise, she has led the way in several Oregon communities in implementing the horizontal Extended Family. "Phillips would like to see more homes open to children within the Black community—thousands have no roots, she said."

There is much else going on this vein, and we wish we had room to tell it all. The following is a news account of June 1, 1988:

"The Black Family Reunion Celebration, widely viewed as the most significant live event in Black America in recent years, returns in 1988 with an expanded program, it was announced by Dorothy I. Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women. Called "a show of strength" by Newsweek Magazine, the Black Family Reunion Celebration has attracted over one million participants during its five previous events from September of 1986-1987. Philadelphia will be added this year to the list of cities hosting annual Black Family Reunion Celebrations, including Atlanta, Los Angeles, Detroit and Washington, D.C."

And so we have it; it is about financial, commercial and educational networking as well as the filial—Bibliography follows.

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Continued Next Week . . .

African-Americans History in Oregon: . . . (Continued from Front Page)

Eventually, these provisions were legally superseded by the passage of the 14th amendment to the federal constitution following the Civil War. But the social climate and environment which these earlier laws reflected did NOT change after the 14th amendment. These portions of the original Oregon constitution were not officially removed from that document until November 3rd, 1926. The race relations these earlier laws symbolized has not yet disappeared from Oregon life - nor has the headstart they provided for the white population of the state.

In many ways the war years of WWII represent a watershed of Oregon race relations. Prior to that time, Oregon's African-American population was too small to necessitate great concern on the part of the white majority. The state's white population in 1940 was 305,394. "The Black population was 2,565 . . ." 1,931 of whom lived in Portland. The pioneer objective of African-American exclusion from Oregon as desired by earlier pioneer whites had not been 100% effective, but it had certainly been close enough to assure white domination.

It is generally true however, that in the pre-war years an "accommodation" between the races had evolved. African-Americans knew their "place" and grudgingly accepted it while envisioning an improved status for their offspring. Whites, for their part, tolerated African-Americans and created an environment in which African-Americans could expect, with occasional exceptions, to be safe from the extreme, overt physical dangers of racism as practiced in other parts of the country.

The labor demands of World War II destroyed the elements of this accommodation. Portland became a west coast center of wartime ship building. African-Americans in large numbers were recruited from other parts of the country, to work in the Kaiser ship yards in the Portland area. The African-American population in the Portland-Vancouver area peaked at approximately 21,000 in 1945.

The real estate practices of this era had a large part to play in creating the patterns of race relations present in Oregon today. The old Black community centered around the railroad station on both sides of the Willamette River. This was a reflection of the fact that practically the only employment available to adult African-American males was shinning shoes or working on the railroads as porters, luggage handlers, etc.

This pattern of African-American residence was not accidental, it was a product of deliberate policy as had been the case in the pioneer period . . . re-enforced by such widely accepted real estate practices as the "restrictive covenant" based on race which was included in many deeds and real estate transactions of the era, i.e. the Ladd District. Typical language can be seen in a deed for a home in the Grant High School District from 1934 which stated:

" . . . No building thereof shall be used or occupied otherwise than for strictly residence purposes, and shall not be used or occupied by Chinese, Japanese, or Negroes, except that persons of such races may be employed as servants upon said premises."

Enforcement of such restrictive covenants was not made unconstitutional until 1948 by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in that year. The covenants themselves were not made nationally illegal until passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. The first suit to enforce this ban was not filed by the federal government until 1984. In Oregon, such covenants were made illegal by the state's adoption of a fair housing law in 1957.

The restrictive covenant was not and is not the only barrier non-whites experience in real estate concerns. The practice of redlining by lending institutions continues to plague African-American property seekers. Under this practice lending institutions treat loan applications for property in identified districts more harshly than in other areas.

An even more formidable obstacle in earlier periods was the code of ethics of the real estate industry itself. As late as the 1950s such language as the following, appeared in the industry's real estate handbook [this passage comes from the 1948 edition in use in Portland]:

PART III RELATIONS TO CUSTOMERS AND THE PUBLIC

Article 34. A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.

The objective of this section could not be more clear. Under the practice known as "Block-busting," the rewards for participating real estate agents could be quite lucrative. When an agent moved a non-white into a formerly all white area, then sought to benefit from panic selling of nearby homes by whites which would be re-sold to in-moving non-whites at greatly inflated prices, the damage to race relations was a high price to pay for this individually profitable behavior.

For example, the issue of school integration which has been of central concern in

Portland since the 1960s until today, is not at the bottom of an educational issue. It is, in fact, a real estate and residential issue. Few people of any color dispute the value and preference for neighborhood schools.

In the Portland experience during the 1940s and early '50s, this negative reality took visible and prominent forms. Quintard Taylor in his article "The Great Migration of the Afro-American Communities of Seattle and Portland during the 1940s" provides examples of the legacy of social conditions that African-Americans in Portland faced in 1950:

"Throughout the war years, many white businesses refused to serve Blacks, and all public parks and playgrounds outside the Black community either barred Blacks entirely or allowed them to utilize the recreational facilities only one day a week. Black automobile owners paid a fifteen percent surcharge on their insurance, a practice which was not eliminated until 1948."

Another reflection of the acceptance by the majority population of this institutionalized racism was the presence in Portland of a popular restaurant called the Coon Chicken Inn, specializing in Southern fried chicken. To enter the restaurant customers walked through the open mouth of a gigantic Black Sambo character which dominated the front of the building. Once inside all utensils, plates, cups, etc. were emblazoned with the Sambo motif. The restaurant operated from the middle 1920s until approximately 1946 when a mysterious fire caused it to close, never to open again.

Gradually, African-Americans in Oregon, Portland in particular, were able to rise above the legacy of early disadvantages and participate more fully in Oregon life.

By the mid-1970s—slowly, through appointments and election victories, African-Americans began to fill seats on public boards and governmental bodies. While the 22,155 African-Americans living in Multnomah County at the time represented a significant figure, it was not enough to sweep African-American office seekers to victory without significant white support.

But African-Americans were able to gain appointments in several elective offices and parlay that incumbency into later election victories. Such was the case in the election to the Portland City Council of Charles Jordan in 1972 - the first modern era African-American to win such a seat. Other African-Americans during the '70s and '80s were able to gain elective office or garner highly sought after appointments. William McCoy was elected in 1972 to the Oregon Assembly, becoming the first African-American to hold that position.

Gladys McCoy, his wife, formerly the first African-American school board member, was first elected to the Multnomah County Commission in 1978. In 1980, a young African-American woman, Robin Marks, became the first African-American to be selected as Portland's Rose Festival Queen. In 1984 an African-American woman was selected as Miss Oregon. African-Americans are now represented by Dick Bogle on the Portland City Council, Dr. Matthew Prophet as the Superintendent of the Portland School District, James DePriest as the Director of our state's symphony orchestra, and William Hilliard as managing editor of the *Oregonian*, as examples of the contributions African-Americans now make in Oregon life.

While these accomplishments and remarkable individuals represent real progress in Oregon race relations, their presence does not, unfortunately, mean that the problems of race have ended in our state.

Now in addition to the battle against institutionalized reflections of past race discrimination, it seems the battle must also be waged against a resurgence of grassroots racism from violently hostile elements in the young and disadvantaged white community. The Skinheads, Neo-Nazis, and KKK elements have identified the Pacific Northwest - much as their antecedents in the pioneer period did - as the location of a future "whites only" homeland.

These dual dangers of right wing reactionism and hate group terrorism act as a lightning rod to further polarize, or at best impede, progress in Oregon's race relations.

No better example of that difficult future is necessary than a review of the current controversy over the naming of "Union Avenue." The basics of the confrontation are simple.

A group of African-Americans began a campaign in the late 1980s to have the city rename a street after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Originally, the request was for Front Avenue to be re-named. Downtown business and economic interest groups put heavy pressure on the city council not to adopt such a change. The council bowed to the pressure. To avoid the appearance of a direct rebuff to the African-American requesting group, the council adopted a complex process through which any street renaming proposal was supposed to go. This was in fact only a transparent though indirect way to avoid the Front Avenue issue and to cloak their refusal with a cover of objectivity.

The council, when pressed further by the requesting African-American group, revealed what can most charitably be called

a benign expression of "paternal racism," by agreeing to the near instantaneous re-naming of Union Avenue to Martin Luther King Boulevard, without even a gesture of applying the process criteria originally developed for the consideration of Front Avenue.

In this sordid episode, there is ample blame in which all the major participants can wallow. What the council thought to be an easy and expedient escape from a sensitive issue, was in fact shortsighted and ill-conceived, lacking integrity at the very least and political courage at the worst. The willingness of the original African-American requesting group in truth failed the same test.

The proper response of this group should have been to refuse to cooperate with the council's shortcut and insist on a full blown and complete application of the process which had been created to thwart their request for Front Avenue. To do otherwise was to willingly conspire in the shallow pretense of their original rejection. That they were willing to do so was an inexcusable miscalculation. Perhaps the rarified experience of being on the plus side of a backroom political power-play, rather than being the traditional victim of such maneuvering, was too unusual and overpowering to resist. In any case, because they were willing to eagerly grab the proffered prize, they too contributed to the present predicament.

The combined result was to present the opponents of the change a sure win proposition. It forced those who might have opposed the change for legitimate, well-conceived reasons, and there are such reasons, to climb in bed with those whose motives were much less admirable. It gave the hate mongers and racists a mantle of legitimacy they should never be able to enjoy in respectable society. If current pre-election polls have any reliability, they also will give the opposition a decisive victory.

What is the lesson to be learned here? There are plenty for all.

For the city council, they should know that no amount of late day posturing and public relations preening can be a substitute for well-conceived and courageous action when appropriate, in the first place.

Inevitably, Portland will receive an embarrassing and highly visible national black eye when the election results are in. It is not inconceivable that we will suffer the same kind of national public relations and economic punishments inflicted recently on Arizona when its former Governor rescinded King's Holiday in that state.

For the original requesting African-American group, the lesson is different but equally as clear. The seductions of power politics must be resisted when they come into conflict with the demands of sound politics and fair play. If Dr. King stood for anything, it was the need to do the right thing for the right reasons in the right way. Anything less does not honor his memory.

As I suggested before, the roots of this issue go deep into Oregon racial history. They are particularly sunk in the real estate and development policies long directed at that location and general area.

A recent article in the *Oregonian* (2/19/90) highlighted the development successes of downtown Portland as an inspiring testament to what effective urban planning in combination with farsighted economic development can achieve. What that article did not reveal was the disparity between that downtown success and the dismal record of planning and development that is the story of the inner Northeast/Union Avenue area.

The history of development in the inner northeast is one long song of ill-conceived notions matched only in magnitude by the exploitive and manipulative suppression of African-American community livability and economic activity in the area.

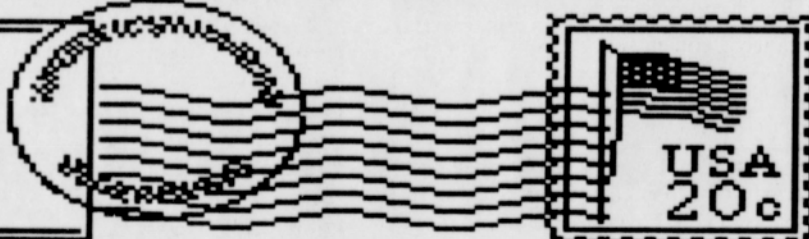
Over the years many opportunities to support and encourage true and longlasting economic and real estate development in the Northeast Corridor have been fumbled or bypassed without consideration. A prime example comes to mind in how the avenue was disfigured with a center dividing barrier in what was supposed to be an economic development project. The barrier produced no positive visual or economic benefits to the avenue. Instead it dislocated the very parking spaces that made many struggling or marginal business enterprises able to survive, at all, along that street. Furthermore it created a very real physical barrier that tended to balkinize the heart of the African-American community, fragmenting an already fragile area.

Such are the real issues of importance to the Union Avenue/Martin Luther King Blvd. area, creating not a symbol but the substance of economic growth and community cohesiveness there. Until the city and all the currently squabbling parties are ready to engage in that debate—all else will remain superficial and unchanged.

They who give have all things; they who withhold have nothing.

The hardest thing to open is a closed mind.

Letters to the Editor



Prison Outreach Committee Met With Administrators and African-American Inmates

Dear Editor:

In February and March of 1989, members of the Prison Outreach Committee met with Oregon State Correctional Administrators and the African-American inmate population. Based upon these meetings, and other observations, it was decided that it was necessary to establish dialogue between the Governor's office and representatives of African-American community organizations. On September 26, 1989, at Portland Community College, Cascade Campus, a meeting was held. In attendance were the Correctional Director, Fred Pearce, the Governor's Legal Council, and Kathleen Sadaat, the Affirmative Action Officer for the State of Oregon. In addition, there were approximately ten representatives from the African-American community.

The following concerns were presented to the Correctional Director, Fred Pearce, and other State Officials:

- * Lack of appropriate promotional opportunities for African-American correctional staff.
- * Lack of appropriate facilities to accommodate large number of participants in Adult Basic Education program.
- * Lack of access to G.E.D. and Vocational training programs for African-American inmates.
- * Absence of effective cultural awareness training and follow-up for all correctional administrators and on-line staff.

Because of these concerns, we are calling on Governor Neil Goldschmidt to appoint a Special Investigator. Among the key responsibilities of this position, we would expect the Special Investigator to meet with members of African-American community based organizations as well as with African-American inmates currently in the system. We would also expect the Special Investigator

to meet with inmates that have been released and are living in the Portland metropolitan area.

Based upon information gathered from community representatives, and the prison population, the Special Investigator would have concrete information to facilitate a comprehensive investigation. We would expect a detail report stating the plight of African-American population. We would then expect specific recommendations to eradicate the inequities that exist in the Oregon Correctional System.

We call on the Governor to take immediate steps to address the pressing issues that confront the African-American inmate population in the State of Oregon.

Halim Rahaan,
Chairperson, Prison Outreach Committee
Black Men's Coalition

Wesbecker massacre of his co-workers in Louisville, Kentucky, the killings of school children by James Wilson in Greenwood, South Carolina, and others.

It is obvious that the psychiatric information given to the court will only lead to more death and destruction in our society as more of their killers are unleashed to rape and murder again.

Tanya Whitman,
Regional Director
Citizens Comm. on Human Rights in Oregon

CREED OF THE BLACK PRESS

The Black Press believes that America can best lead the world away from social and national antagonisms when it accords to every person, regardless of race, color, or creed, full human and legal rights. Hating no person, fearing no person, the Black Press strives to help every person in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back.

Dear Editor:
Today's Supreme Court decision allowing psychiatrists to forcibly drug prison inmates indicates that full information on the destructive nature of these drugs must not have been provided to the Court.

Reports in medical journals have clearly shown that psychiatric drugs can do make people hostile and aggressive and can turn them into killers. One well-known study showed that prisoners given psychiatric drugs are more aggressive, violent and harder to rehabilitate than those not on psychiatric drugs.

There is emerging information that these powerful psychiatric drugs can create states of insanity which persist long after the drug is withdrawn, and which in some cases are permanent.