

EDITORIAL/NATIONAL FORUM

Along The Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

Racism And Hypertention

There have been many studies that have concluded that hypertension of high blood pressure among African American is one of the greatest cause of death. Now a leading medical authority on hypertension has authorized a medical textbook which scientifically establishes a linkage between one's hypertension and reaction to racism.

Dr. Elijah Saunders, a Cardiologist at the University of Maryland Medical School, recently authored **Hypertension in Blacks**. Dr. Saunders concluded that "if there were no racism in America, hypertension would be less of a problem among Blacks. Hypertension is at near-epidemic proportions among Blacks and is chiefly responsible for their high mortality rates from heart and kidney disease and stroke."

We have known for a long time that being a victim of systematic and institutional racism does limit one's life expectancy. Yet we live in a society where certain things have to be proven scientifically or statistically before certain things are believed to be true. Thanks to the research and clinical observations of Dr. Saunders, now maybe governmental decision-makers and others will understand better the deadly nature of racism in this society.

Already, there is considerable academic debate about Dr. Saunders' conclusions in **Hypertension in Blacks**. Fortunately, the results of a study published last month in *Health Psychology* tend to corroborate Dr. Saunders' find-

ings. Dr. Kathleen Lawler of the University of Tennessee and Ms. Cheryl Armstead of St. Louis University demonstrated that "racism sets off a greater blood pressure rise than other kinds of anger" among African Americans. These researchers concluded that "such a sharp rise indicates a hyperactive blood pressure, which, if continually provoked over several years can become a dangerous combination with other risk factors for hypertension."

As a result of Dr. Saunders' pioneering research and other studies, the following findings should be kept in mind: (1) People who tend to suppress their anger, regardless of race, have higher blood pressure than normal. (2) Racism is a particularly potent trigger of anger and of high blood pressure in African Americans. The point here is that African Americans and others who are victims of racism have to be careful not only on how they challenge racism in their midst but also care must be taken not to internalize or suppress one's reaction or anger. It would be a big mistake for readers of Dr. Saunders' book or the studies of the other researchers to respond by saying, "Well, this means we should not react to racism; let's just ignore it because if we react our blood pressure may increase."

One of the historical problems is that too many people welcome a chance to make an excuse or to justify their non-involvement in the struggle for racial justice and human freedom. Again, we

salute Dr. Saunders and the others for their work because it confirms what we have known from life experience to be true. The question is not should one react to racism, but how one should react. Frederick Douglass once said that the limits of our oppression would be determined by the extent of our toleration of the oppression. Thus, we should not suppress or internalize feelings of anger in reaction to racial discrimination and injustice. On the other hand, we should not allow ourselves to become so enraged with anger in reaction to racism that it become detrimental to our health.

We suggest that one's participation in organizations and movements for social change and justice can be very therapeutic. In many communities, we find too many people "worrying themselves to death" literally about their victimization due to racism. Racism can be and needs to be effectively challenged. The whole history of racial progress in this society is a consequence of continued struggle and sacrifice.

Dr. Saunders, however, has given us all an important warning. Just in recent years, we know the tragic heart attacks of a Harold Washington of Chicago and of many others throughout the nation possibly could have been avoided. Thus **Hypertension in Blacks** reminds not only African Americans, but all Americans concerning the need to work harder to rid this nation and this world of the disease of racism.

Perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

More Adventures In Learning: I've Been Working On The Railroad

by Professor McKinley Burt

The "Wabash-Union Pacific-Southern Pacific-P. S. & S.," these are railroads I worked for in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They carried a lot more than paying passengers, freight and mail. Across America, these lines dispatched a complement of laborers and craftsmen entrusted with the task of keeping the nation's most vital arm of transportation functional--from routine maintenance of the tracks to restoring service after such disasters as wrecks, floods blizzards or avalanches. From week to week these peripatetic crews might move from an incredibly beautiful site in a forested wilderness to, say, a steaming hell-hole in the Nevada desert, from the Mississippi Delta to the Rocky Mountains.

I entered the workforce at the end of my junior year in high school, to help support the family. It was a fascinating world of rough, itinerant workers, affectionate camaraderie, oral history and folklore. I was part of that special group of segregated maintenance workers called "gandy-dancers"--Black semi-skilled laborers who were transported wherever their services were needed in special types of railway cars. These "gandy cars" were like rolling hotels (though sparsely appointed), with sleepers, kitchens and shower cars. Also there were mobile tool and equipment facilities, including air compressors, generators and huge cranes. The number of men involved would range from 25 to 100. There is very little of this support activity today--except in dire emergency or to facilitate new construction. Gone too are the huffing, puffing, coal-fired steam locomotives.

The gandy was both a learning and teaching experience, for as I have often mentioned in my articles, there was in these times a strong, hope-driven motivation among Blacks to gain knowledge and education--and it was equally sustained here among the most unlettered or illiterate, as with the urban dwellers. I was constantly pressed into

service to read or write letters, procure mail order merchandise and books, on probation officers, execute money orders, stall divorce proceedings, and otherwise serve as an inhouse lawyer and professor. Overall, the principal inducements were escape from the pressures of the city and relatives, from prosecution or bounty hunters (the railroad went to great lengths to protect their workers from nosy sheriffs)--and in my particular case, a 16 year-old could earn the magnificent sum of 80 cents an hour (\$36.80 for a 44 hour week), as opposed to the 12 or 15 dollars a week he could earn at menial tasks in the ghetto.

Except around payday, the long evening times were filled with job talk, story telling and ribald jokes--but also, the murmurs of serious conversation, the prognostication of political pundits, the lectures of grass roots historians and philosophers. Like an African American barbershop (in the middle of nowhere), the warm, edifying social and cultural intercourse went on into the night--and when the generators shut down, the kerosene lamps lit up and the pleasant cacophony went on. Through it all the gandy entrepreneurs would hawk their wares and services, the barber, the mail order shoe salesman, the pawn broker, the card dealers and book-makers, the loan shark and the pimp who could bring a girl from a nearby town. Alternating with an occasional (boring) factory job, I pursued the gandy until 1943 when I went to work here in Portland as a shipyard welder.

It was at this university that I got my first firm grip on documentation for the actual, verifiable existence of the fabulous Black innovators of African American folklore--leads that led to my recovery of patent numbers and dates, family letters and so forth. Those late-night, kerosene-lit sessions revealed a surprising wealth of research and knowledge among both the literate and unlettered; many of the former spending



Professor McKinley Burt

time in libraries when working near cities. College dropouts or those who went to the cotton fields at the age of eight--it was all of their input that fueled the curiosity and motivation which led, years later, to my publication of the book, "Black Inventors of America."

Other learning situations were part of the process. I taught people to read and write, but I received as much or more in return. I learned more about the industrial infrastructure of America than one could ever learn at school--even from a course in industrial engineering. The gandy who came to these work gangs for one reason or another had worked in every field imaginable; oil refineries, cane fields, sugar refineries, cotton gins, Mississippi River barges, Idaho potato fields, Virginia coast mines, steel mills and iron foundaries, you name it. And then there were those who could quote classic poetry and literature for hours from memory. When I took my college entrance exams after the war I couldn't believe how easy they were for me. The gandy had served me well.

It was on the gandy that I first heard of my partial namesake, "Frederick McKinley Jones." His patented invention of the refrigerated box car and the refrigerated truck changed the mode of food preservation and transportation in America. California and Florida were enabled to become the world's greatest producers and shippers of fruits and vegetables. Other areas were enabled to make their billions shipping beef. I had found the real America.



To Be Equal

Youth Poverty On Rise

by John E. Jacob

It's time Americans stopped congratulating themselves about their affluence and about the great opportunities available here as opposed to other nations, because for all our affluence and for all our accomplishments compared with others, there is one aspect of American life that is nothing less than shameful.

Child poverty in America is outrageously high--and it is on the rise.

Almost one out of four American children under the age of six are growing up poor.

Among African Americans, half of our young children are poor.

That should be an incredible scandal--one that ought to be shaking the Congress and the public. Instead, it's just another statistic to be ignored.

The trouble is, childhood poverty cannot be ignored because it's going to come back to haunt this country and all of its citizens.

When you consider that poor children statistically tend to perform worse at school; to suffer health problems that often lead to costly care; are less likely to become employed in later life, and are more likely to become dependent as adults--then you see this as a national crisis and a threat to America's future, not something to be dismissed.

But so far I haven't seen anyone in Washington crusading for policies to end child poverty. There are plenty of talented, intelligent people fighting to cut capital gains taxes or crusading for other measures.

But no key figure in the Administra-

tion or the Congress is making an issue of the fact that almost one of every four American children is poor.

That's a serious abdication of responsibility. Especially since the problem is even worse than it appears.

According to Census data, not only are over 5 million children living in families with annual incomes below the poverty line--but another 2.7 million are in families just above that artificially low "poverty line."

That means one of every three young children in America is poor or near poor. The poverty line itself is an understated, arbitrary figure. But, however one may define poverty, there can be no disagreement that those kids are growing up in hardship.

Many of those children are in fe-

male-headed households. They are poor because one breadwinner isn't enough to keep a family out of poverty and because women--especially minority women--earn less and are more often unemployed.

But two out of every five of those poor youngsters are living in intact families with two parents, and most of those children had at least one parent working full or part-time.

So the disgrace of child poverty is

tied to America's failure to create jobs at living wages for family breadwinners. Even full-time, year-round work at the minimum wage would leave a family well below the poverty line.

We need to move aggressively to combat child poverty, and we can't separate it from adult poverty.

One front of the war on child poverty should be to raise incomes of the poor through increased support programs and real world work and training programs

that lead to jobs.

A second front must be preventive--developmental, education and health programs that ensure poor children have equal access to life's basic needs and to the tools with which to construct decent lives as they grow to adulthood.

That goes beyond adding a few more dollars to Head Start's budget--it means implementing long-term strategies that ensure that today's poverty children grow up to be tomorrow's middle class adults.

The Rainbow Lobby Pledges Continued Support to Zairian Democracy Movement; Exposes Mobutu Attempt to Discredit Its Work

The announcement by Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko on April 24 that he would institute tentative democratic reforms in Zaire (formerly known as the Congo) was a stunning victory for the democracy movement in that central African country and for the anti-Mobutu movement in the United States that supports it. The Rainbow Lobby, an independent citizen's lobby, has led the effort to expose to the American people and to Congress the brutality and corruption of the Mobutu regime.

At a press conference on April 27 at the Washington Press Club, the Lobby's executive director Nancy Ross noted that this grassroots information campaign, which "countless community organizations, church people, student groups, courageous Zairian exiles and individual American of conscience" had joined, "resulted in a public outcry against the complicity of our government in sustaining, with US tax dollars, Mobutu's reign of repression and poverty. In response to this pressure, significant members of Congress have unequivocally condemned this regime and called for an end to all US military aid."

"Mr. Mobutu, who came to power 25 years ago in a CIA-orchestrated coup after assisting in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, has," stated Ms. Ross, "always owned his office not to any legitimate political process sanctioned by the Zairian people but by his special relationship to Washington. He has clearly been shaken by this turn in the

tide of American opinion. Under pressure from his US sponsors to moderate his tyranny, he has taken various democratic initiatives, such as his call in January for a 'national consultation.'"

Recognizing this call for popular dialogue as a sign of the regime's weakness, thousands of Zairians poured out their criticisms of Africa's oldest dictatorship, boldly demanding the dictator's resignation, the legalization of opposition parties, and the separation of party and state. A document submitted by employees in the Zairian foreign ministry warned Mr. Mobutu that might meet the same fate as Nicolae Ceausescu.

Representatives of the opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress have stated that they are not willing to go along with Mr. Mobutu's plan for a three-party system in which the UDPS would oppose two parties carved out of his ruling Popular Movement for the Revolution, currently the only legal party in the country, UDPS leader Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba, who was released this week after two years of detention, has refused to accept Mr. Mobutu's offer to appoint him prime minister, saying he was unwilling to serve in any government as long as the Zairian dictator is in power. The UDPS has also cajoled for the dismantling of the regime's notoriously brutal security apparatus. The Rainbow Lobby has expressed its full support for the UDPS' demand for a multi-party de-

mocracy, and for its leaders' stipulation that the Zairian people, not the dictator, determine the number of parties.

Amidst these developments, Ms. Ross reported, "a pathetic attempt" to discredit the work of the Rainbow Lobby has come to light. "The Lobby, tiny by comparison with Mobutu's six billion dollar fortune, amassed over 25 years of kleptocracy, has nonetheless become the target of the dictator and his agents in the US," she charged. Camille Bamba, a Zairian exile who fled his country after participating in anti-government demonstrations and one of the most outspoken critics of the Mobutu regime in the Zairian community in this country, had recently told Ms. Ross "that he had accepted \$1000 in cash from Mr. Mobutu's lobbyist in Washington acting in behalf of the Zairian ambassador in exchange for writing derogatory statements about the Rainbow Lobby," Mr. Bamba, who was present at the press conference with Ms. Ross and made a statement corroborating her account, has been working closely with the Lobby as a volunteer for the past year.

Ms. Ross said that Mr. Bamba told her that the ambassador provided him with documents prepared by Zairian security forces which characterized the Rainbow Lobby, its personnel and its organizational allies in not only slanderous, but virulently anti-Semitic and homophobic terms. Mr. Bamba maintained that he stole mailing lists and other materials from the Rainbow Lobby

office at the ambassador's behest. Mr. Bamba said he eventually ended his relationship with the ambassador when he realized that, as someone who had openly criticized the Mobutu regime, he would most likely be killed when he returned to Zaire despite the ambassador's promises to the contrary.

"The Mobutu regime's decision to engage in an intelligence operation against a US organization illustrates its desperation and political vulnerability," said Ms. Ross. "If the history of the past year teaches us anything, it is that even the most entrenched regimes must finally give in to the people's demand for democracy, the Rainbow Lobby will continue to support the Zairian democracy movement by pressuring Congress to condition all aid to Zaire on the complete implementation of democratic reforms," she pledged. "To verify the progress of these reforms, the Rainbow Lobby is organizing a delegation of representatives from the democratic opposition, together with Americans active in the democracy movement, to travel to Zaire. We will be requesting Congress and the press to send representatives to accompany this delegation, and guarantee its safety."

Ms. Ross announced that on May 4 the Lobby is sponsoring simultaneous demonstrations in Boston, New York City, Washington and Los Angeles "to signal to the Zairian people the fullest solidarity of the American people in their struggle for democracy."

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