

What Are the Prospects for Blacks in Rural Northwest?

It's rather hard to say, isn't it? If past experience is any indicator, I would say that the answer is 70% positive. This proceeds both from my personal experience over the years and from numerous visits and interviews with African American workers and business operators in rural areas of Oregon and Washington. Of course you'll find that a good personality and good skills make the difference.

The July 25 Perspectives article ("Loggers are Hurting, Too") detailed some positive personal experiences of my own--primarily representing a major governmental agency, the U.S. Forest Service. But what about the Black "on his own"? The experiences I cited were 100% positive and, actually, even though this agency's "Affirmative Action" sessions were initially provocative and viewed with suspicion, the "rural" responses soon turned favorable with very few exceptions. Let us look at a historical pattern, for many of the African Americans living in this metropolitan area have not the slightest idea of life in these other environs--except for a few negative commentaries they've heard.

When I came to the Northwest for the first time in the late 1930s as a teenage high school dropout, it was to work in various parts of rural Oregon, Washington and Idaho as a laborer on railroad "extra gangs". Even that "late" there were remnants of scattered settlements of Blacks in rural areas. In Idaho I found a group of Black wheat farmers near Lewiston. Not too far away were surviving family members of coal miners who had come up from Alabama at the turn of the century to work in the "Fourth of July Canyon" mines. In both cases the younger generations married into the white communities--or for the most part migrated to the larger cities of the Pacific coast.

In the state of Washington there

were similar encounters. On the Snake River near the Idaho border there was the town of Riparia, Washington where around World War I (1917) a Black Pullman porter on the Seattle run had been stranded when huge snow drifts blocked the main line. Fascinated by the new perspectives and promises of the area, he returned to Chicago to bring his family out and went to work as a ranch hand. When I got to the town in 1939, he had retired--but admiring residents recounted how through the years he had worked up to rancher and businessman, holding at various times the offices of Grange Master and Mayor. In this case too the generations had either married into the community or gone off to the big cities.

These were common experiences, too numerous to mention--when whites would bring their small children down to the railroad crossings where we Black laborers were working. They would point at us and exclaim, "THERE'S ONE!" Most small children in many of these small communities had never seen an African American except in books or magazines. However, in many other small towns, one would encounter all sorts of craftsmen and entrepreneurs: barbers, blacksmiths, agricultural workers, harvest laborers, loggers, farmers, ferry boat operators, bridge tenders, cowboys, mechanics, and operators of hardware stores, groceries, gas stations, garages, and other enterprises.

On my second round of experiences--we'll call this the current era in which we are interested here--I found many innovative Blacks who have made the most of opportunities often unique to rural areas. In Spokane, Washington during the 1970s I met Cliff Ritchie operator of a HELICOPTER SERVICE who contracted for tree spraying with the U.S. Forest Service and for crop

dusting with the sugar beet growers. His father operated the largest Ford garage in the community and the son on returning from the air force BUILT THE FIRST HELICOPTER FROM MIXED PARTS BOUGHT FROM A SURPLUS DEALER IN LOS ANGELES.

In Oregon the experiences of African Americans in the rural areas are extremely interesting, especially in light of the following. During the 1970s, I devised a number of Work Study and Cooperative Education Programs for the U.S. Forest Service and many students in my classes at Portland State University participated, minority and white. For many of the minorities those first assignments to rural areas proved to be a traumatic experience--especially the African Americans. In most cases these cultural problems were resolved, some of the encounters having some rather comic overtures: "Get me another job. I can't stand that hillbilly music on the radio and on the jukeboxes in those 'honky joints'! This big redhead dude grabbed me at the dance and almost broke my bones with that wild stompin' those folks do. My mother told me never to sleep in no house with white folks."

All in all it was the Blacks raised in the south who made the easiest adjustment. This follows a pattern, for I noticed during my work with the U.S. Forest Service that in most cases the spouses of African Americans hired by this agency and were from the south found ready employment in even the most remote areas. Also, they readily entered the cultural matrix of the community. For instance, in the Roseburg area the wife of the African American soil scientist for the agency was hired as director of the area's largest childcare center. Both were active members of and held high lay positions in the community's largest church.

continued next week



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...And Justice For All

by Angelique Sanders



Responding to the Iraqi Takeover

Welcome to my new column, "...And Justice For All". I hope you enjoyed my previous column, "This Week in History". My attempt of this column will be to point out injustices and other disruptions we as citizens may experience, as well as an analysis and hopefully, potential solutions. At the end of each week's column, I'll include a tidbit of information I've read or seen lately that may be of interest to you. If you have any comments or criticisms, or even a topic you'd like to see addressed, please feel free to write or call me at the *Observer*.

For those who haven't been paying attention to the Iraqi invasion hype in the media lately, I wish to break down the political activity to what it means to us.

Firstly, here is a brief breakdown of what's occurred: Iraq has seized Kuwait for the purpose of monetary gain (through the abundance of petroleum in the country), and has its greedy eyes on Saudi Arabia (which is the largest oil producer of OPEC). The U.S. has responded by halting imports of oil from Iraq.

The United States--and by this, I don't mean citizens in general, I mean those in positions of power--has pretended, once again, to be taking a "firm moral stand" (can't you just hear Bush saying that?) against he invasion. We

may even go to war with Iraq over Saudi Arabia. But the reason is clearly not morality.

If Iraq gains control of Saudi Arabia's oil, they would not ship to U.S., thereby drastically--since Saudi Arabia accounts for half the oil of OPEC--increasing the price in America. It could result in an economic recession; and, yes, Bush's least-favorite statistic, loss of jobs. This is what Bush and the bigwigs are worried about, NOT the morality of an Iraqi invasion. Examine the *Statesman Journal's* (Salem's daily) headline announcing this tragedy: "Invasion drives gasoline price up." How is that for American concern for Kuwait? I'm not putting down the *Journal*; they're simply reflecting the American attitude.

Clearly, the U.S. seems more interested in the economic scales being balanced rather than taking a gamble for morality. Take South Africa as proof of that theory: while our government could place economic sanctions on South Africa, instead we do nothing and government officials had to smile face-breakingly at Mandela during his U.S. visit, saying things like "We're headed there (toward sanctions)" or "We're thinking strongly about it" instead of "We're just afraid our economy might experience a rough patch." Well, WHAT ABOUT OUR PEOPLE? What is it

doing to our people to take no moral action? If the government is so worried about crime, how about being a role model, illustrating that morality is worth its price?

If you are shaking your head and saying, "it's not that bad", then pay attention: think of all the companies that you've heard about that transact business in South Africa. Maybe you even purchase products that are produced there. Were you aware that each year, the Coca Cola company pays the White Pretorian government \$30 million in taxes and other subsidies? Your dollar might be going toward racism.

As common citizens instead of authorityheads, we're more limited in the degree of action we can take (Bush has the veto power; all we can do is curse at the nightly newsmen). But there are still actions to be taken: write Congress; write South African-involved businesses; boycott products (when you're unsure, try to buy a local product, so the money won't leave the country); most importantly, keep aware. You're involved in this, too.

Item: The United States, in its latest (July 25) testing of a nuclear weapon, spent 30 million dollars, and the blast registered 4.8 on the Richter scale. [This information, compliments of a poster in Oregon Peace Institute's window.]

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