

PERSPECTIVES

By Professor McKinley Burt

Historic Black Contributions To Our Safety And Comfort

And oh what a wonderful series of contributions it has been. From the railroads to our overburdened streets and highways, this Black genius has poured forth to provide America and the world with a degree of security that was not contemplated at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Nor was it foreseen that these inventions would incorporate such a level of compassion and regard for the well being of passenger and worker alike.

The following instances are drawn from my book, "Black Inventors of America" (Available at the Black Education Center, 4949 N.E. 17th, weekdays, \$14.95). These documented recitations of African American prowess in science and technology are just part of the presentations I have made at schools and universities, both local and national. Additionally, there have been television appearances to further the message that "We are somebody and always have been." Governmental agencies have contracted presentations of the material to successfully counter resistance to the entry of blacks into technical workforces.

Let us begin with the prolific contributions of that "Trained-on-the-job engineer, Granville T. Woods. In his early teens, he mastered the mechanics of the locomotive engine, even paying from his meager earnings for tutorage from the 'master mechanic' (pay attention you trainers and job developers). As we shall see, from the subways of New York to the mountains of the west, we are indebted to this black genius

who combined an uncanny ability to perceive the next-needed step in a burgeoning technology with a dedicated passion for the safety and security of mankind.

On page 33 of the latest edition I have a photostatic copy of Wood's patent No. 701,981, dated June 10, 1902. It is followed on by supporting material and illustrations from the Patent Office. Most interestingly it reads, "Granville T. Woods of New York, N.Y., Assignor, By Mesne Assignments to the WESTINGHOUSE AIR BRAKE COMPANY of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania." In other words, he SOLD IT TO THEM-and the undying fame of the Westinghouse Air Brake Company rests solely on the invention of this brother who so greatly advanced the art of controlling the speed of long lines of freight or passenger cars, that this great American corporation was forced to buy him out to remain competitive around the world.

Well now, how about that? Unfortunately, as with many of the great and seminal inventions by blacks, little or no credit has been attributed to the race. Fortunately, as was not the case with many black inventors, Woods was paid quite handsomely for this and many other of his inspired innovations. As we proceed, keep in mind, too, how much these inventions have contributed to our safety when using this particular mode of transportation. And that so critical were his inventions in this area, the U.S. Government for the first time in its history made a specific invention mandatory under statute. "The U.S. Railway Safety Appliance Act".

But, earlier on he had patented a series of four related inventions which brought him to the attention of the world; 1901 thru 1903 he was granted Nos 667, 110,687,098,718,183, and 729,481. His mind-boggling concept was that of a THIRD RAIL which would carry the electrical motive power for

trains and do away with the need for overhead trolley wires. THE MODERN SUBWAY MODE WAS BORN and "the 'American Catholic Tribune' reported that 'engineers from all over the world came to see a full scale demonstration of the new technology.'" (1903; copy in New York Public Library).

And, much earlier than this, Granville T. Woods secured two key patents for one of the most ingenious innovations ever devised to promote progress and safety in the field of transportation, THE RAILWAY TELEGRAPH; No.373,383, Nov. 15, 1887 and No. 373,915, Nov. 29, 1887. The 'genius' lay in his concept that telegraph messages could be carried by an electrical current transmitted THROUGH THE METAL RAIL OF THE TRACK; Communication was now possible BETWEEN MOVING TRAINS and between trains and stations.

No longer was it necessary to be concerned with the hazards and delays occasioned by downed telegraph lines, knocked out by rockslides, fires or vandals. The world utilizes this remarkable invention everyday, not knowing (or caring) how greatly this African Americans' concept has again advanced its commerce and safety. Unfortunately, most blacks are part of that universal mindset, and the models put forth by Woods are unavailable for their motivation or that of their children.

This prolific inventor also patented many, many other inventions ranging from the first electrical chicken incubator to furnaces, telephone, overhead electrical trolleys, galvanic batteries and many others (my research turned up 93). That New York newspaper commented, "The greatest electrician in the world"; and I comment, "Six transit gloria" (How fleeting is fame).

More next week on African American contributions to our transportation industry; insight, safety, compassion.

Learning To Live By the Advice You Give

BY ULYSSES TUCKER, JR.

One year ago last month, I was composing my third column for this publication addressing the conflicts affecting Black male/female relationships and in the process, subjecting myself to public criticism for my perspectives. Believe me, I've had my share of harsh words, but the good created by the column outweigh the bad reviews. Like most human beings, I had emotional and psychological baggage that contributed to the tone or attitude of the column. As I've documented countless times, past experiences and pain has a way of shaping a person's perspective today. In many cases, those past realities prevented me from taking risk in relationships, altered my ability to share/love, and affected my ability to trust. Simply put, I was skeptical and paranoid when it came to a relationship of substance. I was scared to open up, allow people (or women) in my personal space, and reach out to others. Through prayer and exposing my innermost pain or sorrow via this column, I have been able to come to terms with my past. By exposing my feelings publically I've healed myself and accepted that what has happened in my life is not my fault. I didn't ask to lose both parents at an early age, grow up in urban decay or on welfare, or for the emotional scars inflicted on

me as a youth. Thank God for showing me other options and choices. My friend E. Ray Leary once told me that I was giving the enemy too much information through my column about me, but I soon learned that the enemy was inside of me. With each public revelation or column, I grew and accepted my own shortcomings. I healed myself by sharing the same pain that lingered in the hearts of others for years, who for some reason or another, were afraid to discuss the problem/issue with someone they cared about. Some readers were even unaware of emotional or psychological problems until my column. Many had no need to question their mental state or values because everything in their environment, possibly, suggested that all was normal. By no means has anyone, outside of the Cosby Family, had a idea or model life, but that is not excuse to grow. There have been many moments where I started to end this column, however, countless letters/phone calls suggested otherwise. Many readers will never know the feeling of receiving a letter telling me how they convinced a mate to go into treatment (for physical abuse) or how they appreciate their parents more because of something I wrote. What started out as frustration has evolved into a medium that addresses a wide range of emotional/social/psychological issues affecting black people, not just rela-

tionships in general. More than anything, I've learned throughout this column that Black men and women are hurting inside. There is a great deal of loneliness, confusion, undue expectations of each other, and several unresolved issues that need to be addressed if we are to move forward as a race.

Issues like inter-racial marriages/dating, respect for each other, dating mates with children, irresponsible sexual intercourse, and a host of others like the ones dealt with recently at a panel discussion sponsored by the Black Cultural Affairs Board at Portland State University. It was quite evident, after leading the discussion, that we still have a long way to go despite the few gains we have achieved. Though there is hope, we still have some angry brothers and sisters in the community. Perhaps when we address and solve some of these emotional issues listed above, then maybe we can get on with preparing the next generation of young black people for the economic, political, and social realities to come.

In many ways, it would be hypocritical if I did not take heed the advice that I give in this column. As my friends Clarence and Lynn told me, "you've become a better person because you practice what you preach..." Some times, it's not about finding the right person, it's being the right person.

Observer Writer Featured on Program

Professor McKinley Burt was the presenter of a number of key topics this past Thursday and Friday in Cleveland High School's month-long forum: "Cultural Literacy: The Key to Better Human Understanding." His theme was, "World Science, History and Culture: African and African American Contributions."

Recognized locally and nationally for his in-depth knowledge of those contributions, ranging a long time line extending from the pyramids of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia to this century's "Black Inventors" who hold key patents, Mr. Burt held the interest of students and staff over eight individual sessions. Written feedback from the pupils indicated that his presentations were well received.

A subtheme of his presentation was the origin of "Institutional Racism" in America, and the generations-long omissions of the technological innovations and inventions was

clearly shown to be responsible for today's racist mindset. "When your parents, grandparents, great grandparents and so on down the genealogical line were educated by texts and media that deliberately presented blacks only as servants, slaves, cotton pickers and «Jungle Bunnies» [sic], then what else could be expected but today's prejudiced perspective on African Americans?"

Four of the presentations were made to large groups in the main auditorium Thursday, and Friday's talks were given in a more intimate classroom setting. Here, large display boards were available and these featured documented evidence of the validity of black contributions; ranging from copies of patents from Washington to institutional advertising from American industry acknowledging the importance of the inventions to the economic welfare of the nation and world.

These exhibits were prepared

by Mrs. Claudia McDuffie, Integration Specialist for Cleveland High School, with the assistance of her staff. This dedicated teacher and counselor is the prime mover and organizer in the month-long program "Human Relations and National African History Month, 1991. Theme: Cultural Literacy; The Key to Better Human Understanding." The program will continue throughout the month of February with key speakers and presenters appearing, both locally and nationally.

The staff, teachers, and students of Cleveland High School are to be congratulated and commended for their initiative in providing the community with this positive approach to establishing a favorable climate for successful interaction between cultures often in conflict. It is the hope of this newspaper that it will be able to publish further accounts of—not only presentations at this school—but of other similar endeavors throughout our city and institutions. CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Civil Rights Journal

By Benjamin Chavis, Jr.

Persian Gulf War Will Adversely Affect Black Progress

Everything about the unnecessary war in the Persian Gulf has a disproportionately adverse affect on African Americans. African Americans are disproportionately represented in the military and on the frontlines in the Persian Gulf because we are disproportionately disadvantaged in the United States. When the long awaited and inevitable ground war begins it will be African Americans who will be disproportionately coming home in those dreaded body bags.

What will African Americans who survive this war find when they come "home"? An economy that is in deep recession and innercity African American communities which will still

be ravished by poverty, crime, drugs, violence and NEGLECT. As a recent New York Times series on poverty put it, urban centers are faced with a worsening crisis. And yet there seems to be coherent policy and no serious national commitment or will to solve the crisis.

A major reason for this lack of policy and commitment is the complexion of those who are disproportionately locked into poverty within the inner city urban areas. Black and brown people are overwhelmingly the victims of poverty in America's inner cities. We are all supposed to "stand together" as "Americans" in the prosecution of war in the Persian Gulf. But white America seems unwilling to see a united

front in a war against poverty as a patriotic duty.

The war in the Persian Gulf will adversely affect Black progress for years to come. As Georgia Congressman John Lewis put it, "you cannot spend \$1 billion a day to fight a war and still deal with the problem at home" (New York Times 1/27/91). The "peace dividend" which held out the hope of providing the much needed resources to invest in education, housing, health care, infrastructure development, environmental clean-up and greater energy self-sufficiency is being wasted on this mad mis-adventure in the Persian Gulf.

The ultimate impact will be greater than the loss of the peace dividend. There is the prospect of further reductions in spending or domestic social programs as this nation is forced to come to grips with the consequences of the war. A number of other severe problems are mounting even as our attention is diverted to the Persian Gulf. It appears that another \$50-80 billion will be required to continue the S & L bailout over the next two years. And now comes the alarming revelation that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corpora-

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Less Than Three Percent of Portland Students Join Boycott

Parents of 1,618 Portland School district students cited the boycott as the reason their child was absent from school last Monday (Feb.4), according to written excuses received by principals.

Those students represent 2.94 percent of the 55,000 students enrolled in Portland schools this year.

Figures released today reflect the number of students in grades Kindergarten to 12 absent from all schools in each high school attendance area.

The number of students absent by high school attendance area for the boycott were:

Benson	88
Cleveland	20
Franklin/Marshall	77
Grant	295
Jefferson	851
Lincoln	45
Madison	97
Roosevelt	93
Wilson	52.

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Reinvestments in the Community

Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard

by Samuel Pierce

From 1954 to 1970 America experienced one of the most significant and enduring eras of her short history. That era came to be known as the Civil Rights Movement. It was a movement that would remind her for the rest of her life, that she could no longer be partial in the treatment of her members, but she must make room for all of her children.

Looking back over those times, it seems safe to say that no other individual personified the consciousness of that era than Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was a man so impassioned with the righteousness of justice, that he risked and finally lost his life in countless attempts to defend it.

But Dr. King wasn't only a great spirit, he was also a great mind. We often forget that this man had genius intelligence—graduating from high school at age 12 and from college at age sixteen. Furthermore, he was a most distinguished orator/writer and philosopher. Surely he would have been welcomed in the company of the likes of King Solomon, Aristotle, Socrates, and even the Master himself! At a very difficult time in its history, Dr. King gave America much needed leadership and courage.

Yet, against this most distinguished record of service and achievements, there are those who are still unwilling to honor this man. I speak of those who are attempting to return Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to Union Avenue. In other words, those who constantly try to take from us the small gains that we have made; to stomp out this small lantern of hope in our community.

But, or course, they say the issue isn't racism; that they are concerned about the possible loss of business. And yet, the very statement infers that naming a street after an African-American would hurt business! I find such an argument to be a contradic-

tion. But again, they say surely this isn't racism; but rather an attempt to hold on to a symbol of Oregon's past. And yet, also a symbol of Oregon's past is exclusion laws and sundown laws for Black people. Still louder they say, this isn't racism! But while most of us were preparing to celebrate the contributions of this fallen American hero, these individuals were working frantically in an effort to strike his legacy from our community.

Nevertheless, I must make my stand on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. And I invite all of my brothers and sisters—African Americans, White Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Jew's Gentiles, Protestants, and Catholics, and Muslims—to stand with me. We must lift up a standard of righteousness against this insidious act of shame to all of us. Because if the street reversal is allowed to happen, the city of Portland and the state is bound to suffer. And not because of not many, but, as always, because of a few. However, our stand must not be based upon hate or racism; but rather a stand based upon justice, peace, and brotherly/sisterly love. By doing so we will also embody the principles that Dr. King lived and died for.

Let us not be so naive to think that on the hills of Malheur a Seraw's brutal death at the hands of Skinheads, in the largest city in the state, with the largest African-American population, in the heart of the African-American community, having been "denied" two other streets in predominantly white areas, having compromised to give businesses five years before the name change takes effect, twenty-one years after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the nation will not be watching the first ever attempt to reverse the naming of a street for this kind man! If this can happen in the year of our Lord, 1990-ten years before the year 2000- then we have catapulted ourselves

back in time to the Birmingham Bus Boycott; landed again on Howard Beach; experienced once again the outrage of Forsyth County. I have always wondered if the civil rights movement ever reached Oregon—it appears that we will soon find out. If our neighboring states (California, & Seattle) can elect African-American mayors, and we cannot even have a street named for one, then something is distastefully wrong!

To close, I have faith in the good people of Oregon. I believe, as in the case of presidential candidate Jesse Jackson, they will again stand up and be counted. For these good people know, as Dr. King asserted, that "their destiny is tied to our destiny."

To my African-American brothers and sisters, I say, let us not break ranks. We must stand united in this crisis—and it is a crisis! If we cannot have a street named after someone of Dr. King's stature in our own community, then where can we have a street named? If we can be driven back from our own community, then we have little power as a community. We must put aside our differences and, as King taught, band together as a standard of unity for our generation—particularly our youth. Yes, I am aware that some of our brothers and sisters may have already signed the petition. And the opposition will use this as evidence against charges of racism. However, I am not impressed. The first attempt on Dr. King's life was made by someone of his own race; and history has long since confirmed that Judas was not a Roman soldier.

Finally, in the words of James Baldwin, "There is only one thing required for the triumph of evil and that is, that good men [and women] keep silent." I entered to be one of those exceptional "good men." And I call upon the decency of other good men and women to do the same.

"Reinvestments in the Community" is a weekly column appearing in API publications throughout the USA.

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