

# Vantage Point

By Ron Daniels

## A Job With Benefits Should be a Basic Human Right in the U.S.

Chronic unemployment and underemployment have become a plague within U.S. society particularly for African Americans and other people of color. Even beyond the color line, huge numbers of white poor and working people are also afflicted by joblessness and low paying jobs with no benefits. Despite these conditions there are few signs of revolt or a movement for a more equitable distribution of America's wealth and power. For far too long a majority of Americans have passively accepted the widening gap between the rich and the poor. It is almost as if poor and working people are holding out in hopes that the "rags to riches" mythology of U.S. capitalism will magically touch them and transform their misery into wealth, power and privilege. Perhaps a better explanation is that the culture of capitalism conveys the notion that extremes of wealth and poverty is simply an unavoidable fact of life.

The brutal fact of life in the U.S. today is that 1/2 of 1% of the people now control nearly 30% of the total wealth and the top 10% control nearly 80% of the wealth. By all indicators the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The gap between the rich and poor is the largest in U.S. history as is the unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of a few in this country. The U.S. economy is characterized by prosperity for a relative few and misery for many. The lack of jobs with decent wages and benefits is certainly a critical factor contributing to the desperate condition of many poor and working people in this country.

During his administration, Ronald Reagan boasted of creating 17 million new jobs. What he didn't tell us is that more than half of these "new" jobs pay less than \$7.00 an hour and most of

these jobs carry no benefits. Low paying jobs are threatening the livelihood and stability of millions of American workers thanks in large measure to Ronald Reagan. With the Reagan led assault against unions and with giant U.S. corporations expanding their capacity to exploit cheap labor markets abroad, working people have increasingly been faced with a dictatorship of the corporations. Millions of Americans have been driven into a new class called the "working poor."

The situation of Blacks and minorities is especially bleak. The unemployment rate for Black adults is generally three times that of white adults. Black youth unemployment has persistently remained at depression levels for years. Scores of Black people do not even show up in the unemployment statistics because untold thousands of Black people have simply given up on the hope of ever being gainfully employed in the "legitimate" economy. Little wonder that drug trafficking and other forms of "illicit" business thrives in Black communities.

All of this suggest to me that the principle of good jobs with decent wages and benefits must become a critical cornerstone in the fight for economic democracy in the U.S. Poor and working people must not continue to accept the idea that extremes of wealth and poverty are inevitable and that the wealthy are entitled to be rich at the expense of the rest of society. There is no inevitability or justice in a system which allows a few wealthy executives to have multimillion dollar salaries while millions of Americans have low paying jobs or no jobs at all. Every American who wants to work and is willing to work should be entitled to a job with good wages and decent benefits as a basic human right in the U.S.

To achieve this goal there must be

a renewed commitment to a full employment economy and there must be a radical realignment of this nation's values and priorities. Human centered, rational planning will be required in order to create a full employment economy. An indispensable component of this human centered planning is the conversion from military spending to investment in the civilian/domestic economy. Massive investment in education, health care, housing, energy, environmental protection, and infrastructure repair and development must be seen as productive job creating economic activity which can guarantee employment for every American. And public works projects must also be utilized, when necessary, to insure a full employment economy.

The full employment, right to a decent job equation, must also include a fair tax system. Loopholes for the wealthy must be eliminated through the institution of a genuinely progressive tax system. The profits on overseas investments must be taxed at the same rate as profits on domestic investments to remove the current incentive for U.S. corporations to invest abroad instead of in the U.S. Ultimately, we must contemplate a ceiling on profits as a means of promoting a more equitable distribution of wealth in this country. Why should an elite few be allowed to accrue billions when millions struggle to make ends meet or struggle to survive?

The fundamental transformation of the U.S. economy must begin somewhere if the plight of poor and working people and minorities is to drastically change for the better. The fight for jobs with decent wages and benefits as a basic human right is a good starting point in the quest for true economic democracy in the U.S.



# Perspectives

By Professor McKinley Burt

## In The Beginning Was The Word, Part I

Dear readers, I have changed my mind. It is permissible to "lay back during summer"--well, just for a little while. I had forgotten that "what is good for the goose is good for the gander."

This is the time of year I back away from the guides, handbooks, dictionaries, encyclopedias, directories, texts and manuals; time to get down to some "real" reading as reading used to be, enjoyable prose. Remember that scenario? No directions, no commands, no pressures or stress; just let your mind walk through the "yellowed" pages. Let me start you on some eclectic excursions through "proseland." If, in consequence, you find new insights and perspectives, just remember the old adage, "The heart knows things the mind cannot begin to understand."

For openers, I recommend, "Early Negro American Writers," edited by Benjamin Brawley (Dover Publications, Inc., 1970). The book is prefaced with an introduction that succinctly defines the scope of the anthology and the 18th and 19th century influences that shaped the consciousness of each writer. Included are Gustavus Vassa, Prince Hall, David Walker, Martin R. Delaney, George B. Vashon, Phyllis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and Benjamin Banneker, among others. Beautiful works, inspired prose, and I am prompted to remind you of last week's quote of the words of Black congressman George H. Murray (1894) when he addressed his colleagues regarding the "Atlanta Exposition." It is to the shame of American education that so many African-Americans were more literate a hundred years ago than today.

We find among the selections a favorite passage of mine (first paragraph) taken from Benjamin Banneker's "Letter to the Secretary of State," wherein the gifted and erudite black

surveyor and astronomer nails Thomas Jefferson to the cross of his hypocrisy (August 19, 1791).

"I am fully sensible of the greatness of the freedom I take with you on the present occasion, a liberty which seemed scarcely allowable, when I reflected on that distinguished and dignified station in which you stand, and the almost general prejudice which is so prevalent in the world against those of my complexion."

Banneker goes on to further "mess with the mind" of that patrician Virginian statesman, who was so well known for his black mistresses, even becoming the hottest topic of the French press when he took his favorite black live-in, Sally Hemings, on an 1787 shopping trip to Paris (see "Sally Hemings" by Barbara Chase Riboud, Avon, 1979). But such erotica is not what this series is about. We not only wish to enjoy and explore the scope and competence of the African literary genre--but to advocate for its inclusion in the education process, self-image, motivation, identity.

I would turn now to a period over 4000 years in the past, when the genius of the African continent was excelling in that cultural exercise we are wont to describe as the "founding of civilization." When Ethiopia, the Sudan and Egypt were driving the process and where Plato said the "woolly-headed inhabitants invented mathematics, astronomy and letters." It is with interest we note that so many of the beautiful and inspiring passages in the Bible are found verbatim in the Papyriandon stelae of these African regions--written thousands of years earlier.

Let us hear the words of the famed University of Chicago Egyptologist, James Henry Breasted:

"The Bible really originated in Ancient Egypt, where the population, according to Herodotus and Aristotle,

was black. Here the Jews received almost all of their early culture.

The ripe social and moral development of mankind in the Nile Valley which is 3000 years older than that of the Hebrews, contributed essentially to the formation of Hebrew literature. Our moral heritage therefore derives from a wider human past enormously older than the Hebrews, and it has come to us rather through the Hebrews than from them."

Further testimony is given by that prolific black historian, J. A. Rogers, to whom we all are so indebted for sweeping back the veil that was intended to conceal the blackman's true heritage:

"Psalms that read like those of the Bible were written by a Pharaoh, Amenophis IV, better known as 'Akhenaton, the Heretic King,' 1300 B.C. or more than 400 years before David was born. Akhenaton, who was the father of Tut-Ankh-Amen, was extremely Negro in type. He is called 'the most remarkable of the Pharaohs.'

For a comparison of one of the Psalms of Akhenaton with the 104th Psalm in the Bible see Arthur Weigall: Life and Times of Akhenaton, pp. 134-136, New York, 1923. Also, J.H. Breasted, History of Egypt, p. 373, New York, 1926; pp. 9, 31 Rogers, J.A., 100 Amazing Facts About The Negro."

So, we really have something to look forward to next week; the original texts, style and context of the Psalms, Proverbs, Admonitions, given in a new beauty and background--and clearly recognizable as African. "Thy rod and thy staff, the Good Shepherds," the metaphors and the similes, the style and the manner--they are all yours. Then, go and listen anew to the sermons and speeches of Reverend King, Jessie Jackson, Malcolm X, your favorite ministers. "Before the cock crows thrice you will deny me," let us hope you will not deny your heritage.

## Portland Housing Center Has Dedication

On Monday, July 8, 1991, at 10am, City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury held a press conference to unveil the Portland Housing Center, located at 2755 Northeast Broadway. The Center is a result of a collaborative effort on the part of the local government, community groups and Portland lending institutions. The center will be jointly funded by the City and the local lending community. There was open house from 3pm to 6pm later that day.

The Portland Housing Center serves as a housing information clearinghouse

and counseling support center for home ownership and housing-related issues. Services will include information and referrals programs, educational seminars, and pre-purchase and mortgage default counseling for home ownership.

The founding of the center is part of the city's ongoing effort to promote stability and home ownership opportunities for lower income communities and to encourage the continued investment in improving and maintaining Portland neighborhoods

## Targeting On Black Consumer Marketing

H. Naylor Fitzhugh, retired vice president, Pepsi-Cola Company, told a group of marketing professionals recently that the late marketing expert Herbert H. Wright taught him much of what he knows about target marketing to Black consumers. "Herb's wisdom was in understanding early on that African Americans are not only consumers, but a socio-political force with a rich history and heritage," said Fitzhugh. Fitzhugh was the featured speaker at the recent New York Chapter of the National Association of Market Developers' (NAMD) Annual Herbert H. Wright Awards Presentation Dinner Dance at the Copacabana in New York City. Now a project consultant for Pepsi-Cola, Fitzhugh spoke fondly of his close personal relationship with Wright, a former Philip Morris USA executive. The two men first met in the mid-1940's when Fitzhugh was teaching Marketing at Howard University. Wright was among the handful of Black marketing executives who founded the NAMD in the early 1950s.

## The Salvation Army Needs Volunteers

The Salvation Army needs about 600 volunteer bell ringers in 11 Oregon communities for a one-time Christmas In July fund raising campaign July 12 and 13, 1991.

The organization anticipates collecting more than \$35,000 those two days to make up for the shortage of funds caused by the arctic freeze last December.

"The freeze put an early stop on our bell ringing last December," says Lt. Colonel Mervyn L. Morelock, Divisional Commander of The Salvation Army. "We anticipate much better this July 12 and 13," he says.

Christmas In July will not be an annual event.

The following communities need volunteers: Portland, Hillsboro, Gresham, Cornelius, Forest Grove, Salem, La Grande, Medford, McMinnville, Pendleton and Springfield.

People interested in volunteering for several hours or more should contact their local Salvation Army.

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Reinvestments in the Community

This Week in History by Angelique Sanders

Picture this: you're a college student, on your way to your next class. Hearing a noise like firecrackers behind you, you turn and find some soldiers pumping you and several schoolmates full of bullets...and the soldiers are American, supposedly always on "your" side of the fight...

This is what thirteen students of Kent State University experienced twenty years ago this Friday. Two men and two women never lived to share their side of this tragedy; another man remembers My fourth as the day America turned on him and put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Five days earlier, Richard Nixon had induced America's gasp of shocked war-horror by approving the incursion of Cambodia. Public opinion of the war went from casual approval (stemming primarily from faith in the president) to vehement malcontent. Anti-war demonstrations sprouted from seeds of moral convictions. This was the beginning of separation in the country, between the government and the citizens, the empowered and the powerless. Nixon encouraged this separation, as did many other public officials in positions of power. The president upped his security in a nose-thumbing gesture to the public.

Any public protests, exercising the people's viable Constitutionally-granted right to assemble and speak peaceably, resulted in unjust police-dispersing or arrests. At Ohio State University on April 30, three students demonstrated in support of more Black students and

teachers, and the discontinuance of militaristic research. On May third, the police sent 75 people (including child pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock) to jail for holding an outdoor anti-war prayer session. College students around the nation editorialized and rallied.

The city of Kent, Ohio (population 27,000-21,000 of which were KSU students) cut off its beer supply after the first few days of rioting. When a KSU riot against the ROTC became violent, the National Guard stationed troops at the campus. The student reaction was clear: the National Guard was a symbol of their discontent, representative to them of the army that invaded Cambodia.

On Monday, May fourth, 2000 students planted themselves in protest on the football field with the National Guard. The Guardsmen weren't enveloped by the awed respect they usually commanded; more or less, they felt ridiculed. As Lieutenant Alexander Stevens, platoon leader of Troop G, scoffed, "At the time of the firing, the crowd was acting like this whole thing was a circus. The crowd must have thought that the National Guard was harmless. They were having fun with the Guard. The circus was in town." In retaliation for making them seem foolish, the National Guard inflicted the death penalty on four students, and wounded nine others.

The Guardsmen should not even have had loaded weapons. The guidelines set out by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and the

Department of the Army dictate that the issuance of loaded weapons to law enforcement officials is restricted to instances in which the resistance is armed, and the officials must be unable to control the situation without weaponry. This clearly was not the situation. Yet, the 113 Guardsmen wore gas masks, bore tear-gas launchers, and were armed with M-1 high-powered rifles (deadly even at two miles). General Robert Canterbury "justifies" the shootings--more than 30 rounds of gunfire--with this explanation: the students "threatened the lives of my men." Photographs taken by journalism students reveal that the protesters were clearly posing no deadly threat. The Guardsmen, though pursued by students, should not have panicked (they were armed with guns; the students weren't!), and they had an escape route should they have needed to flee.

Ironically, the May fifth issue of the Wall Street Journal, which carried the story of the KSU incident, also carried a full page that deemed Ohio the best location in the nation, and went on to denote the merits of Ohio, including education.

Over 700 colleges closed in sympathy with the KSU incident, and many remained closed for the whole quarter.

Public excitement died down in 1973, when the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam. The lesson of governmental power, and the separation between governing officials and the citizens, is one that should remain with us on this anniversary of the Kent State University tragedy.

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