

perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

Peer Group Dynamics

At the top of our agendas today are the problems of our youth. You may wish to argue that the disintegration of the economy offers a greater threat, but in either case the losses can be catastrophic.

If you notice, the realms of material written or aired on the subject of gangs, juvenile delinquency and educational failure tend to embrace a common approach; a problem is being AT-TACKED! A war is being waged against "this insidious cancer that is eating away at the very fabric of our society." If we are fighting a disease then we obviously have concluded that we have a patient and that it is he who must be cured.

An unfortunate consequence of either position is that we are found coming AT an enemy in the one case, and the disabled in the other. Under these circumstances one should not expect favorable (friendly) responses from the target groups, and to date their certainly has not been that much. The one fact that has stood out nationwide is that this population develops and functions around PEER GROUP PRESSURE. Then, it seems not unlikely that real time solutions could be built around the very same dynamic.

Those of you who read my recent series, "Nostalgia, Don't Leave Home Without It", are aware that I frequently cited the number of cooperative, apparently self-starting activities that went on among the youth. I had written

before about this interaction between PEERS that encompassed a host of positive activities ranging from the invention of games to sophisticated organizations: Bicycle clubs, science clubs, boat excursions, sports contests between neighborhoods, dances and picnics, benefits for the disadvantaged, you name it! And so many years ago!

What I would draw attention to, here, is not so much what may seem to the modern reader a fascinatingly high level of sophistication -- as important as that is -- but the fact that these social structures had a LIFE OF THEIR OWN THAT WAS TRANSMITTED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. First, older siblings transmitted the know-how to the younger, and then there were always neighborhood oldsters who were a fountain of information and guidance.

The conclusion I have reached after examination of the dynamics of youth social structures within the timeframes of both yesterday and today is that the CONTINUITY HAS BEEN LOST -- that we have been severed from our history and tradition in such a way that we no longer know what "we are supposed to do, can do and should do." The approach that is needed is one that will restore among our youth a PEER GROUP STRUCTURE based upon universally accepted rules of behavior and conduct that lead to mutual love and respect--a type of consanguinity that enhances support and discourages violence.

Carefully selected films and documentaries can be of tremendous help.

It follows from this that if we are to restore the former level of admirable social interaction among our youth, then we must intervene in a structured manner--an approach that assures this population they have a lot to offer and always have, vis a vis not only a documented past, but contemporary achievers from astronauts to business people. I, of course, concentrate on inventors and technology which leads to an opportunity for practical experiments and building models. And it is here that we can develop the techniques of PEER GROUP ASSISTANCE. Kids love to teach each other and, further, they will enthusiastically RECRUIT from a population of their peers.

I had concrete proof of this in a number of the youth programs I conceived and developed over the years: Several U.S. Forest Service supported programs; Providence Medical Center program for health-related occupations and so forth. A principal criterion would seem to be that the activities be interesting, structured and relevant to the contemporary world. And of course the program must lend itself to a great deal of self-study and goal-seeking. Above all the youth must be reintroduced to the idea of respecting and supporting peers--and relying on them for reciprocal considerations. And WE must be there, again, for counsel and guidance.

Inner-City Kid Makes Good: Spears Receives UNCF Scholarship

Continued from front page

rican American woman must rise up, stand her ground and be strong.

Ms. Spears has excelled in many ways and on many occasions; but, recently her hard work and academic achievements received national recognition. Velma is currently enrolled at Prairie View A & M University in Prairie View, Texas as an Electrical Engineering major. The United Negro College Fund of America awarded Ms. Velma Maria Spears a \$5,000 scholar-

ship in recognition of her achievements in the field of engineering. During the UNCF Telethon, Ms. Spears, who was introduced by Ms. Sharon Mitchell, was seen on television by thousands as her excellence was heralded. This achievement should end the myth that says, "All inner-city kids are at-risk of failure and are not going to amount to anything. So why should anyone waste their efforts to help these kids...?" Number one and foremost, society should

stop labeling and lumping our children in one big heap of nothingness. Society feels that if you come from a one parent home, you're African American, you live in the inner city, you are on welfare, you're earning below the marginal level and skimming poverty, you are automatically a failure. WRONG! Congratulations Ms. Spears! May you continue to excel and ride the winds of success. You are one of Portland's babies and we are proud of you.

Alberta Learning Center Receives \$2,500.00

Bank of America, although numbered among the largest banking concerns in the United States, has taken the time to demonstrate its willingness to become active partners in community service in Northeast Portland. Mr. Stanley Emerson, Manager of the Walnut Park Branch on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, recently presented a check for \$2,500.00 to Oregon Outreach, Inc. to assist in the efforts of the Alberta Learning Center.

The Alberta Learning Center is

located at the Yaun administrative offices at 3010 NE Alberta St. This program is a joint effort of the Alfred Yaun program, the Oregon National Guard and Oregon Outreach. Through the Alberta Learning Center, youth and adults can study for their high school diploma, prepare for their GED, or receive tutoring in any academic area. Additionally, the Oregon National Guard provides to assist NE Portland residents who want to prepare for the ASVAB exam. The Alberta Learning Center

also offers a classroom for students who are temporarily suspended or expelled from public schools. There is no charge to anyone desiring to improve their basic skills. More information on this program may be obtained by contacting the center at 281-9597, or by contacting Oregon Outreach at 287-6112.

The donation from Bank of America will enable the center to provide both day and evening classes to interested community participants.

BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT LINE

by James Posey



What We Need To Get Ready To Take Advantage Of The Many Opportunities In Construction: Part I

Like many major cities in the country, black Portlanders experienced the benefits of the Model Cities programs of the sixties and early seventies opened on President Johnson's "war on poverty." We also know during that period a lot of money was spent that went into the hands of unscrupulous community leaders, both black and white who basically heisted the money. We know that many of these programs were strongly politically motivated and designed to institute a quick fix to keep the natives from becoming more restless in the quake of nationwide riots and discontent. Many of these programs sprung up overnight and were all touted in general as mechanisms to eliminate poverty. Some programs akin to this era like Head Start have proven very successful over the years, but others were "DOA," dead on arrival.

What must one do to get ready to answer the call and take advantage of the many opportunities in construction? In our last article we discussed the basic need to get involved and explore the possibilities of entering the construction field based on what appears to be unlimited future opportunities. If it could only just be that simple. The truth of the matter is that it is a very complex endeavor latent with pitfalls and potential discouraging prospects. Conversely, if you are successful, it is one of the very few areas where you can make some money and end up with a sense of accomplishment. It may take a few years to get into it, but the financial rewards are definitely there. Maybe what is more important in a personal sense is the fact that you can visually point to distinct accomplishments long after the work is completed. I don't know of anything more psychologically important than the African American community than to establish reference points of accomplishment. The construction industry provides "concrete" examples of accomplishments.

But before we get all hyped, let's talk somewhat historically about the pitfalls. It's not as if Black folks have not previously tried to get into various construction arenas as business owners and workers. It is just that a combination of factors and circumstances have effectively kept them out. The primary limiting factor has been our own lack of understanding and preparedness in entering the industry and adhering to its prerequisites for success. In many ways we exemplify the biblical warning: "Our people perish for the lack of knowledge." We have also had a strong tendency to self-destruct based on our unwillingness to trust one another and share among ourselves. In many ways we have not learned the lessons of our most recent history.

Today in Portland, revised versions of the above scenario continue. The same devious schemes are resurrected. For example, especially in construction, would be minority and women contractors using the benefits of government programs designed to assist minorities and women to enter the construction industry, have taken contracts both prime and subcontracts ostensibly to perform work but have in reality functioned primarily as fronts for majority culture contractors. This one major misuse and abuse of the program has had devastating effects. While there is a litany of negative consequences, the most destructive is the denial of accruing certifiable experience by black contractors and the capacity to perform real commercially useful work in the industry. In selling out for the quick dollars many of these so called contractors have in fact sold our birth right to the industry. In doing so it has had a domino effect in closing doors and extinguishing other opportunities in such areas as building a viable minority workforce capacity and developing technical knowledge and experience within the industry (qualification prerequisites).

Another shameful consequence is the fact that minority contractors who have historically and currently benefit

from these programs are slow to hire other minorities and women.

As if this situation was not bad enough there is also the notorious infighting among minority contractors and predator quasi-contractor companies and organizations which purport to represent minority contractors but in effect are in business only to line their own pockets even at the expense of the minority contractors they're supposed to serve or represent. In the old post civil war south they used to call these scoundrels carpet-baggers, who lived off the slaves' misfortune and took advantage of programs to help displace slaves. Also, today as in those post civil war slavery days, those who are responsible for today's programs seem indifferent to the abuse or at least impudent to correct the misuse and abuse. So in many ways the programs are designed to fail with many of the program dollars never reaching the individuals who are supposed benefactors.

Another very negative consequence of years of squandering these resources, if we tell the truth, is the fact that as an African American community we have developed chronic deficiencies more correctly inefficiencies, are so pronounced that existing programs and resources no matter how well intended are totally inadequate and don't even come close to addressing the problem.

Now what to do about all this? The first thing we must do is tell the truth. We must next assess what our strengths and weakness are in real world terms and systematically gather and employ the necessary resources to guarantee our survival as people not only in construction but throughout the economic fabric of the country. Make no mistake about it, this is clearly an issue of ethnic survival. In doing so we must become fanatically knowledgeable and hold ourselves, agencies, organizations, businesses, and yes, individual community leaders accountable.

In the next article we will discuss from a very biased point of view, a number of various programs, their purpose and intent and how effective or ineffective they have been specifically as they relate to construction opportunities.

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Basic Skills in a Computer Age	Tues- Thur 3:30-5:30	\$5/session
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registration: January 16, 3-7pm; Jan 21, 12-1pm

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