

perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

Heroes And Heroines: Sung And Unsung

Some reached the pinnacle in terms of our honor, respect and accolades we have just paid tribute to the birthday of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. And, of course there was Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, Walter White, Mary McLeod Bethune, Hannibal and so on.

But, there were others, weren't there? Giants that WE KNEW PERSONALLY if we just stop and think about it. They were in the neighborhood, they taught us in the schools, they let us hold our jobs despite our arrogant ineptitude -- and they were there when we needed them, when no one else would come forward with aid or succor. Though many are gone now, these unsung, who made our successes possible and our travail bearable, deserve a honored place in our memories -- beyond place, race or degree of servitude.

In my own case, I could have [should have] listed several in my series, "Nostalgia: Don't Leave Home Without It." Pleading that there was a lack of space, I now cite some who were key to my formative years, and later. There is no better place to start than with those strong, committed and giving Sisters who taught us in elementary school. Of course, much of what I have learned about their dedication and sacrifice came later at a more discerning age. Certainly, this is a common experience -- when do you miss the water?

When I think of the "John Marshall Elementary School" in St. Louis, Missouri, it is, first, about particular person ages and later about specific activities or spaces. There was Miss Crenshaw,

Miss Brown, Miss Clay, Miss Hunt, et al (In those days elementary teachers were required to be unmarried). Most of my K-1-8 years were during the Great Depression and I remember so well the number of hungry children these teachers fed or at least partially clothed from their meager salaries (black teachers were paid at a substantially lower rate than whites).

And many of us were bought paper and crayons when a Jim Crow educational system failed to supply these supplies in sufficient quantities. Battered or just terrified kids were often accompanied home by an indignant teacher who would lay down the law and become a continuing family counselor. Occasionally, a delinquent father who could never get home with a paycheck--leaving his family destitute and children unable to function in the classroom--would find that the homeroom teacher had gotten a colleague to cover her post and had DESCENDED ON HIS JOB to persuade the boss to turn over the check to the mother each week.

Here, we must remember the tremendous amount of respect paid teachers in those days. It went beyond a place of honor -- they were an institution as integrated into the community as church and business. And they could do these things because they were backed up by the system. Community policing was the mode and a teacher's word, request or safety was immediately supported by the cop on the beat. These men, also, were neighborhood institutions whose social roles went far beyond the job descriptions.

At near the top of fond memories is that of "Mr. Thomas" who operated the neighborhood Coal And Ice Yard. As a fifteen year-old, hungry, ragged and trying in vain to remain in school, he gave me my first real job. Under his hard but fair discipline, I learned the meaning of work, ethical relations with people and the satisfaction of achieving both personal and physical goals. The kid who still determined to be a chemical engineer found that he loved the hard dirty job delivering 40lb. baskets of coal from a pushcart -- or blocks of ice to a third-floor tenement.

And when I went through a rebellious period with my mother -- failing to get home with my paycheck -- it was his huge, calloused hand that emphasized a no-nonsense directive to "Straighten up and fly right." Again, "beyond race or place," there was "Sean," a big Irishman who was business agent for the CIO fur and Leather Workers Union. A community social organization had sent me out on a one day job as a picket -- but they did not tell me I was to PICKET THE PICKETS for management, i.e. a strike breaker!

It was "Sean" who persuaded the angry workers not to assault me, and who later got me a job as an apprentice leather cutter (ladies belts). Later I became his assistant in the union business office and under his tutelage became politically aware as I began to read labor literature and witness negotiations. There were many heroes and heroines, of course -- shall we join in honoring them, unsung no longer?

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Vantage Point

By Ron Daniels

Politicians Use The Poor As Scapegoats For Failure Of The U.S. Economy: The Poor Must Organize To Fight Back

Fannie Lou Hamer, the courageous freedom fighter from Mississippi, once remarked that, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." This expression most certainly captures the sentiments of millions of poor and working people, women, the elderly and minorities who are being blamed by opportunistic politicians for the collapse of the U.S. economy. Using rhetoric reminiscent of Ronald Reagan and code words similar to David Duke, mayors, governors and aspiring presidential candidates are attacking welfare recipients and the homeless as unnecessary and unwanted burdens on the backs of middle class taxpayers and the government.

In Michigan general relief has been completely eliminated, swelling the ranks of the homeless and increasing the agony and pain of thousands of poor people in that state. Ohio has drastically reduced the payments to people on general relief and Illinois is planning to follow suit. California's Governor Pete Wilson is moving forward with a ballot initiative which calls for a drastic curtailment of benefits to the poor in that state. In a number of cities, including Atlanta, Washington D.C. and New York, aid for the homeless has been reduced and ordinances have been passed to "protect" the general public from the homeless.

This mean spirited scapegoating of the poor and disadvantaged by politicians of both establishment parties constitutes the worst kind of political expedience and cowardice. Politicians and "wanabe" presidents can scapegoat the poor because the dispossessed and the disadvantaged are largely disoriented, disorganized, and unregistered. The poor are not viewed as a potent force in U.S. politics. Hence the poor can be disrespected, disregarded and discarded with impunity by politicians who lack both the insight and the will to place the blame for the ailing economy

where it belongs - on a flawed system and failed policies.

It was not the poor who decided that the U.S. should ignite an arms race in the quest to make this nation the muscleman/policeman of the world in the era of the Cold War. It was not the poor who concocted "voodoo economics, and education while simultaneously increasing military/war spending and reducing taxes for the wealthy. It was not the poor who made the decision to spend .50 cents of every federal tax dollar on the military war budget while allocating only .03 cents on income assistance programs (welfare), .02 cents on food and nutrition programs, .01 cent for job training programs, .01 cent for housing, .03 cent for education and .08 cent for health care.

It was not the poor who opened up gaping tax loopholes for the wealthy which allowed the rich and super-rich to escape with \$134 billion in tax savings in 1988 and \$159 billion in 1989. The welfare recipients and the homeless were not the ones who mismanaged and squandered \$600 billion (\$1 trillion over the next 30 years with interest) in the S&L scandal, and another \$10 billion in the HUD scandal. The poor are not responsible for the rampant speculation, greed and mismanagement that threatens to bankrupt the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), requiring \$25 billion in taxpayer dollars to bail-out that agency. It was not the poor who went on a binge of leverage buy-outs, merging corporations, and purging workers of their jobs. It was not the poor who reaped obscene fortunes from this unproductive, non-job generating, paper shuffling.

No, the poor, welfare recipients, the homeless, the dispossessed and the disadvantaged are not the villains. They are the victims of the greed, corrup-

tion, misplaced priorities and wanton neglect inherent in a system that places profit, property, and material acquisition for the few above the general welfare and well being of the majority. That system must be changed. Far too many politicians from the establishment parties are incapable of promoting the "radical revolution of values" which Martin Luther King called for in order to change the plight of the poor in this nation. Such a revolution requires vision, courage and an unflinching will to fight for the fundamental transformation of the policies, institutions and systems which oppress the poor and disadvantaged in this society; a transformation which must lead to the creation of a new and humane society.

It is clear that the task of fashioning a new future, therefore, rests squarely in the hands of the disadvantaged and the dispossessed and those progressive souls who are committed to the "radical revolution of values," required to create a new society. Fannie Lou Hamer was not just "sick and tired of being sick and tired." She rose up, in spite of her circumstances, to engage the struggle to liberate oppressed humanity. The millions of unorganized and unregistered must also come to see the absolute necessity to organize to engage the struggle.

The collective response to the shallow scapegoating and bashing of welfare recipients, the homeless, women, the elderly and minorities must be, "we hold the truths to be self evident;" "that all human beings are entitled to certain basic human rights, among which are: a job with good wages and benefits, a decent home in a clean and safe environment, health care, education, clean air, clean water, a wholesome environment for all living things and peace and security with justice. For these "inalienable rights," we are prepared to fight until the unfulfilled American Revolution is finished!

Portland Observer encourages our readers to write letters to the editor in response to any articles we publish.

'Behind The Badge Murder'?

To The Editor:
An open letter to Mayor Bud Clark, Police Chief Tom Potter, and the entire Police Department.

I am once again concerned about the many human lives that has been taken by some police officers, and special squads of the department over the past year. The death of Mr. Renfro is one that has bothered me most. The assault gun the police used on this man, who was shot twenty-eight times, reduced this human being to a big blob of blood, I was told. He was shot without police calling for him to surrender, or making their presence known after killing his dogs. He was shot with his wife and family in the house.

About a month ago policeman shot and killed a young man who the policeman said had cut him with a knife. This young man was shot an unreasonable number of times. My mind cannot penetrate or eliminate the self defense

claimed by the officers involved as justification for murder, and that is what some of these killings are.

I realize the frustration and irritation of the gangs and drug problems that the officers are fighting. The problems are out of control, because of late intervention of the police who ignored the complaints of the community when problems first started. This part of town has always been neglected, and there has always been an undue amount of brutality from policeman against black citizens.

Some people's memory is very short, but mine is very long. I haven't forgotten the Tony Stephen death, by applying the choke hold by two officers and the many shooting incidents before then.

I am not trying to open old wounds, but I can see the police and the over reaction in this community lately, returning back to its previous ways.

There are some wonderful police

officers that I have met, and they are doing a good job. But bad apples will pop up every once in a while.

If you have been an honest officer and haven't used your badge in a careless and thoughtless manner, this letter is not for you. I will praise you when you do a good job, I will let you know when I think you are slipping and I do think there should be a citizen group with power to look into the things I have brought to your attention. I am not the only one concerned about these things, but I am speaking for all of those who do not speak.

There is too much race hate happening in this county, time to overlook the motive of behind the badge murder.

Think about it.

Sincerely
Vesia Loving
P.S. I wrote this on the 12th of Dec., before the other tragic events involving the police.

History According To Which Truth

Dear Dr. Burt,
I would very much like a copy of Dr. Gilk's article, which was cited in your recent column -- I have included a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose.

I enjoy your insights each week -- it's a shame the "Observer" doesn't have more writers on its staff (to rattle our cages more). It's good to remind us

Americans of our history -- as it is often distorted and presented as truth by those who self-promote and lack courage to see other theories.

I find most of your observations to be correct. we, the white folks and I thank you for them. I am often dismayed by how totally immoral and obscene our form of "democracy" has become (although it was founded and

has promoted itself on racism and sexism -- its crimes have worsened).

I am currently trying to finish my docorial dissertation (uo) and hope that I can continue to be a good teacher. I would probably enjoy taking one of your classes at PSU.

Sincerely
Pamella Settlegoode
Portland

Female Officer Might Have Made A Difference

I am just so overcome by a recent rash of tragic events that have ensnared our youth it's just hard for me to sit down and concentrate. The latest incident involved a 20 year old hostage taker, Brian French and 12 year old who was held with a knife at his throat, Nathan Thomas. Their deaths have shaken our city.

By now, I am sure we are all familiar with the tragic consequences of the

early morning confrontation with Portland Police Officers. I do not know that much about guns and the correct procedures officers should use under such circumstances. And it is not clear to a number of us whether there was an opportunity for some delaying tactic which could have brought about an entirely different chain of events.

I will say this, however. I sincerely believe that the presence of at least one

female officer(s) at the scene would have made a heck of a difference in negotiating with this disturbed young man; such little as was done. Perhaps the Bureau, the City and the Human Relations Commission will make renewed efforts to recruit more female officers.

Sincerely,
Alice Moreland
S.W. Portland

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