

BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT LINE

by James Posey



Where is the Black Leadership?

CERTIFICATION - DBE Highway Related Businesses
January 1991 - December 1991

ETHNICITY	MALE			FEMALE		
	JAN 91	DEC 91	% OF CHANGE	JAN 91	DEC 91	% OF CHANGE
AFRICAN AMERICAN	52	30	-42.31%	5	5	0.00%
HISPANIC	39	54	38.46%	5	9	80.00%
NATIVE AMERICAN	25	36	44.00%	3	4	33.33%
ASIAN AMERICAN	27	25	-7.41%	10	3	-70.00%
ASIAN INDIAN	7	12	71.43%	0	1	100.00%
WHITE	0	0	0.00%	149	179	20.13%
TOTAL DBE	150	157	4.67%	172	201	16.86%

Before we discuss issues related to leadership, politics and construction let's say a few more words in conclusion about the Oregon Department of Transportation. Here is an excerpt from the Department's 1991 Civil Rights report:

Problem Area: The involvement of and retention of Black Americans within the highway construction program. A steady decline in the participation of Black American males continues to occur unabated. We are not certain of the reasons why. A review of the statistical information supports our concerns of a decline in the participation specifically of Black males in the DBE Program.

If this is a not self-incriminating statement, I've never heard one. The following numbers speak for themselves. Now the question is who will step forward and address this issue. Where is the Black leadership? Most of them have known about this situation for years.

While few would disagree that the current Black leadership picture in Portland and in Oregon is pathetic, there is much speculation as to why. But before attempting to answer this question we should reiterate why the issue of leadership is so crucial to African Americans at this particular time. Hopefully there is no need to repeat the litany of ailments afflicting the African American community, but one affliction deserves special attention. It's infamously called the "grab syndrome." Recently, one of the candidates for mayor in a meeting asked politely in relationship to economic development and business why there seems to be this lack of cohesion on the part of the Black community. My interpretation of the question was "why can't you black folks work together and stop bickering among yourselves and

putting and pulling each other down." It will certainly take more than this one article to even begin to address this issue; however, let's look at an overview of possible reasons:

The prevalence of the integrationist vs. separatist approaches:

There are prominent Black people who think and act just as many whites do. They materially reject Black culture and its value system in favor of the majority culture's value system. Every action is based on the white standard of value. They believe that Black people can survive only when they abandon their "Blackness," subscribe to and incorporate the majority culture's business and political prerequisites. Conversely, there are African Americans who can't stand the thought of accepting any values identified predominantly with the majority culture. Consequently, the extremes become polarized and rarely intersect.

Subscribing to the "Me, My, and I" notions of success:

I got mine, you get yours! What's in it for me? The only color or value I'm concerned about is greenbacks! -- and so on. African Americans' culture, historically noted for communal sharing and caring, is under attack from the forces of greed, sleaze and selfishness which is relentless in the larger culture and gaining a foothold in the African American community. There are citings of community members who would sell their mothers down the road for a few extra dollars. While this example is extreme, consider the relationship between how effective our leaders are in relationship to how they are being compensated or how they are pegging their future career opportunities.

Divisive Programming:

We have watched program after program set up mechanisms for produc-

ing divisiveness in the community. Administrators sometimes intentionally and unintentionally design programs that will create dissension and competition among African American respondents. They know that most of the respondents are not more than a paycheck from the poorhouse or the soup line. Yet when they issue a request for proposals (RFP) (which are in most cases really scraps for the white folks table, bones if you will) rather than structuring them to require cooperation, collaboration, and accommodation, it is wholly divisive. Excuse me -- this is not a black folks phenomenon. We have learned well from the larger society how to act like crabs in barrel.

These are only a few possible reasons as to why we are perceived as having a "grab syndrome." So what does this have to do with real black leadership?

Not since the activism of Rev. John Garlington have we in Portland had a black or white leader who could transcend his or her own ego, personal or group self-interest. Not since the Rev. Garlington have we had a leader who was confident, self-assured, respected enough to work across artificial barriers to bring Black people together on one accord. He was a leader that could give a vision and hope for shared prosperity, diversity of ideas, and resources. But more importantly, he demonstrated he was willing to not only to "talk the talk," but also consistently "walk the walk." While granted this is a horrendous feat, it is the most glaring major failure of African American leaders in Oregon and Portland today.

In our next article we look at this issue more closely in terms of a particular program area that we should all be concerned about.

perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

Free At Last! Free At Last! Free At Last!

This past week I had some interesting discussions with several other EMANCIPATED EDUCATORS who also had escaped that frustrating treadmill encountered when one is trying to deliver a better educational product; last week's column: "THIS IS WHERE I CAME IN (on this bad movie!)."

I had served a 26 year stint on the pedagogic plantation and like my friends from the teaching fraternity, realized that we were the ones who had been educated. While a three-hour lunch brought on the realization that the four of us represented over a hundred years of classroom experience--from preschool to graduate instruction--we were not satisfied that we had managed to deliver, that idealized product that all neophytes envision of their careers.

Throughout last week's article I described some rather innovative technology and curriculum I brought to the process in an attempt to overcome what I perceived to be the routine inertia and legarthy found in any entrenched bureaucratic system. Therefore, it was logical that I bring to bear the same tools, training and intuitions developed from years of experience in business and industry. Not to be! The urban educational structures in this nation resemble nothing quite so much as URBAN PLANTATIONS--with all the social concomitants, customs, behaviors, mores and traditions of the original slave culture (nevermind all the professional nomenclature).

Shocked? you would not be if, fortuitously, you had brought to this process a perspective developed both within and without the system. At the same time that I was making the transition from industry to education, I also had a role in the administration and accounting for SOCIAL PROGRAMS. This diversity of vantage points enables one to gain an insight not privileged to a person solely within one system or the other. But, as I said earlier, "frustration" can be the principal achievement no matter how many innovative learning paradigms are brought to the process ("Year 2000" indeed, try year 2020).

Those who have read my book, Black Inventors of America, or heard my relevant television lectures know of the main fantastic inventions of African

American SLAVES--but their genius did not free them, only enriched their masters. The only exception I know of is that of the slave instructor/inventor who taught at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland early last century. A Maryland newspaper at the time reported that he was "a genius at both learning and instructing according to the basic laws that govern nature" -- and that he was "able to devise working models of steam-driven engines and other machinery." (I will furnish the precise citation on request).

The news article went on to state that "the negro is purchasing his freedom in installments out of the remainder of a sum paid to his master, who deducts room, board and clothing." I cite this travesty upon the human condition because as stated I found so many parallels to a "plantation" in our urban education system. Where one might expect a long-term success and proliferation of my curriculum innovations mentioned last week, there must be another point-to-point reference to the plantation system; not only are there the roadblocks and barriers put up by the masters but one encounters blocking and manipulation on the part of DRIVERS AND STRAW BOSSES drawn from the ranks of the slaves (Both black and white, the most ludicrous being those who never realized, until too late, that they were on SOFT MONEY).

I opened today's essay by recounting a luncheon conversation with a group of peers from a wide spectrum of backgrounds in the Portland (and state) school systems. We found ourselves in agreement that our respective standards and pedagogical approach to educating urban students bore the prime responsibility for our being FENCED OUT OF THE SYSTEM by the aforementioned "Drivers and Straw Bosses." We were also in agreement that these types are found on both sides of the equation in this masked ball; loudly for or loudly against the system. It further seemed to us that neither group would have professional careers (or television exposure) except for Portland's educational trauma.

But not to worry, this week's title, "FREE AT LAST!", represents the consensus of all four of us that we have finally shaken off the fetters of that

"ALICE IN WONDERLAND" Portland School System, both administrators and strawbosses, and are doing a good job of reaching students, parents and the more competent administrators DIRECTLY. Two recent and lengthy articles in the Oregonian did not shake us up at all as they would have two decades ago. "SKIRMISHES END IN AN UNEASY PEACE" (3/26/92), and a later article on the infamous "BASE LINE ESSAYS."

Like many others, I found it useful and necessary to return to industry to get the job done, to circumvent the inept and the "STRAWBOSSES." That Beaverton area industry I write about, where the CEO is a former student of mine and I am on the board of directors, transports a bus load of innercity kids to their plant several times each month where I supervise their interaction with children of the plant workforce and executives (math, science and hands-on electronic instrument interface). This is my updated design of that prize-winning "The Dalles Oregon Project" of 26 years ago. I have been invited to reprise that exercise also this fall and have already contacted the prime movers in the district.

What makes me so angry, despite the fact it's great to escape the plantation and the inept, is these "new" mathematics and science lesson plans that were offered locally and rejected or pooh-poohed almost two decades ago. Now, after thousands of our intercity students have gone down the drain (gangs and death), I am getting a belated recognition in industry and overseas. As I said almost thirty years ago in The Dalles, four to eight-year olds can understand much algebra and geometry and combinations thereof. I said and demonstrated the same concept twenty years ago at the Lake Oswego Montessori.

Next week, lets take a new look at those "Baseline Essays" and why a number of educators from eastern and southern cities will be here in Beaverton for my redesign of the science and math components to relate to a REAL WORLD --the kind of package I designed originally for the process, and was rejected. Now three national corporations have joined me in escaping the plantation.

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

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

Dr. Manning Marable

Why Voters Are Angry

The disclosure last month that hundreds of members of Congress wrote thousands of bad checks struck an emotional cord of outrage across the country. Transcending ideological and partisan party boundaries, citizens felt deeply betrayed by their elected officials. The media dubbed this latest scandal "Rubbergate," and newspaper editorials denounced the entire affair.

A Newsweek poll revealed that 78 percent of Americans interviewed would be unlikely to re-elect their members of Congress if they were among the worst offenders. From the vantagepoint of African-American politics, several of the worst offenders were prominent Black politicians: Harold E. Ford of Tennessee, with 388 checks; William Clay of Missouri, 329 checks; and John Conyers of Michigan with 329 checks. The worst African-American offender was Chicago Congressman Charles Hayes. Despite his long and admirable record as a defender of trade union and progressive interests, Hayes was discovered to have written 716 overdrafts in less than two years. Hayes was narrowly defeated by former Black Panther and southside alderman Bobby Rush, who used the check bouncing issue to his advantage.

There are many different reasons why millions of Americans believe that their political system no longer works. Three factors are central to the current public mood of pessimism.

First, most Americans have lost confidence in the politicians of both parties within Congress. Throughout much of the past decade, Congress' "jobrating" in public opinion polls was

about one-third negative. But in the past four years, the political system suffered through a series of scandals and shocks. Congress hiked its salaries during an economic recession; Democratic Congressional leaders Jim Wright and Tony Coelho were forced to resign; Senators were implicated in the massive savings and loan scandal, costing taxpayers billions of dollars. Finally, the public fiasco of the Clarence Thomas hearings outraged many liberals, because it illustrated the Senate as an exclusively white, overwhelmingly male establishment completely out of touch with women's rights issues. Congress' negative ratings soared above 70 percent.

Second, voters are alienated because the middle class, the bedrock of the American electoral system, is in social economic crisis. About 63 percent of all U.S. families of four earn between \$18,500 and \$74,300, which is the group which perceives itself as the "middle class." Since the mid-1970s, the real incomes of most of these families have leveled off, while some have fallen sharply. Families are able to get by only because millions of spouses who used to stay home have now entered the labor market, bringing home extra income. Others have fallen into the ranks of the working poor, and even the homeless.

Millions feel an acute sense of confusion and betrayal. The system which had once been perceived as the victor over the "Evil Empire" was now revealed as hollow and helpless. Thirty seven million Americans lack medical care; millions go to bed hungry every

night; millions of manufacturing jobs have disappeared, while the Bush administration does nothing to halt the economic decline in living standards.

Third, the electorate is angry because the gap between the economic and political leadership and ruling class and the vast majority of American workers is expanding. During the Reagan-Bush years, the upper one percent of all households saw their average incomes soar to nearly \$550,000 annually. This top one percent pocketed sixty percent of all income growth in the 1980s. While poor children starved and the indigent froze in vacant buildings, America's "rich and shameless" made billions, due to the 1981 Reagan tax cut.

In Japan, the gap in the salaries of executives and workers is much less than in the United States. Last year, while Chrysler lost millions of dollars, Lee Iacocca was paid \$4.8 million! Profits are going to fat executives' salaries, rather than being invested back into new technologies and machinery for jobs.

Today's outrage against the politicians and the government may mean an end to the politics of conformity characterizing the Reagan years. Whether this political anger yields constructive and progressive changes within the system, however, still remains to be seen.

Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of Political Science and history, University of Colorado, Boulder. "Along The Color Line" appears in over 230 newspapers internationally, and a radio version is broadcast by over 50 stations throughout North America.

The Portland Observer

(USPS 959-680)
OREGON'S OLDEST AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLICATION
Established in 1970

Contributing Writers
McKinley Burt
Bill Barber
Sharon Camarda
Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

Publisher
Alfred Henderson

Operations Manager
Joyce Washington

Accounting Manager
Gary Ann Garnett

Public Relations
Chuck Washington

Sales & Promotions
Tony Washington

Production Staff
Dean Babb
Sharon Camarda
Gary Ann Garnett
Jennifer Johnson

The PORTLAND OBSERVER is published weekly by Exie Publishing Company, Inc. 4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Portland, Oregon 97211 503-288-0033 • Fax 288-0015

Deadline for all submitted materials:

Articles: Monday, 5:00 pm--Ads: Tuesday, noon

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes to: Portland Observer, P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208. Second class postage paid at Portland Oregon.

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and can not be used in other publications or personal usage, without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 1991 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

Subscriptions: \$25.00 per year.

The Portland Observer--Oregon's Oldest African-American Publication--is a member of the National Newspaper Association--Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY.

SUBSCRIBE

The Portland Observer

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER CAN BE SENT DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOME ONLY \$25.00 PER YEAR.

PLEASE FILL OUT, ENCLOSE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER, AND MAIL TO:

SUBSCRIPTIONS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
PO Box 3137
PORTLAND, OREGON 97208

Name _____
Address _____
City, State _____
zip-code _____

THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER