

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL *perspectives*

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

by Professor McKinley Burt

Dismantle American Apartheid in Education

Now that the stage is being set inside South Africa for the dismantling of apartheid, it is our concern that renewed attention be given to dismantling systems of racist segregation and discrimination here inside the United States. The latest ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States on school desegregation is another step in the wrong direction.

It has been 38 years since the historic 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in which the Supreme Court voted that separate and unequal schools were unconstitutional. For years considerable progress was made toward desegregating the nation's schools. In most cities this was only accomplished after severe court battles and local struggles against institutionalized racism in the educational system. During the past 10 years, however, the Supreme Court has taken incremental steps backward away from the firm stance of the *Brown* decision.

Today, school systems across the nation are resegregating based on race. At a time when there should be a stronger federal demand that all of the children of this nation be given an equal opportunity to receive a quality education in public schools, the highest court in the country acts to dilute the federal role in achieving school desegregation.

The latest ruling involves the De Kalb County, Georgia school district, which has been under federal court ordered desegregation since 1969. The United States 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1989 ruled against the De

Kalb County school officials concluding that the school district should remain under federal supervision until it had achieved and maintained racial equality for at least three years in seven specified aspects of its operation.

The Supreme Court now says it disagrees with the U.S. 11th Circuit Court in Georgia, and instead agrees with the De Kalb County school officials who want to be released from federal scrutiny and supervision on the issue of school desegregation. Ruling unanimously 8-0, the Supreme Court has given a clear signal to hundreds of school districts that "local control" and resegregation of school systems is becoming more and more tolerable and permissive. Interestingly, Justice Clarence Thomas, also from Georgia, did not participate in the vote because it was argued before the Supreme Court prior to Thomas' appointment. We know, though, from reviewing Thomas' public position on related matters that the vote would probably have been 9-0 if Thomas had voted on this case.

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote the majority opinion in the De Kalb decision. Kennedy wrote, "Partial relinquishment of judicial control, where justified by the acts of the case, can be an important and significant step in fulfilling the district court's duty to return the operations and control of schools to local authorities." We must not forget why the federal courts were first petitioned to order school desegregation.

The NAACP Legal Defense and

Educational Fund and other civil rights organizations had to sue hundreds of school districts throughout the country to challenge the racist segregation of students in public schools. Now some of these same school districts are attempting to use the federal courts to justify the resegregation of schools. Sadly, it appears that the present composition of "justices" on the Supreme Court are also prone to be more sympathetic to this regressive and backward tendency.

The school systems of our nation should be preparing for the increasing multiracial diversity of the national population. On the contrary, the ugly specter of racial discrimination is regaining new pseudo justification not only in some local school districts but also in the Supreme Court.

All of these wrong steps pose a renewed challenge to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1990's. Yes, there has been considerable progress. But there are many indications that certain aspects of the foundation of the progress won are being removed. The opposition to racial progress is methodical and persistent. We must not rest on the memory of past victories. The immorality of the recent decisions of the Supreme Court in regard to public education must not go unchallenged.

All children should have a fair chance at life. To deny educational opportunity to a child based on race is wrong, and should never be tolerated no matter what attempts are made to justify it. American apartheid in education must be dismantled now!

ment improvements including: specifying which certification requirements must be met before foster care certificates are issued; improving the use of written agreements; and more quickly seeking adoptive or other permanent homes when it is determined that children cannot return to their parents' homes.

The audit also says that by improving the efficiency of its staff, CSD could provide more family-based services, "a cost-effective alternative to substitute care in which caseworkers work directly with children and families to prevent the removal of children from their homes." The audit notes that caseworkers presently spend only 20 percent of their time in direct contact with children and families, in part because they attend more administrative and judicial reviews than required by federal regulations, and perform reporting tasks that could be done by clerical staff or volunteers. By improving efficiency in these areas, the audit suggests that caseworkers could devote more time to individual group counseling and therapy, parent training classes, homemaker training, and other family-based services.

ing some of its close custody facilities as public child care institutions, CSD could increase by approximately \$1.2 million per biennium its federal foster care maintenance funds. CSD estimates it could increase by an estimated \$1.5 million per biennium its federal funds for mental health treatment for youth by establishing a program that enables private residential treatment facilities to bill for Medicaid services.

In addition to increasing federal funds, the audit reports that CSD could better ensure the safety of children in foster care and avoid an estimated \$3.6 million of general fund expenditures per biennium in foster care payments. This would result in net ongoing savings of \$1.8 million per biennium. (The other \$1.8 million would go for increased adoption assistance payments.) The report recommends that CSD decrease the time children stay in foster care and reduce the state's potential liability from overcrowded foster homes by improving its management controls over the foster care program.

The audit also recommends man-

Teaching Children to Get Smart

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

I seemed to have shocked a few readers with last week's column, "Free At Last," but no more so than did the article preceding that one, "This Is Where I Came In." Let me assure those concerned that it is not so much deserting the ship as it is being about recovering from an unpleasant experience and finding that one can successfully get back on task!

I borrowed today's title from a recent column by Marion Wright Edelman, the African American advocate for inner city children (President, Children's Defense Fund). Certainly, the goals of this dedicated educator, as she seeks to untrack the alleged "learning disabled" and "special ed" consignees, exactly parallel our local efforts to get off of a leaky and ineffective ship—but not to desert the passengers or crew. That is, we will continue to deliver a successful educational product, the innovative methodologies and curriculum we have developed ourselves.

I promised to return to the discussion of those ubiquitous **BASELINE ESSAYS**, the motivation and learning vehicle developed by the Portland School District as the primary bridge over which a foot dragging administration might enter the modern world of **MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**. For a recent review of this controversial approach to acquainting both minority and other pupils (and teachers) with the true heritage of African Americans, one should see a major article in the Forum section, *Sunday Oregonian* for March 8: "Fighting Words: Portland Schools National Essays..." This report by Joe Uris is fairly

accurate and conveys a good sense of the urgency, dedication and the acrimony on the part of many of those involved. But what I am about here, today, is not so much a rehash of past failures and transgressions but to illustrate why several of us made statements last week like "Fenced out of the system—a plantation with drivers and strawbosses." In my particular case, I contend that my suggested interventions and modifications of the process would not only have seen this *motivational curriculum* developed as a more factual and less controversial product, but would have made Portland a national center for teacher training and curriculum development in this field.

Given that I was brought into the process late (circa 1980s) as a **local consultant**, but the essays had not yet been written by individual **NATIONAL CONSULTANTS**, my first contracted task was to work with a school administrator at an outlying office in the compilation of accomplishments by Africans and African-Americans in the fields of science and mathematics. This massive document which lists my name among the contributors was intended as a teacher's manual and guide (also curriculum people); title: "Mathematics Scope and Sequence and Science Scope and Sequence, K-12."

My first contribution was to the revision of data that produced the document above; few of my citations appear and those not in their original form. It is to be further understood that this "Orange Book," as it is called, was designed to include the achievements of **ALL RACIAL GROUPS** (as given here): Asian (Asian-American), African (Afro-American), European (Eu-

ropean-American), Latin-American (Hispanic-American), American Native (Indian-American), Pacific Islander (Pacific Islander-American). Not just blacks.

But as Joe Uris says in his *Oregonian* article of March 8, "\$2.36 million dollars later...only the African-American Baseline Essays Lesson Plans for grades K-5 and other materials have been written—all of the Essay authors have been asked to reexamine their work for content accuracy, style and reference verification." As I have written here several times in the past few years, the process disregarded all acceptable norms for program development, system design and human factors correlation. In no business, industry or public program in which I have worked as administrator or accountant over the years, have I encountered anything similar.

I grant the internal dissensions and acrimony on both sides were driven by the emotion and ideologies in race and culture, but that is still not an excuse for educators who are often found at criticizing others for such responses. This observation includes the roles of the **local consultants**—and here, again, there was not a firm direction, delegation of tasks or powers, or an organized system of correlation with the principal consultants in other cities who were writing those Baseline Essays. Keep in mind that we local consultants were now about writing Lesson Plan Models within our particular fields of expertise. Mr. Uris says the district has plans for only one grade. I am delivering my multigrade designs across the nation. They were finished 8 years ago. (Continued next week)...

Audit Finds Children Services Division Can Realize \$4.5 Million More Per Biennium

Every dollar we can find to help our neediest children and their families must be treated as a precious resource," Secretary Keisling said recently. "The performance audit of Children's Services Division we are releasing does just that—it suggests how the state can provide better services and realize several million dollars in the process."

The audit report finds that the Children's Services Division (CSD) can increase federal funds by \$2.7 million per biennium and achieve a net savings in foster care payments by \$1.8 million per biennium. The report suggests how to improve foster care services and provide more family-based services.

"This performance audit is an excellent example of how the Audits Division and state agencies can work together to make government more effective and accountable," said Secretary Keisling. "Whenever we waste money, or don't receive resources to which Oregon is entitled, we short-change the future and our ability to ensure decent lives and opportunities for the next generation."

The audit says that by reclassifying

THE BLACK-LABOR AGENDA 'Civil Rights Past and President: A Word to Black Students'

BY NORMAN HILL, President, APRI, A Philip Randolph Institute

This column will give a thumbnail historical overview of the civil rights movement and review the challenges we face today, the skills we need and the tasks we face in the 1990s.

We at the Randolph Institute divide the civil rights movement's history into 3 periods: first, the period from 1896 to 1954, encompassing the legal struggle to end Jim Crow; second, the period from 1955 to 1965, encompassing the popular struggle to end Jim Crow in the civic arena; and finally, the period from 1965 to present, which has encompassed the political struggle to achieve economic justice and to maintain and enforce the legal platform for racial equality.

In 1954, the Supreme Court, in the ruling on *Brown vs. Board of Education*, effectively killed the concept of "separate but equal." But the *Brown* decision in itself did not represent a final victory. Instead, it required political implementation and support. The NAACP, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, played a key role in this period by tirelessly mounting legal challenges to Jim Crow doctrine.

Because implementing *Brown* would require broad political support, the civil rights movement had to generate such support by dramatizing and publicizing the evils of segregation. This was the beginning of a new era for the civil rights movement. In the period from 1955 to 1965, the civil rights movement's dominant strategy was "direct action." Our focus was on building a popular protest movement across the nation, and particularly in the South, a movement so influential that change would be inevitable.

This strategy and this period succeeded for several reasons. Because our struggle was against unjust, brutal, and blatant racism, that attacked all blacks, most of America could unite behind us. The pig-headed brutality and bigotry of people like Bull Connor and Sheriff Jim Clark painfully yet

effectively advanced our cause. Civil rights became the dominant domestic political issue. Ending legal segregation was possible at little or no economic cost to the government or to society. Finally, this period depended for its success on the courage, commitment, and short-term organizational skill of civil rights activists, leaders, and volunteers, especially thousands of committed black students. This period achieved a legal platform for racial equality, and laid the groundwork for the broader and more difficult struggle for economic justice.

In the period from 1965 to the present, the civil rights movement's dominant strategy has been, and needs to continue to be, political participation and coalition-building for economic justice. In this period, we have seen a tremendous growth in black political power, reflected particularly in an explosive growth in the number and influence of black elected officials. We have seen significant voting rights progress, and the substantial elimination of legal segregation.

In this period, while discrimination still exists and demands our opposition, black problems and issues have been overwhelmingly economic, not purely racial. We have shared interests with workers, have-nots and have-littles of all races on issues such as healthcare, unemployment, affordable housing, quality education, deindustrialization, and the weakening of the American labor movement. Furthermore, a coalition of broad social forces (including blacks, trade unions, and liberals) has better chances of success than any "go-it-alone strategy" that is sure to be hampered by blacks making up only some 12% of the population.

The civil rights and labor leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin founded the Randolph Institute in 1965 to advance the struggle for economic justice by working with black trade unionists and the black community. They believed that, due to our historical experience and role in the working class, blacks and black students could

be a key part of an overall broader socio-economic reform or revolution.

Today's challenges for black students is to develop the skills necessary to help achieve economic justice. In the past, skills needed by activists in the civil rights movement included courage, commitment, perseverance and short-term organizational skills. Students played a key role in demonstrating these skills, particularly in the period from 1955 to 1965 when students were in the vanguard of the movement. In that period, students substituted for the participation of their elders, who were generally tied down with daily responsibilities. Students were the teacher to the rest of society, showing the world what commitment and faith meant. Students were the front line in the direct action period of the civil rights movement's struggle.

Skills needed today by the civil rights movement include those skills which black trade unionists develop in the labor movement. These skills include organizing and organizational know-how, and an understanding of economics, politics, and coalition-building. To assist the movement, today's black students can and must develop additional skills while building local organizations, skills such as analytical abilities and communications skills. To strengthen ties between labor and the black community, black students must learn to emphasize our common concerns. This demands experience working with local Randolph Institute affiliates, with local unions or with the local AFL-CIO, with Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns, and with Frontlash, the student arm of the labor movement. For our movement to be successful in the future, we must avoid the politics of symbolism, and emphasize the politics of substance, coalition, and substantial change.

In conclusion, the cliché is true: today's students will be tomorrow's leaders. Developing the skills and experience necessary to serve our movement as effective leaders is essential to our future success.

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