

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL *perspectives*

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Punishment and Race in America

"Only in America" is a nice sounding refrain that is usually spoken at a moment of national pride about a special accomplishment or event. But for millions of persons of color, there are many instances of the negative that race plays in the area of the justice system. In both the civil and criminal justice systems there is a prevailing recognition that the color of one's skin can help determine the degree to which justice is done.

In addition, the color of one's skin can also help to determine the judicial decisions regarding punishment. We have reported before the various statistics that confirm the racial disproportionality of the incarceration rate on a national basis. Too often though, when statistics are referred to, the social impact on the human condition is not always clearly transmitted. For example, when we reported that the National Sentencing Project in Washington, D.C. revealed in a national study that one in every four African American males between the ages of 22 and 28 are either in prison or facing some type of imprisonment, there was no national outcry for equal or racial justice.

The fact is that while males in the United States are viewed differently from non-white males by the courts. Yet, this fact is something very difficult for some to understand or believe. One of the reasons why racism in this nation persists is because of the denial of its existence in the everyday affairs of the society. We lift up the following circumstances that occurred in the state of North Carolina as only one example of how race makes a difference concerning judicial punishment.

On the front page of one of North Carolina's leading newspapers, *The News & Observer*, there were two headlines in the April 1, 1992 edition. One read, "Boy's sentence surprises Wentz." The other headline read: "Teen in boulder death spared harsh sentence." The headlines were referring to two different cases, one in Raleigh, NC involving an African American teenager, and the other in Durham, NC involving an Anglo American teenager.

In the Raleigh case, Willie Barnes, an African American teenager was sentenced to two years in prison for "shoving three school administrators" at Enloe High School last November. This type of "simple assault" is a misdemeanor charge. This was Willie's first offense with the law. We know that discipline is a serious problem in public schools and we believe students who push or "shove" administrators should be disciplined. The issue here is that the punishment should be in response to the offense. To sentence this youngster to prison as a first offender for this type of charge seems too severe. Yet, we know that there are countless numbers of young persons of color who wind up inside of the nation's prison system unjustly.

According to published accounts Willie's parents are appealing the sentence and the charge. His parents say that Willie became frightened when "three Enloe assistant principals confronted him and that he tried to rush pass the three in a doorway. The administrators said the act was an assault."

In the Durham case, a white teenager who confessed that "he helped

drop a boulder that fatally crushed a woman as she drove on the Durham Freeway," received a one year "suspended sentence" and was released into the custody of his parents. First, the youngster's name was not reported in the press under court order. Yet, there was no court order or hesitancy to print Willie Barnes' name on the front page of the newspaper. Second, although a person was killed in the Durham case, the fact that the white teenager was a first offender and had the backing of persons from the community that spoke in his behalf, the court showed "compassion" and released the youth to the "custody" of his parents.

Certainly, we are in favor of compassion and for diverting as many young people from the criminal justice system as possible. But, we take strong exception to judicial decisions concerning persons who are brought before the courts of the nation to be primarily determined by racial factors. Another youth drops a 60 pound rock from a highway overpass down into a car of a passing motorist, which results in the death of the driver, and receives only a one year suspended sentence. Another youth pushes three persons and gets two years in prison. Is this justice? No, it is not justice.

Unfortunately, these two cases in North Carolina are only typical of the normative behavior of the judicial system in the nation. Until there is equal justice for all, there will be no real justice for anyone. We must go to the courtrooms and demand that fairness and racial justice be done or we all stand to one day become a victim of this type of injustice.

discriminatory policies and practices in the local construction industry. For additional information call: 282-1190 or 282-8472.

Stop Economic and Racial Discrimination!

A vote by Portland City Council to award a \$5 million contract for improvements to Holladay Street in Northeast Portland, has been met with charges of racial discrimination by a group of local African-American contractors and workers.

Mayor Bud Clark, together with Commissioners Dick Bogle, Mike Lindberg, and Earl Blumenauer, listened to testimony from several contractors, unemployed construction workers, and representatives from the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon, before voting unanimously to award the contract to Slayden Construction, Inc. of Stayton, Oregon.

Opponents of the award charged that the City had violated the integrity of the competitive bidding process and damaged the credibility of the purchasing Bureau's Minority Business Enterprise program. Slayden was given an additional week to increase MBE participation on the project from 2.5 to 10.6 percent. In doing so he denied an

African-American firm, Holefield Construction, the opportunity to negotiate a contract and gave additional work, including work items in Holefield's bid, to out of town firms who did not bid on the job initially.

Now as a tradeoff, Slayden is offering two laborer positions to Portland residents as part of the City First Source Hiring Requirements. Slayden has a work force of 52 people, none of which are African-Americans. As tax paying, law abiding citizens, we are demanding that at least ten African-Americans are placed on this project by Slayden and his subcontractors within the next 30 days and that these positions be representative of all the construction crafts utilized for the successful completion of the project.

We also are requesting support from all concerned citizens who are against institutionalized racism and public officials who aid and support the Slayden's of the world. We ask that you join us in our protest against economic and racial

BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

I left off last week with a brief comment on the "Lesson Plan" models I had designed for use by teachers in their classroom dynamic. Such student-learning paradigms designed by "local consultants" in their respective areas of expertise IDEALLY would be positioned as the end product of the Multicultural Educational Scheme. The time was almost ten years ago [Phase III].

That is, the logical sequence of events would be that pattern I have adopted myself in 25 years of research into African and African-American mathematics on technology. In the case at hand my perception is probably correct, that first came the "Orange Book" described last week--the master compendium and 6000 year TIMELINE of technical achievements of a selected SIX RACIAL GROUPS. The formal title of this massive document (containing little of the really significant citations I submitted under contract) was "Mathematics Scope and Sequence and Science Scope and Sequence, K-12" [Phase I].

It would be assumed that the local consultants, working in the area of the "Humanities," were provided with a similar achievement-specific document. And following along with the conventional concept of system structure, it would seem that the logical next step would be for the "African Baseline Essay" authors to use this vast and encyclopedic collection of facts as the documented base for composing their literary efforts. These national consultants had a rather uncertain and unspecified relationship with most of the local consultants [Phase II].

Those three "phases" represent a traditional procedure used by most of us who are researchers/authors--years of research and documentation followed on by a text structure built upon that firm foundation; in my particular case, the book, *Black Inventors of America* which is used throughout the nation.

"What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up" Examines Puberty on a 3-2-1 Contact "Extra"

From MTV to magazine ads, from sitcoms to soap operas, preteens and children are bombarded with messages about sex. What do preteens really understand about puberty and sex? What do they need to know? What questions do they have about their own sexual development and how comfortable do they feel asking them?

In an effort to provide youngsters and their parents with information and to help open the door for a continuing dialogue about sex, Children's Television Workshop (CTW) presents "What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up," A 3-2-1 Contact "extra."

Designed for children 8 to 12 and their parents, the program--and "Extra" edition of CTW's award-winning science series--premiere Wednesday, May 13th, from 8-9 p.m. on OPB-TV.

"This show is driven by what we found out about parents' and kids' needs," explains executive producer Anne MacLeod. "Parents want to be the primary sex educators for their children and kids want to understand what's happening to them but it can be hard to get the conversations started. We've produced a show we hope will help to break the ice."

Parents waiting to have that "one big talk" may discover that by the time they get around to that conversation, it's already too late. Recent government studies report that by the 12th grade, more than half of all teenagers say they have engaged in sexual intercourse. Since the 1970's, unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, have been on the rise among adolescents.

"What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up" offers straightforward, understandable information about puberty, sexuality and reproduction, including Q and A sessions between kids and sex educators Dr. Robert Selverstone and Rhonda Wise. Selverstone and Wise describe the maturation process with visual help from animation. The one-hour program addresses such concerns as physical and

But, whether for fortuitous or deliberate reasons, the built-in confusions and discontinuities outlined here are responsible for the vulnerability of this multicultural process in the face of many nationwide media attacks.

Though I am indelibly identified with the math and science phases of the process (via the "consultants/contributors" page of that Scope and Sequence document), it was only with the author of the "Mathematics" essay that I had access and a communications mode. On the other hand, access to the author of "Science Essay" was restricted (absent) to the extent that one would suppose him to be private property and that a hidden agenda was afoot. This, of course, was the case as I am informed by several correspondents in the administration of two eastern school districts.

This makes understandable the fact that an otherwise factual and commendable presentation of African and African American contributions was rendered suspect and controversial by the introduction of a number of esoteric and untenable propositions ranging from "African Experimental Aeronautics" to identifying other 4000 year old African icon or rituals with the "extremely energetically intense radiation sources in our galaxy center." Not likely to appeal to classroom teachers.

And there are the other "factual" pronouncements and personal conclusions that the *New York Times* and other papers have had a field day with--the type of comments conventionally expressed by recognized experts in the fields of Astrophysics, Paleontology, Anthropology, Archaeology, Paleobiology, Psychiatry and Psychology, but not by lab assistants. There is a way to challenge the deliberate misstatements and falsification of history's Euro-centric historians, but not by falling into the same trap of misinformation and invention.

For instance, this science essay justifies many of his conclusions by self-reference to his own publications:

emotional development, masturbation, menstruation, intercourse, conception, peer pressure, responsibility, parenting, AIDS and homosexuality.

Teenage hosts Stephanie Yu and Z Wright reflect on the bodily and mood changes children may be experiencing and emphasize the importance of asking questions to clear up confusion. In a segment about responsibility, they learn a little about what caring for a baby entails and discover how hard it is to look after even a "pretend" baby--a sack of flour--for a week.

Parents get their turn in a brief sessions with sex educators, who emphasize the need for adults to be clear about what messages concerning sexual behavior and attitudes they want to convey to their children. To help facilitate that communication and provide an overview of the program's content, a Parent's Guide will be available via a 900 telephone number and by mail while supplies last. After the program airs on PBS, a home video version of "What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up" including the Parent's Guide, will be available from Pacific Arts Home Video.

"The word that was guiding us all the way down the road was 'straightforward,'" said MacLeod. "Any young person who's going through puberty--or is about to--is likely to be confused about it. They get so much information that's misleading or downright false. It wasn't appropriate for us to do anything but be very open and honest in answering the real questions that these kids posed in the sessions with sex educators. You could tell they were just dying to open up about this and have access to someone who would answer their questions."

While the youngsters wanted to know about getting one's period, penis size, how someone gets pregnant and how to say "no" to peer pressure, the underlying quest was for reassurance that what they were experiencing was natural and normal.

As a trusted and innovative producer of children's programming, CTW

"Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Lifeways; Quantum Theory and Egyptian Consciousness; Nile Valley Astrosciences (highly recommended resource materials)." The result has been that not only the racists but many liberal teachers and educators have rebelled against the document as is and have "thrown out the baby with the wash." They have enough classroom duties already without sorting through the collection and separating fact from fancy.

I feel that given the contracted task here in Portland of designing model lesson plans in the math/science field, then a logical sequence of events would have demanded a mutual accessibility and dialogue with the principal essayist in the science field. This was not to be since, as stated, there was another "agenda" in process and the prerequisite was the isolation of those not directly involved--not involved in the formation of national organization of those investigators of African history with a particular viewpoint (intellectual or cultish?).

So I have had to assure two eastern school districts for whom I am developing both a mathematics and science essay and RELATED lesson plans that I had no opportunity to intervene in the process and hopefully head off several of the more destructive components. It is well for some folks to remember that not only is it all of our tax monies that are involved in these educational schemas--but it is the case that in the end, these programs are directed at motivating and intellectually enhancing the young minds out there with factual and documentable accounts of the minority heritage. Not about self-aggrandizement and praise.

Next Week: Particular lesson plans and curriculum that have been working wonders--submitted, but not incorporated into the process. These copyrighted learning systems relate the historic technology to that of today in direct fashion.

conducted extensive research to find out what was on kids' minds and ensure parental acceptance of "What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up." More than 700 parents and children from a variety of religious, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds participated in various phases of the year-long development process.

"This is a fact-based foundation for parents to build on and express their personal beliefs and values," MacLeod adds. "We're simply laying the ground work. 'What Kids Want to Know...' is a program that calls out for discussion afterwards."

3-2-1 Contact, CTW's science series for eight to twelve year-old, airs on PBS stations across the country. The "3-2-1 Extras," which present topical science issues, have covered such subjects as genetics research, teenager Ryan White's battle with AIDS, population growth and the environment, the garbage crisis and rain forest preservation. Previous "Extras" have won numerous awards, including a prime-time Emmy and the Japan Prize for outstanding achievement on an international level.

To obtain the free Parent's Guide for "What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up" send a post card with your name and address to:

Parent's Guide -- What Kids Want to Know

OPB Communications Dept.
7140 S.W. Macadam Avenue
Portland, OR 97219

PLEASE DO NOT CALL
Supplies of the guide are limited and will be distributed on a first come, first served basis. The guide is also available by calling 900-407-2000 at \$2.25 per call.

Immediately following "What Kids Want To Know About Sex and Growing Up" is a special companion program featuring Magic Johnson in an unscripted conversation with a group of kids and teens about AIDS-related issues of concern to them. "A Conversation With Magic," produced by Nickelodeon and Linda Ellerbee, airs on OPB-Television Wednesday, May 13, at 9:00 p.m.

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 Exile 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 \$30.00 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

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