

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL *perspectives*

by Professor McKinley Burt

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

African American Leadership: Calling To Be Chief of Police

It is historically noteworthy that 25 years after the U.S. Kerner Commission called for a substantive change in police and law enforcement practices and attitudes toward the nation's "minority" communities, the largest cities in the United States increasingly are now calling on African Americans to be Chief of Police. As the demographic characteristics of the major metropolitan areas continue to become more multiracial, the demands for racial justice in municipal law enforcement are being made with renewed vigor.

Although the overwhelming number of the rank and file police officers across the nation are not persons of color, the fact that a significant number of the "top brass" leaders of metropolitan police departments are now African Americans and other persons of color is an important dynamic to monitor. Unfortunately, much of the past history of relationships between people of color communities and police departments, urban and rural, has been a history of antagonism, unbridled police brutality and utter distrust.

Last year the video taped episode of the vicious racially-motivated beating of an African American motorist by white officers of the Los Angeles Police Department precipitated a national outrage. The verdict and aftermath of the trial of the officers accused in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles will be viewed by many as another test case on the capacity of the criminal justice system "to police" the police.

The announcement by the City of Los Angeles that Willie L. Williams, an African American, is to be the new Chief of Police of Los Angeles follows

the current national trend. Williams, who is the Police Commissioner of the City of Philadelphia, has an outstanding record of effective law enforcement and a demonstrated commitment to improving police and community relations. We note that Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl F. Gates refused to attend the press conference in Los Angeles that presented Police Chief-to-be Williams.

The person in charge of police departments in any city helps to set the tone and character of the department. Police Officers are, in fact, influenced by their chain of command and key leadership. So much of what has transpired in the City of Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, in terms of negative and hostile community relations is directly attributed to the racist views and actions of Chief Gates.

Chief Williams will, therefore, come into a situation that has been racially polarized for years. It will not be easy, but we believe that Williams has both the competence and compassion necessary to rise to meet this critical challenge. Hopefully, all of the citizens of Los Angeles will benefit from having the police department head in a new direction.

No one seems to be paying attention to the progress that Police Commissioner Lee Brown has made since he became head of the nation's largest police force. To be sure, there are still problems between the African American, and Hispanic American communities, and the police in New York City. But, it is also true that there has been a decrease in the number of cases of the kind of brutal and violent racially-mo-

tivated police misconduct that were disturbingly evident in New York City prior to Lee Brown's administration of the Police Department of New York City. Brown's effective leadership in law enforcement is internationally recognized.

The undergirding issue here is that African American leadership of police departments has made a difference. Yet, it is unrealistic to assume that the fact that an African American is the Chief of Police or Police Commissioner will, in itself, liberate people of color communities from years of oppression and exploitation.

The positive difference is that having a person from a community that has historically been victimized by the police to get into position of leading a police department will, at least, make the police potentially more sensitive to the diverse needs of different racial and ethnic communities.

All communities are entitled to fairness, justice and respect, as well as prudent and effective law enforcement. There is a direct correlation between the stability and empowerment of a community and the presence of economic and racial justice equity distributed to all. A police department cannot enforce judicial justice onto a community in the absence of racial and economic justice.

All this means is that the struggle for freedom and justice must continue and, in cities and communities where African Americans and others have controlling authority over the police, our efforts to secure justice for all should not be diminished but accelerated.

The Thrill is Gone

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Remember that old blues? Quite a number of the folks have used that title to describe the present condition of the Democratic Party. There is no reason, of course, not to extend this viewpoint to the entirety of today's political process.

Some readers said they were disappointed to find so many Black congressmen on that "bad check list." Join the crowd; I've been disappointed (disillusioned) for years as time after time I've failed to receive replies from correspondence to either individuals or to the "Black Caucus" organization. We assume that they are granted the same *frank* (free postage) as the other legislators--who lose no opportunity to "reach out and touch someone," whether in their state or not. They answer and/or will retrieve information and studies for you.

It might be said that we can hardly blame that "present condition of the Democratic Party" on the Black Caucus. Not when we consider that the party has been running out of steam (and commitment) for decades--passing no meaningful legislation that could change the economy or human condition. And that, passed, could hold against a veto. Black or white, congressmen overall could make themselves more available (and receptive) to those of us out here who just might have something to contribute.

I am particularly disturbed that for

over a decade now the black media has been screaming about what a shame it is that African Americans are rapidly losing the valuable lands they own off the coasts of Georgia and the Carolinas. As I wrote here eight years ago (and later), this is some of the most valuable land on the continent. In 1978 I developed a course, "Black Economic Experience," at Portland State University. I developed one chapter in particular which could have been titled, "Lost and Neglected Economic Opportunity." It was pointed out that just one of these small Sea Islands, which was formerly black-owned, was now valued by the Hilton Resorts Co. at \$1,000 a front INCH! What do you think it is worth now?

This is still happening as of today as land for which Blacks are often paid \$5 and \$10 an acre is converted by others to golf courses, marinas, tennis courts and fabulous destination hotels. You must consider that the young folks, finally allowed at least a 10th grade education, were running off to the *mainland* cities "to better their condition." This left the elders, poorly equipped to deal with real estate and tax matters (for the most part, not all), so the sheriffs, county officials, state agriculture agents, and the banks, began to take over a 100-year-old heritage.

It is here that we see fit to reference again members of the Black Caucus (and other black leaders), because a number of us in various parts of the

country seemed unable to impress these people with the urgency and the desperation of the situation. That is not to mention the ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY fully as lucrative as owning the Bahamas! These people of clout and expertise(?) were needed to countervail against the chicanery and fraud practiced by the officials and institutions mentioned earlier. And to lend their prestige in accelerating the FAMILY REUNION process in a highly organized manner, supported with the latest data processing and other information retrieval systems (also properties and potential listed).

This latter procedure is extremely important for so much of the black-owned property is lost when you have acreage subject to the claims of dozens or more missing or unidentified heirs. Fortunately, if belatedly, at least one "traditionally black university" has taken note of the problem and has initiated an *outreach* program. But already strapped financially, they certainly need the political and financial support of those whom we have cited.

I'm with Tony Brown, the journalist. To heck with those Scotch and chicken wing conventions on which we spend tens of millions of dollars--let's get on with it, media, caucus and all. M. Ross Perot just said it: "The Indian went to the reservation and MISSED THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION."

And Charlie Brown?

Statement from State Representative Avel Gordly April 24, 1992

It seems almost perverse that every time another vicious hate crime occurs, a few of us stand up and deplore the incident. Then we wait until the next one comes along and react with the same righteous indignation. In-between we act as if our problem has disappeared; as if our words have quelled the hatred in the souls of the tom Metzgers of the world.

I'm sad to say it just isn't so. And I'm also saddened that each time we react to a violent hate crime, our response gets just a little weaker because we in turn have become a bit more jaded. It's old news on the television stations. It's worth an editorial and a few stories in the Oregonian. It's an agenda item at City Council. And it causes a flurry of activity in the Governor's Affirmative Action Office.

All of these are well-intentioned efforts. And they help raise the awareness that out there on our streets are individuals who will beat person within an inch of their life or even murder them just because of the color of their skin or their sexual orientation.

Fannie Lou Hamer once said, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." I agree!

Ms. Hamer was a poor black woman from Mississippi who fought at the Democratic convention in 1964 to assure blacks the right to vote. To me, Ms.

Hamer statement means we must do more than just speak out when we see injustice occur. We must speak out before the crime; join forces in a united front to let those who would kill for color know we won't allow it to happen anymore.

It's past time for us to act. although I can assure you many of us are trying, we need help. I want to mention three people specifically who I believe deserve our thanks for their continuing efforts. They are Scott Nakagawa of the coalition for Human Dignity, Darryl Tukufu of the Urban League and Caroline Leonard of the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission.

But these three Portland leaders can't do it alone. 100 more police officers can't do without the help of the people.

We need every home and block and neighborhood to become a part of our solution.

When I was first appointed State Representative of District 19, I sent out a legislative survey. In it I asked people if they would like to participate in the Neighborhood Watch Program. Over 140 people responded positively and right now those people are being plugged into the program. That's one of the reasons this recent crime against Jacob Johnson is so disturbing, for it occurred in this same legislative district where

people were so willing to come forward and help.

Now it may seem odd for a State Representative to help solicit volunteers for a city program. But I believe it is this spirit of teamwork, cooperation and vigilance to a common goal that will help us reach our Oregon Benchmark of eliminating hate crimes by the end of this century.

And I will begin asking each one for my colleagues -- whenever they send out a survey -- to begin asking for volunteers to our community policing efforts. And to begin speaking out with me today, and every day, before another horrible hate crime like this occurs.

For I believe that while all crime is bad, hate crimes are particularly devastating crimes. For they are more than crimes against people. They are violations against our city and its national reputation. Hate crimes are crimes against a whole new generation of young people who are just now learning what many of us have known for years -- that hatred cannot be quelled by words alone.

Until we band together, until we make community policing work house by house, block by block and neighborhood by neighborhood, it will still not be safe for every person to walk to the corner store in Portland, Oregon.

And until it is, I and my colleagues, should continue to speak out.

Look For Our Special Housing Section on Page 11 & 12

Tolerance Of Racist Attacks Must Stop

To The Editor:

The Skinhead beating of Jacob Johnson and the police's refusal to arrest all four people involved, and charging the one Skinhead, Randal Krager, with 2nd degree assault and letting him out on bail brings to a head a longstanding problem of police tolerance towards racist attacks and police abuse of force toward the poor, people of color, and demonstrates against the status quo. Mayor Bud Clark and Chief Tom Potter have a policy that permits racism and contempt for the rights of ordinary citizens to flourish. This policy encourages Skinhead assaults.

To turn around police abuse, police racism and murder of civilians, a review board over the police is needed, made up of Portlanders, and absolutely

independent of the police, the Mayor and politicians. The board needs real authority, to change police policy, to discipline, to fire and to grant awards to victims of police abuse of force.

To keep civilians safe from police abuse requires less funding of police and more for the battered citizenry. More money for jobs, training, drug rehabilitation programs and housing will reduce drugs and street crime. An independent review board will help curtail the wild and undisciplined police attacks on civilians in Portland. And, immediately, the police must arrest all four Skinheads who helped beat Johnson into a coma, and charge them with attempted murder. The police must take racist attacks seriously and not permit repeated Skinhead attacks, like the

murder of Mulugeta Seraw, to be taken lightly. Seraw's murderers were never charged in federal court. Now Johnson's attacker are being let off the hook and treated with leniency. To treat Skinhead attackers, who according to an eye witness, were shouting "We're the KKK and we're gonna kill you" so lightly is an abuse of police authority and a welcome mat to Neo-Nazis. This must stop. We need less police funding and more money and attention spent on human needs and human rights. The police must immediately arrest all four racist attackers and charge them with attempted murder.

Sincerely,
Adrienne Weller
Radical Women

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American State Bank

Unveiled Building Plans For Center

In an effort to help with the social and economic burdens created by Ballot Measure 5 and the United Way funding problems, V. F. Booker, President/Chairman and CEO of American State Bank will announce a fund-raising program for non-profit organizations. The first beneficiary of this new program will be the Community Learning Center, headed by Carl Parker, Founder/Executive Director. The Community Learning Center's objective is to provide educational assistance and other services to the community.

Mr. Booker unveiled the building plans for the Community Learning Center, and discussed how the bank intended to assist non-profit groups in the community at the American State Bank 2737 N. E. Martin Luther King Blvd. on Monday, April 27, 1992 at 11am.

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