

perspectives

# Africa Revisited II: Integrating Culture With Commerce

Last week I introduced some aspects of two decisive themes that would seem to place a number of African Americans poles apart in their thinking about the African continent. This was done with the expectation that a vigorous dialogue would be created; one which could lead to a reconciliation—even a synthesis—of two key viewpoints, both with avid partisans. "Vigor" we've got, not doubt about it. Thanks for your calls...

On the one hand it was put that (as there should be) many blacks have a deep cultural appreciation for the continuity of 'roots' extending to that other seminal continent. And, for further, there were cited many of the contemporary observances and ceremonies that give expression to an affective affinity with the past. Her, we speak of the entire spectrum of the cultural heritage, from song and dance to the costume and dress of various eras; from poetry and oral histories to sculptures and religious icons. Do not omit science, math, architecture and language.

And, quite properly, we note that scores of other ethnic groups in America (White and Asian) pay the same tribute to their ancestors and ancestral lands. Here in Portland, we see these people observing their traditions all over the place—in the Park Blocks, on the Water Front, in ethnic districts or dedicated places of assembly, wherever. If anything, most of these races demonstrate more unabashed public display of pride and respect for their roots than do the majority of blacks (fortunately things are improving).

On the other hand, I put it in opposition to this purely cultural approach, that there exists in some parts of the country a fast growing community of blacks whose interest and commitment to Africa is driven by economics. This is to be expected in a fast-shrinking world that is now described as a "Global Village" and which affords relatively cheap transportation and instant communication. And this is not to omit the 'information explosion' which is providing more relevant data on international trade each day; banks, vendors, United Nations, World Bank, shipping lines, embassies, libraries, seminars, universities.

It is my experience with this latter group of black Americans, driven by a vision of huge economic gain for the race, which led me to cite their position as "an opposing viewpoint in need of reconciliation with the traditionalists." It is my observation that too many of the 'entrepreneurs' have adopted a rather simplistic posture in respect to the 'traditionalists'. "Do away with all that singing, dancing and ritual," they say. "Get down to dollars and cents, and marketing".

And I find that underlying the main difference in the approaches of the two groups is a recurrent theme of our "disadvantaged" status in this country. Through no fault of their own, most blacks have a respective developed by life on the fringe of this society. This ugly and demeaning constraint limit perception, expectations, ambitions and the capacity of critical analysis. It does little good to have vast amounts of information available if

one does not have the proper frame of reference to intelligently process it. Meaningful knowledge requires the relating of things—the extraction of similars. Consider the following.

In that "Gales Encyclopedia of Associations" at the main public library, will be found listings for all of the major "ethnic" organizations in this country: British, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, French, East India, Yugoslav, German, South Seas, Russian, German, Norwegian, Iranian, Nigerian, Greek, Ethiopian, Kenyan, Arabian, Austrians, etc. There are hundreds upon hundreds of such organizations of "hyphenated Americans" who have highly structured connections with their overseas roots. And who maintain year-round social and commercial intercourse with their Foreign brethren.

On each side of the Atlantic or Pacific, they maintain offices, libraries, cultural and language centers, publishing houses, trade bureaus, Lobbyists, travel bureaus, etc.

On any given day the skies above the nations are filled with commuters who are pursuing the related business of these institutions. Hundreds of jobs are generated in consequence of this traffic. This is real power and much of the politics and other affairs of nations are shaped with in this context. 'CULTURE AND COMMERCE ARE INTEGRATED!'

If African Americans are to survive and progress in this modern world, it is a given that they must understand where their future lies in this "Global Village". It is my hope that this attempt in reconciling two opposing schools of thought on our relations with the mother continent will reveal that they are not in opposition at all. I believe the two preceding paragraphs will take us a long way in that direction.



by Professor McKinley Burt

## 'An Open Letter To My Brothers, Young And Old

My Brother:

I read somewhere that the ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people". What that says to me is, that as Black men, it is our responsibility to keep our families together if we want our African American community—or "nation" to be strong. The way I see it, we are not taking care of business. We are falling short in three major ways, and it's hurting the children—and our future nation.

Young Brothers, what's the matter with you? You make babies and can't find the time to raise them! Or, skip out on the responsibility all together. What's happening? Sorry, brother this isn't the way to build a nation. The way I figure it, any boy can make a baby, but it takes a man to face up to responsibility and raise a child. But, it goes deeper than that. It's all about how we live our lives. If we grow up hanging out and drinking 40's how can we expect to become lawyers, doctors and architects. Want to bet that the first black president is not a gang banger. What's happening to our ability to dream? Did it disappear or did it just put on hold for a 40 of St. Ides? We have the ability to become world leaders and achieve any dream we decide we want to achieve. Let's

start thinking of ourselves as the next generation of role models. The next time you take a drink or a puff of that joint, look at the man in the mirror and ask yourself what are living for...what are your dreams...what am I saying to younger brothers!

Secondly Brothers, what are we doing to ourselves—brothers killing brothers. What sense does that make? We're destroying ourselves—our future nation. What sense does all this make? Does it strengthen our community—our nation? All it brings is a bunch of funerals to attend, babies without fathers, crying mothers and families left with the memory of that young brother!

The last thing I want to say deals with our Nubian Sisters. I am really confused. Brothers say they really love the sisters, yet, they totally diss them. If you love them why do you hit on them? How can you love someone one minute and turn around and abuse her? What makes you sleep around? Does it make you feel manly to know your wife and children are at home—alone. Don't you realize AIDS is out there? And what's up with this "what a white" junk" Skip that, the deal is what's right! When will you learn that our Nubian Sisters are all we really

have and have ever had. Who was there to keep us fighting when society says that their is no place in this world for the black man. Who continues to stand by us—even though we leave them standing alone? Brothers wake up! What good is a King without a Queen? I believe that sisters are queens and they deserve the honor, respect and love we gave them when we ruled our African nations! So the next time you think of skipping out on your children, stepping out on your wife, or raising a hand to the one you love, think again! We need to stop treating our women like objects that mean nothing.

As mother's day approaches, I applaud my mom, my grandmom, my great-grandmom, my sister, my aunts and all Black women. I realize that they have been the backbone of the black family and the source of strength and power for the Black man. Without them beside us our nation will never be strong. Wake up brothers! They keep us standing tall; they keep us fighting; they encourage us; they keep us focused; and their love keeps us going!

Signed,  
A Brother that cares,  
S. Marcel Irving  
Grant High School

## Anheuser-Busch And Turner Broadcasting System Co-Sponsor First Trumpet Awards Gala

The celebration honored a select group of African-Americans who overcame great odds to make a place for themselves in history.

Anheuser-Busch has had a long-standing commitment to the African-American community as evidenced by the company extensive support of organizations such as the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). Contributions to UNCF through the com-

pany-sponsored "Lou Rawls Parade of Stars" telethon help support the nation's 41 private, historically Black colleges and universities that are UNCF members.

## News From The Governor Strengthening Oregon's Economy

Creating jobs and building Oregon's economy is a top priority for me. By investing in our businesses, communities and people, my administration is helping produce a diversified economy that generates more jobs and higher incomes for all Oregonians.

I have proposed an economic development strategy that will invest in roads, sewers, community facilities, and lands that can be developed for business. This strategy will make sure that our communities remain attractive place to work and do business. It will also invest in key Oregon industries to ensure they remain competitive world-wide.

Oregon's economy is changing. It has been transformed from a domestic, natural resources based economy to an international, technical and services based economy. So I have targeted more than \$180 million to help create jobs in this new economy and to help communities across Oregon—especially rural communities—strengthen and diversify their economy, while maintaining Oregon's special quality of life.

Business growth can often put pressures on communities, but it is possible to manage that growth so we can keep our quality of life and create new jobs. I proposed funding for Light

Rail and the Willamette Valley High Speed Rail, so that Oregonians from Portland to Eugene can travel and ship their goods more easily.

Affordable housing also makes a real difference in whether a community can grow and bring in new business. I have invested in the Oregon Housing Fund, a program I helped created in 1991, so we can provide more housing that low-income Oregonians can afford.

But many Oregon communities that want to expand their businesses or attract new ones lack the roads, sewers or industrial land they need to develop. I have proposed \$20.3 million to help communities meet the federal requirements for drinking water and wastewater treatment. This will remove a barrier to business development.

In addition, rural communities will get help identifying land that can be developed, so that businesses can expand, and communities can recruit new businesses knowing that there is ready-to-go industrial land. And I proposed more than \$7 million in a new fund to help rural communities build the libraries, medical clinics and community centers they need to grow strong.

It's important that Oregon's communities are economically healthy,

and that means making sure Oregon's businesses are healthy. So I have proposed investing in Oregon's key industries through the Regional Strategies Program and the Special Public Works Fund.

The Regional Strategies Program funds projects based on the type of economic development communities want, whether high tech, tourism, forest products or environmental services. The Special Public Works Fund makes sure that businesses have the sewers, roads and water systems they need to expand or locate in a community.

New businesses will get a boost from the \$29.6 million I've targeted to develop new businesses and new technology. These funds will help provide customized training for specialized industries, such as metals or plastics. It will also support the Graduate School of Engineering, the Joint Business school program and research into forest management and food processing.

All together, my 1993-95 targets \$180 million in economic development lottery funds to make a real difference for Oregon's businesses and communities. Together, we can create high paying jobs for Oregon Families and keep the quality of life we all value.

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## '93 Black Legislation: A Snow Ball's Chance in Hell of Passing

BY JAMES L. POSEY

In this session of the State Legislature, several bills have been introduced that could significantly benefit the African-American community. Representative Avel Gordly is sponsoring three bills initiated by the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon (NAMCO), bills which could significantly improve contracting and business opportunities in Northeast Portland. (See summary of bills at end of article.)

Also working with NAMCO is Senator Bill McCoy, who is sponsoring a bill which could ensure the more equitable participation of minority contractors. Rep. Gordly is also sponsoring a bill initiated by the Northeast Economic Alliance which would improve the effectiveness of state enterprise zones. Unless I am mistaken, these bills represent the most business- and economic development-oriented legislation ever sponsored in one session that would directly benefit Blacks and other minorities.

I am told that Rep. Margaret Carter has agreed to support the above bills. However, in contrast, she is also sponsoring a bill initiated by the Associated General Contractors which

would essentially broaden the private sector opportunities of what are now in-house state projects. This legislation would most assuredly benefit the members of the white contracting association which until recently has opposed the inclusion of African-American contractors in the industry. NAMCO has recommended that she not continue to sponsor this bill until it is modified to stipulate that a high percentage of the contract work gained through passage of this bill be set aside for minority contractors.

But the point is while Rep. Gordly, Sen. Bill McCoy and their staffs have been working their butts off to sponsor bills benefiting Blacks, there is about a snow ball's chance in hell that any of this legislation will pass. Why is this? Well, the short answer is that the good ole' boys are opposing it. But more importantly, there are too few Blacks who know about the legislation and who would be willing to go to Salem and demand that this legislation be passed.

Let me tell you that while all these white folks are talking about budget cuts and reducing programs in the wake of Measure 5, they are all scheming and scrambling to make sure that

they get theirs. They have lobbyists up the yin yang, running the halls of the Legislature, sitting in every hearing and looking out for their special programs or interests.

In contrast, it is a rarity to see a Black face in the place, not counting Gordly, McCoy and Carter. And while we are glad Jim Hill got elected to State Treasurer and his office is still in the Capital Building, Blacks have lost his persuasive influence in the legislative process. To their credit, the Commission on Black Affairs is the only organization I know of that is trying to exert any influence on this process. The truth is, these bills represent significant changes in the economic power dynamics and the re-distribution of some of the resources. The white folks in control just ain't gonna roll over and give it up. That's why Blacks had better recognize that it's not enough to elect a few Black representatives; we need to be seriously active in the process from beginning to end in order to gain real benefits.

Fair-minded white people ought to work to see that much of this legislation gets passed because it represents Blacks who are working through the system to get justice, while pro-

moting fairness and creating opportunities. The unacceptable alternative is to go to the streets in violence and despair. Although this alternative may be unacceptable, recent government budgets, bulging with increases in public safety dollars, reflect that street violence is already happening on an ever-increasing scale; and governments are clearly preparing even more for that eventuality.

Rep. Gordly and Sen. McCoy are doing all they can. Katy King and Raleigh Lewis from their respective staffs are working together, pushing that proverbial snow ball up the (legislative) hill. Blacks need to get behind them and lend as much support as possible. This support work must be done by May 14, otherwise it's a done deal at the Legislature. This is where all the Black fraternal, social service, and not to mention, Black business organizations should write letters to the legislative committee chairs and organize to go to Salem to provide hearing testimony. The following is a summary of the proposed legislation and the committees responsible. Call Gordly or McCoy's offices for additional information.

Who knows, you could help a snow ball's chances of getting through hell.

### LEGISLATIVE BILLS IN JEOPARDY

- Senate Bill 980, sponsored by Sen. McCoy, has been placed with the Transportation Committee. The bill requires the Department of Transportation to set aside certain moneys from state highway funds for contracts with historically underutilized businesses. Sen. Joan Dukes is the chair.

- House Bill 3204 requires public contracting agencies to monitor contracts for good faith efforts to subcontract with disadvantaged minority, women and small emerging businesses. It would also require the Department of Justice to report biannually on progress in eliminating discriminatory practices in public contracting. HB-3204 has been given to the General Government Committee, chaired by Rep. Cedric Hayden.

- House Bills 3317 and 3327 were both placed with the Commerce Committee. HB-3317 extends public policy against discrimination in employment to include contracting and confers to contractors the

right to challenge discrimination, similarly to the right of employees. HB-3327 requires the Economic Development Department to propose a plan to increase the number of minority and women business enterprises through field representatives in the various geographical regions of the state. Rep. Eldon Johnson is the chair.

NAMCO requests your support of this legislation and urges that letters be addressed to all committee members asking them to take action on these bills. The Black community should insist that legislators serving on the general government and commerce committees immediately schedule all the above bills for public hearings. As of this date, only one of the bills is scheduled for a hearing. Public testimony will be taken on HB-980 this Friday, May 7 at

3 p.m., the Capital Building, Hearing Room C. Unless a strong message is received from us, as well as women contracting organizations, it is possible that all these bills will be left to die in committee.

James Posey is a local, small business owner with a background in social work and community activism.