

EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

perspectives

In The Beginning Was The Word III: But, You Need To Start Early

I appreciate the interest shown in my first two articles on "words" and speculation on their origin (etymology). However, as I'm sure you are aware, there are some good books at the library which explore this fascinating subject to a great depth.

Interestingly, readers are asking for some specific direction in getting 'a handle' on this word business in these days of "information explosions" when one is under a constant assault of rhetoric (and "B.S.") night and day. Let me say this--where one really needs to begin is with the basic construction of our language. But the past four decades in American, for the most part, has seen a tragic degradation of this aspect of our culture.

I've examined this problem in articles quoting that 1950 book by a Chicago priest, "Why Johnny Can't Read".

There are exceptions of course,

some good public schools here and there but not nearly enough. If you want to get a better grip on words, you must first come to grips with what your deficiencies are. As a man (or woman) once said, "If you don't know what you don't know, you ain't going to ever know". First, let's look at the way it was: The reason I have a modicum of knowledge about these things is I attended public schools before World War II. That is, before a great change occurred--and not for the better (We'll get to "words" in a minute).

In my time in the mid-south, the institution housing grades K to 8 was known as a "grammar school". This name was not entirely correct, for originally (in England) this title was given to 'secondary' schools which emphasized Greek and Latin. However, a point could be made that these 'elementary' schools of ours (ghetto

or white) emphasized nothing so much as they did English grammar (unless it was mathematics). Now "Webster" defines grammar as "the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence".

Our teachers, and whoever designed the curriculum, decided in their infinite wisdom that each and every child in America, regardless of race, religion, gender or previous degree of servitude must have a thorough grasp of the construction of the language if to be enabled to function in our society--And this BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL where these tools would be employed in the understanding of more sophisticated concepts. It is a given that no teachers were hired unless they were masters of this craft (And were TESTED accordingly).

Now, let me advise some readers that there is no way I can furnish the equivalent of basic English lessons in the space allotted for my articles. I can, however, further describe that early process and its methodology,

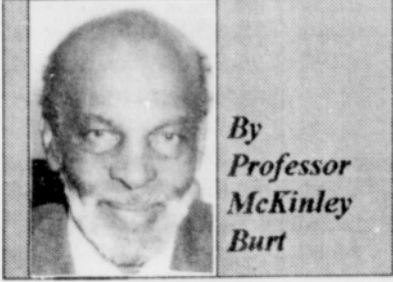
hoping you will be provided some goals, and direction for obtaining relevant manuals at the library or bookstore--either for your child or yourself. Many of you have indicated all along that you wish to read or speak better, improve communications related to your job--or even begin writing.

Our teachers began the 'word' game in the first grade and with the relations described by Webster in that definition of "grammar"--and carried through to K 8 with increasing complexity: noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection, etc. You were given to understand that "a carpenter cannot build a house unless he has the proper tools and materials--and has a blue print to indicate the place and dimension of things.

That was just the beginning of things. There was "tense mood" and the like: had an act already been performed in some past--was it in process--or was the action to take place in the future. By the sixth grade you were into some good literature from Robin

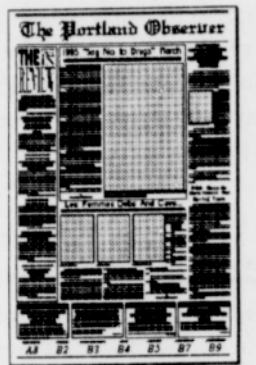
Hood to Moby Dick to The Ancient Mariner, so you were required to select out the "metaphors" that gave language its flair and beauty: "The salty lick and lap of the sea at the foot of every cross town street" (You were ready to go whaling. The teacher made you smell the sea and rock with the ship); "like a painted ship upon a painted sea" (you knew the problem of the poor, becalmed mariner).

So it is that I can remember the lines and passages of the poems and stories all these years later--and, above all, the grammatical construction and why it was done that way. This, though was only part of it. There was the matter of inflection, pronunciation, enunciation, spelling and the like--not to mention the hyperbole and onomatopoeia, or the meaning of certain standard prefixes and suffixes. How on earth, indeed, the teachers supposed in those days--how could a child succeed in high school, let alone life, without this foundation? Did I omit phonic, the key to cracking the language code: Sorry about that.

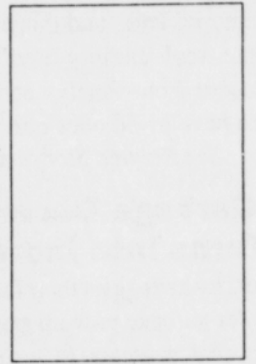


By Professor McKinley Burt

Recently we compared ourself to the competition and found something missing...



The Portland Observer



The Competition

...the Competition!

To Advertise Call 288-0033

The Portland Observer

DRUG TESTING: A Higher Hurdle for Black Employment?

BY JAMES L. POSEY

By now it's no secret that many employers, both those sympathetic to the Black cause and those not, believe that drug testing has become the most effective way of eliminating Blacks from the employment pools. They believe that it will be the single, most lethal and discriminating factor affecting Black employment. To tell the truth, some are even outwardly gleeful to know that this will be an effective race-specific screening mechanism. But, is it true that African-Americans can't get jobs because they can't pass the drug test? Well, after just one experience wading through the dope dealers on the way to Dawson, Unthank and Irving parks or anywhere else in inner Northeast proper for that matter, there should be no question in your mind.

While it's no longer a front page newspaper story, usually hyping the stereotype about Blacks and their wanton use of drugs for the sake of entertaining white folks, the drug and alcohol thing is a real serious problem. It

is wreaking havoc in the Black community with devastating consequence beyond our best understanding. The powerful combination of poor education, mixed with the effects of high rates of unemployment over long periods of time, reinforced by substandard living conditions, and saturated with large quantities of drugs and alcohol, is the ultimate formula for annihilation.

More pervasive than cancer or other dreaded disease, nearly every Black family has experiencing in the here and now, a love one or close friend who has been consumed by drugs and/or alcohol. And, it's not just the so-called uneducated, lower-class or unemployed. We've seen some of the best in the community taken out by heroin, the crack attack or alcoholism, losing good jobs, homes and the rest. Our Black middle class has snorted and drunk up more wealth than the budgets of some of the world's developing countries.

Sometimes you have to ask yourself, is there any sense in continuing

the struggle for equality and justice and all that, when so many Black folks are being thoroughly devastated by drugs and alcohol and will less likely take advantage of these hard fought gains. Actually, this issue is more than a notion. For example, a few weeks ago I was criticizing the Safeway store at MLK and Ainsworth for not hiring enough Blacks in more money-making positions. It came back to me that Safeway had screened over a 100 Black people for various positions at that store. Of that number, only 15 could pass the written test. And of the 15, only three could pass the drug test. If there is any truth to these figures, you can see why Safeway is not about to change its complexion. As I have said before, Safeway is probably one of the better employers in the area. So you can see how serious this problem really is.

But, what's the solution? The tolerance level for accepting things in this community without a fight is too high. We let the cigarette companies come in and give away all the

K-Baseball caps advertising Kool cigarettes. People ought to realize that the 'K' on those caps really stand for "killer". In fact, the marketing of cigarettes is nothing but another form of drug pushing and promotion of death and destruction directed at this community. You sure don't see K-caps in Lake Oswego or downtown Gresham!

Somehow the community has to empower itself to be more invested in life and prosperity and not let death and other destructive forces come in and take over. We can not continue to let the youngsters deal and do dope out in the open without any resistance from the people, let alone the police. Equally important, we must hold our elected officials to a higher degree of accountability in terms of how they create or perpetuate depressed economic conditions that foster drug and alcohol abuse. While the story is told that it is even difficult to recruit drug-free employees from the Black churches, they remain the best source of moral responsibility and stability in this area. Regardless of their capacity,

we need to challenge the churches to do even more because the cause is so great.

Finally, there are a lot of things African-Americans can blame on racism, the system, etc., etc. This issue of drugs and alcohol and how it is rampant in our community is no different. Unlike the lack of economic opportunity, access to resources and the rest, chemical and substance abuse is something Blacks can and must deal with themselves. Farrakan and the Nation of Islam has it right. Black people better do something awesome and quick about this problem of drug and substance abuse less we all be resigned to slavery of the worst kind --

self-imposed. Given all the other barriers one has to overcome in order to get and retain a decent job, African-Americans ought to put themselves in a position of never having to worry about passing a drug test.

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

CLINTON POTPOURRI

Travel Workers

Contradictory statements involving travel workers who were dismissed for alleged incompetence, and Thomas McLarty, was blamed for the messy travel office situation.

Five of the seven persons were reinstated because they were not the ones responsible for writing of checks, but they were put on indefinite administrative leave.

The travel office arranges transportation for the press traveling with the president, but the press pays for most of that.

Clinton was quoted as saying, "I

had nothing to do with any decision, except to save the taxpayers and the press money. Ultimately, anything that happens in the White House is the responsibility of the president."

Tax Plan

The House gave the President a narrow win on his proposal to see Congress approve his deficit-reduction package. It was a 219-213 vote. All of the Republican were opposed. Both the Republicans and the Democrats were cheering for each their sides.

The bill is a combination of tax increases and spending restraints. It's

a part of a plan to reduce the deficit by about \$500 billion over the next five years. The tax increases would exempt most low-income people, cost middle-income families perhaps \$17 a month and fall heavily on the well-to-do.

Visits War Memorial

President Clinton visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial under protest from some of the war veterans. They felt if the President did not participate in the war, he did not have the right to be at the memorial service.

In the speech he delivered he shared some of his feelings: "Let us continue to disagree if we must about

the war, but let us not let it divide us as a people any longer.

No one has come here today to disagree about the heroism of those whom we honor. But the only way we can really honor their memory is to resolve to live and serve today and tomorrow as best we can and to make America the best that she can be."

President Clinton announced that he has ordered that all U.S. military documents pertaining to missing Americans in Indochina be declassified and made public by Veterans day...

He left the ceremonies with 'thumbs up' from most of the people.

The Portland Observer
(USPS 959-680)
OREGON'S OLDEST AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLICATION
Established in 1970 by Alfred L. Henderson

Joyce Washington
Publisher

The PORTLAND OBSERVER is located at
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. © 1993 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

Subscriptions: \$30.00 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, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association • Serving Portland and Vancouver

SUBSCRIBE
The Portland Observer

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER CAN BE SENT DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOME FOR 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

Why Black Workers Should Support Striker Rights Bill

BY NORMAN HILL

The ban on permanent replacements not only helps the labor movement--the single most trustworthy historical ally of blacks for racial equality in America--but it also disproportionately aids black workers.

Black workers constitute more than 15 percent of the nation's unionized workforce, thus benefitting disproportionately from pro-labor reform such as a ban on permanent replacement of workers during a legal strike.

Because the vast majority of blacks are working people, we know full well that it is meaningless to say that employers are forbidden by law from "firing" legal strikers, but they can still "permanently replace" their legally-striking employees. In either case, the workers' livelihood has been stolen.

Even closer analysis reveals more benefits. Employers are most likely to replace unskilled or semi-skilled employees because it's easier to train replacements. Because of historical discrimination, twice as many blacks work in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, thus making blacks twice

as likely to be vulnerable to the unscrupulous use of permanent replacements and twice as likely to benefit from legislation that would ban such action.

Freedom of association is simply the right to associate and form organizations with whomever you choose. It is the bedrock of the trade union movement and crucial to racial progress in America.

Blacks are concentrated in three of the least free sectors of the American workplace: the South, the service sector and the public sector.

In the South, so-called right-to-work states and an anti-union climate combine to disenfranchise many blacks from the workplace democracy that unions provide.

In the service sector, which is more than 17 percent black, unions have traditionally encountered fierce employer resistance and obstructionism.

And in the public sector, which is a heavily black workforce, American workers are frequently denied their rights to organize and bargain collectively, and to strike.

Internationally, full freedom of association would mean that workers and trade unionists throughout the world could improve their standard of living and contribute to the democracy and more egalitarian development of their societies. In Africa and throughout the Third World, free trade unionism would mean the liberation of vast masses of exploited working people.

International freedom of association would also mean that fewer good-paying union jobs would be lost here in America due to unfair trade and workers' rights practices by countries and companies that exploit a non-unionized, fragmented and unfree workforce abroad.

Support for these objectives is crucial not only to the black community but to the entire American labor movement.

(Editor's Note: Norman Hill is president of the notional A. Philip Randolph Institute.

Contact Local: 235-9444
"Workplace Fairness Act" HR5-555 is expected to come up for vote in mid-June.