

EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

The Magnificent Healing Lady

perspectives

That's It? Over 6000 Years Of Glorious Black History Crammed Into One Month?

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT
A READER HAS JUST TAKEN ME TO TASK FOR NOT INCLUDING A FEMALE IN MY PORTRAITS OF BLACK CONTRIBUTORS TO MEDICINE.

I was saving this gem for a special monograph to be published this spring, but let me add this bit of reassurance to those women who might wonder if they had carved a place in the early history of the healing arts.

Mary Seacole, born in Kingston, Jamaica (1805) was a nurse whose reputation just after the Crimean War in Europe (1853-56) rivaled or surpassed that of the renowned Florence Nightingale. Again, I am indebted to that international "Electronic Information Superhighway" for a continuous flow of documentation of important elements of black history. At the end of this article you will find citations of several key sources.

Mary's mother was a competent practitioner of Jamaican traditional medicine and kept a boarding-house where she cared for invalid officers and their wives. She is said to have "soaked up" medical knowledge from early childhood and in early youth had gained a reputation as "a skillful nurse and doctress". Before and after marriage to a Horatio Seacole, she traveled widely -- twice to England and then, in 1851 during the California Gold Rush, she joined her brother Edward in Panama where she opened a hotel.

During this period she saved her first cholera patient and began the foundation for a well-deserved inter-

national reputation. Like our other medical pioneers of color Mary suffered outrageous slurs and insults. "A white American suggested that she be bleached in order to make her as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be". A woman of high intelligence and quick wit, Mary wrote the man a stinging letter which ended "...as to the society which the process [of bleaching] might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here, I don't think I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners".

The autumn of 1853 found her in London where news came of the collapse of the British army's nursing system in the Crimea and the agonies heightened by gross mismanagement. Volunteering here services she repeatedly turned down, even by one of the noted Florence Nightingale's assistants. Mary said, "I read in her face the fact that had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it". Fortunately for the British and thousands of suffering soldiers, she had a relative called Day with whom a business enterprise was formed and they proceeded to set up a store and hotel at the main British army camp in the Crimea.

Mary Seacole's British hotel (and army store, dispensary, hospital, etc.) opened its doors in the summer of 1855 near the besieged town of Sevastopol, Russia. A lieutenant in the 63rd West Suffolk regiment wrote, "She was a wonderful woman--all the men swore by her, and in any case of any malady would seek mary's advice and use her herbal medicines, in pref-

erence to reporting themselves to their own doctors...her never failing presence among the wounded after a battle and assisting them made her beloved by the rank and file of the whole army".

It was with Russen, the first modern war correspondent who made Mary Seacole famous in England, "This kind and successful physician", he wrote in a dispatch dated September 14, 1855, "doctors and cores all manner of man with extraordinary success...I have seen her go down under fire and a more tender or skillful hand about a wound or a broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons".

But the end of the war left Mary back in England, broke and with a lot of unused military stores on hand. A letter in the London Times asks, "While the benevolent deeds of Florence Nightingale are being handed down to posterity...are the humbler deeds of Mrs. Seacole to be forgotten?" Lord Robley and another British commander in the Crimea staged a gigantic four-day musical benefit for her at the Royal Gardens--1000 performers, nine military bands. So it is that she did not die in poverty and left forgotten.

Mary published an autobiography in 1857, "Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole In Many Lands". Other citations are Alexander and Dewjee, Mary Seacole: Jamaican National Heroine and Doctress In The Crimean War, Brent Library Service, 1982. Ed. W.J.S., Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole In Many Lands, James Blackwood, 1858 and Frederick Robinson, Dairy Of The Crimean War, Richard Bentley, 1861 (P.290).

WELL, THIS YEAR THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW PROTESTS, ALBEIT MUTED. BUT, WHAT CAN YOU SAY. IF IT IS 'YOUR' HISTORY AND, UNLIKE MANY OTHER PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, YOU DO NOT CELEBRATE IT, EXPLORE IT EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR EXISTENCE--USE IT EACH DAY AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO MOTIVATE YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN.

Do we really need hosts of psychologists, consultants and other professional motivator to build our self-image? Much of this world is our own creation.

I, among others, have long recognized the importance of having an enduring and permanent concept of self-worth--worn every day with pride and not a periodic thing like spring flowers or the winter solstice. Black contributions to the world's culture, the literature, sciences, religions, mathematics and so forth represent a well spring of support of the spirit and psyche that is always within reach. I remember the phrase from our high school Latin class, "semper eadem" (ever the same).

And, certainly, in order to promote a decent level of coexistence with our cultural and ethnic neighbors, it is required that they be kept acquainted with "who African Americans really are"--certainly not the vilified tribe as described by both text and media, and reinforced by the educational establishment. It is an absolute

must that there be well-designed vehicles for this continuing process. It is not nearly enough that your 'different' associates simply regard you as a good friend or a civil fellow employee--not with a denigrating media in an attack mode 24-hours a day.

An excellent model for the effectiveness for such an approach is my experience with the United States Forest service with whom I had a succession of contracts to "acquaint their personnel with the fact that Africans and African Americans had made the aforementioned contributions to man

Kind--along with later and contemporary achievements in technology and the arts and sciences." Indeed, the expectations associated with this endeavor proved more than justified when 'hard core' personnel managers and a race-oriented workforce were, for the first time in their lives, brought up against documented and irrefutable evidence of black talent and abilities.

The hiring of minorities proceeded apace with these revelations as my seminars presented in an interesting and fascinating fashion hundreds of essential facts about a group of Americans--the very core and elan vital of a people, previously ignored or deliberately hidden by the education system, media and other elements of the system--include the culture transfers of the extended family.

As I've become much more

active in respect to interfacing with other agencies and the business community as well, I find that the novel ideas I initiated back there in the 'old' days are now considered "innovative" and of a "critical immediacy". The 'futuristic' interfaces and curriculums I presented to public agencies and educational circles from 1966 to 1977 are now considered 'cutting edge' technologies.

Because I used African and African American scientists and inventors to introduce my motivational concepts there is increasing attention from industry elements who are fearful of even more problems in the education communities. There is nothing like having the most pragmatic members of a community on your side, people who live in a 'real time' world and are willing to back a person who shares their vision. That 1966 Computer/Communications Demonstration in The Dalles, Oregon won a National Science Foundation award--and documented the fact that African invented the "Binary Mathematical System" used in Computer and Communications Technology.

Where many educators have seemed a little "slow" in comprehending the tremendous motivational and leaning impact (and social) such facts can have upon students of all ages, industry has swung in right behind my pioneering concept of a structured, year-long presentation of the kind of black contributors I've highlighted in The Observer Newspaper. Locally and nationwide we are going to break out of this "One month box".



By Prof. McKinley Burt

Civil Rights Journal: Why The Cuba Embargo?

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

To Americans the little yellow school bus is a symbol for children and education. It is a sign of the future and at the same time brings back fond memories of childhood trips from home to school.

Last summer the little yellow school bus became a different kind of symbol when the Pastors of Peace led a caravan of 95 trucks and cars and three yellow school busses across the United States/Mexican border along with 100 tons of humanitarian aid for the people of Cuba. Pastors for Peace, an arm of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, had collected this aid, including food, medicine, wheelchairs, Bibles, bicycles, soap, toothbrushes and computers from churches and organization across the United States to be given to the people of Cuba through the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center in Havana. The busses themselves were to go to a program for mentally impaired per-

sons and to church youth groups in Cuba.

For the past 34 years, the United States has embargoed all trade to Cuba, including food and humanitarian supplies. Thus, Cuban hospitals cannot purchase prescription medicines from U.S. companies and Cuban churches and other humanitarian organizations cannot receive relief. Food itself is a scarce commodity to most Cubans, while we in this nation still grow more than we eat.

Pastors for Peace decided to challenge what they believed was an unjust law. Thus began their caravan, collecting relief in cities across the nation and culminating in a border crossing last summer en route to Havana. But U.S. Customs officials were unhappy with this attempt at circumnavigation and while they allowed across two of the school busses, they forced the caravaners to carry across much of the aid by hand and confiscated the third little yellow school bus.

In early March, watch the newspapers and television for news of the

U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan, which will include contingents not only from the United States and Canada, but also from Mexico, England, Sweden and Germany. There will be over 100 vehicles and 10 little yellow school busses.

Pastors for Peace asks those who believe that people in Cuba should have food, medicine, wheelchairs and other humanitarian aid to write or call the White House, the State Department and the U.S. Department of the Treasury (of which the Customs is an agency) during that time. And if you're interested in supporting Congressman Rangel's legislation, let your congressperson know.

The right to food and to medicine is a fundamental human right. How long can the U.S. go on denying this?

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 role model,
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 AND
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