

# EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

## Civil Rights Journal Stop The Violence!

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Last week I went with a friend to help select a casket for her husband. We were in Washington, D.C., at an old and established African American funeral home. As we looked at the various coffins, I stopped in front of a black one which had a Kente cloth trimmed liner and pillow. I knew this coffin had not been there four years ago, when I was last there. Then I realized that this coffin had been designed for their fastest-growing market -- young African American men.

It must be difficult to be an undertaker in black America these days. It must be difficult to see week after week young men mourned by their mothers and sisters and brothers, loudly mourned by their friends, who themselves soon may become one of the mourned. It must be difficult to embalm young children who are innocent victims of drive-by shootings or who are killed with guns accidentally, often by other children who are either their relatives or playmates.

It must be difficult to be a pastor in black America these days. It must be difficult to find ways to console inconsolable mothers who have lost their sons because of jackets or shoes or jewelry. It must be difficult to support the other children, locked in a world of retribution and violence and knowing no way to end this spiral which can only end in the self-annihilation of a generation.

It must be difficult to be a police officer in black America these days. It

must be difficult to know that young people have access to weapons more powerful than the ones you carry and that for many of them human life has no value and little reality. It must be especially difficult if you are an African American officer, constantly faced with the fact that these are your children and the children of your sisters and brothers and neighbors.

It must be difficult to work in a hospital emergency room in black America these days. It must be difficult to see young people thirteen, fourteen, sixteen years old wheeled in with gunshot wounds night after night. Some of them have been shot two or three times before. Some are able to walk out, some face a lifetime in a wheelchair, others are taken out in a hearse. It must be difficult to hear their cries in the emergency room late at night, after all, they are only children.

It must be difficult to be a teacher in black America these days. It must be difficult to help young people deal with the loss of their classmates who have been killed. It must be difficult to find ways out of the violence for those who are trying desperately to stay out of the violence. It must be difficult to get students to concentrate on geography or chemistry or algebra when the violence whirls around them, like a great whirlwind threatening to pull in all those nearby.

It must be difficult to be a parent in black America these days. It must be

horrible to worry about your children, about whether they will come home from school alive each and everyday. It must be horrible to worry about whether you will be called to that hospital emergency room, or worse, that you will be visited by that police officer or pastor or teacher with the word that your child is no more. It must be horrible to live with a knot of anxiety in your stomach day in and day out.

It must be difficult to be a young African American these days. It must be difficult trying to stay out of the violence when your peers ridicule you for making good grades in school or for going at all. It must be difficult if you are a gang member, always looking over your shoulder, always having to prove how tough you are, even when deep down inside you're just a frightened sixteen year old who doesn't know a way out. It must be difficult to worry about your younger sisters and brothers, about whether they too, will get home from school alive.

Everyday four African American male children under age 19 are killed by guns. According to the Children's Defense Fund, homicide is the third leading cause of death for children ages 5-14. What will it take to make us - each of us -- take one step to stop the violence? There are 30 million African Americans. That would be 30 million steps. Can we even imagine how far 30 million steps would take us? Let's get started.

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT Mr. President, Put Democracy First!

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

Last month, nearly a year after Bill Clinton became president of the United States, the Washington Post became the first (and so far, the only) member of the mainstream media to point out the Clinton administration's betrayal of African democracy movements in general, and the Zairian democracy movement in particular. In an editorial that went beyond the now common condemnation of the 27-year-old CIA-installed dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko, the Post underscored the role the administration is playing in keeping the dictator in power in Africa's second largest nation.

"Last month American, French and Belgian diplomats approached Mr. Mobutu and Prime Minister [Etienne] Tshisekedi and asked the two men to set aside their differences and form a new coalition government," read the Post editorial. "Mr Tshisekedi, who wants Mr. Mobutu out, denounced the trilateral proposal as capitulation to a corrupt dictator ... Mr. Tshisekedi is right to be disappointed, especially with an administration that promised better."

Having robbed his country blind for the past three decades while making himself into the fifth richest man in the world, Mobutu seems ready and willing to drag the Zairian people down into endless horrors rather than concede power to the transitional democratic government headed by Tshisekedi, who was elected with 71% of the vote by the Sovereign National Conference. Mobutu's ongoing sabotage of Tshisekedi's efforts to democratize the country have produced truly apocalyptic conditions in Zaire.

Bubonic plague, long since eradicated from the country, has reappeared in northeastern Zaire. Hospitals and clinics, repeatedly looted by the Mobutu regime's soldiers, have no medicine to fight the plague, nor the epidemics of measles, cholera and tuberculosis which threaten millions more. To make matters worse, the disease has broken out in an

area already devastated by ethnic violence deliberately provoked by Mobutu's local allies and directed against people from Tshisekedi's ethnic group. 9,000 people have lost their lives and 500,000 have been driven from their homes as a result of this violence.

Meanwhile, the economy continues its rapid decline. Most Zairians are unemployed (schools were shut down years ago, as Mobutu has left mines, mills and factories to rot while he continues to finance his lavish lifestyle and his private army through the clandestine sale of Zaire's mineral wealth. Millions of Zairians are reduced to bartering: an egg for an aspirin.

Instead of supporting Zaire's unarmed democratic leadership in its stand-off with Mobutu, the Clinton Administration has insisted, as the Washington Post noted, that the democratic opposition sit down and try to "resolve their differences" with the dictator. For Clinton, Mobutu continues to have a "role" to play in Zaire.

What "role" is Mobutu playing? He has blocked the transitional government from functioning by surrounding government buildings with tanks and even holding members of the parliament hostage without food, water or medicine for three days. The political impasse caused by his clinging to power serves Clinton's goal of blocking an independent and popular leader until he can find someone more to his liking.

Though hardly a radical, Tshisekedi is the most popular political leader in Zaire. Clinton's disregard for the hard-won democratic institutions of the Zairian people - their constitution, their parliament and their popular prime minister - reveals an extraordinarily (and extraordinarily racist) bias against politics and political activity by the Zairian people. Clinton wants a technocratic "solution" brokered by supposedly non-political outside players (like the U.S. State Department) which are not accountable to the Zairian people. Politics and democracy are, apparently, good enough for white

people but not for Africans.

What has been the result of these forced "negotiations" between Mobutu and the democracy forces? To appease Mobutu, the transitional parliament was enlarged to include the deputies from Mobutu's defunct, one-party National Assembly - a change that gives Mobutu's clique a slim majority and puts them in a position to try to "legally" oust Tshisekedi by pulling off a vote of "no confidence" against his government.

Countering these Clinton-supported moves against African democracy are the Zairian people and their allies here in the United States. Back in 1987 Tshisekedi reached out for support to independent Black leaders in the United States. I've been organizing humanitarian aid, and a people-to-people connection between the Zairian people and the American people ever since. I've worked with the Rainbow Lobby and later the democracy lobbying firm of Ross & Green on Capitol Hill to make congress - particularly the Congressional Black Caucus - aware of what was going on in Zaire and the need to do something about it.

Representative Donald Payne (D-NJ), the senior CBC member on the Africa Subcommittee, has taken the lead in this session of Congress, introducing house Resolution 128 which "urges President Clinton to pressure Mobutu to leave Zaire" and recommends a variety of severe sanctions to press this point.

It's important to note that H.R. 128, which has the support of almost all the members of the CBC, is directed not toward the likes of George Bush - whose personal friendship with Mobutu goes back to his days as CIA director - but to Bill Clinton, a Democrat who owes his narrow presidential victory to the African American electorate and who promised us a new era of support for democracy in Africa. We must keep the pressure on our elected officials - particularly the CBC - to make sure they keep the heat on President Clinton to put democracy, not 30 years of U.S.-backed corruption, first.

## perspectives Checking Bases Around The Medical Plantation

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Perhaps we have been placing too much emphasis on the "Clinton Health Plan" and neglecting many peripheral, yet important health issues.

What indeed should invoke more of our concern than a recent report by the L.A. Times-Washington Post News Service; "Racial characteristics can affect potency of prescription drugs". The report goes on to make a very significant point, "Now that pharmaceutical companies are including more minorities in their clinical trials of new drugs, one risk factor has become even more apparent: Ethnicity!"

Most immediately it occurs to me - and perhaps to you -- that here and there, but in no coordinated fashion, we have all read of, or heard of, certain adverse reactions to medicines by African Americans; Responses that 'seemed' race specific but where, of course, there was no reference work or body to which one could turn for verification. I am deeply disturbed, even contacting a number of local physicians and medical centers -- nothing so far, but I am proceeding further. More on that in a moment.

It is also stated in this report that some medications can be toxic to black patients with the Sickle Cell Trait.

Also, it is said that Asians metabo-

lize tranquilizers differently than Caucasians, and might require a smaller dose. Hispanics may need a smaller dose of pain medication to avoid unpleasant side effects. Even hair color can pose problems. Red-haired children are often allergic to antibiotics. Note, too, that these preliminary findings concern only "prescription" drugs -- what about "over-the-counter" medications?

Looking at health care from a different vantage point (or disadvantage point), we see that western Indian leaders are greatly disturbed about the effect of health care reform on American Indians. It is not just that they fear that proposed changes in their relationships with the federal government will undermine their culture, but that an already fragile health situation will degenerate. In 1987 the death rate for American Indians in Oregon, age 15 to 44, was 88% higher than for all Oregonians. Playing a role in this depressing scenario was lack of prenatal care, alcoholism, accidents and homicides.

Though an administration official says that under the Clinton Plan American Indians would be free to choose their own health care providers, the vice chairwoman of the Nez Perce Tribe and the Northwest and National Indian Health boards said "All I can see is trouble with

this health care reform." Now, we wonder why the Indians would mistrust the "great white father", just no faith. Joseph B. Delacruz, chairman of the Quinal nation suggests a very good reason during a meeting with national health officials in Vancouver, Wash.

"The Quinalts gave up 6 million acres that are now the Olympic National park and national forest...like other American Indians, the Quinalts signed treaties promising them benefits, including health care and education, in exchange for their land" Delacruz went on to say, "the Indians have paid for their education and health care...if you won't do it, you can give us our land back." Amen! There are a lot of caveats abounding. There is fear that if too many Indians left the Indian Health Service that agency would have its federal support cut--leaving those who remained with greatly impaired service. "So much fine print in the document, and so many unanswered questions."

And we all need to be the very epitome of vigilance as we ourselves take a look at that "fine print"; Especially all those new investigators and contract enforcement people who already are being referred to as the "health police". Letting one's guard down could be dangerous to your health'.

## 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 503-288-0015

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.

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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

## Letter To The Editor

On February 8, 1994, my teenage daughter, while returning merchandise, was attacked, thrown to the floor, and handcuffed by Meier & Frank security officers at the Lloyd Center Mall. She was held by security for approximately two hours and was then taken to Donald E. Long juvenile Services, where she was held approximately for another two hours.

To date, my daughter has not been charged with any crime. We are aware of numerous incidents of this nature at the Lloyd Center Mall, and are looking for other community members to join us in finding a solution to the abusive and disrespectful treatment of our children and community as a whole.

If you are a concerned citizen and interested in addressing these violent attacks on our children, please call 293-3373 for more information. We need your support.

Thank you  
Concerned Citizens

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