

EDITORIAL

WEDNESDAY MORNING BLUES SONG

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

It's been called an earthquake, a revolution, a hurricane, a tidal wave, a land slide and probably a few other things as well. By whatever name you use, the elections of 1994 mean change for the American people. For people of color in this country, the elections of 1994 may very well be a nightmare come true.

Make no mistake about it. I'm not talking about partisanship and blind support of the Democratic Party. In my own family my father was a Republican when he died in the 1950s. But the Republicans now in power - Orrin Hatch, Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, Alphonse D'Amato, Phil Gramm and Robert Dole - have never been good news for people of color.

Take, for example, their posi-

tions on the Voting Rights Act of 1990. Everyone of them voted against it. We could look at their past records on other legislation impacting people of color as well. The records would be similar.

But just important as past records are the announced intentions for the future of the new Republican leadership. For example, their "Contract with America" declares war on wel-

fare. Their solutions to the need for welfare reform include excluding teenage unmarried mothers and legal aliens under age 75 from welfare altogether, requiring unmarried adult mothers to get high school diplomas or face losing \$75 per month in benefits and a lifetime limit of five years on welfare for everyone, with a two year consecutive maximum limit. In addition, their plan

does not give additional benefits to mothers who have additional children and requires mothers to submit to drug and alcohol testing and treatment. While the welfare reform proposed in the contract takes dollars away from mothers, it increases funding for group homes and orphanages, where, presumably, children of these unfit mothers will be placed.

The message that many of us

received from the elections is that America is struggling for its very heart and soul. As our economy changes and many of the old blue-collar industrial jobs disappear, we are tempted to care only for and about our own. "We've got it bad and that ain't good. That's the message I got from the elections. We've a lot of soul searching to do. We can only sing the blues for so long. Then we've got to do something about them.

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

Crown Heights Was Not A Pogrom. But It Could Have Been A Bloodbath.

I first heard about the death of Gavin Cato while I was on my way back to Manhattan from St. John's University in Queens, where I had participated in a student protest against the acquittal of four young white men who had been charged with raping a Black student. When I heard that Gavin, a seven-year-old Black child, had been run over by a car in the entourage of the Lubavitcher Grand Rebbe, I drove immediately to Crown Heights.

When I got to the block where the Cato family lived, I thought I had entered a war zone. What seemed like an army of police officers dressed in riot gear were staked out across the street; some of them were up on the roofs, pointing sniper rifles. Outside the building where the Catos lived, 400 or 500 Black youth armed only with rocks and bottles faced down the police, while crowds of Hasidic men milled around.

The anger of the young Black

men was directed not at the Hasidim, but at the police. It was an extremely tense situation, and I realized that there could be a bloodbath unless someone stopped it. It turned out that the Reverend Al Sharpton, attorney Alton Maddox and Sonny Carson were inside with the Cato family. I went around the block and asked some of the Black women I saw to help me talk to the youth, but they refused. So I went back and stood in the middle of the street, demanding that the commanding officer on the scene pull back his men so I could have room to work with the youth, and to persuade these enraged young men not to give any of the officers a pretext for blowing their heads off.

For ten hours, I talked myself hoarse. Eventually, the police did pull back. The snipers were called down from the rooftops. The kids called me every nasty name in the book, but they did cool down and none of them died that day - which might not have been the case had the police been provoked into showing the kind of force that the governor's special assistant on crime, Richard Girgenti, later argued was required.

Girgenti did not interview me

for his report. He was originally assigned by the governor only to investigate the stabbing of Yankel Rosenbaum and the subsequent prosecution and acquittal of Lemrick Nelson. It was not until the day after Senator Alfonse D'Amato announced his intention to run for governor that Mario Cuomo - apparently concerned to prevent conservative Jewish voters' defection to D'Amato - that he expanded Girgenti's mandate to include an investigation of the Crown Heights riots and the conduct of the Dinkins administration in dealing with them. When politics comes before principle, even Gavin Cato and Yankel Rosenbaum must be sacrificed on the altar of political expedience. Lemrick Nelson, who now faces charges for federal civil rights violations, is just the latest offering.

A number of political commentators have pointed out that Girgenti's report on Crown Heights - coming on the eve of the mayoral election in New York City last year - effectively prevented Mayor Dinkins from being reelected by placing the blame for Yankel Rosenbaum's death on Dinkins' unwillingness to allow the police to move against the Black

community with sufficient force. The truth is that if the police had not acted with some restraint in that situation, New York City - and other cities around the country - might well have erupted with bloody race riots which would have made Los Angeles seem tame by comparison.

Recently, one of the police commanders I confronted in Crown Heights came over to me and introduced himself. He thanked me for the role I had played in preventing a catastrophe. Sgt. Kelvin Alexander, a Black police officer who is the president of the Guardians Association of the Transit Police Department (the Guardians are a fraternal organization of African American police officers), and who was also in Crown Heights in August of 1991, has said publicly that his organization endorsed my recent campaign for governor because I am offering "real solutions" to the violence crisis.

The Crown Heights incident continues to be used as a political football which opportunistic politicians of both major parties toss about for their own partisan interests. Until we take on their racialistic opportunism, violence will flourish.



Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

What Is Acting Black?

BY NYEWUSI ASKARI

Recently, a very popular television host did a show about people who preferred to act, dress and behave differently than members of their own ethnic group. The panel was split down the middle between whites who said they wished they had been born black and blacks who had adopted white styles and behaviors. And, as you might suspect, it turned out to be a very heated show.

What got my goat was the attempts by the host and black panel members to downplay all definitions of "what black is." Almost everytime black came up, black panel members would express an ignorance of its true meaning. By the time the show as half over, most white audience members were in agreement that definitions of white n' black were not important; that African Americans should get off the definition bandwagon and just look at themselves as humans.

The agreement generated hostile disagreement between blacks and whites in the audience. Tragically, the same degree of hostility exists between African Americans and whites in the larger society. One cause of the friction has to do with how

African Americans continue to define themselves.

In the minds of many Americans, African Americans are simply Americans, not African, not black. The concept of "I see no color when I look at you" stems from that mind set. So does the expression, "I see you as a human being, not a black or African American human being. "Sounds good doesn't it? The only thing wrong is, good sounding expressions about race and ethnicity are not going to change the way in which African Americans define themselves.

Why some people fail to realize is, "African Americans cannot escape from their African ethnicity or their African ancestral roots." Most African Americans know this, and more are learning it everyday.

At the foundation of that understanding is the realization that our African ancestors transmitted the genes and blood that are responsible for the color of our skin, the texture of our hair 'n' skin and the physical features we were born with. On top of that, our culture is an African-inspired culture - from the language we speak to the dances we dance to the many ways in which we worship God. But quite as its kept, it's that way in most pockets of America.

German retain their ties to German ancestry. The Irish retain their ties to Irish ancestry. An on 'n' on it goes. Why? Because the retention of ancestral roots is important in ethnic, group, racial, cultural and family identification. It identifies a beginning. It defines custom, culture and ritual. It gives shape and definition to traditions, folklore, folktales, music, dance and other cultural forms as they evolve over time.

Now back to the television show.

The confusion among the black panel members about "what is black or African American" shouldn't have existed. That points to a lack of understanding about who they are. In black popular speech, the word "black" is simply another term for the word "African." Thus, when I am acting "black," I am acting "African." That means I am following the customs, rituals and behaviors passed on me by my ancestors and my elders.

Whether some people believe it or not, our African ancestors and elders passed on time-honored, time-tested customs, rituals and behaviors which sustained African Americans for centuries. What has many African Americans in a panic now is the fact that many of those customs, rituals and behaviors have not been passed on to our children!

Those customs and rituals not only instructs how we are to treat others, but, also, how to go about properly raising African American children. Most African American baby boomers were exposed to those customs and rituals, especially those of us who grew up in the deep South. However, many of us have done a poor job of passing them on, yet, we employ them as we go about our everyday lives.

We try to make sure we are polite. We try to make sure we are fair. We try to make sure we are tolerant of people who are different. We try to make sure we honor and respect our elders. We try to make sure we continue to respect and workshop our Creator. We try to make sure we're not speaking profane. We try to make sure we put our children first.

Being black or acting black is all of those things and more. It is about coming from an established place where honor and respect are primary, social, virtues. It's about honoring and respecting the best of yourself so that you can honor and respect the best of others who are coming from a different cultural space.

Because, as Brotha Marvin Gaye told us, "Ain nothin like the real thang!"

are obviously creating our victims. This is not merely a political issue, but a matter of life and death of innocent people. The "doubled prison capacity" disinformation has been printed and reprinted. It has been referred to by the media and by Criminal Justice Officials repeatedly until now it is accepted as concrete fact.

It is our hope that you will address this issue. This type of deceptive misinformation is exactly why the people have little respect for and have lost confidence in their leaders.

Thank you for your attention,
Bob and Dee Dee Kouns
and Members of Crime Victims United

perspectives

Portland Blacks Defend Their I.Q.s

Just like that famous ending Count Basie tacked on to his rendition of "April In Paris," this I.Q. series seems to have a built-in "after-life." Thanks for all those clippings from the "Doonesbury" strip from the comic section of the Nov. 13 Sunday Oregonian: "In an information-driven economy, society's class lines seem increasingly determined by knowledge and intellectual merit!" Whatever that is.

I agree, Trudeau is trying to tell us something - and a lot of poor white folks too. I hope the rest of you got the point

as well, seeing through the thinly-veiled reference: to industry downturns and layoffs to come. Hear Ye, Hear Ye, Here Ye! "More than at any time in our history, brains, not brawn, are key to economic success... Will you be part of the new cognitive elite, will you make the cut?" And a worried Zonker ventures, "Hold it! What about those of us who don't know how to use a... oh-oh."

You wouldn't need to be a member of that "cognitive elite" to know his next word would have been "computer." If you've been listening to all that "Information Electronic Highway" jargon being developed by the "language departments" of the big advertising agencies on the payroll of the supporting hardware and software vendors and major communication companies. I'm sure that is how the marketing sector of industry operates these days - specialists in goal-oriented metaphors, similes and icons please apply here. Preference given to education, curriculum specialists milling around, afraid they had outlived their usefulness (haven't felt secure since "the metric system" and the "new math" went by the wayside.)

One reader reminded me of a 1989 article in which I described the demise of those "big old multi-room (7 or 8) homes that we poor people could afford "back then" - when they went, the older families went, because they could not be

accommodated in the cute little cracker-boxes-on-concrete slabs masquerading as homes. So much for my allusion to yester-year's experienced providers to tutor and nurture children at critical stages. As a friend of mine used to say, "we've got to have some mau mau and some grandma."

That judgement call on your intellect (I.Q.) prompted by a response to a series of questions about nothing in particular, but which specifically reveal your exposure to a "knowledge environment" com-

posed of the elements I cited in the Nov. 16 article is what determines that fateful "quotient" and your ensuing place on that "bell-shaped-

curve." In that same article, I pointed out that I revisited the childhood "incubator" that had stigmatized some of us with the "low-I.Q." denigration and found that most had achieved magnificently in those occupations and professions deemed to require high levels of cognitive skills.

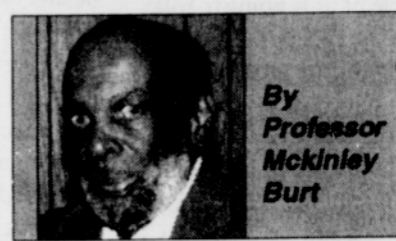
In any case, let us be aware of what is driving this most recent round of attacks on African American intelligence. The right wing, wanting to ensure a victory by conservatives, needed an emotional issue to which an increasingly insecure electorate would respond, viola! "Blacks on welfare and too dumb to get off." But what about "white welfare." Thousand times larger:

-\$100 million to Sunkist, Gallo, MEM's Campbell's Soups, McDonalds and others to advertise their products abroad.

-\$135.6 million to private timber companies that owe taxpayers for timber purchased but are allowed to default without consequences.

-\$1 billion to Continental Grain, Cargill, Inc. and Louis Dreyfus for free shipping of wheat, corn and other commodities.

Just the tip of the iceberg as Republicans plan to cut "black welfare," food stamps, school lunches, WIC, Medicare and other "waste." Oh yes, Senator Gramm got billions for that abandoned hole in Texas.



By Professor McKinley Burt

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An Open Letter To Former Governor Neil Goldschmidt

Dear Governor:

We write this letter out of concern for our State and all its citizens. As you may recall, we and other Crime Victims United members have been close observers of Oregon's criminal Justice System for many years.

You can imagine our surprise and great dismay when we heard the Department of Corrections announce that the institutional capacity had doubled during your term. When the citizens hear that the capacity has doubled, they expect twice as many inmates to be incarcerated. That clearly is not the case. According to your Task Force Study (June 1, 1988),

there were 4,610 inmates in Oregon prisons. As a result of "overcrowding", there were an additional 1,001 inmates on "temporary leave" status. If just the number who were actually in prison had doubled, we would have 9,220 inmates in prison. However, we now have approximately 6,600 in our prison system.

In addition, we have included a copy of the capacity study survey done by Dr. Richard Seiter, Director of the Ohio Department of Corrections. He was selected as a consultant to conduct a capacity survey of the Oregon corrections system for the Department of Correction and your Task Force. This survey was includ-

ed as Chapter 4, Institutional Capacity, in your Task Force on Corrections Planning Publication issued in August 1988.

With minimal adjustments such as adding double bunks, Dr. Richard Seiter found a recommended total capacity limit of existing facilities to be 4985 (or 9970 if doubled.)

This must be very embarrassing to you to be a party to such an unconscionable hoax on the public. Certainly the intent of the public was not to supply inmates with more space, but instead to incarcerate more offenders.

The criminals not incarcerated (80% of convicted felony offenders)