

EDITORIAL

Vantage Point: Reaffirming King's Vision

This year as the nation "celebrates" the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we are living in some of the most perilous times since the Great Depression.

The rise to hegemony of the radical right through the Republican capture of Congress and the introduction of Newt Gingrich's contract with America poses a real threat to the well being of millions of poor and working people in this nation. The Contract with America is a mean spirited initiative which scapegoats and blames people of color and poor and working people for the ills of American society.

The Contract with America is really a "contract on America" which consciously feeds on the fears and anxieties of an insecure White middle class to promote policies and programs that will ultimately benefit the rich and the super-rich in this country. Racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-poor bias and anti-immigrationism are used to blind the middle class to the real intentions of a wealthy and privileged class of people who will go to any extreme to enrich themselves. At base the Contract on America is a reflection of the greed, materialism and corruption that is inherent in America's amoral capitalist system. If we ever needed

the vision and voice of Martin Luther King, it is in these perilous times.

In one of his most profound speeches King offered this prophetic warning: "I am convinced... that we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented society' to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered." The enactment of the Contract on America would place this nation in imminent danger of becoming mired in the madness of racism, materialism and militarism. We need the vision and voice of King to show us a way out. Beyond the pomp and circumstance that has come to dominate the Martin Luther King Holiday celebration, we need to focus on King's prescription for correcting the ills of American society if this life and legacy is to have meaning in this crucial moment of history.

"True compassion is more than flinging a coin at a beggar; it comes to understand that the edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring." What King was attempting to tell America is that poor people are not poor because they want to be poor. Poverty in America is a func-

tion of failed policies and a flawed system. And, the misery and poverty which results from "being neglect" and Contracts on America can not be overcome by occasional acts of charity and kindness only. What is required is a "radical revolution of values," a change in this nation's priorities and a change in the edifice/system that is breeding poverty, misery, crime, violence and destruction.

Acting on this analysis, at the end of his life Martin Luther King was pressing America to "undergo a radical revolution of values." King was eloquently and passionately espousing and Economic Bill of Rights to force this nation to live up to its obligation and responsibility to guarantee certain basic human rights to every human being in the United States. King was challenging America to "live up to its creed" that all human beings are entitled to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." In concrete terms these "inalienable rights" translate into the right to a decent job or income, housing, health care and education.

King was unwilling to let America, more importantly the rich and the super-rich, the powerful and the privileged, get away with blaming the poor for their condition of impoverishment. Nor was he content with accepting a kind of charitable "noblesse oblige" as a substitute for a compassionate

government and humane policies. Martin Luther King was demanding radical, fundamental change in this nation's public policy and in this nation's flawed challenged the victims of this nation's failed policies and flawed system to act. King challenged Black people, people of color and poor and working people to rise above the limitations of their condition to liberate themselves and the nation from the "giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism." At the time of his death, King was planning a "Poor People's Campaign" to fight for an Economic Bill of rights or what might be termed a New Contract with America.

In these perilous times, we must not allow the vision of King to be blurred by meaningless ritual and superfluous ceremony. The vision and voice of King must be our primer and our guide as the dispossessed and disadvantaged - Blacks, people of color and poor and working people engage the struggle to counter the Contract on America. The celebration of the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. must be manifest in real deeds that express our resolve to compel America to shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented society. The vision and voice of King demands that we engage the struggle to restructure the "edifice which produc-

perspectives

Selected Readings In Ebony: Classic And New

First, some sources of good, solid image-building materials that will do much for self-esteem and that will provoke much discussion of an enlightening nature. Since this is Black History Month these purveyors of classic ethnic gems will have many special additions to their expansive catalogs.

"African American Images", 1909 W. 95th Street, Dept. FC Chicago, Ill 60643; Books, Cassettes, Posters, Movies, Games, Toys, Puzzles; Children's Titles, Histories, Texts, Bibliographies; Individuals - Schools - Libraries.

"A&B Books", 149 Lawrence Street Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201, (718) 596-3389; This mail order, catalog house will be found to have the same extensive coverage of African and African American literature and related materials.

"ECA Associates", P.O. Box 15004, Great Bridge Station, Chesapeake, VA, 23328-0004, (804) 547-5542. The same comprehensive coverage as above--plus Black Education Video Series, Studies in Religion, Philosophy.

Edward R. Hamilton, Bookseller, Falls Village, CT 06031-5000. Now, this catalog mail order house is not an ethnic supplier of books but you will find some listed each month among some of the major categories: History, Music, Bibliography, Science, Sociology, Psychology, Fiction, Adventure, Religion, Entertainment, Collecting, Language, Architecture, Art, Literature, Television, Childrens Books, Medicine, Crafts, Etc. The huge free catalog (printed like a tabloid newspaper) lists yesterday's bestsellers at a fraction of the price.

Let me also recommend several good books that I consider classics, not only for general reading but also to inspire and motivate our youth in these times when a good self-image is suffering a dramatic attrition. They present excellent role models from today and yesteryear.

"Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story", Zondervan Books, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1990. The life story (auto bio-

graphy) of the still young African American neuro surgeon who has won world-wide honors for his pioneering procedures in separating and saving the lives of Siamese twins. Raised in inner-city Detroit and suffering from early educational and pathological disabilities, he nevertheless surmounted all these difficulties with the aid of a super-motivated mother--from

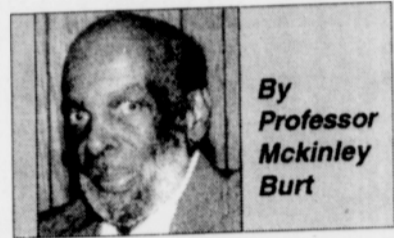
failing grades to top of class and scholarship to Yale. At age 33 became director of pediatric neuro surgery

at Johns Hopkins. Truly inspirational.

"North Pole Legacy: Black, White and Eskimo," S. Allen Counter, University Of Massachusetts Press, 1991. This story centers around the African American explorer, Matthew Hensen who, though usually described as the "faithful assistant" to the acclaimed white explorer, Comdr. Robert E. Peary, actually was the first man to reach the North Pole (the description in quotation marks is an allusion that classic Anglo Saxon 'put down' imagery technique ie. "Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday.")

Dr. Counter, a black neuro science professor at Harvard is director of the Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations. As was Matthew Hensen, he is a member of the world-renowned "Explorers Club" and traveled extensively in the frigid arctic lands, finding the Eskimo descendants from explorer Hensen (and Peary). Dr. Counter flew them to the United States where they met their American relatives and there are many wonderful photographs throughout the book. Dr. Counter arranged to have the body of Matthew Hensen reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

Does it also occur to you that we need a lot more of our wealthy professional and educational elite to be about this type of activity--honoring and thrusting into the world's spotlight the African Americans who paved the way for us to come as far as we have. I say less of this posturing for television, Jet and Ebony--more of the sustenance for esteem, soul and psyche.



By Professor Mckinley Burt

Economic Empowerment

BY JAMES CLINGMAN

Farrakhan is right.

In August of last year Minister Louis Farrakhan spoke at my first school of higher learning, North Carolina Central University, formerly North Carolina College at Durham. His speech, made before a packed gymnasium in unbearable heat, centered on economic self-sufficiency. The theme that filtered through the entire message was, "we can do for

ourselves." The minister was right, and he and the Nation of Islam are proving it daily.

In Chicago, the Nation is involved in economic development in the African-American community on an unprecedented scale. Nationwide, the members of this group do for themselves, without getting into the "begging mode" in which many of us find ourselves. Farrakhan cited the reasons that African Americans, owners of nearly \$400 billion in annual income, are the beggars of this nation, the most important of which

is our reluctance to stick together.

The Minister noted the thousands of people sitting in the sweltering heat of a gymnasium that was not air conditioned. He asked why was that so, and he alluded to the simple fact that if those in attendance pooled their funds, they could purchase air conditioning for the gym. He brought forth the fact that African Americans are so splintered and stratified that it is virtually impossible for us to gain any concessions, economic, social, or political.

He talked about economic leverage and the importance of land

ownership and production and distribution and selling and buying. He spoke of all of these things in the context of what they mean to Black Americans. I might add that he did it without malice toward white people or Jewish people or any other group. He did it with love toward Black people, tempered with stern admonishments, as any caring parent would for his or her children. In other words, he came down on US.

I don't know how much it's going to take for us to turn our rhetoric into action.

Civil Rights Journal: Making Black History Come Alive

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

I recently attended a play entitled *I Am a Man at the Karamu Theater in Cleveland.*

It was the story of the union organizer who worked with the sanitation workers in Memphis during their strike in 1968. This was the strike which brought Martin Luther King Jr. to Memphis and to the Lorraine Motel, where he was assassinated.

Today the Lorraine Motel houses one of the nation's finest museums, which chronicles the civil rights movement, particularly the 1950's and 1960's. Called the National Civil Rights Museum, it houses 10,000 square feet of exhibitions, and auditorium, a courtyard, a gallery, a museum gift shop and administrative offices.

The exhibits of the National Civil

Rights Museum make African American history come alive, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, student sit-ins and the Memphis sanitation workers strike. A ten minute introductory audio-visual program focuses on the Constitutional Rights we all have as U.S. citizens; other audio-visuals place the viewer in the Birmingham jail cell where Dr. King wrote his famous letter and allow the viewer to hear the stories of the Little Rock Nine, who integrated schools in Arkansas.

Rooms 306 and 307, which Dr. King occupied on that fateful day in April, 1968, from an emotional focus of the museum and are the historical climax of the exhibits. These rooms have been recreated as they were when Dr. King was there.

Another treasure chest of African American history is the National Afro-American Muse-

um and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio. Located on the campus of Wilberforce University, a historically black university, it includes a permanent exhibit which chronicles the period in American history from 1945 to 1965. This exhibit has cars, barber chairs and straightening combs and even a reproduction of a church from those days. It looks at the migration of millions of blacks from the south to the North and at African American family, work, community and religious life.

In addition to this permanent exhibit, the National Afro-American Museum has changing art and photography exhibits and special exhibits of black dolls and for the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, Black History Month and Kwanzaa. The 35,000 square foot building, which opened in 1988, also includes a gift shop, an

audio-visual presentation on black music and a collection of manuscripts and library materials.

For our children to really know and appreciate African American history, we must find all kinds of ways to make history come alive. Plays like *I Am a Man* or museums like the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis and the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio are critical to telling our stories.

African American history is important for all Americans all year long. As you plan trips for your family, include these museums on your itinerary. As you try to tell your children about African American heroes, include black theater productions and black art exhibits in your plans. Let's make African American history come alive for our children. It's not for the sake of our past, but for the sake of our future.

Letter To The Editor

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

Give Something Back To U. S. Troops

The Persian Gulf War continues to take its toll on U.S. troops and U.S. taxpayers.

Not only are we paying for the billions in direct military costs in defending Kuwait, but we are paying for all the illnesses that have stemmed out of the Persian Gulf War--illnesses that, scientific experts say, may be attributable to uranium poisoning and/or Iraqi chemical/biological warfare.

The Gulf War tab took another toll on the families of the soldiers and the unfortunate in this country, in the form of cutbacks on affordable housing, food stamps, medical care and education.

About half of the soldiers who fought in the Persian Gulf were mi-

norities--mostly African Americans and Hispanics. Statistics show that more U.S. soldiers from Watts and East L.A. served in that war than the total contingent of Kuwaiti troops.

All this is happening while Kuwaiti newlyweds are being given free homes or free land and \$225,000, 60-year, interest-free loans; free medical care; free college education; and freedom from taxation. The country, which is \$200 billion in the black, has not even entertained a request made last fall by the Greenlining Coalition for a total of \$2.6 billion in community reinvestment funds to go toward low-cost housing for the country's poorer populations.

Instead, Kuwait's royal family forgave all loans for items which range from homes to luxury automo-

biles, in order to "bolster morale" among its citizens.

Kuwait makes \$35 million a day in oil revenues. Our poor are sleeping in cardboard boxes on our streets, our veterans are suffering from a myriad of maladies directly stemming from their involvement in that war, and our citizens are paying for studies to determine the cause and treatment of these illnesses.

If nothing else, Kuwait should invest some of its revenues in the soldiers who fought to ensure that they could reap all the benefits of having one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. It is because our soldiers battled on their fields that their pumps are churning out oil.

Kuwait should be paying for these studies and treating the sol-

diers. It could invest in businesses among veterans, or even commit \$2.6 billion out of its overflowing coffers in just plain gratitude for their freedom and their present ability to keep their coffers growing.

Instead, there's silence from Kuwait on the request. It doesn't take much to see where Kuwait would be now if it weren't for our soldiers. We wonder where they will be if our soldiers refuse to fight the next time Saddam Hussein decides he would like to attack Kuwait. Perhaps a little gratitude would be in line here. We think our soldiers deserve a little more than just getting to watch a diplomatic thank you from the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the President.

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: Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday 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.

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