

EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily
Reflect Or Represent The Views Of
The Portland Observer

Vantage Point: The Will Of The Haitian People Is Unbroken

BY RON DANIELS

I have recently returned from leading an African American fact finding delegation to Haiti.

What we witnessed and learned should be a source of inspiration to Africans in America and the oppressed everywhere. Few people have suffered under White supremacy - slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism like the people of Haiti. Yet despite this long history of oppression, what we found was a people whose will is unbroken; a people determined to achieve democracy and development in spite of the devious designs of the U.S. government; a people on a mission to finally fulfill the Revolution of 1804 which established the first Black Republic in this Hemisphere.

Haiti is often described as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and one of the most destitute nations in the world. To the degree that Haiti is near the bottom of the ladder in terms of development, however, it is a consequence of a long history of intervention, occupation and interference in the affairs of a "free" nation by the U.S. and its European allies. It is as if Europe and the United States have conspired for nearly two centuries to punish the former enslaved Africans of Haiti for shattering the myth of White superiority/invincibility. The decimation and defeat of the mighty army of

Napoleon by the Haitian legions of Dessalines was a humbling experience for the "master race."

France and the United States never intended to respect the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the Haitian people. Indeed, in 1836 Europe and the United States colluded to force Haiti, the victor, to pay France, the vanquished, millions of dollars in reparations as a condition to recognize Haiti's independence and sovereignty. Hence Haiti was straddled with a huge debt which severely stymied the prospects of development for decades. And, under the Monroe Doctrine, the United States increasingly saw Haiti, like all nations in the region, as a source of profit for U.S. corporations.

The U.S. invasion and occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 was designed to "pacify" the population and ensure that Haiti would forever be a safe haven for U.S. business interests. After brutally crushing a fierce resistance, the U.S. "trained" and left in place a new Haitian army that would become the tool of tyranny and oppression in the hands of a tiny, corrupt, self-serving elite; an elite that would become the willing instrument of the U.S. in exploiting the resources of the country and ruthlessly oppressing the Haitian masses. The heinous regime of the infamous Papa Doc Duvalier with the dread Ton Ton Macoutes was characteristic of this unsavory conspira-

cy.

The Haitian masses, however, have never ceased to resist the machinations of the U.S. and the Haitian elite, never surrendered in the face of terrible oppression, never relented in their pursuit of democracy and development. The stunning election to the presidency of "the little priest," father Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1990 was a remarkable testimony to the resolve of the Haitian masses to break the back of U.S. sponsored tyranny. Uncomfortable with the outcome of the elections and fearful that the new people based democracy would threaten U.S. business interests, the U.S. government acquiesced to the coup that overthrew the regime of the first popularly elected President in Haiti. Once again the Haitian masses would suffer the brunt of rape, torture, terror, intimidation and mass murder at the hands of yet another regime of tyrants seeking to make Haiti safe for U.S. business interests and themselves.

What our delegation discovered, however, is that even under the illicit regime of Cedras, Francois and Biamby, the resistance continued. The pro-democracy movement through its popular organizations of peasants, workers, women and youth fought back despite incredible oppression. And, now that President Aristide has been reluctantly returned to power by a government which has never wanted to see genuine democ-

cracy and development in Haiti, the Haitian people are clear about U.S. intentions and determined to restore real democracy despite the designs of the U.S. government.

The Haitian people are laboring under a new form of occupation, the U.S. dominated U.N. peacekeeping force, but they are taking advantage of the space created by the dislodging of the coup leaders and the return of President Aristide to repair and rebuild the pro-democracy movement. Everywhere we went in Haiti we observed the unspeakable poverty and misery of the Haitian masses and heard dreadful testimonies about the suffering of the people under the coup.

What we also saw was a people who are clear about their identity as African people, clear about a culture which has been and continues to be the foundation of the people's resistance to domination and a people mobilizing/organizing to finish a revolution initiated with the blood of their ancestors - Boukman, Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe and countless thousands of rebellious enslaved Africans who refused to be bound by White supremacy. What we witnessed in Haiti is a people, and African people whose will is unbroken, a people whose struggle for democracy and development must be seen as integral part of the global Pan African struggle for liberation and self determination.

Civil Rights Journal: The Strangling Of Affirmative Action

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

From what they tell me, my father was a very special human being. Intelligent, articulate, great sense of humor, committed to his family. For a black man during those days preceding World War II, he had a good job -- working in the post office. Indeed, because of segregation, the best of the black community worked in the post office, often while they were studying law or architecture or medicine.

My father even became one of the first black postal inspectors and during the war he supervised the post office at the now-famous Tuskegee air base, where the black pilots trained. After the war he continued his work and by 1956 he was in charge of the post office of the U.S. State Department. But when he died suddenly that year at age 54, he had gone about as far as he could as a black man. I am told that had he been white, he would have been paid more dollars for the same job.

That is not long-ago history. It is the story of one black man forty years ago. I know lots of others just like it. The story of my mother, for one. Stories of black men and women who, but for segregation, would have achieved far beyond where society allowed them to go.

Affirmative Action was one way this country acknowledged that an entire group of people had been discriminated against. Affirmative action was one way this country tried to make amends for a wrong it had committed. Affirmative Action was one way this country tried to ensure that future generations might have a fighting chance to compete with the old boy networks, with family connections, with insider knowledge and privileges that just having white skin brings to those who have it.

Affirmative Action allowed me to attend a very fine predominantly white private college and probably allowed me to get into graduate school. It certainly has allowed me to

get two or three jobs in my lifetime. It allowed Colin Powell to become a general. It has allowed 40,000 black police officers and nearly 30,000 black electricians to enter the work force. Without affirmative action, Clarence Thomas might never have left Pinpoint, Georgia and certainly would not be on the Supreme Court.

Most historians trace affirmative action back to the days of Lyndon Johnson, who was seeking "not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and equality as a result." Those were his words at a Howard University commencement address 30 years ago. Equality not just as a theory, but equality as a result.

There is some evidence that affirmative action was beginning to do just that -- make equality a result. Today's African American middle class is larger than any in our nation's history. And women, who were added to affirmative action laws, have made great strides in the work force. More women own their own busi-

nesses and their businesses and those owned by people of color were beginning to be able to compete, often because of affirmative action.

There are some who argue that President Johnson's War on Poverty did not succeed because the rug was pulled out from under it too soon. Just when the War on Poverty began to make changes in the lives of the people it was targeted to help, its flaws and problems were highly publicized, its successes weren't and instead of making the needed corrections, the whole program was scrapped. The nation decided it had done enough for poor people and moved on.

For some of us, that's the way this latest Supreme Court ruling and the accompanying public mood, feels as well. Just as affirmative action was beginning to succeed, it seems it is slowly being strangled to death. Affirmative action is about ending the legacies of slavery. But it is also about my father and it is about me.

perspectives

Have A Good Summer Of Inspiring Reading

I It seems that the full story of the African American scientist, astronomer, inventor and surveyor -- Benjamin Banneker -- and his experiences with Thomas Jefferson (described as a "founding father") was quite a revelation to some of our readers. I was delighted to be able to enlighten them with the usual thoroughly documented material.

Since so many of our young people are out of school for the summer, with lots of time on their hands, we thought it might be good to suggest some very interesting and highly motivational reading. We think that parents, grandparents, older siblings might do well to use this method to provide role models and inspirational messages. It is a proven method of beneficial instruction without preaching.

First, let me recommend "Queen Bess: Daredevil Aviator", by Doris L. Rich Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. This is the story of "Bessie Coleman", born in 1892 in a Texas sharecropper's cabin this strong and vivacious female went on to become the first African American to earn an international pilots license and the first Black Woman In The World to Fly An Airplane!

This fascinating story is for all ages and races as it traces a fantastic career of overcoming barriers of race and sex on three continents. And of course exhibiting remarkable skill and courage -- especially considering the state of the art and the equipment in the 1920's. The book concludes with a touching "afterward" by Ms Mae Jemison, the first and only Black woman astronaut. How wonderful and courageous our sisters are. Get this one, its a must (Excellent Photos).

Smithsonian Institution Press, Marketing Department, 470 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 7100, Washington, D.C. 20560.

A second book I wish to recommend is for middle school through college, whether science-minded or not -- just be proud, curious or ambitious (try all three). The

book is "Created Equal: The Lives and Ideas of Black American Innovators", James Michael Brodie, Quill, William Morrow Publishers 1993.

This interesting account of African American contributions to the industrial age and technology begins with documented inventions of slaves, cites innovations through the Civil War and The Reconstruction period and on into the modern era. Especially interesting is the first chapter, "Slave Inventors". One can only weep at the loss of this information which, revealed, would have made it impos-

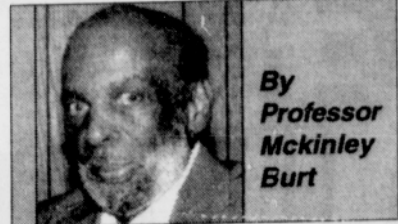
sible for the racists to denigrate Africans as dumb, brutish beings, fit only for "involuntary servitude". Witness the excerpt below, p.23

"Ned was a slave on the plantation of Oscar J. E. Stuart in Pike County, Mississippi, who on August 25, 1857, wrote to Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson regarding a cotton scraper Ned had invented. The device required one person and two horses and could do the work of four people, four horses, two scrapers, and two plows. Stuart argued in his letter to Thompson that ownership of the machine was rightfully his, explaining that "the master is the owner of the fruits of the labor of the slave both intellectual [sic] and manual."

The patent application was denied though the Confederacy passed laws during the Civil War stating that "all inventions of slaves shall become the property of the masters." After the war all restriction against slave patents were overturned by the 13th and 14 amendments (equal protection).

Also, many readers may remember my information here from the former "British Colonial Office": accurate records of the iron ingot production of "Iron Plantations" run solely by complements of African, men, women and children, bringing their skills from the West Coast of Africa where iron-working had been done for over a thousand years.

Be sure to add both of these books to your library so that the entire family may have a good summer's reading.



By
Professor
McKinley
Burt



Letter To The Editor

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

Dear Editor,

Our children need your help. One of the most blatant examples of discrimination is the current penalty for possession of crack cocaine in the federal system.

No one believes in not punishing illegal drug distribution. However, that punishment should fit the crime and those guilty of the same crime, regardless of race or color, should be punished equally.

I myself do not fall under the crack cocaine sentencing guidelines, nor am I an African-American, but I cannot with a clear conscience allow this injustice to continue within the prison system. I would like to remain anonymous during the course of this letter, not because I am embarrassed of my crime, but rather out of respect for the privacy of my parents. I will tell you that I am a non-violent first-time offender sentenced to six years for the importation of hashish (a marijuana substance), with a graduate degree from the University of Washington's School of International Business. Hopefully by the time I complete my sentence, I will have a foundation to fall back upon, along with the support of my family.

Since I have been incarcerated, I have come to realize America's dirty little secret, where first-time non-violent offenders are being incarcerated for 10, 20, and 30 years of their lives due to federal minimum mandatory sentencing for non-vio-

lent offenders. Even more disgustingly, people of the African-American race are being sentenced prejudicially, whether intended or not, under the current 100-to-1 ratio penalty for crack cocaine as compared to powder cocaine.

Currently, the federal guideline system penalizes crimes involving crack cocaine 100 times more severely than crimes involving powder cocaine. As a result, harsher sentences are imposed on Afro-American defendants 30 times more often than on Caucasians. Whereas, the majority of powder cocaine sentences are Caucasian related, Afro-Americans are sentenced in 96% of the crack cocaine cases. In passing the existing federal guidelines for non-violent drug offenses, Congress decided arbitrarily that only crack cocaine cases should be punished a hundred times more than powder cocaine cases.

Congress has stated that crack penalties were enhanced because of the potency and intensity of addiction, more than that of all the other drugs such as powder cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, which Afro-Americans are less likely to distribute than Caucasians. This idea that crack cocaine is more addictive or potent than all these other drugs is irrational and simply not true. Doctors who have testified said there was no pharmacological difference between powder cocaine and crack cocaine and no scientific basis for treat-

ing one unit of cocaine as equivalent to 100 units of crack for sentencing purpose. The only difference between crack cocaine and cocaine itself, is the baking soda that is added as the cutting agent. The reality is that crack cocaine is actually less pure than powder because it has been cut with baking soda to cook into crack.

It is worth noting that Congress will change federal guidelines for drug offenses when they are shown to be unfair. In fact, Congress saw in 1993 that their existed similar types of unfairness with the LSD drug sentences, of which 97% affected Caucasians, and through church and community pressure, lowered the sentencing and incarceration time for these people. You must do the same for your own people. We are not trying to divide the people by races, but the reality is that a complete generation of people of color, whom were non-violent are being wiped out and forgotten, and that is wrong.

Crack cocaine and powder cocaine are essentially the same substance in different forms. Since crack cocaine is cheaper than powder cocaine, Afro-Americans and Hispanics distribute it more than Caucasians. Federal Judges are overwhelmingly against these mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent offenders and have seen the injustice of this policy, and a few have refused to go along, either departing from the 100-to-1 ratio difference or declaring the law unconstitutional on equal

protection or cruel and unusual punishment grounds. The faster and simpler way to fix this situation, is for Congress to change this racially discriminating law to a equal (1-to-1) basis of powder cocaine, as they did the LSD law in 1993.

Your younger generation is begging for your help. We need you to write a letter of support endorsing this issue, and if you do not endorse it, please state why you do not. We would also appreciate that you publish an editorial to this effect. Congress and the U.S. Sentencing Commission heard the issue on March of 1995. Thus, we need your editorial and letter of support. It is extremely important that the general public becomes aware of this issue.

Too many young Afro-American and Hispanics have been deprived of a childhood, an education and any chance of life other than crime and prison. There are more black men in jail today than there were slaves when the Civil War started. Please, we need your help. An entire generation of young people of color will lose their lives in prisons as a result of these discriminatory laws.

Your leadership will hopefully bring fairness and justice to a clearly unjust situation. We cannot allow another generation of talented, young people of color to fall victim to unjust policies which do nothing to rehabilitate them. We must keep the truly violent off the streets.

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