

Black Labor, White Wealth. Part II

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Man, last week's article certainly got some attention. However the last line should have read, The 'Negroes' were saying, "Mckinley, you 'can not' do that" -- in reference to my setting up the 'Union Avenue Finance Co.' for the white car dealers (circa 1948).

Of course the same 'plantation types' voiced similar warnings and cautions when in the winter of 1945-1946 I set up the "Pacific Business Service" and years before "H&R Block", proceeded to set up a chain of "Income Tax Stations" ranging from inner-city Portland to the former Vanport -- and from Vancouver, Washington to McLoughlin Heights. A good dozen commissioned operators were trained and employed to perform initial interviews and then process the returns through the system, with head quarters at 2017 N. Williams.

It is all well and good to say, "well, you were always ahead of your time." But what does that tell us about the black body politic and the caliber of leadership when, consistently through the years, we have the many failures to rally around and support the many other innovators and builders I have cited from time to time.

Even when I made detailed accounts of these experiences part of my university Minority Business course, the concepts still were hard to get across.

Still seeking an improved method of 'technology transfer', I sponsored several meetings this past summer on the "campus" of a large electronics firm. As I've mentioned before, a number of my former students (white) are executives out there in the westside computer land and they have provided meeting space and

transportation for related activities. Consequently, I have been enabled to develop some progressive techniques for African American parents and students to use in interfacing with the system (no "Negroes" were allowed).

I also had invited several "emancipated" educators and a black scientist from large eastern cities. They were all put up at a guest house usually reserved for foreign buyers (mostly Asian) and were given the usual tour of Portland and environs. But, getting down to cases, they did an exemplary job of making the vital connections for the audience -- between curriculum, teacher attitudes, grades and the job market, between the preparation of the young and the economic health of the community (Black Labor, 'Black' Wealth).

But, most importantly, they defined the crucial and critical role of the parent, describing the games and manipulations practiced by all major school systems in the country. Hint-

ing broadly that Portland might soon be the target of a wide-ranging federal suit, the Hobson vs Washington, D.C. Board of Education was used as a model (circa 1970). I was very familiar with this victory of a community over a corrupt and manipulative school district. I flew to Washington and spent some time under the tutelage of Dr. Julius Hobson.

He was the black economist who structured the massive suit, bringing in economists, CPAs, educators, anthropologists and psychologists among others to make the case that the educational disabilities inflicted upon African American pupils by a manipulative school district imposed a life-long constraint upon their ability to learn and otherwise compete in America's economic system. In other words, an avenue to "Black Labor, White Wealth!"

A number of readers are aware that in 1974, while head of the "Minority Teacher's Association", I sought to gain backing from the mem-

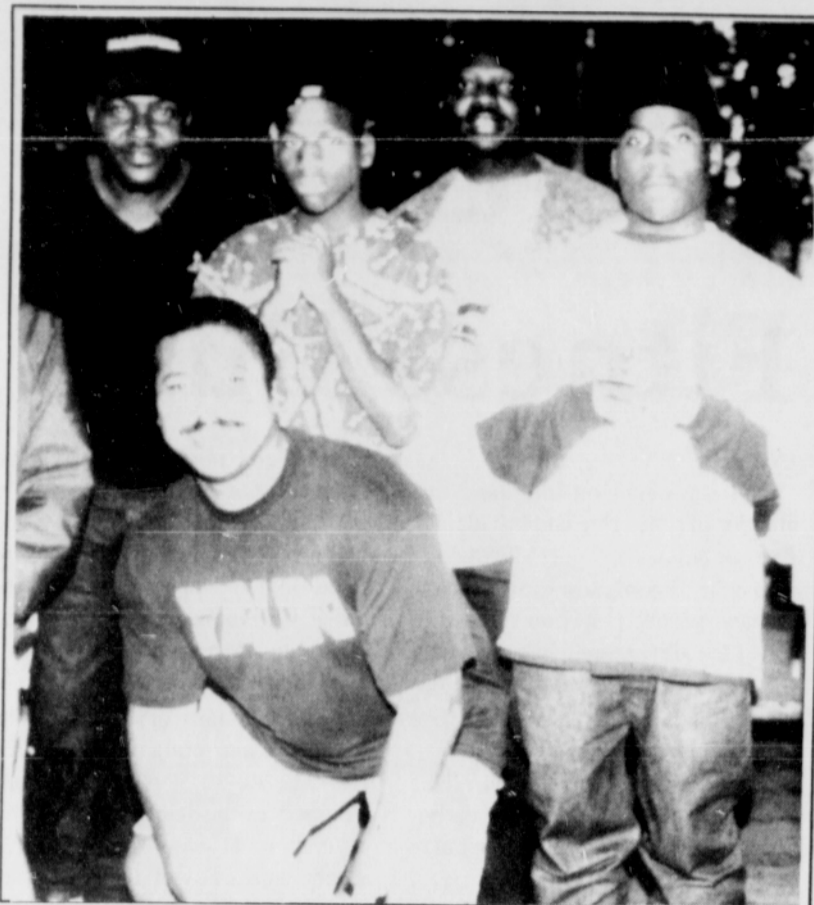
bership to mount a similar suit against the Portland District. It goes without saying that was a lost cause, a membership of close to a hundred reduced to less than a dozen stalwarts at the first intimation of a possible suit. Most simply faded away but several Uncle Toms and Aunt Jeminas were intercepted trying to get membership lists to massa superintendent.

Some of us speculate yet today 'what Portland would be like had a suit been successfully mounted.

Would we have had all the half-literate dropouts and forced-outs waiting to be recruited by gangs, to become ill-prepared parents, to go to the penitentiary or to die?

Did the system deliberately program them not to be competitive with other cultural groups in the economic arena.

The Beaverton group, both black and white, thoroughly understood the mechanism that leads to "Black Labor, White Wealth."



Yaun Youth Care Center Director Rodney Cook with Lee Grimes (from left), Fred Barnum, Joseph Gusek and Barry Stevens at weekend picnic at Peninsula Park in north Portland. (Photo by Duane Lewis)

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