

EDITORIAL

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

Civil Rights Journal

Tomorrow's Martin Luther Kings

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

In January 15 we will once again celebrate the birthday of a great American and citizen of the world, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many school children will recite his I Have a Dream speech given at the 1963 march on Washington and we will pay tribute to a great religious and moral leader of our lifetime.

But in the course of remembering Dr. King's life, it's important to remember that when he came into the nation's limelight as a leader of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 he was only 26 years old. As the civil rights movement showed here in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement did in south Africa, young people are often in the forefront of social change.

Who, then, are the future Martin Luther King, Jr.'s in our time? Who are the young people who are working for justice for their people? While the media often ignore the stories of young people working for positive change, the good news is there are many young people who are about the business of justice for all. Here

are the stories of just two of them.

Angela Brown is the only American winner of the Reebok Human Rights Award, an international award honoring young human rights activists working on the front lines for social change. We in the Commission for Racial Justice are especially proud of Angela because we have watched and encouraged her from age 14, when she organized young people around education and voter registration.

A child of the civil rights movement, she has been involved in the environmental justice movement from its inception and Angela now works with the Southern Organizing Committee and Greenpeace in organizing young people across the South around environmental justice issues. Her successful work helped to prevent the installation of a PVC plant in Wallace, Louisiana and a hazardous waste incinerator in Noxubee, Mississippi. She is also an assistant pastor at Saint Delight UCC in Louisburg, NC.

To today's young people, Angela Brown says, "Our generation is faced with a continual epidemic of drugs, the culture of violence, the sin of

racism, the pain of miseducation, the divisiveness of class, and the indecisiveness of truly sexist oppression. As young people we can not continue to aid in these kinds of environmental atrocities. It is our human right all over this world to work, live and play in a healthy environment. I hope all people, but especially young people, will hear my call to struggle and demand their human rights."

Justin Deegan is an Arickara/Sioux from the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. Currently a student at the University of North Dakota State University at Fargo, Justin's Indian name is We Cha Sha Nahzin, which means "Standing Man" in Dakota Sioux, a name given to him by his father who taught him that "when a man falls down, he must get back up again."

Justin was named North Dakota Indian Student of the Year in 1994 by the North Dakota Indian Education Association and was selected for Who's Who for three consecutive years. A natural leader, Justin has served as National Vice-Chair for UNITY, the United National Indian Tribal Youth organization. UNITY

believes that as Indian youth, their members can make changes through their 12 inter-related goals -- Unity, Spirituality, Family, Heritage, Health, Environment, Sovereignty, Mental, Service, Education, Physical and Community.

An athlete and scholar, Justin is also a Sunday School teacher in the church which his mother pastors in Bismarck, Justin is working with other Indian youth to make the world a better place for themselves and their people. He says, "I have become more aware of education for myself and for other Indian youth. I realize it is a tool for us to become more prosperous and spiritual. Throughout my journey I have dedicated myself toward protecting our environment and being drug/alcohol free." One of Justin's role models is Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and he hopes to one day be elected to public office and serve in Washington.

Justin Deegan and Angela Brown are just two of our future Martin Luther King, Jr.s. I think Dr. King would be proud.

Position Statement

Illicit Drugs And The Immune System: Aids And Disease

The impact of illicit drugs on the immune and central nervous systems is a key factor in the suffering from AIDS and the spread of other life-threatening diseases.

The single most compassionate and cost effective method to reduce the damage of AIDS and to improve the quality of life of HIV positive people is to eliminate the use of illicit drugs. Public and private funds should be directed to education and research which focus on the impact of illicit drugs on the immune system and disease.

Background:

Scientific research conclusively documents that illicit drug use, including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines and marijuana, weakens and suppresses the immune system, impairs human judgment regarding safe sexual behavior, and facilitates sexually transmitted diseases. Despite this information, public policy has been subjugated to social and political arguments, such as distribution of syringes and needles and providing marijuana to smoke as "medicine."

Enabling illicit drug use contributes to AIDS and the spread of HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis, chlamydia, Kaposi's sarcoma, and other infectious and sexually transmitted diseases. Pro-drug legalization advocates and illicit drug users have deliberately used the tragedy of AIDS to promote public sympathy for public acceptance of drug use and to

undermine drug paraphernalia laws. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has chastised pro-legalization groups for perpetrating a "cruel hoax" upon sick and dying persons.

Proponents of illicit drug use ignore the strong relationship between drug use, drug toxicity, and the behavioral effects of such use in increasing the risk of AIDS and other infectious diseases. Drug legalization groups mislead compassionate individuals by focusing on routes of drug administration and supply instead of drug toxicity. Concern about the toxic and immune damaging biological effects of the drug in the needle has been severely ignored and replaced by political and social arguments to increase the supply of needles to inject the drugs. Research linking illicit drug use to the spread of HIV and infectious diseases has largely been ignored in public health strategies to deal with the AIDS problem.

Rationale:

A healthy immune system serves as the body's first line of defense for disease. Scientific research demonstrates that drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin suppress and damage one or more of the body's immune systems. A weakened immune system increases the odds of a variety of "opportunistic" infections i.e., those that occur because they have taken advantage of an opportunity which would not exist with a normal immune system.

The use of illicit drugs is highly correlated to contracting and spreading HIV and other infectious diseases. The use of illicit drugs results in impaired judgment leading to unsafe and permissive sexual activity. Drug addicts often exchange sex for drugs. Drug users often have poor nutrition and health practices which increases risk of disease and infection. The use of illicit drugs is correlated with rape and violent crime. The illicit drugs used by injecting drug users often carry bacterial and fungal contaminants. Injecting drug use carries a host of risks regardless of the sterility of the needle used.

Public and professional education on AIDS has not placed proper emphasis on the relationship between illicit drug use, the immune system, and AIDS. Social and political pressure by special interest groups has brought misdirection with AIDS education funds, which are used to focus on routes of drug use, rather than the biological effects of drug toxicity. This is a barrier to effective prevention of illicit drug use.

AIDS patients and HIV positive individuals have not been fully informed of the hazards of illicit drug use on their condition and the need to abstain from these drugs. The plethora of scientific research linking the effects of illegal drugs to impairment of the immune system and to the spread of AIDS and diseases has not been widely disclosed or disseminated.

Sufferers of AIDS and infectious disease, the public, health professionals, policymakers, and children must be informed of the role that illicit drug use has in facilitating the development and spread of these diseases. Providing hypodermic needles for HIV positive individuals to shoot drugs, rather than directing these resources to helping individuals halt drug use, is both inhumane and ineffective.

For over two decades there has been a clear correlation between increased public perception of the harmfulness of drugs and a reduction in drug use. Prevention education in the past has focused on the effects of drugs on organ damage and the respiratory system. All AIDS and drug education efforts should now provide greater focus on the effects of drugs on the immune system and their linkage to the spread of contagious disease.

Funds should be directed to scientific exploration of the biological impact of illicit drugs on the immune system and to the dissemination of this information to the public. Our limited resources must not be misdirected through the social and political pressure and misinformation of special interest groups. Compassion and science require true drug prevention and treatment, scientific research, and accurate education on "Illicit Drugs and the Immune System: AIDS and Disease."

DrugWatch international



Letter To The Editor

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

Dear Editor:

Last month a grave disservice was done to the people of Oregon and to two members of the African American community when appointments put forth by Governor Kitzhaber for Marva Fabien and Gerald McFadden were rejected by the Oregon Senate.

Fabien was nominated for reappointment to the position of Chair for the Oregon Board of Parole and Gerald McFadden was nominated to serve on the Governor's Criminal Just Council. These two were qualified based on their experiences and expertise to work toward solutions to one of the most critical symptoms of a troubled society: skyrocketing Crime. Ms. Fabien has one of the most conservative records for a Parole Board Chair in recent years and Mr. McFadden has extensive corrections experience in California and Oregon. They each received numerous letters of support from democratic and republican legislators, business and community leaders support-

ing their nominations, and were thought to be ideally suited for the respective positions.

We believe that the Oregon Senate has an obligation to confirm or withhold confirmation after considering a nominee's qualifications and philosophy on the issues and how it relates to others who's rights and views should also be critically considered. Mr. McFadden and Ms. Fabien are highly regarded members of our community and we take exception when such individuals are treated with such callous disregard. Senator Miller's refusal to extend the common courtesy of meeting Mr. McFadden, as a condition of the confirmation to meet with a non-legislative committee, with a particular perspective of the criminal justice system, and giving more deference to its recommendations than the letters of commendations supporting Mr. McFadden's confirmation, was highly inappropriate.

One member of this non-legislative committee, Mr. Fred Stewart, an African American, after meeting with

Mr. McFadden issued a letter, not recommending Mr. McFadden for confirmation. The letter by Fred Stewart was read aloud in the Senate Chambers by Senator Randy Miller, who implied that the African American community did not support Mr. McFadden's appointment and this is simply not true. It appears to members of the African American Legislative Roundtable that the use of the Stewart letter was an intentional tactic to derail the confirmation of an outstanding community resident and embarrass the Governor.

This letter and this statement condemns that process of co-opting and using an individual out of touch with community based initiatives and issues and no accountability and labeling them as a leader or spokesperson for our community to advance personal political agendas.

Mr. Stewart is often at odds with the African American community and works against consensus. The tactic may have worked for this particular issue but the fact remains that this community identifies its own lead-

ers. Mr. Stewart, who is not considered to have universal consensus or broad based support is not considered one of them.

For the record, a formal complaint regarding Senator Miller's actions and statements during the process will be delivered to the President of the Senate. Mr. Stewart was invited to sit down and discuss these and other issues that he has taken an opposing position from the community on. He accepted with a tirade of outrageous expletives but failed to show up for the meeting, indicating he had forgotten or it slipped his mind!

Sincerely, Members of the African American Legislative Roundtable.

The following individuals have granted permission for their names to be added as signatures on this letter: Baruti Artharee, Faye Burch, Margaret Carter, Carol Chism, Lawrence Dark, Antoinette Edwards, Carl Flipper, Avel Gordly, Tony Hopson, Raleigh Lewis, Joe McHenry, Shirley Minor, Lorenzo Poe, James Posey, Sandra Price, Anne Sweet, and Jaki Walker.

perspectives

Black History!

How Relevant Will It Be In The Next Millennium?

If course, you might as well ask, "How relevant will 'we' be?" As the old folks used to say, things seem to be getting down to "short rows". While that phrase may be meaningless to most of the present generation, the fate of the dinosaur certainly is not.

As the annual observance of Black History Month approaches, it is not out of order to remind the readers of

the thoughtful judgement of a number of eminent historians that "a people who ignore their history may be destroyed by it". Or, as I would say, "at the very least, they will be ignored by other people who are of the opinion that they have none; at least not worth extolling." Bill Cosby put it, "Black History: Lost, strayed or stolen".

Such a circumstance can be exceptionally disastrous for a nation whose stated goal is to achieve the ultimate in egalitarian culture, with a diversity second to none other in the world. Earlier on, it was the education and public sectors that most readily seemed to grasp the significance of this basic impediment to the removal of inequalities among the American people. Now, it is the industrial and financial institutions that are taking the lead in seeking out experienced professional who can come onto their sites with realistic tools for interfacing with their staff and/or employees.

Specifically, those whose experience and training have equipped them to interact effectively with an ever-increasingly diversified workforce. Attainable objectives in the here-and-now are perceivable improvements in human relations, increasing self-confidence and motivation toward acquiring new skills, and the upgrading of present ones. We find that firms are achieving these goals by direct hiring in their

Human Resources Departments, or by contracting with consultants on call as I am.

On another page of this week's Observer, I describe such an engagement in Beaverton, where the CEO for a major firm (a former student of mine at PSU) described classroom ex-

periences in exact correspondence to what we have been discussing. He was able to deliver first-hand testimony that

the "delivery" of demonstrated and documented evidence of the technical and intellectual accomplishments of a people could motivate 'all' members of a diverse group (see "Education For The Next Millennium"). This, though the specific experience was an introduction to the wealth of patented inventions by African Americans; all races were motivated, inspired.

Seeing united parcel at the forefront of the news, I am impressed again with their penchant for community involvement (hauling KeiKo the Killer whale to Newport). In the early 1970's the personnel manager for this very socially progressive firm took my specially designed Diversity and Affirmative Action Class, along with a score of other industry and public sector managers and personnel. At other times I would be an on-site facilitator for public agencies like the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Corp. of Engineers.

This year will be the tenth anniversary of the largest such seminar I addressed bringing to the structure my years of research and documentation of the considerable contribution of African Americans to the technology of the world. But, keep it in mind these conferences and workshops provide an opportunity for all ethnic groups to discuss and implement strategies for developing and enhancing networks and advancing the talents and skills of a diverse workforce.



By
Professor
Mckinley
Burt

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