

EDITORIAL

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

"Along The Color Line"

Race And Revolution In Cuba: An Inside Report

BY DR. MANNING MARABLE

During my recent visit to Cuba, I met many government officials, intellectuals and community leaders, who provided many critical insights.

But one of the highlights was having a lengthy conversation with Assata Shakur. She had been a prominent black American activist in the 1970s who had been unjustly imprisoned. Escaping from prison, she somehow managed to reach Cuba. Today she is a lecturer and teacher, active in local affairs, and remains an astute judge of society and politics.

Assata Shakur emphasized that while Cuba has its problems, some of the Castro government's strongest supporters are Afro-Cubans. This is because the actual conditions of daily life for black people—incomes, educational opportunities, health care, etc.—have greatly improved. The old restrictions of racial segregation which had been imposed by the US upon Cuban society have been dismantled for decades. The Castro government more recently has become supportive of black cultural and religious groups such as Santeria, which draw their orientations from African spiritual traditions. There are many black Cubans who are proud of their African heritage and culture, Shakur said, but who also support the Revolution.

lution.

Shakur's comments highlight the long and continuing relationship between African-Americans and Cuba. Black abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet had actively supported Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain over a century ago. After the revolutionaries seized power in 1959, Castro made a powerful impression among African-Americans by staying in Harlem during his first visit to the United Nations. Castro's famous September, 1960 meeting with Malcolm X, to the great consternation of the US government, reinforced the solidarity felt by progressive black Americans toward the revolutionary government. As one black newspaper, the New York Citizen-Call, defiantly described Malcolm's private session with the Cuban leader at the time: "To Harlem's oppressed ghetto dwellers, Castro was that bearded revolutionary who had thrown the nation's rascals out and who had told white America to go to hell."

Since the 1959 Revolution, Cuba has developed a special relationship with black people throughout the world. Fidel Castro has personally and politically identified himself and his entire nation with the cultural heritage and legacy of Africa. Since Afro-Cubans had been at the bottom of the social and class hierarchy be-

fore the Revolution, they have gained the most from the vast societal changes which had occurred. A quarter century after the revolution, employment, infant mortality, and life expectancy rates were better for blacks in Cuba than for blacks anywhere in the world—even in the United States. Nevertheless, when our Cuban comrades sometimes insist that racism had been completely uprooted and destroyed in their country, many African-Americans have expressed strong doubts. Any multiracial nation which had slavery for many generations would still have a powerful legacy of racial discrimination. Even in a revolutionary context, old habits and attitudes would be difficult to uproot.

How is "race" manifested with Cuban society in the 1990s? One research staff member of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee admitted to me that genuine advances for blacks "have mostly occurred in the public sphere," rather than in civil society. With the exception of some cultural reforms made in the first decade after the revolution, Cuban television today is still monochromatically white. There are virtually no black actors on television. Most Cuban playwrights and filmmakers don't want to address the contradictions of race within contemporary society, preferring instead

to focus on the role of blacks in earlier historical periods. Some white Cubans still engage in a massive denial of the existence of prejudice, yet nevertheless perpetuate and tolerate unequal treatment across the boundaries of color. White police officers today still tend to stop and interrogate Afro-Cubans much more than whites.

I spent part of one day with a prominent Cuban anthropologist, who discussed her ethnographic research in one particular urban neighborhood in Havana. She explained that although formal racial discrimination has been outlawed for years, prejudice is still virulent. "White values and standards" which were the cultural background of the traditional Cuban upper-class before the revolution continue to influence behavior. For example, no discrimination in employment is permitted, she observed, "but an employer can still manifest his prejudices by not hiring blacks. In many communities, blacks and whites live side by side, working and interacting closely. But many of these same whites 'don't want their daughters to marry black men.'"

The struggle to destroy racism still remains a central challenge in Cuba. But on balance, the Cubans are far more honest about their shortcomings, and have achieved greater racial equality for blacks than we have in the US.

Civil Rights Journal

Locking Up Children And Throwing Away The Key

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

We were all shocked more than a year ago by the story of Eric Morse, the five year old child killed by two older boys, one ten and one eleven years old, who threw Eric out the window of their Chicago housing project when he refused to steal candy for them. We were shocked by the reality of children killing children.

Now we should be shocked by the sentences which the two older boys received and what it says about us as a nation. The younger boy becomes the youngest child locked up in a maximum security juvenile prison in the country. The older is also headed for prison.

Both of these boys are living, breathing examples of what happens when parents and all the institutions of society fail children. Both are living, breathing examples of what happens to children who do not know love at home and do not find caring in schools, social agencies or the criminal justice system. Both show us what happens when little children "fall between the cracks."

They younger boy has an I.Q. somewhere around 60. The older child failed every subject in the fourth grade, only to be passed on to the fifth grade by a system that had to know he was in trouble. Often a runaway, he had been picked up by police before but he had never been seen by a social worker. His father is also imprisoned. Both boys lived most of their lives in the Ida B. Wells housing project, one of the nation's toughest.

Before this horrible case appeared in the nation's headlines children under 13 could not be sent to prison under Illinois law. Now that has changed so that children as young as 10 can be locked up in Illinois. It's a trend that is being followed in state after state. Said Jay Hoffman, an Illinois state legislator, "... That's my sense of what the public very much wants."

Like much of the national debate

around crime in this nation, public emotion and sentiment are often used as the rationale for get tough laws. Make no mistake about it.

The murder of a five year old is a heinous crime. But it was a crime committed by children, no matter how angry or defiant or hardened they may seem to be.

Indeed, much of the debate around these two child murderers centers around whether punishment or treatment should receive priority. The judge in their case seems to have weighed in on the side of punishment. But those who are studying children and violence believe that while they should be punished, that intensive psychiatric care and old-fashioned nurturing must be a significant part of what happens to them if they are to change.

Moreover, the same laws which imprison ten year olds also mandate that the children must be freed by the time they turn 21. As Dr. Bruce Perry, a psychiatrist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, said, "these

children have to get out of prison eventually. And when they do, if they haven't received intensive treatment and help, they will be the most remorseless, angry and skilled predators imaginable. What else can we expect of someone who has grown up in prison?"

The boys lawyers fear that they will end up in prison with 200 or more inmates and one part-time psychiatrist, guaranteeing that they will receive little help. Said Michelle Kaplan, the lawyer for the 13 year old in a recent New York Times interview, "there's this history leading up to this child being in crisis and no one has ever intervened. Now the system has finally intervened and they want to throw him away."

We're in trouble in this country. A nation where children are killing children must deal with what has created murderers out of children.

A nation that locks up its young and throws away the key can only create more murderers and more Eric Morses.

As a radio station which welcomes public input and participation, it is valuable. What makes KBOO especially valuable to minority communities are the twin opportunities to counter negative media images and to broadcast news and information relevant to us.

How KBOO does this is unique: by inviting ordinary people to become volunteers. Volunteers can perform in many radio related positions, angling from receptionist to computer data entry to news reporters.

Training is available for all positions...with open access to anyone sincerely interested in becoming a part of community radio. Many volunteers have gone on to find paying jobs at other stations around the country.

However, as great as they may sound, there is a responsibility attached; the responsibility of utilizing this wonderful resource. Something

as informal as "community radio" may not seem significant, but consider...information shapes the way you think, act, live.

The better informed one is, the better one can shape their world to suit themselves and the better one can protect their freedom. It's elementary that the best way to control people is to control information and, therefore, control their options. It's been done repeatedly, successfully.

It's even being done now. With the buyouts of major electronic and print media by large corporations, many news departments are finding themselves censored and regulated by their new owners. Perhaps you head how 60 Minutes had to kill a story exposing harmful and illegal practices of various tobacco companies.

Our conservative, business-oriented government also knows this. Recent legislation has drastically cut

the amount of your tax dollars available to community radio, mainly because an informed public is alert and aware. Those cuts are designed to hobble these grassroots media facilities that tell the truth about corporate piracy and government impropriety. Fortunately, volunteers keep community radio alive and well by pledging money and time. Volunteers are the lifeblood of KBOO. By volunteering at KBOO, you help your community stay informed and aware. You can combat media stereotypes, and you can have fun become alert, aware and active—"radio-active"—and volunteer at KBOO-FM. Positively impact your respective communities, to control your options, to protect your freedom.

Take a chance -- and the time -- to visit the station, and see where you could fit.

—Celeste Carey, KBOO-FM president, board of directors.

perspectives Sugar Dynamics, Thermodynamics Or Black Dynamics!

"What's in a word?" asked Shakespeare, but we are not writing about teenage lovers here (Romeo and Juliet). Beginning with last week's column we are dealing with two African American Scientists, engineers and inventors who pushed the field of thermodynamics to new heights. And it seems so appropriate that the term is derived from the Greek word for "Powerful"—dynamikos.

Last week's article centered around Norman Rillieux who invented the sugar refiner (Evaporating Pan, Patent No. 4879) and changed not only the field of chemical engineering but much else about our world. Today, I introduce another great black engineer, a man with whom I had a number of opportunities for dialogue (1974 and 1975); conversations about matters that heavily impacted African Americans, yet today.

David Crosthwait, 1891-1976
For his outstanding contributions to engineering technology. David Crosthwait was awarded an honorary doctoral degree in 1975 from Purdue University, the same school that had awarded him a B.S. in mechanical engineering 62 years earlier. In the years between, he had received 34 U.S. patents and 80 foreign patents relating to the design, installation, testing, and servicing of powerplants and heating and ventilating systems.

Crosthwait worked for the Dunham Company of Chicago during much of his career and headed its research laboratory in Marshalltown, Iowa. Later he served as technical advisor to the company.

An authority on heat transfer, ventilation, and air conditioning. Crosthwait invented several new systems. He developed the control systems and the variable vacuum system to heating for major buildings including Rockefeller Center in New York City. His writings included a manual on heating and cooling with water and guides, standards and codes dealing with heating, ventilation, refrigeration, and air conditioning.

After retiring from industry in 1969, Crosthwait continued to share his knowledge by teaching a course on steam heating theory and controls at Purdue.

I am deeply indebted to this great man for a number of insights, but two in particular. First, he warned me that, given his own experiences, I was headed for a traumatic dis-

pointment if I believed that my presentations of a newly realized impact of black scientists and inventors on the world was going to meet with a corresponding acceptance and enthusiasm among the general African American population.

Sometimes bitter and sometimes hopeful, Mr. Crosthwait would detail his encounters with "a black establishment of entrenched education and social agencies as cold and indifferent to new ideas as any other bureaucracy in America." He described experiences similar to my own; spending one's own meager funds to direct black youth into science and technology, using accounts and models from our glorious history (and personal example).

All this, while many inner-city programmers, loaded with monies for the "disadvantaged" spent a great deal of it on stop-gap measures, Black English, retreats and 'buffalo wings'. And, of course, as with my own experience in Portland, Mr. Crosthwait understood that the white establishment controls both the school systems and the inner-city social agencies. "If the black social-types can't read and comprehend that science and technology are the key to jobs and survival from now on, may the Lord help us."

This was over twenty years ago. Anyone seen any great activity lately? I'm trying to do my little thing yet, out of my social security check. And, by the way; for those fans of Norman Rillieux who made 'sugar sweeter', here is an interesting commentary.

Since his inventions were essential to sugar production and maintaining American dominance in the field, the southern sugar planters faced a perplexing problem. Rillieux was a "Negro"—how in the world could they provide him with the facilities and amenities required while he oversaw the construction of his engineering marvel on each plantation. Certainly, they couldn't put him up at the "big house" with them; The slaves would see this.

What happened was that at each installation a special house was built for Norman Rillieux—all across Louisiana and parts of Florida. They were called "Rillieux" houses; well built, several remain today.



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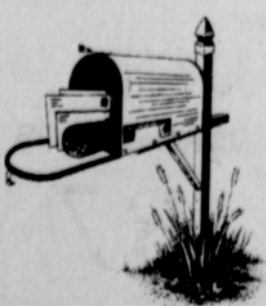
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