

EDITORIAL

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

Some days, there's just too much rain in the Rainbow. Since 1968, April 4th has been a solemn time--today marks the 28th year since Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination pushed the course of American history into a downward spiral.

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Brown Is A Color In Our Rainbow

As we reflect on those 28 intervening years--on the failure of this great and wealthy nation to protect the social safety net that Dr. King helped expand and create; on the malign neglect of our declining urban centers, now seen mainly as site locations for new stadiums and jails; on the lack of attention to our children, 1/4 of whom are growing up in poverty--we can measure how far we still must travel on Dr. King's road.

April 4th is a day to think about our own history; a day to renew our commitment to the struggle; a day to remind our nation that Dr. King died defending the rights of working men and women of all colors to organize, to strike, to participate fully in our democracy, and to live in peace; a day to remember those who have made a difference.

In the true spirit of April 4th, Reverend Jackson spent the pre-dawn hours Thursday rallying the mostly female, mostly African American, very underpaid workers at a poultry plant in rural N.C. as they prepared to vote in a union election.

This year, April 4th carries an even heavier burden, with the sad and premature death of Ron Brown. We will not forget him, especially

those of us who knew him personally, were touched by his warmth, graced by his generosity, or elevated by his leadership.

Ron Brown's personal history is strongly intertwined with our own Movement. When, in February, 1989, Ron Brown was elected as the first African-American chair of this nation's largest political party, he entered his name in the history books.

His historic election came as a direct result of the success of, and his role in, Jesse Jackson's 1988 Presidential Campaign.

Ron Brown oversaw our National Convention operations in Atlanta that July, helped negotiate a united Democratic Party that left the convention with a 17% lead, and insisted that Reverend Jackson had earned the prime-time nationwide speech that riveted 50 million Americans to their television sets.

[I would also proudly note that along with current White House Deputy Chief

of Staff Harold Ickes, Ron Brown helped us win the fight for proportional representation above 15% that we had waged for years. That change in the delegate selection rules has produced the two least fictionalized, least bitter primary fights in the party's recent history--a result directly opposite of the conventional wisdom.]

In the fall of 1988, I found myself one of the lucky few brought together to map out Ron Brown's campaign for party chair. By uniting the Jackson and Kennedy wings of the Democratic Party, along with organized labor, and despite both vocal and covert opposition, we were able to systematically drive 4 other opponents out of the race.

By the time the votes were cast, the "unthinkable" had become the "inevitable"--and Ron was elected Chair of America's oldest political party by acclamation.

DNC Chair Brown proved much more than a symbol. He literally re-

built a dispirited Democratic Party. Ron brought in Paul Tully to reinvent Coordinated Campaigns; he raised more money than ever; he opened up the Democratic Party to all its constituencies; he carried the torch for the party when George Bush's ratings soared above 90%; he travelled endlessly for the party, building a structure that helped elect Dinkins in New York, Wilder in Virginia, Rice in Seattle (all candidacies built upon the foundation of Jesse Jackson's 2 Presidential races!); and finally, he led the party to victory at all levels in 11/92--bringing an overdue end to the Reagan/Bush Era. This will be Ron Brown's legacy.

Ron was Reverend Jackson's friend; he was my friend; he was the Rainbow's friend. And his victories would have been impossible, without the sweat of Jesse Jackson and the NRC.

We will miss him. Brown is a color in our Rainbow. Today our sweat has turned to tears.

[Other notes, in a day of eulogies: we note with sadness the passing of Cleveland's first African-American Mayor, Carl Stokes, who won a ground-breaking victory in 1967 (Rev. Jackson will speak at Mayor Stokes' service Monday); an untimely car crash in South Africa, which took the life of Haywood Burns, distinguished law school dean and freedom fighter; and the death of our friend Bill Morton, former aide to Rev. Jackson, who also died in the plane crash that took the life of Ron Brown. They all served our people, and we wish their families well.]

perspectives

Community Overwhelmed By Extent Of School Problems

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT
The Oregon Education Association has suggested that our 'problems' may very well be "The Manufactured Crisis." The March, 1996 issue of its monthly publication featured supporting quotes from the coauthor of a book by that title (David C. Berliner, Addison, Wesley, 1995).

And the same article abstracts the following portentous advisement from a feature story appearing in the March, 1966 issue of Better Homes and Gardens Magazine.

"The Good news About Our Schools - School-bashing is a popular Pastime, but Americans are being misled. It's time to set the record straight."

But Portland (and Oregon) Teachers, pupils, parents and taxpayers all seem of the opinion that something 'is' wrong with the educational system and they will be "dammed if it's 'manufactured'." Last week I pointed out some critical concerns, "Media Reports Indicate Portland's Education System Ready For Triage" (an emergency medical system for maximizing disaster survivors).

And it was in this column that I reported the rather urgent tone of the recent Governor's Education Summit, "led by the CEO of the IBM Corporation who paraphrased the very same "basic-skills-deficiencies" I have cited time and again." As a group of concerned teachers remarked to me, "Some of our glorious leaders seem to have adopted that 'Humpty Dumpty' logic you have often written about (things are what I say they are)."

The sad spectacle does make it seem as though our school system has been transformed into a Lewis Carroll fairy tale. The teacher organizations and the industry/human resource people are poles apart in their evaluations of the graduates who seek to enter the workforce; "just what is it they know and how well do they know it? -- and beyond that, isn't there something else they should know?"

The most reported and most dis-

cussed, of course, are the highly emotional issues centering around pay scales, seniority and merit pay, classroom size, state-wide equalization of funding/local options and even the less-heated arguments centering around the 'risk' of immunization -- and escalations of the use of the drug Ritalin to "quiet the unruly."

Funding, of course, is the most immediate problem, granting that it has been a perennial structural failure of local, state and most national education systems for ages. Next week we will examine some of the many proposals being offered as solutions for a very vexing problem, an adequate, stable and affordable support system. In the interim I will indulge myself in the following commentary, given that there are those who would rather not know.

It has been persons of an 'African persuasion' who have pioneered well-structured educational processes throughout history. National Geographic Magazine has detailed that 4000 years ago the Africans in Egypt had set up "endowment funds to support the many temple schools. Farmers and orchardists were assessed each year for a fixed percentage of the agricultural bounty. The records left, etched in stone detail the efficient educational process that produced the erudition at which Plato and other Greeks were to marvel; stability over millenniums, not just year-to-year.

And then, of course, it was Shakespeare's jet-black conquering, Arabic-speaking Moors whose universities in Africa and Europe restored learning in the Western World and rescued Europe from its "Dark Ages". And then in America, we find that contrary to the movie "Birth Of A Nation", the Congressional record shows that intelligent and well educated black congressmen -- not only patented their many inventions and promoted industrial fairs -- but introduced the first federal legislation to support and stabilize education (1870's Senator Blanche K. Bruce).



By Professor McKinley Burt

Civil Rights Journal: Burying Racism

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
We hear the stories of how racism is a thing of the past. We see the interviews with those who write books based on that premise. We hear the stories of the Clarence Thomases and Ward Connerlys who say they have never experienced racism. But too often we don't hear the stories like that of

Jamie Wireman and Jeffrey Johnson and their baby, Whitney. Jamie Wireman is a 18 year-old white woman in love with a young black man, Jeffrey Johnson, in Thomasville, GA. Last month their baby, Whitney, was born incomplete and not fully formed. She lived only 19 hours. "God let her live long enough so that I could hold her. I wouldn't take a million dollars for

that time," said Ms. Wireman in a New York Times interview.

But the death of their baby was only part of the nightmare for Ms. Wireman and Mr. Johnson. The baby's mother wanted Whitney buried next to her grandfather so she would have company. But three days after her burial, the deacons of the church found out that Whitney's father is black. They asked the parents to move

Whitney's body for their all-white cemetery.

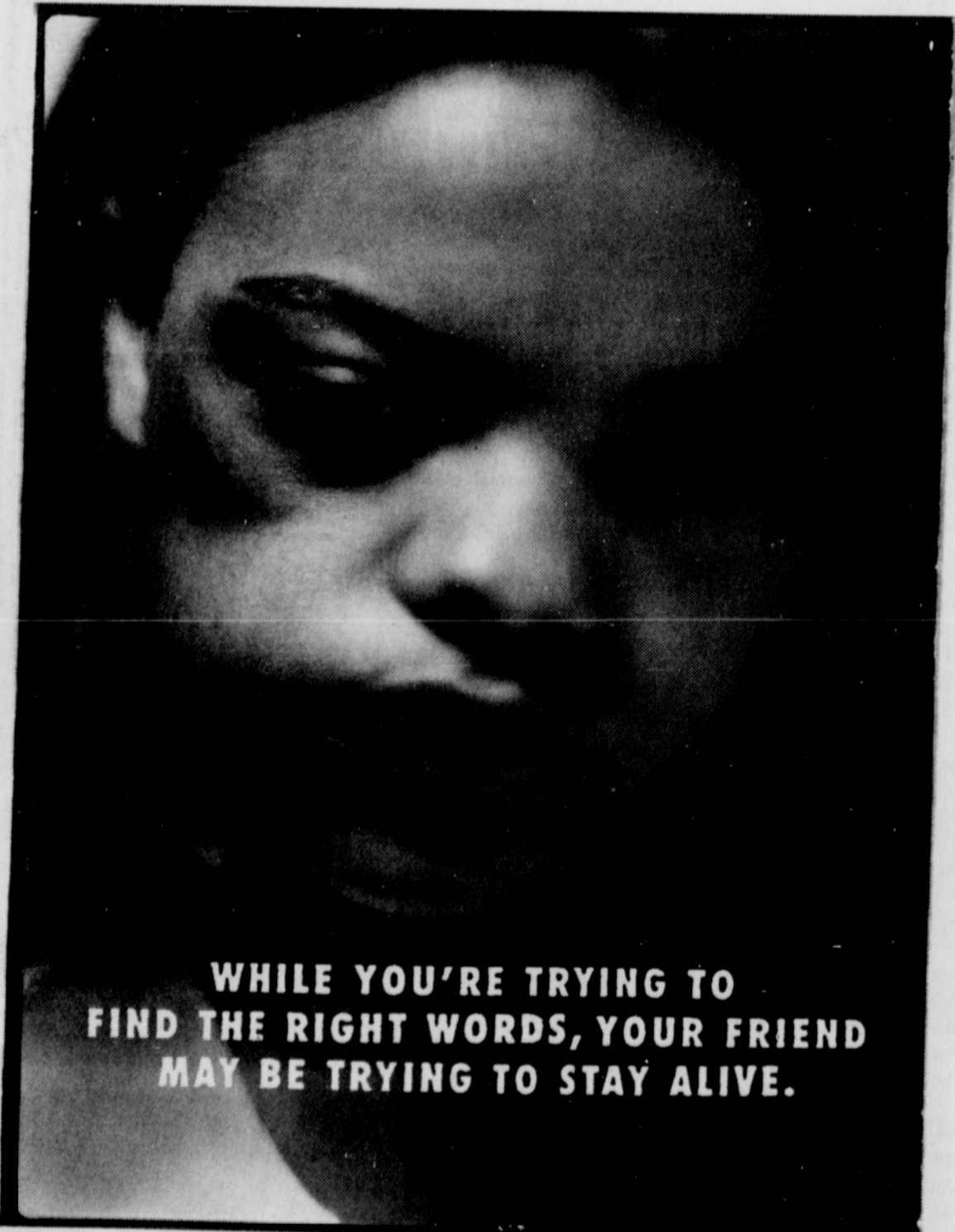
Segregated cemeteries are still a way of life in some parts of America it seems. Not only can we still not live together, we still cannot die together. Many Northerners are often surprised to hear that segregation followed African Americans after death. In most instances that has changed. But little Whitney Johnson, who lived less than one day, shows us that racism is still alive and well in cemeteries and in churches in this country.

When my father died in the Nation's Capital in 1956, he was buried in the all-black Lincoln Memorial Cemetery, which was all the way across town from where we lived. Across the street from Lincoln was a white cemetery and as a child I remember looking at its little brook with the picturesque bridge going over it as we entered our very plain cemetery.

It was nearly twenty years later before the cemetery nearest my house in Washington began to bury black folks. Like the cemetery in Thomasville, it, too, was a church cemetery.

After the storm of condemnation that followed the deacons' decision to ask the family to remove little Whitney's body, they relented and let her stay. And after the baby's grandmother insisted, they even apologized to the parents. "I wanted them to admit what they did and say they were sorry for it," she explained.

Unfortunately, this story does not stop there. The deacons now have told the young parents that they were living in sin and that their baby was a product of that sin. But, when the parents asked to be married in their church, the deacons refused. Maybe Ward Connerly, the wealthy ally of Governor Pete Wilson of California and the sponsor of the California Civil Rights Initiative to end affirmative action, has never experienced racism. But Whitney Johnson, who only lived 19 hours, did and so do her parents.



WHILE YOU'RE TRYING TO FIND THE RIGHT WORDS, YOUR FRIEND MAY BE TRYING TO STAY ALIVE.

Talking with a friend who's being beaten up by her husband will never be easy. We understand that you want to say just the right thing, in just the right way. If you need help finding the right words, call 1-800-END ABUSE and we'll send you useful information and suggestions. Whatever you do, however, don't wait too long to offer her your help. At least one out of every three murdered women is killed by her husband or boyfriend. So your friend might not have the luxury of time.

THERE'S NO EXCUSE for Domestic Violence.



Family Violence Prevention Fund

Letter To The Editor.
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