

The Theory Of A Black Middle-Class: Concluded

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

A young woman had this comment to make about the whole affair: "My grandfather used to go around the house singing a song from his youth, 'Is you is or is you aint, my baby'. I don't know quite how to put it, but it seems that we (blacks) have a split-personality as a group; going in two directions at the same time, a dichotomy."

Well, that's been said before, and by some heavyweights, black and white. But first, let me correct some misconceptions that might arise from last week's article (next to last paragraph). The university course I designed and taught at PSU, "Black Economic Experience" was not intended to present the exploitive "Black Market Men" in a good light, or as role models.

Rather, I was, A), pointing out that the very same techniques of analytic demographics could have been used by African Americans themselves to harness the tremendous buying power of the group (trillions). Instead, the Black Market Men packaged an entire race and sold them to the 'Fortune 500'. There was a structure here to finance and entire economy of black-owned markets, shops, factories, etc.

And B). And at the same time these hucksters forged and shaped a new "black middle-class", elevating

brand-name conscious consumers to the level of super-consumers--with all the desires and tastes of a "leisure class" but hardly any of the necessary commercial substructure. Ebony, Jet and similar magazines lit up the "conspicuous consumption" stage with the most beautifully designed and effective advertising campaigns ever created by psychologists.

Mainly, they were about liquor, tobacco, automobiles and an expensive haute couture. Look back at some of the 1950 and 1960 issues of 'black' publications: "the very popular Mr. and Mrs. Jones dining on the patio of their \$250,000 home, entertaining friends" (Beefeater and Schenley labels are prominently displayed, though a fog of cigarette smoke almost obscures the Eldorados, Jags and Mercedes). "Conspicuous is graphically defined.

This leads one to consider, "what forces are shaping the black middle-class today? Are we victims or are we in control? Are we still suffering from that earlier failure to 'seize-the-day'? Is it the case that we must completely rebuild a structure which seems to have real meaning only to market men? Perhaps, like James Champy's "Re-engineering the Corporation," we need to "Re-engineer the black middle-class.

As I said at the beginning of this

series, there is not the time nor space to fully develop, analyze and place closure on this subject. But I would draw attention to several more significant factors that have shaped (or limited) the development of full-blown, self-sustaining black middle-class. Shouldn't 'upward mobility' have reality?

In answer to one young woman's query, I certainly do believe that the black woman's role is critical to such development. The economic and political dynamics of their contribution is, and always has been a critical factor (not to mention 'nurturing'. To trace this role from slavery to 1984, see "Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family" Jacqueline Jones, Vintage books pb. 1986. Very excellent notes on the literature.

I have emphasized in these pages, at other times and places, the traumatic stresses that all Americans are undergoing today. The harsh realities of economic uncertainty--from layoffs to pension-doubts--give rise to despair and social frictions. It is rather obvious that we could have better prepared for this day. In a recent edition of the "Los Angeles Sentinel," a black newspaper a glowing tribute was paid to a 'Black Market Family; the clan who would finance every race but their own.

Black Jewish Relations

The American Jewish Committee in New York City and Howard University in Washington, D.C. have joined together to publish "Common Quest: the Magazine of Black-Jewish Relations." The magazine was launched officially on May 7 at a reception at Howard.

The magazine seeks to provide a place where the differences and commonalities between blacks and Jews can be explored in a tough-minded and civil fashion. It will also examine broader issues such as the impact of poverty on race relations, the present political landscape, and the changing nature of ethnic, religious, and racial relations in the United States.

"In recent decades honest, some-

times painful disagreements over public issues have divided African Americans and Jews of good will," said Robert Rifkind, president of the American Jewish Committee. Asks Rifkind, does not Common Quest "constitute an affirmation of our faith in our shared humanity?"

H. Patrick Swygert, President of Howard University, expects the magazine to energize the dialogue between the black and Jewish communities. "We have the potential here to reaffirm and strengthen one of the more effective progressive partnerships in our country's history. Our interests aren't identical, but where they overlap we should struggle together," he said.

Davis Recalls WW II Racism



Paying respects: The actor Ossie Davis receives an award from Gen. Colin Powell following the National Memorial Day Concert in 1992. Davis was recognized for honoring World War II Veterans at the ceremony.

Actor Ossie Davis was extremely "depressed" by the pronounced racism he experienced among fellow American soldiers when he served in World War II and swore never to participate in Memorial Day celebrations.

"I did not want to get involved in anything that glorified war," Davis said in an interview with this Sunday's Parade magazine, in which he explained why he is hosting third year's National Memorial Day Concert in Wash-

ington, D.C.

Davis, now 78, who served as a surgical technician in North Africa, recalled watching a white soldier choose to die rather than accept care from black medics. He also witnessed German prisoners of war being treated with more dignity than the African-American troops.

"I felt betrayed," he recalled. "I had come to feel that I had been not only a patriot but a fool. I left the Army very depressed."

Asked why, then, he agreed to host the concert, he said, "I realized that no matter what I thought of war, we should pay tribute to those both living and dead who sacrificed."

"The military has also made significant strides," he added. "Colin Powell was no accident. He was affirmation of what has changed. One of the things I'm proudest of about America is that once she got into it, she came up with a color-blind Army."

One Strike And Your're Out

No probation, no parole, no early release, Ballot Measure 11, voted in by Oregon voters went into effect last year on April Fool's Day. It means mandatory minimum sentences for teens, 15 to 21 years of age, who commit crimes such as robbery, assault, sexual abuse and manslaughter.

Rogers Heads Albina Bank's Residential Loan Team

Lynn Rogers has joined Albina Community Bank as Vice President, Residential Lending. She comes from Keybank, where she served for several years as the Community Reinvestment Officer.

Lynn Rogers brings a strong background in community reinvestment, especially in the North/Northeast communities of Portland. As a member of the Advisory Council for Project Down Payment, Lynn was instrumental in promoting a program of assistance for



Lynn Rogers

first-time home buyers.

Lynn has fond memories of her childhood in Detroit and would like all families to enjoy "good old days" of their own.

Albina Community Bank is a new community development bank dedicated to assisting low-to-moderate-income residents take advantage of economic opportunities in North and Northeast Portland. The bank will move this summer to a new location at 2202 NE MLK Jr. Blvd.

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