

EDITORIAL

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

Civil Rights Journal: The Shame Continues

By Bernice Powell Jackson

It was shocking. To drive down that country road outside Meridian, MS and turn onto a parking area and see only charred remains of what used to be a house of God. Only the concrete steps were left standing of what was once St. Paul's Primitive Baptist Church. Gone were the pews. Gone was the pulpit. Gone was the cross. Only a few pieces of burned wood and ashes, a little bit of the siding and the memories of the people were left.

The fire started on Easter Sunday, but because this little country church only meets two Sundays a month, no one was there. The local officials came, followed by the Justice Department. They sifted through the ashes for nearly two days. And then after they left, a second fire started, destroying everything.

And, like in many of the 31 cases of black church burnings since the beginning of 1995, the officials are

investigating the deacons or the pastors first, accusing them of burning down their own churches, intentionally or accidentally. In this case, they say it was accidentally started by a deacon who put out a cigarette as he was locking up.

But when you see the building's remains and see that the church sat up two feet off the ground, you see how unlikely that was. When you know how reverent black folks are about their churches, you know no deacon would ever have been so careless. And when you see the pattern of the firebombings in churches across the South, you realize how unlikely it is that these burnings are unconnected, random acts.

I joined a National Council of Churches delegation visiting with the pastors of many of the burned churches and over and over again we heard the same stories. The story of how both local and federal officials first investigated the pastors and deacons.

Even through many of the churches were uninsured or underinsured, even when two black churches in the same community were burned the same night, officials suspected that the churches were burned down by those who loved them the most. In some cases, that seems to be as far as the investigation has gotten.

We heard stories of white men seen near the fires, sometimes by the fire fighters, but never heard about again. We heard stories of expletives being painted on buildings, and then being painted over by investigators and never mentioned again. We heard stories of how months have passed with no contact from local or federal investigators. We heard the story of one black judge in Alabama who was bold enough to sentence the white men responsible for a church burning having his house shot at in the middle of the night. We heard stories of how officials told church people in Tennessee towns not to talk about what happened, so that

months passed before they realized what was going on all round them.

On Monday we visited with a group of pastors who had come to Nashville to tell their stories of what was happening in their communities. They told of the unanswered questions, the cloud of suspicion placed over them, the questioning of their members. But they also expressed their commitment to re-build.

Indeed, many of them already have re-built, often with their congregations going into debt to do so. As the assistant pastor of the Inner City Church in Knoxville said, "If they burn us again, we'll re-build. They're not going to run us out of our community."

We were in Tennessee on Monday. On Tuesday another black church was burned there.

(You may write to Attorney General Janet Reno at Department of Justice, Constitution Avenue & 10th Street, NW, Room 4400, Washington, DC 20530.)

Vantage Point

The Making Of The Second Post Reconstruction

BY RON DANIELS

One hundred years after the historic Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme court Decision which sanctioned the doctrine of "separate but equal" and provided the judicial capstone for the betrayal of the civil rights of Africans in America, there is a view that Black America is experiencing a second Post Reconstruction.

One could argue that the period from 1954 to 1965 marked the second Reconstruction period with the milestone Brown vs Board of Education decision sparking a civil rights revolt that resulted in several new civil rights laws culminating with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Taken together the Court decisions, presidential executive orders and civil rights laws essentially reclaimed that which Black America lost after the betrayal of 1876 and the onslaught of Post Reconstruction. The Voting Rights Act in particular unleashed a mobilization of Black electoral power that resulted in the election of

thousands of Black people to public office.

However, by the time Martin Luther King journeyed to Memphis, as he prepared to launch the Poor People's Campaign, he was sounding the alarm about a "white backlash" that threatened to stall the steady march of Africans in America towards first class citizenship. Indeed, the white backlash that King warned about steadily gained momentum. During the Nixon years there was a concerted effort to curtail civil rights enforcement in response to the "silent majority." Ronald Reagan borrowed the "burden of government" themes of George Wallace's campaigns for President, with all of the racist code words and phrases, to propel himself into the White House.

Once in office Reagan launched an all out assault on civil rights and affirmative action introducing such terms as "reverse discrimination" and "black racism" into the national dialogue on race relations in America. The Justice Department under Reagan was assigned to dismantle

civil rights laws or interpret them in such a way as to undermine their original intent. The not so subtle message of Reagan's attack on civil rights and affirmative action was that the federal statutes enacted by Congress and the decisions rendered by the courts were infringing on the rights of White Americans.

Throughout the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations there was a gradual erosion of the gains of the civil rights movement as the conservative forces fueled the white backlash against Black progress. The assault on civil rights and affirmative action reached its apex, however, with the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court by George Bush and the Republican capture of both houses of Congress in November of 1994.

With the appointment of Clarence Thomas, a Black conservative, to the Supreme Court, the reactionary forces gained the majority within the body which had promoted and defended civil rights for more than three decades. And, the rise to power

of Newt Gingrich and company with a majority in both houses of Congress positioned the conservative forces to initiate a legislative attack on civil rights, affirmative action and related issues through the racist and reactionary Contract with America.

Though there are qualitative differences between 1896 and 1996, there is no doubt that once again forces within White America are at work to thwart the forward advance of Africans in America. And, just as the Supreme Court of a hundred years ago provided the judicial sanction for our reversal of fortune, the current Supreme Court is leading the charge in turning back the clock on Black advancement.

The Supreme Court with brother Mr. Justice Thomas casting the decisive votes is systematically destroying affirmative action as an instrument to overcome past and present discrimination, and gutting the Voting Rights Act as a tool which produced the largest number of Blacks in Congress since Reconstruction.

American Violence In Black And White

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Ph.D

"Why is the FBI being so soft on them? They've got to do something." The resident of Jordan, Montana was bewildered that more than a month (and still counting) later a small army of FBI agents waited patiently for the band of 20 Freeman holed up in a Montana ranch house to surrender. The Freeman were wanted for land theft, check fraud, swindling banks, public institutions, and businesses of \$1.8 million. The FBI wait-out cost the taxpayers \$300,000 per day and Montana residents an added \$250,000.

FBI officials say they wanted to avoid a repeat of the blood bath that followed the siege at Waco and Ruby Ridge, which touched off public outrage and congressional investigations over FBI tactics. Ramona Africa was probably bewildered that law enforcement didn't take the same precautions to avoid bloodshed and the destruction of property in Philadelphia a decade ago. A week after the FBI wait-out in Montana began, Africa filed a multi-million dollar lawsuit in federal court against Philadelphia city officials for the March 1985 bombing of MOVE headquarters that killed 11 MOVE members.

Although local police confronted MOVE and the FBI confront the Freeman, there are similarities. MOVE, like the Freeman, was as radical fringe group. Their members were armed. They had members in jail and a history of prior confrontations with the law. Women and children were in the siege house. Neighbors and area residents complained about them. The bomb dropped on MOVE contained C-4 explosive was reportedly supplied by the FBI.

But there are also differences be-

tween the law enforcement confrontation with MOVE and the Freeman. The Freeman sunbathe, ride horses, dance jigs, receive visitors, and plow their fields in full view of the FBI. Their armed supporters patrol the back roads keeping the press and on-lookers out. Their sympathizers have an open platform in newspapers, on radio, and national TV talk shows to spout their views. MOVE didn't.

In less than 48 hours, a Philadelphia police helicopter dropped the C-4 bomb on the roof of the MOVE headquarters. Six adults and 5 chil-

"Their terrorist threats, tactics, criminal activities, and violence are not the stuff of nightly Action News reports, press features, editorials, and exposes."

dren were incinerated, 61 homes destroyed, and 350 resident were left homeless. Three days after the MOVE bombing then Attorney General Edwin Meese told the California Peace Officers Association that the bombing was "a good example for us all to take note of."

The biggest difference, however, between the two groups is that the MOVE activists were black men, women, and children. The Freeman are mostly white males.

In the decade since the MOVE bombing, armed white "anti-government" militants like the Freeman have committed dozens of bank robberies, shot it out with FBI, IRS, BATF officers, attacked federal land agents, stockpiled mountains of weapons, openly tested bombs, and conducted military maneuvers.

A year after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, 441 active "anti-government" militia groups operate in all fifty states and have paramilitary training sites in 23 states. One hundred and thirty-seven groups have ties to white supremacist organizations like the Klan and the Aryan Nation. Last July the Aryan Nation, active in 22 states, held its Annual Aryan World Congress near Hayden, Idaho. It drew 200 white supremacists. Militia groups have more than 100 World Wide Web sites to spew their hatred

probation. Nearly half of America's one million prisoners are black. The top heavy number of black men in jail reinforces the public view that they commit most of the major violent crime in America.

They don't. White males commit fifty-four percent of violent crimes in America, sixty percent of the urban hate crimes and the majority of serial and mass murders.

The O.J. Simpson, Mike Tyson, Mel Reynolds, and Colin Ferguson trials dominated press headlines for months. The legal actions involving accused Oklahoma City bombers, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols; accused mass serial murders, Glen Walters and Charles Rathburn; accused child murderer Richard Allan Davis; and accused double murderer Robert Acremont have barely made a media ripple.

There are thousands of Freeman, Militia, Patriot, Aryan Nation, Order, and neo-Nazi members at large. They are well armed and financed. They have the tacit support of dozens of public officials, and the sympathy of millions of Americans. Many of their members agree with William Pierce who in the rabidly racist, anti-Semitic fictional blueprint for terror Turner Diaries wrote that "We are in a war for the survival of our race." Their key to victory is terror and mass destruction.

While they often get kid glove treatment from law enforcement, militant groups like MOVE get swiftly attacked and harshly prosecuted. Violence may come in black and white, but law enforcement does not treat both the same.

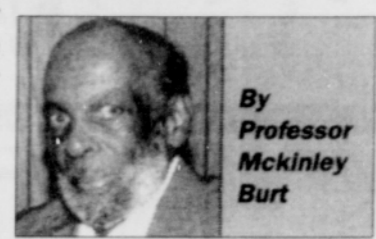
Responses may be sent e-mail to Earl Ofari Hutchinson: ehutchi344@aol.com

perspectives

Our Summer Reading List: Motivations, Factual, Inspiring, P111art II

This week, I am presenting a most "eclectic" list; as Webster says, "selecting what appears to be the best in various doctrines, methods, or styles".

History, prose or poetry, these are the best. Thank you for your comments on last week's list; happy to be able to "open your mind" as one reader put it. Africa led in the healing profes-



By Professor Mckinley Burt

sions. First, let me cite three books that will broaden your appreciation of early African civilization fully as much as those revelations of medical firsts. And keep in mind that when we speak of "Egypt" of ancient days, we speak not of arbitrary boundaries and restrictions established by European marauders and colonialists -- but of Nile Valley cultures which were, of structural necessity, integral at various times with Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya (language, technology, religion agriculture, literature).

"Ancient Egyptian construction and Architecture," Clarke and Engelbach, Dover Publications Inc. a thoroughly enjoyable book written for the layman and well illustrated. Much more to be appreciated since the racists and revisionists have been proven quite wrong in their allegations that the monumental architectural achievements of the Africans required hordes of slaves.

Excavations the last two decades reveal elaborate housing complexes built next to major engineering sites such as pyramids, dams, canals and urban developments. Permanent housing for projects which might require decades or a century to complete, reflected the social structure of the workforce. The laborers and minor craftsmen were provided small but comfortable two or three-room apartments while foremen and supervisors occupied larger, more sophisticated quarters to match their rank.

"Music And Musicians In Ancient Egypt", Lise Manniche, Dover Publications Inc. this book is a true treasure with excellent illustrations and with notes on Egyptian musical conventions and terminology. The author, a Danish

egyptologist, has included the lyrics of several songs in the "established genre" of Egyptian literature. Dover Publications, Inc. @ 31 E. Mineola, N.Y. 11501 or call (516) 242-6657 to order and/or re-

ceive catalog (same for first book cited).

"African Music: A Peoples Art", Josephine Bennett, Lawrence Hill & Co.,

1975. Here, we leap to the twentieth century, but again with an excellent text, photographs, supporting notes and appendices. The basic elements of a discography are provided under a geographical classification. And there are revealing insights into both the musician and the aesthetics of his art; the book is highly recommended.

"Conversations With God: Two Centuries of Prayer by African Americans", James Melvin Washington. Composed between 1760 and today, these 190 prayers represent an indomitable spirit that has flourished in the face of horrendous odds" (Christianity Today). There's Douglass, Hughes, King, Dubois, Baldwin, Wright, Walker, Truth, Thurman, 347 pages, hard cover \$14.95, No. 71618, The Religious Book Club, P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961-7000; (508) 977-5000, S&H 3.00.

Also, I stopped by the Reflections Bookstore the other day to replenish some of my library standards (lost) strayed or stolen) and to pick up anything new and interesting. I've got to get up to N.E. Martin Luther King Blvd. and N.E. Killingsworth more often. I picked up the following books at this well-stocked collection of black history and culture.

The following three books are by Cheikh Anta Diop, that most renowned and respected African Scholar:

"The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The-Domains of Patriarchy and of Patriarchy"

"Precolonial Black Africa: Systems Compared"

"Civilization or Barbarism: And Authentic Anthropology."

And another classic by a renowned scholar of African History, Ivan Van Sertima, "They Came Before Columbus".

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