

# EDITORIAL

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

**A**s we celebrate the 220th birthday of the United States of America, JaxFax would like to focus in on that key phrase of Jefferson's from the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal..."

America is a nation born in revolution, founded on the idea of freedom and set of principles that the rest of the world has long admired and respected. Yet the United States was also, as Rev. Jackson says, harking back to Isaiah, born in iniquity (and inequity).

Founded half-slave, and half-free, with slaveowners prominent in many of the key positions of power in the early Republic, America has yet to resolve the contradictions of its slaveholding past, and the legacy of slavery that still afflicts so many of our fellow citizens. Many of those who suffered the most are still waiting for their long-promised "40 acres and a mule."

"All men are created equal..." We know that this is still not true--too much of each baby's future opportunity is still determined by where, and how, and to whom that baby is born.

- 1/5 of all children born in America live in poverty--over 15 million kids.

## NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

### Born On The 4th Of July

- Child poverty rates in many of our major cities exceed 35%, with African American child poverty rates over 50%.
  - 10 million children have no health insurance.
  - 13 million children live in families that run out of food before the end of the month, every month.
  - We rank 15th in the industrialized world in infant mortality.
- [Facts taken from Common Agenda Coalition report; for more information, call 202.388.1535.]
- More whites commit crimes; more Blacks are in jail.
  - Most poor people are not on welfare; they work every day. Most poor people are not Black; they're white, and female, and young. In fact, 2/3 of AFDC recipients are children. Yet poverty in America wears a "Black

mask," and is defined as a "special interest." We must "whiten" the face of poverty in America, as was done in the Dust Bowl '30s and the Appalachian '60s, so that poverty becomes a national interest again.

Our children may be created equal; but they are born into such unequal circumstances--constricted by monetary inheritance, no affordable housing, dangerous neighborhoods, failing schools, downsizing job opportunities, and lack of hope--that the course of their lives is demonstrably unequal.

This has been true from the beginning. America's original definition of equality was far too narrow, and fell far short of America at its best. The "We, the People" that got to participate in governing our early nation included only white males with

property. No lower class white males. No women. No Hispanics, yet to be conquered into the nation. No Native Americans, whose land was yet to be fully stolen, and whose people were not yet decimated. No African Americans, who were officially valued in the Constitution as only 3/5 of a person.

America has gotten better since then, because everyday Americans have forced it to expand, to become more inclusive, to mature as a democratic society. America has been at its best when it has been forced by its own people to expand the ranks of its democracy.

First, white males won the right to participate. Second, the Civil War established for a short while the right of African American males to be included in government, until lynchings and cross burnings, Jim Crow laws, and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision ended our first Reconstruction in 1896.

But our people continued to struggle. Women won the right of suffrage earlier this century. The union movement vastly expanded the rights of average people in the 1930s, and improved life for millions and millions of Americans.

## Civil Rights Journal: For Fear Of Plessy

**BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON**  
There are students of history who believe that history goes in cycles.

That is, the fear of African Americans who know our history and the record of this country when it comes to our community.

One hundred years ago, the United States Supreme Court rendered a decision which changed the fate of African Americans for generations. Known as Plessy v. Ferguson, it established the nation's "separate but equal" doctrine which legalized separate public facilities and separate educational facilities for African Americans in states all across the South. And while the separate part of the doctrine was strictly enforced,

the equal part was quickly forgotten. Southern states, for example, quickly decreased their spending on education facilities for blacks, with dollars for white pupils often being allocated at twice the amount for blacks. Southern black school rooms often had no textbooks and lower salaries for black teachers.

Public facilities suffered the same fate, with train cars for African Americans being dirty, noisy, and ramshackle, while white passengers rode in comfort. Separate bathrooms, water fountains and eating facilities were the rule of thumb in the South, even in my childhood. Separate had nothing to do with equal.

The Plessy case came about as a result of the attempt by Homer

Adolph Plessy, a New Orleans shoemaker of color to ride in the first class coach on a train between New Orleans and Covington, L.A. He boarded the train, taking a seat in a coach reserved for whites only. When he refused to obey the conductor's command to move to the car for blacks, he was arrested and imprisoned. The New Orleans black community hoped that they would find justice in the courts, but instead they found segregation legalized and "Jim Crow" laws established.

But the Plessy case was really only one response of the county to the period after the Civil War called Reconstruction, when freed slaves found newly-won political power. During Reconstruction, 22 blacks

were elected to the U.S. Congress and dozens more elected to state legislatures. Former slaves learned to read and write; some became business and farm owners.

The Plessy case was part of a reactionary wave of segregation laws passed in response to the growing economic and political clout of African Americans during Reconstruction.

Southern states amended their constitutions to take away practically all of the blacks to vote. African Americans were excluded from juries and the convict lease system was rapidly expanded. Lynchings increased to 161 in 1892 alone; often their victims also were burned at the stake.

## Vantage Point

### "To Every Thing There Is A Season": It's Time For War

**BY RON DANIELS**  
The terrible toll of the assault on the heart and soul of Black America continues to rise.

According to data compiled by the Atlanta based Center for Democratic Renewal, nearly 100 African American churches have been burned, vandalized or desecrated since 1990. There is yet another season of discontent in Amerikkka and Black churches are being burned as white supremacist sects in general and much of White America in general scapegoat/blame Black people for the woes of this nation. In a broader sense, it is really the soul of Amerikkka which is singing from the flames of its own historical legacy of conquest, colonization, dispossession, racism, white supremacy and capitalist exploitation of indigenous people, Africans, Latinos, Asians, women and the masses of White poor and working people. As W.E.B.

DuBois prophesied, the root of Amerikkka's woes is the "color line," the problem of race and racism in U.S. society.

Racism and white supremacy are the unresolved contradictions in the American character. It is racism and the ideology of white supremacy which fuels the hatred towards Africans in Amerikkka and other people of color. It is racism and White supremacy that allows a few, mostly White men, at the commanding heights of capital and finance, the rich and the super-rich, to grow fat off the ruthless exploitation of Black people, people of color and white supremacy which blinds most White people to their own exploitation/oppression away from the real enemy. It is racism and white supremacy which divides White poor and working people from potential allies with whom they should be working in concert to create a just and humane society.

There is yet another season of

discontent in Amerikkka as corporations by the hundreds downsize hurling millions of workers into the unemployment lines or low wage jobs, ruining the promise of the "American dream." The working poor are on the increase. Welfare, social programs and the safety nets are being shredded. Schools in the ghettos, barrios and reservations are crumbling and dispensing inferior education. The housing stock is blighted and inadequate. Homeless people roam the streets of every urban center. Bridges are falling down. The stock market keeps going up. The prison-jail industrial complex is an excellent investment. Stock holders rejoice as the bottom line keeps improving. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. There is anxiety in the land. It is yet another season of discontent in Amerikkka. Black people are being blamed. Black churches are being burned. African people are a loving and

forgiving people (particularly of others). Even as our churches burn, Black pastors exult patience, love, peace and forgiveness. Such is the nature of a people who were enslaved on the African continent by those whom Africans welcomed with open arms and with whom African willingly and graciously shared their land. African people received a holocaust in exchange for African hospitality. The indigenous peoples of the Americas were victims of a similar fate.

In Ecclesiastes, it is written that there is a "time for love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." It is time for war. Africans in Amerikkka must not be caught in slumber while the conflagration consumes/destroys the gains of our long march toward freedom and liberation in this land and the world. Africans must declare war, righteous war on racism, White supremacy and an exploitative/oppressive system.

## Letter To The Editor

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

Dear Lucious,  
I cannot begin to tell you how disappointed I was to read your comments in The Oregonian article regarding Nike issues. Somehow I expect more from you. I expect that at least you would understand by the middle age we share, that justice most often is created not from the top down but from pressure below. The federal government is made up of representatives from a one (corporate) party state with two branches, termed Democrats and Republicans. Without major change in how campaigns are financed, this will remain our sorry condition. A national government so elected will not seriously challenge multinational corporate practices at home or abroad. We have to; you and I.

I have my voice and my body. You have a position of power from which you can advocate the change that will help create a just future for your children and all children and adults. So far, when it counts most on the School Board you seem to have abdicated your responsibility, washed

your hands of weighty issues, tried not to offend any group that can help or harm a candidate's future aspirations. It won't wash to say you need to be elected first to have the opportunity to do good; you are elected and I supported you.

However, if in my mind you cannot better perceive the true interest of those voiceless souls you purport to champion, I will have to take my tiny vote and support elsewhere. You have to know, Lucious, that if local boards and local/state governments stood up with social and economic justice groups there would be further chance for needed change. You are a bright man and you do a great job of running a meeting. But I think you need to again consider, now that you have reached a position of relative comfort and beginning authority, whose side you are on.

If you do not work for cooperation

and compromise from a position of justice, you will be useless to those of us who have placed some trust and hope in you.

It is not enough to work for school funding or other worthy local goals; how you accomplish these matters. Likewise, Nike needs to be held accountable by all of us, not just for showing local benevolence, but for how they operate in the world to create wealth.

If their child laborers and grossly underpaid and police/military repressed parents were African, would that strike a responsive chord in you? How big is your embrace for humanity?

I have found the following useful in finding my way in a world that daily asks us to compromise our principle and integrity.

**The Seven Deadly Sins**  
Wealth without work;

Pleasure without conscience;  
Knowledge without character;  
Commerce without morality;  
Science without humanity;  
Worship without sacrifice; and  
Politics without principle.

**Mahatma Gandhi**  
I have not written such a letter before. I do not enjoy so doing. I imagine you will be offended; I considered that because I like you and wish you well. But issues today are not just interesting questions for law school debate, as your fellow board member, Mr. Abrams, seems to feel.

Unless we find our common humanity and proceed as an African proverb I learned teaching BUF Saturday School says, "Love is an attitude acted upon", then our path to destruction is writ large.

I urge you to again find your love for humanity's masses, most of whom do not have white skin and most of whom are being immiserated by corporate greed and contempt, and chart your still fresh political path accordingly.

Sincerely, Claudie Fisher

## perspectives

**Alma Reeves Woods: Master Nurturer Honored**  
Last Friday morning the CBS Network high-lighted the news with a short but moving tribute to an African American librarian from Watts, California.



By Professor Mckinley Burt

Known over the decades as the "reading lady", she was honored by having the new city library named after her.

Ms. Woods gained her colloquial title through 40 years of paid and unpaid reading to perhaps the most appreciative audience of all--a rapturously engrossed circle of little ones at story time. Her commitment and dedication to task at the most critical time for early childhood development cannot be overemphasized.

And, indeed, "nurture-over-nature" is the approach we have emphasized in our recent education articles. In assessing the marvelous work this woman has done, we would keep in mind the documented enhancements of intelligence test scores where this type of early intervention was made available; whatever IQ measures and however important it may or may not be. We have made it quite clear by either example or documented statistic that African American intellectual abilities rate with the very best where there has been that childhood nurturing accorded to others.

Interestingly, there was considerable controversy within the ranks of the Watt's city council when a motion was made that the beautiful new structure be named "The Alma Reeves Woods Public Library." Can you imagine? Of course you can, because you and I both know that in the ordinary scheme of things, new civic buildings are named after millionaire contributors.

A commentator ventured aloud the very same thoughts that I was having. The argument for naming the new library after the "reading lady" won out due to the dominant presence on the council and in the community of so many "properly nurtured and successful citizens who came her way during the past 40 years." The citations went on and on: working people, activists, house persons, doctors, lawyers, school teachers, truck drivers, whoever!

Having, already pulled a number of related files when working on that "Top Educators Catch Up" se-

ries, I pulled from my shelves two books where the 'distance' in years between their respective publications embraces what seems more like a lifetime of learning the subject matter rather than the actual 20 years:

Book 1. 1972. "Early Childhood Development Programs And Services: Planning For Action", Battelle Memorial Institute Book 2. 1992. "Montessori Play And Learn: A Parents Guide To Purposeful Play From Two To Six", Leslie Britton Crown Publishers.

I have a call in for Ms. Woods, for I know it would be wonderful to be able to talk with that woman; to see if she has been to any of the 'places' I've been. Our high school English teacher teased us for many a year about this "story teller", Norma Loquendi, before we found out that was the Latin term for "common speech" or the colloquial. We forgave him, for this was the same man who motivated us by pointing out it was the Greek, Plato, who said that the Africans invented letters' numbers, and astronomy.

As the reader and former students know, I have always taught and demonstrated that 'language' (letters) is the key to all knowledge, all disciplines--the code that will reveal the inner workings of mathematics, chemistry and all the other disciplines. Long before the Greeks said it, and before the Hebrew sages, the Africans incorporated the critical advice into their most sacred literature, on papyri and granite steel. "In the beginning was the word."

In that "twenty year space" described earlier, I have found nothing to conflict with this admonition--only support for successful teaching paradigms and for winning battles against those who wanted to abandon "phonetics" or to introduce the barbarism called "Black English". In public meetings I have referred to these people as the "educationist aborigines" and felt no pain (of course not; I have had to spend valuable academic hours trying to resuscitate their victims).

Next week we'll spend some more time with "Norma Loquendi" and how this lady can aid in the nurture of your children, as well as yourself. The lady can enhance life, boost income, whatever.

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