

EDITORIAL

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

BY JANICE MATHIS,
GENERAL COUNSEL

The 25th Annual Operation PUSH Convention was such a smashing success, it will be the last one. The next time the loyal supporters of PUSH and Rainbow meet in convention, it will be as the Rainbow/PUSH Action Network.

The merger of these two "Jackson Action" organizations was formally approved last week. The Board of Directors of Operation PUSH--which for 25 years has used boycotts, pickets, negotiations and covenants to fight for economic empowerment and a fair share, by opening up this nation's corporate economy to all Americans--said yes to the merger. So did the Board of Directors of the National Rainbow Coalition, this country's cutting edge social change organization, which for more than a decade has emphasized voter registration, voter mobilization, "street heat," and marching to secure political empowerment for the historically locked out.

Now these two are one--the Rainbow/PUSH Action Network. Our headquarters will be in Chicago, with a bureau in Washington D.C. In addition, PUSH/Excel and Rainbow Reclaim Our Youth are merging, to

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION Rainbow/PUSH Action Network

combine their educational advocacy activity on behalf of our youth.

The media has asked if this is a downsizing, and the answer is no. The two organizations are being combined and strengthened, not reduced. The merger was done to build one stronger organization out of two complementary bodies. It will improve coordination, reduce duplication, and increase efficiency. As Reverend Jackson phrased it at a press conference in Chicago: "since there's such a connection between political empowerment and coalition-building, and economic empowerment and expansion, we're pulling these two organizations together to be more

efficient and more effective."

None of these, however, are the main reason PUSH and Rainbow were merged. The point is, America must have a strong, active, tough, nationwide political and economic empowerment organization as we approach the 21st century. Our goal is to make Rainbow/PUSH Action Network that group.

We know what we have to do--make social change once again a crusade across this land:

- build chapters in every state and city, on every high school and college campus;
- rebuild our network of ministers, to strengthen our defenses

against the inroads of the religious political extremists who seek to split our forces;

• forge serious coalitions across lines of race, gender, religion, and class. Work together with our allies--labor, women, African Americans & Latinos & Native Americas, students, environmentalists, gays and lesbians, and ministers--we can win. Working together, we will deserve to win.

We will use the boycott and the ballot to fulfill Dr. King's dreams, to complete the unfinished business of Lincoln and Roosevelt, to attain the full measure of liberty and equality that is the promise of America.

We have learned the lessons of recent American economic history: multi-national corporations open up their doors to the locked out only when we demand that they do so. From the UAW's sitdown strikes, to the picket lines that built the union movement, to the economic covenants enforced by the boycotts of Operation Breadbasket, economic doors have opened only when a mobilized people have pushed on them.

We have learned the lessons of recent American political history: progress comes through an enlightened President, in coalition with an energized populace.

Civil Rights Journal: The Prison Industrial Complex

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Twice within a few days I heard a new term which sent chills down my spine.

The term was "prison industrial complex." It signaled the recognition of the fact that our economy has gone through one more dramatic change--from the post-World War II military industrial complex referred to by President Eisenhower to the present day when prisons are the growth industry. We've gone from a nation which builds missiles to one which builds prisons.

The first time I heard the term was in a National Public Radio story about Dannemora, New York which houses a large prison. The prison is the town's largest employer and it is the only place many of the guards have ever encountered black or Hispanic men and their racism is evident. Many

of the businesses in the town are dependent on the guards and prison employees and the wives and mothers who come to visit the prisoners. Without the prison, many people in Dannemora would be out of work.

Prison business is big business in America and not just in Dannemora. Millions of dollars are spent each year in building more prisons. Millions of dollars are spent in purchasing uniforms, linens, beds, paper and other products. Tens of millions are spent on salaries of guards, counselors, doctors and nurses and prison administrators. The prison industry is a growth industry, so much so that private corporations have entered the business.

One of the most frightening aspects of the prison industry is that the majority of those incarcerated are people of color. The majority of those

working in the industry are not.

And then there is death row. As of fall, 1995 there were 3,045 inmates sitting on death rows in the United States. Over half of them are people of color. Just about all of them are poor.

Most death row inmates are represented by court-appointed attorney. In many jurisdictions there are no requirements of proficiency and experience for such attorneys even though capital cases are extremely complex.

The court-appointed attorney must ask for funds from the court each time experts in pathology, ballistics, substance abuse and mental health are used. There are very limited funds available for private investigation.

A recent study by the American Friends Service Committee on Native American on death row found

that in over 70 percent of the cases, native Americans on death row had been substance abusers and that this substance abuse was a controlling part of the inmates life before he committed the crime.

Too often such factors are not taken into account by prosecutors or juries.

What does it mean that we have chosen to invest in prisons rather than in education and prevention for tens of thousands of our young people? What does it mean for a democracy that one of its fastest growing industries is one which imprisons over a million citizens? What does it mean that people of color are over-represented in the prison population and especially, on death row? What does it mean for us all when we have coined a new phrase--the prison industrial complex?

perspectives

Should the village return to the barricades?

What question increasingly comes to the fore during discussions on public education among some residents of the Northeast village; especially since the acerbic exchange between a faceless editorial page of the Oregonian newspaper and Ron Herndon, veteran education activist.

In a surprisingly petulant editorial, "Stand And Deliver" (9-15-96), the newspaper tore into Herndon with an over-italicized polemic that could only be described as a contentious admonition, "how dare you--you sassy brat". This loss-of-cool was provoked by comments Herndon had made to reporters the previous week, "things in the school district are worse than ever".

Taking umbrage at this journalistic banishment to the terra incognita of "character schools", Herndon, consistent throughout 25 years of critical concern for the education of minorities in Portland, gave a measured response in the 'Reader Feedback' section, (9-23-96). His detailed piece, "Education Serves Adults, Not Our Children" again described Portland Public Schools as a "fatally-flawed system".

So what's to contest? A neighbor informs me that both black and white parents at the neighborhood meeting rose to comment on the eight very negative "Oregonian" headlines I had culled in just thirty days--all citing a school district in very serious trouble, "totally flawed" if you will (my 'Perspectives' column, 9-25-96).

Another speaker said, "Tell me that the establishment is not saying, 'it isn't just a case of whose ox is being gored but more importantly, who is complaining?' The sheer weight of the district problems proves overwhelming to both professionals and roving pundits alike (including editorial writers). I find that many people, within and with-

out the system have become increasingly frustrated and short-tempered.

That terse command of the editorial page to "stand and deliver" is the phrase used by highway robbers in the days of Robin Hood, they would demand that stage coach passengers get out and hand over their valuables.

However, it has become a more difficult proposition for school district critics outside the more formal structure; villager who would return to the barricades find that they still lack the forums and delivery systems afforded the establishment. And that strident polemics still fail to move the beast.

When I am queried, "where do we go from here?", I find it necessary to remind some that "I never left the barricades". It proves quite informative in many cases to back up several decades, especially when talking to members of a younger generation too often susceptible to those "strident polemics".

I usually begin with account of my tutelage under Dr. Julius Hobson, the African-American economist who in the early 1970's took the gigantic, mercenary and mendacious bureaucracy mislabeled, "The Washington, D.C. Board of Education"--and won a landmark legal victory (Hobson vs Board of Education).

Perhaps his most important contribution was to establish the incontrovertible fact that it takes a well-structured machine with in-depth support to go up against and opponent of similar stature.

In past years I have detailed here my return to the local education bureaucracy in a similar fashion; colossal failure--frightened troops.

This was during my 1974 tenure as head of the "Minority Teachers Association".

Next week: What works at the barricades and what doesn't--Burt's solutions.



By
Professor
McKinley
Burt

"ON NOV. 5TH, I'M VOTING FOR MY KIDS."



Every day of your child's life depends on whether or not you vote.

And, whether or not you vote for Clinton/Gore.

If you *don't*, the Dole-Gingrich Republicans may get the chance to continue cutting, slashing and eliminating the things that are important to you and your family. They've already voted to cut school lunches. Limit child immunization programs and Head Start.

You've got the power to stop them.

President Clinton is meeting the challenges of raising a family, protecting our values. He pumped nearly \$800 million into Head Start • Expanded Child Immunization and access to quality Health Care • Supported School Lunches • Is fighting crime in public housing • Working to prevent teen pregnancy • Reduced violence and drug abuse in school • Passed the toughest Crime Bill ever.

President Clinton is dealing with the hard issues. But he can't continue to do it without your vote.

On Nov. 5th vote for the people you care about.



**VOTE
CLINTON/GORE '96**
IT'S TOO IMPORTANT NOT TO.

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Charles Washington <i>Publisher & Editor</i>	Mark Washington <i>Distribution Manager</i>
Gary Ann Taylor <i>Business Manager</i>	Sabrina Sakata <i>News/Copy Editor</i>
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Timothy Collins <i>Photography</i>	Paul Neufeldt Iesha Williams <i>Production & Design</i>
	Rovonne Black <i>Clerical Assistant</i>

Contributing Writers:

Professor McKinley Burt, Lee Perlman, Pamela Jordan

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,
Portland, Oregon 97211
503-288-0033 • Fax 503-288-0015
Email: Pdxobserv@aol.com

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