

# EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

### Letter To Editor

The All-Nite Grad party and Celebration was a success thanks to your generous donation and contribution. The Jefferson High Senior Class of 1996 had a wonderful time. The party was held at the Griffith Park Athletic Club in Beaverton, Oregon.

The Class of 1996 enjoyed themselves immensely. They had the pleasure of swimming, enjoying the sauna, listening and dancing to the music of a live D.J., lots of fun on the velcro wall, lots of other games and activities, not to mention plenty of food, drink, gifts and prizes.

All of this could not have been accomplished without your help. You have aided the Class of 1996 to bond for the last time, for many will have soon gone on to college and into the job market in pursuit of careers.

The Senior Class was faced with many obstacles beyond their control in the planning of senior activities, that the All-Nite Grad party was the only senior activity for the 1996 school year.

We, the PTSA of Jefferson High School and the Senior Class would like to take this time to express our sincere gratitude and thanks. Your generous donation and significant contribution has shaped Grad-Nite into a successful event.

We are yet hearing hearts of thanks and gratitude from the class of 1996 because you took the time to care and the time to share.

We thank God, and we thank you. Jefferson High School PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association, Class of 1996.)

Jacqueline Debnam, President

## p e r s p e c t i v e s

### Beyond the net, there is cyberspace

The tone and tenor of recent communications from readers indicate they thought things were getting pretty "spacey" alright, and long before I began this series.

"That's all we needed, a 'PC vs Network computer' controversy just when reaching decisions on what our children needed at home--or at school."

Sorry about that but I am not responsible, and certainly am not to blame for the big price hike on the "new economical architecture" previously touted as a "\$300 to \$500 consumer product." I have a ten-year collection of "PC Magazine" that detail a decade of claims, speculations and projections by computer companies and many more closely resemble the pitches of used car dealers or roofing and siding salesmen than the pledges of a "mature industry manufacturing sophisticated hardware."

Be that as it may, I did say I would address several items that have proven of interest to the readers. Quite a number displayed interest in that "cancellation of the scheduled presentation of my book to President Nixon

in the Rose Garden." Let's see if I can assemble these letters and telegrams in an intelligible sequence.

First the book, "Black Inventors of America", Nov. 1969, was designed to motivate African American youth by revealing the previously suppressed documentation (patent) of their many inspired inventions that played a great role in the development of America's industrial might. Where hither to I had only heard rumors of these accomplishments, I found the evidence at the Moreland Library of Howard University in Washington, D.C. then, Senator Wayne Morse opened up the Patent Office.

I have before me a letter from the Office of Senator Bob Packwood, dated Jan. 23, 1970. He had been of great assistance on my trips to Washington, opening doors to agencies that might be helpful in advancing my "computerized terminal-in-the-classroom" learning system. Inside the book cover was a picture of me conducting a junior high school dem-

onstration. There had been no response whatsoever from the Portland School System; no one had a clue about the future.

"...I've already written the White House to ask if it would be possible for you to make a personal presentation of your book to the President.

The time is certainly appropriate and I think this would be an excellent opportunity for both you and the President. Just as soon as we can confirm a date on this, I'll let you know. Cordially, Bob Packwood."

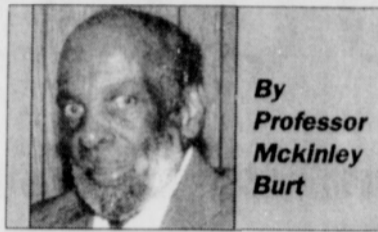
That he did, and I went to Washington for pre-screening by a zillion federal departments (and agents), got a tour of the White House, peeped at the Rose Garden, and saw this Red Room which Jackie Kennedy had furnished in French Empire Style. This is the mode of furniture and dress that Napoleon brought back to Europe from his African expedition to Egypt (the sophisticated haute couture soon swept the entire world).

I returned home to Portland to await the great day when I would be

summoned to Washington to meet the 'great white father' and complete the first step of my well-planned marketing plot. Instead, I got a phone call from an excited local Western Union Office and agreed to have an "important telegram from the White House" read to me over the phone. The way this woman was stuttering and spluttering I still had to wait for a physical delivery before I could fully understand the content.

I don't suppose too many blacks in Albina got telegrams from the President of the United States. It was an interesting format; first there is what you might describe as an "alert." This telegram says "please clear all wires immediately, a special message from the President is coming through!" That was the good news, then came the bad news in the main telegram. Seems that Israel and the Arabs were about to go at it again, and the president would be busy with the emergency.

"My dear Mr. Burt, it is with deep regret... blah,blah,blah". They sure know how to hurt a fellow; but, anyway, next week I will detail the learning technology information that was promised.



By  
Professor  
McKinley  
Burt

## Civil Rights Journal: Victory In Pensacola

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

They were surrounded by toxic wastes in two different abandoned sites.

More than three hundred African American families, were fighting for their lives and those of their children and grandchildren. The odds seemed overwhelming at times, but the people of Pensacola, FL held out--and they won. The Environmental Protection Agency ruled that they will move 358 families to new housing, the largest environmental relocation since Love Canal in New York and Times Beach in Missouri.

The neighbors of the abandoned Escambia Treatment Company, which had treated the wood for telephone poles, were living next to a 60-foot-high mountain of toxic wastes created by a half-finished EPA clean-

up. The dirt in that pile contained dioxin, a potentially cancer-causing agent. And the people were getting sick--with cancer, inflammation of the eyes and lungs and they were dying--stillborn babies and cancer among other diseases.

A second abandoned plant, the Agrico Chemical Company, was located nearby. This plant manufactured sulfuric acid and agricultural chemicals. When it closed in 1975, it left behind its toxic wastes. The community, believing their health to be so at risk, fought for relocation rather than clean-up.

Four years ago the people of these Pensacola neighborhoods banded together and began to organize. Homeowners, tenants and former workers at the plants established Citizens Against toxic exposure (CATE)

and began to lobby local and federal government officials to do something about their problem.

Using President Clinton's executive order on environmental justice as their bottomline, CATE was able to keep their neighborhood's problem on the government front burner.

The executive order mandated that federal government agencies pay attention to environmental justice and required that victims of environmental racism be given a voice in the cleanup of their neighborhoods. There are at least 1,300 toxic waste sites located in communities of color across the nation.

CATE hired a scientist to monitor the EPA testing of the toxic waste sites. It lobbied both local and federal government elected officials. It

was able to get the EPA to hold a hearing in Pensacola earlier this year. And when earlier EPA recommendations seemed to be leaning toward relocating some of the residents, leaving others behind, CATE was adamant that unless everyone was moved, no one would move. They understood that sticking together was one source of their power.

Some have argued that it was Presidential year politics that are responsible for this significant victory for environmental justice. The citizens of Pensacola, whose neighborhood has been destroyed by these toxic waste dumps and whose health has been jeopardized because of them would probably say the government is just doing what was right.

I would say that justice has been served.

## The Lost American Dream

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

If you asked most Americans what one image most epitomizes the American dream, most would say owning a home of your own.

But that all-American image is not only impossible for millions of Americans, but even renting one is becoming less possible. Decent, affordable housing is becoming the impossible dream for millions of Americans.

A recent New York Times Sunday magazine article pointed out that hidden in the recent legislation signed by President Clinton is an unknown sentence which eliminates the possibility of new poor families receiving housing subsidies. Yet today five million working families now pay more than half of their pretax income for housing. These families must then choose between paying for utilities or paying for food with their remaining funds.

"Stable, affordable housing keeps kids in school and adults on the job... (the elimination of housing subsidies for new families) marks the demise not just of a budgetary line but also of a hope that has transfixed reformers for a century: that all Americans can find safe, decent and affordable housing," said the New York Times article.

Indeed, only one third of those eligible for Federal housing assistance actually get it, while the others, including the disabled, elderly and welfare recipients, pay 50, 60 or 70 percent of their income for housing.

While the Federal government is eliminating its support of housing for poor Americans, it continues to subsidize housing for middle and upper income Americans through tax deductions. According to the New York Times, the \$66 billion a year the Federal government spends on mort-

gage-interest and property tax deductions is about four times as much as it spends on low-income housing. Most of it goes to families with incomes above \$75,000. In addition, both Candidate Dole and President Clinton have proposed eliminating capital gains taxes on the sale of expensive homes.

Meanwhile, the numbers of the nation's homeless seems to be growing. A National Public Radio story included an interview with a social worker working with the homeless in Washington, D.C. The social worker pointed out that the faces of the homeless are changing. While there are still many single men, there are increasing numbers of families, many of whom are finding it difficult even to find shelters which will take them because of the complexities of their needs.

Non-profit groups like Habitat for Humanity and Manna cannot keep

up with the rising number of people who are homeless or in desperate need of decent and affordable housing. In 1995 Habitat, for example, using volunteers in its 1,300 affiliates to build or rehab its buildings, was able to complete 3,282 homes.

A child without stable housing will likely fail in school. A family without affordable housing will find itself in perennial crisis.

As more landlords find it financially unfeasible to build or lease low-income housing and as the Federal Government gets out of the housing subsidy business, the question becomes where will millions of poor Americans live. After a decade of visible hopelessness in this nation, are we immune to the housing needs of the poor? Is decent, affordable housing, a lost American dream for millions of Americans? Is owning a home the impossible dream?

## An Island of Hope for Returning Ex-Offenders

BY DENNIS SCHATZMAN

While on the reelection circuit, Gil Garcetti, the embattled Los Angeles County district attorney of O.J. Simpson fame, promised a powerful group of black minister he would draft legislation that would require offenders who are high school dropouts to earn a general equivalency diploma (GED) before being released.

If Garcetti makes good on his promise, he would be prudent to find a community-based correctional care facility with a proven success rate to implement the program. One such facility is Bridge Back, an inmate outreach center right smack in the middle of South Central Los Angeles.

But I warn you, although the place houses up to 77 non-violent offenders serving the last four months of their sentences prior to parole, you

have to look very hard to find it, unless you know exactly where it is. These inmate are rarely seen and seldom heard.

Bridge Back is operated in a quiet unassuming building that sits near the busy corner of Western and Vernon Avenues. One doesn't see young Black men standing around chillin', drinking 40 ounce beers, shooting craps or engaging in any other neer-do-well type activity. Instead there are dozens of young men inside working, studying, going out on jobs, attending schools and the like. As they carry out their daily activities, you don't hear a peep out of them.

A reporter who used to catch the bus at the corner every day never knew the place was there until he heard the residents were about to be moved back to county jail by the Department of Corrections as "a pre-

cautionary measure" during the final days of the federal trial of the four LAPD officers charged with beating Black motorist Rodney King.

Celes King, III, state president of the congress of Racial Equality of California and the members of the local businessmen's association heard about the discriminatory move (similar centers located in white neighborhoods were not forced to relocate) and "persuaded" the state to put a stop to such action. They argued successfully that the Bridge Back residents were never involved in the April 29, 1992 riots that followed the officers' Simi Valley acquittals. So why the harsh treatment, they asked?

King, a local bail bondsman and prominent civil rights leader, has been a long time friend of Roy Evans, Bridge Back's founder, administrator and proprietor. "I have known

Roy for nearly 30 years," beams King, whose office is walking distance from the facility. "We answered his call for help on that matter mainly because Roy is the kind of guy who doesn't cry 'wolf.' When he says 'let's, we say 'go.' when he says 'Hal,' we say, 'leluha.' It's as simple as that. And CORE makes no apologies about its support of Bridge Back."

Evans, a Willie Wood (of Green Bay Packer fame) look-a-like founded Bridge Back 14 years ago. He operates the facility off of a \$950,000 yearly budget. A staff of 16 persons provides 24 hour service (which includes job preparation, placement, substance abuse assistance, stress management, victim awareness training and computerized educational services), seven days a week. Two parole agents are assigned to the premises. Since its inception, over

5,000 people have passed through its doors, receiving food lodging, counseling and training before being reintroduced to their home communities.

"Bridge Back has come a long way from its beginnings as an anti-substance abuse program," Evans explains. "In the early days we took advantage of the opportunities provided by the War on Poverty and Model Cities programs to create and establish programs of our own through which attacked some of the problems overwhelming our community. We networked, we opened our organizations, staffed them, and started to work on the needs among our people."

In a community where nearly one-third of all Black men are either in jail, on parole or on probation, correctional services has unfortunately become an unwelcome growth in-

dustry. Yet it is usually the court system, the lawyers and the jail houses that reap the lion's share of the benefits. Evans believes more Bridge Back-type facilities are needed, especially in Black communities.

"California and other states must take immediate steps to treat low risk, non-violent offenders differently than violent predatory offenders," Evans says. "We must expand the number and type of community corrections programs for these offenders. For every bed the state establishes in a community-based corrections facility, it can save the cost of building a new prison cell."

In an era where politicians are promising to build more jails, they need to look closely at the Bridge Back concept. It works, and at a fraction of the \$400,000 per year it costs to house a man who is convicted of cashing a bad check