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NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION Triumph Over Texaco

The Rainbow/PUSH Action Network offers its congratulations to the African American employees of Texaco, who were victorious in their racial discrimination lawsuit.

The $176 million settlement sends a clear message to corporate America--not only is race and gender discrimination wrong, it is expensive.

Nevertheless, though civil rights leaders have declared a moratorium on picketing, the Texaco boycott continues. Rev. Jesse Jackson, President of the Rainbow/PUSH Action Network; Rev. Joseph Lowary, President of the SCLC and the Black Leadership Forum; Cong. Sheila Jackson-Lee of Houston; Rev. Al Sharpton of New York; State Rep. Alvin Holmes of Alabama; Delores Huerta, President of the United Farm Workers; Hazzel Dukes, President of the New York NAACP; Dennis Walcott, President of the New York Urban League; and 19 other ministers and civil rights activists agreed to keep the boycott pressure on in a pre-dawn conference following Texaco's announcement that they would settle the lawsuit.

In Rev. Jackson's words: "Texaco's decision to settle the suit with the gun of public pressure firmly at its head does not give us comfort that the company will change its ways and eradicate the racism that currently exists at the company, once that pressure is removed.

"The Rainbow/PUSH Action Network intends to become a shareholder of Texaco. We will purchase $1,000 of the company's stock, and will work with other existing shareholders to examine the most effective means of insuring that Texaco's Board of Directors will take tangible steps to end the company's discriminatory policies and corporate culture."

The civil rights coalition leading the boycott is demanding:

(1) the release of relevant Texaco staffing and management data;

(2) institutionalized policies that discourage "patterns and practices" of intimidation and discrimination in the workplace;

(3) open doors allowing for advancement and greater opportunities for people of color and women in all ares of Texaco operations; and (4) halting the use of Texaco credit cards, and stopping the purchase of gas at Texaco stations, until these demands are met.

As Rev. Jackson stated: "The settlement is a step in the right direction but a comprehensive plan including goals targets and timetables in terms of employment and economic development is still not on the table. There are also unresolved matters regarding the environment and economic development, and changing Texaco's internal culture for women and people of color."

The boycott is having an effect. In a national newspaper brief last Monday, the following quote says it all: "Operators of some Texaco gas stations are seeing their sales eroding in the wake of a call by the Rev. Jesse Jackson for a boycott of the oil company because of racist comments that were made by its executives.

Way to go, Rainbow/PUSH! Continue the boycott. Texaco will change its corporate culture.

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

The Village Gets Educated

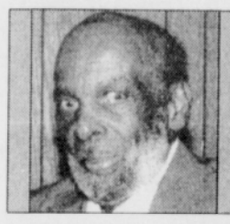
BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

There were many words of appreciation for information on the brilliant career of T.M. (Don Rutherford), the black engineer who graduated from Benson High School; "Will we ever see his picture in that hallway showcase honoring 'Benson Greats' who have made major contributions?" (Portland Observer, Perspectives column for 11/20/96)

I ask, now, what do the readers think? We are not talking about the most yardage gained in a single game or of track records still standing after so many years or any other 'expected' examples of physical prowess. We are talking serious cultural one-up man ship here -- brain stuff at level I.

The cultural mind-set of the successive ruling dynasties of the Portland School system has never been one to permit any radical departure from the prevailing racist postures they reflect.

Not all of us are naive nor entertaining that old adage, "hope will spring eternal, even from the breast of a fool." At a coffee house meeting of 'the folks'. One parent said, "you wouldn't really expect them to display the image of a highly successful African American Engineer to epitomize the type of graduate Benson send out in the world? after all, you're talking 'white-boy' stuff here... try and conceive a picture of a black man standing next to Howard Hughe's Spruce Goose. And with a notation that this man made a significant technical contribution. For pity's sake, this plane is an All-



By Professor Mckinley Burt

American icon of the nation's technology."

Evidently, though, there were some villagers present who had entertained some degree of hope for the educational process and as late as this past October. They were still expressing disappointment at superintendent Jack Bierwith's laconic response to a proposal their group had made to the school board in September--for establishment of a 20-member Citizen Monitoring Advisory Committee. Someone observed in a loud 'stage whisper', "that approach has failed a dozen times so now you're going to do it 'rainbow style'... they still won't respect us."

After this there were a few less-than-polite exchanges and comments about gutless "talking heads" and "media freaks" who would never seriously challenge the system and jeopardize their program or public sector jobs. "No matter another two decades of ruthless gang activity, our youths shot dead in the streets -- and, worst of all, the production of yet another generation of minority youth who on the whole are not seriously educated for effective competition in a technological world."

Somehow the conversation was diverted to me before things got too rough -- the management was looking rather concerned. This was alright with me on two counts. First, I would have hated to see some long-term friendships destroyed in the heat of anger, while the real rascals escaped the wrath of God and man. Secondly, it opened the door for a friend who was close to the process to explain the serious error made twenty years prior when I did all the necessary research for implementing a lawsuit to bring that arrogant 1974 Portland School District to account.

This parent of three children, brought up in Portland and educated in Northeast schools, pointed out that he had lost one to gang violence and that the other two bounced between correctional institutions and deadend jobs, high school graduates who were ill-equipped to deal with today's world. And much less so than the other cultural groups who were their classmates.

The point he emphasized was that he was one of those members of a minority teachers group I headed who "chickened out" when I actually found three lawyers to take on a major suit. "The talking heads and media types all fled like rabbits when McKinley made a presentation of all he had learned in several weeks of tutelage under Dr. Julius Hobson who won the famous and successful suit against the most intransigent school district in America" (Hobson vs Washington , D.C. Board of Education).

He was referring to the fact that immediately on returning from Washington I made it clear that such an encounter with "old massa" would be total war.

As Hobson had done, everything would have to be challenged and brought under scrutiny, monies, buildings, equipment, textbook allocation, possible diversions and 'exotic' accounting in funds originally targeted for disadvantaged' (black) children, and a score of other 'soft' areas in urban school systems "Some people go to jail, some lose professional licenses. And if you lose the suit, your name is mud!"

He made his point and several loud 'talking heads' crept out.

Civil Rights Journal: Criminal Justice and Johnny Gammage

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

I have often said that Rodney King was not the only victim of police brutality, just the most famous.

And, if an onlooker had not videotaped the brutal beating, the rest of the world would have never known and those police officers would still be on the street.

Last week I wrote about Kwame Cannon, a young African American man who received an overly-harsh prison sentence and who has been rehabilitated while in prison. Still, the governor of North Carolina has refused to give him clemency or to release him to a group of pastors who want to help him.

This week I write about the case of Johnny Gammage, a 31-year old African American in business with his cousin, Pittsburgh Steeler Ray Seales. While driving a Jaguar, Gammage was judged by police officers to be tapping his brakes too often and was stopped by these officers outside Pittsburgh. In less than 10 minutes, Johnny Gammages was dead.

The five officers who held Gammage down claim that he was resisting arrest. Conflicting accounts say that they were fearful that he was carrying a gun and that they saw he was really carrying a cell phone. Indeed, the phone was swatted out of his hand and the five officers hit him with flashlights and batons. With the weight of five men on top of him, Gammage was quickly squeezed to death, killed by the compression on his neck and chest.

Gammage was characterized as easy-going, mild and professional in his demeanor. There were no drugs or alcohol found in his system. Ray Seales and those who knew and loved him find it impossible to believe that he would have charged and attacked five police officers.

Sadly, the criminal justice system did not protect Johnny Gammage that night on the side of the highway and it is not working on his behalf now. The primary police officer involved in this incident was not charged with murder, but with involuntary manslaughter. Claiming that he would not be able to receive a fair trial in Pittsburgh, the system brought in an all-white jury from Scranton, 200 miles away and in a county with less than 1% people of color. Not surprisingly, the jury found the police officer not guilty.

Reminiscent of the Simi Valley jury which found the police officers who beat Rodney King innocent, these jurors believed that Johnny Gammage was the aggressor in this incident. This was despite the testimony of a passing tow truck driver who said the police were clearly the aggressors. This was despite the conflicting testimony of the police officers themselves about whether they knew that Gammage was holding a cell phone instead of a gun.

The trial of the two other police officers charged in Gammage's death ended in mistrials because of the testimony of one witness. They could be re-tried, but so far that has not been decided. A major contributor to the gulf between white Americans and people of color is the difference of perceptions about the criminal justice system. As long as people of color can die while in police custody and the police can go unpunished, the gulf will continue to widen.

The tragedy is that the most punishment Johnny Gammage should have received was a ticket for his driving. The reality is that Johnny Gammage could have been any African American man in an expensive car in the wrong place and confronted by police at the wrong time. The irony is that only because of his relationship to a professional athlete do the rest of us even know his story.

Justice Clarence Thomas and the black leadership: a changing of the guard?

BY STEPHEN F. SMITH

It has been five years since Associate Justice Clarence Thomas was confirmed as the 106th Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

During that time, he has come under sharp and unrelenting criticism from almost all segments of the media. Indeed, some of his harshest attacks have come from the civil rights community, which one would have expected to welcome the ascent of a black American to the pinnacle of his profession. Is all this part of some personal vendetta against Justice Thomas? Maybe in part, but far more is at work here.

The relentless assaults on the Justice are part and parcel of a larger struggle for the hearts and minds of black America, a veritable last gasp of those who have traditionally viewed themselves as leaders of the black community to maintain their hold on power. As the standard-bearer for black conservatives, it is only natural for civil rights leaders to single him out or denunciation because the continued spread of conservative ideas in the black community poses a direct threat to the status quo and has potential of filling the leadership vacuum that is widely perceived to exist for black Americans. It is, therefore, little wonder that the traditional civil rights leaders have been Justice Thomas' sharpest critics.

Their constant yet unexplained refrain has been that on a number of issues, especially affirmative action and race-based redistricting, Justice Thomas holds views that no "true" black person could hold. For example, Leon Higginbotham gave a bitter, rancorous speech last Fall at New York University, arguing that Justice Thomas is not "really" black. Higginbotham state that Justice Thomas' conservative voting record on the Supreme Court proved that the Justice suffers from "racial self-hatred". The obvious implication, of course, was that only a self-hating black person or an "Uncle Tom" could oppose affirmative action or any number of similar race-based programs advocated by the black leadership.

The vehemence and persistence of Higginbotham and others in asserting the view that all blacks must and do think alike does not, of course, make their thesis true. In fact, it is obviously both racist and untrue: Black people are not and never have ben monolithic in their views. To the contrary, there has always been a healthy diversity of opinion within the black community, as in the white community. This is true even--and, perhaps, especially--as to civil rights issues.

In the decades that followed abolition, W.E.B. DuBois and others (including, after the turn of the century, the NAACP) rejected the orthodox approach of Booker T. Washington and argued for an immediate end to all forms of racial discrimination. In the 1960s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advocated nonviolent means for achieving civil rights, but Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party, for instance, were prepared to reject nonviolent means if "necessary". Today, of course, many in the black community agitate for race-conscious remedies such as affirmative action in the belief that racism constitutes an insuperable barrier to black progress. Others, including Justice Thomas and Shelby Steele of the Hoover Institution oppose affirmative action and argue that, having achieved equality before the law and basic civil rights, black progress depends on improving schools, maintaining strong family structures, and the like.

As their use of plantation, terms like "Uncle Tom" indicates, it is Justice Thomas' critics who are stuck in the oppression of the past. Justice Thomas, by contrast, invites us to live in what Dr.Kind called the "promised land"--a land where that sky is the limit to our success because all people are judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. That beautiful conception of racial harmony and equality is inconsistent with racial preferences of any kind. The civil rights leadership is able to insist on such preferences only be rejecting Dr. King's vision.

Higginbotham and others who argue today for convenient departures from the unyielding principle of equality that many generations of blacks struggled and died to have written into law must be regarded for what they are--the intellectual offspring of Jim Crow (in reverse) and the rejection of the civil rights movement led by Dr. King and others.

As a consequence, in arguing for governmental colorblindess in the affirmative action case from last Term, Justice Thomas has not turned his back on blacks or on the struggle for civil rights. Rather, he has remained true not only to the text and fundamental design of the Constitution, as amended by the 13th and 14th Amendments, but also to the views of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and before. To the extent Higginbotham and other modern civil rights leaders no longer favor colorblind law, it is they who have "turned back the clock," not Justice Thomas.