

# EDITORIAL

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## Miracle Theater speaks out

To the editor:

On behalf of Miracle Theatre we would like to congratulate you on the Portland Observer.

The Observador represents a new model for community expression. Its format encourages youth to voice their concerns and opinions. By promoting youth to express themselves, the Observador is helping to model the future of the Latino-American community.

The Portland Observer is also enriching the community at large by offering a Hispanic perspective to a large and diverse readership.

Miracle Theatre's mission is to provide Hispanic theatre, arts and culture experiences to Northwest's audiences. We feel that the Observador is a great asset to the promotion of this culture.

Sincerely,

Jose Eduardo Gonzalez

Executive/Artistic Director

Enie Vaisburd

Marketing Director

Miracle Theatre

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON  
Texaco is off the front pages of the newspaper and not on the television screens, but a closer reading or watching will tell other stories of corporate racism which have surfaced in the past few weeks.

These stories show how institutional racism is still very much a part of corporate life in America as we near the 21st century.

Indeed, only days after Texaco went

off the media radar screens, we learned that Avis car rental agencies in North and South Carolina discriminated against African American customers and that the national Avis corporation probably knew about these racist practices. Now a federal jury has found that Circuit City has systematically discriminated against its African American employees.

Corporate racism, then, is a coat of many colors. These include the corporation's employment practices, its ser-

## Who told you that you were naked? conclusion

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

**You won't know the players unless you buy a program, folks", shout the vendors at the sporting events. And some readers still express amazement that I am able to relate to so many people of different ages, races and walks of life, particularly the youth.**

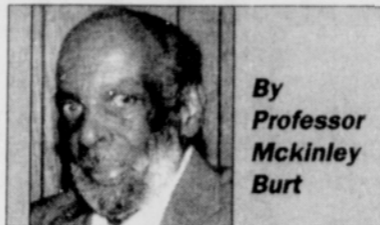
Whatever the nature of this modus operandi, I frequently find myself trying to translate it into some kind of universal paradigm useful to any of us who would successfully interact with our communities. But as you can well imagine, it is quite difficult to tell most people, "Hey, your not 'naked', you've got everything you need to work with--all the tools, all the know how, Just Do It!"

What I usually get in reply is, "that's easy for you to say because 'you know everybody' -- you can design and implement projects across the spectrum of education, economic or societal; you've been in the community 50 years, so you've automatically got credibility!"

"Not true", I answer with vigor; there is a little more to it than that. Now that I am working with youths again, as I did in my U.S. Forest Service Outreach Programs during

the 1970s and early '80s, it is very important for them to understand that successful community interaction is neither automatic nor easy.

First off, I explain the "inter-generational advantage", using some con-



By  
Professor  
McKinley  
Burt

temporary activity for a model: "alright crew, we're going out to Beaverton tomorrow. The electronics company is sending two vans to pick us up. You know, this reminds me that twenty years ago some of your parents were part of my "Technology Outreach Program" for innercity youth, and were just about your age at the time."

The difference is that, then, I was leasing Grey Hound buses for field trips which included both youth and parents; "Your grandparents," I emphasize. We went to such sites as the U.S. Forest Service Tree Nursery at Wind River Washington, where the black role model was the chief horticulturist Oscar Halh a product of famed Tuskegee University. "Some

of your parents were on those trips and, in fact, are still employees of the agency. And twenty years from now you may have a key position with one of the corporations we will be visiting this month. Hundreds gained employment before."

And again, I make it clear to these young people just as I do at meetings with adults in the community, there is no such thing as "automatic credibility". I've had them study models I've designed with specific experiences in mind; from "creating" classes at the university for the specific purpose of bringing into the mix with students such people from industry and public agencies as personnel managers, department heads and even a CEO or two, to simulating technology in the classroom.

Tell the youth I meet with that an extension of this paradigm led to further interaction with an "expanded" community that included other cultures--very fruitful in the economic sense.

In past years I had discovered while working with some of the parents that they had a "bad attitude" toward certain "hard" components of the learning process; "White folks stuff," they called it. It requires definite well-planned procedures to

overcome this disability.

One of the things I do is a technical readers of the Portland Observer would immediately recognize. I tirelessly point out the extraordinary number of mechanical and electrical devices around that were invented and patented by African Americans--but which most Americans think were developed by white men like Thomas Edison or the famed Westinghouse of "airbrake fame." "It is institutional racism."

It works and you can see youngsters swell with pride--but then they ask, "why weren't we told this in school, this is real education and motivation."

I have no hesitation in telling them the how and the why or about my 22 year fight to make backwards school system aware of this--in a time of accelerating technology, yet.

And it certainly helps in a session out there in Beaverton, when a white CEO verifies it then introduces a black engineer who reinforces the point. We will reprise my university course.

"You really aren't naked, are you Mr. Burt, said one kid. My father says you can get more done in the community with part of your social security than some programs."

## Restating the problem: race and inequality

BY DR. MANNING MARABLE

**The poet Langston Hughes once suggested years ago that the black American's search for democracy in the United States was "a dream deferred."**

Perhaps we should now add that this dream has been so long delayed, corrupted and compromised that many black folk now question the viability of the entire political project called American democracy.

Any understanding of American society and history must begin with the study of the black American experience in this country. This is because the status and existence of black people, the quality of our lives and the range of possibilities which we can realistically achieve through our own endeavors, is the essential litmus test for the viability of American democracy. It is the distance between America's rhetoric vs. its reality, between what America says about itself vs. what it actually is.

African Americans are at the center of the definition about what it has meant to be "an American." The reality of "blackness" has all too often been the criteria for determining a series of questions about the relationship between the people, the state and civil society: who rides in the Jim

Crow section of the bus, and who does not? Who lives in the ghetto, and who does not? Who is the first person to get a job, and who is the last?

The basic paradox one must confront in any consideration of the role of race in American life, is the tension between "marginalization" and "inclusion." Historically, African-American culture has been central to the construction of the cultural and the aesthetic contours of America. Politically, the issue of race has been absolutely central to the major conflicts in the American experience, from the civil war to the civil rights movement.

Economically, black labor was essential in the construction of this nation, from the unpaid exploitation of slavery to the underpaid labor of African Americans in central cities in the 1990's. Nevertheless, despite our centrality, we continue to be marginalized by the mainstream of the dominant social order. We are continually unequal members of the household, but never members of the national family. In the language of "hip-hop" culture, we are "dissed" in the very house we have helped to construct.

From the vantagepoint of African-American history, from the depths of our sorrow and anger, we

ask ourselves, why do we continued to be marginalized? Who benefits from this marginalization? Who is responsible for maintaining the structure of power and privilege which makes this marginalization and enduring fact of American life?

African Americans understand that race is not a valid biological concept; that it has no genetic validity. Stripped of the rhetoric superiority and inferiority, the science of race is nothing but a fraud, grounded in power, privilege and violence against those who are oppressed. Yet our lives are defined and circumscribed by the brutal reality of racism, a system that denies the humanity of millions of people, limiting their education, employment, health, housing and future.

This is why all the recent talk about "reverse racism" is sheer nonsense. When African Americans control all of the banks and financial institutions in our neighborhoods, all of the real estate and commercial enterprises, we might begin to talk about discrimination against whites. When our government truly reflects the real percentages of African Americans, Latinos and other racial minorities within the general population; when the corporations that exploit black, brown and poor consum-

er markets are actually controlled democratically by those who produce the wealth, then we might seriously discuss the possibility of "reverse racism." Whiteness in a racist, corporate-controlled society is like having the image of a American Express Card or Diners Club Card stamped on one's face: immediately you are "universally accepted."

Let's restate the problem of black liberation in a white, conservative and capitalist society; to end racism, we must end inequality.

Our goal cannot be simply the assimilation or integration of black elites into the white cultural and corporate mainstream. Nor can we combat inequality by going it alone, divorced from real and potential allies from a broad spectrum of brown, poor and working class women and men.

The problem of the twenty-first century is the challenge of multicultural democracy -- whether American political institutions and society can and will be restructured to incorporate the genius and energy, the labor power and social struggles of millions of people who have been denied full equality -- Latinos, Asian Americans, American Indians, Arab Americans, African Americans, women, working people, the unemployed, the poor and many others.

## A modern-day Christmas story

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

**In the midst of the violence, in the midst of the drugs, in the midst of the recall of affirmative action, in the midst of the cuts in welfare and housing subsidies for the poor, in the midst of civil wars in Africa and not-quite peace in the Middle East, Bosnia and Ireland, it is easy to lose heart.**

But, every now and then one hears stories which show that God's light still shines in the midst of the darkness. Every now and then one hears a story of hope. Here is one of them, which I heard about on a recent National Public Radio news broadcast.

The Manchester Craftsmen's Guild is located in the heart of a poor community in Pittsburgh. Once home to wealthy industrialists, the

Manchester section of the city was left out of the 1980's re-birth of Pittsburgh.

But, because of the vision of one man, Bill Strickland, that community has not been forgotten completely. Thirty years ago Strickland, a University of Pittsburgh history student and pottery maker, began a ceramics program for children in this neighborhood. Today it has blossomed into an art program which impacts thousands of Pittsburgh children and into a training center for hundreds of poor adults in that neighborhood.

Strickland, combining his pottery-making expertise with his experience in the 1960's civil rights movement, realized that the arts and a caring teacher had saved his own life and could do the same for others. Using the apprenticeship model un-

der which he flourished, he established a program which today includes 500 students who learn ceramics, photography, painting, drawing and computer imaging. Another 4,000 students attend workshops run by the guild in the city's 12 public high schools. In addition, guild students attend summer arts residency programs at nearby universities.

Through exposure to the arts, these students come to realize their own creativity and imagination and develop a new sense of self-worth. From this new view of themselves, students have new reasons to go to school and new reasons to stay alive. "You can't teach a kid algebra if they're not interested in being alive," said Strickland. Remarkably, 80 percent of the Manchester Guild students go on to college.

And for the future? Strickland's plans include a greenhouse which will grow flowers and hydroponic food on a nearby vacant lot. His dream is to build an office tower and women's health care facility to make the Manchester Guild and Bidwell Center self-supporting. Strickland says, "I think that we could solve the problems of the cities in our lifetime...But in order to achieve that, we're going to have to get a lot more aggressive and a lot activist in terms of our orientation and our orientation and our thinking, and the meter's running."

Signs of hope. Signs of light in the darkness. It takes only one man or one woman with a vision to be the light...And the meter's running.

A blessed Christmas to us all.

## Texaco, Avis, Shell, Circuit City et al

vice to its customers, its use of people of color vendors and franchisers, and its corporate social responsibility performance, not only in the United States, but around the world.

While recent headlines have focused on discrimination and racial hostility in the work place, it is important not to underestimate the importance of social responsibility accountability. For example, there is Shell Oil, which has been criticized for its support of the South African apartheid regime dur-

ing the 1970's and 80's and its current support of the Nigeria dictatorship, which is responsible for the repression of the Ogoni people, whose land supplies the oil. Texaco itself has been criticized for its role in developing oil and gas reserves in Burma, which is run by a repressive and illegitimate military dictatorship also notorious for human rights violations. The attitude an actions of multinational corporations toward so-called Third World nations, thus, must be considered a

part of their track record.

While the media world seems to have put corporate racism on the media back burner, it is not off the agenda of the religious community, which has been challenging corporations like Texaco for 25 years. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a coalition of 275 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish institutional investors with combined portfolios of over \$50 billion, is closely watching the follow-up to the Texaco settle-

ment. ICCR-member agencies, for instance, are sponsoring shareholder resolutions on a variety of Texaco problem. They will call on Texaco to diversify its board of directors, to break down so-called "glass ceiling" barriers to the advancement of women and people of color and to make a detailed report on Texaco's diversity efforts." (For more information about the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, write 475 Riverside Drive, Room 566, New York, NY 10115.)