

# EDITORIAL

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Advertising Sales Manager

Tony Washington  
Arts & Entertainment

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Public Relations

### Contributing Writers:

Professor McKinley Burt, Lee Perlman,  
Neal Heilpern, Eugene Rashad

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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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Be Wise, Be Well

BY JUNIOUS RICARDO STANTON

There is a Swahili saying, "Wisdom creates well being." Africans have always recognized the constructive role wisdom plays in promoting and maintaining social stability and harmony. The New Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language defines the word wisdom as; the quality of being wise, the faculty to discern right and truth and to judge and act accordingly, sound judgment, sagacity, discretion, common sense, extensive knowledge. (Emphasis mine.) Mediate on that for a moment. In essence, one who is wise discerns truth, that which is right and acts accordingly.

In a sane and civilized society, wisdom, doing what is right would be encouraged, recognized and honored by all strata of the culture. Unfortunately for us, America in neither sane nor civilized. How can you make such an assertion, you ask? Study the real history of this nation. Take a look around you. Now imagine a society based upon truth and righteousness and contrast that with what you see. Does what you see give any indication Americans have discerned truth, what is right and right action? If wisdom was promoted as a virtue in America, would her citizenry assent to the hypocrisy and corruption we see all around us? Would there be as much animosity, frustration and rancor in this society if truth and right were priorities? Would the suicide rates for all races, ages and socio-economic groups be so high? Would alienation, substance abuse, divorce, domestic

violence and social cannibalism be rampant if sagacity and common sense were encouraged on all levels of society?

Where are our philosophers (lovers of wisdom), our sages and deep thinkers? In America, people are made celebrities and "stars" simply because they are proficient at playing sports, entertaining or because they are in the media spotlight? No consideration whatsoever is given to their character. In television and motion pictures most of the major characters are seriously flawed. They are sociopaths, ruthless connivers or people with no morals. Is it wise to trumpet antisocial values and parade degenerate behavior before the public without offering a counter balance? Can a culture that fosters instant gratification, conspicuous consumption, crass materialism, situational ethics, hypocrisy and social irresponsibility be deemed wise? What does the future bode for such a society?

Will this nation continue its slide into depravity and decadence or is moral transformation possible? For Africans in America we face an even greater challenge: maintaining our sanity. Prior to our captivity and subjugation to European or Arab hegemony, we came from traditions where wisdom, mother wit and common sense were integral parts of the social fabric. African people venerated their elders, they were spiritually centered and communally focused. Wisdom, right discernment and right conduct, was encouraged, foolishness was clearly defined and discouraged. Now we find ourselves in a situation where the exact opposite is true. Check out the media.

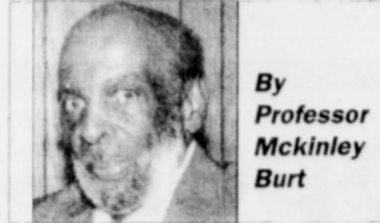
**Part one of this series certainly triggered a large and favorable response, and I am pleased for a number of reasons.**

Not the least of which is what seems to be an almost universal recognition that a "return to basics" can indeed be a "back to the future" movement.

Of equal importance is the fact that the spectrum of favorable respondents was across all age, ethnic, gender and generation lines. It was my intention that this second part of the "Education Plan" would address several novel innovations for expediting the integration of 21st-century technology into the school system. However, last Thursday's opportunistic participation in an "Ebionics" discussion on Cable TV (2/13/97) has led me to defer this component until next week.

This "Ebionics" roundtable discussion was sponsored by "Straight-Talk, Inc.," a very active community organization dedicated to timely and constructive intervention with our at-risk youth. The program moderator was Mr. Samuel A. Johnson, and my three fellow panelists were, Dr.

Charles L. Hopson, principal at Harriet Tubman school, Education Consultant, Edward T. Roberts and Dr. Robert Garlett, principal at Zellerbach Elementary School, Camas, Washougal, Washington.



By Professor McKinley Burt

The exchange of viewpoints was quite lively and informative, and while no absolute consensus was reached (or expected), some classic positions on the subject were delineated. The principal arguments subtending these positions emerged as did differing viewpoints on the sociological frame of reference to be employed in evaluating the linguistic component of African American experience. But more on this in a later evaluation of the "Ebionics" theme.

Meanwhile, "back at the ranch" let me cite again, this week, a noble phrase from president Clinton's educational priorities, "Every eight year-old must be able to read". Well, I

would certainly hope so, but in my "Plan", I emphasize how important it is to restore that pre-World War II "learning incubator" which combined motivation and expectation in a fashion that saw many segregated ghetto schools performing at a level of say, the local "Catlin Gable." There follows a note I wrote in the third grade, at age 8.

"Dear teacher, I wish to acknowledge to you that I did not participate in the disturbance of your room yesterday." I could have done a little better with the modifier, but my students at Portland State University got the message when I circulated a photostat of the original note. This was during one of my "bad" semesters when I was being forced to deal with a freshman class with many graduates of Portland's notorious "Adams High School." This was in the early 1970's

This tragic "open campus, do-your-own-thing" experiment on a lower-income student population (who else, of course) had devastating results, inflicting long-term social and economic disabilities. Those students that were reading and writing at the third to fifth grade level when they entered

high school left in the same condition. Not all of course, as a number of parents, and many students themselves, belatedly realized the consequences of this educational travesty, and took remedial measures. I and an associate have tracked several of these cases, even across generational lines. So you can understand our concern with the inspired rhetoric of the architects of "Ebionics."

As is par for the course with these carefully orchestrated education game plans, the Portland experiment was preceded by a glowing, two-page spread in Time Magazine. Two young, white lads flashed their brilliant smiles and new education doctorates, then waxed eloquent on their scheme to retrieve inner-city youth. Suitably equipped with both advanced degrees and foundation monies these two upper-middle class pedagogues descended upon a naive (?) Portland School district.

Early on I encountered these Harvard graduates in the staging area that had been set up for them in the basement of Jefferson High School. Naturally, any attempt to dissuade them or the administration was futility itself.

## San Francisco: deja vu all over again

BY JOHN WILLIAM TEMPLETON

**Ever since the Gold Rush, it has been very dangerous to be an african-american neighborhood in San Francisco, as soon as a community gets settled and comfortable, someone else decides they want your land.**

The city's history can literally be traced by the neighborhoods that used to be populated primarily by Blacks form the Financial District and Chinatown to Russian Hill and the Fillmore and Hayes valley, tactics ranging from vigilante violence and the Fugitive Slave Act to the right of testimony law, urban renewal, and in the case of the Fillmore, even murder, have been employed to displace Black land owners. But generally, it's been done under the auspices of legitimate governmental authority through planning, zoning and permits granted, often with the stated purpose of improving community conditions.

You'll find very few former residents of the Hayes Valley or North

Beach public housing projects who expect to move back into those areas once they are demolished nationally. African-American urban neighborhoods have been sited near industrial concentrations.

We've all heard the oft-quoted saying "the other side of the tracks." While doing an analysis of Census data in the 1980s, I was able to confirm demographically the validity of that notion, while looking at more than 100 metropolitan areas, I was struck that 95 percent of the time, the 2000 block of East 14th Street in any city was an 100 percent African-American area. Further queries determined that because of prevailing winds heading east, African-American neighborhoods were generally just east of the industrial area near the site of the pollution form smokestacks. Since railroads ran to the factories, those neighborhoods would be next to the tracks, conversely, in practically any city, the "West End" was described as a fairly upscale area with very few Blacks.

Despite the environmental consequences, there might be some security and lower housing prices form

being in a less desirable area. But those neighborhoods have tended to be the path of least resistance for highways, and major construction projects like the oakland postal clearing center. Crippled by the lack of access to mortgage capital for thome building and renovations, the communities have been unable to amass the capital to hold on to their neighborhoods.

New Bayview aublisher Willie Ratliff is now sounding the alarm for Vayview-Hunters Point, the site of the highest concentration of breast coancer in the world. It also lies between the already approved Pacific Bell Park for the San Francisco Giants and the about-to-go-to-voters 49ers stadium-mall complex, linked by a planned light railline up Third Street. Although the combined impact of the Giants and Niners has never meant an iota of economic benefit to Bayview, Ratliff correctly perceives that someone will benefit from the increased land values due to the appeal of the new facilities. History tells him that it won't be the current residents.

In the same way that an effort has

been launched to create an economic magnet with the Fillmore Jazz Preservation district, although hopefully much more effectively and quickly, there is a need to give the Bayview-Hunters Point community an economic focus that provides jobs and entrepreneurship for the current residents.

One of the first steps that can take place is to replace the impersonal Third Street and honor the legacy of the recently departed spokesman for Black San Francisco--Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, physician, psychiatrist and publisher of the Sun Reporter--by renaming the street Carlton Goodlett Way. In addition to Goodlett's local and statewide contributions, he is due the primary credit for helping to revive African-American community newspapers in the 1960s and 1970s as president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. By lobbying with major corporations, he helped the papers transition from a reliance on circulation revenue to advertising and inspired a whole new generation of editors and publishers through his advocacy of journalism education, including this writer.

## Is Alexis Herman Paying the High Cost of Public Service?

BY YVONNE SCRUGGS

**A few years ago, I taught the Capstone Seminar for 22 second-year graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Fels Center of Government.**

Earning Masters Degrees in various aspects of government and public affairs were 14 Phi Beta Kappas, several former Rhodes Scholars, a contingent of honors bachelors degree holders and a majority who had rich backgrounds as legislative aides to congressional persons or as assistants to various mayors and governors.

During the final class meetings, we polled each student about his or her career plans after graduation. With the exception of one, all of these stimulating and bright young people excitedly reported their success in finding coveted positions with private corporations and industries, not with governmental agencies or public organizations. Why? Because they feared the effects of press intrusion and unwarranted notoriety on their children and families, and felt that given the conservatively capped governmental salaries and other restricted public employment amenities, the gains from public service simply were not worth the pain.

This took place between 1986

and 1989. I wonder if these students feel vindicated today when they look at the cannibalizing of public servants that dominate the front pages of national newspapers? It appears to me these days that prominence in public service eventually leads to having every minor personal flaw magnified and having the well-intentioned and completely appropriate fulfillment of legitimate duties of public position distorted into devious schemes of personal or political aggrandizement.

There are numerous recent cases of character assassinations and reputation assaults which would discourage any sane person from voluntarily accepting a high government appointment. Often the entire family is vilified and tarnished by broad brush allegations or "appearance of impropriety," this is then incorporated into the persona of the public figure, and whether or not it for future publicity. Often these allegations can haunt public figures for a lifetime.

It should come as no surprise therefore, that of the many who are called to offer service in a national public administration, few choose to be chosen. And of those who do choose, many (especially women and minorities) come to wish that they had not. The current contretemps

over the alleged/assumed/speculated upon role of Alexis Herman in the Democratic National Committee's (DND) fund raising investigation, is a graphic and dramatic case in point.

Herman's primary responsibility in the White House for the last four years had been to reach out to constituents, especially traditionally excluded or under-represented classes, to make sure that they felt embraced. These groups, included clergy, small business owners, and labor groups. Herman was responsible for correcting that impression and improving the reality. Where excluded groups often are not asked to help make a difference in decisions affecting all Americans, Herman's office existed in order to facilitate their participation by the inclusion of their opinions, encouraging their influence and recognizing their civic and entrepreneurial power.

Alexis Herman did her job well. This fact has been under-reported and underestimated.

Unfortunately, the decision to leak un-annotated records of the many perfectly legitimate meetings she arranged for diverse groups of Americans added to the problem and was unhelpful at best, cynical at least.



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