

EDITORIAL

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Charles Washington
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Gary Ann Taylor
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Danny Bell
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Paul Neufeldt
Production & Design

Tony Washington
Arts & Entertainment

Audrey Washington
Business Assistant

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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perspectives

Spring Will Soon Have Sprung; Has Your Sap Risen

Years ago at this time of year there would be a lot of ribald levity and even worse poetry printed about 'spring', the season when a young "man's" fancy turns to romance -- as though it didn't take two to tango!

Today, we are much more likely to groan at the thought of a broad verdant lawn (fully equipped with dandelions) that seems to increase in size each year

in direct proportion to our own calendar years; or to stare aghast at a tour Internet billing -- did we really order that much access time? And just what the heck was it that we thought was going to be interesting enough to justify five out of seven sleepless nights with no seasonal variation?

All that aside, the more urgent realities of our cyclical existence will kick in about March 23; this includes creditors who promised to wait ninety days to be reimbursed for those sacks of holiday goodies. And all things considered, our total outlay for taxes of one sort or another has not decreased -- contrary to all that inspired rhetoric accompanying various initiatives and other promises made to the body politic.

In fact, the cumulative pressure of such unpleasant events this spring equinox seems to suggest that somewhere there is a demonic spirit whose evil avocation is to operate a rather sophisticated balancing mechanism. The tax reductions promised in that "inspired rhetoric" are soon balanced out by sneaky new adjustments to the process. Worse yet, it would appear that some gaming specialists from Los Vegas or Reno may have been imported -- in some areas the taxpayer is finding a net increase. Vigorous protest is required.

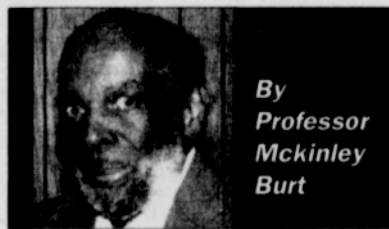
This year can be a very productive one despite minor(?) disappointments and discomfort. A number of the

Portland Observer readers say that they are quite satisfied with their learning curve: Being a better parent (grand parent); increasing the economic value of the family unit (via added job skills and/or business venture); networking and relating to friends and neighbors in a more meaningful manner.

I am also getting some interesting feedback from the younger generation. As many of you know I have worked for two decades at getting our youth summer jobs, a most critical factor in keeping both high school and college students in school. I began this process with the advantage of having an 'industry' background which enabled me to assess the specific enterprises of the area in realistic terms of what job opportunities would be available. I've tried to transfer the technique.

Of course, it is evident that same type of experience-based assessment works as well for the adult job placement process. But what I wished to note here in particular was the nature of that "feedback from the youth." The kids that I placed in summer jobs last year (12 different occupations) got together on their own this winter and worked out their own program to secure summer employment for 1997. You hear that? No Prof. Burt, no parents, no guardians no urban programs -- just good old initiative, 7 black and 5 whites.

Say, that's what it's all about, I'm really pleased that many of the youth will not need my continued assistance in that area. That leaves me free to help others or to develop new programs -- and you just know I've got some. Next week I'll be describing some of these ventures including some interesting venues already in operation. Everyone did not wait for spring for the sap to rise.



By
Professor
McKinley
Burt

Two recent studies contribute important data to support the contention that the criminal justice system is both out of control, and targeted against young, Black men.

The first research report, conducted by Vincent Schiraldi and Tara-Jen Ambrosio of the Justice Policy Institute, and summarized in the 2/24/97 Washington Post, analyzed government budget expenditures at the state and national level. In the words of Schiraldi, director of the policy institute, their research demonstrated that "...in the funding battle between prisons and universities, prisons are consistently coming out on top." Prison construction is outstripping college construction.

The second study, conducted by the Sentencing Project, shows that 1 out of every 7 Black men cannot vote today due to felony convictions. (We have often cited earlier Sentencing Project studies concerning drug sentencing disparities and the large number of African American males trapped within the criminal justice system.) In the New York Times, Barbara Wright, of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, put her finger on this tragic situation: "Voting is what makes you a citizen. It's tragic to contemplate the creation of an entire class

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Putting Prisons First

of native-born non-citizens."

Here are a few of the horrible facts from these two studies:

[JPI=Justice Policy Institute; SP=Sentencing Project]

*[JPI]-State spending on prisons went up by 30%, while higher education spending decreased 18%, between 1987 and 1995.

*[JPI]-In 1995, state spending on prison construction went up \$926 million; higher education building monies went down by almost the same amount.

*[JPI]-Justice Department figures show that the number of adults in prison increased more than 3 times between 1980 and 1994, going from 320,000 to 992,000.

*[JPI]-Both California and Florida now spend less on their universities than on their prisons, a marked change from only a few years

ago. California, for example, has constructed 21 prisons since 1984, but only 1 new university.

*[SP]-An estimated 1.46 million Black men--14%!--have lost the right to vote because they have been convicted of a felony, out of a national voting age population of only 10.4 million.

*[SP]-In 1994, there were 7.66 African Americans in prison for every white in jail, a significant increase from an already high 1988 ratio of 6.88 to 1.

*[SP]-Despite being only 12% of the population, African Americans make up 51% (over half!) of the 1.1 million people in jail.

The high rate of incarceration for Black males undoubtedly contributes to the findings of another recent study, this one by the College Fund (formerly the United Negro College

Fund), which concluded that Black women are now receiving college degrees at two times the rate of Black men. As report coordinator Michael Nettle noted in the Washington Post, these new "...statistics are a real cause for celebration for Black women."

For African American men, however, especially when combined with the imprisonment figures given above, these statistics are cause for special concern. In Reverend Jackson's phrase, those enrolled in jail will not be attending Yale.

David Bositis, and expert on African American voting patterns, was quoted in the New York Times to the effect that having so many Black men lose their voting rights "...clearly diminishes Black influence politically." Bositis went on to say that this disenfranchisement may have important psychological effects.

"You have a prison system where Black men are back in servitude, along with an economy where Blacks are in the low-paying jobs, so it all ends up in the minds of Black Americans that the system is basically rigged to diminish their political power and recreate the plantation system with prisons." Amen.

This country has spent the past decade putting prisons first, and children--especially poor children--last. We must change direction.

We're all precious in God's sight

BY EUGENE RASHAD

What you're about to read is not the script for a new Hollywood film: Two-footed predator on the loose stalking its prey.

Homicide on the streets. Crime on the streets of America is no joke. There is nowhere to hide unless you're the stalker.

Two incidents in particular come to mind: news reports about carjackings and robberies at gunpoint which led to the deaths Ennis Cosby, the son of entertainer Bill Cosby, and Michael Jeffrey Jordan, father of sports star Michael Jordan. In each case the victims were surprised by a predator lurking in the shadows.

To say our streets mimic a jungle is an understatement.

And like the drum beat deep in the bush, the sound of a siren could be a signal that another killing has occurred. These criminals move through our streets with stealth-like ability. Its like guerrilla warfare.

No one is safe from this band of modern day, nomadic monsters on two legs who stalk innocent humans like prey. We know it happens because the news media swoops down like a vulture to circle the remains of a fresh kill. We read about the brutal demise of another life. The street

curb once again is a tombstone for another victim stretched out in blood.

The Public Space

America is suppose to be the land of the free, home of the brave. Seems its become land of the predator, home of the afraid. To a great extent most of us take precautions to avoid danger. Unfortunately certain groups are dehumanized by society through stereotypes. In his book Streetwise Author Elijah Anderson writes:

"...In negotiating the streets, people watch out particularly for a certain kind of young black male. 'People, black and white, who are more familiar with the black street culture are less troubled by sharing the streets with young black males.'

Anderson's comments have applications mostly to integrated populations. He writes about how unreliable stereotypes about any group, particularly black males can be:

"[People] rely for protection on broad stereotypes based on color and gender, if not outright racism. They are likely to misread many of the signs displayed by law-abiding black men, thus becoming apprehensive of almost any black male they spot in public." Of course all this goes out the window if the perpetrator is a white male.

Stay In The Foxhole

Lets call it the foxhole mentality. We lock ourselves up in our homes, use burglar alarms on our cars, and develop social distance to feel safe. This gives one a false sense of security until they're visited by the bogey man. Another way people take a wide berth from trouble is to avoid eye contact. A language is developed and decoded without a word spoken, that everyone understands.

This system of communication is charged up with subtlety and innuendo. Anderson writes: "...Skin color, gender, age companions, clothing, jewelry, and the objects people carry help identify them, so that assumptions are formed and communication can occur. 'Eye contact is discouraged. What people do is take a quick read from a distance before the approach and, hopefully safe passage. Its a sad irony but people do it. And the price we pay is alienation from each other that is only rivaled by computer users and drivers who can go a whole day without having public contact.

You Can Come Out Now

One problem-solving technique is for residents to become more vigilant. Such is the case for a neighborhood patrol orchestrated some years ago by Richard Brown of the Black United Front. Here you have people

from their respective neighborhood walking the blocks and being visible. This may not be the reason, but the numbers on crime have slightly gone down.

According to statistics compiled by Portland Police, there has been a 13 percent drop in violent crimes since 1994. The list includes aggravated assault, burglary, and robbery. Lt. Cliff Madison is a Portland Police Bureau spokesman. He told a reporter that people seem more willing to come forward, even testify to a crime. "People believe we're working with them, and they're willing to work with us."

A Life Is A Terrible Thing To Waste

It has already been pointed out that celebrity status, which sometimes means if the victim is white, brings more attention. In the 1994 edition of The Public Interest periodical Glenn C. Loury wrote: "...The muted response to the anonymity of countless young black victims is a direct reflection of an ambivalence toward and identification with the perpetrators of these crimes."

The tragedy is that life in the inner city, black or white, is rendered as part of a body count, rather than a loss of a valued member of society.

Welfare reform & Fed policy collision

BY CONGRESSMAN JESSE L. JACKSON, JR.

Welfare reform, which has an unstated but underlying premise of full employment, and federal reserve policy, whose stated purpose is full employment and price stability, are on a collision course.

Why? Because the Fed is dominated by those who protect financial interests first. Thus, fighting inflation wins out over full employment.

In fact, if the economy really begins to grow and unemployment begins to recede below five percent --- in the 1960s and 70s it was three percent -- Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, and the Federal Reserve Board raise interest rates to slow the economy and reduce job creation. They will say the economy is overheating. So just as the jobs begin to flow down, so those on welfare can go to work, Mr. Greenspan shuts off the spicket. The course is set for a collision between the stated goals of federal welfare reform (welfare-to-work) and the Fed.

In the past, when the national economy slowed, unemployment rose and hard times set in, the less fortunate could at least turn to welfare as a last resort. Under the new welfare reform policy they can no longer be assured of that. The fed-

eral floor under the poor for the past 60 years has been removed.

Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed into law the welfare reform bill in 1996. It changed the entire structure of welfare. Recipients can be on welfare only two years continuously and then they are legally guaranteed to be off. The federal government will guarantee paying for a cumulative five years of welfare benefits lifetime and no more.

There is not a similar federal guarantee that when you are forced off of welfare that a job will be available through the private or public sectors. Thus, today's welfare recipients are left only with the mandate of a 1950s song, "Get A Job!" It's easier to get though on poor people who don't vote than it is to get serious about full employment.

Underlying welfare reform is the moral principle that every person who can work, should work. That is morally sound, but it has no economic support. Government leaders and the nation should not impose the cultural standard of "the Protestant work ethic" on welfare recipients and the unemployed on the one hand, unless they have a real policy and an actual program of full employment on the other.

Logically, because of welfare reform, the government must now become the employer, not of last resort,

but of first resort. That policies and programs must be to achieve full employment and balanced economic growth. If full employment cannot be achieved in the private sector alone, then the government should guarantee every able-bodied person who wants to work a socially useful job doing meaningful work, making a liveable wage. Only then does the nation, the government and its leaders have the moral right to even suggest that every abled-bodied person be trained to work and get a job.

Currently, there is an abstract policy (Humphrey-Hawkins), but no actual government policies or programs to achieve full employment. Since the Great Depression, despite rhetoric which emphasizes the work ethic, the nation's and the government's leaders real commitment has been to be far more willing to establish entitlements to welfare or income transfer programs than to establish a full employment peace-time economy.

There is great concern among many politicians that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) be accurate. Of course, the CPI should be accurate, but the politics of CPI appear to be more a bipartisan conservative Democratic concern about reducing the budget deficit in exchange for certain tax cuts for the Republicans on the road to getting a budget agreement, than accuracy.

There is no similar concern that

the unemployment rate be accurate. While the official unemployment rate is 5.3 percent (7.5 million people who receive unemployment compensation but do not have a job), the actual number of unemployed (and underemployed) people is closer to 15-to-20 million Americans who are unemployed, underemployed, working part-time when they want to be working full-time, have never had a job or gave up looking for one (so that they are not even counted among the unemployed) -- or, with corporate and government downsizing, workers are worried that they may soon be in one of those categories. That's a more accurate picture and the reason there is so much economic anxiety in the land.

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan will testify before the Domestic and International Monetary Policy Subcommittee. No doubt, he will give his usual classic presentation of "reserved optimistic pessimism" that will cause the markets to tremble and react to every intonation of every syllable of every word. One reason he will speak in such obtuse terms is to obscure this collision course--a verbal commitment to full employment Act), while really pursuing a policy of fighting inflation.

What Mr. Greenspan ought to recommend today is a comprehensive and sound plan of government finance.