

EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

(USPS 959-680) Established in 1970

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Deadline for all submitted materials:

Articles: Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday, 12:00pm

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes To: Portland Observer,
P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon.

Subscriptions: \$30.00 per year

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Northeast Portland and Light Rail—Urban Renewal or Removal?

Public mass transit has always seemed like a good public service to me; affordable transit is a necessity for people who don't have cars, and everybody wishes there were fewer cars on our city streets.

What about light rail? Like most people, I hadn't paid too much attention to the dozens of meetings on light rail and the huge costs of building the South/North light rail line—until recently.

All of the light rail route maps we have seen in the newspapers and at meetings are "conceptual", like most planning maps. They show light rail route alternatives running along city streets, and look like they are in the street right-of-way. But a short time ago, a public agency planner called me and asked: "Aren't you doing building research in North/Northeast Portland, and have you seen these maps that show buildings that will be removed along the different routes?" I told him that yes, we are continuing to identify buildings associated with Portland's African American history, and no—I haven't seen these maps. He brought me a set and one Saturday I went over to North Flint, Vancouver, Page, and Tillamook Streets, near Williams and Russell Streets—and I got angry. I saw some of the houses included in the 1995 publication "Cornerstones of Community: The Buildings of Portland's African American History", and I pictured them gone, if the Wheeler/Russell Light Rail alternative is built as "conceptually" planned. (I confess, I have not had the time to search out the impacts on North Kerby or North Interstate.)

Last month, I joined some 300 people who turned out at a Saturday morning light rail meeting at Kaiser Town Hall, and I took my three allotted minutes to state my con-

cerns. My biggest issue is that no one I know (of the general public, that is) had seen these maps. I believe that the Affected public—those whose homes and businesses will be directly impacted by a public project—should have first place in any debate and decision about projects like this.

So, why do I care, and why should you care? Last month I was asked to do a presentation on Urban Renewal programs and their impacts on Portland's African American neighborhoods, for a history symposium at Portland Community College. In preparing my presentation, I spent several weeks re-visiting those programs from the 1950s-1970s and their devastating "removal" of hundreds of houses, businesses, churches, and other buildings in the African American neighborhoods that stood in the way of Memorial Coliseum, Interstate 5, the Fremont Bridge, and hospital expansion. I comforted myself somewhat with the belief that things are different now, and that this could never happen again, not today. Well, today Page, Tillamook, Wheeler, Flint, and Vancouver Avenue are what remain from the vibrant neighborhood centered around Williams Avenue that was destroyed for construction of Memorial Coliseum.

In 1957, 456 housing units and many, many businesses, along with Bethel AME Church were "displaced", with inadequate notice and inadequate compensation. Today, anything like that really should not and must not happen again. The affected public needs to be heard from, and that includes people who live and work within the 1000 foot areas along both sides of light rail routes; that's where the city's adopted policies of encouraging high-density residential (that means apartments) and mixed-use developments

(commercial on the ground floor with apartments upstairs) will have even greater impacts.

I am not leading an anti-light rail campaign, and I am not trying to "save" anyone. I was asked to write this article after the light rail meeting was shown on local cable TV. My point is that peoples' homes and businesses should not be clinically examined as "under-developed real estate"; these are places where people live and work, not just "through routes" for travelers in North/Northeast Portland. I believe that we all have a civic duty, that is sometimes an unpleasant one, to speak up and participate in the many public plans that affect our future. To their credit, City of Portland and Metro staff have contacted me, gone through the Cornerstones book, and are expecting to get information about other buildings we are identifying for the African American Buildings History program. All known impacts must be included in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for any project with federal funding.

So what should you do? Remember that just like you, I am only one person, but that together we make up "the public". We, "the public", are invited to attend and speak at public meetings on light rail. The next one is scheduled for Wednesday April 9th, at 6:00 PM, at the Oregon Convention Center. It's being billed as the South/North Light Rail Cost-Cutting Measures meeting. You can call Metro's transportation hotline at 797-1900 to get any public information you want about light rail. Most importantly, we must show up and participate, if we want light rail to be built the way we want it, if it's going to be built.

This article was written by Cathy Galbraith, Director of the Bosco-Milligan Foundation

A week ago, Rev. Jackson gave a major address to the National Association of Minorities in Cable.

In his speech, Jackson went back through the history of segregation and exclusion in the telecommunications industry, showing the path to the neglect of equal opportunity in the industry we see today. Some excerpts:

Cable television began in the foothills of rural Pennsylvania in 1949. Originally designed to bring urban TV signals to rural small towns, cable's culture until the early 1970s was all-White. In the early 1970s, the cable industry "discovered" Black and Brown America—in the same sense that Columbus supposedly "discovered" America.

The cable industry realized that Black and Brown Americans living in cities are a huge market, their money is green, they watch lots of television, and they are exceptionally brand-loyal consumers. But by then, the ownership structure of the cable industry had already been locked in. Those with a 20-year head start in ownership—none of whom was Black or Brown—had a hammerlock on the industry.

Today, District Cablevision in Washington, D.C., Percy Sutton's

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Broken Cable

company in Queens, NY, Frank Washington's 3 small cable systems in CA, and perhaps 2 or 3 other systems, are all that's left.

There has never been a limit on the number of cable systems one company can own. Thus, a handful of huge "multiple system operators" with extraordinary economies of scale control the industry today. Indeed, two companies control a majority of America's cable households. Companies like these can outbid any small company for the handful of cable systems which come onto the market.

Whose interests do these companies serve? For years, cable operators wired the wealthy and White neighborhoods first, and today they continue to scramble for the so-called "high end" market.

It's happening again with the

forthcoming Video-on-Demand and specialized Internet services. As telephone companies provide video services in competition with traditional cable operators, we must watch very closely to ensure that they do not redline poor and minority neighborhoods—just as they redlined new and enhanced telephone service 20 years ago.

Unfortunately, the FCC did not consider segregationists and race discriminators to lack the requisite character to serve as public trustees. Over the course of six decades, the FCC deliberately gave away billions of dollars worth of broadcast spectrum—and, I might add, billions of dollars worth of microwave spectrum in the cable antenna relay service—to licensees it knew would never hire a Black man or woman in

any capacity except that of janitor, would never put a Black man or woman on the air except in news stories focusing on crime, and wouldn't even allow a Black church to sponsor the devotional messages which concluded the broadcast day.

Generations of White men received a vast head start in obtaining the skills, experience, and network of contacts required to become media owners. Those denied these opportunities in the 1950s—due to racism—lost their chance to be broadcast station and cable system middle managers in the 1960s, entrepreneurs in the 1980s, and broadcast group or multiple cable system owners in the 1990s.

In 1978, the FCC realized at last that because the airwaves belonged to the people, and we were part of "the people," it had to do something to ensure that we would attain ownership of our fair share of the spectrum resource. This wasn't going to be easy, because 99% of the spectrum had already been given away to Whites.

But the FCC tried anyway, adopting the "tax certificate policy," which meant that companies selling a broadcast station or a cable system to minorities could defer the capital gains tax.

Can Small (Lending) Also Be Beautiful?

Last week's column—"Small Is Beautiful, Or Is It?"—described a down-scaling of the development efforts by Western nations in the poorer nations of the 'Third World'.

It was seen that successful economic systems must take into account the customs and traditions of the people.

And the "In focus" section of the April issue of the highly regarded "Scientific American" magazine features a related article (P-16) on an innovative way to finance individually-owned enterprise in the same countries: "Micro-finance is proving that the poor are creditworthy, but will the movement try to grow too fast"? At a recent summit meeting in Washington DC, representatives from 113 countries endorsed a

goal of extending loans to 100 million of the world's poorest families by the year 2005.

So what does it all mean? In last week's article we sought a correlation with the accelerated growth of small business in America that was principally initiated by workers displaced by mergers and other downsizing. We would note that a great number were highly skilled, in contrast to the Third World entrepreneurs described in the Scientific American magazine as follows. "Seamstresses, carpenters, street vendors and the proprietors of other small businesses in Bolivia would typically be shunned by banks. For these people, the only possible sources for loans have traditionally been family members or money-lenders charging up to 10 percent interest daily."

"Yet 72,000 of them have been welcomed at BancoSol, turning that institution into the bank with the largest customer base in the country. The banks decision is neither lunacy nor charity but rather a new finan-

cial experiment...demonstrates that borrowers without collateral can often be very good credit risks, faithfully paying back loans of a little as even \$100."

You may have last week's article before you or you may just reflect that the typical approach of western nations to economic development in poorer countries has too often been a 'top-down' imposition of classic economic systems of mass production and economies-of-scale. We pointed out in "Small Is Beautiful..." that "successful economic systems must take into account the customs and traditions of the people."

Certainly, we already see that "Small Lending" can accomplish this 'social fit' in the microeconomics and surprisingly or not so surprisingly we have the following from Scientific American.

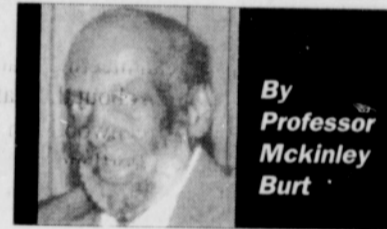
"Micro finance is not confined to the Third World. It was not happenstance that a sprawling convention hotel in Washington, D.C. was chosen as a summit meeting place rather

than quarters in La Paz or Dhaka. In fact, BancoSol and Grameen have served as models for legions of U.S. copycats, most of which are run by small nonprofit groups. The idea of pulling oneself out of poverty by building a food stand in La Paz or a hair styling salon in Chicago has a universal attraction."

And we have this, "The notion holds an appeal to a federal government pledged to ease people off welfare. In a survey, the Aspen Institute in Washington, D.C., found that 250 'micro enterprise' programs in the U.S. last year represented more than a doubling from four years earlier."

However, we do not find complete satisfaction with these alternative economics in either the Third world or America-Overseas there is concern that Small Lending (micro finance) could become an all encompassing approach rather than a tool within a larger antipoverty strategy."

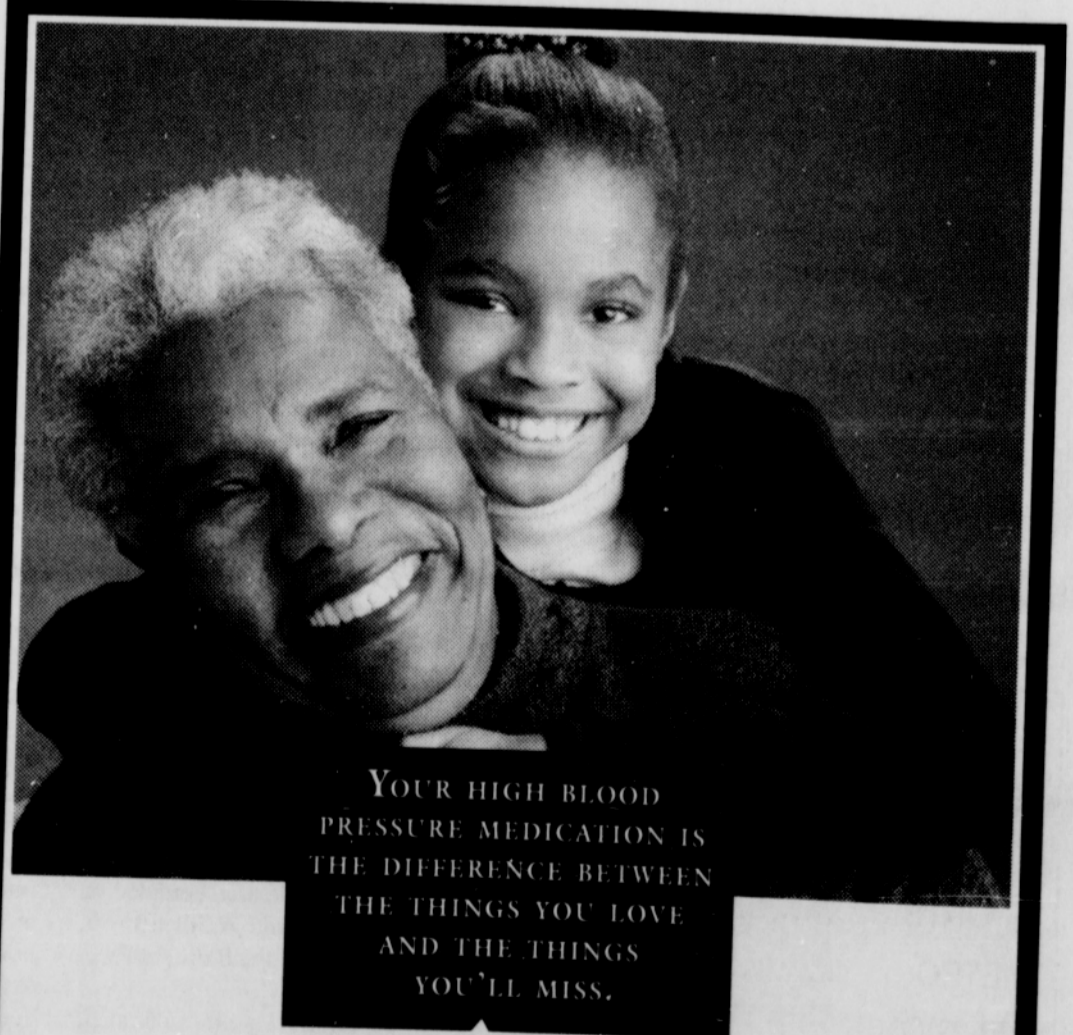
And here in America, there is not only that concern, but a premonition that the mini-economics could lead to return of the demeaning "cottage industry" of the 19th century. Hundreds of thousands of the poor eked out a bare living performing "piece work" at home by manufacturing articles from raw materials delivered by corporate agents who picked up finished goods for a mere pitance.



By Professor McKinley Burt

Letter To The Editor

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