

EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

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The Portland Observer

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Charles Washington
Publisher & Editor

Gary Ann Taylor
Business Manager

Yvonne Lerch
Account Executives

Mark Washington
Distribution Manager

Larry J. Jackson, Sr.
Director of Operation

Mike Leighton
Copy Editor

Contributing Writers:
Professor McKinley Burt,
Lee Perlman,
Neil Heilpern

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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It's amazing what kids pick up
at the beach.

Over a lifetime, one in five Americans will develop skin cancer. Don't let your child be the one. For more information, see your dermatologist.



www.aad.org

In Wednesday, July 30th, at 8:00 p.m., the first night of the Rainbow/Push Coalition annual conference, Reverend Jackson is putting together an important panel to discuss the current state of racism in our county.

The panel is entitled "Race, Reason, Remedy," and will be moderated by the distinguished Harvard professor and author, Dr. Charles Ogletree.

Why do we need such a panel? A few key statistics provide insight: "Senator Spencer Abraham (R-M) has proposed an amendment to the juvenile crime bill to address the disparity between powder and crack cocaine sentences, a disparity that was confirmed by the Sentencing Commission, and which we have discussed in this fax in the past.

However, Abraham will not attempt to equalize the situation by lowering crack sentences; instead, he suggests raising sentences for people distributing the lowest quantities of powder cocaine.

In addition, penalties for higher-level dealers of powder cocaine would remain the same; only low-end cocaine defendants would face increased sentences.

Wallace suspects this proposal is

P e n s p e c t i v e s

Lets sojourn (rove) farther into science

After all, the powers-that-be just held a contest to rename that little exploration vehicle running around the surface of Mars - And, lo and behold, the winning name as "Sojourner."

"But Black History is pretty much as the inimitable Bill Cosby described it, "Lost, Strayed or Stolen."

Just how many Americans do you think will relate this choice to that brave African woman who escaped the obscene involuntary servitude of Dixie to 'Sojourn' the length and

RAINBOW PUSH COALITION Race, reason, remedy

"...a cynical effort to quiet the complaints of racism in crack sentencing, while in fact making the racial impact much worse."

Wallace notes that "nothing is done to relieve the draconian sentences for crack; an addict convicted of simple possession will still get a mandatory five years."

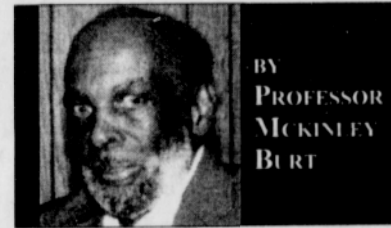
The Sentencing Commission found that "low-level street dealers of powder cocaine are primarily poor, minority youth, generally under the age of 18," while its Chairman testified in the Senate in 1995 that just raising penalties for powder, rather than lowering crack sentences, "Could distort this sensible structure [the current targeting of mid- and upper-level dealers] and result in application of the mandatory minimums to defendants at lower culpability levels."

The White House is reportedly planning to weigh in on this issue next week. President Clinton and

Attorney General Janet Reno need to hear our views. Don't we already have enough young African Americans in prison? The U.S. is #2 in incarceration rates (behind only Russia), 51% of this national prison population, and 41% of death row inmates, are African Americans.

One in three young Black men is caught in the criminal justice system. And a recent report by the Sentencing Project indicated that 1/7 of adult African American males cannot vote due to felony convictions. These are horrible statistics for the world's most powerful democracy.

Quoting from a recent analysis by Davide Bosisis of the Joint Center for Political Studies, "in the 46 states that in some manner deny or abridge voting rights, there are 510,000 Black men in prison, 250,000 on probation, and 190,000 on parole; there are 510,000 Black ex-felons in those states that permanently disenfranchise felons."



BY
PROFESSOR
MCKINLEY
BURT

breath of the rest of the land as a lecturer and anti-slavery crusader - "Sojourner Truth." Too proud to adopt the convention of taking the 'masters' name, this heroic black woman named herself to exactly correlate with her chosen life-long crusade for human freedom and dignity - "Sojourner Truth," yes Lord, she did!

Several readers have predicted that there will be serious objections just as there have been to including Sojourner among the statues of historic women crusaders whom female congress persons are seeking to have elevated to a more conspicuous spot in a prominent building in Washington D.C. Another reader, a senior citizen, reminds us that many years ago when space exploration was first contemplated, the Pittsburgh Courier, an African American newspaper, come out with a cartoon that mirrored the mind-sets of the times.

A large, sleek space ship was shown streaking heavenward, with a full crew of Anglo Saxons in control, noble visages fastened on eternity.

Some distance behind and connected by a tow chain several miles in length was a trailing vehicle with no visible means of propulsion but containing a full crew with decidedly African features. It was labeled, "Colored section!"

Well, so much for levity (of a sort), that last meeting of concerned parents determined to enhance their children's immersion into the sciences and mathematics agreed on several key points. "Much of our limited resources will be better directed to support the purchase of equipment and materials for our kid's neighborhood science clubs. OMSI is fine for occasional structured visits to keep the big picture in view, but not as a technology 'Disney Land', an overly-expensive entertainment center and parent trap."

Another conversation arose around my experiences with an OMSI Northeast "outreach" branch. This was about a decade ago when I was engaged as a consultant, with ill-defined duties. A parent pointed out

All this, out of a total Black adult male population of only 10.4 million. One out of every seven.

Bosisis also makes the following points:

- "There is differential treatment of Whites and Blacks by police authorities in enforcing the law." Even a majority of Whites agrees with this point-56% in a 1/97 survey.

- "As far as the racial makeup of the prison population, the single largest contributor is drug convictions."

- "At the start of the current campaign finance scandal hearings, Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI) received the following vicious fax:

"Don't even think about playing the race card! Don't use the words 'racist,' 'nativist,' or 'Asian-bashing.' None of those words are applicable at all here. If you use this tactic you will be swimming in the slimy depths with the likes of Johnny Cochran. We are watching for this shameless and despicable tactic that it is rumored you would use, without regard to the truth. Why don't you surprise us and display integrity, and character?"

Talk about shameless and despicable-this is nasty stuff. Just another reminder that not everyone is comfortable in our emerging multiracial society.

that I hit a stone wall when I tried to bring in talented black role models who were professionally engaged in high level technology in industry, government, military or as an avocation.

I located a black traffic engineer who was a walking history on 'Morgan' the African American' who invented the automatic stop light and sold it to General Electric; A navy man and scuba diver with pictures and tape who could expound for hours on the sea shore and tide pools; A young I.B.M. employee whose hobby was building radio-controlled helicopters. These among others.

The parent who had a younger child in that group made the point that I didn't receive strong support from black staff to bring in high-level super-competent African Americans. "You know folks, 'we' are frightened to do that. We think it makes us look bad, and old massa might get disturbed." A closing comment was "are we going to be about buying micro scopes, telescopes and chemistry sets for our kids, or stupidly buying some more \$150 sneakers?"

Next week the mathematics orientation you wanted.

Civil Rights Journal Forty acres and a mule

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
People have been asking what I think about all the talk about whether the nation should apologize to African Americans for slavery.

Combined with President Clinton's recent call for Americans to dialogue about race and his apology to the victims of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, much attention seems to be focused on righting our past sins as we prepare for a new century and a new millennium.

Having visited the "slave castles" in Ghana and Goree Island in Senegal where my ancestors were held until the slave ships arrived, I know some of the physical and psychological pain those men and women must have felt. This nation, and others, have much to atone for when it comes to slavery.

Unfortunately, slavery is not all this nation has to apologize for to African Americans. It has the lynchings of thousands of black men and women and it has decades of Jim Crow laws of segregation. It has political disenfranchisement and destruction of whole towns like Rosewood, FL and whole communities like Greenwood Ave. in Tulsa, OK to apologize for.

I must admit it's difficult to find words to express what I feel about all of this.

As a Christian, I truly believe in

the power of forgiveness. As a student of language, I understand the power of words.

But, as a student of American history, I know that words alone can ring hollow.

I know of the many times our nation has signed treaties with our native American brothers and sisters, only to break them when they were no longer convenient.

Words alone are too easy. Words must be accompanied by repentance -- by empathizing with the people who were hurt and acknowledging the wrong that has been done. Words alone, without wrestling with the pain of the broken relationship, are not true apology, they are only words.

Many cultures of people of color around the world are based on relationship and include a formal or informal process for reconciliation. Native Hawaiians, for instance, call this process ho'oponopono, which means setting to right. It is based on the word and concept of pono or righteousness which is always connected to right relationship and requires one to keep working at relationship until it is right. Ho'oponopono includes prayer and a conversation among those whose relationship has been broken. Confession is made; restitution is offered. Forgiveness follows.

Without all these steps, apologize, I haven't heard much support for

restitution. In the 1960's and 70's we called it reparations and Congressman John Conyers had even introduced a bill calling for some kind of payment to African Americans. The bill may still be languishing somewhere in the basement of the Capitol, but we haven't heard it mentioned in the discussions about apology.

Reparations are probably politically problematic. But, if Congress is serious about apology, then restitution might take the form of college scholarships, job training programs and prison intervention and alternative programs. If Congress is really serious about apology, how about increasing Head Start programs and providing health care for all African American children.

It's a little difficult to take seriously all the talk about apology from a nation which is quickly retreating from the closest thing we have had to restitution--affirmative action--after only thirty years. It is difficult to hear a president talk about race and racism only months after he signed a welfare "reform" bill which he knew would make 1 million poor children -- many of them children of color -- poorer.

African Americans are not likely to get those forty acres and a mule promised at the end of slavery. But without their modern-day equivalent, we can talk about apology, but I don't know if we can really have reconciliation.