

The truth about black labor (and brains)

By Prof. McKinley Burt

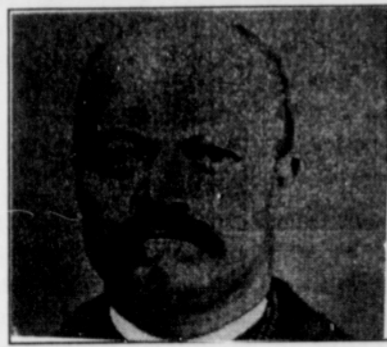
Today, major labor disputes dominate the news media and to some extent my recent articles here. I have been careful to maintain a frequent African American perspective so that readers of whatever ethnicity may gain an additional insight into the relevancy of these issues to their own condition and circumstance.

More often than not, I have used these pages to chronicle the magnificent achievements of African American people, and, frequently, their contributions to industry, science and culture have occurred so early on as to defy comprehension (that is, so soon after slavery). Today's offering will be no exception as we present in evidence a description and picture of the "Coleman Manufacturing Company", a linen mill founded in 1898 by the blacks of North Carolina (See Picture).

This past Sunday, several TV networks portrayed a major labor dispute at this plant but I am quite sure that you did not recognize the

"Coleman" plant I just described. The feature story was about a long-term struggle between the "Fieldcrest - Cannon Mills" of North Carolina and the "United Southern Textile Workers." Remember how your mother would always insist on 'brand name' quality, like "Cannon Sheets"?

A decade ago I wrote here of the



recurring and ironic story of how the industry and inventions of the former slaves were appropriated (read as "stolen") by the greedy 'ante bellum' society that was unwilling to surren-

der the idea that at little cost they could enjoy both the brains and labor of blacks. I traced the saga of the "Coleman Cotton Mill" from the black founders, to the Duke family (Tobacco) to the "Cannon Linen Co." And now we have the "Fieldcrest - Cannon Mills."

This research was one of the most interesting in which I've ever engaged. I was first 'turned on' by a chapter in one of the most fertile chronicles of documented African American history; "Evidences of Progress Among Colored People", G.F. Richings, George S. Ferguson Co., 1902. "On the 8th of February, 1898, was laid with Masonic honors, the cornerstone of the handsome three-story brick building, 80 X 120 feet in dimensions, of the Coleman Cotton Mill. Noted speakers came from all over the United States and the railroads gave reduced rates."

The 'prime mover' in this endeavor was "Warren C. Coleman", a former slave who attained "one year of schooling at Howard University

in Washington, D.C." and parlayed his talent and drive to become one of the wealthiest businessmen in North Carolina; landowner, farmer, grocer, philanthropist, educator. Initial



capital stock in the company was over a million dollars in today's money. "The property consists of 100 acres of land on the main line of the Southern Railway."

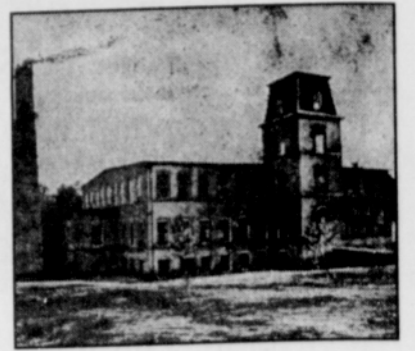
"With the building completed, machinery is being moved in at this writing: 7,000 to 10,000 spindles and from 100 to 250 looms. By it's

charter, the mill will be allowed to spin weave, manufacture, finish and sell warps, yarns, cloths, prints or other fabrics made of cotton wool or other material."

It is interesting to note that among all this economic ferment driving African American we also find at this time the formation of the "Mississippi Cotton Manufacturing Company." Originally conceived by the great "Frederick Douglass" in 1893, "the project was taken over upon his death by the Hon. James Hill, the former Postmaster of Vicksburg, Mississippi who was appointed by president William McKinley."

Before black people disappeared as owners and managers of the "Coleman Manufacturing Company" (they just lost a union election over wages and benefits, \$10 hr.) many strange things happened after the first white was brought in as a shareholder and director; a prominent member of the 'Duke' tobacco family. At this point the trail suddenly ends, but some records of New

York stock brokers indicate that a "Cannon Mills" acquired textile interests in the area during the time of the depression.



Now there is a "Gone With The Wind Story" for you - wealth, history, memories and all. And there were literally thousands of these instances as a new form of slavery was instituted (with sophisticated public relations) as my elderly neighbor says: "They give us this 'first black to do this and that' bull - we ain't a patch on our great grandfathers' behinds. When are we going to wake up?"

ROSE CITY WELCOME



Enjoying the ride on a Harley is what many more people will be doing this weekend when up to five thousand Harley riders hold their annual rally in Old Town. Local restaurants, hotels and stores are getting ready to welcome the riders as guests who like to shop.

Employment cuts Oregon welfare

Oregon has cut its welfare caseload in half in the last three years, primarily through strategies to put people to work, according to state officials.

Sandie Hoback, administrator of adult and Family Services, says "22,000 families are no longer on welfare and in poverty because we have refocused AFS on helping people become self-supporting while assisting them in meeting their basic needs."

AFS began implementing welfare reform in the early 1990's, realigning its resources and making investments in moving the state-wide system toward an employment focus. The return on that investment began to appear in the spring of 1994, when the caseload first began to drop.

Hoback credits her workforce and bipartisan support for the state's unique brand of welfare reform with

Oregon's success in moving people out of poverty. She notes local JOBS is locally based, with planning groups designing the program in each of the 15 AFS districts.

"AFS is now governed by a set of principles, which guide our workers as they make decisions about how they do their jobs," Hoback said. "And we recognize that work is always better than welfare, because it offers the best avenue for people to escape poverty."

Hoback also cautions that reducing the caseload further will be tougher, as the people who remain face more barriers to employment, such as mental illness, physical and sexual abuse, and drug and alcohol issues. AFS is now working to strengthen the partnerships with local communities and the private sector that will be necessary to help people move past those barriers.

Mediation axe raises issues

By Lee Perlman

A city proposal to privatize the Neighborhood Mediation Program has raised issues, concerns, and a counter-proposal.

Diane Linn, director of the Portland Office of Neighborhood Associations, says that the current program will "close its doors" on or before Dec. 31.

To replace it, she says, she envisions a "partnership" with the Multnomah County Youth and Family Mediation Program, and a private concern such as Resolutions Northwest.

The Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods is considering submitting a counter-proposal to operate the existing program under independent contract with the city. Linn says she would consider such a proposal when submitted.

According to longtime mediation specialist Eddie Collins, a similar proposal was submitted to Linn last spring.

At that time she proposed to have the program "transition out" of direct city operation as part of the city's post-Ballot Measure 47 budget cutting.

According to Collins, Linn said she was committed to the transition plan, a response he says left him "shocked and saddened."

One concern raised about the current proposal is the loss of the current program's considerable experience and expertise in the area of neighbor to neighbor

mediation.

The process has become increasingly popular as an alternative to costly legal proceedings.

However the Neighborhood Mediation Program is one of the few that provides the service for disputes between individual citizens, and the only one that does so for free. Resolutions Northwest, for instance, specializes in arranging resolutions between offenders and victims.

Betsy Coddington of Resolutions Northwest says, "I haven't the slightest notion that we could provide the staff and expertise that the Neighborhood Mediation Program provides. We would have to add both."

This is not the program's only function. It has increasingly been used by the city as a resource for resolving disputes of all kinds.

For instance, the city's Task Force on Citizen Involvement cited mediation as the cure-all for disputes between neighborhood associations and other volunteer groups.

It recommended that the program's \$336,000 annual budget be increased by \$50,000 to help it play this role. Instead, the current mediation budget is \$200,000, plus a \$50,000 one-time "transition" appropriation.

Asked about this contradiction, Linn says, "I would have liked to have gone into this with a lot more money. We have what we have, and we'll do the best we can with it."

The same may be true of Collins, director Emmanuel Paris and other mediation employees.

A few years ago they received a new, specialized civil service classification. This now makes it more difficult for them to transition into other city jobs.

Commenting on the proposed change, Northeast Coalition board member Charles Ford says, "We have had a program that's been working

fine. To take it and privatize it out is absurd.

"Low-income people all over the tri-county area are served by this program. I fear that the alternative won't be housed in the community (the current program is located in the King Neighborhood Facility), and will serve primarily the middle class. I raised

this with Diane Linn," Ford says.

Noting the recent transfer of contracts for services such as youth gang outreach and graffiti removal, Ford says, "I haven't seen how our community is better off for the transfer of those programs, and those are questions that are going to be asked."

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