

# 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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## Civil Rights Journal

### Ethics And AIDS

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

There's been a quiet up roar in the medical community in the past few weeks as it has become public that the federal government has financed a medical study using third world women who are pregnant and who have HIV/AIDS.

Doctors already know that when pregnant women receive the drug AZT that their babies are more likely to be free from the virus. But, in this study, some of the women are given a shortened course of the expensive AZT, while others are given a placebo, or dummy pill.

The women, from Africa, Thailand and the Dominican Republic, were asked if they wished to participate in the study and the terms of the experiment were also explained to them, that is, that they may receive the drug or they may receive a placebo.

However, a recent New York Times reporter interviewed some of the women participating in the testing program and found that for many, the concept of a scientific test in which some get medication and others get a dummy pill is not understood.

One woman told of having the test explained to her within an hour of finding out she carries the AIDS virus and that it may be transmitted to her unborn child.

Another, more educated woman indicated that she never

understood that it was already known that AZT prevents the transmission of the virus during pregnancy.

When asked if she found out she had received a placebo when a proven treatment already exists, she replied, "I would say quite simply that it is an injustice."

The testing is necessary, we are told, to see if there is a less expensive way to treat the growing number of people in developing countries with HIV/AIDS which cannot afford the expensive and complicated AZT regimen.

The controversy has erupted, largely in the medical community so far, around the ethics of treating some women with a drug known to help, while giving others the dummy pills, perhaps dooming the untreated women and their children to die, and then there is a question of the ethics of doing a study which would not be allowed here in the U.S. in third world countries.

While U.S. government officials argue that because these developing countries cannot afford the high-cost AZT drug for their patients, this testing is the only option that makes sense, and some African public health officials say that because of the price

of the drugs, their only alternative to the testing is to do nothing, but when asked by a reporter if she realized that these tests could not be done in the U.S., the head of the testing program in the Ivory Coast asked, "If the country that is paying for the study cannot accept conducting it, then we can't be expected to accept it either."

The fact that these drug trials are being done in third world countries inevitably raises questions about government tests using the poor and people of color.

Even the New England Journal of Medicine has compared this new study to the infamous Tuskegee experiments done by the federal government on poor, uneducated black men who were never told that they were not being treated for syphilis and who never were offered treatment even after penicillin had been proven to be effective.

In the latest twist in this new case, several members of the New England Journal of Medicine editorial board resigned after the editorial appeared, saying they had never been consulted about the article and that they did not agree with it.

Whether a comparison with the Tuskegee experiment is fair or ac-

curate or not, there are some real moral and ethical questions which must be answered. Is it ethical to do a test elsewhere which we could not do in our own country? Is it ethical to do complex testing using poor, mostly uneducated people who have few or no other options for treatment?

Can we absolutely discount the element of race in all of this? Is it fair to ask women to participate in such a study only minutes after learning they have this deadly disease and that most likely their unborn children will have it as well?

But in the articles being written by medical ethicists and others, no where have I yet seen the question being raised about the ethics of charging thousands of dollars for medicine which we know save lives.

Indeed, HIV/AIDS patients in the U.S. spend \$12-15,000 annually for these drugs. Pharmaceutical companies argue that they must be able to recoup the high cost of research. But where does responsibility to their profit line and responsibility to million of poor people who are destined to die without the drugs begin?

What is the ethics of only the rich of the world having access to these life-saving drugs?

That to me is the real moral and ethical dilemma.

## perspectives

### Will The 'North' Rise Again?



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

with the tone and tenor of my economic commentary over the years will say, "McKinley's hurting again-missed opportunities."

Well, not really. What actually bought this type of economic enterprise to mind was a certain fact of life derived from a page-by-page assessment of the Portland, Observer's big comprehensive "Minority Enterprise Development" issue. It is not meant to surprise anyone when I state that "Minorities are doing better in retail and service-but land and its amenities are not 'our' thing at this time."

Your most immediate comment might be, "is land and its development anyone's thing, unless rich, corporate or governmental?" I would be hard-pressed to disagree, recalling the economic environment during the time I was teaching "Urban economic Experience at Portland State University (the first half of the 1970s).

It was so much easier, then, for those 'at-the-margin of the economy

to become involved in land and its development. I cite two examples from that PSU class which was designed to equip the neophyte with the tools' and procedures I'd gained from 'real-time' experience.

One 'enterprise' was a white female and her middle-aged mother, both of whom had taken some carpentry and related courses at a community college. By the end of the second, unit, these two students had used their savings to purchase a half-finished house-and persuaded a savings & loan to underwrite its completion while they lived in the 'basement' and did most of the work.

When I saw them again in later years, they had acquired a number of properties, initially in this manner. In addition they had formed an association of women property owners who shared critical information and contacts.

My second example is that of the Black Education Center school on

N.E. 17th near Alberta Street. Founded by a committed group of young black college students, their dedication and the community's needs soon outstripped their small rented house.

After meeting them and assessing their needs I designed a unique model for unsolicited proposals to charitable trusts and corporations-an absolutely unheard of proposition at that time (any other time?). And while the shocked targets were mulling over these proposals, the young people were out locating a building(s) to fit the proposals.

As we've said, the economic climate was different in those days, and in quick succession the group "bought" the former public library on N.E. 17th and the two buildings on Alberta Street, now owned by the "House of Umoja!

Will related opportunities arise again? they say, "what goes around comes around!"

I'm Rather glad that response to last week's article about a specific minority enterprise did not indicate the readers concluded the concept to be fatally flawed.

The venture described was a 1970's 'REIT' to be operated in Washington, D.C., the knowledgeable investor will identify those letters with a "Real Estate Investment Trust." Very simply put (very simply), this is when a pool of investors jointly hold, buy, sell, rent, lease, build or otherwise benefit from the ownership of real property-apartments, hotels, shopping centers.

Those familiar with the basic concept, though not necessarily with the financial sophistications, will immediately recognize Portland, Oregon as a current beehive of these developers. And many of those familiar

## "Struggling To Pay the Rent"

Dr. Manning Marable "Along the Color Line"

The majority of all African-American families are renters, not homeowners. Most people with low incomes, racial minorities and the unemployed, are always confronted with the difficult challenge of finding decent housing which they can afford. Increasingly for millions of Americans--black, Latino, Asian and white alike--that challenge has become an "impossible dream."

A recently released study by the national Low Income Housing Coalition, which represents a broad spectrum of housing advocacy groups, fully documents this growing problem. The study observed: "Housing costs, for most people, represent the largest monthly expense. Most people pay their rent first, buying food, clothing and health care with what remains."

The report used an index developed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to estimate the cost of decent but modest housing in cities and states throughout the US. The study found that in almost every state "more than 30 per-

cent of renters paid more than they could afford for one-bedroom apartments and more than 40 percent did so for two-bedroom apartments."

Not surprisingly, housing conditions were worse in major urban centers and in states with high concentrations of low income working class and unemployed people, such as New York. The study found that 48 percent of all renters in New York State were unable to afford the estimated fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment, \$687, and 54 percent were unable to afford a two-bedroom rent, \$796. The report estimated that New York renters would have to earn wages exceeding \$13.22 an hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment, and \$15.32 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

Even these dire statistics fail to capture the vast social consequences of the housing crisis. Hundreds of thousands of families in New York City, largely black and Latino, live doubled or tripled up with their relatives, friends and neighbors. Crowded housing conditions push poor families fre-

quently into unsafe or unsanitary conditions, threatening the health and welfare of their children. Youngsters who have no space for homework and study are less competitive when they go to school. The lack of adequate shelter directly contributes to domestic violence and spousal abuse.

What are the solutions to address the housing crisis? Conservatives who say that the federal government should get out of the housing business, and let the marketplace determine the availability and cost of shelter by the laws of supply and demand, are just wrong. The private sector overall has little interest in constructing millions of new housing units for people of modest means. Luxury condominiums and shopping malls have larger profit margins. We need to devote a greater share of national resources to guarantee that clean, basic shelter is considered an inalienable right. No one should be homeless or poorly housed, in a land of vast material affluence.

But the real solution to the housing crisis can only be achieved by

raising all incomes to meet the cost of basic human needs. In short, you can't pay the rent if you don't have a job, or if the job you have doesn't earn enough for you to pay your monthly bills, including rent.

According to the research of the New York based National Jobs for All coalition, as of 1996 there were nearly 17 million adults working full-time, year-round jobs, who were earning less than the poverty level for a family of four. Another 4.3 million workers have part-time jobs, but aren't able to get full-time positions. Adding to these millions of Americans are the displaced former recipients of aid to Families With Dependent Children. The draconian 1996 Welfare Bill hurled a million children into poverty, and coerced hundreds of thousands of women into workfare programs and low wage jobs that don't pay enough to afford decent shelter.

Building more affordable housing is helpful, but not enough. Only when all American have a real living wage or a guaranteed income if they are unable to work, will all of us be able to pay the rent.

## Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:  
Editor PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

### An Open Letter to The President

Dear Mr. President,

I want to thank you for encouraging the Nation to enter into an honest dialogue on issues of race. As a free people, we still have the opportunity to shape this mighty nation into a place where each individual is important and each opinion is counted.

Mr. President, I offer you the following suggestion as a way to help treat the nations' weeping sore of racial intolerance. The suggestion is, change the artwork on the faces of our money. Remove the portraits of the African slave traders George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Also, remove from our money the likeness of Abraham Lincoln, a professor in the doctrine of racial superiority.

Mr. President, I ask you earnestly, what purpose is served by

### To the Editor:

Will the people of Oregon stand up this time around on the physician-assisted suicide measure and vote Yes to repeal it? (Abolish it.)

Ethical doctors do not want the responsibility to assist in destroying life. There is no place in the medical profession or society for laws that authorize them to kill. Their healing role is compromised by such laws.

Consider Biblical values. We are created to overcome any attitudes or circumstances that try to take away our gift of life, including depression, disablement, trag-

having a five cent piece depicting a slave breeder's mansion at Monticello, Virginia.

Monticello must evoke feelings in the African American similar to those evoked in Jewish Americans when they see pictures of the death camps of Germany, or what Japanese Americans must feel when they are re-visited with WWII images of detention. Mr. President, can you imagine how a Native American might feel if the Indian prisons at Ft. Leavenworth, in frontier Kansas, were seen as a symbol worthy of national pride?

Mr. President, I again thank you for this opportunity to engage in a dialogue and to remind you of the contribution African labor has made to this great nation, a contribution deserving recognition, not insults.

Sincerely yours,  
C. Walker  
Portland, Oregon

We are stronger and very capable of enjoying life in the worst of circumstances because we are created with a divine purpose and a destiny. Even if we can't see or understand how our existence has any purpose in it, God does see and does work out His plans and purposes. For us to end our life or someone else's based on our views of their quality of life, makes us God, as if we know what is best for any living human being. Vote YES on Measure 51!

Sincerely,  
Alex and Rebecca Johnson