

# EDITORIAL

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## The Portland Observer

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### Letter To The Editor

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Their have been several articles written in regard to the Disparity Study in the construction industry.

As an active member of the construction industry, and as a member of the Black Contractors Alliance, AGC, and the Port of Portland's Mentor-Protege Program, I believe that I have a well-rounded view of the current state of the construction industry with regard to minority and women opportunities.

Some members of the public have voiced concerns about the progress being made by the City of Portland and other public agencies which participated in the disparity Study two years ago. Whenever public policy is changed, there will be dissenting voices and no one person or affected group will get everything that they might want. The key is to have all parties working together in a spirit of mutual respect and honesty.

I believe that this is occurring. The Disparity Study pointed out instances where women and minorities, particularly African-American, have historically been left out of the public contracting process.

In response to these findings, the City and County have put into place stakeholder groups (of which I am

a member) to develop new programs and public processes to remedy these situations.

Programs such as the City's proposed Sheltered Market Program, the Port's Mentor-Protege Program, the County's informal Sheltered Market Program, the education of the public project managers about diversity issues and the modifications to the selection methods used by all apprenticeship programs in Oregon are some of the attempts at trying to reverse past inequities.

Will these types of programs solve all problems? Probably not. Will we need to evaluate their successes and failures and fine tune them as we see their results? Yes definitely. Is there commitments to doing that? I believe there is.

We should not cry "wolf" and say that the public agencies are acting in bad faith or proposing programs that are doomed to fail. But instead, we should give the process a chance by working together as a community to bring forth creative ideas and at the same time, hold the public agencies accountable.

Sincerely,  
Edward Holmes  
President Ebony Iron Works, Inc.

# To Be Equal

## Just Open Up The door

By HUGH B. PRICE

PRESIDENT  
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

I'll get it myself goes the title lyric from one of soul-singing legend James Brown's hits of the late 1960s.

It was a song-and a sentiment--that came to me while reading two different kinds of documents last week.

One was Jackie Robinson: A Biography, the powerful new book on the life and times of that baseball star and American hero by the distinguished Princeton scholar Arnold Rampersad.

The other was a landmark study of the affirmative-action program at the University of California at Davis Medical School published recently in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The study, undertaken by two of the medical school's faculty, compared students admitted with lower scores on the medical school entrance tests through the affirmative action program with those admitted through the regular program during the last two decades. Significantly, the study pointed out, the program was not limited to African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans. Nearly half-46 percent of those admitted

through affirmative action were white or Asian American.

The Davis study reported that, while the affirmative action students had lower standardized test scores and grades in key courses in the first years of medical schools, the differences began to narrow in the later years, and that both groups had high graduation rates: 94 percent for the former compared to 98 percent for the latter.

Perhaps even more important, the report discovered that the post-graduate and career experiences of the two groups "were quite similar." During their residency training both groups gained honors evaluations in nearly equal percentages, both chose similar kinds of medical specialties, and both had similar kinds of practices--even to the point that both groups said that between 55 and 60 percent of their patients were white.

Both the Rampersad book and the UC-Davis study speak volumes about how closed and unjust-and wasteful of talent and potential-American society was just a short time ago. Both speak volumes about what happens when the exclusionary barriers are limited or narrowed so that doors of opportunity can be opened wider. Those who'd been previously declared to be too stupid, too lazy, too shiftless, too culturally deprived, to...show that their "kind" possess

talent and determination in abundance, too.

It really is that simple. What has made realizing the American Dream for all complicated-and necessary to struggle for-is that some people construct obstacles in order to limit opportunity.

Regardless of the form those barriers take, their purpose has been, as the scholar and poet Sterling Brown so keenly put it in "Strong Men" seven decades ago, to shout prohibition at you./ Thou shalt not this/ 'Thou shalt not that/' Reserved for whites only...

That some still cling to the old racist shibboleths, as if to a dank security blanket, is evident in the instances of overt discrimination--as common as commercials on television," in the words of the newspaper columnist Bob Herbert--that continue to demand our attention.

And it is evident in the surveys by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, which, as writer David K. Shipler recently pointed out, have found that "most Americans still regard blacks as less intelligent (53 percent), less hard working (62 percent) and more desirous of living on welfare (78 percent) than whites."

Shipler goes on to write that "Such prejudices are merely thoughts, of

course, and to dampen their expression, the society has created a structure of law, ethics, educational programs and other mechanisms. But bias is agile enough to worm its way through the inhibitions."

The heartening thing, however, is that the fight against racism goes on, the will to overcome persists.

Arnold Rampersad does us all a great service in examining at length the abundance and quality of the will Jack Roosevelt Robinson possessed. He shows that what lifted Robinson to the stature of American icon was not his athleticism, as extraordinary as that was. It was his commitment to social justice, his will to help bring the American Dream into being, which became manifest to us all because of his singular achievement in baseball.

Rampersad gets the man right when he writes, "Despite his quick temper in the face of injustice, especially racial injustice, he lived on the whole a life of discipline, restraint, and self-denial; he thought of himself and his future in terms of moral and social obligations, rather than privilege and entitlement..."

As I stated in a previous column, this is the attitude, and these are the kind of people--success stories--that are the real cause of the opposition to affirmative action.

# p e r s p e c t i v e s



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

## Yes, The North 'Will' Rise Again - If 'We' Rise To The Occasion

One thing was made very clear by the Portland Observer's special issue of Oct. 8, 1997, "Minority Enterprise Development." The Northeast community has the people and the resources to make the area economically viable again.

This well organized and researched report recited and defined a broad spectrum of people, institutions and resources available for developing the area. And with the right effort and commitment, a new minority business complex could be developed, far surpassing the commercial operations that were derailed or destroyed by Urban Renewal (A major disaster to blacks in over 20 key cities).

There was a "can do" inventory of skilled artisans, service firms, professionals of every sort, appropriate educational and financial institutions, experienced counselors and supporting agencies of city, state and federal government. The overall assessment is that of a community positioning

itself to "do-the-right-thing."

Most immediately some will say, "but haven't we been this far before?" Practically a consensus of opinion drawn from studies, experiences and real-time analyses given here from time to time will point in this direction. Over the years, I've done my best to accurately detail the heights, and the "full back" positions.

The past two weeks I have given some details of a large east coast real estate development proposed but not carried through by a group of African Americans I cited this venture only in making the case that in the Minority Enterprise issue there was a definite limit to the type or genera of business enterprise - especially as compared with that business spectrum of the city as a whole. We must breakout of the mold.

In speaking to one small group I suggested applying the "business diversity" structures I introduced in past evaluations of minority busi-

ness. Two stand out as I recall both my roles as business consultant to the Model Cities Program, and, later, as an instructor in small business operations at Portland State University.

Both require following up with in-depth research and the assembly of necessary support structures, but accomplish the initial purpose very well - identifying possible new opportunities. The first procedure sounds simplistic but is rewarding: Inspect the yellow pages of the out-of-town (large) phone directories at the library.

And given that expanded reach to possible ventures whose local viability, of course, will have to be determined, the next step should be a thorough review of the U.S. Government publication, "Standard Industrial Classification Manual."

I've reviewed this 'jewel' before, recommending it for the master coding and indexing of the many thousands of types of commercial enterprises operating in this country. And

there is a companion federal publication that also can be put to good use in evaluating the "can-do" and the "how-to-do" potential of this community.

This second important federal manual is the "Dictionary of Occupational Titles" which provides a similar type classification of all the thousands of jobs and professions in this country. Certainly, these two commercial 'bibles' should expand one's reach, grasp and comprehension of commerce to an extent compatible with a new and well-structured business complex in this community. The North 'can' rise again!

However, as we've observed at other times, factors of people and community relations are equally important to the effective planning and design of urban projects. Next week we will evaluate what could have/should have happened at the N.W. corner of N.E. 19th and Alberta.

## RAINBOW PUSH

# C O A L I T I O N

# African American

In the '84 & '88 Presidential campaigns, only one man focused on democracy and liberation in South Africa.

In his 1984 Democratic National Convention speech, that same man told the 50 million people who were watching on worldwide TV that the supportive relationship of the United States for apartheid South African was a "moral disgrace."

In 1989, that man played a key role in popularizing the term "African American." That same man was present when Nelson Mandela was freed, and headed the Presidential delegation that observed the first free and fair elections in South African in April, 1994. That man served as co-

leader of the Presidential mission to the recent African/African-American Summit in Zimbabwe.

In a ceremony held in the Secretary of State's private office, that man-Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.-was sworn in as the Special Envoy for the President and the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa.

In Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's words: "That is a long title for an important job to be filled at a key moment by an extraordinary individual... Reverend Jackson is ideally suited to help us as we proceed to build partnerships and establish dialogues to assist Africans as they move down the democratic road. He is, after all, well known to African

leaders. He is deeply respected by the African people. He has been a champion of human rights and human dignity throughout his career."

We should note that this Special Envoy position does not pay. It is not a full-time job, requiring no more than 60 days per year to handle special assignments which reinforce the development of African democracies. The position will not require Jesse to move to Africa, nor will it require him to give up his leadership role in the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.

Special Envoy Jackson added his own perspective, noting that "though the years I have been able to develop a view of the world in part because of my kinship with Dr. Mar-

tin Luther King, Jr., and Dr. Samuel Proctor, which...taught me abiding principles about our relationship to other countries that guide my view to this day.

"Africa has meant so much to the world. It helped to subsidize the development of our county and Europe. Through centuries of work without wages and exploitation of vast raw materials, the contribution of Africa constituted a subsidy to the development of Western civilization.

"Now in this period of post-colonialism, President Clinton asserts the idea of Africa as a reciprocal trading partner - a continent of expanding democracies-a continent of hope and opportunity.