

EDITORIAL

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Letter To The Editor

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By DOROTHY I. HEIGHT

As a child growing up in Rankin, Pennsylvania, one of the first lessons I learned was that "family" is not necessarily determined by blood. I would ask my mother, "Is that my real aunt?" She would always answer, "That's your aunt."

That's the way it was in African American communities. If you cared for one another, you were family. If tragedy struck, the aunts, cousins, grandparents, neighbors and friends would provide.

That was how we got along in those days. We looked after each others' children and took them in. We were a more caring community.

But as the social services establishment cast a wider net, standards and restrictions were established on who could care for a child, when parents could not. There were court orders, home inspections, complicated applications, age and income requirements, investigations by social workers. The informal system gave way to a highly structured one.

And with the growth of a vast network of temporary housing for children in crisis, extended families were discouraged -- in some cases, barred -- from playing their traditional roles.

I believe that we have a special responsibility, especially in November, when the nation celebrates National Adoption Awareness Month, to correct some misconceptions that have grown up around foster care and adoption and to bring attention to the children who are waiting for families.

Although many people feel they're not economically in a position to take care of a child, adoption is neither as costly nor as unwieldy a process as they suppose. Some employers are providing adoption benefits.

The heads of more than 30 African American organizations have joined forces to promote and speed adoptions; after attending a Black leadership "summit" in Washington last May, several took steps to support the recruitment of black families and, in some cases are setting up funds to help lower income parents with the payment of legal fees.

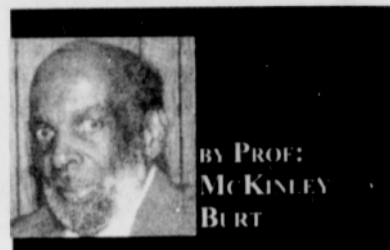
The number of children growing up without families is appalling.

Today, more than 60,000 children of color in foster care are ready and waiting to be adopted; some have been waiting for years. Yet there are caring people in our communities who don't realize that they can qualify to receive children.

According to the latest Census figures, there are more Black children in foster care than there are children from any other racial or ethnic group. Black children make up 47 percent of the foster care population, almost three times their share (16.5 percent) of the general population. They are five times less likely than white children to be adopted during their first 3.5 years in care. And the longer they wait, the less likely they are to ever have the permanent family, the anchor, the source of love and mentoring that every child needs and deserves.

We must do better than this, if we want to keep these children from being shuffled from one temporary "home" or juvenile facility to another, without any family connection or moral compass.

I think it starts with the recognition that these are our children -- not somebody else's children, not the system's children -- and that we must embrace them. We are their family, and we must rekindle that spirit of caring for one another.



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Re-Segregation And That "White Stuff"

A startling and quite deplorable situation frequently was reported by several teachers and leaders in the northeast community in the past decade. A number of black students had stayed away from the "white stuff" (math and science) either because it was not thought to be "relevant" or else "grades would suffer."

Before we engage in any analysis of the "current" situation, let me point out that a quite different scenario existed in the "past", and why. Those of my situation and experience, unfortunately, have a great difficulty in explaining the causative factors to the education and social science professionals from other cultures -- or to many "younger" black professionals, for that matter.

"You've got to have been there," as the saying goes. If one is to be clear on this issue, we need to avoid the semantic confusion that might arise from use of the term, "re-segregation." Any

fairly perceptive citizen would look around at the "majority" of the nation's churches, residential areas and schools (excluding remaining inner-cities), and the nation's workforce (except the highly visible public sector) - and immediately ask, "when did segregation ever end?"

Actually, we are talking about a "mind" thing here, not to be confounded with social interaction. For my often startling, experience-based observation is that the "socially segregated African American of the "South" produced most of those great inventions and science which blacks contributed to the industrial revolution and medicine.

And the same technological genius was exhibited by the second and third generations after leaving the South for the "North". I confound many here in the education establishment when I write of our teenage science and math clubs in the neighborhood; and a "seg-

regated" high school curriculum of algebra, geometry, biology physics, chemistry, languages - all compulsory in St. Louis, MO. before World War II. "Why not now", I keep asking.

What those education and social science professionals to whom I referred earlier do not understand is that from the time of slavery to World War II - and past- huge numbers of blacks worked as domestics in the homes of southern white officials, professionals and businessmen. They had Access to the system.

These black "fathers", mothers, aunts, uncles and grand parents, not only knew who ran the world, but how it was run and what knowledge and training was necessary to that end. Consequently, these chauffeurs, butlers, maids, cooks, gardeners and nannies "carried the message back to the ghettoes, where it was well received. All of that "white stuff", that is.

With a driving commitment and

fervor they designed, built and operated educational and social institutions that would equip and motivate their children for that "Great day in the morning ... free at last, free at last, free at last! We helped build the world and we'll help enjoy it."

The general deterioration of the nation's education system is not restricted to any one race or culture. I noticed the difference decades ago - in industry, before I began teaching. Later, I'd ride the bus and recruit young black high school seniors for PSU, only to find that many could barely read, write or count (this last was in the 1970's).

Portland, Oregon was not at all like this when I arrived in 1945. The system was producing black engineers like Benson High Schools Don Rutherford who designed all the engine controls for Howard Hughes's flying boat, "The Spruce Goose." Of course, 99% of Portland's early black population was from the "South".

Civil Rights Journal Signs of Hope

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

I keep reminding myself of the importance of finding good stories amidst the bad -- stories of people working to eliminate racism-in their lives and the life of their community, stories of opportunities for communities to come together and tell the truth about the past, to learn about the rich histories of people of color in this nation. Here are two such stories.

Wilmington, NC

It was nearly 27 years ago that Wilmington, North Carolina came into our national consciousness, when black high school students began to protest the racism they saw in their school. Organized by Rev. Ben Chavis, the students boycotted the school and came to Gregory Congregational Church for a meeting. The reaction of some whites in the community was immediate and violent, beginning with threats from the Klan and leading to drive-by shootings into the church, where the students remained. Before it was over a white-owned grocery store was burned, one police officer was wounded and two people died.

And the case of the Wilmington 10, America's first internationally acknowledged political prisoners' case, was born. The Wilmington 10

included Rev. Chavis, eight high schools students and one other adult, who were tried and convicted of conspiracy to burn the grocery store and of firing on emergency personnel. All were sentenced to 23 or 24 years in prison, based on circumstantial evidence. It took nearly 10 years for a federal appeals court to overturn the convictions.

For years afterward relationships between the black and white community were soured. So it is a sign of hope to see a new relationship between the Gregory Congregational Church, and African American congregation and the predominantly white Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Led by their pastors, Rev. Suzanne Graves of Gregory and Rev. Lone Jensen of the Unitarian Church, these congregations are holding joint worship services and picnics and beginning to reach across the difficult and shared past.

Importantly, part of the reaching out has included a recognition of what happened in 1971. Indeed, when the Unitarian members first visited Gregory, they were shown the bullet holes which are still in the walls from that troubled time. Their new relationship is being built on the acknowledgment of their shared history,

but is looking toward a new future.

Kansas City, MO

Eighteenth and Vine is a legendary address in the African American Community. Anyone who has heard it knows that it's in Kansas City and it was the heart of that city's African American community in the early years of this century. It was also the heart of jazz for a number of years, as well-known jazz musicians were nurtured and performed there.

In recent years though, the 18th and Vine district had declined, as the African American community dispersed. Businesses closed, the clubs were no more and even housing had suffered. All that has changed as the city of Kansas City has sought to rebuild that legendary community and to re-develop it in a number of ways.

Just opened are the new Kansas City Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, which share a bright new building. Music fills the air in the Jazz Museum, as the stories of some of jazz's greatest performers are told. It includes interactive exhibits, a sound library and a mixing studio. It even includes a jazz club, as well as the old signs from the heyday of that street.

The new Negro Leagues Baseball

Museum covers the entire history of the Negro Leagues from after the Civil War through their end in the 1960's. It tells the stories of the heroes of that League, through photographs, video and sports memorabilia. It is the story not only of black athletes, but of black entrepreneurs who created the league.

Across the street from the new museum is the re-furbished Gem Theater. Originally a movie theater, it quickly became a center of social and cultural activity for the 18th and Vine community. Great performers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker once stood on this stage and once again this cultural and performing arts center will be filled with musical performances, theater productions and multimedia events.

And, if you walk just around the corner, you'll find the set of the movie Kansas City, which starred Harry Belafonte and many jazz greats and told the story of the heyday of this community. In addition, new restaurants and businesses are scheduled to open in this re-developed legendary community.

There are signs of hope across this nation. We only have to look for them.

This Way For Black Empowerment Ending Racism In America

By DR. LENORA FULANI

Black people look at America and we are very proud of our country, even though it's still the case that we are less than fully included -- in political terms, economic terms, social and cultural terms -- in much of mainstream American life. We look at the most influential and dominating of American institutions -- the Democratic Party -- that originally come into being as an all-white party to preside over a society that practiced slavery; we see the other party -- the Republican Party -- that came into being as an all-white party to preside over the abolition of slavery. In neither case were we -- or any other populations of color -- a part of the founding of those parties, the shaping of their vision or their fundamental sensibility. We simply weren't there.

And though, over time, Black America became associated with first one and then the other major party, hoping that first one, and then the other, would unlock the door to full participation in the life of our country, this did not happen. Sometime we made strides -- as

we did in the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War or in the 1960's in the civil rights movement. But even the civil rights movement had its limits, because American democracy was itself so structurally limiting, that there was only so far we could go. Quotas, affirmative action, majority Black and Hispanic districts, and other such attempts to improve the position of people of color were not, as some people believe, the success of the civil rights movement. They were, in my opinion, an accommodation to its limits. Unable to restructure the whole of American politics to make it more inclusive and participatory, largely because we were politically attached to the Democratic Party which had absolutely no interest in a political restructuring that would threaten their institutional power, we instead fought for little pieces of access to a system that was controlled from the top by the top.

Identity politics came to dominate. African Americans became a part of special interest politics. Ironically -- and tragically -- race relations worsened as a result. Black Americans felt increasingly frustrated

and alone. Black politicians -- mainly Democrats -- who made their own careers off of the perpetuation of racism proliferated. They weren't interested in structural change either. Racial inequality keeps them in business.

Much of white America felt frustrated, too. America was not doing well. Everybody took to blaming everybody else. But the real problem was not we, the people. It was Big Government -- unresponsive, corrupt and irresponsible. Identity-based politics -- which has shaped much of Black participation -- only made matters worse.

My own involvement in third party politics was based on wanting to create a way out of this bind for Black America; a way out of being essentially held hostage to a two party system that was not only hostile to us, but hostile to the democratic participation of all the American people.

When Ross Perot announced his independent candidacy for the presidency in 1992 and said it was time for the American people to take back our country, I was deeply inspired. And I quickly and passionately accepted the invitation.

I am well aware of the fact that I was not your most typical Perot voter. The press tends to paint independents as angry, white males who are politically conservative. That stereotype doesn't fit many independent voters -- and it certainly doesn't fit me.

When Ross Perot arrived on the scene, this meant that a new moment and a new movement had arrived. That movement was the first sign of the upsurge of all the American people against special interest politics and the corruption of our political process and for a total politics restructuring, that would put we, the people, in control. As that movement progressed and began a process of consolidating itself into a political party, we finally stood at the doorway of being able to solve America's race problem. How? If Blacks and Hispanics and Asians and Native Americans were included in that party-building process, then we would be part of creating the foundation, the vision, the morality, and the culture of a major political party for the first time ever in the history of the United States of America.