

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

To Be Equal Missionary Work

By HUGH B. PRICE
PRESIDENT
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

Who can forget that moment at the opening of the Atlanta Olympic Games when Muhammad Ali, as if walking out of the depths of our dreams, appeared to take the Olympic torch and light the Olympic flame, declaring the centennial celebration of the modern Olympic open.

It was a moment that seemed to evoke a gasp from and bring a catch in the throat of the thousands assembled there in the stadium and one could feel it--from the millions watching around the globe. After all the feverish speculation about who would be so honored, it seemed so right that the final torch bearer would be Muhammad Ali.

It seemed so right to me, however, not because of Ali's athletic achievements, as peculiar as that may seem at first glance.

Oh, yes, of course, he is one of the greatest boxers--and athletes--of our time, simultaneously enormously skilled and powerful: able, as he so memorably put it, to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.

But his athletic prowess alone--his collecting Olympic and world boxing championships with ease--isn't why Muhammad Ali has become a transcendent figure on the world stage.

It's because of his character.

The other night the Urban League honored Muhammad Ali with its humanitarian of the year award during our annual Equal Opportunity Day Dinner. At the reception, as I watched ardent fans of all ages flock to Ali like moths to a brilliant light, I was reminded that the difference between superstars and heroes, if you will, is a matter of the understanding of missionary work.

Superstars, athletic and otherwise, excel in their fields, and often receive lucrative endorsement contracts. But they envision no larger role for themselves in the human community. Indeed, many explicitly reject the notion that they're "role models" precisely because that implies they have a responsibility to contribute something off the basketball court, the movie set, the bandstand, and yes, the corporate boardroom or the university lecture hall.

Ali has become a heroic figure precisely because he not only recognized his responsibility to the larger human community, he exuberantly embraced it. He's become one of the most revered and probably the most recognized person in the world not just because of his boxing crowns but because he identified so personally with the aspirations of our people and of all people.

Because he was a man of principle, he did not flinch from saying no to military service during the Vietnam War, exchanging a brilliant, lucrative career for widespread condemnation and a prison cell.

Muhammad Ali saw himself then as he sees himself now: as a man with a mission. It was a mission that took him during his boxing years away from lucrative markets to the far reaches of the globe--to staging those legendary matches in Manila and Zaire--because he wanted to envelop and engage everyone in his missionary work. More recently, it has expressed itself in his determined struggle with Parkinson's syndrome and in his book, *Healing*, a moving statement on overcoming bigotry.

Some of that zeal, that sense of mission, that humanity is evident in the riveting documentary about the Ali phenomenon, *"When We Were Kings,"* that won an Academy Award last year.

pe r s p e c t i v e s



BY PROF.
MCKINLEY
BURT

Last week's article provoked quite a discussion among Portland Observer readers, and particularly among parents and guardians who had bitter experience with the "white stuff" phenomenon among black students.

It does seem that there remains some vestige of an avoidance of "hard core" math and science by minority students. At the same time, I got an almost vehement response from a score of parents whom I polled; that they had encountered this "frightening problem" early on and had taken counter measures - though "the schools have been very, very weak in this situation."

But I also find that a large segment of the population that should be involved in this critical issue are either unaware that there is a problem - or if aware, do not have the "tools" to become proactive in the matter. And some have been beguiled by the occasional presence of a really great program that involves (a very few) minority students.

But these "math and science spe-

cial" are not part of Portland Public Schools standard curriculum. In fact, they are funded by special federal programs developed (at taxpayer's expense) to offer the appearance of compensating for the math and science minorities should get as everyday educational fare. This is nation wide.

Obviously, only a very (selected) few are reached by such programs as "Saturday Academy", a great math, science and computer-enrichment exercise developed by Michael Grice, a dedicated African American instructor. In 1995 I was invited to present to this group my own developments in mathematics for computers and science. Mr. Grice is no longer here doing great things for black students in the Portland School District. We wonder why?

In the meantime, certain strong and committed African American parents and activists continue to confront the bureaucracy and the racists. We should all commend Halim Rashaan who for so many years has fought to secure an equal slice of the

education pie for minorities; so many thousands of hours of time and effort.

And there is the super-dedicated Lulu Stroud-Johnson whose specialty is raising straight-A, high achieving daughters (4) who carve new scholastic niches at Grant High School and at Oregon State University. But this single-parent does not stop there. This community-minded activist formed an organization of other black parents - "we can all reach this level."

But back to last week's commentary on the source of much early black commitment to education. I heard not just from blacks but from a number of whites and from immigrants of other cultures. Some were aware of this phase of the African American experience and some were not.

An 'East Indian' said, "in one way we had a parallel situation in India where for so long 'we' were the domestic servants for the British colonialists. So we too had the bitter

experience of learning how the infrastructure of government and industry was developed and administered - but prevented from exercising this knowledge by force of arms."

He also remarked on the favorable comment generated in his community by my article that cited the failure of America to recognize the trillions of dollars in wealth created by black inventors. I had compared the situation with that in India where the greedy British had taken out trillions in rubber, tea, gold, jewels and critical minerals - yet they had the writer Rudyard Kipling describing these people as "The White Man's Burden." Is there an American Version?

Two old-maid cousins of my grandfather were 'retired' domestics who would speak glowingly of the "Atlanta Exposition" of 1895 where black inventors displayed patented machinery from locomotives to farm and industrial machinery. I will provide documentation from the Congressional Record during Black History Month.

This Way for Black Empowerment

By DR. LENORA FULANI

Much of the national political analysis these days is about the conflict within the Democratic Party between its Clinton-led centrist wing and the party's liberals. The Administration's failure to muster sufficient votes in Congress from fellow Democrats to back Clinton's trade process of choice -- fast track -- is the evidence of this rift, according to the pundits.

Certainly the fast track failure is significant - a result of a growing lack of trust in the President in the wake of various campaign finance scandals, a well-organized lobbying campaign against fast track by the labor movement, the environmental movement and the Reform Party and a sense among many (80%) Democratic Congresspersons that this was an opportune moment to buck the President. But it would be an error to measure the instability in the Democratic Party solely at the level of Congressional action. Because there is a bottom-up dynamic in this picture that indicates a new instability at

the base of the party. It involves numerous constituencies, most notably Black voters. And while coalition breakup and reassembly are a fairly consistent feature of congressional life, it's not clear that the rift between Black voters and the Democratic Party can be so easily repaired.

The results of several recent elections provide insight into this situation. In New York City, Black voting patterns made a shift that indicates a palpable alienation from and anger toward the Democrats. Fully 70% of Black voters stayed away from the polls, a staggering blow to the Democratic mayoral candidate, Ruth Mesinger, who needed an outpouring of support from African Americans but got a severe rebuke instead. In spite of heavy campaigning on her behalf by Rev. Al Sharpton, Black participation dropped from the 50% in the last municipal elections to 30, demonstrating that Sharpton had no "coattails" and the Democrats had no clothes -- meaning that the venerable political rule that Black voters rally round any Democrat to block an

anti-Black Republican had broken.

Black voters were singularly disenchanted -- not merely with Messinger -- but with the total impotence of the Democratic Party to act on our behalf. My recommendation to the Black community that it boycott the Democratic Party -- a response I promoted in a month long advertising drive and door to door campaign -- resonated strongly.

Interestingly, the exit polls showed that of Black vote, somewhere between 20 and 30% of them voted for the Republican Giuliani, up from 5% four years ago. At one level this was a function of the boycott campaign, the breakup endorsement of Giuliani by several prominent Black elected officials and labor leaders, and Giuliani's own efforts to cast himself in a more sympathetic light to communities of color. But ultimately the double blow (low turnout, and a serious rupture in traditional Democratic bloc voting) was an expression of a profound unhappiness on the part of Black New Yorkers with our position on the political

landscape.

New York was apparently not alone in this regard. In the Virginia gubernatorial race -- won by Republican Jim Gilmore -- Black voter turnout was down. The Democrat, Donald Beyer, polled only 80% of the black voters. In this race, former Democratic Governor Doug Wilder -- the state's first and only Black governor -- refused to endorse the Democrat and remained pointedly neutral in the race, adding to the list of Black Democratic elected and former elected officials refusing to tow the party line.

Other signs of black disalignment and realignments surface at the end of the political season. The Black Reformers network had a substantial presence at the national founding convention of the independent Reform Party. A gathering we sponsored for all delegates, alternates and observers in Kansas City at which I spoke, was attended by close to 500 Reformers, all of the party's officers and our 1996 vice-presidential candidate Pat Choate, among others.

Civil Rights Journal On Behalf Of A Good Man

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

We've all heard the phrase "Catch 22" meaning that one is caught in a paradox and a non-win situation. It's kind of what the old folks meant when they said caught between a rock and a hard place. That's kind of where Bill Lann Lee is right now and we all stand to lose because of it.

Bill Lann Lee is president Clinton's nominee for the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. That's the job in the Justice Department which helps set the administration's policy when it comes to civil rights issues. Its a job that at times has been controversial, at times pace-setting and has often been the place where the marginalized could turn for help in finding legal remedies for their situation. Most recently it was held by Deval Patrick, who was instrumental in assisting with the FBI investigations of the burned churches in the African American community. But it's been a year since that job has been vacant, a long time for such a key position, especially during this time of many legal challenges facing human rights issues and concerns.

Bill Lann Lee, the President's choice for this vital position, is the son of a Chinese laundryman, who came to this county during the Depression as a penniless immigrant.

A Chinese laundryman whose business was located in Harlem. His mother worked as a seamstress and ironer in that small, cramped laundry and Bill and his brother watched their father suffer the indignities of being called a "dumb Chinaman" and being denied housing because of his race, even after serving honorably in the Army Air Force during World War II.

Bill Lann Lee, the son of the poor laundryman, was able to attend Yale University, as one of its first affirmative action admissions but he graduated Phi Beta Kappa, with a magna cum laude degree in history. After studying law at Columbia, he has dedicated his entire career to working in the field of civil rights law. In a recent statement he said, "In my mind the people I have represented in civil rights cases are people very much like my father."

But Bill Lann Lee is not just a theorist, he is practical solution-seeker, one who has a reputation for searching for common ground in the process of working for fairness for those who have been excluded and disenfranchised. Even the Republican Mayor of Los Angeles, one of Mr. Lee's opponents in a case concerning poor bus riders in that city, wrote in a letter of recommendation for Mr. Lee that, "The work of my opponents rarely evoke my praise,

but the negotiations could not have concluded successfully without Mr. Lee's practical leadership and expertise."

Bill Lann Lee is an honorable man. He is a man of whom all of America should be proud and should be honored that he wants now to work in our government. He is a man who has spent his lifetime working for civil rights law, believing that, "The civil rights laws do not confer charity. Their protections have their roots in prior discrimination and exclusion of those who look different, who speak differently, who are disabled and who were once enslaved. They are laws designed to overcome relegating minority schoolchildren to segregated schools, the unjust denial of employment opportunities on account of ethnicity, the artificial exclusion of women from educational opportunities, the barriers that obstruct the access of the disabled to public buildings."

Those don't sound like the words and his is not the story of an extremist. But Republicans in the Senate are determined to paint him as a radical and marginalized left-wing lawyer solely because of his support of affirmative action and his work against Proposition 209 in California. This arguments forget the fact that affirmative action was the law of the land for nearly 30 years, so it is only

natural that Mr. Lee would work on their behalf and that as a staff member of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, it should be no surprise that he would be joining in the efforts against Proposition 209, a law which would deny him the very benefits which allowed him to move beyond the horizons of working in his father's laundry in Harlem.

So far Senator Hatch and others in the Senate Judiciary Committee have blocked Mr. Lee's nomination and kept it from going to the full Senate, where it most likely would receive confirmation. Only Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) broke ranks in support of this outstanding candidate, while the others cited his support of the Administration's position on affirmative action as their reason for opposing Mr. Lee. Following that logic, the President cannot nominate anyone who supports his position on affirmative action.

Although the Senate has adjourned for the year, it is not too late to let your Senator know where you stand on Bill Lann Lee's nomination. You can call your Senator at 202-224-3121 or visit your Senator's office in your hometown and let him or her know how you feel or write the United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

If Bill Lann Lee loses, we all lose.