

Has Ever Such African Dignity, Spirit And Courage Been Captured In a Painting?

By Prof. McKinley Burt

We refer to the "masterful 1840 portrait of Joseph Cinque", leader of the 'Amistad Revolt': a classic reproduction appears on page 120 of the December 1997 "Smithsonian Magazine", part of an excellent article.

Seldom have I recommended a movie not yet seen but in this case I relied on the well-known integrity of producer, Debbie Allen, and the opinion of Dr. Russell Adams of the Howard University African American History Department - an invitee to a pre-public showing. Nobody, but nobody, has voiced disappointment in the film.

Dr. Adams, with whom I am in contact today, stated on NBC Television this past Sunday that he "rates the film 91% accurate", especially the role of former President, John Quincy Adams. An exception would be the scene where Morgan Freeman and Adams are shown riding together in the carriage; definitely a social 'non-no' even in the North at that time. For meritorious reading, Adams cites "Black Mutiny", and "History of the Amistad Affair."

That first title prompts me to revisit that semantic exercise I introduced last week. A "mutiny" is a breach of an employment contract effected by free men who have signed up (promised) to perform a service for a valuable consideration. I learned that in my first year of law school where several of the students here were seamen. Slaves "revolt", for there is no contract, real or implied, and their duress is forced-against their will.

A 'sister' who is a secretary at a downtown law firm has posted a photocopy of my 'Amistad' article on the office bulletin board where it elicited quite a bit of interest. A partner in the

firm is sending me excerpts from that maritime code which covers such situations. Also, there was great general interest from readers in all walks of life. "Whites are not willing to grant us the guts to revolt."

During Black History Month (and before) I will present many more authenticated annals of African and African American seafarers, shipbuilders and explorers. The uninitiated may ease their shock at American revelations by obtaining a copy of "Black Jacks: African American Seaman in the Age of Sail", W. Jeffrey Bolster, Harvard University Press, 1997.

And of course, I will have much more documented evidence of black maritime involvement as shipmasters, officers and adventurers from 3000 years ago, through the Middle Ages, material from the son of Thor Hyerdahl (Kon-Tiki), to a personal account from the African American who sailed around the world alone in 1995 - getting a resounding reception in New York Harbor, but little notice from the educationists whom you would expect to leap at this opportunity to motivate black kids in science and technology. Who are these slave-minded gatekeepers? The man should have been at every inner city school.

Also, I will have updated information on the Africans who sailed and traded in the Caribbean and along the West Coast of Mexico, centuries before Columbus, Portuguese and Spanish explorers. Both Lerone Bennett, "Before The Mayflower" and Ivan Van Sertima, "They Came Before Columbus" describe the African artifacts from tools and weapons to statues with African features that appeared in the region before the tenth-century A.D. the racists hate to admit black sailors and genes went all over.

Justice for Welfare and Poor

CONTINUED FROM FRONT.

children live in a car (even if she has a job), they are calling her 'self sufficient'."

Weed said she was treated poorly by case workers when she wanted to return to school and become more employable, yet keep her children on welfare until graduating.

Lakita Logan, a teen mother, was denied welfare and told to live with her parents and to work rather than college. She accused corporations of supporting a system which provides "cheap labor by keeping us uneducated and inadequately trained."

"They said I was marketable and couldn't receive benefits if in school rather than on a low paying job," said Joy Fauth, who was pressured to (unsuccessfully) look for work for two years. "I could have had my bachelor's degree by now and be self sufficient."

She noted people may find low income jobs, get off welfare rolls, and not have adequate resources for health care, child care and education.

Several teenage girls from Sisters in Portland Impacting Real Issues Together (Sprint) shared relevant ideas.

"Women and girls have a right to an education," said Amourie Downing, 12, of Tubman Middle School. Classmate Alexis Downing, 13, added the right "to work and receive substantial living wages."

Cadis Williamson, 11, also from Tubman, said, "Caseworkers don't

sit down and talk to you about how we can be self-sufficient." Classmate Shereese Alexander, 13, talked about the high percentage of female headed families with children who had income below the federal poverty line.

"The welfare system doesn't address the issues or root causes of welfare," said Needra Conner, 12, of Ockley Green Middle School.

"Women and girls have the right to adequate housing," said Tyesha James, a seventh grader at Fernwood Middle School.

Classmate Shaneva Jackson, 12, declared "It should be a right to have economic choices."

"People believe we don't care that they have problems and that is not true," said Nancy Magill, OPEU member and case worker. "We write separate plans for individual people. I am a union worker who feels strongly about fair wages."

"Companies complain there is a lack of local qualified workers for certain jobs," said State Rep. Mike Fahey, who noted many qualified workers are "imported", when Oregonians could be trained to fill those positions instead of remaining on welfare.

Fahey noted the failure of the state prison system which "teaches inmates to make beautiful furniture and cabinets, then fails to follow up and track their cases to find them living wages."

"If we had living wage jobs, many of these people probably wouldn't be there (jail) in the first place," he added. Fahey is a candidate Oregon Labor Commissioner.

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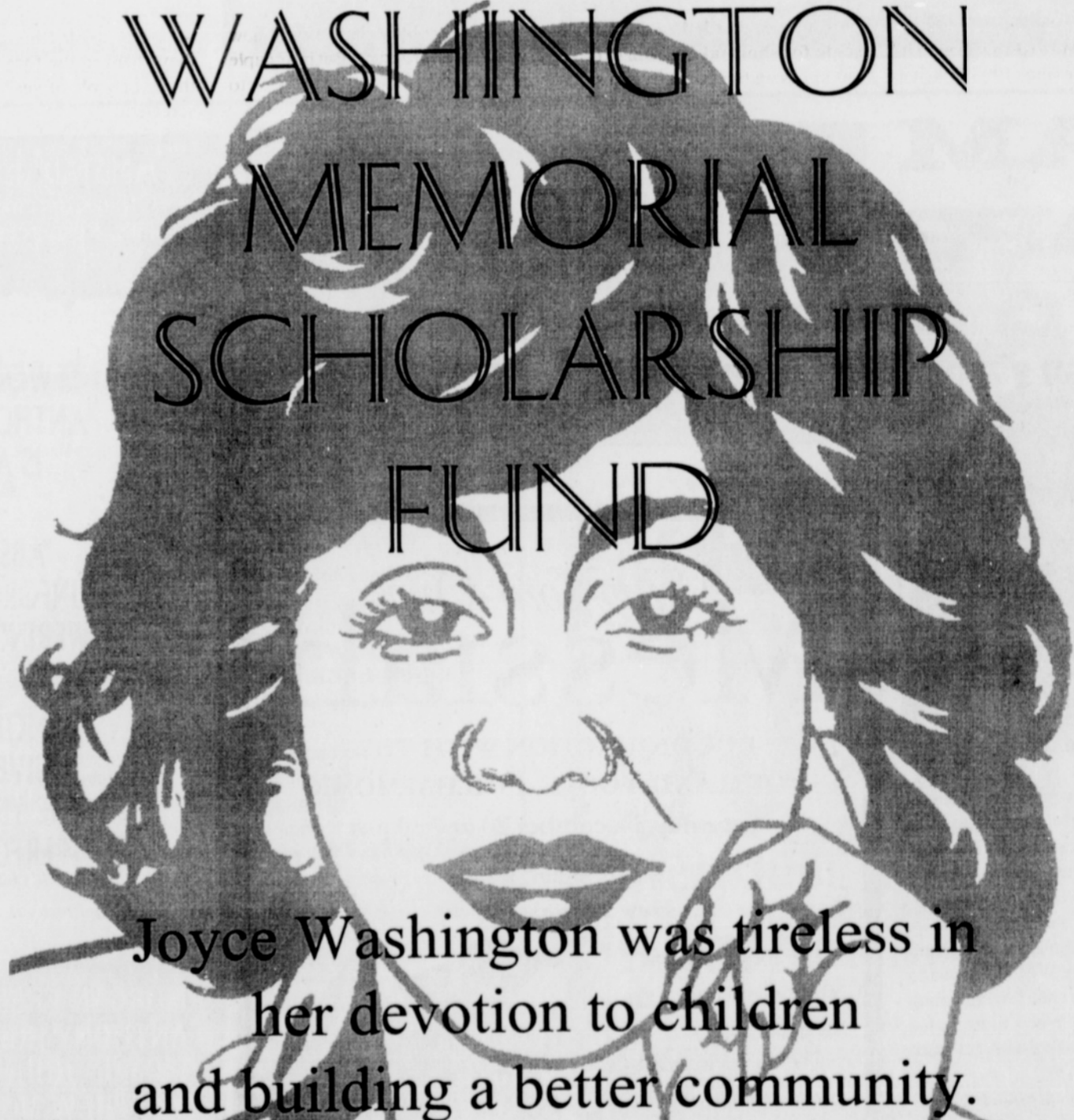
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