

EDITORIAL

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



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

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That's right, go for it this year! Go for the gold, or even the platinum. Ignore the "Apocalypse Now" people and the "doom sayers." Get your "container" ready for the long haul. Make those resolutions real.

For 52 straight weeks, 'The Portland Observer' has identified and highlighted as many as possible of those caring and motivated residents and organizations of our Northeast community responsible for significant advances in our quality of life. Only the restriction of space and time have prevented a broader citation (including those very helpful 'outsiders'). Thank you!

And here in my weekly column, I strive to place a realistic and informative "perspective" on those events and forces that may either advance or constrain our ambitions and aspirations - and similarly motivate and structure the future of our children in

a world that is known best for its uncertainty.

But having said that and hopefully making the case that we may replace your "psychic", what serious statements can we make about the future? If we refer to this column and/or this newspaper generally, then be assured that we will "keep-on-keeping-on." How better can we put it then to state that it is our resolve to continue in the tradition of journalistic excellence established by our late past publisher, Joyce Washington.

I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to provide critical information and some degree of insight - not only to the community and the metropolitan area with its extended Portland Observer readership, but increasingly to other parts of the nation. And occasionally abroad, since it appears our readers are rather emphatic about communicating their opinions and faxing news clippings

to other media, organizations and politicians, whoever and wherever (Journals-Net-Worldwide Web).

As I said on the front page of The Portland Observer, "The legacy of Joyce Washington" (3/20/96)." ... my appreciation for the opportunities Joyce provided for many of us to reach our community (and the world) with the news and information so vital to our well-being. And the chance to motivate our youth to greater achievement and fuller lives through the medium of The Portland Observer."

I can assure the readers that this tradition and community spirit is not only intact but is being aggressively pursued. And another measure of an organizations ability to interact effectively with the external is its own internal sensitivities expressed in relations with staff. Earlier in the year I was incapacitated by a very serious illness but few in the community

were aware of this situation due to performances 'beyond-the-call-of-duty'.

Because of the cooperation and support of the Portland Observer staff and my careperson (Cathy Galbraith (Project Coordinator, "Cornerstones of Community: Buildings of Portland's African American History"), not a single deadline for my articles was missed - they were either faxed from the hospital or delivered to the paper for me.

Further cooperation from this 'extended family' - type operation kept physical and economic situations intact during a month's hospital stay and a long recuperation. Things are looking better all the time and I plan to "accentuate the positive with a vengeance. "Black History Month" contributions should be broader and more motivating than ever. Happy New Year to you all!

Gephardt VS. The DLC

House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt let the cat out of the bag, when he picked a fight with the "Democrats for the Leisure Class" in the midst of a thoughtful, well-written, and timely speech at Harvard's Kennedy School.

This is no ordinary political squabble-Gephardt was a co-founder and the first chairman of the DLC, a corporate-funded, media-oriented, Beltway organization founded in the mid-1980s with the specific purpose of moving the Democratic Party away from its base, away from unions, Blacks & Browns, and women's rights.

Despite his DLC roots, Dick Gephardt stripped the bark off Al From's hide, with these pointed remarks:

"And now more than ever, pragmatism...cannot be a substitute for the principles that give us purpose and direction in a time of rapid change.

RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

This is a different approach from some who now call themselves New Democrats-but who set their compass only off the direction of others-who talk about the political center, but fall to understand that if it is only defined by others, it lacks core values. And who too often market a political strategy masquerading as policy."

[In other words, those, as Jesse always says, who choose the political center over the moral center.]

The DLC's founders were the original triangulator, long before Dick Morris popularized the phrase. Their whole strategy was based on "push-off" politics, to attract corporate fund-

ing for public policy research that sought a "third way" between artificially-defined "old Democrats" and the rising right-wing Republicans.

The DLC's real selling point, however, was that its strategies and policies supposedly offered New Democrats a chance to win at every level. And the election of Bill Clinton in 1992, another former DLC Chair, seemed to vindicate the DLC strategy, at least to the Washington Establishment.

The truth is far different. The truth, in the immortal words of Mark Shields, is that "if the Clinton Democrats have written a new political chapter, sadly,

it must be called Chapter 11."

This basic truth has been pointed out by Shields, by Kevin Phillips, and by Michael Barone in The Almanac of American Politics 1996-that while Clinton himself has been successful at the politics of triangulation, every other level of the Democratic Party has literally collapsed. We would say it is dying of "strangulation by triangulation."

The Rainbow's view is that the DLC's original "push-off" political strategy, its strategy of running away from the base voters of the party, is the main reason for this collapse.

Apply the DLC logic to sports-using DLC strategic thinking, Chicago Bulls coach Phil Jackson would build his entire offense around Steve Kerr rather than Michael Jordan. True, Steve Kerr often provides the "swing" points needed to win big games, as he did in the NBA Finals earlier this year.

Ron Brown May Have Suffered Gunshot Wound

By ELAINE HEGWOOD BOWEN
SPECIAL TO THE NNPA FROM THE CHICAGO NEW CRUSADER

After the sudden death in April 1996 of U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, some in the African-American community said the crash of his plane in Bosnia reeked of conspiracy. Now, more than 18 months later, a Pittsburgh Tribune Review expose, while not clearly substantive, points to tragic circumstances.

A hole in Brown's skull could have been a gunshot wound, wrote reporter Christopher Ruddy. Ruddy interviewed several major players in the ensuing plane crash investiga-

tion, which didn't prompt an autopsy of Brown's corpse.

One reason that an autopsy wasn't performed is because White House officials were pressured to speed up the return of Brown's body to the United States for his funeral, Ruddy wrote.

According to Ruddy, Lt. Col. Steve Cogswell, a doctor and deputy medical examiner with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, said that evidence that Brown may have been murdered has been ignored. A 22-volume report issued by the Air Force said the crash, which killed Brown and 34 business executives and others, resulted from pilot error and

faulty navigation equipment.

Cogswell said an X-ray showed small metal fragments inside Brown's head and he claims according to Ruddy, that this X-ray has disappeared.

Ruddy wrote, "The pathologist said the fragments could be what pathologists sometimes call a 'lead snowstorm' pattern from a disintegrating bullet."

And while Cogswell didn't examine Brown's corpse, Ruddy wrote, he (Cogswell) did interview colleagues who were part of the examination team. Cogswell also reviewed reports, records and photographs of the crash scene and victims.

To Be Equal

Reading Is Fundamental

By HUGH B. PRICE

PRESIDENT NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

A colleague and I were talking recently about the distressing news of the poor performance of black seventh-grade pupils in reading in the suburban Washington, D.C. jurisdiction of Prince George's County, Maryland.

There, in a county that is 62 percent African American (and those Americans are basically working class and middle class), 81 percent of white pupils passed the reading test, 75 percent of Asian-American students passes the tests, and 46 percent of Hispanic-American pupils passed the test-but only 40 percent of African-American pupils passed the test.

My colleague, visibly upset, responded by telling me this story of his childhood.

"For all my adult life," he said, "I've had to acknowledge that I don't know, because I never read, most of the fairy tales and comic books that comprised the typical child's reading list of the 1950s.

"I never read those tales because I was too busy-too enthralled with reading the twenty-volume 1947 edition of the World Book encyclopedia, and with flipping through the newspapers and magazines that lay on the floor, on tables, and on chairs in the living room of my family's apartment in Chicago. I read anything I could get my hands on, including the Reader's Digest condensed Books series they also subscribed to. I didn't need fairy tales and comics; this was the reading that took me far beyond the world of

Chicago's South Side ghetto.

"My father, who was a longshoreman all my life, and my mother, who was a homemaker until I was a teenager, had bought the World Books set brand spanking new when my brother was born in late 1946.

"I don't know what damage buying the World Book set did to my parents' finances. I do know that purchase was the single most important foundation of my life. For me, reading-and absorbing all sorts of information, as much by accident as by design-became as fundamental as breathing."

I understood then why he found the news from Prince George's County's so painful. It's painful to many black parents there, too. They're open arms. Any they should be. It's inexcusable that the school district-any school district-should allow this to happen. So, those who manage the educational system must be taken to task.

But when the parents go home, they need to look in the mirror and ask whether they've done all that they can do and must do to make certain they have put their own children on course, and that their children are staying there.

They need to ask themselves: Do they have books, newspapers, and magazines prominently available in their homes? Do they read with their youngsters at home, and prominently available in their homes? Do they read monitor how their children are doing in school? Do they talk with teachers about how their children are faring? If this is beyond them, do they seek out the help of pastors and friends?

In saying this, we at the National Urban League are doing more than just talking the talk, to use a popular expression. Our new Campaign for African-American Achievement is intended to help black parents-and their communities-put their children on the path to high scholastic performance and keep them there.

Finding and pursuing that path is more critical then ever, says James Comer, the child psychiatrist and school reformer, because, for the first time in human history, individuals need a good education in order to earn a good living. Gone are the days when a factory worker could earn a decent wage off the sweat of their brow and the strength of their back. Now and in the future, the strength and suppleness of one's mind is the only route to that end.

That means that if you can't read: You can't handle the word problems in algebra. You can't handle the reading assignments in social studies. You haven't a prayer of writing well. You won't be able to navigate the Internet. You won't pass the reading test to become an auto worker. You won't do well do well enough on the Scholastic Aptitude Test to get into college-much less handle the workload once you get there. And on and on.

We're all conscious at this time of the year of the presents we give to others as expressions of our love. And perhaps we parents are more conscious at this time of year of our wish to give our children what they'll need for a productive, bountiful life.

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