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# EDITORIAL

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(USPS 959-680) Established in 1970

Charles Washington  
Publisher & Editor

Gary Ann Taylor  
Business Manager

Iesha Williams  
Graphic Design

Mark Washington  
Distribution Manager

Larry J. Jackson, Sr.  
Director of Operation

Tony Washington  
Associate Editor

### Contributing Writers:

Professor McKinley Burt,

Lee Perlman,

Neil Heilpern

Joy Ramos

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,

Portland, Oregon 97211

503-288-0033 • Fax 503-288-0015

Email: Pdxobserv@aol.com

Deadline for all submitted materials:

Articles: Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday, 12:00pm

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes To: Portland Observer, P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon.

Subscriptions: \$30.00 per year

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

# RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

"So now it is Christmas, And what have you done? Another year older, and a new one's just begun..."

John Lennon

The ending of the old year, and the start of the new, is always a time for reflection, resolution, renewal, and rebirth. It's a time to rededicate ourselves to the ideals and principles by which we live.

Those of us in the Rainbow/Push Coalition have long labored to be "promise keepers" - because we all, from Reverend Jackson on down, made our own promises to Dr. King, to struggle nonviolently for peace and justice, and to open up the freedom train to all our people.

Marshall Frady made a similar point, in his book Jesse: "He is now about the only figure remaining from the classic days of the civil rights movement--the last survivor--who is still actively at it, who has not wandered off into other occupations. In the same way, he has become one of the few remaining voices of any force in the land still unabashedly campaigning, like the Last Believer, for the old, liberal conscience in American politics..."

It is not an easy time to be a progressive in American politics. We have had our victories, but the basic agenda is set

by corporate elites, by the rich and powerful, amplified by monopoly forces in the media, and carried out by right-wing functionaries with manifest destiny in their eyes, hot rhetoric on their tongues, and ice in their hearts. (To borrow from Alexander Pope "brains of feathers, hearts of lead.")

Our job is to be ready to move when the wheel turns again, when the next economic downturn comes, when the air goes out of Wall Street, as it will.

Our role is to sow the seeds of change for the coming generations. Our task is to keep fighting to hold the hallowed ground won by our ancestors' struggles, and to develop the resources and ideas the next generation of activists will need to build a better world for our descendants.

Never forget what Dr. King taught us: "The arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

Or the words of Henry David Thoreau: "any man (or woman) more right than his (her) neighbors, constitutes a majority of one."

Or Abe Lincoln: "Why should there not be patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world?"

Our job is to keep hope alive.

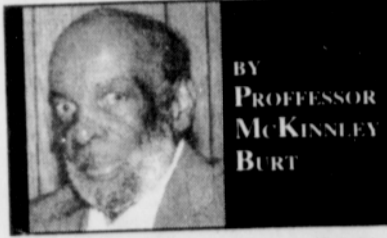


## Letter To The Editor

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# periodicals

## What Is History? The Countdown



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

As usual we find that it is not sufficient to rely upon a definition from Webster, "A chronological record of significant events...affecting a nation or institution, often including an explanation of their causes."

This is certainly true as we approach the month of February, the critical time for Black History presentations.

That period when, nationwide, a goodly number of us - mostly black, and some whites - make a determined effort to further reveal to the world the magnificent contributions of people of color to the arts, sciences and humanities.

When we turn to the 'mind-expanding' categories given by Roget's International Thesaurus for assessing the human condition, we find many sufficient as well as necessary expansions of Webster's limiting definition of a "chronological record."

The entry "history" in the dictionary section of Rogets offers us a palette of descriptors. "Record" (class eight, language

succinctly cites under 549.1, "record, recording, documentation, written word, chronicle, history, story, roll."

Other items under this class are "archives, public records, historical documents, biographies, ad infinitum."

"The same exercise also leads us to "History (class eleven, arts)." Item 719.1 "...the investigation of the past, the story of mankind, cliometrics, narrative history, oral history, survivor's or witnesses' account, biography, memoirs, etc." And, then, entries through 719.8 provide additional parameters from "story, yarn, saga, to chronicle, narrative or anecdote."

Under these circumstances, one might well ask, "given the availability of precise directive and techniques for the accurate recovery of the history of any peoples upon the world's stage, how can there be such a recurring difficulty in assembling and disseminating the marvelous (and well-documented) history of African and African American

people?"

How indeed, unless one is terribly naive and completely oblivious to the controlling parameters of racism - or more to the class and demographic order of this world - unmindful of the pernicious cultural warfare. Such naivety is frequently reflected in an uncritical acceptance of the pontifical pronouncements of admired leaders, politicians, scholars, or teachers.

It is essential to understand exactly how much falsification, distortion and omission of history is/was driven by economic factors.

In the United States, but not exclusive to this nation, the driving force behind the evil, execrable efforts to vilify and dehumanize the black race is still the existence of a massive institution of chattel slavery on this continent.

One hundred and thirty five years after the "Emancipation Proclamation", this horrendous fact still whips the American conscience and, to further the di-

chotomy, pains its "Christian Ethic."

So it is that we have the refutation of common sense, clear evidence and documentation, as well as intellectual and academic standards when it comes to the retrieval, recording and assessment of the history of black people.

And so it is that each year we have a "Black History Month" when the more knowledgeable of citizens and educators alike (or bravest) dare challenge the establishment.

There are the direct attacks upon the intellectual capabilities of non-whites by the vaudeville sector of academia e.g. Jensen and Shockley (I.Q. and genetics).

But we need not go 'abroad' for the denigrating rejection of documented accomplishments of Africans and African Americans.

Some of the most scurrilous attacks of this nature were those mounted by some local educators against the Portland School District's "Base Line Essays."

## Where Was The Amistad Story Before Spielberg?

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

Steven Spielberg recently told an interviewer that he wouldn't have made the film Amistad, if he couldn't tell it as the story of Joseph Cinque, the reputed leader of the shipboard slave revolt. He felt that the story would only make sense if moviegoers had someone they could identify with.

This approach points to a sad, but painful truth about African-American history, while there are scores of heroes and heroic acts in Black history, many African Americans don't know about them. I don't exclude myself. I have written and researched numerous articles and several books on the Black experience, yet I was only faintly familiar with the Amistad story.

I remember that during the early 1970s, San Quentin prison activist, Ruchell Magee, and Black ex-convict, Donald DeFreeze, the leader of ill-fated the Symbionese Liberation Army, styled themselves as rebels and adopted the name of Cinque. Beyond that distant recollection the Amistad story seemed to me to be lost in the shadows of history.

This is inexcusable. The story is straightforward enough. In 1839, 53

Black slaves were transported illegally from West Africa on a Spanish schooner from one Cuban port to another. Led by Cinque, the slaves revolted at mid-sea, commandeered the ship, and attempted to sail it back to Africa. They never made it. The ship floundered for two months at sea, was captured by a U.S. navy cruiser and towed to Connecticut. In a bitter two-year court battle, the case became a cause celebre for abolitionists, drew much national and international attention and stirred political intrigue and controversy. Eventually the Amistad captives were freed in a landmark Supreme Court decision, and repatriated back to their African homeland.

But why did it take top gun Hollywood film maker Spielberg to make million of Americans aware of this magnificent tale of triumph and heroism. One answer is that Spielberg has the money and the muscle of Hollywood behind him. The other is that many Black scholars, activists, writers, filmmakers didn't do their job. They failed to chronicle the vents of the Amistad for generations of African-American students. Even many Afrocentrists, who have turned the

study of Africa and Egypt into a political fashion statement, have mostly ignored the Amistad story.

Despite the current hoopla over the film, there are still only three books on the Amistad saga, "Black Mutiny" by William Puffins, "Black Odyssey" by Mary Cables, and "Mutiny on the Amistad" by Howard Jones. Although these books have been hastily reissued to capitalize on the film, they were out of print for nearly a decade. The public ignorance about the Amistad story tells just how much of African-American history has been lost, stolen, ignored and deliberately distorted. In the study guide for students accompanying the film Amistad producer, Debbie Allen got it right, "Whether you're talking about art, or literature, or music, the real history has just been castrated--left out."

The Amistad story, of course, is only the tip of the rich Black historical iceberg in America. Black inventors, explorers, scientists, architects, and trade unionists helped construct the foundation of American industry. Black abolitionists, religious and civil rights leaders helped shape law, politics, and ethics in America. Black

artists, writers, and musicians gave America its most distinctive cultural art forms. This should be a pint of pride and self-esteem for young African Americans, and Americans of all colors, instead much of this is barely known by them.

My great fear is that the Amistad story again may be lost in the "tie-in" stampede to cash in on the heightened public interest and curiosity that the film has stimulated. This happened with Spike Lee's film on Malcolm X. Hordes of fast-buck artists blitzed the market with paraphernalia, t-shirts, caps and poorly researched books. They turned Malcolm, the man, into a franchise. When the buzz died, so did public interest in Malcolm.

If the Amistad saga is reduced to loads of caps, t-shirts, and images of super action heroes, it will do nothing to promote and everything to discourage serious on-going study of the case's importance to American history and the Black struggle. Ignoring African-American history is bad enough, but commercializing or romanticizing it is even worse. Let's hope the Amistad story won't suffer that fate.

## Your Marvelous Mind Our Moods Color Our View Of Reality

BY MICHAEL A. GRANT, J.D.

Listen to your internal conversation. Become aware of the dialogue that goes on non-stop inside your own head. If you pay close attention, you will be able to identify your mood.

Have you observed that when you are feeling unappreciated or unloved by your spouse, you are probably also finding fault with your job, your friendships and your immediate prospects for improving your financial status?

It is nothing but a mood. Moods come and moods go. They are an inescapable feature of the human predicament. They color our view of reality. They determine whether we are satisfied or discontent with those important aspects of our lives. But our moods change so fast that a morning's glowing description of one's love mate can by evening deteriorate into a litany of accusations and misunderstandings.

Here's the good news. We may not consciously place ourselves in a

foul, depressing, aggravated mood but we can deliberately come out of it. You see, our moods are nothing more than barometers of our most persistent thoughts. If our heads are filled with negative, reactive, exaggerated, "making-the-world-a-nightmare" thoughts, our moods will reflect our self-defeating evaluation. If on the other hand, we decide to ignore a barrage of hypercritical, judgmental, and anger-provoking thoughts, replacing them with more truthful or hopeful ones, we will notice an evaluation in our moods.

For example, in our very materialistic culture, no matter how much we acquire, we are never satisfied. Like hungry ghosts, we are haunted by an obsessive need to always want something other than what our present reality is offering us. We tell ourselves that we will be happy when we get another job, or lose 10 pounds, or find another love mate, or buy a new car, or move into a different house or apartment, on and on ad nauseam.

If we would silence those noisy, troublesome, hungry ghosts inside our heads, we would soon discover (as one brilliant mind once wrote) that happy people are not those who get everything they want, they have got. You can always add something later. The secret, however, is to stop and genuinely focus with an attitude of gratitude on that which you already have. An attitude of gratitude guarantees and elevation of your mood.

Here's another proven method to lift your mood. Transcend yourself and focus on love. Love of God, love of family, love of strangers, love of life, love even of your enemies. Focus on love. Consciously transmit it to others.

Visualize yourself receiving the love and concern of others. Remember all emotions are rooted in either love or fear. When love dominates our thoughts and subsequently our feelings, our moods are buoyed effortlessly. We return to that state of emotional equilibrium called happiness.

You will know when your mood has changed because you focus less on what's wrong in your life and more on what is right in it.

Some other obvious mood enhancers are: Exercising, deep-breathing, laughing, dancing, listening to music, praying, meditating or just plain relaxing your mind and body.

The final and most powerful strategy for lifting oneself out of an ill-tempered mood is found in this simple admission: Whatever I am going through at this moment in my relationships, with my finances, with my health or with my attitude about life in general, I subconsciously created it. If I will take full responsibility for my situation and chart a more desirable course, I will begin to see the lesson in all my dilemmas and the solutions to all my problems.

Life has some wonderful moments to offer, but only those who ascend to loftier moods will be present to enjoy them.

God bless!