

EDITORIAL

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

What Is History? The Countdown; Part II



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

Enough of definitions, already! The readers say those parameters given last week for an orderly record and chronology of the past were just fine, but let's get on with it. What is real about 'our' history is not just omission but manipulation."

It is as though some sort of prescience was working for me as last week's Perspectives column achieved a point-to-point correspondence with the issues raised in the book section of the Sunday Oregonian, 1/11/98; the Scott Ellsworth review of, "History On Trail: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past", Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, Knoff.

The reviewer refers to the recent "cultural skirmishing over 'Afrocentrism'", while I described a "pernicious cultural warfare" still driven by economic forces set in motion by the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery on this continent. Particularly I made the case for a severely impaired American psyche (conscience-Christian

ethic) that not only handicapped the nation internally, but posed difficulties for a world moral leadership.

Of course, the dice are always loaded in this "cultural skirmish" as witness the usual selection of the term "Afrocentrism", rather than "Anglocentrism. Tells you who is in charge here, doesn't it? and as Black History Month draws ever closer, we should keep Marshall McLuhan's message firmly in mind, "the medium is the message" - and for those who can't read, America's most ubiquitous illustrator, Norman Rockwell laid it out in "Anglocentric" style for decades.

Several of those involved in an aborted process called in response to my reference to the "Baseline Essays" component of an early Portland School Districts 'Multicultural/Multiethnic program (mid 1970s). I heartily assured two of the callers that I wished they had opened their mouths at "that time" in support of my widely proclaimed - and

documented - contentions that key generic black contributions submitted by program contractors like myself were deliberately omitted.

This ruthless exclusion of major seminal contributions in the arts and sciences on three continents was designed to preserve intact the community's ethnic and cultural mindset. Particular examples will be presented during Black History Month. This leads us to a key point of discussion in the book, "History On Trial."

As is usually the case, the authors of such texts seldom place specific people and events or documentation on trial; they wouldn't dare! Were Plato and Isaac Newton right about the African developments of language and mathematics? As indicated by the graffiti they left on the great Pyramid, did both Fibonacci and Mercator simply latch on to African developments? Were all those European Scholars telling the truth when they came back from Timbuktu

during the Middle Ages and wrote of the great learning they received at the University? Dumas? Pushkin? Napoleon's greatest generals? Etc, Etc?

In the particular case, the agenda of the authors is "the history wars of the 1990s" and does not center around such specifics as cited above - not at all about what facts the majority of citizens and students would like to know. The book is about establishing the "National Center for History in the Schools - along with creating and disseminating teaching materials that would help bring 'recent' historical scholarship into the nation's classrooms..."

This Bush Administration initiative meant thousands of times the grant monies allocated for a local "Baseline Essay Program" and still no motivation - challenged black student, concerned parent or taxpayer in general would know how much of the world around him was of his making.

Concluded next week.

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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

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

To Be Equal The Legacy of Levittown

By HUGH B. PRICE
PRESIDENT
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

It was a visionary's dream--mass-produced, single-family tract housing that, at a cost of \$7,000, or \$60 a month, ordinary working people could afford. And when in 1947 the visionary, William J. Levitt, buoyed by substantial federal monies, opened the first Levittown on a vast expanse of flat Long Island farmland twenty miles from Manhattan, he helped intensify not just the deluge of suburbanization which was to reshape America's residential housing pattern but the huge expansion of the American middle class that is one of America's greatest post-war achievements.

Last month, when Levittown marked its fiftieth anniversary, I couldn't help but place it aside two other significant fiftieth-anniversary events now within our vision. One was the breaking of baseball's color barrier by Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby in the summer of 1947. The other was President Truman's executive order of 1948 desegregating the military.

In that comparison, Levittown's anniversary is a bittersweet one, to say the least.

The reason is that from the beginning Levitt's vision and achievement were besmirched. Levittown, built just outside the country's most racially diverse city, was for whites only. So, too, would be the Levittowns he subsequently built near Philadelphia, and in New Jersey.

There were no "whites only" signs on the properties. But the exclusion of blacks from what was for many white families the opening of the door to the American Dream was ironclad. That point was clearly made

in a recent article about Levittown in the New York Times, as it was in David Halberstam's recent book, The Fifties.

Yes, Levittown has changed. Blacks have lived there since the late 1950s, and all evidence suggests they find it a welcoming place to live--though it is worth noting that even today Levittown is more than 97 percent white. Blacks make up just one-quarter of one percent of its nearly 53,000 residents.

But, recalling Levittown's discriminatory beginnings isn't merely a matter of a particular historical interest.

In fact, its past, in and of itself, the devastating and continuing impact discrimination has had on the ability of African Americans (and others) to pursue the American dream.

In that way, recalling Levittown's past is vitally important to the current "conversation" we're having about affirmative action and whether a preferential treatment that seeks to expand opportunity is worth pursuing.

Levittown's history underscores how much many white families benefitted in material, traceable ways over the past two and three generations from the most exclusionary kind of preferential treatment in jobs, housing, and schooling. It is not a matter of conjecture or mere assertion. It is evident in a substantial number of demographic facts that stretch far beyond Levittown.

It is starkly apparent in the different housing profiles of blacks and whites, as economist Wilhelmina Leigh, of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, wrote in the 1996 issue of The State of Black America.



Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Dear Editor:

As an African-American physician in practice for many years, I have become increasingly concerned about the debilitating effects of a meat-and-dairy-centered diet on the health of African-Americans and others. These dietary factors play an important role in the cause and progression of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and cancers. And, unfortunately, those hardest hit by such diseases tend to be minorities. In the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr., I would like to invite your readers to celebrate Dr. King's peaceful accomplishments and his historic legacy in a special way. Nonviolence begins in the kitchen, one bite at a time.

Many renowned Americans--Dr. King's son Dexter Scott King, his widow Coretta Scott King, author Alice Walker, comedian Dick Gregory, comedian and actor Bill Cosby, politician and educator Charlene Drew Jarvis, talk show host Keenine Ivory Wayans, model Roshumba, singer Janet Jackson, and rapper KRS-One, to cite but a few--have become vegetarians. So have many ordinary Americans, and I hope to see those ranks swell considerably.

Let us celebrate this Martin Luther King Day, and those following, by eating food that is good for our bodies, our planet, the hungry, and the animals. Try a vegetarian lifestyle, and you'll find it could give you a much longer lifetime.

Expanding the Marketplace

RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

an anomaly or an aberration. It is the direct expression of the hard work and enormous challenges that were the essence of his life."

Rev. Jackson was joined in the conference with President Clinton, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, Congressman Charles Rangel, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, a host of CEOs from America's largest corporations and leading minority-owned businesses,

and event co-hosts New York Stock Exchange President Richard Grasso and Travelers Group Chairman and CEO Sanford I. Weill.

The most recent, available Census Bureau statistics tell a compelling story.

1993 Median Household Net Worth
White \$45,740
African American \$4,418

Hispanic \$4,656
Female Head-of-Household \$13,294

Blood is to the human body as capital is to the economic system. It must circulate and flow throughout the whole body. If it does not circulate fully, clots form. Clots cause strokes. If the wealth and capital are all held by a select, isolated few, the economy will suffer.

Inclusion - Growth. Restraint of trade is the worst sin against capitalism. It impedes growth and limits the ability of the free market to operate.

Dr. King spoke of the bounced check hurting three parties--the writer of the check, the recipient of the check, and the bank.

Dr. King's Legacy And The Consequences Of Racism Part 1

By DR. LENORA FULANI

The civil rights movement of the 1960's ended structural racism in America. That movement was an independent movement, a grassroots movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and enlivened by thousands of activists, attorneys, and students. Dr. King was not a Democrat -- with a capital "D" -- and it was not a Democratic Party movement, though the Democratic Party did succeed in coopting it and taking credit for its achievements.

Throughout the struggles which led to the passage of the civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (which were propelled through Congress by Lyndon Baines Johnson -- not by the liberal establishment) the Democratic Party was ambivalent. The Democrats, after all, had constructed an electoral coalition that relied heavily on Southern white voters. But once the civil rights movement -- independently led -- galvanized the country, the Demo-

cratic Party figured out how to consolidate it and opportunize off of it.

The success of Dr. King and the civil right movement meant that structural racism had been eliminated. Race discrimination was outlawed and participation in the political process was secured for Black America.

With racism ended, the issue for the country became what to do about the consequences of racism. We had lived for 300 years with racism as an institutionalized element of everyday life. Slavery had been abolished only 100 years earlier. The social fabric of our society was deeply corroded by this social/political/cultural experience. America needed to go through a healing process to deal with the residual anger and outrage of Black America and to create a unified country that could move forward in the national interest.

But the 30 years that followed the elimination of structural racism were years -- not of healing -- but of wheeling and dealing. The Democratic

Party was eager to translate all of the social movements of the 1960s into its political subsidiaries and so it nurtured identity politics -- the elevation of and competition among fractured segments of the population based on racial, cultural, gender, ideological and sexual identity -- in order to do so.

This modus operandi served the interests of the Democrats -- and the Republicans as well, who quickly learned how to play this game on the "right" -- but not the interests of the country. As the Democrats promoted various oppressed grouping for their own political purposes, the Republicans organized the backlash against it, playing on the incomplete social/cultural process left in the wake of the structural elimination of racism and elevating their own identity groupings, e.g. Christian fundamentalists, veterans, pro-lifers, etc. The country needed to have spent the last 30 years creating a new post-racist political culture that could bring the

country together. Instead, the two parties spent the last 30 years tearing the country apart, while taking extreme measures to preserve and institutionalize their own political power and that of the corporate and special interests which run America.

This 30 year bipartisan gambit, however, is losing its grip on the American public. There is still much unresolved outrage on the part of Black America which, though still loyal to the Democratic party, is showing signs of breaking out of its monolithic allegiance. In 1997, Black voters stayed home from the polls in record numbers and sought out Republican and independent options in discernible numbers. There is also a new generation of young Black adults without the civil right era experience to tie them to the Democratic Party. Black America is communicating a new message, a question that has remained unanswered for 30 years. What do we do now? Where do we go next?