

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

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.

Sincerely,
Milton Mills, M.D.
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Washington, DC

Dear Editor:

Who would have ever thought that it would be illegal for local government officials to return property tax dollars to the taxpayer?

Deschutes and Linn County officials were recently told that it would take legislative action in order for them to return 11 million dollars of unanticipated revenue back to the taxpayer.

What Oregonians didn't realize when they passed Ballot Measure 50 was that all expiring tax levy's would become a permanent part of the tax rate. I guess the drafters of Measure 50 figured that Oregonians wouldn't notice and that local officials wouldn't complain about the increased tax revenue.

Are Deschutes and Linn County alone in this predicament? No. According to state revenue officials, 20 counties are in a similar position. However, the taxpayer overcharge is much smaller in the other counties.

Why then is the legislature refus-

ing to convene a special session to correct this wrong?

Two reasons. Legislative leaders do not want to deal with other issues that would be brought up during the session. Second, the State of Oregon is the benefactor of this mistake. By allowing the expiring levies to become a permanent part of the tax rate, local school districts collect a greater amount of their school funding from local property taxpayers. Therefore, reducing the amount that the state contributes to local school districts. State revenue officials recently revealed that the state will spend 40 million less on Basic School support this biennium due to higher than anticipated property tax dollars.

It is no wonder that Oregonian's distrust government and their elected officials. We give them every reason to believe that we are not interested in justice, fairness and just doing the "right thing", for the "right reason."

Linda Swearingen
Deschutes County Commissioner

PERSEPECTIVES



BY PROFESSOR
MCKINLEY
BURT

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

"Countdown to what?", asked a caller who had just read last week's article, "Part II." Good question from one coming into the middle of a series initiated as a "countdown to Black History Month." Sorry about that but it does seem that my definitions or interpretations of history got through to many readers.

Let's proceed further along that line. I read an interesting article by syndicated columnist Roger E. Hernandez. "What's in a name?" Of course, that phrase is also a famous line from Shakespeare's play, Romeo and Juliet. The query is sparked by the passionate lover's concern with the attitudes of their respective families, the Montagues and the Capulets.

But in the particular instance, Mr. Hernandez invokes this play-on-words in a strained effort to state that there is no distinction between white parents in River-

side, Calif. Who did not wish a school named after "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." -- and black parents in New Orleans who changed the name of a school from "George Washington" to "Dr. Charles Richard Drew".

Playing to the gallery - white, at least in his mind - our anxious writer hastens to assure all who would listen. "Both [sets of parents] are trying to Twist history to suit their own simplistic, racially-motivated ends."

Mr Hernandez, a minority himself, obviously yearns for inclusion (acceptance) and employs a tactic that has been used by other 'outsiders' who have felt almost-but not quite-part of the establishment. For the moment let us ignore his spate of oxymoronic statements such as indicting the New Orleans' school board for having "the politically correct idea that nothing white in America is good".

History - Black History, if you

will - has always been an integral part of the lives of African Americans, whether written, embodied in the artifacts and icons around them, or simply (but importantly) in the stories and folklore passed from generation to generation (a white professor at Los Angeles City College once reminded the class that "Homer was illiterate, but we worship the Greeks through his eyes").

It is unfortunate that the columnist whom we are exorcising here does not have a better grasp of black history or of that spiritual, life-sustaining force (elan vital) so frequently manifested in the naming of institutions after 'the great ones'.

How shocked would Hernandez be to know that in my southern ghetto of St. Louis this had been the trend since shortly after the Civil War - and other parts of 'Dixie'.

The elementary schools that my mother and aunt attended

were respectively named, "Louverature and Dessalines", after the two great Haitian freedom fighters whose courageous revolts against slavery were as important to the black populace as was George Washington's opposition to "taxation without representation." And, of course, there were other schools named in an effort by black people "to twist history to suit their own simplistic, racially-motivated ends", as Mr Hernandez would say.

Institutions honoring W.E.B DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Elijah McCoy, Dumas, ad infinitum. What, indeed, is in a name? I'll tell you. It can inspire you, motivate you, elevate you - make folks want to "lift every voice and sing", make them "climb to the mountain top." Those black parents in New Orleans knew exactly what they were doing - what the needs of their youth were.

Setting The Growth Agenda

RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

Today, the First Annual Rainbow/PUSH Wall Street Project Conference concludes its third and final day of landmark sessions. Although the conference itself ended, the themes and goals of the conference will continue as Rainbow/PUSH makes its presence felt.

The response to our sessions has been tremendously positive. Every major network, newspapers from overseas, were covering the conference. Over 250 press credentials were issued and rooms were filled to capacity at each event.

Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin - "Although government at all levels is important to addressing these issues, I believe corporate America has a vital role to play in its own self-interest in expanding opportunity for all Americans. Inclusion is good for the bottom line."

President Bill Clinton - "I thank Reverend Jackson for his insight, that he has said for years, and years - (investment banks) are missing a market here. This is America's opportunity to close the opportunity gap. Let's seize it."

The American Minority Market - Key Facts

- * 60 million people and growing rapidly.
- * Commands more than \$600 billion in annual earnings.

* Compared to other national economies around the world, it ranks fifteenth--ahead of Mexico, Switzerland, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa just to name a few.

* Right in our own back yard.

* Better-educated and more stable.

A recent study rating the S&P 500 companies on factors related to the hiring and promotion of minorities and women offered quantitative evidence that there is an economic incentive for workplace diversity, and a disincentive for exclusion:

* The top 100 companies averaged about an 18% return on their investments.

* The bottom 100 companies averaged about a 7% return on their investments.

What is the securities industry's record diversity?

* Of the 90,000 people in America classified as stock brokers, only about

600 of them are African Americans.

* The number of minority portfolio managers has declined in recent years.

* Fewer than 40 African Americans have discretion over portfolios at majority-owned asset management funds or major pension funds.

The Wall Street Project has purchased shares in fifty different publicly-traded companies and will continue to closely monitor their corporate practices and, if need be, intervene in our role as investment advisors. These corporations in which we own stock include:

- * Columbia/HCA
- * MCI, WorldCom, and Digital
- * CBS, Sony, Time Warner, Columbia Pictures, and Ploygram
- * Ford, Chrysler, GM, Honda, Nissan, Toyota, and Volvo
- * Texaco, Chevron, Shell, and Ration
- * Coca-Cola, Pepsico, and Seagram

The Wall Street Project will convene six task forces that will issue interim reports in six months and final reports a year from now in the areas of:

- * Employment Practices in the Investment Industry
- * Opportunities for Minority and Women-Owned Investment Firms, Ad agencies, the Automobile industry, Energy industry, and Telecommunications
- * Pension Funds
- * Commercial Lending Practices
- * Domestic Development Finance Initiatives
- * The Emerging Marketplace of Minorities and Women

Rev. Jackson announced ten cities where we intend to hold follow-up dialogues and negotiations to ensure that this opportunity to grow is not wasted. The cities will likely include:

- * Chicago
- * Los Angeles
- * Atlanta
- * Houston
- * San Francisco Bay area
- * Philadelphia
- * Miami
- * Boston
- * Washington, DC/Baltimore
- * New Orleans
- * Detroit

America Need Diverse And Excellent Educators

BY BOB CHASE

There aren't a lot of Pacific Islanders teaching in Billings, Montana. As one of the few minority teachers at Riverside Middle School, Diane Welhaven often becomes the standard-bearer for all of the school's children of color.

"The expectations for minority students are remarkably low," she says. "I bring them high standards and a desire to excel. I show them that anyone can be successful."

Yet minority students are hardly the only ones who benefit. An award-winning teacher, Welhaven demonstrates to all Riverside students that intelligence and ambition have no racial or ethnic boundaries. Her presence does more to open students' minds than any multicultural curriculum. She teaches by example.

So does Charlee O'Reilly, one of the few African-American teachers at Manalapan English Town Elementary School in Manalapan, New Jersey. "Because of me, students have a higher comfort level being around people from different cultures," she said. It broadens their knowledge and understanding of people.

Unfortunately, minority teachers like Welhaven and O'Reilly are

scarce. Currently, over 90 percent of America's teachers are white; 75 percent are female. By the early 21st century, the percentage of minority teachers is expected to shrink to an all-time low of 5 percent, while 41 percent of American students will be minorities. Already, several cities have "majority minority" student bodies. Classrooms everywhere are starved for good teachers of color, particularly black and Hispanic men.

Make no mistake: Competence, not background or gender, must be the defining criterion for hiring any teacher. Yet excellence and diversity are not -- and must not be -- mutually exclusive.

America is a gold mine of ethnicity. As a nation, we have at our disposal more diverse cultural resources, viewpoints, talents, and insights into the human experience and the global community than any other nation on the planet. To deny our children full access to this wealth is criminal.

Yet the sad, ugly truth is that children in America still attend public schools where the only minority adults they see are custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers. These jobs are important and noble. But such a division of labor sends a skewed and

dangerous message to children about the relationship between race and human potential. Whether it's in Billings or Baltimore, Children learn as much from what they see as from what they read. A homogenous teaching force contradicts the very values of equality, opportunity, diversity, and tolerance that public schools struggle to teach.

Furthermore, as traditional families and the social safety net disintegrate, it is falling to schools to pick up the slack. Teachers are now expected to be part social worker and part surrogate parent to children whose backgrounds are far different from their own. They need diverse colleagues as much as students need adults who can relate to them.

How to attract more minority teachers? Among strategies the National Education Association supports are aggressive recruitment campaigns, financial aid to future teachers, partnerships with schools of higher education (including historically black colleges). "Grow Your Own" teacher cultivation programs, and extensive teacher preparation. Last month, we awarded grants to 11 affiliates engaged in collaborative recruitment with their school dis-

tricts. A handful of schools are also launching innovative programs to train and credential school support staff -- such as secretaries and teacher's aides -- to become full-fledged teachers.

But ultimately, I believe we have to take a page from Diane Welhaven's lesson book. If we want more minorities to teach, we have to encourage children when they are young. We have to endow them with a love of learning, stoke their ambition, and demand excellence. This requires more than a few role models. It requires patience, commitment, and guts; it requires us to purge ourselves and our school systems of any unwitting biases that might exist -- be they in the form of lower expectations for minority students, "color coded" tracking, or attitudes.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "We have to be together before we can learn how to live together." We have to be together before we can teach how to live together, too.

Bob Chase is President of the National Education Association, which represents more than 2.3 million public school and college employees.