

EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily Reflect Or Represent The Views Of The Portland Observer

It's The Little Things That Mean (Meant) So Much

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

I'm making the rounds of the coffee shops and other neighborhood places again. And generous readers say, "you were right on target this past month with your analysis of a 'societal fabric ripped asunder' by children, no less."

Leaving aside for a moment the question as to whether we can justifiably incite our children for these grievous circumstances, I did get consistent requests for a recitation of those "little things" you've always insisted are woven into the whole fabric.

I had to reassemble that universal 6 PM 'Supper Table' of those earlier days. No telephones were answered and, of course, there was not the distraction of television, and the radio was turned off. A strident hectic world for media was not allowed to intrude—the 'communicants' at the table placed their personal spin on the events of the day, abroad or in the neighborhood. A visitor was as welcome as the plague.

In a world with a great deal of order and a fair degree of certainty, this situation prevailed at the magic evening hour: An assigned place for every person and a uniform sequence

of activity from seating, to reciting the blessing, service, conversation and departure. Our table was par for the course; no brusque orders or commands, only a nod or raised eyebrow. Yet, it was a wondrous time, and you knew that, generally, it was being

repeated throughout the neighborhood, so you, the child, projected this throughout the city and throughout the country (except for those 'poor folks' for whom you brought canned goods for the collection at school, May 30, "The Colored Orphans Home").

It is to be noted here that the diners usually came to the table directly from 'their rooms,' and this fact provides an opportunity to make an important point. I have not been alone in my contention that many of the physical assaults and much of the vandalism is due to a lack of understanding of the value and use of personal space and consequently, the personal nature of property within it. Many dare not own

anything.

Our supper table (and others) was like a stage set, with 'actors' appearing from the wings, stage right, or stage left. My dignified grandfather striding purposefully from his room to the head of the table. My mother and my aunt coming from their respective rooms (no way those two could share a space).

Next, I would bounce in from my small cubicle which was overcrowded with balls, bats, gloves, 'toy guns,' erector sets, etc. Fifth and sixth would be my grandfather's two old maid cousins, the retired seamstresses. They would have had a lot to do with the preparation of the meal and their contribution would continue with the serving. They shared a room somewhere in the house, a mysterious place that was off limits.

Perhaps now, there will be greater understanding and comprehension for some in respect to what I described as "one of civilizations most important hours." Those "personal spins" placed on family channel news was an early

and important 'NET.' I believe I put it as follows.

"Then, contemplate if you will, the richness and variety of the conversations and information that would flow back and forth across this 'supper table.'" The broad knowledge and experience of many age groups and occupations reach the ears of adult and child alike. Apartments, public housing and urban boundaries have changed the culture."

Ones neighbors, being part of the "It takes a whole village to raise a child" scene; saw to it that there were no 'latch key terrorist' in the neighborhood. A woman at a coffee shop said, "your city must have been like mine. We had a 'Marian Wright Edelman' in every block, we all cared—we 'were' the social agency."

Several young fathers said, "no wonder your youth could plan and organize so well as teenager,; the inter-neighborhood ball games and bicycle races funded and structured without adult supervision in many cases, the moonlight excursions down the Mississippi contracted by your senior high school class. Our genes couldn't have changed so fast. What's going on?"

Statement On The Murder Of James Byrd Jr.

BY HUGH B PRICE

The brutal murder of James Byrd Jr., of Jasper, Texas allegedly by three whitemen was a modern-day lynching that recalls the worst atrocities of the ugly era when racial discrimination ruled American society.

Today, racial discrimination no longer rules American society. But the slaying of James Byrd Jr.—yet another episode of racism taken to the extremes of deadly violence—underscores the fact that racism remains a significant factor in American life.

For women as a group, and for blacks and other people of color, the substantial progress made in expanding opportunity has not eliminated the barriers they face in the workplace—nor in just living their lives free of racist and sexist violence.

Data on incidents of racist violence and

hate crimes gathered by the anti-Defamation League and other organizations show that organized white-supremacist hate groups still constitute a serious threat.

But, even more worrisome, those who closely track hate crimes say that hate groups actually commit less than 5 percent of them. The rest are the work of individuals. "We're in the era of freelance hate," Brian Levin, an expert on hate crimes, told USA Today this week. "You may have people who go to a Klan rally, or tap onto a web site, but they're their own franchise."

Those words, chilling as they are, should not dismay us. They should energize us to do the work that needs to be done.

Mr. Byrd's murder, occurring as it did near the first anniversary of President Clinton's much-maligned race relations initiative, also underscores something very noticeable—and pernicious—about the discussion of race in America.

That is, that whenever an outrageous incident of overracism such as this occurs, a deep silence seems to blanket part of the nation's racial landscape.

No, I am not faulting those whites, in Texas and elsewhere who have forthrightly condemned the reprehensible deed.

State and local officials in Texas appear to have acted with dispatch to arrest the men responsible for this act of horrific savagery, and they have pledged to investigate the crime fully and prosecute it vigorously.

And, as our sympathies surround Mr. Byrd's family and friends, we also ac-

knowledge the decency and courage of Ronald L. King, whose son is one of the accused. The open letter of "apology" he issued this week was a selfless act from one who, from the depths of his own sorrow, urges us all to follow the path toward redemption.

"It hurts me deeply," Mr. King wrote with obvious anguish, "to know that a boy I raised and considered to be the most loved boy I knew could find it in himself to take a life. This deed cannot be undone, but I hope we can go forward in peace and with love for all. Let us find in our hearts love for our fellow man. Hate can only destroy."

Who can deny the truth of that statement? We have seen and continue to see hatred's destructive force acted out time and again in this country and around the world.

The looming question is: Will we go forward?

That challenge—has been posed in many different words this past week by those who have been urging the nation toward such a discussion—among them, President Clinton, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, invited by Mr. Byrd's family to Jasper, leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus, Kweisi Mfume, President and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

But one group has been noticeably silent:

Where is the comment from those who've been saying so vociferously that we should not pay attention to race, that we should be "blind" to color?

Now, where is the comment—the con-

tribution—of those conservative and so-called centrist media commentators, politicians, professors, and think-tank fellows who've spent the past year disparaging the Clinton Race Initiative.

I've looked for them these past few days.

Instead, I found that profound silence from them which signals their retreat behind walls of blindness and denial to wait for the shock of the murder of James Byrd Jr. to fade away, to wait for us to forget.

It's up to those of us who are not blind to reality to not forget the work that must be done.

That is why the National Urban League has joined with six other organizations to fight bigotry. Our partners are: the Anti-Defamation League, Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, the National Conference for Community and Justice, the National Congress of American Indians, the National Council of La Raza, and the National Italian American Foundation.

We must remember that if we Americans don't unite against all forms of racism, bias and bigotry, intergroup violence will continue to spread.

In that regard, it's not too late to improve the effort the President's initiative on Race has made to encourage a frank, positive discussion of America's racial difficulties.

Mr. Clinton himself should devote more personal attention to it in order to sharpen its focus and tackle the really tough issues.

That is one way America can "go forward," and in so doing, redeem the suffering James Byrd endured and repudiate the intent of his killers.

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Letter To The Editor

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

Dear North Portland Neighbor,

The city is undertaking a planning process for improvements at the Portland International Raceway (PIR), that will also be of benefit to the surrounding neighborhoods. One of the improvements proposed last year was the possibility of adding a concert facility to the raceway site. As part of the improvement planning process, I requested the Bureau of Parks and Recreation to explore the feasibility and community interest of an amphitheater at PIR.

In the initial meetings convened with local residents, neighborhood groups, environmental groups, activists, raceway users, and business groups, we explored advantages, disadvantages and affects on the quality of life associated with an amphitheater addition. Environmental impacts, noise levels, traffic and parking were some of the issues and concerns raised. Some opportunities that could bring significant benefits to North Portland were also identified. Potential benefits could include: employment opportunities, increased local access and use of Portland International Raceway complex, community events and enhanced opportunities for area youth.

One of the strongest advantages to the project idea at this time is the possibility of private developers collaborating with the City on this project, saving millions of dollars in development and construction costs to the public and infusing much needed capital into the Raceway Park complex.

I urge you to get involved in the planning process. I want to hear your ideas and concerns about this proposed project. My key goal is to assure you that improvements at the Portland International Raceway will, wherever possible, compliment community needs and provide local, as well as citywide, benefits.

Sincerely

Jim Francesconi,
Commissioner

If You Have Any Questions About:
Improvements or Plan District development
Bryant Enge 823-6875
Public Involvement
Vaughn Brown 235-5881

Civil Rights Journal

People Of Color and Disabilities

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

When Ralph Ellison's book, *The Invisible Man*, was published some 50 or so years ago, it created an uproar because it pointed to the fact that millions of African Americans were all but invisible to the larger society. A half a century later there is an invisible group of people in our society, including in communities of color, but there is

no hard-hitting novel to tell their story. The invisible people are those with disabilities.

Eight years ago the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed and went into effect, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. And while it has made a significant difference in the lives of many people, the 54 million Americans with disabilities still face all kinds of discrimination.

A few weeks ago I was speak-

ing in California and I told the story of a federal judge whose mother had taught him an important lesson as a child growing up in the South. When his mother saw busses passing by an elderly black woman at the bus stop in front of their house, his mother went and stood with the black woman so that the bus would stop.

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Connecting with the spirit of Homowo



Honoring tradition and celebrating community. That's what the Homowo Festival of African Arts is all about. And that's why PGE is proud to be the largest corporate sponsor of this annual festival of music, dance, art and fun slated for August 15-16 in Cathedral Park. We're also helping sponsor Homowo's African Arts Day Camp for Children in July and invite you to call now about enrollment: 288-3025. See you at the festival in August!



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