

# EDITORIAL

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

### Webster's First Dictionary Featured 'Eurobonics';

#### "Ebonics For White Folks"

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

A little over 170 years after Noah Webster completed his great etymology (1825), the Oakland, California School Board also shocked the American nation with "Ebonics, our standard English program to 'meet the kids where they are.'" The academics were in uproar.

Webster's courageous attempt to meet the white folks of his time 'where they were' brought down a firestorm of criticism upon his head. An advocate of "simplified spelling," he incorporated into the first drafts of his dictionary, the new system of phonetic spelling used in a popular spelling textbook he published.

"Bred" for "bread"; "masheen" for "machine"; "fether" for "feather"; "fantom" for "phantom"; "karacter" for "character" and "ieland" for "island."

Webster's dictionary was intended to displace the "best available standard dictionary" which had been compiled by British author, Samuel Johnson in 1755. Webster called it a "purely British product with no 'American' words. Most Americans liked Noah's new spellings: "music, color and theater, instead of musick, colour and theatre."

The media and readers had a field day with this linguistic controversy. One satirist wrote as follows:

"Deer Mistur Webster, I am a natcheral born spellur, never tuk a lessun in my lif, an I am jutz the man to help yu with yur diskshunary-I wurk cheep. Hiram Jonz"

Leaving Noah Webster and his "Europhonics for the moment, we return to the Oakland Unified School district and address the phenomenon some say to be the lingua franca of America's inner cities. In most cases a mode of communications is being described that linguists say is common to speakers in less formal situations to separate themselves from the main stream (white folks) and create solidarity.

That's the way it was with my generation and all those that preceded them in the ghetto. You would leave the English Lit or history class in your segregated high school clowning in inspired repartee with black classmates, "I say there whitey, you saxon from yon mountain high, I mark thee sead with delighted eye-kick you pale behind without a sigh" (counter

injection from other side of town).

On it might be. "Dawn in the bowl of night has big butt Mabel was there in my arms...yeah, ain't no use rolling your eyes, baby, you know what I be talkin' about." And up and down the hallways and in the cafeteria and study room there was that incessant teenage chatter, verbal calisthenics and innuendo that played and teased with all those erudite concepts which E.D. Hirsch Jr. expounded in his, "Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know" (Vintage 1988). Where did it go?

Also see Allan Bloom's, "Closing The American Mind" (Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1988). These two bestsellers addressed a growing perception that "all" of America was in educational and intellectual trouble viz a viz "Why Johnny Can't Read" or "Crisis In The Classroom," etc. But like J.L. Dillard's "Black English: It's History and Usage in the United States" (Vintage 1973), none of this literature and research answered (intended to?) a number of basic questions.

Did the Oakland Educators really

need a dialect appendage to the mainstream Indo-European language, when we find so many inner city educators and academics succeeding without its use. Also (as in Portland, Oregon), there has been an ebb and flow in minority performance on educational tests across the nation—especially to be noted after World War II, and, then, beginning with the launch of the so-called "Great Society," a new but temporary high ground.

Back to that ubiquitous 'verb-to-be' and the British influence on American grammar, spelling and dictionaries we recommend the following texts as documentation for our rather startling revelations about Noah Webster before Mr. Merriam bought him out. Next week there will be more on these episodes in Norma Loquend: (Language of the people).

Noah's Ark: New England Yankees and the Endless Quest, by Robert Keith Leavitt. G&C Merriam Company, 1947. Noah Webster, Schoolmaster to America. By Harry R. Warfel, Octagon Books, 1966. The Long Journey of Noah Webster, by Richard M. Rollins, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980. Noah Webster, by Richard J. Moss, Twayne Publishers, 1984.

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## All Roads Lead to Chicago

On August 12-15, the Rainbow/Push Coalition will hold its annual convention at the Chicago Hilton and Towers. The theme that will infuse the convention (and the work that follows it) will be "Leave No One Behind." Over the four days, speakers, workshops, and plenary sessions will cover the full range of issues that will drive Rainbow/Push for the next year and beyond.

### The Wall Street Project

Various workshops will discuss our drive to close the gap between Appalachia and Wall Street to spread the growth, wealth, and prosperity of these strong economic times to under served communities.

By the time of the convention, Rainbow/Push will have held a conference on LaSalle St.—the heart of the Midwestern financial community—to open opportunities for African American and other minority businesses to build reciprocal trading relationships with major corporations. Also, the list of companies in which we own stock continues to grow so that we can continue to address issues of inclusion as shareholders.

### Labor

One convention day will focus

on Rainbow/Push's work in partnership with organized labor. Events will include a breakfast featuring a leading figure in the labor movement, workshops, and an afternoon rally in downtown Chicago.

As our recent victory in defeating Proposition 226 in California proves, organization is critical to defending the rights of

working people. Twenty six states are currently considering Prop. 226-like initiatives. We stand with organized labor to maintain momentum and unity to defeat these attacks on workers in each state.

## RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

### Promotion of Democracy and International Affairs

Other sessions will focus attention on Rev. Jackson's work as Special Envoy for the President and the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa. As the promise of freedom spreads from country to country and changes the face of a continent, we must remain vigilant—not just for Africans' sakes, but for our own. A stable, free, democratic Africa offers tremendous opportunity for American busi-

ness—especially for minority owned businesses.

### Campaigns '98 and 2000

A voter registration and mobilization planning meeting will be held at Rainbow/Push National Headquarters on Saturday, August 15.

Far too many elections have been lost by the margin of cynicism. We can put control of Congress in the hands of people who make sense if we organize and empower people with the belief that their vote counts. Our charge is to show people how their vote makes a difference in people's daily lives.

We have already launched a massive voter registration drive to bring people into the political process. Last week alone, we registered more than 600 Chicagoans. With the support of our friends across the country, we can register enough new voters between now and November to determine the outcome of critical races.

### Chapter Development

A Rainbow/Push chapter development session will be held to organize our allies throughout the country to implement programs and to share information across our computer network.

## Congress Blows Smoke

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Just as schools were letting out, with long, idle summer days stretching ahead for students, the United States Senate decided to follow Senator Phil Gramm's lead and blow smoke at our children.

Our lawmakers chose to vote to defeat legislation that was a landmark opportunity for this country to reduce teen smoking and promote children's healthy development by investing in child care and after-school programs.

Big tobacco interests put \$40 million into an advertising campaign to defeat the legislation, proving once again where they stand: for profits and against children. But that's not news, is it? The tobacco industry has long targeted children as future customers. One company even paid to insert smoking scenes into popular movies, such as the Muppets, to observe the attitudes towards smoking of children as young as 5. As a result of these calculated efforts, more than three million American teenagers smoke and 3,000 children start smoking each day -- one every 30 seconds.

Over 16 million American children were projected to start smoking last year. One out of three teen smokers will eventually die from tobacco - imposing \$200 billion in future health costs.

The legislation the Senate sent up in smoke could have made a difference in those sta-

tistics, as well as set aside a portion of the more than \$500 billion generated in tobacco revenues as a downpayment for child care and after-school activities, making an enormous difference for millions of children.

Studies have shown that the nearly five million children left home alone after school are much more likely to give in to negative peer pressure or pressure from industry, and to engage in risky behaviors that jeopardize their futures. These are precisely the teens targeted by the tobacco industry. Studies also show that children engaged in constructive after-school activities are less likely to smoke and get into trouble with the law. After-school programs also provide an important opportunity to present anti-smoking strategies. In addition to providing the adult supervision that is so important, effective anti-smoking curricula have been incorporated into many community after-school programs to further enhance smoking prevention efforts.

Quality child care for our young children is also very important in the fight against teen smoking.

It is clear that by promoting children's healthy development and helping children to make good choices, quality child care programs are effective tools to reduce teen smoking. Recent research shows that the first three years of life are critical to brain development and to laying the foundation for positive self-

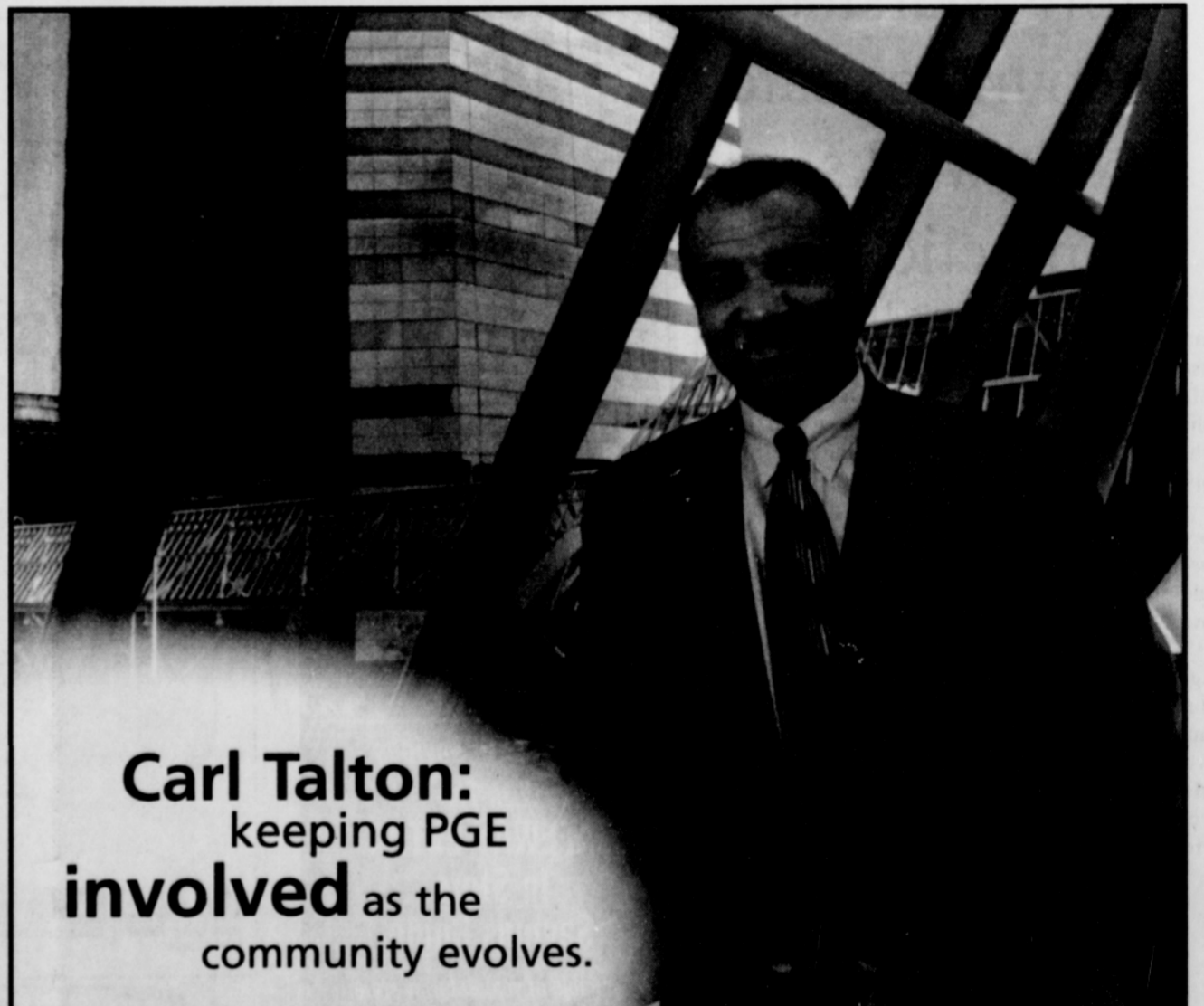
esteem. Quality early childhood and after-school programs have been shown to reduce criminal behavior which is correlated with risky behaviors, such as smoking and drug use.

Parents are working harder than ever to support their families and provide bright futures for their children. Yet parents face great difficulty finding safe, reliable care for their children while they are at work. Ask America's parents and they'll tell you they wish they could do better for their children, but cannot because costs are too high, they can't find the quality they're looking for, or the demands of their work schedules limit their choices.

It made common sense to use tobacco funds to invest in the child care programs that work for America's children and families. Rarely have so many important goals been addressed in a single piece of legislation before Congress.

But Congress said no. In effect, they told our children to "light up."

Let's remember that in November when they're asking for our votes.



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involved as the  
community evolves.

At PGE, we believe it's important to take a leadership role in the healthy development of our communities.

Carl Talton, our new economic development director, has years of electrical utility experience and also serves as the chair for the Portland Development Commission. So with Carl's expertise, PGE can help facilitate wise growth and revitalization throughout the area.

Carl is another way PGE stays connected to the community—and to the future.



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