

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 III," Conclusion

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Civil Rights Journal Preventing Hate Crimes

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

With the horrible murder of James Byrd, Jr. last month in Jasper, TX, the nation's attention was turned for the moment to the simple fact that Americans are still being attacked and even killed because of the color of their skin or their sexual orientation. Less than two years before the millennium, hate crimes are still a part of life for this nation.

Senators Kennedy, Specter and Wyden have introduced federal legislation which will expand federal jurisdiction to reach all serious hate crimes and provide grants to state and local authorities to help prevent hate crimes, especially by juveniles. Now the Senate Judiciary Committee is holding hearings on this bill, with the hope that similar hearings will be held in the House of Representatives and that a hate Crimes Prevention Act will be passed this year.

"Hate crimes are a form of terrorism," said Senator Edward Kennedy, adding "They tear at the heart and soul of our country... They threaten the entire community and undermine the ideals on which the nation was founded."

Wade Henderson, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, noted that the dismembering of James Byrd, Jr., after being chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged along a dirt road, and two similar copy-cat crimes in Belleville, IL and Slidell, LA are but the latest in a long series of

violent crimes against people just because of their race, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation. Indeed, it is estimated that there are some 10,000 such crimes committed every year.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1998 is designed to close some loopholes earlier federal legislation left which have tied the hands of federal prosecutors in the past. Under current laws, a federal prosecutor must prove that the defendant acted because of the victim's race, color, religion or national origin and because the victim was exercising a federally protected right. There have been many heinous acts of racial and religious violence that the Department of Justice has been unable to or unsuccessful in prosecuting because of the restrictions in the law.

Under the new provisions, for instance, the federal government would be able to get involved in hate crimes committed by organized hate groups who have sophisticated interstate networks, making it more difficult for local and state law enforcement to prosecute. In addition, it would close gaps caused by the fact that only 18 states have laws criminalizing violence based on sexual orientation and that 12 states have no hate crimes laws at all. Several states, including Ohio and New Jersey, have had their state hate crimes laws struck down on constitutional grounds. States will continue to take the lead in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes under this new legislation, but the federal government will also

be able to punish these crimes.

The horrible death of James Byrd, Jr. offended and shocked many Americans. But many were shocked and offended by the police brutality in the case of Abner Louima in New York City last year. But, in the aftermath of the public outcry, once the television cameras went away, in terms of systemic, long-ranging changes in the New York City police department and its handling of police brutality, little or nothing was done.

We cannot enter a new century with thousands of hate crimes occurring every year. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act is but one step in what we as a nation must do to stop the killings. But it is a step -- let's take it and then look seriously at how we can stop these crimes on our own streets, in our own communities. Because Jasper, TX is not unlike your town or mine. Because the death of James Byrd, Jr. and the thousands of Americans who were victims of hate crimes and have died before him must not be in vain. Because we must live up to the ideals of freedom we say we still believe.

(Note: You can contact your Senator about the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, S. 1529 at United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510. You can contact your Congressperson about the Hate Crime Prevention Act, H. 3081 at United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.)

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

The responses of readers to this series on 'Grammar Wars, Past and Present' have run a full spectrum; from surprise; "knew-it-all-the-time," to outrage or that irrepressible American humor which sustains our citizens under the mostrying of circumstances.

Beginning with the latter reaction, I had a caller insist that either Eurobonics or Ebonics would have served as well or better than the Navajo Indian language used in World War II. Over 400 Navajo "code talkers" used this "Athupaskan tongue with its complex syntax and subtle tonal qualities to encode the dispatches of American troops in the South Pacific."

Japanese cryptographers were unable to decipher the critical messages passed between the marines storming the shores of the Pacific Islands: "ginit" (hawk) for dive bomber, "nimasii" (potato) for hand grenade. The caller, a Native American, said he was considering an SBA loan to develop "code-breaking kits" for sale to industry that would be hiring both white and black victims of the "Eurobonics."

Well, now that I have been made an

honorary member of the "Navaho Code Talkers Association," allow me to relate some other advises and concerns of readers and callers. I heard from parents, teacher, students and from the public at large, including irate taxpayers.

Several commented on a 'Portland Oregonian' article of July 7, "Oregon Schools Should Teach Citizenship." It was contributed by Robert Y. Thornton, retired judge and former attorney general of Oregon. One could anticipate the response from that great majority who feel that teaching staffs first should "get up to speed on reading, writing, and arithmetic, and especially grammar."

There was much commentary on an educational system decrying the lack of adequate funds for music, dance or driver education, being asked to "give instruction in honesty, morality, courtesy, obedience to law...respect of parents and the home and related subjects as required by Oregon Law (ORS 336.067, 1929)." It was "like," "can he be serious?"

As usual, industry was complaining that, "things are not getting any

better with this crop of new hires." My former PSU students, now in management, tell me that my anticipation of second generation "functional illiteracy" problems has come to pass. "And we are crucified by some members of congress when we ask for more visas to 'import' skilled technicians, the people showing up at our door do not have sufficient language skills for training."

Clearly, we are able to see what will happen in the case of any economic downturn, for the problem is said to exist among many of the non-technical new hires. And holds true for both white and black. Our education system has produced new demographics for that, "Last hired, first fired" slot.

Noah Webster, the great 'dictionary-maker' also "had a dream;" a completely literate America, with such a goal to have been met well over century ago. But we have the following from the wife of one of those 'chip-land' executives, a dedicated public school teacher these past 25 years.

"I hope that I'm wrong buy my greatest fear is that the most highly publicized (and vigorously marketed)

elements of the electronic revolution will provide the ultimate escape hatch for a failed education system."

Our conversation ranged from enthusiastic press releases completely at odds with media reports of the same day--and those reports in conflict with others in the same newspaper on the same day. "Parents ask me, 'are reading scores up or down--the same with math or whatever. Answers phrased in 'psychometrics' do not satisfy many parents who know that their child does not read nearly as well as they did at that same age."

The teacher unions--'associations' in their purulence--are not nearly adept as they once were at reassuring either the public or many members that their main objectives have to do with 'education standards.' Publications loaded with icons of cyberspace like computers up-your-gizmo, and "cute little colored kids sitting at terminals may be good grant bait--but what about those scores? What are they being taught?," a parent asks. her child asks, "How can I look it up if I can't spell it?"

CAR MAKERS PUT ON NOTICE

Rev. Jackson announced that five automobile manufacturers - Mercedes, Honda, Lexus, Volkswagon, and Volvo - would be targeted for action because of their practices of excluding minorities from business relationships.

Two weeks ago, the National Association of Minority Auto Dealers (NAMAD) held its annual convention in Houston. Coming out of the meeting, we found that, despite the fact that African Americans alone spend more than \$22 billion every year on new and used cars and trucks, minorities are spectators in the auto industry rather than players.

At the press conference announcing Rainbow/PUSH's intentions to monitor the automotive industry and take action if necessary, Rev. Jackson said, "Many of these car makers, including but no limited to the five we are naming, are boycotting us. They are willing to take our money and deal with African Americans and

other minorities as consumers, but

come boycott partners. We would

New York City spent \$1.3 billion on cars and trucks in 1996 alone.

In Washington, D.C. there is not one minority-owned automobile dealership. And yet African Americans spend almost \$300 million on new and used cars and trucks every year.

If, by August 15 (during Rainbow/PUSH's annual convention), these five corporations have not developed comprehensive plans to include African Americans and other people of color in the industry as reciprocal trading partners, Rev. Jackson will announce the organization of a nationwide boycott of the offending car makers.

RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

they refuse to engage us as reciprocal trading partners - dealers, suppliers, attorneys, money managers."

Rev. Jackson went on to say, "Either they will drop their boycott of us and become trading partners, or we will stop buying their cars and be-

rather be trading partners, but we are willing to be boycott partners."

Evidence of Exclusion - Geography

In New York City, there is not a single car dealership north of Central Park. And yet, African Americans in

Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

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