

# EDITORIAL

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## perspectives

### What Could Be More Interesting Than "A History of Reading," III

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## The Portland Observer

(USPS 959-680) Established in 1970

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**Deadline for all submitted materials:**  
Articles: Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday, 12:00pm

**POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes To: Portland Observer,  
P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.**

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon.  
Subscriptions: \$60.00 per year

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Budgeting

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

When you make up your household budget there are a lot of necessities to consider like shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and medical expenses. Sometimes there's room for a few luxuries. If you have children, they usually take up a large part of every category, and you probably make sure they have shoes and school clothes that fit before you look at the state of your own closet, and their nutritional needs come before your extra cup of coffee in the morning or the slice of pizza at lunch.

Well, our country has children, and some people don't think they should take up much room in the budget. They're at it again, those folks who supposedly represent us in Congress. The Budget Resolution passed by the U.S. House of Representatives calls for cutting national spending. We all know what it's like to cut spending when we need to, but in most families children are the last to feel the cuts. If this Budget Resolution becomes law, children will be the first to feel it.

We cheered last year when Congress passed and the President signed into law the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), providing \$48 billion over the next 10 years to ensure health coverage for 5 of the 11 million uninsured children in this country. Now the House proposes to slash \$12 billion from this program. It also proposes to jeopardize the health of the nearly 20 million low-income children who depend upon Medicaid.

"Unspecified cuts" in income security programs—\$10 billion worth—will jeopardize assistance and services for some of our most vulnerable populations. If they go through, we can expect to see deep cuts in programs targeted for children with disabilities under the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI), children in the

federal Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program, and children in single-parent families whose parental support (usually from absent fathers) is ensured by the Child Support Enforcement program. Also cut out of our national budget by this proposal is \$2.7 billion for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for working families and \$2.4 billion in funding for the Social Services Block Grant.

In these time of budget surpluses, we should not be taking funds away from our children and most vulnerable citizens. We should be providing health care coverage for every uninsured child, ensuring high-quality, affordable child care for working families, increasing training and employment opportunities for parents who want and need to work, and increasing support for children with disabilities and those at risk of or already in foster care.

The Senate and the House will be appointing a committee to look at their budget proposals and vote on a final budget that will be sent to the President for signature. It's not too late to stop their unfair treatment of children and working families.

Write or call your Representative and Senators and tell them that you don't balance your budget by cutting out things your children need, and you don't want them to do that either. Remind them that an election is coming up in November, and that you vote for people who put children first. Contact them at the U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, and the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515, or call 202-224-3121 and ask for the office of your Representative or Senators.

Make them listen and make them understand that you Stand for Children.

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Since I closed last week's article with a 'page-image' from Herman Melville's classic, "Moby Dick" ("like a painted ship, upon a painted sea"), I thought, why not draw again from the poetic prose he used to describe the pursuit of 'The Great White Whale?'

Melville engraves a permanent place in the readers mind and in the 'history of reading'-when he brings one's ear to interact with his visual description of the port city from which Captain Ahab launched his ill-fated adventure.

Had this gifted writer so very early on developed a 'literary virtual reality?' "...the salty lick and lap of the sea, at the foot of every cross-town street?"

Can you not hear, see, and smell the reality of this New England town. The word-artist has left an indelible imprint on a receptive mind; a master craftsman has painted a word-picture that the reader may recall and enjoy forever. This is why there are

those of us who indict today's education system for failure to equip so many children with adequate reading skills; intellectually starved.

Of course, we have it on good authority that 'Homer,' the famed Greek bard was illiterate, though, as Alberta Manguel tells us in his "History of Reading" (Viking, 1996), his admiring listeners transcribed poems like the "Illiad" onto parchment scrolls-24 in the particular case. They were distributed throughout all known lands.

A "scroll" is an interesting device for conveying a written message; in the third grade we wrote horizontal messages on long strips of paper, such that they could be wound between two sticks-gradually revealing the entire message by winding or unwinding the sticks.

We, like the Greeks, called this "scrolling," and interestingly, the technique of retrieving stoned information in your computer is still called "scrolling." Of course, that is a vertical process as opposed to horizon-

tal; but as early as 1979 I had a handheld Texas Instrument calculator on which one could horizontally scroll an almost infinite number of decimal places. I was never sure of the accuracy.

Manguel goes on to recite an informative and fascinating story of the development of books as we know them. Clay tablets of legal codes became "codexes" which could be hand-held. Papyrus was too brittle to be folded into booklets, but parchment or vellum (animal skins) could be cut or folded into all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Our author provides us with much of the history of 'books' in the ancient world of Greece, Rome, and Mesopotamia (Middle East-Iran, Iraq). The Egyptian development centers around the fairly 'late' developments at the famous library at Alexandria.

Manguel skirts the seminal contributions of the Africans and obviously, begins his story with the conventional European treatment. Thus, you will not find commentary on the

famed "Rosetta Stone" whose parallel inscriptions in three languages permitted modern man to learn of the wonders and grandeur of ancient Egypt: Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek texts.

But then again this book is not about the particular technical or cultural contributions of mankind over a long-time line of 'recorded' history. But, instead, is about the devices and techniques that various peoples and organizations used to record and pass on information about the world as they knew it; religious, secular, scientific and philosophical.

You will be inspired to read further, inspired to follow up the many little gems of knowledge that have been revealed.

But I think that most important of all, you will be highly motivated to join the current drive to raise the reading levels of our school children.

"Phonics" is 'where its at' and where it has always been. They must not be deprived of the great gift of literacy.

## Midnight Train to Georgia

There are a little more than nine weeks remaining until the congressional midterm elections-a little more than nine weeks until we can send Newt Gingrich on a midnight train to Georgia as just another congressman.

The Democratic Party only needs a net gain of eleven seats in the House to regain the majority. If we look past the trauma in the White House and focus on the needs of the other 100 million households in this country, we can do it.

### Unprecedented Opportunity for African Americans

If Democrats regain control of the Congress, three of the most powerful House committee chairpersons will be African Americans:

\*Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY)- Ways and Means.

\*Rep. John Conyers (D-MI)- Judiciary.

\*Rep. William Clay (D-MO)- Education and Workforce.

This opportunity used to motivate African Americans to turn out to vote in record numbers.

### Key Races Needed to Take Back the House:

The following list includes some of the most important races this year in which African American voters have the power to de-

termine the winner and the direction of the next Congress.

AL-3: Dem challenger Joe

NC-8: Dem challenger Mike Taylor faces a GOP incumbent in a district that is more than 25%

## RAINBOW PUSH COALITION

Turnham faces a GOP incumbent who won less than 51% of the votes in his '96 election victory. The district is nearly 25% African American.

AR-4: Dem challenger Judy Smith faces a GOP incumbent whose campaign is being managed by former Christian Coalition Exec. Dir. Ralph Reed. The district is nearly 25% African American.

CA-27: Dem challenger Barry Gordon faces a GOP incumbent who won less than 51% of the votes in his '96 election victory.

IL-17: Rep. Lane Evans (D) faces a tough challenge.

IN-10: Rep. Julia Carson (D) faces a tough challenge in a district that is more than 27% African American.

KY-3: Dem challenger Chris Gorman faces a GOP incumbent who won less than 51% of the votes in her '96 election victory.

African American.

NV-1: Dem challenger Shelley Berkley or Clay Baty will face a GOP incumbent who won less than 51% of the votes in his '96 election victory.

OH-1: Dem challenger Roxanne Qualls faces a GOP incumbent in a district that is nearly 28% black.

TX-14: Dem challenger Loy Sneary faces a GOP incumbent in a district that is more than 20% African American and more than 20% Hispanic.

### Democrats Must Not Take Black Voters For Granted

A number of newspaper columns have been written in recent weeks suggesting that there is about to be a shift in black political loyalty away from the Democratic Party.

Since the 1960's, Democrats have consistently won about 80-90% or more of black votes. How-

ever, evidence of gradual erosion of support has surfaced in recent years.

African American voters are not a monolith that will blindly support Democrats regardless their message.

If Democrats are to earn African American votes, they must address fundamental issues like choosing to improve our public schools rather than acquiescing to GOP plans for private school vouchers for only a few students.

### Pray for Congressman and Sandi Jackson

As you may have heard, last week Mrs. Jackson was hospitalized due to complications from her pregnancy. Saturday evening, the Jackson's pre-term baby boy was delivered and died a short time later.

Rev. Jackson, sons Jonathan and Yusef, and Cong. Jackson's pastor Rev. James Meeks of Salem Baptist Church in Chicago flew to Utah to be with Jesse Jr. and Sandi who had been in Utah attending a conference on youth leadership.

The Rainbow/ Push family would like to than Sen. Orrin Hatch for facilitating the Jackson family's trip to Utah in this difficult time. Please keep Jesse Jr. and Sandi in your prayers.

## Count Every American

BY-HUGH B. PRICE, PRESIDENT-NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

Those Americans who have viewed that American institution, the census, as largely the quiet province of statisticians, are about to discover how contentious counting-and not counting-number can be.

This week a special three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court in Washington ruled that the federal Census Bureau can't use a proposed new method of counting to conduct the decennial count of the American population in the year 2000.

The Clinton Administration wanted to use a method known as statistical sampling-an approach that combines the traditional house-to-house attempt to count every person in a neighborhood with a simultaneous sample of 10% of households in that neighborhood.

By comparing the two results, the Census Bureau claims it can estimate the characteristics and numbers of people who are missed and provide a more accurate total count.

But that proposed new approach generated bitter opposition from Congressional Republicans.

They argued that the Consti-

tution requires "an actual enumeration," or head count, of every U.S. resident. Their opposition led to the lawsuit and the court decision.

Congressional Republicans had argued that the new approach was unconstitutional because the Constitution calls for an "actual enumeration"-head count-of American citizens.

The three-judge panel sidestepped the constitutionality question, declaring instead that the Census Bureau had wrongly interpreted the federal law regarding taking the census.

For its part, the Clinton Administration reacted to the court decision by immediately filing notice to have the issue heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.

No one should think the issues in this dispute are minor or hard to fathom. This battle is about power and money-and race and ethnicity.

In 1990, when the Census Bureau used the traditional method of trying to count every person in a neighborhood, some of the counts were significantly skewed:

Census counters missed 8.4 million people. In addition, they counted another 4.4 million either twice or in the wrong neigh-

borhood of residence.

Since the Census count is used to, among many other things, apportion political districts and distribute federal monies, undercounting or over-counting people in particular areas can have a significant impact on political party fortunes in state legislatures and the Congress itself.

And it can also determine how much federal aid a locality does or does not get.

However, the issue of who was "under-counted" and who was "over-counted" when the traditional head-count method was used for the 1990 census is even more sensitive.

Most of the 8.4 million people who were missed were African Americans in inner cities and Hispanics in California, Texas, and New Mexico.

Most of the 4.4 million who were counted twice were college students and affluent whites who owned more than one home.

Statistical sampling, in other words, would increase the number of blacks and Hispanics counted, which would help the Democrats and could shift money and political clout away from wealthier, mostly white districts.

That's part of the political calculus at work in the debate.

But there's a large issue here also, one which is the foundation of our support for the use of the statistical sampling approach: It is that every American citizen ought to count-and therefore ought to be counted.

The Census predicts that if it uses the traditional way of trying to count every individual head-and estimated 275 million in 2000- it will miss about 5 million people.

If that comes to pass, there's no reason to think blacks and Hispanics and the poor won't make up the disproportionate share again.

As I wrote in a recent column, all Americans deserve to be counted in the Census. Their being made visible is the very foundation of democracy.

That point should especially resonate with African Americans-whom others sought for so long to make visible, as far as democracy was concerned.

The concept of "actual enumeration" cannot be used to glibly rationalize the current

