

EDITORIAL

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P E R S P E C T I V E S The Curtain Rises On Black Inventors (Slightly) V

By Prof. MCKINLEY BURT

It was famed American 'pop' artist Andy Warhol who suggested that everyone is due "15 minutes of fame." Unfortunately, America did not take this approach to that eclectic group of thousands of black inventors who gave the "industrial revolution" a seminal reality - they were truly a suis generis.

Last week, our assertion that 'hiding' the contributions of these turn-of-the-century pioneers in America's (the world's) technology was a form of genocide brought some objections - but much, much more agreement. What else, indeed, can be the impact of raising five generation of Americans with the crippling cultural determinant that only white actors may come on stage in the roles of major inventors, engineers and scientists. Lost role models, motivation and career choices.

Of course, we must acknowledge the frequent and 'non-threatening' walk-on part given to George Washington Carver, the Tuskegee "peanut man". He was usually described in such terms as a "natural genius - a man of one with God and the plants commanded to reveal their secrets of medicine and nutrition." But never, never as the eminent, intellectual giant who had mastered the technical protocol which for white practitioners is described as the "Scientific Method" - an 'Anglo Saxon' paradigm.

And so it is that each succeeding generation of black youth has been progressively (and deliberately) disengaged from the truth and reality of his talent, intellect

and his place in God's scheme of things. Yet we have those in the fields of education, sociology and urban planning who knew the consequences, a cruel and often fatal game - depriving a people of their true history, increasingly devaluing the currency of human worth. Behold!

Marion Wright Edelman, director of the Children's Defense Fund, puts it quite well (I quote from a new but widely-cited book by Lonnie Jackson, Oregon Corrections, Salem; "Gangbusters: Strategies for Prevention and Intervention) or 1-800-222-5646.

"Never before has our country seen, or permitted the epidemic of gangs and violence that is turning our communities into fearful armed camps and sapping the lives and hopes of so many of our children... Never has America permitted children to rely on guns and gangs, rather than parents and neighbors, for protection and love, or pushed so many into the tumultuous seas of life without nurturing families and communities."

Undirected and misdirected youth who have no idea of who they are or what they can be - no more than their parents in many cases. This inverted pyramid of social degradation reflects the predictions of noted black historian, Carter G. Woodson ("The

Miseducation of the Negro"). This tragedy is not a result of Murphy's Third Law: "Unintended Consequences." The distortions and omissions (and lies) have been a deliberate economic/cultural weapon.

In a recent article (11/18/98) Hugh B. Price, president National Urban League described an America that "depended for its prosperity upon the stolen labor of its slaves." I noted here several years ago

that Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy attempted to patent the invention of a slave by the name of Thomas; a propeller that greatly increased the speed of boats ("Labor" was not all regularly stolen).

The application was denied on the basis that "a slave has no rights which may be acquired at law," and as the Civil War begins, we find Davis incorporating into "The Constitution Of The Confederate States of America", a Patent Office (Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 7.). It would be certain that the master would control the inventions of the 'dumb' slaves.

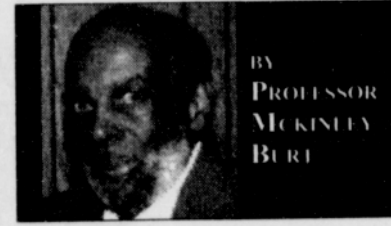
Obviously, an escalating price in suffering and economic deprivation is still being paid by African Americans - and in consequence of their calculated travail, the 'entire' nation suffers huge

losses. It is difficult to list all the originators and directors to-date of this tragic play. We could begin with plantation owners who obviously never freed their slaves (tenant farming) and D.W. Griffiths infamous propaganda movie, "Birth of a Nation."

Then, of course, there were the overwhelming masses of European immigrants whom corporations played against the talented blacks who had proven their abilities in technology from industrial fairs to Congressional Record and Patent Office - and many other blacks who had made their mark in southern (white) universities before being ousted in a vicious backlash of violence and Jim Crow Laws. The question, today, is, are our wayward youth, gangbangers retrievable for technology?

And against the background of Hollywood's downgrade and caricatures - see Michael Jordan's latest comment - we have millions of black youth who have and are attending a network of the nation's schools that are really no more than "farm teams" for the professional sports teams and their subsidiary industries (the new version of "Roman Gladiators - No math, science).

Next week. Today's stage for black technology and the economic and educational realities; the genius is still there, but it requires support of the entire community.



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Open Letter to Those Concerned:

Police Chief Charles Moose is entitled, in our opinion, to give voice to the frustration he has been feeling since some misguided citizens marched on his residence and disrespected him by yelling curses outside his home.

The Chief, who has given so much to this city and to the Northeast Portland community in particular, was left feeling vulnerable in his own home. No one responsible has offered an apology to the Chief and his wife for the irresponsible behavior. He has a right to feel frustrated and betrayed.

Our Chief of Police receives death threats regularly, yet continues to get up each morning with service to Portland on his mind. Over many years he has provided courageous leadership of the Bureau and moved it forward.

Yes, accountability of the police for their response to the disturbance is something that needs to be fully addressed. But, no public servant or family member should have to live in fear in their own home.

Some may not like the tone or the message that the Chief delivered at the City Council meeting, but those things needed to be said, and he needed a forum to express himself. His comments may have been stated in anger but it takes courage to speak your truth. And sometimes the truth is hard to hear.

Our next steps ought to be about continuing to develop relationships with the young people who lacked judgement and positive adult guidance, and ended up protesting at the Chief's home. These youth apparently were unaware that they had other options. It's the job of the adults to make sure that they know where to turn, and how to constructively channel their own frustrations.

Some have already spoken out in response to the Chief's comments, and most remain supportive of the Chief even though they may have expressed disappointment at his statements.

Because of the difficulty disseminating a complete message through the media or in convening a forum in which information could be shared objectively and in a timely manner, this manner of expression has been selected by the undersigned. We acknowledge the courageous leadership of Chief Charles Moose. We respect that he has chosen Northeast Portland for his home, and join him in his efforts to get more people proactively involved in their community and their neighborhoods.

In the Spirit of Building Community,

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