

EDITORIAL

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P E R S P E C T I V E S

"Blacks Put Their Stamp On Modern Technology And Society, IV"

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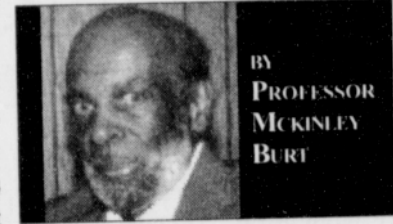
THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

1998 has been quite a year for our "Perspectives" column, and it is particularly fitting that we began our windup for the year with last week's crucial observations on the nation's obsession with "History Standards In Public Education" - and with our own rhetorical question and answers, "why do we need Black History?"

with crucial needs in the areas of education, economic expertise, and informational technology. We can do it.

It seems that I was right on time with my 12/16/98 citation of the major inventions in refrigerated trucks and railway cars by Frederick McKinley Jones. The very next week, the Associated Press news agency reported, "Cold Devastates California's Citrus Crops: Early reports indicate at least a half-billion dollar loss," and add losses to transportation industries.



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

That "why" question got answered with a flourish this past February, during Black History Month, when this column featured a number of major contributions to the world's technology by black inventors -- all well documented and supported by patent photo stats and detailed illustrations. "History Standards", if you will! and we will do even better this time.

My only regret was that our late publisher, Joyce Washington, was not her to see that we are still 'on task' - following through with her kind of energy and commitment to the community, public, individuals and organizations. However it is a heritage that motivates the Ob-

porter."

A concerned reader reported that his father had an old Lionel model train set from the 1930's and that it had a box car labeled "refrigerated" - preceding Jones inventions by several decades. Don't be fooled, let me clue you in. In those days we kids would pull our little wagons down to the train yards where these so-called "refrigerated cars" would receive chipped ice from huge ice-making plants (reefers)".

Long lines of these cars were pulled under chutes where ice was dumped into protect the perishables. Whatever hit the ground we kids hauled home for mother's "ice box."

The modern examples of electro-mechanical refrigeration for transports was yet to be perfected and patented by Frederick McKinley Jones (1950's). Sort of the "Real McCoy".

In respect to this most recent series on African American contributions to our way

many favorable calls and faxes from whites as well as blacks. Interestingly, as in early days when touring the country spreading the word about the neglected black inventors - or much more recently when making the same pitch all over Oregon and Washington in an affirmative Action Program sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service - whites in the audiences volunteered information on black inventors whom my research had not uncovered.

And there are today's signs of hope. Several teachers and a local politician of note say they are in agreement with my thesis that the deliberate century-long omission of the race of the black inventors has proved to be a form of genocide - whether deliberately directed to that end or a natural consequence of prejudice or envy. They, too, are not fooled by the new "colorblind" scam dreamed up by the right wing in their attack on Affirmative Action. The 'right' wants votes.

Let us look forward to this New Year with renewed vigor, and commitment to our goals; economic, educational,

Why The Year 2000 Problem Poses A Risk To The Public Health And Safety

CONTINUED FROM FRONT
The Embedded Chip/System Problem
These are the unseen guardians of our lives. They keep nuclear cores stable and the oil, gas, water and electricity flowing; they keep intensive care units operating and our military forces armed and mobile. If they fail, our world implodes. And, embedded systems are located everywhere. Embedded chips and control systems are more difficult to find and fix or replace than software because of their physical inaccessibility. Take

the signal repeaters on undersea telecommunications cables, or the flowmeters on underground pipes, even the pacemakers in patients' hearts, for example. Also, control systems are constructed of a hierarchy of component systems, each of which may be vulnerable on its own, or in conjunction with others. In many cases two separate subsystems may operate in a single system. With embedded systems, the concern is often with intervals rather than specific dates: the need may be for an event

to occur at 100-day intervals rather than on the 5th day of each month. There is also the possibility that devices with cycles that are measured in hours, and minutes (or even seconds) may be affected by the problem because year numbers are the basis of time calculations. In such systems, the effect may not be evident at midnight but will arise within the following 24 hours. Paloma O'Riley is the founder of The Cassandra Project. For more information, visit www.millennia-bcs.com

Consumers Need More Information About Air Bags

Today, the public might think it is better informed about air bags than ever before. Sadly, it is not. In October, I represented Norma Swanson v. Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., which was tried in Federal District Court in Portland, Oregon. Swanson was blinded by the passenger-side air bag in a 1994 Nissan Altima. The air bag deployed when the vehicle in which she was sitting drove over a curb at a relatively low speed. Although Swanson was properly seat belted, with the seat halfway back in the seat track, she was struck traumatically in the face by the air bag. The passenger-side air bag was designed to strike the occupant while still inflating at speeds up to 159 miles per hour. This was contrary to the basic underlying premise of air

bag technology for over 25 years - that is, that an air bag be fully inflated before the occupant falls into it. The driver in Swanson's vehicle was completely uninjured. His air bag had tethers, which are internal straps designed to restrain the air bag from striking the occupant. The passenger-side air bag (which struck Swanson) failed to incorporate tethers. To date, at least 24 individuals have been significantly injured by the 1994 Nissan Altima passenger-side air bag. Most victims have been women and children and most injuries involve significant anatomical damage to the eye, including blindness. Swanson's injuries could have been avoided. She purchased her Altima in 1994 specifically because the ve-

hicle had a passenger-side air bag and because she thought it would better protect her two young children. It was not until 1996 that the public learned for the first time that air bags presented a danger to children and shorter women. Had Swanson known this, she never would have purchased the vehicle. Although the public is better educated today about air bags, many misconceptions remain. For example, most people do not know that air bags come in a variety of designs, many of which are clearly better than others. Support for the petition for fuller disclosure should be sent to: Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590.

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