

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Letter To The Editor:

On January 25, 1999 the Oregon Senate Committee on Education is expected to pass a charter school bill which will be forwarded to the House. I hope they slow down their rush to embrace this latest fad in education as this state is a long way from making prior efforts at alternative education to serve families properly. I speak for the 1979 Alternative Education Act, which although amended over the years to address its shortcomings, still has a long way to go before being an effective approach to providing alternative methods and environments in delivering efficacious pedagogy and services to K-12 students.

As the recent Director of Operations for a NE Portland nonprofit organization that has contracts to provide alternative education services to African-American and other minority students with eight local school districts (Portland Public Schools; Woodburn; Parkrose; David Douglas; Centennial; Estacada; Corbett; Hillsboro) I find it appalling and a complete abdication of their responsibility to honor the public trust they are vested with that these districts entered into contracts with an organization that had, and still has, very serious financial and programmatic mismanagement problems. Their 1997 audit contains a number

of troubling findings such as "the Company has suffered recurring losses from operations and has a net asset deficiency (\$102,947.00), which raises substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern."

Without even looking at this audit these districts pledged over \$1 million to this nonprofit which has owed the IRS over \$50,000.00 in longstanding delinquent payroll taxes, \$6,000+ to the Oregon Dept. of Revenue for unpaid unemployment taxes, and started the school year operating on a deficit that exceeded \$100,000.00. What is upsetting about this is that for a number of years this nonprofit has been paying monthly penalties and fees on its delinquent taxes, and guess where the money to pay this has come from. That's right—Oregon taxpayers.

This blind-leap-of-faith by school districts in handing over millions of dollars to organizations that don't know how to conduct themselves with sound management practices is startling. What concerns me is the nonprofit alluded to is waiting with baited breath to transform itself into a charter school so that there will be even less scrutiny on how it administers itself.

I don't speak from ignorance as I come from Arizona and was involved at the ground level in the charter

school movement there. As a consultant I facilitated the chartering of four schools, one of which served at-risk youth such as the nonprofit noted herein. The director had to close his doors because of his inability to manage a business, which a school ultimately is. The excitement that fueled charter schools in Arizona has waned and the results are quite mixed. Some have been closed for falsifying attendance, as it is the head count that gets the funds to keep people employed. Sometimes a private or charter school can become more interested in maintaining employment for those who operate it than in providing quality instruction to their students.

Before Oregon foolishly rushes forward to create what could be a bigger problem than what it already has with some of its alternative schools, I suggest that a prudent and cautionary approach to charter schools be taken. And be sure to make sure that whomever operates them has a clean financial history, operating capital, and a comprehensive understanding of school finances and business practices.

James Houston, Ed.D.
Former Director of the Consortium of Arizona Private & Independent Schools and current Co-Director of CRIE - Consumer Rights In Education

Black History Month Is Here (Again)

This article was requested for reprint, from the Black History issue of, the Portland Observer on February 18, 1998

By PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

The following critical analysis of the teaching of history in our schools may extend the parameters of our own running commentary here, "History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past" Nash, Crubtree and Dunn, Alfred A. Knoff, N.Y. 1997.

Principally, my approach, or perspective, has been to retrieve those experiences/lessons that retain their value over time and circumstance. And there is no question but what black people have many hundreds of such well-documented models available to them, whether the American experience or on a world stage. Builders, artists, poets, inventors, educators, entrepreneurs.

Given these facts about such an extensive and authentic data base of relevance, then the remaining questions or issues must be about ease of access (to the many) and/or their motivation and dedication to the task. Where as I have been addressing the latter parameter (for years), "His-

tory On Trial" represents a very recent generation of educators and historians who have gained or assumed enough power to challenge a firmly entrenched establishment. It is only 'that,' at present, a "challenge", but the energy, commitment (and courage) of the "Young Turks" may yet allow them to successfully engage those who believe the world's history is "inherently and eternally Western." The latter viewpoint we find enthusiastically adopted by E.D. Hirsch, author of the 1987 best-seller, "Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know", Vintage Books.

Several readers say they remember a quarter-page special I presented in the August 8, 1990 Portland Observer, "Where's The Beef: is it to be Cultural Literacy or European Literacy?" My impassioned polemic headlined my less-than-enthusiastic review of the English professors' argument for "a common store of basic knowledge that would permit all citizens to 'talk the same language...society would be more

equitable, just and unified," he furnished a list "What Every American Should Know"

I point out, of course, that what Dr. Hirsch is about is not only a further frigid exclusion from our history texts of the major contributions to the world's culture and technology by people of color, but a tactic to implement for all time an education system guaranteed to produce an accepted 'Nordic response' from every student.

Hitler's propagandist, Dr. Herman Goebbels, asked no more. Nor did the famed 'liberal' philosopher Locke who designed the Constitution of the Carolinas to perpetuate slavery forever.

These guaranteed, one-hundred percent, 'Anglo' lists are not the exclusive domain of the education establishment. Every, teacher and parent (who cares) should be aware of the avalanche of corporation-designed "Ethnic Support Material"

that is reaching the school houses during a 'recently discovered' Black History Month. Major firms seem intent on catching up with the tobacco and liquor companies in dollars directed to "Special Markets", e.g. African Americans.

Several teachers and a principal have sent me copies of materials received. All of course high light. Reverend King, Jackie Robinson, Dr. Carver, and a few cite Crispus Attucks.

But those I've seen present a black whose existence in the Universe began with slavery—there is no Ethiopia, Egypt, Black Popes or Virgins, no Leo Africanus, no Great Pyramid, no great universities in West Africa like Timbuctu, no speech by Napoleon. Standing on the sands of Africa, before the Great pyramid, "Forty centuries of greatness look down upon you."

No sir, there is nothing that would jeopardize a corporation's bottom line, that could provoke objection by either a racist or a fearful curriculum specialist. 'Blacks are just here that's all—and we're stuck with them'.

DNC Chairs Decry Supreme Court's Decision to Reject Census Sampling

Washington, D.C. — Recently, Democratic National Committee (DNC) General Chair Governor Roy Romer and General Co-Chair designate Mayor Dennis Archer decry this weeks Supreme Court decision to reject sampling in the 2000 Census. Democrats support the recommendation by experts from the National Academy of Sciences that using scientific statistical methods will result in producing a census that is more accurate and less costly than the one in 1990.

Although the Supreme Court may have rejected the use of sampling in apportioning congressional seats, it did leave open the possibility that it could still be used in drawing election districts and for distributing federal aid.

"Scientific sampling is the best way to ensure that all Americans are counted,

especially those that are most often ignored," said DNC General Chair Governor Roy Romer. "The Republican Party has clearly led the fight against scientific sampling. The question is, why don't they want all Americans counted?"

Millions of Americans — especially minorities, children, the poor and rural residents — were undercounted in the 1990 census including 12.2% of All American Indians, 5% of all Hispanics, 4.4% of all African-Americans, and

2.3% of all Asian Americans. About half the Americans who were never counted children.

The census has a real impact on the lives of real people. State and local government to plan schools and highways use census information. The federal government uses the information to distribute funds for health care and other programs. Businesses use census information for long-range economic planning.

"The U.S. Supreme Court's deci-

sion left open the possibility for use of sampling that can make a difference in state senate and house races and, more importantly, in dispersing federal funds that help educate our children and improve our senior citizen's quality of life," said DNC General Co-Chair-Designate Mayor Dennis Archer, "I hope the Republican leadership will put politics aside and support sampling so that every American is counted and receives vital funds for their community."

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