

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Letter to Editor

I am writing in response to Mr. Ed Wilson's letter to the Editor dated June 16, 1999. As you might imagine, The Black United Fund of Oregon is very pleased to see Phase I of our project on Alberta taking shape and are very excited about the opportunities that it presents for neighborhood residents, community-based organizations, and the city as a whole.

While we appreciate Mr. Wilson's interest in this project, we are deeply concerned that Mr. Wilson did not speak with anyone within our organization to confirm whether or not his assumptions were correct. Had he taken just a moment to discuss this matter with us, he would have learned that his suspicions were in fact baseless.

As a community we must learn to work together, and when we disagree we must work out our differences in cooperative manner - with open and honest dialogue.

Founded by community leaders in 1983 and managed by a dedicated staff and board of directors, The Black United Fund has worked in cooperation with neighborhood residents, community leaders, and public and private institutions to stimulate neighborhood revitalization for more than fifteen years, and our project on Alberta is no exception.

To ensure minority participation on this project we:

- 1 Identified three (3) qualified general contractors and invited them to bid on the project; Portland's largest African-American general contractor was included in this group.
- 2 Developed a "Statement of qualifications" describing the Owner's goal of having minority sub-contractors actively involved in the project. A commitment to the inner northeast Portland was our primary concern.
- 3 Forwarded two sets of bid documents to OAME (Att: May) on March 18th and included the names and phone numbers of the three general contractors invited to submit bids.

4 Had discussions regarding the scope of the project with Tony Jones at Housing Development Center. We then forwarded a set of bid documents to Tony March 25th and included the three general contractors invited to submit bids.

5 Had additional discussion with Tony Jones regarding the goal of increased opportunities for participation of minority sub-contractors during construction.

6 Extended the bid date by one week to allow interested sub-contractors the opportunity to prepare their bids despite being on an extremely tight schedule.

7 Discussed additional site visits for sub-contractors during the bidding phase with Tony Jones. Consequently we decided in order to provide opportunities for minority sub-contractors we would hold three site visits. Three site visits during the bidding phase is far beyond the industry standard for a project of this nature and size.

8 Discussed with Tony Jones the success in contacting contractors in the Housing Development Center's CSP to see if they were informed of the project and interested in bidding.

9 Had the architect, Bill Hart, who is African-American, from Carleton Hart Architecture, submitting the names of the general contractors to interested sub-contractors.

10 Interviewed each general contractor to ensure minority participation and commitment to north/northeast Portland.

11 Hired at least seven local firms to work on this project. We are not aware of any "out of state" contractors on this project.

12 Have identified six of the seven firms working on the project as minority firms; and

13 Have identified that four of the six companies working on the project are African-American firms.

This process not only indicates the extent of our outreach efforts, but the diversity of our project team also demonstrates our commitment to minority and community involvement. Few constructions have this level of minor-

Good News, Bad News For Black America

By RON DANIELS

In a recent edition of Newsweek Magazine, Ellis, the author of Rage of the Privileged Class, penned an article entitled The Good News About Black America. In essence Mr. Cose indicates that the good news is that Black America is better off than at any time in history. Ostensibly, this good news is attributable in large measure to the tremendous growth in the U.S. economy in the last few years. The Black middle class in particular has benefited from the explosive growth in the U.S. economy. Overall Black income is at its highest level and unemployment at its lowest in nearly three decades.

Some 46% of Blacks now own their homes and the number of Blacks living in poverty declined to 27% in 1997 as compared to 32% in 1980. Eighty-eight percent of Black high school students are now staying the course to graduate compared to 55% in 1973. While college graduation rates for Black males dipped slightly in 1997 from a high of 15.4% in 1981 to 13.7%, the rates for Black females rose from 14.5% to 18.5% over the same period. Infant mortality for Blacks has also dramatically declined from 44 per 100,000 in 1960 to 12 in 1997. In addition, the fratricide which has plagued inner-city Black communities for more

than a decade also seems to be bottoming out. The homicide rates for Blacks was 28 per 100,000 in 1997 compared with 40 in 1980. The percentage of Black offenders declined from 50 per 100,000 to 32 during this same period.

While much of the improvement in the quality of life for Blacks is due to the sustained growth in the economy, Cose notes that some of this progress is the result of strenuous self help efforts by Blacks. An increasing number of Black churches have started community development corporations to build low and moderate income housing and create various economic development projects. Simultaneously, more Black professionals are returning to the Black community to make their skills and expertise available and Black entrepreneurs are investing in major business and community development projects in a number of cities.

As Mr. Cose suggests, however, everybody in Black America is not celebrating. For all of the progress of the Black middle class and upper class, Black professionals and Black executive do not fair as well as their White counterparts. For example, Black median income reached an all time high of \$34,644 in 1997, but the median income for Whites was \$56,022 or \$21,378 more than the median income for Blacks. And while Black unem-

ployment is at a 25 year low of 8.9%, it is still twice as high as White unemployment which stands at 3.9%. In addition, White home ownership is nearly 20% higher than that of Blacks.

Among Black young people ages 20-24 the unemployment rate is still a staggering 16.8% (significantly down from 24.5 in 1985) compared to 6.5% for Whites and among young people ages 16-19, only 40% of Blacks are in the labor market compared to 50% of Whites. In the Watts section of Los Angeles, which is probably typical of many Black inner city neighborhoods, 70% of the Black men are in prison, on parole or have been under some form of correctional supervision. Some 1,400,000 Black men in America or 13% of the Black male population have lost the right to vote because of felony convictions.

Ironically, while Black young people continue to suffer from disastrous levels of unemployment, some White business owners are complaining that they cannot find enough workers to fill vacancies in their enterprises, particularly for seasonal Summer jobs. According to an article in USA Today, resorts, theme parks, hotels and restaurants are aggressively recruiting in various European countries like England, Scotland, Spain, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Latvia to find workers to fill jobs that pay anywhere from \$5.25 to \$10.00 an hour. If

Black young people are not being aggressively recruited by certain categories of businesses during economic good times, what can Black America expect when the economy cools down?

Africans in America have always been the last to be hired in economic good times and the first fired during bad times. Hence the good news for Black America could evaporate rapidly if there is a substantial slow down turn in the economy. The bad news would become even worse for those who have not benefited from the current economic upswing. In order to make sustained progress towards the goal of economic well being for the masses of Black people, it is incumbent on those Blacks who are more well off to invest in improving Black communities. Pressure must also be exerted on corporations and government at all levels to develop initiatives and programs designed to strengthen the economic infrastructure in the Black community. Black America cannot allow the good news of the progress by some to obscure the persistent bad news which is a daily reality for vast numbers of impoverished Blacks who struggle to survive in the inner-cities. We must resolve that it must be freedom and prosperity for everybody or freedom and prosperity for nobody in this nations.

Some Justice For Louima

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

With the plea bargaining agreement of Justin Volpe and now the conviction of Charles Schwarz in the beating and sodomizing of Abner Louima, one more chapter of the tragic and frightening and on-going tale of New York city police brutality against people of color comes to a close. It's not all over yet since officer Schwarz' lawyer has indicated that they will appeal his conviction and since Mr. Louima has filed a civil suit against New York city for the injury done to him that night. Moreover, not all of the officers who were tried were convicted, but at least some justice has been achieved in one of the most horrible cases of police brutality in this nation.

After the jury's decisions were announced in New York, Mr. Louima indicated his disappointment with the acquittal of those officers whom he claimed had beaten him in the police car on the way to the precinct. Incredibly, it was the police precinct bathroom where he was sodomized with a broken broom handle by Officer Volpe while Officer Schwartz held him down. But, Mr. Louima said that he was gratified to know that finally those who terrorized him that night were being forced to pay for their crimes.

All too often in the few police brutality cases that do reach trial, the jury dismisses the testimony of the victim, choosing to believe the police officers instead. In many cases prosecutors do not even file charges against police or the grand jury refuses to indict them because most Americans still find it difficult to believe that some police officers do harass and sometimes beat people of color. Indeed, it is only because of cases like those of Rodney King, where a bystander videotaped the beating by police or in cases as unsettling as that of Mr. Louima that large numbers of Americans have begun to question the reliability of the blue wall of silence disavowals. In the Louima case several things happened which changed the usual dynamics of police brutality cases. First of all there was the horrendous nature of the sexual attack on Mr. Louima, which immediately drew the headlines in the press and a public outcry. Indeed, Zachary Carter, ity participation.

While I agree with Mr. Wilson's basic concern given the lack of minority participation on most construction projects, the issues that he raised regarding our projects are entirely misplaced. Unfortunately, all too often, the companies with a historical pattern of exclusion are rarely, if at all, questioned or held accountable, and these projects have the potential to generate far more revenue for minority contractors than the project that we've undertaken.

The Black United Fund will continue to do its part to build community, and I hope that we can continue to count on our many supporters to work cooperatively with us to accomplish this important goal. Sincerely, Judith Pitre, Board Chair The Black United Fund of Oregon, Inc.

the U.S. Attorney in this case, called it "the most depraved act that's ever been reported or committed by a police officer or police officers against another human being."

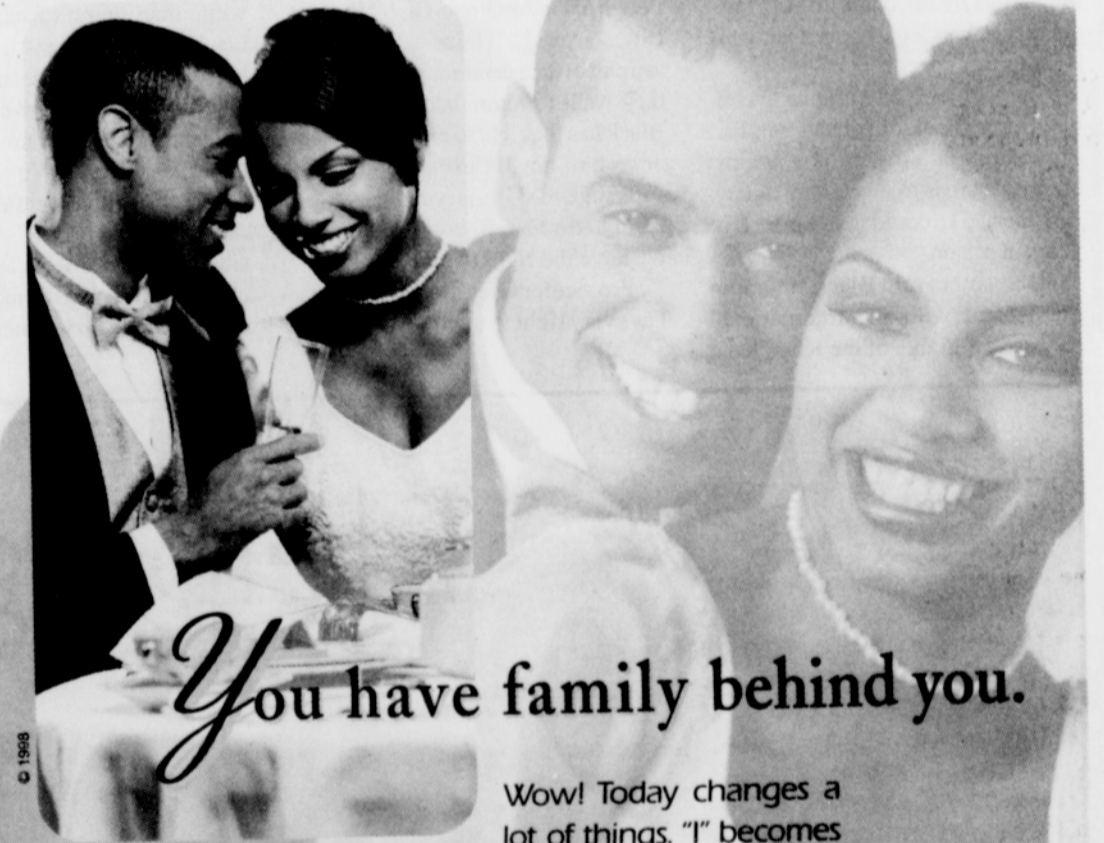
And perhaps it was the nature of the attack which brought about the second change—the break in the “blue wall of silence.” That code of silence of police officers, thus called the blue wall, has in the past been almost impossible to break and thus it has been hard to get police officers convicted in cases of police brutality. In the Louima case it was only after four other police officers testified against him, and despite

months of denying the allegations, that officer Volpe admitted his guilt in a plea bargain agreement.

But while some justice has been achieved in this case, there still can be no reconciliation in this terrible case. That is because after pleading guilty, Officer Volpe apologized to his family but refused to apologize to Mr. Louima. Without apology and a request for forgiveness there can be no reconciliation. Without admitting guilt to the injured party, there can be no healing. That is true for Officer Volpe and that is true for the New York City police department.

It's time for an apology, it's time

for an admission of guilt and it's time for a request for forgiveness. It's time for all of those from Officer Volpe and from Police Commissioner Saffir. It's time for all of those to Mr. Louima, to the communities of color in New York and the great people of the city of New York as well. The New York city police department has already paid out millions of dollars in settlements to victims of police brutality, but without those admissions of guilt and requests for forgiveness there will be no reconciliation and healing and there will be no true justice. And the brutality will just continue.



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