

# Illuminating the Black Power Movement

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as--and arguably is--un-American. "Power to the People" could only be treasonous when viewed from a dominant American culture lens.

The film's focus on Bill O'Neal--the Judas of the title--is just as complicated. O'Neal as a person was more opaque than Hampton--a petty criminal, he became an easy target for the FBI. He was evidently lured by money that, while modest by some standards, was far beyond what he could acquire by other legal means, and he no doubt lacked the principled vision of the stakes that drove those he spied on. But as played by LaKeith Stanfield, he is not exactly a fool or a sociopathic, and he is almost sympathetic. As I've read other reviews critiquing the film on that score, I've paused to wonder if part of the problem is our reluctance to see ourselves in O'Neal. Most of us are much more like him than Hampton--and the culture we all participate in and don't find ways to disrupt creates people like O'Neal who powered the FBI's counterintelligence program, known as COINTELPRO. If we really want to understand this Judas, we would do best to look at ourselves.

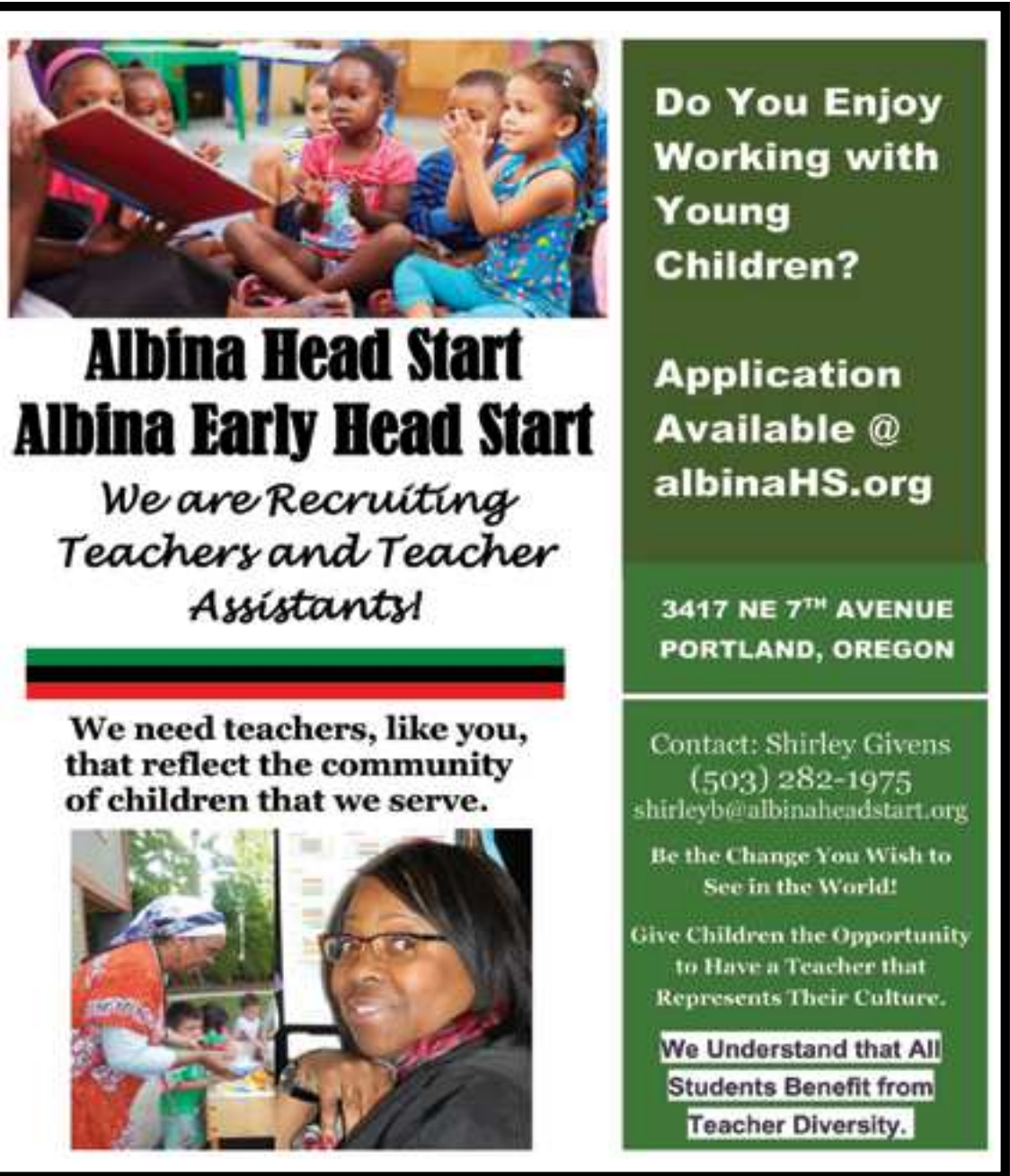
The curiosity this film awakened in me sent me to two other films that make good companion pieces. "MLK/FBI" is a new documentary by the venerable Sam Pollard (whose "Two Trains Runnin'" topped my list of the best films of 2016) and explores the FBI's obsession with King. It offers some further unpacking of the dirty methods that were used

without any real danger of pushback, and notes that in the 1960s, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover garnered much higher public approval ratings than the hated and feared King. Pollard, too, means to awaken our curiosity--not to what those long-buried tapes of King's private activities might reveal but to what it reveals about us that we are so prone to identifying black visionaries as public enemy number one.

The other is episode 6 of "Eyes on the Prize II," which features not only an interview with Bill O'Neal, but also some good context for the Black Power movement and how the black community in Chicago responded to the government lies told after Hampton's assassination. There is also a chilling account of the uprising in Attica prison, another shameful episode that most of us know too little about.

We've got work to do. I'm grateful for the work of these artists to assist us in undertaking it. "Judas and the Black Messiah" is enjoying a limited theatrical release and is streaming on HBO Max; "MLK/FBI" is streaming on Amazon Prime; and you can find "Eyes on the Prize II," which originally aired in 1990, on YouTube, though it is (tellingly) harder to find than season 1 of the series. Back to work.

*Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie and theater review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer. Find her review blog at opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com.*



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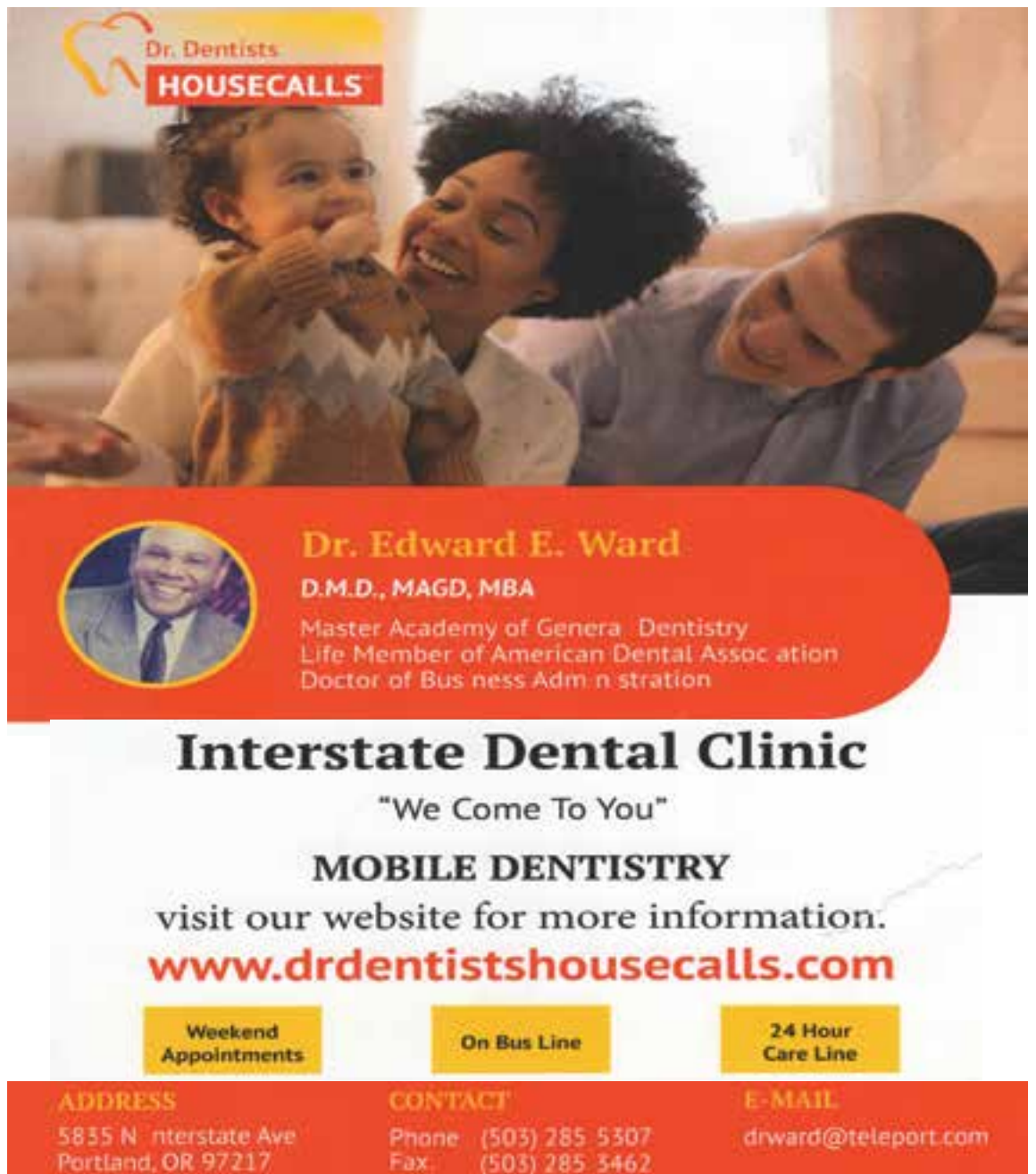
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