

## BLACKONOMICS

# School changing U.S. pupil by pupil

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After several unsuccessful attempts to arrange the trip, I was finally able to get to Piney Woods School, one of this country's four remaining Black-owned boarding schools, located about 21 miles south of Jackson, Miss. Nestled among the pine trees, amid rolling hills, lakes, and farmland, Piney Woods School made me feel like I had found a lost treasure. As I walked the campus and learned about the history of this school, a deep sense of melancholy came upon me and, feeling almost ashamed, I questioned why I had not come to that magnificent, historic, and wonderful place much sooner than I had.

The Piney Woods, a boarding school for grades 9-12, was founded in 1909. The students hail from cities from coast to coast, and they even come to attend the school from other countries such as Ethiopia and Mexico. Literally every student I met during my visit was courteous; they also demonstrated the initiative to walk up and introduce themselves to me without being prompted. That alone was enough to impress me; but there's much more.

The staff of Piney Woods is a group of dedicated, concerned, and loving teachers and administrators who welcomed me with open arms and a willingness to assist me in any way they could. They exuded a pride and loyalty that would have made the founder, Laurence C. Jones, smile from ear to ear. That same spirit obviously transfers to the students when they arrive and as they make their way through the school year. It was pure joy to be among teachers and students who were on the same page when comes to education and had great relationships to boot. Did I mention the food was excellent?

I was taken on a tour of the Piney Woods Museum and was able to travel back more than 90 years and make my way up to the present, learning about how Jones was able to open the school, seeing his writings, photos of his friends, relatives, and former students. There are photos of the famed Cotton Blossom Singers and artifacts brought back from other countries by Jones. It was a truly inspiring and enlightening experience. I stood in the small cemetery where President Jones, his wife, and others are interred, and I stood inside the former slave's house that was given to the founder to start the school in 1909.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to Marvin Jones, assistant to the president, who arranged for my visit Piney Woods and served as my personal escort and tour guide throughout the Piney Woods grounds. To Piney Woods President Charles H. Beady, Jr., a man of many talents and a man who loves his work and the students at Piney Woods: Thank you, my brother, for your hospitality and for your commitment to the vision of Laurence Jones and your predecessor, James S. Wade. You are a true role model for us all.

Now for some Blackonomics business. You know I have to write something about economic empowerment. So here it is. In 1954, Ralph Edwards, host of the television show, "This is Your Life," featured the founder of Piney Woods. Edwards was so impressed with Piney Woods that he put out a call to his viewers to send in \$1 each to the school in an effort to raise \$1 million. Nearly 50 years later, on www.blakeradio.com, during my last show, I put out a call to listeners. I also sent out a call on my e-mail list, The Whirlwind. Now I am issuing that same call for readers of this column.

That call is for you to send \$5 each to Piney Woods in an effort to raise \$1 million! (Psst, don't tell anyone, but I think we can do even better than that.) I know if \$750,000 could be raised in 1954 from an effort that went out over television, a medium only a few families were fortunate enough to have, we can surely eclipse that effort in 2003.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful Kwanzaa gift to Piney Woods, a school that exhibits all seven principles of the Nguzo Saba, if they could count a million dollars in

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# Audit: Missouri disses Black businesses

By Alvin A. Reid  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (NNPA) - Auditor Claire McCaskill's audit of the state's minority business program concludes that it "is not making enough effort to create contracts under \$100,000."

"Minority-owned firms have difficulty getting big contracts. The way to grow their companies is by getting them smaller contracts. Those are the meat and potatoes for these firms," she said.

"What is alarming that there is no effort to remedy the situation. That's a serious indictment."

McCaskill announced last month her candidacy for the Democratic nomination. This will pit her against incumbent Gov. Bob Holden.

Holden released the State of Minority Business Report on Nov. 6 at the offices of the St. Louis American.

According to the report, operating expenditures by the state with minority businesses increased by more than 150 percent since 2000.

## Housing

(Continued from Page 3)

tion, adding that "plaintiffs in this case have spent an inordinate amount of time detailing racism of the past."

But Baltimore abandoned discriminatory policies immediately after the Brown decision and took vigorous efforts to tear down vestiges of past segregation, Zollicoffer said.

He promised to put a human face on the decision-makers.

"Plaintiffs of this case use expert witnesses, academics, people not from Baltimore who have an agenda," said Zollicoffer. He promised to call former Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke and Daniel Henson, former housing commissioner - both Black - who will describe for themselves their motives and thoughts as they made difficult choices.

The case is being closely watched by civil rights advocates across the country, not only because of its possible effect on housing policies but because it could have far-reaching consequences on public policy on issues such as public schools and transportation.

Advocates argue that federal and local policies forced public housing for Blacks into Black neighborhoods, creating a concentration of poverty that overwhelmed community resources.

It also sets goals for achieving 10 percent overall minority participation.

"State spending is at the highest level it has ever been, however there are still areas that need improvement," Holden said.

According to the Holden administration, the state's Department of Economic Development has more than tripled its MBE participation from 7.4 percent in 2000 to 26.59 percent in 2003.

McCaskill said that number is deceiving because of a \$30 million contract with World Wide Technology, which is owned by David Steward.

"That's almost half of the spending with minority owned firms," she said.

McCaskill said Holden's announcement on progress "was due in part to us putting out this audit."

She also said the audit actually started almost 18 months ago, and most of the work was completed over the past year.

"The audit began long before I considered running for

the nomination. It is much too detailed for me to be using it as part of a campaign."

McCaskill said this is the first report on accountability of the minority business program since it began in 1998.

"That's a bad sign," she said.

The state auditor said the program also does not address "fronting." This is when a white person or people own a firm, with an African-American "front" person.

"They've done nothing on this issue. That is one of the most alarming things we found," she said.

McCaskill said there was no uniform policy on granting "waivers" to firms with state contracts because they could not find qualified minority firms to help reach the state's 10 percent goal on minority participation.

"Agency personnel said a \$431,000 contract to build a prison did not require participation due to claimed difficulties in finding minority firms. Auditors, however, found both minority and

women subcontractors nearby able to compete for the work," McCaskill said.

When asked, McCaskill said that auditors did not check to see of the minority firms had the capacity to actually bid for contracts on the prison.

Holden was in St. Louis last week to announce the Ameren Community Development Corporation.

The American contacted his office for a comment on McCaskill's audit. Holden was celebrating good news after learning that the Missouri State Labor Council (AFL-CIO) has endorsed him for re-election.

"There is no greater friend to working families in this state than Bob Holden," said Missouri AFL-CIO President Hugh McVey.

McVey, who heads the state's largest labor organization, said Holden is "willing to stand up and make sure these families' voices are heard."

Alvin A. Reid writes for The St. Louis American.

Meanwhile, poor whites had greater housing options, were dispersed throughout the region, leading to greater stability in white working class neighborhoods, advocates claim.

In one sense, the trial could provide a critique of the model cities and urban renewal programs of the post civil rights era, attorneys on both sides said. In another, it

could hinge on whether politicians had a legal obligation to overcome community resistance in their attempts to address patterns of past segregation.

The plaintiffs' first witness was John A. Powell, a Moritz College of Law professor who has had his name legally changed to all lowercase letters. He testified that city and HUD officials re-

peatedly bowed to pressure from white communities to keep public housing out of their neighborhoods.

"Time and time again, Blacks protested siting public housing in slum communities, and in each case they were ignored," said Powell, who has written extensively about civil rights issues.

The trial is expected to last at least a month.

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