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OPINION

'Dreamers' still working for African-American Museum

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

By GREG JACKSON
SPECIAL TO THE POST-INTELLIGENCER

In Kimberly Mills' column March 14, she asked the "salient" question, "when, not if, the dream will be realized;" that "dream" being the African-American Heritage Museum and Cultural Center.

The answer is quite clear to those who visited the museum when it was still at 25th Avenue South and South Massachusetts Street. It is also quite clear to anyone who has done the research and can balance a checkbook.

It was the so-called "dreamers," Omari Tahir and Earl Debnam, along with other "dreamers" such as youths and adults from both the African and African American communities who ran programs such as youth baseball, classes in computer literacy and foreign language (teaching Amharic and Swahili), homework assistance, at-risk youth intervention, cultural awareness and other alternatives to hanging out in the streets and getting into trouble.

It was the aforementioned "dreamers" who also put on the African Heritage Festival and Parade (Umoja Fest '97 and '98), the largest annual gathering of Africans in the Seattle area, and possibly the state. (And, unlike the city-funded and operated "Bite of Seattle," it was peaceful.)

It was Bob Flowers, senior vice president of Washington Mutual Savings Bank, the museum chairman, who ignored the museum board resolution commanding him to purchase the Colman School building. When Tahir and the Youth Action Committee of the museum demanded to see the paperwork of all museum finances and transactions, members of the board began to push for Tahir's removal from the board.

Flowers and Charlie James (of the African-American Business and Employment Journal) were the ones who went to King County Executive Ron Sims and King Council Councilman Larry Gossett to demand that we "dreamers" be forced off the Colman School property. And that is exactly what happened, at gunpoint, June 4, 1998.

The only major newspaper covering the story reported it as an "eviction of squatters from a construction trailer," which took the struggle out of its actual political context and further demonized Omari and the rest of us.

Our challenge to the readers of this newspaper is to investigate for themselves what's really going on. Anyone who is interested in seeing the evidence is invited to contact the African-American Heritage Museum. We will gladly show all the relevant paperwork, as well as the positive work we are doing in the community.

Greg Jackson represents the Youth Action Committee of the African-American Heritage Museum and Cultural Center. E-mail: gda7@yahoo.com

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Seattle Post-Intelligencer

101 Elliott Ave. W.
Seattle, WA 98119
(206) 448-8000

Home Delivery: (206) 464-2121 or (800) 542-0820

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