—School's out

(Continued from Page A1)

on the lay off situation. "What the school system has not done well is setting a curriculum for students who don't go to college. Enrollment in these areas is dropping because the curriculum is not up to date.

According to Prudente, most of the instructors laid off are certified in a second discipline and will be hired back if they wish to be.

She speculates there is a good chance they may eventually be hired back in their original positions.

Officials that we attempted to contact in the areas effected by the lay-offs, were either unavailable for or refrained from comment at press time.

Contract negotiation strategies will be debated during the summer months as well.

The teachers union and the school board still have much to resolve as far as contract talks are concerned.

"When we went out on strike in 1974, we were unsuccessful because parents didn't support the teachers. Things can be gotten other than by way of strike," says Pat Washington, a gifted and talented facilitator for Armistead Gardens Elementary School.

In fact, a strike is an illegal job action and it is looked upon as a last resort by most teachers.

"If we don't get anything before mid-August, we will start mobilizing our teachers," says Linda Prudente of the Baltimore Teacher's Union.

A work slow-down by teachers towards the end of the school year was generally viewed as a failure. The teacher's union had its last negotiating session June 29.

The teachers and the city are farthest apart on the money issue, specifically salary and health and welfare benefits.

According to Prudente, the city wants the teachers to pick up the majority of the health and welfare package increase which would cut the proposed salary increase from seven to 3.5 percent.

"We don't want to start the school year without a contract," says Prudente.

Oregon passed the first state legislation marking Labor Day as a holiday in February 1887, according to the U.S. Labor Department. In 1894, Congress passed without discussion an act making the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

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The Afro-American Section B

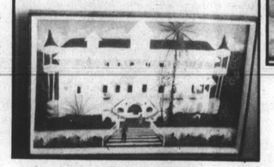
METRO PROFILE

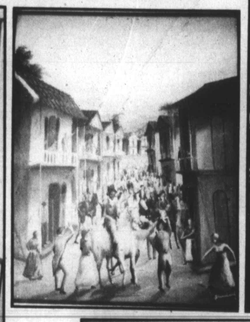
■ Lifestyle B4
■ Kids Talk B6

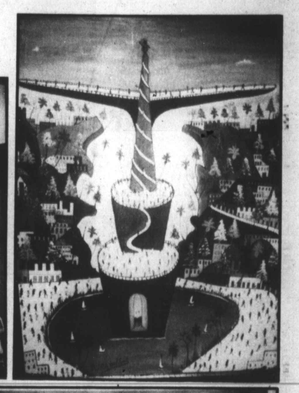
Saturday, July 8, 1989

Haiti's hidden treasures

Journalist has vast selection of priceless black art







TOP, LEFT: Abner Dubic (top). Hotel Oloffson in Port-Au-Prince (below); MIDDLE: Estime Haitian Oil of Cap Haitien, the former capital on the north coast of Haiti - L. Clayton Willis Collection; RIGHT: Prefate Duffant painting - L. Clayton Willis Collection.

RIGHT, G. Stranberg, American watercolor of the Maine coast. Brought at the same sale as The Hector Hyppolite's - L. Clayton Willis Collection.

JOURNALIST AND COLLECTOR L. Clayton Willis with some of his paintings. He recently paid $47,304 for two, which he discovered at a junk sale in Washington, D.C. He found the paintings by Haitian Artist and Voodoo Priest Hector Hyppolite covered with cobwebs. Another painting by Haitin J.E. Gourgue over Mr. Willis' right shoulder is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Willis, who worked for the Presidential Transition Office of President Bush, was an arts critic and reporter for The New York Amsterdam News.

Beauvoir, Haitian - L. Clayton Willis Collection, D.C.

Fine art auction prices on the international art market continue to hit dizzying dollar figures as two works by an Haitian primitive painter and voodoo priest set a Washington auction record bringing $44,500 ($47,304.62 including tax).

Washington journalist, collector and investor L. Clayton Willis paid $18,550 and $26,400 for the folk art works of the late Haitian Artist and Voodoo Priest (Houngan) Hector Hyppolite at Weschler's Auction House. The two oils were representative of "My Imagination," and on a religious theme "Paradise and Hell."

"Mr. Hyppolite was the greatest Haitian artist since John James Audubon who was born in Haiti in 1785," Mr. Willis said. To walk into a weekly junk sale and find these two masterpieces with cobwebs on them was something else. I like to see how people decorate their attics and basements which are the sources of many of these auctions. You never know what you'll find at an auction," he said.

Mr. Willis is a George Bush and 007 James Bond look alike, and Latin American. European art and antiques which include paintings by President Bush's mother-in-law, and 22 paintings by Juan Lascano of Argentina.

In May, a painting by Lascano brought about $23,000 at Christie's in New York.

The three underbidders at the sale were a District of Columbia Police Sergeant and two art dealers. Rounds of applause broke out at the culmination of each sale.

Mr. Willis, who worked for the Presidential Transition Office of President Bush, also bought an American watercolor of the Maine seacoast by G. Strandberg for $77.00 "I was lucky to have had the chance to bring home these eye catching pictures at such bargain prices because last year one of Mr. Hyppolite's paintings sold for $80.000.

After the boatloads of negative publicity about Haiti, I'm glad some people will know about school in the twentieth century. The result of this sale is also recognition of the achievements of Black artists in this hemisphere such as our own Horace Pippin (1888-1946) who was one of the great American artists, Mr. Willis said. "Mr. Hyppolite was one of the world's art giants," he continued.

The former art critic and adviser to several American presidents added, "Mr. Hyppolite was one of about 25 of Haiti's remarkable painters in this century, most of who were untrained. Some of the other masters were J.E. Gourgue (first Haitian painter to be represented in the Museum of Modern Art in New York); Seneque Obin, Philome Obin, Prete e'Duffaut, Salnava Phillippe-Auguste, Bourmond Byron, Sisson Blanchard, Wilson Bigaud, Gesner Abelard, Laurant Casimir, Abner Dubic, Andre Normil, Michelin Brierre, Calixte Henri, and Roger Christophe.

There should be many more exhibitions of quality Haitian art to encourage the artists there and broaden the recognition of the marvelous works of the Haitian Renaissance since the 1940's and work that goes on today.

This would give the world an opportunity to understand this complex people and culture. Haiti is one of the most interesting and culturally dynamic countries in the world in spite of its shocking rate of illiteracy, malnutrition and health problems," Mr. Willis noted.

Mr. Willis bought his first art work outside Mexico City at the age of nine. His first oil painting as a student in Paris and his first Haitian oil when he was on a trip in Haiti as a student in 1955.

Works by Haitian painters are in museums in New York's Museum of Modern Art, Yale University, New Haven, Ct.; the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Ct.; Milwaukee, Wisc.,; Davenport, Iowa; San Francisco, Cal.; Washington, D.C.; and other cities.

Important collections exist around the world and include those in Washington, D.C.; Arlington, Va.; Miami, Fl.; New York City, Algeria, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Puerto Rico, New Jeresy, Louisiana, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Switzerland, Colombia, Haiti, Czechoslovakia, England, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Holland and Mexico.

Willis is a freelance journalist and broadcaster based in Washington. He is writing a novel set in Haiti. As a correspondent, Willis set up a training program for minorities on the Richmond Afro-American for The Ford Foundation for which he worked before working ethnic affairs, international affairs and communications for several presidents. He also served in the Eisenhower and Johnson Administration.

Asked what he did when he won the bidding war at the sale, Willis said, "I called J. Bush and Co., the moneymakers in New York and told them to send plasma and they did."

"If the result of this auction gets one person to Haiti to see what a great culture it has, if that person buys one painting there and encourages artists there, then the $47,304.62 was worth every penny."

In The Dog Bark, reprinted in 1951, author Truman Capote called Hyppolite, "the most popular of Haiti's primitive painters." Writing in the World Encyclopedia of Art in 1984 British Critic Sheldon Williams said that only 80 Hyppolites have survived. A third generation voodoo priest, Hyppolite only painted two years from 1946 to 1948. He painted most of his works with chicken feathers and housepaint or enamel.

"When Mr. Hyppolite became world famous, he continued to live simply by lamp and candle and without electricity. He guarded his integrity as an artist and painted the world as he saw it. He didn't go commercial and crank out potboiler tourist art. Mr. Hyppolite didn't sell out to the greed of some of the art dealers," Mr. Willis observed.

"Mr. Hyppolite's designs, the directness of his statements, the originality of his works, his imagination and boldness of expression are incredible. Hector Hyppolite and Haitian primitive art are the national anthem and national flag of Haiti," Willis said.

"Finding a Hyppolite to the international art world is like discovering a Rembrandt high on a wall in an Amsterdam antique shop or gallery," said Willis. Asked what he would do with them, Willis said, "Enjoy them."

Top quality pictures are generally catalogued and illustrated in current catalogues in which estimates of selling prices are given. In this case, three very fine paintings were not identified and eased into a weekly sale known as "a junk sale" in the field where paintings on an average day may average from $.25 to $200.

Both amounts paid for Hyppolite's were the most paid at auction for a painting from Haiti at any auction in Washington, and the highest figure for a painting, antique or collectible at Weschler's weekly sale in its 99 year history, said Arthur Baer of Weschler's. Mr. Baer is a veteran of 8 years there.

Writing in an Haitian daily newspaper April 27, 1988, Le Nouvelliste, Haitian Journalist Aubelin Jolicoeur said, "The American writer L. Clayton Willis, former adviser to Presidents Nixon and Ford has one of the greatest collections of Haitian Primitive art in the world." Mr. Jolicoeur also is known to the world as a character in Graham Greene's novel set in Haiti in the time of the Duvalier's, "The Comedians."

Haiti's first great artist and anthologist, John James Audubon, was born in Les Cayes, Haiti in 1785. It is on the southwest coast of Haiti.

He was the son of a French naval officer and a Creole woman from Haiti. Mr. Willis has an Audubon in his collection. After studying in France, Audubon moved to the family estate, "Mill Grove," near Philadelphia.

Said Willis, "To indicate what needs to be done in Haiti, to this day the last 40 miles of road from Les Cays through Camp Perrin to the important city of Jeremine, remains barely passable. That last 40 miles to Jeremine which is a coastal city, and another road nine miles long down the mountain to the sea from Bombardopolis to Mole St. Nicholas should be built as all weather roads to provide services to the people in those areas. Both regions have produced fine painters such as Charles and Audes Sal of Bombardopolis."

"They are examples of the talented artist that have come from Haiti's remote areas. I hope communications to both areas will improve dramatically soon to the benefit of the people who live there. And it could promote tourism to these scenically beautiful, but economically poor areas, "Willis commented, "Roads in those areas are almost as bad as Audubon's day."

"Many people do not know that Haiti has produced great art, music and literature," Mr. Willis continued. Also the father of French writer Alexander Dumas who was a general in the French Revolution, was born in 1762 in Jeremie, Haiti. His mother Louise Cosette Dumas, was a Black Haitian.

Christopher Columbus dropped anchor in 1492 in Mole St. Nicholas and in Cap Haitien. Both are beautiful harbor towns. Mole St. Nicholas needs a small guest house for yachtsmen and tourists. Mole St. Nicholas is terribly isolated.

The road from there north to Jean Rabl also is very poor and needs to have a hard surface. It takes three hours to go by jeep those nine miles down what is really a goat trail through beautiful mountains to Mole St. Nicholas from Bombardopolis.

A painting by J.E. Gourgue is the cover illustration for Elizabeth Abbott's book, Haiti, the Duvaliers and their Legacy, McGraw Hill, 1988. Amy Wilentz's, The Rainy Season, Haiti Since Duvalier, Simon and Schuster, 1989, has reports about Haitian painters.

Mr. Willis was an arts critic and a reporter for The New York Amsterdam News, New York. It is America's largest Black weekly paper. He was also arts critic and a reporter for The Albuquerque Tribune before joining Newsweek in New York.

He studied art theory and criticism at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., and at the Sorbonne, Paris, France after going to the University of Oslo, Norway.

Willis concluded, "In another interesting art story, in 1976 I met another self-taught genius, Juan Lascano of Argentina. He has given great pleasure to people with his realistic works. He has been able to make a living doing what he likes doing and excels at. I was happy to get 22 of his works 13 years ago. I liked his work, thought he was a fine person and was glad to buy some of his work when he was starting out." The general or Caucasian press hasn't done a word of recognition of this significant Black achievement.

Mr. Willis received an outstanding public service award from the Harlem Prep School in New York.