

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Blacks and crime

Solution in the ballot box

The Black United Front and its co-chairman Ronnie Herndon are being criticized for their confrontation tactics. The "responsible citizens and organizations in the black community" are condemned because they either support or do not speak out against the Front's strategy.

It seems we've heard these words before, when three years ago Robert Blanchard said "responsible" Black people would not support a call for a school boycott. Blanchard was proved wrong.

What many of the detractors fail to recognize is that never in the history of this country have black people gained anything without confrontation. Would *The Oregonian's* editorial writers now say that Martin Luther King should not have walked across the bridge in Selma? Would they say the students should not have sat-in at the lunch counters in Georgia? Or that freedom riders should not have gone to Alabama? Or that black people, young and old, should not have faced dogs and fire hoses in Jackson, Mississippi, to demand their freedom?

The BUF demonstrations before the Portland School Board are part of the Black movement—a struggle that has continued for 400 years.

The Oregonian compares the BUF tactics with those of the Jackson community, which is attempting to secede (with its taxes) from the District in protest of the planned closure of their school. This brings up the old dilemma—is it better to quit or to stay and try to make constructive changes? Who was right—the young men who went to Canada to escape the draft, those who stayed and went to jail, or those who demonstrated in the streets? Perhaps each was right in his own way—together, they brought an end to the war.

Steve Buel is also the butt of criticism. Buel refused to participate in a School Board meeting he considered to be illegal and unethical. Herb Cawthorne and Joe Rieke felt they should participate—even though they thought it was illegal—and Cawthorne took the opportunity to express his concerns about the meeting. Which position

was right? Is it necessary or useful to castigate the person who acts according to his conscience?

The real problem is the School Board. They have boxed in their new superintendent, sending him out to settle the problem with the black community but withholding the ability to negotiate or compromise. The Board has made its decision; it will not reconsider; it seems there is nothing to talk about. The Front's only recourse is to attempt to force the Board into a situation where they will talk—plus, requests and demands have been ignored.

The sad thing is that during the past two years—while the District was stalling the move to Eliot—there was no conversation with the representatives of the black community on this matter. Perhaps honest discussion could have prevented this situation. If there were valid reasons—educational, social, economic or physical—for not using Eliot, if there were valid reasons why another building would be a better site, reasonable people could have found solutions. The neglect of Dr. Fenwich and the Board Chairman to talk with black leaders and parents is another demonstration of lack of respect and consideration. It is inexcusable.

The School Board has the power to act; the black community only has the power to resist. It is the responsibility of the Board—beginning with its chairman, Bill Scott—to take the first step. Or is this a power struggle designed to demonstrate that the control by the downtown business interests lost during the "new Board" days has been regained? If Scott is free to act—let him act.

For the long range the solution is the ballot box. A strong community, registered, educated and ready to vote is the best deterrent to the kind of decisions the School Board is making for black children.

Frank McNamara, Joe Rieke, and Bill Scott will face the voters next year. The time to prepare for their removal is now—the system can be used to bring about changes that are necessary.

Unite for District 18

The *Observer* and many community organizations fought hard to get District 18—a district that has over 50 per cent minority population. This district provides a real possibility for a black to be elected to the Oregon Legislature. The black community needs a black person to represent it in Salem.

But now five black candidates have filed. Some are active, some are not. Some are involved in the same organizations and issues, have the same constituents, are friends.

It is difficult to choose from among these candidates—they each have their own talents and interests.

But they should not all be running for the same office. They cannot all represent District 18. Some must sacrifice their own ambitions and desires in the interest of community representation.

If District 18 is to be represented by a black person these candidates must get together, choose one of themselves as "the candidate," and work together to get community support for that candidate.

Only a united effort and a massive voter-registration and get-out-the-vote campaign will ensure victory.

by Manning Marable
"From The Grassroots"

In the 1960s and 1970s, white public opinion on crime took a marked shift towards an authoritarian and "law-and-order" mentality. Polls commissioned by the American Institute of Public Opinion of Columbia University, and the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago indicate that the percentage of Americans who were afraid to walk within a mile of their homes at night increased from 32 per cent in 1967 to 45 per cent in 1977. In national surveys taken in 1965, 57 per cent of all Americans responded that the U.S. justice system was not "dealing harshly enough with criminals." Since then, that troubled majority has climbed: 74 per cent in 1972, 85 per cent in 1975, and 90 per cent in 1978.

Various governmental agencies responded to the anxiety of the white middle-to-upper class by increasing expenditures for public safety. Local government spending for police protection jumped from \$1.8 billion in 1962 to \$8.8 billion in 1977. States increased their police budgets in the fifteen year period from \$285 million to \$1.6 billion. The Federal government followed suit, raising police protection spending between 1962 and 1977 from \$177 million to \$1.4 billion. Payments for police protection between 1952 and 1977 soared 375 per cent, and annual government expenditures for prisons reached \$4.6 billion in 1977. U.S. per capita expenditures for police protection jumped from \$21.12 in 1960 to \$34.50 in 1970 and \$47.98 in 1977. States with substantial Black urban populations generally exceeded the national per capita average. In 1977, Michigan was spending \$54.89; Illinois, \$58.36; New Jersey, \$58.82; California, \$65.20; New York, \$72.33. By 1974, cities with large numbers of Blacks were allotting substantial per capita sums to expand local police forces: Los Angeles, \$60.51; Baltimore, \$64.29; Chicago, \$73.38; St. Louis, \$74.11; Philadelphia, \$74.98; Newark, \$76.44; Detroit,

\$76.81; New York, \$86.61; Washington, D.C., \$123.60.

The U.S. Right was able to manipulate the public's anxiety by propagandizing crime statistics. The number of reported violent crimes climbed from 161,000 in 1960 to 487,000 in 1978. The various types of violent crime had increased across the board. The number of murders per 100,000 population, for instance, jumped from 5 in 1965 to 10 in 1975. In the same decade, reported instances of rape per 100,000 increased from 12 to 26; robbery, 72 to 218; and aggravated assaults, 111 to 227. White male victims of homicide increased from 5 to 9 per 100,000. The number of property crimes reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had increased from 1726 per 100,000 in 1975. Civil libertarians and civil rights supporters pointed out frequently that the huge fiscal increases in the number of police were not justified. For instance, the absolute number of homicides declined 3.5 per cent between 1975 and 1978. In the same period, robberies dropped 4.4 per cent, and property crimes reported to the FBI declined by 1.3 per cent. In 1980, the Bureau of the Census reported that "the average annual growth rate was 17 per cent between 1965 and 1970, but it was only 5 per cent during the next 5 years, and it actually fell by 4 per cent between 1975 and 1978. Similarly, the rate of motor vehicle thefts, which had risen by some 12 per cent per year from 1965 to 1970, grew by less than 1 per cent per year between 1970 and 1975." The data indicates that "most reported crime is either leveling off or diminishing...."

Crime statistics can always be interpreted in different ways, depending obviously upon one's political perspective. What neoauthoritarians failed to explore accurately was the factor of race within this unprecedented explosion of lawlessness. Several observations along the color line must be made. First and foremost, is the fact that the percentage of Black and Hispanic victims of violent crime has always been higher than for whites. From 1973 to 1978,

white males were victimized by violent crime at rates between 42 to 45 per year per thousand. Hispanic male victims of violent crime had rates during these years between 49 to 54 per thousand. For Black men, the rate was between 53 to 57 per thousand. Nonwhite male homicide rates per 100,000 during the 1970s were between 60 to 83 annually. In other words, any Black man in the U.S. has a 600 to 800 per cent likelihood of being murdered than any white man. Second, Black working class and poor people, not whites, are usually the greatest victims of household crimes. Between 1973 and 1978, Black families earning \$7,500 to \$9,999 annual income experienced burglary rates per 1,000 of from 132 to 159 annually. Black families earning under \$3,000 in these years reported between 129 to 115 burglaries per year, and 83 to 96 household larcenies per year. "Households maintained by Blacks [are] more likely than white households to have been burglarized," according to the Bureau of the Census: "The 1978 rates per 1,000 households amounted to 115 (for Blacks) and 83 (for whites) respectively." Third, the Black middle class has a greater chance of being victimized in most property crimes than whites of all income groups. In 1975 alone, almost one out of every ten Black families earning more than \$25,000 annually lost their cars or motor vehicles to criminals, a rate 436 per cent higher than that of whites of identical income. The irony of the newest "war against crime" is that white police, politicians and law enforcement officers have been nonchalant, at best, in aiding and defending Blacks' lives and property. Indeed, it can be argued that the foundations of the modern American police state are designed specifically to ensure that the killings, rapes and property thefts of Blacks continue unabated—so long as whites remain protected."

Dr. Marable teaches political economy at Cornell University. "From The Grassroots" appears in this paper and in over 135 publications in the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

A Message From Steve Buel

by Steve Buel,
School Board member

I wish to dissociate myself from recent Portland School Board actions concerning the placement of Tubman Middle School at the Boise School site. While I am a member of the Board, I am embarrassed and dismayed over our recent lack of sensitivity to the hopes of Black parents to obtain quality education for their children to be treated equitably and fairly when petitioning their elected officials and to be accorded the common courtesy of full discussion of issues which integrally affect their children and their neighborhoods. It is this last point which so glaringly stands out in this decision. People in a city, county, state, or country need to be willing to accept for the time being decisions which various bodies of government make contrary to their own opinions. This is the very basis of a democracy. But this does not mean that government officials can callously disregard the opinions and feelings of a large number of people nor refuse to allow for a real means by which an opinion contrary to their own can be adequately heard. Yet, this is precisely the position taken by the Portland School Board concerning the issue of Tubman Middle School. Under the guise of "we have heard it all before," both old and new members of the Board refuse to ac-

cept the suggestion that the School Board invite leaders from the Black community to sit down with them and work through the difficult and complex problems concerning the Tubman School site selection. Instead, the Board held a hearing, a hearing where the public speaks to the Board, and then the Board speaks to the public, no dialogue, and where the commitments by Board members were made outside of the hearing, and in most cases prior to the hearing, and where only vague reasons were given publicly for each Board member's decision.

Board members thereby having no constituencies in the Black community, little or no contact or rapport with Black leaders, and evidently little or no concern over the need for these contacts, made a decision affecting the lives of thousands of Black people, a decision contrary to the position of every Black organization petitioning the Board. Now they ask the city and particularly Black citizens to accept this decision and move forward. It is no wonder that people speak of racism.

Yet this type of decision is a developing pattern with this Board and in areas where race plays only a secondary factor. For instance, in the Jackson school closure issue, the same Board members voted to close Jackson High School without even bothering to notify parents or em-

ployees that the closure was going to be discussed. Three months later, a contingent of Jackson parents approached the Board and asked that they be allowed time on an agenda to present new evidence to the Board concerning the eminent closure of their school. The Board refused to allow for such time.

This disturbing trend continues. Last Saturday, April 10th, members of the School Board refused to make a resolution for actions to deal with any disruption of the meeting (Monday night's Board meeting). The Board, over strenuous objections by myself and Joe Rieke (Herb Cawthorne was absent), decided to act by what can only be described as administrative fiat and to use a plan for dealing with demonstrations which was decided upon outside of the Board meeting and which has never been passed by the Board. Nor would the Board agree to my suggestion that the Board pinpoint someone (the chairman preferably) with the authority to act in the case of further disruptions.

It is this type of government action which causes demonstrations, distrust, and the disillusion of the willingness of people to work within the system. And it is this type of action which particularly causes one to wonder if the children of this city are getting lost not in the blessings of a fine education but in the blessings of power politics.



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