

# EDITORIAL/OPINION



## Holiday season reflections

by Matthew W. Prophet, Jr.  
Superintendent, Portland Public Schools

## Terror sanitized

The execution of Charlie Brooks, Jr., in Texas opens a new chapter in legalized killing. Brooks was the first to be executed with the new "high tech" way of death. He was strapped to a hospital-type cot, catheters placed in his veins, and drugs administered in a sanitary saline solution until he was dead, while doctors stood by.

The execution raises ethical questions beyond the question of the death penalty itself. The American Medical Association has decreed that no physician should take part in an execution, but where is the fine line drawn? Is examination of the executed before and after death participation? Is the use of medical techniques and equipment participation?

Throughout American history—while advocating the death penalty as prevention or retribution—new "pointers" and less abhorrent methods have been sought. The electric chair was invented in 1890 to replace the firing squad or the hangman's noose; the gas chamber replaced the electric chair in many states beginning in 1924. Several states have adopted the "lethal injection"—Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Idaho, Washington. Other states including Oregon and Massachusetts have considered it.

The move to medically inspired methods of death can be compared to the "clean" bombs of

nuclear warfare—an attempt to sell the public on the idea that death is safe, clean and acceptable. It is an attempt to replace the horror of the noose—with the broken body swinging in the breeze—and the choking convulsions of the gas chamber with peacefully "going to sleep" in a hospital-like atmosphere.

Will this new "peaceful" way of death speed the executioner's hand? Brooks was the fifth person executed since Gary Gilmore's execution in 1977—the first black and the first to attempt to continue his legal fight against death. Approximately 1,100 prisoners wait on death row and another 100 are added each year. The legal process is running out on many, so more executions can be expected in 1983.

Many problems follow the death penalty: The criminal justice is neither just nor error-free; there is injustice in the selection of those to be executed and those to be spared; the society in which we live fosters and perpetuates criminality; execution does not deter.

The new "lethal injection" will make opposition more difficult and more important for those who believe that execution is immoral and that inflicting death on another can never be just.

## Budget whitewashes conflict

In paring the budgets of those bureaus for which she has responsibility, City Commissioner Margaret Strachan has announced the vacation of the position of Director of the Bureau of Human Resources. Whatever the plans for the future of this bureau might be—whether it is phased out, its functions given to other bureaus or to the County—it is highly unusual that the bureau be left without a director.

The answer to this dilemma appears to be the fact that this position is filled by Emma Hepburn, the City's only black and only female bureau head. Rumors have circulated since early summer; the problem has been discussed in the press; and "insiders" say the real question is how to gracefully get rid of Ms. Hepburn. Whether the problems between Commissioner

Strachan and Ms. Hepburn are personal, personality, style or a question of competence neither seems willing to say. But it is very clear that Commissioner Strachan does not want Ms. Hepburn to head the bureau.

Taking the easy way out, Ms. Strachan is vacating the position—a little more difficult when the employee is director of a large bureau rather than a low-level technician.

We would have greater respect for Commissioner Strachan if she would just terminate Ms. Hepburn and announce her reasons rather than pussy-footing around the issue. The community has the right to know whether the elimination of the City's highest ranking black employee is being done justifiably or whether she is the victim of petty politics or racism.

## Letters to the Editor

### President explains NAACP role

To the editor:

Since you have chosen to slant your articles regarding the NAACP and me, I have chosen to respond to you in writing and I demand that this letter be printed in its entirety. If not, I will simply take the matter up with the FCC.

There comes a time when a man must defend himself. The commentary over the NAACP elections has been unduly negative. Why? Is this an assessment of some scientific kind? Is it political? What is it?

The feeling seems to be, people are not happy with the NAACP. That's clear! And it's about time, too. I've been unhappy with the NAACP for years! In fact, that's why I ran for the presidency in the first place. I chose to display my unhappiness by getting involved, not by standing around on the outside taking pot shots.

While the *Observer* and Herb Cawthorne choose to espouse negative projections about the NAACP and what it hasn't done, no one has stopped to ask, "Who is the NAACP in the first place and what has it done positively?"

The NAACP is you and me and everyone else who is a member or victim of this vicious game of so-called 'politics.' The NAACP are

the people who stand up for justice and equal opportunity. Nationally, the NAACP is made up of 400,000 card holders and a few hundred workers. Locally, the NAACP consists of about 1300 card holders and a dozen or so workers.

The hypocrisies of politics can be terminal if you let yourself get caught up in them. For example, it's been said, "It's time to return the NAACP to the people," when in fact, over half of the recently elected Executive Committee have been sitting there for over 20 years. Therefore, I'm inclined to ask, "Who are the people to receive the NAACP when it is 'turned over'?"

The Executive Committee approves or disapproves programs, projects and direction. The branch membership has the overall responsibility for sanctioning the committee's recommendations. So, as you can see, the NAACP is based on membership. That is the true NAACP... the membership. Now, the membership has met on the third Sunday of each month at 4:00 o'clock for years. So, the bottom line here is involvement. Those involved set policy, direction and program. If you are involved you have a voice; if you're not you don't.

Let's examine the allegations which have been published in your

newspaper. The educational issue was addressed many times by the branch. The initial challenge issued by Jonathan Newman, which precipitated the Coalition for School Integration, was issued to the NAACP, Urban League, and the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission. The Coalition was aided by the participation of our Education Committee Chair, our President and several of our members. In fact it was the sharing of the NAACP Report on Quality Education that led to the development of some measurable goals and objectives. This has now been incorporated into the Desegregation Plan.

The development of community goals and objectives which were presented to the school district were composed with the NAACP's help. The reduction of two-way bussing, scattering of teachers, and attainment of a Middle School were all issues which the NAACP faced and supported publicly. Even the selection of our current School Board member was aided by the NAACP's vanguard. In fact the NAACP was a key element in the process which resulted in the selection of our current Superintendent of Schools.

On the subject of Police Relations, we were congratulated for our efforts to increase the number of black police officers on the force.

The traditional values of home, school, family and church are all evoked with greater intensity in this holiday season. For all of us, it is both a time for reflection and a time for renewal. It is an appropriate time for individuals and institutions to reflect on the quality of life and to take stock of where we have been, where we are and where we hope to be in the future.

The holiday season this year finds us all distracted by the nature of the world in which we live. Uncertainty and concern, whether it be about the serious economic conditions, continued inequalities between American citizens, or the trend toward further nuclear proliferation, threaten to engulf us in self-doubt and contribute to a sense of national and personal drift that seems to be our common lot in contemporary society. The intrusion of the holiday season with its sense of renewal and hope provides a welcome respite and opportunity for all of us to set aside the cares of our daily lives in contemplation of the intrinsic wealth of spirit we share as Americans, Oregonians and Portlanders.

As we look back and ahead, we can renew our commitment to the quality of our personal lives and celebrate with our friends and families in recognition of the fact that we do not stand alone, but we fact together, with those we love and cherish, a common tomorrow that cannot help but be better than yesterday because of the bond of brotherly love that strengthens and sustains us.

It is a singular strength that enriches and ennobles our lives and springs from our multicultural heritages that holds dear those values on which the decency, humanity and

equality of our society is dedicated. All of us in reflecting on these values, no matter how imperfectly addressed, can be thankful that we still have the capacity to believe that as a nation of people we can truly commit ourselves to the common good of all.

Regardless of the tensions of today or the turmoil of tomorrow, we can remain confident that the democratic values that promise to protect and defend each of us can become more viable and grow stronger by our vigilance and our sense of faith and dedication to American ideals—no matter how imperfectly realized.

It seems that is the fundamental message of the holiday season and its meaning—personal and institutional renewal and a pledge to do better and work harder to achieve full realization of the national commitment to freedom to work and worship, to learn and to grow as we choose without fear.

Of all of our traditional institutions, the one most common to all Americans is the public school. Over the years of our national heritage the public schools have been the transmitter of our cultural heritages from one generation to another. It is the one institution that binds all of us together in a common national purpose. We must all believe that from that commitment will ultimately evolve change and intellectual and cultural growth and development which will enrich us personally and as a people.

The holiday season is also a time of joy. It is not a time to reflect on the problems of our past, but instead to renew the promise of the future. In Portland in the months and years ahead, the pledge and commitment to excellence in education and equal educational opportunity for

all will become stronger and more vibrant than it has ever been. The district is committed to improve schools for all of the children in its charge but in reality the district can no longer guarantee quality schools at any cost—but it can pledge quality schools within the available resources. The promise for the future is to do more with less.

The Portland school system has a great deal to be thankful for in this time of reflection and renewal. All members of the school family, from custodian to teacher, to clerk, to administrator, to Board of Education member, at this holiday season thank the community and offer an extra measure of gratitude to the citizens who twice in this past year have, in the crucible of the ballot box, affirmatively renewed individually and collectively a personal community commitment to the national promise of free and equal public education for all children, regardless of race, creed or color.

For the schools, for the students, for parents and the community there is a great deal to be thankful for in those acts of faith. For those who work in the schools the pledge of equality, economy and efficiency is renewed in gratitude for community recognition of the needs and promises of education for the future benefit of all of us. It is in that sense that in this holiday season there is a rebirth of mutual commitment and dedication to a common goal of excellence in education between the schools and the community.

In the spirit of this holiday season, the pledge to excellence in education for all children is the renewed personal commitment of all of us who work to educate Portland's children.



## Don't walk out on the people

by Herb L. Cawthorne

Just because you have reached a position your mind thinks to be important, don't place yourself so high and mighty that you think you can walk out on the people, without care or concern, without looking back, without hearing their call to you;

Just because the world made you to have powers of strength and sharp intellect, don't take what the world has given and walk out on the people, caring only to build your private empire on the tired sweat of human sacrifice, caring only to amplify your living in a sheltered personal world;

Just because you have been set up by another man with title, fee and free hand, don't walk out on the people, because they have no real say so, because they did not appoint you, because they cannot increase your freedom, only lessen it with desires for your dedication and commitment and love and hard work;

Just because you cannot remember how the world took care of you, nursed you, and listened for your cries, don't walk out on the people, for they are the reason for your work, and they are the source to which your soul returns—they, and only they, can appreciate the beauty of the gifts your spirit creates in gratitude for the opportunity of living.

Between the NAACP, Urban League, and other groups the complexion of the Police Department has improved for the better. The NAACP also participated on the Citizen's Task Force on Internal Affairs, also known as the Storrs Committee. We pulled out because the Executive Committee expected a whitewash and wanted to remain autonomous. A regional consultant was brought in from Oakland who had worked on the Oakland Model for Citizen Review Committees. He considered the Portland Plan a "paper tiger" and recommended the consideration of another plan but only if there was support. The branch voted the proposal down.

On the subject of re-districting, our position then and now is another plan. We opposed the one-district plan in anticipation of its outcome and we were right. The community put all of its eggs in one basket and came up short.

On the subject of Youth, the Portland ACT-SO Program has been recognized nationally for its success. In five years of competing on a national level, we have brought home four medals. Who can argue with that? The NAACP staged the first Black Youth Leadership Conference which featured, among other attractions, black role models. This conference has reached hundreds of youth and has been adopted by Youth Councils around the nation. The NAACP youth of our city are among the most active in the Northwest.

There are other areas where the NAACP has been active as well. For example, we submitted several friendly amendments to the controversial Racial Harassment Bill

which was passed. Some of our amendments were accepted, which made it a better piece of legislation. We also participated on the Governor's Task Force to draft the Charter of the Governor's Commission on Black Affairs. We endorsed Operation Big Vote '80 and '82 and also took public positions on Ballot Measure 3 and 51.

In summary, it's very frustrating to believe in a cause so much until you began to make personal sacrifices and to have your service rewarded with slanderous half truths by people who are removed from the source and who do not bother to check their facts. It is also a very sad commentary when our so-called community newspaper willfully steps on an organization in order to endorse a candidate. However, the most saddening part of all of this, we as a people have not learned that everything doesn't have to be negative for healthy change to occur. We must rise above the crab mentality if we want to truly be free. Remember the record, "Free Your Mind and your --- Will Follow." Well, some of us would be better off if we had a

copy to listen to daily.

Mr. Cawthorne and I have been friends for over 12 years and it's too bad that he chose to use me as his subject to earn a few extra bucks. I do not prefer using this forum to express my feelings. However, inasmuch as you saw fit to use it, I felt it might be appropriate to reciprocate. I'm particularly distressed that a communicator such as yourself would violate the first law of communication... presenting accusations face to face, man to man. If your aim is to be the first black Bill Buckley of Portland, congratulations, you are well on your way. Just remember, those people you step on on the way to "the top," you will also have to face on your way to "the bottom."

Lucious Hicks IV, President  
Portland Branch NAACP

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