

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Inquest jury ignored bias

Multnomah County District Attorney Michael Schrunk did not represent all county residents during the Tony Stevenson inquest because his line of questioning was biased; he did not really seek to find out what transpired between Stevenson and the gas station attendant, and all of his questions were asked in such a way as to excuse the criminally negligent homicide of Stevenson at the hands of the police.

All of Portland heard or saw the bias in Schrunk's questions as he tried to discredit Stevenson's family, witnesses and allowed the police's expert witness to explain, defend and interpret what the officers did and said.

What's important is not the questions asked by Schrunk, but what he did not ask. Schrunk tried to pry out from two witnesses — Pantley and Greg Cavic — what Stevenson said. But these two witnesses had the most to hide. Nor did Mr. D.A. pursue the outright contradictions in the officers' testimony or the racial slurs.

Schrunk performed and questioned as if he was the defense attorney for the police officers as he tried to prevent another witness from testifying to the fact that he saw the police standing around playing with themselves as Stevenson

lay handcuffed, face down, and dying in the parking lot.

The all-white inquest jury saw through the lies and the cover-up. They wondered why the police did not perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when it became apparent that Stevenson was having difficulties breathing. In the back of their — and our — minds, we know the outcome would not have occurred if Stevenson was white or a female. The police allowed him to die because of his sex, race and size.

Schrunk is an accessory to the racism that allowed Stevenson to die. We will remember Schrunk's line of questioning when he's up for reelection. His preconceived defense for the police removed all trappings of an impartial inquest. But the truth pushed through as Portlanders listened to what our "finest" had done.

If the Grand Jury returns a verdict of less than homicide, we know who is responsible. High unemployment, poor education and a host of social problems created by institutional racism is the climate in Portland. A verdict of less than homicide will not help ease the tensions created by these conditions.

ARE YOU SURE IT'S SAFE TO LEAVE MY SAVINGS IN THIS BANK?



WHAT IF YOU MISMANAGE THE FUNDS AND RUN UP HUGE DEBTS YOU CAN'T PAY?



WE'VE TAKEN OUT INSURANCE WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT...



AND THEY HAVE LOTS OF EXPERIENCE WITH THAT



WAGGEMAN
Drawing for Portland Observer

The housing crisis and Blacks

Along the Color Line by Dr. Manning Marable

The heart of the Great American Dream has for generations been the ownership of a home. Since the late 19th Century, at least half of all white Americans have been homeowners.

This percentage increased to 64 percent by 1960, and reached 67 percent by the late 1970s. Black Americans' dreams have generally been deferred in this area. Barely one in five Black families owned their own homes from 1890 through World War II. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the percentage of Black owners doubled, up to 44 percent in 1975. But for both races, the desire to claim one's own house has remained strong. In one recent *New York Times/CBS* poll, 55 percent of all renters stated that they expect to buy a house. For 18 to 29 year old renters, 63 percent plan to become homeowners.

But in recent years, the Great American Dream has become a nightmare for millions of property owners. Back in 1971, the median price of a home was \$24,800. Since the median income for white families was about \$13,200, most households could easily afford a home. Even Afro-Americans found housing relatively accessible in financial terms. The median Black family income was above \$8,100; Black families with both spouses in the labor force were earning over \$12,400 annually. In the past 14 years, however, housing costs have risen steeply. By the end of 1984, the median house in the U.S. sold at \$72,800, an increase of nearly 300 percent. The median family income now stands at \$26,300; for Black

Americans, median family income is below \$15,000.

Families which were entering the market for the first time had to allocate a larger proportion of their incomes toward housing costs. By 1982, average monthly mortgage payments reached \$732. Today the typical buyers must give up 35 to 40 percent of their total income in order to keep up their payments and taxes. This fiscal crunch forced millions of households to transform their lifestyles. Both parents are now pressured to seek jobs, or to switch employment, to accumulate savings. Others delay having children, or move to cities where housing prices tend to be lower.

Perhaps the greatest difficulties are experienced by homeowners who secured mortgages when interest rates were high, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Families purchasing a \$60,000 house in 1980 with a typical mortgage rate of 16 percent, had expected to sell their house five years later at \$75,000 or more by 1985. With declining inflation rates and attend toward smaller homes, the house might sell for only the original purchase price. The family would in effect lose any chance of obtaining the downpayment for a new home. Or, more typically, if the major income earner lost his or her job, a foreclosure would occur.

This is exactly what is happening to hundreds of thousands of homeowners. The number of foreclosed homes by the Federal Housing Administration rose to 40,000 last year, an increase of 142 percent over 1982's total. The Veterans Administration foreclosed 29,000 homes in 1984.

Some of the cities with the highest rates of foreclosures, not coincidentally, have large Afro-American populations and/or relatively high unemployment rates — Cleveland, Ohio; Camden, New Jersey; Chicago; Newark; and Philadelphia. According to the January, 1985 report of the Mortgage Bankers Association, nearly 6 percent of all home mortgages are past due — twice the rate in 1970. A total of 400,000 families lost their homes in 1984 alone.

Who's responsible for the housing crisis? Look at the rate of profit made by financial lenders on all homes. Between 1945-1975, the average mortgage rate factoring inflation was 3 to 4 percent. Last year the price for borrowing money was 10.6 percent above the rate of inflation. Compounding problems for homeowners, Reagan's new tax proposal eliminates the deduction from taxable income of interest payments on home mortgages. The only effective resolution of the crisis would include legislation halting all home foreclosures of workers who have been the victims of joblessness or marginal employment, and reductions on all outstanding and new mortgages to the rate of inflation, if not below. Federal programs granting low interest loans to renters should be expanded with similar guarantees. An affordable home should be a reality for all, not a dream.

Dr. Manning Marable teaches political sociology at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.

Street Beat

by Lanita Duke and Richard J. Brown

With the decision of the public inquest in hand, the Street Beat team asked, "How did you feel about the inquest decision?"



Sonja Jackson
Housewife

"I hated that the guy got killed, and I hope it will prevent other lives from being taken for nothing."



Barbara Marquez
Housewife

"I thought it was a good idea. I felt the outcome was fair."



B. E. Johson
Pastor

"The inquest opened a lot of people's eyes who do not live in Northeast Portland. It let people know what's going on with the police and Blacks."



Lin Knox
Community Medicine

"It was very interesting. It showed there were some serious problems with the police. They need to be better trained and supervised."



Evelyn Burell
Housewife

"I thought it was fair and it showed it wasn't a racist thing. It showed the police were wrong."



Bill Justice
Retired

"It was a good thing and was needed. It was something that needed to be looked into."

Letters to the Editor

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be typed or neatly printed and signed with the author's name and address (addresses are not published). We reserve the right to edit for length. Mail to: Portland Observer, P. O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.

Sales tax unfair

To the Editor,

I am a senior of 73 years justifiably concerned about this new tax. Does it help me? Equally important, does it help mine?

Had I a lot of houses or other properties and neither need nor inclination for new furnishings, cars nor accoutrements, then I would most certainly be among the gainers. In fact I have only one house, our home. And the every day costs of maintaining it. Figuring this additional tax against whatever property tax relief I'll be lucky to break even.

Our children? Our soon to marry grandchildren? How will it be with them? Together we've spent the allotted years raising, educating, helping our youngsters to what we thought a better life, an economically more secure future. So now I should vote to saddle them with another tax?

They are the ones who must build the new homes, buy the new washers and dryers, the cars none of us can do without, bring into the world the next generation with pyramiding costs of hospital, clothes, and school. Everything which makes an on-going America. Plus five percent!

Who are the gainers? We oldsters who may or may not save a dollar? Is it we who own the media? Finance the campaigns for far too many legislators? Are we the ones who are in Salem these days seeking all kinds of exemptions while in the same instant pushing for Sales Tax passage? The ones planning to set up a new bureaucracy — thirty million dollars of unproductive manpower? Do the big corporations think that after 50 years of previous attempts that we can be gulled? That media outpourings next September, with elected officials genuflecting in concert, can induce us to vote against the welfare of our own kind?

We oldsters of all people should be the surest to see through their schemes. I'm certain we will.

RUSSE FARRELL, Chair
Consumers Opposing Sales Tax

Article disputed

To the Editor,

The story of the conflicts with the principal of our school is a long and painful one. Your article of May 8 — "Harrison fired" — does not help the cause of understanding. It appears that, although you use the words "according to the church leadership," your reporter did not contact the school board, myself, or anyone other than the principal. There is always more than one side to a story. Many pieces are missing in our one-sided account.

Our decision to not renew his contract (not a "firing") followed a long

history of difficulties in working with him and many attempts to mediate those conflicts. Unfortunately, he continues to carry on the conflict in ways that serve no one's good. Many of his statements were offensive and unfair to St. Andrew Parish and to those of us involved in this personnel issue. Mr. Harrison's claim, for example, that "no reasons were given," that "due process was not involved" and that he has a grievance, would not hold up if you were to talk to school board members and Archdiocesan school officials.

REV. JAMES COLEMAN
Pastor, St. Andrew

Include U.S.

To the Editor,

The City Council should pass the ordinance to declare Portland a nuclear free zone. Although this ordinance, by prohibiting nuclear weapon production locally, will not end the war drive, it is an important step, both symbolically and in actuality. But its effect both as a symbol and as a law, is negated by exempting the U.S. government from its strictures. It is the U.S. government who is the primary international user and proliferator of nuclear weapons, from Hiroshima to the 100s of warheads on European soil to Star Wars. The ordinance should be passed with the deletion of the language exempting the U.S. government from its provisions. The U.S. government, above all, should be prohibited from nuclear weapon production in Portland.

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