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Two Sections

## Relations Between the Black Community and Police Still Tense, a Year After Stevenson's Death

by Jerry Garner

It has been a little over a year since Lloyd D. Stevenson was killed by Portland police officers during a disturbance at a 7-Eleven store in Northeast Portland.

Stevenson's death angered many in the Afro-American community. There was a protest march at the Justice Center and the City Hall. Although an Inquest Jury ruled that Stevenson's death was the result of criminal negligence, the Multnomah County District Attorney Office failed to get an indictment from a secret Grand Jury against any of the officers involved in Stevenson's death.

The failure of the Grand Jury to indict the officers angered many Black citizens as well as other citizens in Portland. Tension between the police and the Black community remains high after Stevenson's tragic death.

Herb L. Cawthorne, Chief Executive Officer of the Portland Urban League, said that he believes police community relations have improved somewhat since the death of Tony Stevenson. "However, I believe that the meager improvements have to do more with the fact that relations were at such a low during the time of this death, than it does with any increased efforts on the

part of the Police Bureau to better the situation," said Cawthorne.

Cawthorne said the requirements of police are not sufficient in the newly implemented Multi-Cultural Education Training Workshop. "In order to change the course of recent years, the Police Bureau must recognize Black leadership and its ability to involve the Black community in the problem-solving process. Until this occurs, relations will be decent at best," said Cawthorne.

Cawthorne's view is shared by Jean Vessup. Vessup is an investigator for the Civil Rights Division Bureau of Labor and Industries. She is also a member of the Police Internal Investigation Audit Committee (PIIAC). According to Vessup, "if the Bureau would listen to what the community wants, solutions can be found to solve the problems that exist." Vessup said that she hasn't seen any improvement in relations between the Portland Police Bureau and the Black community since Tony Stevenson's death.

"Even before Stevenson's death, relations were bad between the two groups," said Vessup. "From my vantage point as a community volunteer involved in police matters relating to

police/community relations; my observation is that the Black community has lost faith in the Police Bureau at this point in time," said Vessup. "I believe there is room for improvement in that there may be some good officers and/or some officers interested in improving the Black community's perception of the Portland Police Bureau," said Vessup.

Vessup said there are people in the community who are perceptive and intelligent enough to realize that these officers exist within the Bureau. "These are the officers we want to see in our community." "In order to improve relations, the Portland Police Bureau needs to realize the existence of a serious problem that you cannot put a band-aid on and expect it to heal itself without effective planning and appropriate programs and procedures," said Vessup.

Cawthorne said Tony Stevenson's death is a painful thought; a thought which stirs deep hostility. "But we must move forward." "We owe that to Tony and to his family." "We must work together — the Police Bureau and the Black community — to insure that a tragedy such as this will never happen again."



7-Eleven store on N.E. Broadway & Union Ave.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

## Racism, the Cause of Conflict Between the Police and the Black Community

by Jerry Garner

Racism still operates in contemporary American society, but in somewhat more subtle forms than it once did. Racism is defined as the majority groups members (Whites) feeling of superiority to the members of some other racial group. Resulting in the majority group harboring feelings of hatred, fear and repulsion toward minorities.

The treatment of Blacks in the United States has been shameful throughout this nation's history. Blacks have been denied equality in employment, housing, education, justice, voting rights and services.

Historically, police have enforced cruel customs of racism in this nation. During the civil rights movement for equality, Blacks were arrested, beaten, hosed, gassed, clubbed and murdered by the police. Two of the most hideous actions by the police in an attempt to crush Blacks' resistance toward racism occurred in Alabama and Mississippi. On May 20, 1961 in Montgomery, Alabama, nineteen Black and White students were attacked with metal pipes, baseball bats, sticks and fists by a wild White mob. The students were Freedom Riders and were testing the Interstate Commerce Commission's order against segregation in interstate buses and terminals. Police made no attempt to control the vicious mob or render first aid to the injured students.

In the Summer of 1964, three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner (Chaney was Black, Goodman and Schwerner were Jewish), were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia, Mississippi. The three were stopped by a Sheriff for no reason and were turned over later to the Klan and killed. Their bodies were discovered forty-four days later, buried in an earthen dam.

Police hatred and repression of Blacks is still present in the majority of police departments across the country. This animosity accounts for the violent and sometimes deadly confrontations between Blacks and the police.

Despite numerous studies and governmental commissions presenting evidence of police prejudice towards Blacks, police and police administrators continuously argue that none of their officers are bigots.

As stated earlier, the police historically have been agents in the power equation. They enforce the laws of the larger system by restricting the striking back of Blacks to skirmish inside their community, thus deflecting energies and attacks from communities and in-

stitutions of the larger power structure. This results in the police imposing their own conception of law and order in Black communities. In many incidents the result is the violation of both the constitutional and civil rights of Blacks.

Blacks have complained repeatedly about "police practices" in their neighborhoods nationwide. Prior to the Stevenson killing, Black citizens living in Northeast Portland voiced their concerns on numerous occasions regarding the behavior of some White police officers who patrol their neighborhood. Their grievances have fallen upon deaf ears of both police administrators and city officials.

The following question must be asked: Why are so many White police officers hostile toward Blacks? In order to answer this question, one must first understand the ideology of most individuals who are police officers which explains the reason for the prolonged racist treatment of Blacks by many White police officers.

Police officers tend to be recruited from the lower middle and upper-lower social classes of society. They hold attitudes typical of their working class origins: belief in the status quo, respect for authority, and hostility toward certain racial and ethnic groups (especially Blacks). This results in police having a narrow and unsophisticated outlook of minorities and society.

The majority of White police officers who patrol Black communities are likely to have grown up without any significant interaction with minorities or lower-socioeconomic class individuals, and have no experience or knowledge of the realities of ghetto living or Black culture. Their attitude towards Blacks is based on biases and prejudices; an attitude that is shared by the community in which they come from. This racism on the part of White police results in the fear and distrust of Blacks and other minority groups.

Once again, I focus on the Stevenson tragedy to illustrate the above. After reviewing the testimony of eye witnesses who were present during the incident at the 7-Eleven store on April 21, 1985, it is safe to say that the White officers involved in Stevenson's death were guilty of the excessive use of force and lying. During the Inquest hearing, witnesses testified that at no time did Stevenson strike any of the officers (as claimed by the officers) and that the officers refused to listen to Stevenson or the witnesses' explanation concerning Stevenson's role as a peacemaker.

In the officer's perception, upon arriving at the 7-Eleven store, they saw two White men and a Black man in a confrontation. As testified by the witnesses, the officers went directly towards Stevenson. To the officers, Stevenson was the aggressor (due to their fear and distrust of Blacks). This fear and distrust is the result of racism.

Racism is a serious problem among White police officers in the Portland Police Bureau. For members of the Bureau have exhibited their racism towards Blacks repeatedly: the dumping of dead opossums in front of the Burger Barn restaurant; the selling of the "Don't Choke 'Em, Smoke 'Em" T-shirts; the use of excessive force on law-abiding citizens; and the daily harassment of Blacks. Such behavior by officers only worsens the already chill relations between Blacks citizens and the Police Bureau.

Although Chief Harrington has shown that she is concerned about the bad relations between the Bureau and the Black community, nothing concrete (except for implementing a multi-cultural education training workshop for police officers) has been done by the Chief to tackle the problem of racism.

In fact, some Blacks have questioned the sincerity of the Chief in regards to her commitment to deal with officers in the Bureau who commit acts of racism and criminal acts directly at Blacks. They point to the Chief's opposition in making officers testify before the Police Internal Investigation Audit Committee (PIIAC) as an example. Many Black community leaders believe that by requiring officers who have been accused of misconduct against a citizen to testify before the PIIAC, is a step in the right direction in making officers accountable for their conduct.

If racism is to be eliminated from the Bureau, police administrators and city officials must do the following: Recruit more Blacks to the Bureau (there are only 21 Blacks on the force, out of 750 sworn officers); make officers who are guilty of criminal or racist acts accountable for their actions (in order for this to occur, police administrators and the Multnomah County District Attorney office must be willing to prosecute those officers guilty of such acts); and finally the Police Bureau must recognize Black leadership and their ability to involve the Black community in the problem-solving process.

Until the above occurs, relations between the police and the Black community will continue to be volatile.



Sandra Parker, Administrative Coordinator at OMSI Lloyd Center handled a snake from one of the exhibits

while on lookers watch from a not too close distance.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

## OMSI Big Hit at Lloyd Center

by Jerry Garner

The OMSI II EXHIBIT LOCATED AT THE Lloyd Center in the old Woolworth Building has been well received by the community says Sandra Parker, Administrative Coordinator for OMSI II.

OMSI II has been at the Lloyd Center since March 15, and will run through Labor Day. It is open from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday. Admission is \$1.00 per person, with a family maximum of \$4.00.

The OMSI II exhibits were made possible by a community outreach grant from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust. The Lloyd Corporation provided the building, moving and refurbishing expenses.

"OMSI realized they were being utilized mainly by people living in the Northwest and Southwest parts of Portland, not by residents of the Eastside of the river," said Parker. "Especially people from the lower socioeconomic scale of all races, or by ethnic minorities." Realizing this, OMSI Director Jan Dabrowski decided to do what is called "creative displacement." The result was the creation of OMSI II at the Lloyd Center.

Parker said OMSI II is only the third science museum in the country that is

located in a shopping mall. OMSI II is also unique because it is the only science museum located in a mall in the central city. Usually shopping malls are located in the suburbs.

Parker said the point of OMSI II is to attract new and different audiences and a more diverse group of people who go to OMSI. The Lloyd Center location is an ideal place, said Parker. It is on the Eastside of the river and many different ethnic minority groups shop there.

"People come here to congregate, therefore, they can attend the science museum without planning to do so," said Parker.

OMSI II also heralds a fresh new OMSI look — light, bright, exciting and fun. Visitors at OMSI II will enter the magic and wonder of OMSI II through two 14 foot columns of color and light. Vibrant colors and shapes, hands-on exhibits and exciting demonstrations will entice visitors to touch, discover and explore a wide range of science activities.

Some of OMSI's most popular exhibits can be found at OMSI II. One such exhibit is the Transparent Lady, formerly a show, the exhibit is operated by visitors. Push on a lever and you will activate a giant slinky that shows how

sound waves travel through the air.

Another interesting thing about the science museum is the fact that all of the explainer/guides are teenagers. These youths come from the Portland Public Schools, the Business Youth Exchange and the Portland Private Industry Council.

Parker said the trainees are in a sales training program. Spanish, French, Chinese and Laotian are just a few of the nationalities and languages which are spoken at OMSI II by some of these explainers. "They are selling science too," said Parker.

Parker said those who come to OMSI II love the exhibits. "My hope is that a lot of people will visit OMSI II." "This will show the people at OMSI that the community will support and appreciate science exhibits. She urges residents living in Northeast to visit OMSI II.

Due to a grant from Fred Meyer, the admission is only a dollar, compared to \$3.50 at OMSI. However, on the first Tuesday of each month, from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m., admission is free. The \$1.00 OMSI II ticket will also be good for \$1.00 off the regular OMSI admission through September.