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SAY YOU SAW IT IN

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Marion Barry: Continued
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to City Hall. Barry brought new construction to D.C., encouraged corporations to relocate there, built a wonderful convention center, and created all types of employment opportunities for the city's residents. He also watched his appointees go to jail for fraud, receiving illegal kickbacks, and a host of other charges. Still, Barry stood tall and no one in the District Attorney's office could pin charges on him. He was protected by the "machine" he built and by black people, who thought that he could do no wrong. If you would poll the black jury members today, secretly, I'm more than willing to bet the "farm" that many had been directly affected by some good that Barry had done or maybe even someone in their family. Loyalty runs deep in the D.C. black community.

Barry is no hero to me for what he has avoided as a drug abuser. I thought that he should have fried and spent a long time in jail. There is a big difference between racism in America and overt drug abuse. Sending Barry to jail would have forwarded a strong message to the streets and to the drug dealers/abusers that the "war on drugs" is real. "Down With Dope, Up With Hope" (at the Martin Luther King, Jr. library) is what Barry told the children in the MLK choir on their visit to Washington, D.C. in 1988. Twenty minutes after his speech (while waiting to meet him), several choir members noticed a Washington Post (front page) story about his drug abuse and penchant for "nightlife". Some of the kids refused kisses on the cheek and talked negatively about him on the bus ride back to the hotel. Imagine meeting the first black mayor of your young life and he turns out to be a drug abuser. I saw pain in the children's eyes. Barry was not a good role model or hero for young people because he did not practice what he preached. However, there is still hope for him.

God has a way of bringing what has been done in the dark to light. The light is now on Mayor Marion Barry, who has successfully completed drug rehabilitation and confesses to being clean (over 250 days). It is my wish that he stays clean and sober. Maybe then, through his community outreach (as a potential city council member?), he will earn the right to be called a role model/hero. He has been branded. Barry must re-gain the respect of Washington, D.C., black people in America, and more importantly, establish respect for his family and self. That's one element Marion Barry cannot blame on racism. A person can always respect himself, despite the conditions of the world or their life. We can't continue to blame the white man for our shortcomings or habits.

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