

EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

p e r s p e c t i v e s

Commuter Train Killings: A Study Of Two West Indies Immigrants Named Colin.

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Actually, no further study is needed on the one who became Chief of Staff of the U. S. Armed Forces, Gen. Colin E. Powell--and whom the establishment appointed a 'leader of the black folks' and a shoe-in for a future presidency. It is to be admitted that they provided some comic relief with tons of media copy about the "Jamaican Bob Sled Team".

It is a different story with the tormented and manic Colin Ferguson for whom it all came together on the 5:33 train to Hicksville (a real town, not a pun). It is interesting that both men come from what the media want to describe as "middle class" families. The term is as misapplied in the case of the general's family as it was in the case of several of the Milwaukee teens who bludgeoned that 103 year-old man to death.

Monday's Oregonian described their family's income at slightly above a middle class average of \$32,500. Heaven help us if this is true either in Oregon or across the nation--if such families must use this sum to stay off food stamps, pay the rent or mortgage, save for the kids' college education and, additionally, put enough aside for retirement. Know any more jokes? What we have here is a media-generated cultural farce developed in concert with the advertising and market-

ing fraternity (and politicians) to keep the mass of consumers content with their lot while they spend what they can't afford.

This classic exercise in American demographics is quite relevant here as we examine the commuter train tragedy and various media treatments -- which includes not only 'reporting' but many interviews that are frequently designed to elicit specific responses that will support the emotional thrust of a story (selling many more papers or building T.V. ratings). When a reporter who is astute in this 'craft' is able to elicit a shocking quote, no matter how racist or denigrating, the rest of the nation's media feels free to run with it. Such as the police chief's description of Colin Ferguson as an "animal".

Were those killers from the Milwaukee high school called animals? Was the man in California who abducted the child at knife point from her bedroom? Have the murder(s) of the little girls in St. Louis been termed anything other than human? What about the Milwaukee man who killed and ate the body parts of black victims; the murderous rampages at post offices and fast food outlets or the "Manson Gana"?

Rev. Jesse Jackson moved on it immediately in his recent sermon decrying the use of the term "animal"

and the deliberate night and day repetition of that Police Chief's interview -- however, the harm was done and surely a number of us not-so-vigilant public should be awakened. A black commentator points out that none of the nation's police have described Mafia or Costro Nostra as "animals" (Nor, of course, have they ever been cruelly beaten like Rodney King). It is always a matter of American demographics -- and dollars!

The Southern Poverty Law Center says that, "Racial Murders remain relatively rare, and thus figures can be skewed dramatically by a few incidents such as the train shootings or the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, focusing here rather than the broader systemic patterns of discrimination in American life produces a distorted, misleading picture". Why, then, do you suppose that the New York Times News Service writer would claim that "there is no evidence that Colin Ferguson ever suffered from discrimination"?

No, the writer is neither stupid nor a fool. He is playing to and enhancing the mindset of that media-generated demographic group I described. They represent billions of dollars that will be pried loose in one way or another, whether it takes the insanity of television violence or racism.

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Violence In America

Legislators Against Crime?

Nothing in the crime or gun bills passed by the House or the Senate this year will significantly reduce or prevent violent crime in America. Since the November 2, 1993 elections jolted members of Congress, the national craze on violent crime has been matched by a rush to "get tough" on crime and the predictable knee jerk rush to punishment.

When the Congress adjourned in November the Senate had passed Senator Biden's Omnibus S-1607. The bill expands the death penalty to over 50 new crimes and demands stricter sentences for another 60 crimes. The Senate allocated \$22.3 billion - six times more than at any time in the last twenty years of crime legislation - for more prisons and cops from money to be "saved" by the proposed future layoffs of 250,000 federal workers. There were at least 22 House and 8 Senate legislative measures proposed at controlling handguns, automatic weapons or bullets. With fanfare the Brady Bill and one banning automatic weapons became law.

The United States already jails proportionately more people than any other country in the world, and criminal justice spending is the fastest growing area of state and local spending. But from 1974-1990 the growth in prison population was not primarily a result of more crime but prosecution

and sentencing policies which imposed harsher sentences. Most such measures, whether by Congress or local officials, reflect the public's impatience and the politicians lust to find a quick fix to the escalating violence in America. In the process, Americans seem increasingly willing to undermine fundamental liberties and basic humanitarian concerns for the promise of greater safety. Already nearly half of young African-American males in major cities are under the jurisdiction of juvenile or criminal justice systems and evidence continues to be amassed that existing sentencing policies are often racially biased.

Current anti-crime efforts are no more likely to reduce the violence than international interdiction reduced the flow of drugs into the United States. Both the demand for drugs and the resort to violence stem from a common poverty of the soul and an emptiness of spirit that America refuses to address. This is why the United States lost the "war" on poverty and the "war" on drugs and is headed toward losing the "war" on crime and violence. The affects of recent national and local anti-crime efforts will further impoverish local governments, further escalate racial disparities and further restrict fundamental liberties. America will never become less violent by frantically

pursuing greater safety at the cost of social investment. Genuine safety and security can only come from consistent democracy for every person and a profound redirection of our national wealth toward our children. The more we spend on police and jails, the less likely it is that we will care for our children in ways that lead them away from violence and lawlessness.

Redefining violence as a "public health epidemic" often misses the endemic character of violence. Violence prevention today does not address the reality of more poverty for longer periods of time than any other industrial country and the growing racial and social inequality that is the mother of violence and lawlessness. Neither incapacitation nor deterrence, the aims of punishment, constitutes genuine prevention. It is time for a comprehensive federal, state, county, city and community violence, substance abuse and crime prevention strategy.

On January 6-8, 1994 in DC there will be a Rainbow leadership meeting on black-on-Black violence. Reclaim Our Youth Co-Chairman Bill Cosby is confirmed along with Spike Lee, Cong. Charles Rangel, John Conyers, Laura Murphy Lee of the ACLU, Will Minter of NBC-LEO, and Marion Bowden of BIG.

Volunteers Needed To Invest United Way Funds

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette is currently looking for African-American individuals to serve as fund-distribution volunteers, individuals like Helen Pittman.

"I got involved in United Way because of my business experience, social concerns and my African-American perspective," said Pittman, who works as a tax auditor.

During 1993, more than 110 volunteers like Pittman committed their time to learn about the overall network of community programs, visit and evaluate agencies, listen to presentations, and decide on how to divide up United Way funds. People form many backgrounds working together ensures that contributions are invested in human-care programs that best serve the local four-county area.

Pittman believes it is important for more African-Americans to get involved in the process. "This allows them to have a vote and a voice in how United Way dollars are spent and how it impacts our communities," she said.

Orientation sessions begin in mid-January 1994. The most time-intensive period lasts from March through May, requiring an average of three hours a week in meetings to evaluate programs and make funding



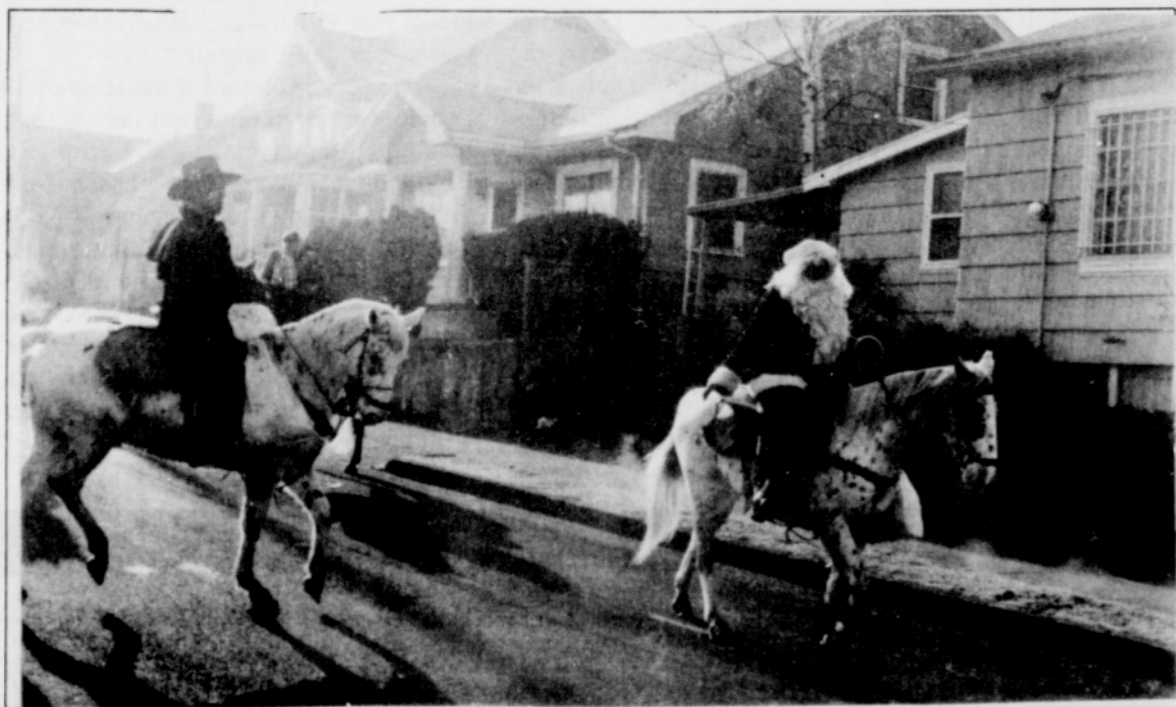
Helen Pittman

decisions. Volunteers are assigned to one of eight committees that look into specific areas such as child care for low-income families, emergency food and shelter, or domestic violence. Throughout the remainder of the year, participants meet less frequently to continue looking into overall community human services.

If you are interested in volunteering or if you'd like more information, please contact Claudia Wilton at 226-9346.

Merry
CHRISTMAS
from The Portland Observer

Christmas Arrives on Horseback



Brothers Free: Duane Washington and Santa Claus' annual gift-give away: candy toys, hats and mittens giveaway. They also sponsor a dinner for families and community residents.



Celebrate Diversity

Visibly Committed



The work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC) of America, the National Urban League, and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) is essential to the communities they serve. That's why R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company is committed to their continued growth. No where is this support more visible than in the R.J. Reynolds Public Service Billboard Program.

This program makes available to these organizations hundreds of high visibility locations in dozens of cities coast to coast.

As a result, more awareness is focused on the vital community development work they carry out.

This is just one of the many ways R.J. Reynolds, in cooperation with numerous billboard companies, is demonstrating its longstanding commitment to African-American progress.

A working commitment that is working for all of us.

