

# EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

## "Returning...Of The Fathers"

by Sam Pierce

**L**ast month I had the fortunate occasion to attend a national gang conference in Orlando, Florida.

While I was there I had the opportunity to visit my family who lives in Vero Beach. Although I was born in the state of Georgia, at age eleven, we moved to Florida where my parents and most of my siblings still reside. Since I had not visited my birth place for about thirty years, my father I decided to make the four-hundred mile trip together. It gave us personal time to catch up after two years and to visit a place we are both very fond of.

My other siblings were older when we left Georgia and still had bad memories of working from dawn to dark in the bean, corn, cotton, peanut and tobacco fields. Therefore, it was the very last place on earth they wanted to visit. Not so for my dad and me! For him, Georgia held the precious memories of a loving father who had literally worked himself to death on the very land he was so eager to show me. Also, it cradled the boyhood memories of a kind mother who died too young at age thirty-six. I could still see the sadness in his eyes as he talked about it and hear in his voice, even after all these years, the respectful questioning of God—"why".

As for me, the one my father and others declare was the "spitting" image of my grandfather, Georgia was the place where I was born--pure and simple. And since I could have been born anyplace else on the planet, but God and my parents chose Eastman,

Georgia, well, to me that meant something! Furthermore, I felt the embrace of my father's longing. For in spite of the Jim Crow laws and overt racism I too experienced, I yet felt the responsibility to keep my family's legacy alive. My sense of justice told me that I must pay homage to the land where my grandparents worked and died.

The four hundred miles passed quickly as my father entertained me with more memories and his dry humor kept me in stitches. At Cordelle we turned right off of I-75 and drove east to towns that had familiar names like Rochelle, Abbeville, and Rhine. Finally we turned back north on route 117 and then it appeared--Eastman, Georgia! Chills ran up and down my spine as the still clay roads rolled back time for me. I saw places where my brother Joe and I played shenanigans in the wooded pine forest. I saw the dirt road we walked a mile on to catch a bus that would take us past a very nice "white school" to the "Negro one"; and I remembered wondering why we couldn't stop.

A short distance from our destination my father slowed down as my eyes caught the eerie spot where my mother had fended off a man who had attempted to strike her because she dared to stop him from beating her children. He felt he had the right to make us work--even if it meant by force. We then stopped by the Ross'-Therman, C.W., and Russell. The Ross' were the white family my grandfather and his sons, my father being one, had worked for. Therman and C.W. had died, only Russell, the youngest, remained. At seventy-three

Russell Ross' mind was still quite sharp. A lump climbed into my throat as I found myself fighting back the tears as he spoke with sincere affection how loved and respected my grandfather was. And how his brother, C.W. literally saw my grandfather as his father and was visibly broken when he died.

Finally, we came upon the two-hundred acre plantation my grandfather worked with only two mules and five sons. The place where my grandmother died of childbirth complications. The place where my father, although she made him wait four years, asked my mother to marry him at age fourteen because he had lost his mother. The very plantation that contains the cemetery where my grandparents graves lie next to each other. As I kneeled to pray, I was careful to thank them for giving me such a wise and loving father. As we drove away, a quiet hush fell upon the two of us. And although we did not hear an audible voice, in our hearts we knew they were glad we came.

Back in Portland I began to ponder the meaning and debt of that rich experience. In doing so, it became clear to me why I do the work that I do with troubled youth. All I am trying to do is give them a portion of the love that my father gave me. Which is the love my grandfather gave him; which in turn is the same love my great-grandfather gave to my grandfather and so on. Way down deep in the reservoirs of my soul and spirit, somehow I know that if African American fathers would return to their sons and sons would return to their fathers, if

fathers would receive the love of their sons and sons their fathers' whether they be in prison or in exile--the black community would be changed overnight. Because the father who truly loves his son would never recruit another father's son to sell crack cocaine; and the son who truly loves his father would never sell crack cocaine to another father's son.

As I struggled to find a place to close the article, my son interrupted by informing me that his team had won their Little League playoff game. Without warning he walked up behind me and gave me a kiss. And as we embraced and exchanged "I love you's," I suddenly realized what fathers are for. Fathers make children believe in themselves. They make them feel safe and give them the permission to be carefree. They show them that it is okay to cry or say "I love you" without fearing loss of manhood. In particularly and more importantly, fathers teach the next generation of sons how to be men. How to love their wives and daughters. How to assuage their anger and give selflessly of themselves in this tumultuous yet glorious experienced called life.

I think a prophet of old said it best: a father has the power to "Turn the Hearts of the Children to their Fathers." Perhaps he too understood that if our hearts are turned to our fathers, then surely, we will turn our hearts to our fellow men.

Sam Pierce is a freelance writer whose column appears bi-monthly. His work is in the process of syndication. He can be reached at (503) 281-9741.

## perspectives

### Oregon Ship Of State: Dead In The Water?

**S**ome of us remember that story from high school literature or English classes, "The Ancient Mariner"

-- describing sailors helplessly becalmed without a wind to fill their sails, "like a painted ship upon a painted sea."

Whether studied for simile or metaphor, that ancient tale certainly provides a number of parallels to the present condition of Oregon State government -- an institution seemingly possessed of a certain ennui or weariness of spirit and making little headway in the water. Certainly, elected officials, hired hands, appointed honchos and the taxpaying public all mill about in this sea of uncertainty, buffeted by various and sundry financial shortfalls like "Measure 5."

Firm and promising solutions for crises in the economic and educational arenas are in short supply. The state legislature from whom we might expect such a helpful response is itself under a barrage of criticism. This is the group of politicians that in 1975 characterized themselves as "public-safety employees" so they could become the beneficiaries the more generous pension formulas granted to police and firefighters. They have lost none of their financial astuteness as we shall see later.

Though I will present an in-depth educational analysis during the coming month, one particular facet of the crisis in Oregon's educational scene may serve to illuminate more legislative inertia. Between 1991-1995, more than 22 percent of the Oregon State System of Higher Education administration and support costs have been cut and the resources transferred to the classroom. Such continuing financial loss is considered an effective barrier to achieving a year 2010 target of access for 80,000 Oregonians in higher education.

Like the long suffering public school districts of the State the Board of Higher Education is not to benefit from innovative and comprehensive planning from a committed state legislature, but must do its own thing in order to "achieve significant permanent savings and to pro-

tect student access to instruction." The Higher Education 2010 Advisory Panel has proposed a trendy, nation-wide move: Shift the state system to a "Public Corporation."

In other words, another wild and spirited steed will be escaped the legislative corral, determined and appropriately committed -- but certainly not part of the kind of integrated and comprehensive planning that would permit effective solutions to the crises in education and other sectors of infrastructure requiring intensive care. And, of course, the "Public Corporation" route does not ensure "significant permanent savings." The taxpayers are not that naive, are they?

It is understandable that many more Oregonians than usual are subjecting their state legislature to scrutiny. Some are even saying that perhaps the time has come for Oregon to have fewer but full-time, better paid legislators rather than "this rag-tag body consisting of too many unemployed lawyers and/or lobbyists." It has not gone unnoticed that many members of the legislature are beneficiaries of the "Oregon Public Employees Retirement System" (PERS).

And, therein lies a tale, for never in the history of the territory has an Oregon institution been under hotter and more intense fire. In one way this is a strange state of affairs for I think most of us have always regarded Oregon's pension fund as a bright spot in the state's financial operations -- and over a long period of time. Certainly the media has consistently touted the "smart investment earnings" of PERS. Makes money like its going out style!

However, as to be expected in tight economic times it has come to the notice of many with less prosperous benefit plans (like taxpayers who work for private enterprise) -- that the payouts and retirement schedules are more generous than those of five nearby states and most industry (many of the latter have no pension plans at all). Consequently, there has been mounted a full scale assault on the legislative to "remedy" this situation. This trend can be expected to continue as cutbacks in both public and private sectors increase.



By Professor McKinley Burt

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT Break The Chokehold On Our People!

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

**A**ccording to a Civilian Complaint Review Board memorandum on the death of 22-year-old Ernest Sayon at the hands of Staten Island police officers on April 29, the cops who killed him in the presence of dozens of eyewitnesses did not have the legal authority to arrest his young Black man in the first place.

The internal memorandum, which was prepared by an attorney who sits on the Board, said the officers lacked "probable cause" for the arrest. The law requires that the police link a suspect with a felony or have reasonable suspicion that their lives are in danger before they can stop and search anyone. Ernest Sayon was walking down the street with a friend when the cops grabbed him during a so-called "drug sweep" of the housing project where he lived.

They choked Ernest to death as he lay face down on the sidewalk with his hands cuffed behind him. The job of the Civilian Complaint Review Board is to determine whether the cops exceeded their authority; the grand jury investigating the case will determine if they committed a crime.

The police story is that the three officers involved, one of whom is also Black, used "necessary force" to restrain Ernest. But if the arrest itself was illegal then presumably any

amount of force used by these officers would have been -- by definition -- excessive.

Meanwhile, New York Governor Mario Cuomo, who is seeking reelection to a fourth term -- and desperately needs a high turnout in the Black community to succeed -- is dragging his feet in deciding to appoint a special prosecutor in the case. Cuomo is, once again, playing politics with an issue that is literally a matter of life and death in the African American community; this is one of the many reasons that I am running against him for governor in the Democratic primary.

As the advisor to the Sayon family, I wrote to Governor Cuomo in May to demand that he appoint a special prosecutor in the case. On the evening of Wednesday, June 1, accompanied by a member of the Sayon family, I confronted Mr. Cuomo in the parking lot behind St. John's Baptist Church in Buffalo, where Rev. Al Sharpton and I had just addressed the congregation on the importance of a Black insurgency in New York State. Cuommo, who was there to pay his respects to Rev. Sharpton, had just made an appeal to the all-Black audience to help him get reelected. In the presence of the entire New York press corps, I demanded that he meet with the Sayon family and me while he was in town for the Democratic Part convention (which was to give him the gubernatorial nomination the next day). He agreed to "sandwich it in"

before he left Buffalo on Thursday.

At 1:30 in the morning of June 2, I received a phone call from an aide to the governor who said that Cuomo would not have time for a meeting that day but wished to reschedule it for some time in the future. I responded that this was "unacceptable."

At 2 a.m., the phone rang again. This time it was Richard Girgenti, the state director of criminal justice in New York. Mr. Girgenti, who heads the panel which is evaluating the request for a special prosecutor, said that he was calling on the governor's behalf to give me an update (and, presumably, to "smooth things over" so that I wouldn't do anything to mar the occasion of his nomination). Mr. Girgenti told me that Governor Cuomo had decided to have the state police join the New York Police Department's investigation into the conduct of the police officers responsible for Ernest Sayon's death. The governor had made this decision, Mr. Girgenti said, in response to the concern that I and others have expressed about the propriety of the police investigating themselves.

While Mrs. Sayon and I welcome this important concession on the part of the governor, I am determined to keep up the pressure, from every side, to insure that the Sayon family gets justice.

It's common knowledge that Mario Cuomo is hurting, a lot of liberal Democratic Party politicians,

Black as well as white (along with their friends in the liberal media), are trying to convince our people that it's our job to save his behind. Otherwise, they say (relying on the usual scare tactics), the Republican might win! But they prefer to forget that a year ago Cuomo -- who as the governor is the leader of the Democratic Party in the state of New York -- helped engineer the defeat of his fellow Democrat, David Dinkins, New York City's first Black mayor, thereby enabling a right wing Republican, Rudolph Giuliani, to become the mayor in a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans five to one. The election of Giuliani, a former federal prosecutor who campaigned on a strident "law and order" (that is, anti-poor and anti-Black) platform, sent a message to the members of the NYPD that as of that moment it was open season on young men of color like Ernest Sayon.

I don't agree that we ought to save Cuomo's skin. I think now is the time to pay him back. My message to New York's Black electorate is this: Given that Mario Cuomo is either a loser or a lame duck governor, we need to do what is in the best interests of ourselves, our families and our community.

And the best way to do that, in my opinion, is for Black voters to pull the lever for me in the primary on September 13. Let the governor sweat for a change.

## Civil Rights Journal: Human Rights, Africa And Us

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

**H**undreds of thousands of Rwandans have died over the past few months as the rest of the world has looked on, seemingly paralyzed and unable to stop the slaughter.

Bodies have washed up on shores in neighboring countries. Hundreds of thousands have fled for their lives, becoming refugees in countries little prepared and unable to finance the costs of receiving them. The sad reality is that the civil war in Rwanda has been going on for decades, receiving little of the world's attention until now.

Similarly, the political situation in Somalia was an old conflict which continued to worsen until tens of thou-

sands were dying of starvation and the world was confronted with the pictures of thousands of dying children. Only then did the United Nations and the United States intervene in the internal conflict of that nation.

Now, a similar situation exists in another part of Africa. Liberia has long and close historical ties to the United States. Indeed, Liberia was founded in 1847 by freed American slaves, who chose to return to Africa rather than stay in the country which enslaved them. The capital city, Monrovia, was named for U.S. President James Monroe. Its official language is English and its uses Liberian dollars, which are actually old U.S. dollars as its currency. For many years rubber was Liberia's largest cash crop and it had strong ties to the U.S. rubber

companies, especially Firestone.

Liberia has faced political instability for nearly two decades but this has escalated over the past four years as a civil war continues to be fought and wide-ranging human rights violations and abuses continue to be committed by the various parties of the conflict. Indeed, since 1990, Liberia has been a divided country with one armed force controlling Monrovia and several other factions controlling much of the rest of the country.

Human rights violations have been a part of the continuous and bloody civil war. In late 1992, five American nuns and four novices were killed, drawing much international attention and finally forcing the United Nations to take action in the form of an international arms embargo.

During this time, several cease-fires and peace agreements have been signed, only to falter once the warring parties left the peace table. Moreover, the military intervention sponsored by other west African countries and originally hailed by the rest of the world has yet to bring peace to Liberia and this military force, mainly staffed by Nigerians, is now accused of aligning itself with two of the warring factions and perhaps even supplying arms and ammunition to them.

Human rights groups remain concerned about the status of human rights in Liberia and President Jimmy Carter's Carter Center has had an office in Monrovia for the past two years. The Carter Center is monitoring the situation closely, as are the other human rights organizations.

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