

# EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily  
Reflect Or Represent The Views Of  
The Portland Observer

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Charles Washington  
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Sean Cruz  
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Portland Observador

Danny Bell  
Advertising Sales Manager

Paul Neufeldt  
Production & Design

Gary Washington  
Public Relations

Rovonne Black  
Business Assistant

### Contributing Writers:

Professor McKinley Burt, Lee Perlman, Pamela Jordan

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,  
Portland, Oregon 97211  
503-288-0033 • Fax 503-288-0015  
Email: Pdxobserv@aol.com

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## Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:  
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## Civil Rights Journal: Criminal Justice And The Case Of Kwame Cannon

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

**I**nstitutional racism is part of the daily life of most people of color in this country.

The Texaco case and others like it point to racism in the workplace. But institutional racism in the criminal justice system is perhaps the most devastating because it impacts the poorest of our nation's citizens in life and death ways and seems to be the institution least likely to change.

Take the case of Kwame Cannon. Kwame has served ten years of not one but two life sentences for unarmed burglary in the state of North Carolina. He has an outstanding prison record, having assisted chaplains and counseled other inmates and

guards. He studied for his GED and now is studying college courses. He works in the kitchen. His life and his attitude shows that if our criminal justice system were really interested in rehabilitation, he would be a model.

Why did he receive such a harsh sentence? There are some who believe that his sentence is related to the fact that his mother, Willena Cannon, was a labor leader in 1979, when five activists in the Greensboro area were shot by the Klan and Neo-Nazis in broad daylight, but never convicted. At age 10, Kwame was present at the massacre. As a result of his mother's part in a lawsuit against the city for its part in these killings, she was unable to work for a number of years. As

Kwame grew up, he became frustrated and angry with the extreme poverty and he began to break into houses. He never used a weapon or confronted residents. At age 17 he was caught and confessed to six burglaries. But he was accused of many other unsolved burglaries by the police at the time. Several white men were later convicted of some of these burglaries vaguely attributed to Kwame. They received much shorter sentences.

There are others who believe that Kwame's long sentence was because he was a poor African American youth, who ended up being represented by an alcoholic attorney, who was later disbarred. His attorney recommended that Kwame accept a plea bargain which resulted in the two

## Concrete Jungle: "Shut Up...Or I'll Shoot"

BY KIMBERLY McLAUGHLIN

**A**t the risk of sounding like an Andy Rooney wanna be, I'd like to know... "did you ever notice how Americans show dissatisfaction with leaders, politicians and other public figures?"

In short, we try to extinguish their lives. Somehow or another some of our fellow American brothers and sisters of all colors have misinterpreted the term "disagreement". Americans have taken the lives of other Americans for reasons unknown for decades. Due to the unfortunate excess of live lost, I'll refrain from making direct references. My main

objective here is to try to solicit the help of Journal readers. I ask you, why have we bought into this "death notice" form of disenchantment?

Most recently, former Nation of Islam Minister Khalid Muhammed was attacked in Riverside, California. A former member of the Nation of Islam has been fingered as the gun wielding culprit. For those who've forgotten, Dr. Khalid Muhammed is the now infamous former right hand man of Min. Louis Farrakhan. A speech delivered at a small New Jersey college by Dr. Muhammed contained language that several white, Jewish, and other students found reprehensible. Sources say that Dr.

Muhammed made ill reference to the Pope, and the entire Jewish community.

There are many who have little to no compassion for the fallen Dr. Khalid Muhammed. Those who have been targeted in this speeches across this country have every right to hold the Dr. in low regard.

What is not acceptable is the recent attempt on this human being's life. As Americans we are all entitled to our own opinions.

We are entitled to voice our opinions, and to stand by them as best we know how. It is people like this gunman who sot Dr. Muhammed in the leg who are reprehensible! How dare

## NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

### Would You Trust Your Car To Mark Fuhrman? Boycott Texaco!

you need gas and see a Texaco sign, you'll just keep on driving."

"They say they're doing all they can, but this deplorable audio tape--and the 1,500 employees who have filed a suit which should have been settled by now--say otherwise."

The civil rights delegation denounced the recorded remarks of top Texaco executives referring to African Americans as "niggers" and "black jelly beans" when they met with CEO Bijur. They also asked Bijur to:

- provide data on Texaco's employment picture;
- provide a breakdown of staffing patterns, including the number of African Americans, Latino/Hispanics, Asian Americans, and women in managerial positions, and on the Texaco Board of director;
- release procurement data;
- reveal the number of discrimination complaints the firm has logged in recent years.

Texaco would provide none of this information.

Jackson concluded: "These Mark Fuhrman's of corporate America need to be exposed and weeded out. We will withdraw our consumer dollars until we become respected trading partners, and Texaco's 1,500 employees receive justice."

Boycott Texaco.

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

### The Village Needs Education As Well

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

**A** reader says this "NET" and computer barrage from the media reminds me of your quip that "often its hard to see the dance because so many dancers are in the way" ('can't see the forest for the trees in the way').

A most pertinent observation, and many are being brought to the same viewpoint in respect to being able to distinguish education priorities through a blizzard of fiscal emergencies; the passage of "Measure 47" not being the least of these traumas. But hold that for the moment--I am also reminded "not to drop the ball" on some issues considered very important to both parents and students. I would hope that teachers are as interested.

First, yes, I did include in that 1980s television presentation an account of the many patented technological contributions of the brilliant African American engineer from Portland, Oregon, T.M. (Don) Rutherford, a Benson High School graduate. There was the special lock/catch that made possible the sliding

doors on first the Volkswagen and later most American Vans. Before this Mr. Rutherford had patented the seemingly simple catch that secures the closing of our kitchen cabinets, etc.

Even more fascinating to the viewers was the revelation that this black engineer played a critical role in the design of that famous Howard Hughes flying boat, "the Spruce Goose." How many times have we seen that one momentous 'flight' on television; Mr. Rutherford was on board as accounted by him in his March 24, 1995 letter to me.

...I was the Systems specialist on the Hughes Flying Boat project. Since I designed the Engine control system, my duty on the flight was to fill in as a back up for the active flight-engineer."

'Don' has since retired (Rutherford & Associates Engineers), but his accomplishments live on--right here in Portland! Many of us followed the accounts in local and national media when the "Spruce Goose" was dismantled in California several year ago, then transported to Hillsboro, Oregon for reassembly. I

have been unsuccessful in an attempt to secure a date from the owner as to when this important exhibit might be on display (Don's niece, Charlotte, is a Portland resident).

There are a number of African Americans with 'Portland ties who have made major contributions to the nation's technology. In the past I have encountered the same degree of inertia at OMSI in respect to featuring any motivating or inspiring displays of any such contributions as was the case with Benson High School Staff. Many, many parents, both black and white deplored the situation, voicing their own negative experiences.

This last observation brings us to an interesting experience, one that might be termed a cultural anomaly. When I mentioned that white parents were sending or bringing their kids by my office for help in developing profiles of black inventors as the ultimate in role models, one way suggested the message to the child was, "By God, if they could achieve against all those odds Junior, you've got no excuse at all!" What ever, they call up and ask "what do you

charge an hour for tutoring?" Is 'our' village listening?

When I announced in the Portland Observer Newspaper a \$25 award to the first Middle School student who could use the clues I furnished to track down the black inventor of a "within-the-engine cab" semaphore system for railroads, 'sixteen' white kids leaped to the task--parents and teacher's encouraging. Several opted, "that was sure a neat invention, it might have prevented that fatal freight train collision in a Washington State fog.

I am not surprised at this turn of events, and on two counts. First, that there were no responses from 'blacks', including parents and teachers and, secondly, that so many people from other cultures are reacting vigorously to the threat of being left out of the "technological wave of the future." I noticed a universal comprehension of this fact during my ten years of contracting with the U.S. Forest service to document the technical contributions of African Americans all over Oregon, Washington, parts of California, Alaska as part of cultural awareness programs. Cont'd next week

## Vantage Point: Fighting To Repair The Safety Net In the U.S.

**H**eritified by the fear of a Dole victory in the 1996 presidential election, liberals, progressives and advocates for the poor swallowed Clinton's signing of a terrible welfare reform bill with only mild protest.

In addition, there was hardly a whimper when Clinton failed to renew the patry commitment to build new public housing units for needy families in the

face of escalating demand (the commitment was cut from 400,000 units per year to 40,000 by Ronald Reagan).

Across the board the conservative clamor for leaner government and less social programs is having disastrous consequences on the quality of life for poor and working people and those locked into the ghettos, the barrios and reservations. The safety net which had become such an integral part of life in

the U.S. is in shambles.

The re-election of William Jefferson Clinton will do little to repair the damage that has been done to the safety net. The Republicans have always unapologetically been the Party of big business and the rich. The Democratic Party, however, in its effort to gain and retain the White House, has abandoned its principles and reinvented itself as a moderate-

centrist political institution consciously coopting traditional aspects of the Republican agenda. It is clear that poor and working people can no longer count on the Democratic Party to champion their cause. It is equally clear that poor and working people cannot count on the electoral process alone to repair the safety net. It's time to "agituate, educate and organize."

him to the clergy so that he can work with them to help keep others out of prison. But Governor Hunt has turned a deaf ear to their cries.

The Greensboro Pulpit Forum sees the case of Kwame Cannon as both the most extreme example of the inequities of the criminal justice system and an instance of wasted human potential. Kwame Cannon, they believe, has been rehabilitated and can help others to stay away from a life of crime.

Here is an excerpt from an open letter written to young people from Kwame Cannon:

"...Sure, life out there can seem unfair at times, here in prison nothing seems fair... Does this sound like the way you would like to live your life? It's so easy to make the same

mistakes I did, but here are a few tips on how to avoid falling into the same trap I did.

Always remember this, 'For every action there is a reaction.' What I am saying is, learn to take responsibilities for your actions...

Trust me, it's not worth it! I've been living in here more than ten years and every night, I lay in my bed thinking about how my life could have been different. It hurts, but I can't blame anyone but myself. Your life doesn't have to be like this, set goals for yourselves and always, think before you act."

(Note: If you would like to write Governor Jim Hunt on behalf of Kwame Cannon, write State Capital, 116 W. Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27603 or Fax (919) 715-3175.

tain issues you could be putting your life on the line. I've been thinking readers. I've come to the conclusion that with every Concrete Jungle I write, I may be taking seconds, minutes, and perhaps days off of my own life. In thinking back over the past several months, I've done quite a bit of name calling, finger pointing, etc. I've made ill reference to several groups, and individuals.

I've basically commented on or verbally chastised more people than you can shake a stick at. My only saving grace is that The Journal is a small, weekly, community newspaper. After all, The Journal is only read by thousands of people in the

U.S. and abroad. Being the small town, cub reporter, little known journalist that I am, I shouldn't even consider fearing repercussions from enraged readers... right? Okay, so maybe I should, but I won't because telling the story the way my eyes see it is my style.

As human beings we are promised only two things, life and death. If having the courage to inform people (especially my people) of what they need to know makes someone uncomfortable, so be it. Whether my train outta this game called life is coming today or tomorrow, I will go with my truth in my heart and mind. What about you?