

EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Second Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor:

Watch out all persons with disabilities who rent in the state of Oregon. If you have poor living conditions because of a negligent landlord and take it to court using the first Amendment of the Constitution to defend your tenant rights, the chances that your rights will be denied are 99%. I am a physically disabled person and I can attest to this, based on my recent devastating personal experience which began October 31, 1996 continuing to this day in 1997.

Why was I denied my rights under the First Amendment of the Constitution in Portland, Oregon on October 31, 1996? This happened in Judge Mary Overgaard's court, when my landlord, Mr. Michael J. Penney was petitioning to evict me without cause. The Judge would not allow testimony about my disabilities; my speech impediment, my hearing deficits, my eating requirements nor accept all of the defendant's exhibits in my behalf.

I lived twenty years in the same apartment, yet without a working stove (shut off at the fuse box by the Fire Department) for three months. I have friends who can verify this. I am extremely ataxic with descending neuropathy causing me to sometimes choke when eating and I require special food preparations.

Is this why my landlord refused to put a working stove in my apartment for three months? Or is it my speech and hearing impediment caused by nerve damage the reason Judge Overgaard did not want to listen to my testimony?

I call the Oregon State appeals

Clerk in Salem weekly (1-503-986-5555 ext 3) just to check on my court case (CA A 95188) to find out what the final court judgment costs will be. Since I have no money and no means to pay the court. I am afraid that the Sheriff can come and seize what little property that I have even to the extent of beating me.

Before I became physically handicapped, I can honestly state that I created 100,s of businesses and 1,000,s of jobs in Portland, when I helped start the Portland Saturday Market. Little does this matter now.

I am lucky that I have found a place with a friend (on a month to month basis) so at least I am not on the streets.

I do not want to impose on my friend, however I do not know if and when I will ever be able to find another safe place to live. I may never feel safe no matter where I live. I left my safe neighborhood of 20 years, which protected me from physical and mental abuse.

Though the courts have thrown me out into the streets, I will never give up on the fight for the rights of disabled and physically challenged persons to live in a safe environment.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. Any response can be directed to:

Former State Senator: Mr. Robert W. Boyer
King Neighborhood Facility Coordinator
Portland Public Schools
4815 NE 7th
Portland, OR 97211
(503) 916-5835

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Civil Rights Journal Government, Poverty And Cities

Ever since I read William Julius Wilson's book, when Work Disappears, I've been thinking about how government policies, both intentionally and non-intentionally, have played a part in many of the problems that our urban communities face and are now held responsible for. A recent article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer also pointed that out, but shows an opportunity to turn one past government mistake into a positive, if only the opportunity is used while the proverbial window is open.

Wilson's book points out how government housing policies after World War II shut out blacks, who found it impossible to move to the segregated suburbs, where federal housing loans were available. Mortgage capital was not made available to the inner cities, where blacks could live, but government dollars did support the building of large develop-

ments of suburban tract houses. Meanwhile, federal dollars supported the building of highways and transportation systems to the suburbs while they destroyed black communities by building these highways through the middle of city commercial and residential areas. Local governments subsidized the suburbs with new water and sewage systems, quality schools and economic development monies for businesses relocating to the suburbs.

Federal housing laws thwarted the maintenance and/or development of viable city communities, so that public housing became an institution which isolated families by race and class, Wilson contends. Thus, they, too, have responsibility for the jobless urban ghettos which many large cities now must deal with.

All of this has been on my mind during the recent public debates about the welfare system and the need to

"end welfare as we know it." Indeed, the irony of the formal name of the law which changed the welfare system, The Personal Responsibility Act has not escaped me. While I believe that each individual must take responsibility for himself or herself and their family, I know that many poor people are poor not because they are not hard-working, but because of government policies and economic conditions for which they have no responsibility.

All of this has been in my mind as I hear the poor -- all the poor, working or not -- increasingly being demonized in the public debate. As I listened to the debate on the new tax changes earlier this summer, I have heard it said over and over again that poor working people who pay no income tax because of their low incomes, but who do pay payroll taxes and sales taxes and real estate taxes, should not be able to receive the tax credits for

their children that the rest of us will. Somehow it feels a little like robbing the poor to feed the poor to me.

The sign of hope in all of this is buried in the new tax laws which virtually repeal capital gains taxes on the sale of personal homes. While this does discriminate against the poor, most of whom never have the opportunity to purchase a home, it may have a helpful impact on the cities, many of whom are struggling with the abandonment of the middle class.

This provision is due to the research and hard work of Thomas Bier, the head of the housing policy research center at Cleveland State University, who had examined the impact of the 1951 tax law which in effect forced homeowners to buy more expensive housing or pay federal taxes on the difference. This single federal policy meant that inner cities had no where to go but down.

p e r s p e c t i v e s A Dream Deferred Or A Dream Inferred



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Declaring a racial "Apocalypse Now" in his inimicable style of social metaphor and snappy innuendo, the Rev. Jesse Jackson led his followers across the Rubicon last Thursday (The Golden State Bridge). This was the high-point of a long and bitter protest against California's Proposition 209, the law that eliminated race and sex in hiring, education and contracting (but not age or disability or veteran status).

It is an ironic coincidence that these times mark the recent death of the black administrative assistant who coined the phrase "Affirmative Action" while serving in the office of President Lyndon Johnson. Now, the equally maligned or honored phrase is a call

to war among various governmental, educational, political and

legal groups. A long, bitter and divisive struggle looms ahead for this state.

Republican Gov. Pete Wilson has filed a lawsuit in superior Court that seeks, ultimately, a state appellate court ruling declaring all five categories of state affirmative action laws unconstitutional so that they can be removed from the statutes. This includes the three preference cited earlier as 'remaining on the books: Age, disability and veteran status. The law abolished only programs benefiting women and minorities.

A Portland Observer reader in The Dalles, Oregon who listens to "Radio KGO, San Francisco which comes in clearly after the sun goes down", says that his favorite commentator has compared the dismantling of Affirmative Action programs to the dynamiting of the high-rise structures which shelter so many black families around the country. It was suggested that in neither case is there provided - or indeed intended - adequate preparation for the social disruption that necessarily must ensue.

It should be stated that the ban does not apply to private corporations or other nongovernment groups, nor to federal affirmative ac-

tion programs - or get this! - to state programs needed to maintain eligibility for federal aid. The method in this ambiguous madness is quite obvious. Many groups of contractors, public school and university teachers and similar 'special' groups had enough weight in the California State legislature to be darn sure their "Affirmative Action" monies were protected.

This Proposition 209 went into effect Thursday, August 28 but the American Civil Liberties Union plans an appeal to the Supreme Court in an attempt to stop the law - this after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied an attempt to block the law on Tuesday. There possibly (and hopefully) will be time for a successful turn-around before too much damage is done. State and county officials forecast a long and typical bureaucratic delay in dismantling the many programs.

The smiling, happy face of Ward Connerly is being seen all over the television screen. He is the African American member of the California board of Regents whose vote was decisive in ending Affirmative Action in California Universities. The consequences have been disastrous

with minority enrollment in some fields like law and science dropping catastrophically for blacks, hispanics and women.

Mr Connerly, the sharp businessman he has always been, has launched a new venture which already promises to be quite profitable. Perhaps even more so than the "contract preference - affirmative action" enterprises that made him a wealthy man. His new, perfectly-timed operation is the "American Civil Rights Institute" and is guaranteed to bring in big bucks from Industry, Chambers of Commerce, and 'right Wing' organizations of all kinds.

Semantics and other language barriers may stand in the way of an early implementation of this racially and socially divisive law; what is a "race conscious or gender conscious preference."

Many officials see long (and expensive) legal struggles ahead. Also to be kept in mind is the fact that many state governments across the land are watching this drama. There are other governors like Pete Wilson who would like to go down in racist history as blocking a doorway of opportunity like the notorious pair, Governors Faubus and Wallace.

To Be Equal

currred and kept silent.

But the Louima case does come against a particular backdrop in New York City: for one thing, there have been several recent killings of black and Hispanic men--innocent of any crime--by white police officers under controversial circumstances. For another, according to one news report, the city government paid at least \$22 million in 1996 alone to settle claims of brutality against the police department.

And the Louima case fits a larger national pattern.

That pattern includes the killing and beating of black and Hispanic men at the hands of white police officers under questionable circumstances; the police use of traffic laws to arbitrarily stop black and Hispanic drivers on city streets and highways because their skin color "justifies" their being suspected of crime; and the "routine" disrespect on the street, in their homes and at the station house people of color receive at the hands of too many white police officers.

Something must be done--and done quickly--at the local, state and federal level.

One way to start is for President Clinton's newly established commission on race relations to take up the issue of police abuse of civilian rights.

No Justice, No Peace

that both government agencies and community institutions, while in many instances distrustful of one another, seem to be working toward the same ends and reinforcing each other's efforts."

It is that still-fledgling combination of individual and community initiative along with solid police work and appropriate government support that local, state and federal agencies as well as community organizations must work to support.

That's why Dennis M. Walcott, president of our New York Urban League affiliate, co-chairs the C.P.R. initiative--the initials stand for "Courtesy, Professionalism, Respect--Police Commissioner Safir developed when he was appointed. African Americans, whether US-born, or from Haiti or elsewhere in the Diaspora, have as great a vested interest in an effective police force as anyone, for they know all too clearly the need law-abiding citizens have of police committed to their protection.

But they also know that a mutual commitment to justice--and to courtesy, professionalism and respect--are vitally necessary parts of any true program of crime reduction.

Without it, there will be no peace.