

# EDITORIAL

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## The Portland Observer

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Jackson Speaks to Farrakhan

"He is strong and vibrant" As Nation of Islam officials held a news conference here to dispel media reports the Nation of Islam leader Minister Louis Farrakhan was "gravely ill," the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, talked with the Muslim leader via telephone from Washington, D.C.

Jackson, who is preparing for a Southern Crusade throughout the state of Mississippi, released the following statement regarding their conversation:

"I talked with Minister Farrakhan

and his voice was vibrant and strong," Jackson said. "He shared with me that he had a virus attack and that his doctor could not very well explain what it was; but that it is not related to his recovering tate condition.

"He indicated that he had indeed lost 20 pounds rather quickly and that it had indeed caused people throughout the world some concern. But I am glad to say that thanks to God he is now on the mend again. He sounded very good and very strong. We had prayer and we will talk again soon."

Oh, you mean THAT Clinton. I thought you meant George Clinton. Yeah, I guess he is kinda wild.



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## Strengthening Bonds of Trust

By HUGH B. PRICE  
PRESIDENT  
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

Public safety and civil liberty can peacefully co-exist in America's black and Hispanic communities.

Not only can they co-exist; they must co-exist if the social peace of American society is to be preserved.

That is why in recent weeks a national movement involving many black and Hispanic leadership organizations, other civil rights groups, and ordinary citizens has coalesced to stop the "racial profiling," low-grade abuse-and unjustified violence-the law-abiding among America's people of color too often endure from some white police officers.

The immediate causes are the horrific police shooting deaths of two African Americans and a West African immigrant from Guinea-in, respectively, Riverside, CA, in Pittsburgh, PA, and in New York City-which have occurred since December.

But it will not do to pretend these are "isolated" incidents. In fact the issue of police misconduct has been simmering for years among Asian-Americans, African Americans and Hispanic Americans. It can no longer be ignored.

That point was expressed in varying words, but with equally impressive passion by civil rights leaders representing the African-American,

Jewish, Asian and Hispanic communities of America, as well as prominent business persons and other influential figures at a news conference the National Urban League held recently in Washington. Our purpose was to support the effective policing of black and Hispanic neighborhoods and the protection of its residents-and to condemn the pernicious idea some seem to favor that it's a fair trade if we people of color give up some of our civil liberties in order to produce the sharp declines in crime American society is enjoying.

Instead, we urged President Clinton to become directly involved in resolving these issues and defusing this crisis.

In his March 13 weekly radio address the President responded to the words of our partners and the voices rising from all parts of the nation, and to an open letter the National Urban League had sent him proposing specific action.

The President promised, among other things, that the Justice Department will vigorously investigate and prosecute law enforcement officials who are suspected of excessive use of force or outright brutality.

He said that Attorney General Janet Reno will hold hearings around the country to examine how proven crime-reduction methods which do not compromise civil liberties can be successfully implemented in other

communities.

And he added that the federal government will help fund efforts to make police forces more racially and ethnically diverse and better trained and educated.

These initiatives represent an encouraging start. Some are contained in the Administration's \$1.3-billion 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Initiative he said he will soon send to Congress.

We are encouraged by them, and by Mr. Clinton's stated determination to "strengthen the bond of trust between police officers and the communities they serve... to build bonds of understanding and trust between police and citizens."

However, for all the good dedicated police officers, often working with dedicated community activists, have done to reduce crime, much work on "building trust" remains to be done at the state and local levels.

That was dramatically underscored by the response of Jim Pasco, the executive director of the National Fraternal Order of Police, to a Newsday reporter's inquiry about the controversy.

"I'm not sure we have to do anything with respect to our relations with members of these communities," Mr. Pasco is quoted as saying, "but it's clear we have a problem with leaders of their organizations. A few anecdotes isn't a trend it's an illusion."

That's the kind of comment many

southern law officials made in the 1960s when civil rights demonstrations started up in their communities- to their later regret.

The stories of abusive encounters with police which have poured forth from ordinary citizens in recent weeks are not "illusions," as more whites themselves are seeing and saying.

Richard Cohen, a Washington Post columnist, wrote recently that "When blacks or Hispanics are disproportionately stopped, it defies logic to claim that it's for any reason other than race or ethnicity. Cops who deny it are profiling in more ways than one. They think we're all dumb." The issue of police misconduct is not going to go away, and its political ramifications, in New Jersey, New York City, Pittsburgh, Riverside, California and elsewhere intensify with each passing day.

"You grow up as a black person in the United States, you're used to unequal justice" Dr. Elsie Scott, a top official of the National Organization for Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), told a New York times reporter recently.

Dr. Scott, a former New York City deputy police commissioner, knows the reality of policing and the sentiments of America's citizens as well as anyone. Her point in saying that was the same as ours in writing our letter to the President:

It was to warn that America must make that truism obsolete.

## A New Verse Of An Old Song: Blaming The Victim

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

If I ever heard a story where the victim is blamed, this is it. It just makes you want to cry or curse or shake your head. It's the story of Tabitha Walrond of New York City.

Tabitha was a poor, not well-educated, 19 year-old single, new mother whose son was born in June, 1997. Seven weeks later little Tyler Isaac Walrond died in his mother's arms of malnutrition. Tabitha, knowing that breastmilk was better for her newborn than infant formula, had chosen to breast feed little Tyler, nursing him faithfully but not realizing that her breast milk supply was inadequate until it was too late.

Tyler's death could have been prevented had he received routine pediatric check-ups, but although Tyler was entitled to be covered by Medicaid, Tabitha's efforts to have him enrolled were delayed or turned down. It was months after his death that Tyler's Medicaid cards and HMO membership arrived in the mail.

Tyler's death is a tragedy for his mother, who even now is haunted by her son's memory. But, now Tabitha is going on trial, charged with recklessly causing Tyler's death by failing to nourish him adequately and by failing to get him medical attention. If convicted, she could receive 15 years in prison.

Urged on by Tyler's father, the Bronx District Attorney has prosecuted Tabitha, the second such case in New York in the past year. Last spring another young, poor mother who had been breast-feeding her daughter was accused of homicide in the death of her six week old child. She had taken her daughter to an outpatient clinic, but had been turned away for lack of Medicaid coverage or the \$25 fee. Her charges were later dropped when the District Attorney heard from lactation experts.

Such experts point out that young, inexperienced mothers, who see their babies every day, typically fail to recognize the weight loss of their child until it is pointed out by a doctor. For this reason, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that breast-feeding newborns be checked after they have been home for 48 hours and typically newborns are scheduled for a check-up by a doctor at 2 weeks of age.

Many assume that nursing comes naturally to mothers, but problems do sometimes occur. In recent years there have been several other cases across the nation where breast-feeding infants have died or fallen ill from malnutrition. One child, the son of a nurse and a minister, died in Colorado in 1995. A Cincinnati, OH baby had a leg amputated and a Norfolk, VA child suffered permanent brain damage. In none of these cases did the parents face criminal charges. In none

of these cases were the parents poor.

The third layer of tragedy in this case is that Tabitha began her quest to get her unborn child enrolled in Medicaid when she was only four months pregnant. But New York's Medicaid computer system kept rejecting the request, classifying the child's eligibility as "pending." Tabitha says that her caseworker told

her that the baby's coverage would start after his Social Security card and birth certificate were issued. And even when the new mother brought her son to her own postpartum checkup and her doctor noticed that Tyler seemed underweight, the HMO still did not treat him. Her doctors seemed to miss several other signs that she might have problems in breast-feed-

ing, including a troubled childbirth and prior breast reduction surgery. If anyone should be prosecuted for the death of Tyler Isaac Walrond, it is the health care system which denied a newborn the health care to which he was legally and morally entitled. To prosecute his mother is just plain wrong. It is truly a case of the state blaming the victim instead of itself.



Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day You love the direction your

career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

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