

# EDITORIAL

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## The Portland Observer

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Letter To The Editor

To: Multnomah County Commissioners

RE: Testimony on the Bybee Lake Jail "Hearing"

I see no reason to take time off from work to participate in this board meeting about the jail. It's a waste of my time. Let me explain why.

As you preside over this kangaroo "hearing", please be mindful that no amount of professional spin-doctoring will repair the damage you've caused to the County Commission as a public institution. Last September, the Commission threw out all eight sites selected by a Citizens Siting Advisory Committee (the SAC), and unilaterally chose a completely new and smaller site at Bybee Lake for the jail. By this action, the County perverted, subverted and destroyed the public involvement process.

Eight months have now passed, and the Commission has stubbornly refused to look at any of the numerous, available and more suitable sites of this size, in spite of repeated urgings from citizens and community groups. The Commission also has adamantly refused to hold a public hearing in the St. Johns neighborhood, despite many requests, including a resolution from the County's own citizen involvement Committee (sic). Further, the Commission failed to reach out to include numerous non-English speaking citizens in St. Johns.

The public can only conclude that the County's "public involvement process" is a sham—a shameful rubber stamp to get "public approval" for the County's done deals. The litany of the Commission's abuse of the public involvement process extends beyond this jail. For example, the Commission made a mockery of meaningful public involvement for the parole of-

office and the health clinic in North Portland. The pattern is well established and deeply entrenched throughout the County. The Commission may find this expedient, but it's a shortcut that will fail in the long run. Despite appearances, no real decision is being made today. Today's "hearing" merely formalizes a decision made long ago. As one neighbor recently put it, "this reminds me too much of what it was like to grow up as a child in Hamburg, Germany, during the 1930's under Hitler". One of history's biggest lessons is that citizens must refuse to participate in a dishonorable and nefarious system; and they must refuse to trample and destroy the tenets of a free and democratic society. That lesson should be applied to the Commission's imperial rule and totalitarian practices.

As for the Bybee Lake, this is only the beginning of a long, protracted battle. This is a battle to save the environment and to preserve it for the wild-life and for future generations of urban dwellers, especially those who cannot get to the mountains or coast. This is also a battle to prevent the Port of Portland from reaping profits at the expense of the environment and the livability of our communities. The County has foolishly chosen a long, bumpy road to site this jail complex at Bybee Lake. There are many other sites where you would have broken ground by now. Unfortunately, when the Bybee Lake Jail site is ultimately defeated, as it most certainly will be, the County will be left holding the bag, and then what? You'll have only yourselves to blame. Citizens have bent over backwards to advise and assist the County, all in good faith, but to no avail. To add insult to injury, and as a

# America: A Nation In Denial

By Ron Daniels

The tragic assault on the Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado by two hate filled students has sent shock waves throughout this nation. Twelve students and a teacher were gunned down by two members of a clique of disgruntled and alienated teenagers called the "Trench Coat Mafia." Then the killers committed suicide. The terrible toll from this violent assault was fifteen dead, scores wounded and hundreds scarred, some perhaps permanently, by the psychological trauma of being unwilling witnesses to an unthinkable act of human rage. This unconscionable act did not take place in one of America's desolate inner-city ghettos, or in a barren barrio or wretched reservation, this

deliberate crime against humanity was committed in the "safe" and "secure" environment of an affluent suburban neighborhood.

Therefore, the question troubling the well healed citizens of Littleton and much of middle America, is how could this tragedy take place in "our" neighborhood(s)? After all, the residents of the Littletons of this country, fled the inner-cities seeking the comfort, quietude and security of suburbia. But herein lies the key to understanding why such a tragedy could shatter the illusion of safety/security for the prosperous suburban havens in this nation. There is no hiding place from the ills and injustices of this nation. America's steadfast refusal to face and own up to the many maladies which plague this society,

America's denial of its sickness and sins is leading to fatal consequences like the heinous slaughter in Littleton.

America is in denial about the proclivity for violence ingrained in the culture of this nation and the corrosive effects of violence on civil society. The United States is awash in guns—little guns, medium sized guns, big guns, automatic, semi-automatic guns. In the name of the constitutionally guaranteed "right to bear arms," ordinary citizens, including young people, are storing arsenals and walking and riding through the streets of America packing potent "pieces," guns, some of which are only suited for warfare. America has the highest per capita rate of deaths from guns of any of the industrial democracies in the world.

Violence fills the "flicks" we view for entertainment. Cartoons are funny, but many of them are violent, very violent. And, all one need do today to work off a little frustration is play your favorite video game where you can rack-up a ton of kills to salve your emotions. America is in denial about its violent nature.

America is in denial about the existence and danger of violence prone, hate groups, militias and neo-fascist organizations in this country. When the federal building in Oklahoma City was decimated by a devastating bomb blast leaving massive human carnage in its wake, the word went out to scour the land for some "middle eastern looking" terrorists. The terror brewing from within was not self evident to a nation which is also in denial about racism, sexism, anti-Semitism and homophobia.

## The Truth is Out

By Hugh B. Price  
President, National Urban League

The truth about what far too many African Americans and Hispanic Americans endure from the small but significant number of police officers who are a disgrace to their uniforms is pouring forth now across the country.

In New Jersey, Governor Christine Todd Whitman and her Attorney General said that a new study proves that "racial profiling" by New Jersey state troopers has resulted in their stopping a wildly disproportionate number of black and Hispanic motorists on the state's highways. The numbers are astonishing: Blacks made up 27 percent of those stopped, Hispanic Americans, 7 percent, and whites, 59 percent.

But 53 percent of those whose cars were searched were black and 24 percent were Hispanic. Only 21 percent of those whose cars were searched were white.

The study also found that 62 percent of those the state police arrested were black and 33 percent were white. The percent of Hispanics arrested was less than six percent.

That report was released one day after state officials indicted two New Jersey state troopers for falsifying documents to make it appear that some of the black motorists they had stopped were white.

As she has in the past, Governor Whitman condemned racial profiling, which she described as a "problem that is more complex and subtle than we first realized," and said the state would take both immediate and long-term steps to eliminate it. We applaud her pledge.

And we agree with the Reverend Reginald Jackson, head of The Black Ministers Council of New Jersey, that now "comes the hard and difficult part, and that is the process of ending racial profiling."

Lest anyone think otherwise, it isn't just hip hop-clad dudes who are subjected to this.

An article this week in Crain's New York Business recounted the experiences of about twenty black business executives who'd been stopped and questioned by police while walking in their suburban neighborhoods or pulled over by police while driving their late-model cars in the city or suburbs.

"No matter what level of success you've achieved," one of those

further betrayal of the public trust, the Commission now wants to add a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility plus a mental health facility at the Bybee Lake site, again without meaningful public involvement. Fortunately, our constitution provides a system of checks and balances that gives citizens recourse to the courts (fair and impartial) and the ballot box. The Commission leaves us no alternatives. That is the civics lesson we've learned from the Commission. So, please don't bother to ask good, honest, and conscientious citizens to participate any more in these sham hearings and committees. We'll see you in court and we hope to see you out of office, hopefully very soon.

Kevin P. O'Sullivan

interviewed, a senior marketing executive for a record company, said, "every black man is exposed to these kinds of indecencies."

It's not only black men, of course, as testimony given by black and Hispanic men and women at a special hearing of the New Jersey state legislature's Black and Latino Caucus has underscored.

Police practices which encourage racial profiling must be rooted out. The cost of the pain and humiliation, and the threat to the safety of law-abiding citizens it causes is more than people of color should have to bear—and more than a nation dedicated to equality should tolerate.

The meetings held by the Police Executive Research Forum in Washington involving police chiefs, representatives of civil rights and civil liberties groups, and Attorney General Janet Reno

and her aides are a sign that some progressive movement is occurring.

The Attorney General is right to urge police departments to collect racial data on traffic stops. Some departments, such as the San Diego police force, have begun to do this.

Also, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., is right to re-introduce in the Congress legislation requiring the Justice Department itself to collect data on traffic stops by local police. The Attorney General should support it, as she did last year. The effort to reduce the tension and distrust—yes, justified—communities of color have learned to have for the police deserves it.

This is not being "anti-police." Blacks and Hispanics need no lectures on the value of police protection.

That was made apparent—again—in tragic fashion earlier this month when Orange, N.J. Police

Officer Joyce A. Carnegie was gunned down by a criminal she was trying to apprehend.

Her death brought an outpouring of grief and tribute not only from other police officers, but from many people in the predominantly black neighborhood she patrolled. They respected her—because she showed that she respected them. She showed that she was there to protect and serve.

That is the responsibility of the police. If law-abiding civilians are to have respect for the law, that must be the code of conduct all police officers practice, regardless of the race, ethnicity or skin color of the Law-abiding citizens they encounter.

Any other attitude presents a clear and present danger to the civil liberties of all, not just a particular group, of American citizens.

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