



# Opinion

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## State rights over human rights

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

African Americans have had to be at least bi-cultural and bi-lingual since our very earliest days on this continent. W.E.B. DuBois, the African American scholar referred this "twoness" in his writings at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to survive in a hostile environment we have had to learn how to "read" between the lines" and to translate the code words, which seemed being on the surface, but meant life and sometimes death in everyday life. Those who misread or ignored the true meaning of words had shots ring through their homes at night or were found hanging on a tree. It was just that serious.

So when an African American hears George W. Bush or John McCain talk about "states' rights" when it comes to the controversy around the state flag of South Carolina, our antennas go up and our code-reading books come out. The term states' rights was used by racist governors of the South to oppose desegregation of schools and public facilities throughout the 1950's and 60's. They claimed that

states had the right to determine whether blacks could be educated with whites or whether we could sit down on a bus or at a lunch counter. It was code language for white supremacy as usual. It was code language then and it is code language now.

And when white South Carolinians argue that using the confederate flag as the state flag is just a way of honoring their heritage, we understand that it is just as much about honoring those days when blacks were enslaved as it is about honoring those who fought in the Civil War. For we know very well what the meaning of the confederate flag was then and what it means now.

Just as troubling as the code language used by both of these Republican candidates the waffling by Senator McCain on this issue. "First you say you do and then you don't" might work for song lyrics, but it doesn't work in presidential politics. Coupled with the fact that his South Carolina office shares space with the Southern Heritage Association, a vocal proponent for saving the confederate flag, McCain's words and actions tell African Americans not

only in South Carolina but across the nation that he supports racist symbols and those who would use them.

The fact of the matter is that the confederate flag was not adopted as the official state flag of South Carolina until a century after the Civil War and in the midst of the tremendous struggles of the civil rights movement. Similarly, the inclusion of the confederate flag in the state flag of Georgia did not occur until the 1950's. It was as much a reaction of those who were determined that the status quo of the old South would remain as it was to honor the war dead.

The fact of the matter is that the confederate flag is an archaic cultural symbol of white supremacy and black oppression which should no longer be a public symbol for the whole society. That is true in South Carolina; that is true in Georgia. We can't go into a new millennium carrying the old cultural and racist baggage. If Georgia and South Carolina really want to be symbols of the new South, a place of economic development and domestic tranquility, then they must put aside their old ways. South Carolina has already lost \$50 million in conventions, the long-term economic and moral impact will be even greater.

Fifty thousand people marched in South Carolina on Martin Luther King's birthday to just that, the largest march in the state's history. And it was an integrated march, showing that white Americans agree that the confederate flag must go. Now it's up to the leaders in South Carolina — and the leaders of the Republican party, who say they want to reach out to people of color — to act. Those of us who know how to read code word language are listening.

## Letter to the Editor

I am writing on behalf of the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods. We are surprised, concerned and distressed over the recent actions of the Portland Police Bureau about the Safeway Store located on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard & Ainsworth Street.

The Portland Police Bureau has recommended to the Bureau of Licenses that Safeway's application to renew their OLCC package store license for the MLK store be Denied. The denial is based on the fact that the store has failed police decoy stings. We have learned that the Bureau of Licenses supports this recommendation.

Officials from Safeway have maintained an open and ongoing dialogue with the Northeast community about this issue over the past year. We are aware that the loss of Safeway's OLCC package store license may, in all probability, result in the closure of the store.

You and I both know that if a new licensee were applying for a package store license in this neighborhood, the Police would have attended one (or more) of our neighborhood meetings to ask us our opinion. The police would have wanted to know if we would be opposed to having another package store in this area. Where was the Police Department when they made the decision to oppose the renewal of Safeway's license? No one from the City of Portland asked us how we felt — and we are the ones who depend and rely on Safeway! There are no other major grocers within miles of this store — each of the other grocers abandoned our community years ago. If the Portland Police and the Portland Bureau of Licenses are intent on closing our Safeway, what other grocer would even consider replacing them?

We are approximately 30,000 strong. We live in, and many of us work in, the area this store serves. What about our opinions, our thoughts, our input? It seems no one from the City cared enough to ask. And, that is not right.

This store is not perceived by our neighborhood as a problem; we don't believe this store intentionally sells alcohol to minors. We know the management of this store, the employees and we appreciate the manner in which they continue to approach this issue.

Mayor Katz, our neighborhood has been encouraging Safeway to remodel our store — not close it.

Do you have any idea of the impact the closure of our Safeway would have on this community? Let me tell you, it would be devastation.

Neighbors without cars, those who walk to the store, would have an immediate and serious problem. The Seniors who rely on this store would be severely impacted. There are many of us who rely on the pharmacy at this store. Our Safeway is an important part of this neighborhood.

Think of the message the closing of this store will send to the developers that you, the City and the neighborhood are talking to — to encourage them to build new businesses in this community — "A national company closes its doors and leaves the community because the City of Portland decided to not renew their OLCC license."

Where is the problem? Who is Safeway causing problems for? If it's not the neighbors who live here, if it's not the business owners and it's Not the employees who work at the store, who is Safeway hurting?

This situation leads me to a question. Have the police captured "real" minors attempting to buy alcohol at Safeway — or any other retailer? I think you and I both know the answer to that.

Mayor, the loss of Safeway is a serious issue to this community. The fact that the Police and the Bureau of Licenses haven't even talked to Safeway to see what steps they've taken or what they've done to prevent sales to minors says a lot in itself.

Members of our community — who are shoppers and voters — would encourage you and other members of the Portland City Council to attend one of our neighborhood meetings to hear firsthand our support for the renewal of Safeway's license.

Sincerely,  
Willie Brown, president, Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods Association

Have your opinions heard in  
The Portland Observer

## Churches still burning, hatred still smoldering

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

You can't pick up your local newspaper and read about them any longer or turn on your television set and see stories about them, but churches in America are still burning. Churches are still being set on fire by arsonists bent on terrorizing African Americans, and increasingly, Hispanics and those who worship in multi-racial churches. These racist domestic terrorists have focused on starting a racial holy war which they believe will happen in 2000.

And if this January is like those in the past five years or so, while most of us are pausing to remember the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the racists will be setting fire to churches as their own personal protest of the holiday. Indeed, in 1999 there were 9 such burnings within a week of the King holiday and in 1998 there were 14, according to the list of the National Coalition for Burned Churches. What a horrible irony that on the birthday of a man of God, houses of God are burned.

The National Coalition is a coalition of burned church victims whose places of worship have been burned or firebombed. Its mission is to act as an advocate for these churches and to provide technical assistance to them as they try to re-build not only their church buildings, but the lives of the congregation.

At its recent conference in Texas, where large numbers of church arsons are now taking place, the National Coalition brought church leaders together with government officials, volunteers who have helped in the rebuilding efforts and those who are working to stop the burnings of churches.

In spite of all of this, we still do not have a federal hate crimes bill. Once again, it died in Congress last year and must be re-introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in this new session.

Sadly for our nation, racism and hate seem to be following us into the new century and the new millennium. Sadly for us, too, we keep treating it as if we just ignore it, it will just go away. That treatment plan doesn't work for illnesses of the body and it won't work for this illness of the soul. Meanwhile, I pray that no churches will burn and none of our African American institutions will be targeted. And I pray for a hate crimes bill and not a racial holy war in this year in which we mark the 2,000<sup>th</sup> birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., the Prince of Peace and champion of love.

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 Mutual 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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