



Opinion



Have a safe
and happy
St. Patrick's Day

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No Justice, No Peace

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's difficult for many Americans to believe the charge of police misconduct, which have swirled around in cities across the nation for more than two decades. Instead, many have chosen to believe law enforcement officials who have vehemently denied such accusations not only in large cities like New York and Los Angeles but also in smaller ones like Pittsburgh and East Haven, CT. Now a scandal in the Los Angeles city police department based on the confession of a member of one of the plain clothes divisions of that force threatens the fiscal viability of that city and undermines the integrity of the entire force there.

When officer Rafael Perez was accused of stealing cocaine which had been confiscated from drug dealers, he began to talk to the Los Angeles District Attorney's department and the stories that he told now resulted in at least 70 Los Angeles police officers being investigated, dozens of criminal cases being thrown out because of police misconduct and hundreds of millions of dollars in suits against the city expected. What's more, as information has come out, it has shown that the L.A. police department officials covered up bad behavior of police officers, did not civilian complaints seriously and failed to take many steps which could have headed off this scandal.

As the story has been revealed, Officer Perez, who was part of an anti-gang division in one of the city

poorest neighborhoods, and his fellow officers were just as much of a gang as those they were policing. They had initiation rites and plaques celebrating the shooting and even the killing of victims. They beat prisoners, planted drugs and guns on them and sometimes shot and even killed them. They protected each other's illegal activities, with supervisors sometimes helping to plant or change evidence or to concoct protective stories after shooting. But as horrible as the activities of this unit of the L.A. police department were, just as troubling were the charges which have come out against the whole department. For instance, despite the U.S. Justice Department's repeated attempts to get it to computerize information about its officers since the Rodney King beating, it appears that much information about its officers are making decisions about promotions and assignments, they have done so without knowing about complaints officers and other problems with them. In addition, as Mayor Riordan has pushed to hire thousands of new police officers over the past few years, at least four officers were hired who had previous criminal records themselves, including one who had sold drugs as a juvenile and as involved in a "vehicle tampering" incident as an adult. The police department itself admits that this is a problem, which has not yet been solved.

The terrible irony is that Los Angeles black and Latino communities, who desperately wanted to see an end to gang violence of the 1990's, found

themselves in double jeopardy. They were now victims of police violence and police selling drugs as well. While some of the gangs were broken by police activity, at what price is the question that must hurt us.

Officer Rafael Perez's accusations of brutality and harassment, bribery, planting of evidence, framed suspects and even shooting unarmed men by Los Angeles Police officers has reverberated throughout the department.

The scandals of the L.A. police department have a broader meaning which must not be lost. All cities must take seriously civilian complaints against police officers. All police officers must understand that police brutality and harassment and cover-ups will mean the loss of jobs. All police departments must put in place ways of monitoring officers, and up-to-date, accurate record keeping about their officers. In addition, they must find ways to avoid hiring and to weed out officers with criminal and violent histories. Police departments across this nation must understand that Americans want safe streets, but not at the expense of constitutional rights and not through the use of unnecessary and illegal violence.

The reality is that unless every American believes that every police officer is treating all citizens justly and legally, then the moral authority and integrity of all police departments are threatened. Without that confidence of the people, the police become a force of occupation and the very foundations of our justice system will be shaken.

Cloning not the answer

BY DAVE BROWNLOW
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Recently, Oregon Health Science University proudly announced the birth of Tetra, their cloned monkey by the process of embryo splitting. Many hail it as an accelerated step to finding cures for diseases. However, we must consider how cloning animals is a threat to human life as it is a stepping stone to cloning humans. The Scottish scientist Ian Wilmut who cloned a sheep, named Dolly, told the Press Association of Britain, "It would be desperately sad if people started using this sort of technology with people."

But, this technology is already being desired and used. Some folks think that in the future there will be no need for sex. Matt Ridley, wrote in the November 8, 1999 edition of Time Magazine, "Many human beings, especially those who are rich, vain and ambitious, will be using test tubes — not just to get around infertility and the lack of suitable partners — but to clone themselves and tinker with their genes." Ursula Goodenough, a cell biologist at Washington University in St. Louis, joked with The New York Times, "There'll be no need for men." Lindsey Griffiths, in the Toronto Star wrote, "Sex will be for lust — babies will come from reproductive bank accounts." A team of South Korean scientists from Kyunghee University claimed to have cloned a human cell from an infertile woman which met with strong protest for developing human cells to create replacement organs.

A 1997 CNN poll in the U.S. found that 89% of those who responded believed that cloning humans was morally wrong, and 74% said that human cloning is against God's will. In spite of that, a team at the University of Wisconsin at Madison reported that it was able to grow unlimited amounts of embryonic stem cells — cells that are the parent cells of all tissues in the body — in the laboratory. And now the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has issued draft guidelines in favor of federal funding of research that requires the killing of human embryos for stem cell research. The scientists would be violating the January 1996 federal law that has banned federal funding of "research in which a human embryo or human embryos are destroyed, discarded, or knowingly subject to risk of injury or death greater than that allowed for fetuses in utero" under federal human subjects regulations. Experimentation on live human embryos is demeaning to human life and many embryos — small human beings — will be destroyed.

My main reason why cloning is unethical is that it will up the standard for "perfect" children. If there would be an option to produce children without medical problems, then those families who did have a handicapped child born to them would fall into social scorn. Already a recent survey by the Down Syndrome Association in the U.K. found that Down patients had experienced discrimination by health officials. They had been denied health care for hearing and sight, and even been tuned down for life saving heart surgery. Those who suffer from any disease should not be looking at the experimental use of embryos with hope but with fear. If one human can be designated expendable because he or she is small in size, then it's a short step to designate others as expendable for their weaknesses or deficiencies.

I sympathize with those who suffer from diseases, and I hope and pray for cures. But, I cannot abandon the defense of human life. Since Roe v. Wade, human life has been crushed and degraded, while "reproductive rights" have been elevated to the highest point of eminence. Over the cacophony of voices arguing over the value of life, we must remember that this is all about an assault on the most vulnerable — those who are too weak to defend themselves.

Concerned Women for America, with 600,000 members nationwide, is the largest public policy women's group in the United States. It supports the protection of all life from conception until natural death.

Vote 'No' on 81

Members of the Trust Juries Not Politicians Coalition converged on the Secretary of State's office today to submit voters' pamphlet statement urging a "no" vote on Constitutional Amendment 81 in time for the filing deadline for the May 16, 2000 primary.

"I got justice from a jury that spent three weeks hearing my case and three-and-a-half days considering the facts. A jury of 12 of my peers ruled in my favor—a verdict that is now under review by the State Supreme Court. I am a quadriplegic, I need 24-hour care, and I'm in this wheelchair for life. The jury helped me recover the costs for my three children and myself. Oregonians need this kind of case-by-case justice." — Linda McCathern, survivor and mother of three.

"Amending the Oregon Constitution to limit what a survivor may receive from a jury is irresponsible. Juries should decide the consequences for a drunk driver on a case-by-case basis. Politicians are ill prepared, without having heard the facts, to set limits on justice."

-Arwen Bird, volunteer, Survivors Advocating for an Effective System. "Too often, survivors of a brain injury need to recover damages through our civil justice system in order to pay for rehabilitation and long-term care. All these people ask is that their case be judged on the evidence brought forward at the time of the trial, not pre-determined by politicians who set arbitrary limits based on special interest lobbying. The backers of this constitutional Amendment will tell you that it's about controlling costs. But it is really about asking you to give away your constitutional rights to a jury trial in exchange for vague promises of future cost reduction." — Bill Olson, President, Brian Injury Association of Oregon.

"If this passes, defiant, reckless companies will not be held accountable for dangerous decisions that hurt the public, whether it's making cars with exploding gas tanks or garage doors without safety features to protect children, or it's an HMO withholding life-saving treatment. Insurance companies will bluster and fulminate as usual, saying this constitutional amendment is needed to bring down rates. This is untrue. Studies show that greedy insurance companies will not reduce premiums upon enactment of such laws." — Jason Reynolds, Director, Consumer League of Oregon.

"When you live long enough to be a senior citizen, you know people who have been victimized by a scam artist, defective products that can injure, bullying landlords or abusive care givers, and drunk drivers who hurt, maim and kill. Unfortunately, seniors are often the targets of the unscrupulous and the victims of the reckless. Right now, the Oregon Civil Justice System is the ultimate decision maker — 12 Oregon citizens, our neighbors and friends, rich and poor, seniors and non-seniors. Constitutional Amendment 81 would change all that. Oregonians must vote "no" on Constitutional Amendment 81." — George Starr, Former state legislator and volunteer for the Oregon State Council of Senior Citizens.

The Trust Juries Not Politicians Coalition is fighting for the most basic rights Oregonians possess the right to complete and impartial justice on a case-by-case basis from a jury of our peers. This broad-based coalition includes organizations that represent consumers, seniors, survivors, and working families.

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.

You have family behind you.

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