

Portland
Observer
Opinion

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Your shortcut to a better life

BY JOE KLOCK, SR.
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

We humans spend far too much of our time on this small planet searching for a quick fix of the problems that beset us — the ones that stand between the status quo and our individual concepts of Camelot. This popular, purposeless pursuit inspires us to buy lottery tickets, watch soap operas, follow the fad du jour, daydream, toss coins into fountains, besiege the Almighty with petitions, pop open another can of Bud Light, wish upon a star, pore through lists of missing heirs, and open urgent mail from Ed McMahon.

Although Creationists and believers in the Big-Bang Theory say "aye" to "aye" in few other areas, they agree that homo sapiens was the last arrival in the known Universe.

Thus, our earliest ancestors were provided with behavioral models in plant and animal life before, both for better and for worse, devising their own modus vivendi. From this decision evolved such human refinements as prejudice, nuclear warfare, drug addiction, politics and Howard Stern. From both plants and animals, they could have learned (and we still can) to change whatever we can, accept what we can't change and play the cards we're dealt to the best of our abilities.

When you think of the physical handicaps and environmental challenges facing all other living things on earth, it's hard not to admire the pluck, ingenuity and persistence that has enabled them to survive and prosper. And it's equally difficult to feel sorry for ourselves, given our free wills and incredibly powerful minds, even though Eve and the snake (or some unfavorable by-product of the first bomb) deprived us of an Eden-like existence.

We're still hell-and-gone better off than the cockroaches that were here before the likes of us and will almost certainly be crawling about when future archeologists dig up our civilization.

If we humans are destined to be the dinosaurs of the future, it's because we didn't learn the lessons of survival placed here before our time, either by the hand of God or fallout from a long-ago explosion. So how does this philosophy translate into rules for coping with fear, uncertainty, disappointment, PMS, bum luck, boorish bosses, domestic strife, bad genes, nasty neighborhoods and other invitations to a pity party?

Here's the how-to:
First of all, don't hesitate to ask yourself how you feel at any given moment. The easiest question might be: "Am I having fun right now?"

If the answer is NO, follow it up with this query: "Do I have any alternatives? Any doable choices? Any escape strategies that are not illegal, immoral, fattening or worsening of the status quo? If the answer is again NO, just shut the hell up and do what you've gotta do. It's just as simple as that. Moaning about what wasn't, what isn't and what won't ever be makes little more sense than fighting fire with gasoline or obesity with pecan pie.

If the answer is YES - i.e., that there IS something you can reasonably do to avoid or mitigate the problem, DO it without delay. Not necessarily (or likely) without some stress, self-doubt, uncertainty and sweaty palms, but with the assurance that you'll fare better stepping onto a road to change than wallowing in a cesspool of inertia.

(Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been.") Some of the hands you are dealt by fate are unavoidable and can't be folded or improved by selective discarding. Neither can they be wished away, gambled away or spirited away by prayer alone. In this last regard, it is well to note that winners in the game of life pray for a miracle after everything possible has been done, while losers do so before anything has been tried.

Are ya havin' any fun? If so, stay the course. If not, check out every possible, logical, workable, acceptable alternative...and when you find one, GO for it. If there is no discernable way out (or way up to a more comfortable level), bite the bullet and do as much as you can about what needs to be done. It may bring little or no light into the darkness or relief from the pain, but you'll feel better about yourself for having tried. Above all, knock off the bitching. But for the grace of God or the DNA in that Big Bang, you might be born a cockroach. Or, worse still, Howard Stern.

Lynching: the Federal Government's dirtiest racial secret

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Compulsive collector James Allen is causing quite a stir with his macabre one man exhibit in New York City of black lynching victims. The 68 gruesome pictures show black men and women being burned, dragged in chains, roasted alive, dismembered and bullet ridden while whites crack jokes and mug for the cameras. According to official NAACP figures, between 1890 and 1960, 5,200 blacks were burned, shot, and mutilated by lynch mobs. The horrid death toll is almost certainly higher since in many cases sheriffs and local officials didn't deem the murders or victims significant enough to report.

Allen's photo display and his book "Without Sanctuary" which presents a bigger array of macabre lynch photos has infuriated many blacks and whites. They rail at the barbarism and sadism of Southern white mobs. But their anger is misdirected. The real blame for the seven decades of racial bloodlust lies with the federal government.

Federal officials were well aware of lynch violence. The lynch murderers made no attempt to hide or mask their acts. They took out ads in newspapers, and circulated flyers announcing lynchings. They ignored the 1908 ban by the U.S. Postal Service on violent material in the mails and conducted a brisk trade in souvenir postcards and letters with snapshots of lynched victims. NAACP officials meticulously compiled photos of lynchings, collected witness statements from law enforcement and public officials, even the lynchers themselves, and promptly turned the incriminating documents over to federal officials. They took no action. The NAACP also relentlessly lobbied Congress and the White House to pass an anti-lynching law. They also ignored them. Every president from Theodore Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy refused to draft or vigorously support a federal law to end lynching. Nearly every attorney general refused to push for indictments against public officials or law enforcement officers complicit in lynch murders. FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover successfully manipulated Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Kennedy to prevent the FBI from direct investigation of lynchings. The Department of Justice seldom directed Hoover to conduct investigations.

Presidents, attorney generals, and federal officials wailed that their hands were tied because it was the job of the states to prosecute the lynch murderers. But they wouldn't. Less than one percent of the murderers were ever tried in state courts. Rather than risk alienating politically powerful Southern state officials and jeopardize votes and legislative support, they

rationalized their hands-off policy toward lynching with a narrow and rigid interpretation of the federalist doctrine of separation of state and national power. This was a face saving political cop-out. In many cases a bevy of Southern sheriffs, mayors, and municipal and state officials openly aided and abetted the lynch mobs. The Justice Department had two powerful legal statutes to go after them. The statutes authorized prosecutions of public officials and law enforcement officers who, acting under color of law, committed or conspired with others to commit acts of racial violence. They were based on the Fourteenth Amendment due process and equal protection clause. The statutes were expanded under Reconstruction-era civil rights laws passed in the 1870s to specifically punish racial attacks against blacks. They were repeatedly challenged by local and occasionally federal officials, as poorly worded, unconstitutional violations of states rights. Even though they remained on the federal books, federal officials rarely used them to prosecute lynch murders. By contrast the White House and Congress did not bat an eye in passing and enforcing legislation that widened the jurisdiction and broadened the power of the FBI and the Justice Department to prosecute crimes such as bank robbery, kidnapping, illegal weapons violations and carjacking. Congress and the White House made few claims that these laws violated states rights or infringed on the Constitution. The hideous legacy of the near century long hands off federal policy toward lynching is the current reluctance of federal officials to vigorously prosecute racially motivated hate crimes, let alone police violence, against blacks and Latinos. Federal officials still argue that it is the responsibility of local officials to prosecute these crimes. They will not intervene unless there is a compelling federal interest. Federal officials have never bothered to spell out what that means. But in practice, federal intervention in hate violence cases is almost always measured by the yardstick of political expediency. Attorney generals generally will not authorize investigations and prosecutions of police violence or racist terror acts unless civil disturbances occur in cities or following mass national protests. The beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers and the torture-beating of Abner Louima by New York police officers are textbook examples of this. It took riots and mass outrage for officials to prosecute the cops. Collector Allen deserves much praise for exposing the shame and disgrace of the American horror of lynching. The tragedy is that it's a shame and disgrace that presidents and Congress apparently never felt. And until federal officials publicly admit their complicity in lynch violence it will remain the federal government's dirtiest racial secret.

The
Portland
Observer

USPS 959-680
Established 1970

STAFF

EDITOR IN CHIEF,

PUBLISHER

Charles H. Washington

EDITOR

Larry J. Jackson, Sr.

BUSINESS MANAGER

Gary Ann Taylor

COPY EDITOR

Joy Ramos

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Shawn Strahan

4747 NE Martin Luther King,
Jr. Blvd.
Portland, OR 97211
503-288-0033
Fax 503-288-0015

e-mail
news@portlandobserver.com
subscription@portlandobserver.com
ads@portlandobserver.com

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Send address changes to
Portland Observer
PO Box 3137
Portland, OR 97208

Periodical Postage
paid in Portland, OR

Subscriptions are
\$60.00 per year

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