

# OPINION

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<p>POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208 Periodical Postage paid in Portland, OR. Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year 503-288-0033 • FAX 503-288-0015 • EMAIL: news@portlandobserver.com subscription@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com</p>		<p>DISTRIBUTION MANAGER Mark Washington</p>	<p>WRITER, PHOTOGRAPHER David Plechl</p>	<p>The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association • Serving Portland and Vancouver.</p>

## Gross Injustices Galvanized Human Rights Offensive

BY VICTOR E. BUKSBAZEN

The nation's reaction to the O.J. Simpson verdict of Oct. 3, 1995 seemed to fall along racial lines. Whites thought he was guilty and an injustice was done, while African-Americans overwhelmingly supported his innocence.

To comprehend fully this response, one must understand what happened on Aug. 28, 1955, 40 years earlier. That episode and its aftermath probably galvanized the last great human rights offensive, which reached its climax eight years later, on Aug. 28, 1963, with the March on Washington. I was a high school senior and, as is typical at that age, care-free and girl-crazy.

Aug. 28, 1955 was the day that 14-year-old Emmett Till was abducted at gunpoint from his uncle's home, beaten, shot in the head and thrown into the Tallahatchie River, with a 70-pound cotton gin fan tied around his neck with barbed wire. His mutilated body was found three days later. The whole criminal act, from start to finish, was the result of having said—on a bet with other black teens—"Hey, baby!" to Carol Bryant, a 21-year old white woman.

Roy Bryant, Carol's husband, and his

half-brother, J.W. Milam, did what they thought any honorable, self-respecting, red-necked white man would have done. They killed Emmett Till.

Emmett had been born and raised in Chicago. He did not understand Southern racial "etiquette" (Jim Crow) and their customs, which were rooted in slavery and exploitation. On Sept. 3 1955, the defendants were acquitted in Sumner

County, Miss. on the murder charge. They were subsequently acquitted on the kidnapping charge in Leflore County—even though they readily admitted abducting Emmett, but said they released him when they realized that he was the wrong person! After being out for an hour and seven minutes, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. One juror casually remarked that they had

been out long enough to have a cola. Dan Wakefield, a reporter for the Nation magazine, wrote: "When the people first realized that there was national, even worldwide publicity coming to Sumner and the murder trial, they wondered why the incident had caused such a stir. At the lunch recess on the first day of the trial, a county health office worker who had

stopped by to watch the excitement asked a visiting reporter where he was from, and shook his head when the answer was 'New York.'

about, though, are those that received widespread publicity, for one reason or another. The Till case was the one which galvanized African-Americans and the world human-rights community to action. For these kind of stories are a part of the black mythos, an aggregate of attitudes which form the African-American mindset. Those gross injustices are the warp and woof of the collective black genetic memory, a consciousness shared by all members of the race, even those ancestors who where never themselves enslaved.

You see, part of growing up black in the South 50 years ago was hearing tales of black men who simply went for a walk one day and were never seen or heard from again. So, to understand fully why African-American and white perceptions of justice and police actions are so different, one must first comprehend this background.

It helps to explain why so many blacks applauded when the Simpson verdict was read.

Victor E. Buksbazen is a former Freedom Rider who lives in Spokane, Wash. He was a Human Rights Commissioner from 1997-2000.

*Part of growing up black in the South 50 years ago was hearing tales of black men who simply went for a walk one day and were never seen or heard from again.*

— Victor E. Buksbazen

## Vote to Restore Parks and Recreation—Again

BY SCOTT MONTGOMERY

In the May primary of this year, about 70 percent of Portland voters approved the Parks Levy that would restore basic park maintenance and recreation programs. Why are we voting again? Because not enough Portlanders returned their ballots to reach the required 50 percent turnout.

As a result, our parks suffered additional cuts in services this summer, on top of cuts of the past several years.

But we can restore our vote and restore our parks.

The November levy will restore and continue to maintain our local parks, play fields and recreation programs. It will restore services like litter removal, restroom cleaning and mowing; restore basic upkeep and safety of parks, natural areas and recreation facilities; Restore recreation programs for youth, seniors and families; replace unsafe, out-dated play equipment and play fields – in parks and around schools; and restore after-school programs to provide safe, constructive places for kids to go.

Many of our parks' buildings are over 70 years old, with an average age of 60. They have

safety issues, deferred maintenance and cannot meet the needs of our growing population. Funds from the parks levy will address urgent safety issues like outdated electrical systems, crumbling walls, pest infestations and water problems in swimming pools, community centers, and maintenance facilities.

Parks and recreation are an essential part of our quality of life—especially in an uncertain economy. It is critical that parks and recreation facilities stay open and provide affordable family and community gathering places in neighborhoods all across the city.

The parks levy will help protect our investment in both parks and recreation facilities, and continue the services we have come to rely on.

The Portland Parks Levy will mean the difference between preserving and restoring an essential feature of our neighborhoods and our city, or letting it decline into even greater despair. It will keep our parks clean, open and safe. And that's important, because without parks, it wouldn't be Portland.

Scott Montgomery is a member and vice chair of the Parks and Recreation Board.



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