

OPINION

Delivering to the Masses

Obama's urban agenda

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS



Much has been made about the debate between two of our most respected black leaders: Tavis Smiley and the Rev. Al Sharpton. The two men, both activists in their own way, disagree on whether or not President Obama should openly pursue an 'urban agenda'.

Smiley thinks Obama should be more aggressive in pursuing a black agenda and thinks black leaders are being too soft on him. Sharpton thinks pushing such a plan would put the President in a vulnerable position and that black leaders, not the President, should pursue a plan for urban improvement. Rev. Sharpton is correct.

Residents of urban areas, many of whom are

African American, suffer disproportionately from many issues mainstream society may not: failing schools, high dropout rates, lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare, poverty, high unemployment rates and increasing incarceration rates. While we certainly want those who live in these communities to receive increased attention and governmental support, it is not realistic.

America is a country with a variety of people and variety of obstacles to overcome. It is naïve to think the President would be able to push such an agenda through Congress if it is explained as something that would primarily benefit blacks. As a people, we represent just 12 percent of the population and we don't have the votes in Congress to get such legislation through. Pursuing a black agenda would render the President ineffective and he would not succeed.

But let's be clear: residents in urban areas are

benefiting from the President's efforts. What Obama is doing with his employment and training legislation and what he did with healthcare and education will undoubtedly affect African Americans. While these agendas support the entire nation, they will disproportionately benefit urban residents.

Many of our leaders are quick to dismiss the President's efforts as not being 'black enough'. They should open their eyes and realize that he is delivering to the masses what he promised while also affecting changes in our community. And he's doing it while trying to work across both political aisles.

Although the urban agenda isn't obvious, the urban benefits are clear. We should applaud and support the President as he works and recognize that he is, in fact, President of the entire United States of America.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court Judge and syndicated television judge.

Most Protestors were Peaceful

'I was not a violent anarchist'

BY LEAH GIBSON-BLACKFEATHER

I was leaving my graduate-level class at Portland State University on March 29 to meet my boyfriend in the Smith Memorial Student Union. I was tired from a full day of work and my first class of the term and just wanted to relax; I planned to start on some reading while having a bite to eat.

My boyfriend called me as I was walking down the stairs -- he said, "Come now! There are cops everywhere in the Park Blocks." I quickened my pace.

Four hours later, I was being called a "violent anarchist" on all of the local news broadcasts

I am extremely disappointed that the majority of local media have portrayed the protesters that night as a violent group of "anarchists," rather than what we really were—a group made up of mostly students and concerned community members.

I work full-time at a large non-

profit organization in Portland. I'm a concerned community member and a person of color. I have recently become aware of and outraged by the escalation of violence and killings committed by the Portland police, specifically those affecting people of color and their families.

Thus, I joined the group of protesters as they went through the PSU campus and were continually blocked by masses of police officers and riot cops—even when we were just walking on the sidewalks through the Park blocks.

After four hours of standing and running in the rain while being chased, pushed, and hassled by police on horseback, motorcycles, bikes, and in cars, I had had enough. I did not participate in any violence of any kind; I had barely even raised my voice to chant. I was simply there, a quiet presence standing with friends and fellow students in solidarity.

I was pushed and harassed by cops; I ran from one police officer who was bumping into people purposefully with his motorcycle. I ducked as a cop on horseback pushed his horse's face at me while it was biting at my head. When another police officer shoved me

into the crowd as I was trying to take a picture of a cop punching a student, I didn't push back.

I never once saw or participated in any act of violence or vandalism—besides the harassment that we received from Portland's finest. I did witness a minority of protestors who pushed over garbage cans and newspaper racks; however, most of the crowd was peaceful and nonviolent and even asked the more "expressive" protestors not to damage anything.

Our demands were very simple: Make the police accountable for their actions and require that police be reviewed by the community, not by other officers. The present system is obviously not working. When your citizens are being attacked by officers in the streets, there's a problem. When peaceful students and community members are being physically harassed for raising their voices in resounding protest against police brutality and are only met with more brutality, there is a problem.

There has been the suggestion that Portland cops should be from Portland—the city, not the suburbs. This probably will not alleviate all of the Portland Police

Bureau's problems, but could definitely help. More involvement and oversight of the Independent Police Review Division is another good suggestion. The point is there are solutions that still have not yet been utilized.

This issue not only affects the city's homeless or African-American community—it affects all of Portland's citizens. I am Native American and have been involved in research done by the Northwest Area Foundation which found that approximately 42 percent of Native people in Portland have suffered violence at the hands of police. Just recently, a Native woman was brutally beaten by police and came to my organization for help.

There is a problem and it doesn't just affect one group or race of people: it is affecting us all.

If you are a concerned citizen, please find a way to express your concern and stand in solidarity with us—we can achieve so much more when we work together. If you are not a concerned citizen, you should be. And if you are a member of the media, please tell them the truth. It is your job.

Leah Gibson-Blackfeather is from Portland.



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