

OPINION

Gone but Not Forgotten

Our challenge to get involved

BY BOB INGRAM

Friday, July 2, 2010 at 11 a.m. is etched into my memory so vivid and clear. I have had many appointments in my life, but few feel or seem as prominent or important as the two memorial services of two very significant people on this particular date and time.

Mr. Charles Ford was a mentor, advocate, community leader, activist, and patriarch. We met a few times at community rallies and events, and often at the Overlook Restaurant in north Portland. That was where he would tell me to come find him when I needed to.

"Don't bother calling, don't think about sending me those e-mails either, you know where to find me," he would say. In fact, that was the last thing I remember him saying to me. Walking from one meeting to another, we were chatting about stimulus funds, California's gang problem, gentrification, and a whole host of other issues (of his choosing).

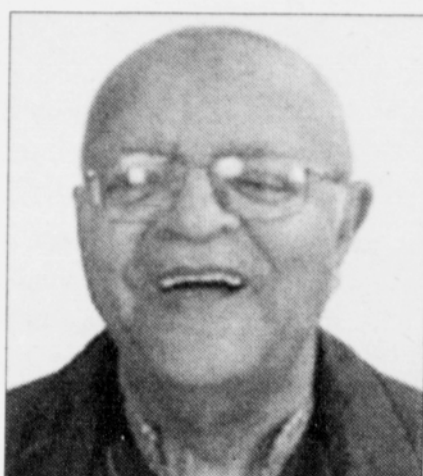
Mr. Ford was one of the original community members who stood up and warned us all that gangs were planning their operations and meant to invade our quiet neighborhoods. He said it over 20 years ago, and he kept saying it, to anyone who would

listen and to some who would rather not hear it but needed to hear.

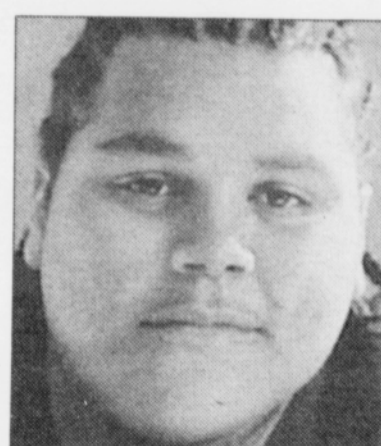
When I reflect on the legacy of Mr. Ford, I can't help but to wonder how bad things would have become if it hadn't been for him. Did he save lives? Certainly! Did he change lives? Absolutely! But what he did was even bigger than that. He changed the city. He was almost like Paul Revere: I will remember him for sounding the alarm and demanding awareness of the problem. He could have sat back and lived his life. He had a family to take care of, friends to support and sup with, and I'm sure many aspirations. But instead he chose to live his life benefiting others.

The other service was that of Billy Moore. Billy was 17 years old when he was shot and killed. He had recently graduated high school, where he'd even been elected Prom King. I met Billy years ago, when he and my son played on the same football team. They were part of the tight-knit family of linemen. Big, strong, mostly quiet and often hungry, he and Derriel were alike in many ways.

After middle school, I didn't see Billy as much, until last spring. At a



Charles Ford



Billy Moore

youth summit at the Blazers Boys and Girls Club, Billy was in the audience I was addressing. It was good to see him. And then he spoke! And immediately I thought that he had the wisdom, articulateness, understanding and acumen to have been the one speaking to the group. For every point I started, Billy could finish it. Yet he also seemed to know just when to be quiet and let the others get involved. He didn't want to brag and parade his intellect; he just wanted to share what he had learned so that it might help someone else.

I saw Billy again a few weeks later. We had a chance to catch up, and he told me that his mother was terminally ill. We prayed. Billy left that day in good spirits. I told him that I was proud of him and that he should not hesitate to call me if I could help him craft his future. And as I think about that evening, I pledge to you that had his life not been abruptly interrupted, he was going

to become a beacon for his family, community and friends.

And you know the truth? He will still! Maybe not in his full-sized physique, but definitely in his larger-than-life spirit. Billy touched so many lives in a positive way that it would be unfeasible to see it any other way.

And so it is that two great people left us. I believe the saying goes "gone but not forgotten." I will remember them whether I try to or not, and I'm sure I'm not alone there. But that leads to the next question: What will we do? Or better yet, I will share a question that is asked of me often: What are we going to do about these kids killing each other?

Billy didn't have to die. He was the third person killed in Portland this year to youth and gang violence, and they were killed in June. Billy's death was preventable. No, I'm no fortune teller, and I can't predict the future. But I do know that we have to keep our young people alive. And since I know you are wondering, here's the solution: Keep them busy!

Whether they are at school, work, home, a community center, church, or a park, kids need to be busy. Look at it like this: If we don't give them something to do, they will make or find something to do, and we probably won't like it. And I would even

include that while we are thinking about how to keep kids busy, we should create and promote things that they actually like to do. People vote with their feet, so we can't be upset or surprised if the kids walk out. They are sending a message.

I know it's not a cure-all. I know that we will still have people, young and old, who harm others. And no, I do not know what to do about them. But, our kids are ours, and we owe it to each other to take better care of them. Get involved! I challenge you! Mentor a young person through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Columbia Northwest, coach a Little League team, join your neighborhood watch, if you have time to commit. And if you don't have as much time, but still want to help, join an advisory board.

Great organizations are great because of the capacity and commitment of their advisors and directors. And just in case you've got no time at all, make a donation. In a shrinking economy, philanthropy has been a common target for reduction. Donated goods and services are great, but nothing beats good old-fashioned money. Not sure where to volunteer or donate? Contact me. OK, enough reading, time to get busy! Time to get involved! Out!

Bob Ingram is the director of the Office of Youth Violence and Prevention. His essay first appeared in Portland Family magazine.

A Cause for Concern: Black politicians singled out

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Recently, two top ranking Congressional Democrats have been charged with ethics violations by the Office of Congressional Ethics, where members can anonymously accuse their peers of wrong doing.

Whether or not there is any merit to the charges remains to be seen but it is interesting that, of the last 10 ethics investigations the office has conducted, eight of those under scrutiny were black.

New York Congressman Charles Rangel is charged with 13 congressional ethics violations and California Congresswoman Maxine Waters is charged with three.

Among the charges Rangel faces are improperly using his office to secure donations for a school of public in New York that is named after him, failing to pay taxes on



rental income from a home he owns in the Dominican Republic and for using a rent-controlled apartment in Harlem for his campaign office. Waters has been accused with using her influence to arrange a meeting between the Treasury Department and a bank her husband owned shares in. Both plan to fully fight the charges against them.

Eliminating government corruption is important but the fact that blacks make up less than 10 percent of Congress yet comprise 80 percent of the most recent ethic violation investigations is a cause for concern.

The fact that the charges can be levied anonymously only ups the suspicion factor. Political enemies on the other side of the aisle can bring the charges in hopes of tarnishing a politician's image. Even if

the accused isn't up for re-election, his or her party could suffer from the negative publicity.

In an election year, this could mean a few extra Republican seats in Congress. Singling out black politicians could also be a tactic to play up on the racist undertones of growing movements, like the Tea Party, sending a message that "they" - blacks - "can't be trusted."

Since our achievements - and failures - as a people are often lumped together by the main stream, hurting black politicians could have a negative impact on the President's 2012 re-election bid down the road.

Congress is right to heavily scrutinize its members. But it should also scrutinize the way charges are made.

Has no one outside of the Congressional Black Caucus wondered why so many black Congressmen and women are being "nominated" for investigation? That, in itself,

warrants an investigation.

Let's hope that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in her quest for a clean Congress, works to bring any

underlining racism to light.

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

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