

OPINION

Christie Distorts Civil Rights History

Governor insults generations who put their lives on the line

BY MARC H. MORIAL

In recent weeks, outrageous statements targeted at minority citizens have come out of the mouths of a number of conservative politicians — everything from the assertion that African Americans prefer food stamps over pay checks to the claim that “black people” are using “other people’s money” to get ahead.



But Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey may have topped them all when he declared, “People would have been happy to have a referendum on civil rights rather than fighting and dying in the streets in the South.”

The Governor’s statement was made in the context of his proposal that the issue of same-sex marriage in New Jersey be settled by a voter referendum.

But his words amounted to an insult to generations of men and women who put their lives on the line for equal rights. They also ignore the fact that the sole purpose of any civil rights struggle is to gain rights for minority citizens that the majority has historically and consistently denied.

The nonsense of Christie’s state-

ment was made all the more apparent by the fact that during the heyday of lynchings, poll taxes and “separate but equal schools,” any referendum on voting rights and civil rights for African Americans would have excluded many of the very people seeking those rights.

In fact it was only because the majority for centuries had first enslaved, and then discriminated against, African Americans that it became necessary for people of conscience to organize in protest against such treatment. Christie should remember that in the 18th Century, it was not a referendum but a revolution that formed the United States of America.

In the 19th century, it was not a referendum, but a civil war that ended slavery and unified our nation. And

in the 20th century, it was not a referendum, but a series of non-violent civil rights struggles that defeated Jim Crow and secured voting rights for women, African Americans and other disenfranchised minorities.

Sheila Oliver, New Jersey’s first African American woman Assembly Speaker, correctly saw Christie’s proposal to submit same-sex marriage rights to the whims of voters as a shirking of responsibility.

She said, “The major issues of our time such as women’s suffrage and civil rights were rightly decided legislatively. We are elected by the people of New Jersey to protect civil rights. We do not pass on such tough decisions.”

Oliver also took issue with Christie’s characterization of the civil rights struggle, adding, “Governor,

people were fighting and dying in the streets of the South because the majority refused to grant minorities equal rights by any method. It took legislative action to bring justice to all Americans, just as legislative action is the right way to bring marriage equality to all New Jerseyans.”

It is almost unthinkable that a sitting governor would either be so uninformed, so callous, to suggest that civil rights movements have not played a necessary and positive role in ensuring that the promise of freedom, equality and democracy is made real for every citizen.

We think Gov. Christie owes the people of New Jersey and all Americans a clear explanation.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Deadly Force Policy: We’re All at Risk

BY MARVA DAVIS

On behalf of the Campbell family, I am pleased to say that we have settled the claims relating to Aaron’s death for \$1.2 million. We will now propose to the probate court that a lion’s share of these funds be held in trust for Aaron’s children until they are adults.

We are told that this is the most money that the city’s insurer has ever paid out on a claim against the Portland Police Bureau, although in truth it does not seem like enough for the losses we have suffered.

We are grateful, however, that we will not have to relive the events of that awful time, and reopen those wounds again. We are also grateful for the support that we have received from family, friends and members of the community who have supported us throughout.

We take to heart that officer-involved shootings have gone down in Portland since Aaron was killed, and choose to believe that in some measure, losing him has made our community safer from those we’ve armed with guns and entrusted with



the community’s safety.

However, this needs to be said. During the case, our attorneys uncovered some very troubling information regarding our police policies and practices.

First, we are very disappointed with Police Chief Reese’s refusal to add language to the Police Bureau’s use of force policy requiring in writing that officers take a person’s emotional upset or mental illness into consideration as a factor when making a decision to use force. There is no good reason not to make this change.

Second, Chief Reese assured the public in disciplining the officers involved that Police Bureau policy required that before shooting to kill, the facts and circumstances must justify the conclusion that the citizen’s behavior amounts to an immediate threat to life.

The chief’s investigation concluded that Aaron Campbell clearly did not present such a danger to anyone. Compare this with the fact that Officers Frashour and Lewton were going to call as witnesses at trial 11 of the trainers who teach our officers the rules.

All of these trainers were to testify under oath that Chief

Reese is wrong. To make this worse, the city was ready to stipulate to this testimony. This disconnect between what the Police Bureau’s policy is supposed to mean and what officers are trained to do is dangerous, and puts us all at risk.

And third, the Police Bureau took the position in defending this lawsuit that the city was not responsible for Aaron’s death, even though admitting the death resulted from violation of its own bureau’s policies.

The city argued that the officers didn’t need to comply with Portland’s policies, but need only comply with broader state statutes regarding the use of force. Those statutes do not spell out that use of deadly force requires an immediate danger to the life of others as justification.

Our city leaders need to address this duplicity and hold our police force to its own rules and regulations.

And finally as a mother, I regrettably do not believe my living sons are safe. That bond of community trust has been broken. I cannot say to them that if there is a mental health crisis ... “call the police.”

We have asked our attorneys to contact the U.S. Department of Justice to report these findings. Our hope is that the information will be of help during its on-going investigation into the use of deadly force

in dealing with emotionally upset or mentally ill citizens in crisis, and help reduce the danger to the most vulnerable among us.

Marva Davis is the mother of Aaron Campbell.

Letter to the Editor:

Stop the Violence

Why are we killing each other? What message are we giving our youth?

Will we have any youth left if we don’t stop it now? How would you feel if it was your son? Your brother? Your cousin?

How do you tell three little children that their father is not coming home again, ever?

How do we as a community keep our mouths shut and allow cold-blooded murderers to continue to walk the streets looking for another victim? The next time it could be your child.

We need your help getting justice for L.J.

If you know anything about my son’s murder please help us. We know that the community

knows something. Please come forward and stop this vicious cycle of silence.

We, as a people, have always known that “Just Us” means that we have to stand up for ourselves. The violence has to end, and we have to end it.

The greatest tool we have is to stop the silence. L.J. did not deserve to die and neither did the countless others killed by gang violence and black against black crime.

Help me, help yourself, and help our community, so all of our kids can be safe again.

Our people have come too far to end up as victims of genocide.

Lucy Mashia, devastated mother of L.J. (Leonard James Irving Jr.)

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