

OPINION

Bizarre Ruling by the Supreme Court

Strip searches and driving while black

BY DONALD KAUL

The radical conservative majority of the Supreme Court delivered yet another bizarre opinion last month.

It ruled that police and jail officials can strip search anyone arrested for anything, no matter how minor the violation or how upstanding the suspect.

In doing so it agreed with the rulings of lower courts that have found strip searches legal after arrests for violating leash laws, driving without a license, falling behind in child support payments, failing to use a turn signal, or (my favorite) riding a bicycle without an audible



bell.

Are these guys nuts?

The case that triggered the ruling involved a man who was a passenger in a car stopped for speeding. A background check revealed an unpaid fine on his record, so the cops took him to jail and forced him to take off his clothes, bend over, and the rest of it.

He spent the better part of the following week in jails, where he was strip-searched again, before police discovered that their information was wrong, that he'd long since paid the fine.

That was fine with the Four Horsemen (John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Antonin Scalia, and Clarence Thomas) and their faithful companion Anthony Kennedy. Apparently, you can't be too careful. That seems to be the paranoid Right's mantra.

Oh, by the way, did I mention that Albert Florence, the guy arrested—a finance manager for a New Jersey car dealership—was black?

The Court didn't seem to mention it either. It acted as though it hadn't mattered. I've got news for them.

Being black in this society always matters. Always.

I've been driving for some 60 years and I've never been pulled over by police in a random check. It happens to black men all the time, particularly to those who commit the crime of driving a nice car. To be black in our society excites the presumption of guilt.

Some people are still arguing over whether the shooting of black teenager Trayvon Martin had something to do with his race.

We'll never know what actually happened that February night in Sanford, Florida. We have the version of the shooter, George Zimmerman, who was finally jailed more than six weeks after the bullets went off. But Martin is, well...dead.

I must say, Zimmerman's story seems far-fetched. He asks us to believe that his sense of duty as a

self-appointed Neighborhood Watch guard prompted him to follow Martin and confront him, despite a warning from a 911 dispatcher not to.

Then, he says, Martin jumped him as he was walking away, causing him to fear for his life. So he shot the kid. In self-defense.

That sounds like a dog-ate-my-homework alibi if I ever heard one. Martin was a tall, skinny 17-year-old. Zimmerman's a 28-year-old man on the stocky side.

I don't know how it was in your neighborhood growing up, but in mine, tall skinny kids didn't go around committing unprovoked assaults on older, heavier guys. It just didn't happen.

Following the Feb. 26 shooting, the Sanford police released Zimmerman on the grounds that he was protected by Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law, which allows people who feel threatened to shoot their assailants. That's where racism

really begins to rear its unlovely head.

Had the young black man been armed and, feeling threatened, turned and shot this hulking white stranger following him, do you imagine that the police would have let him go? In Florida?

If you think that, give my regards to the Tooth Fairy the next time you see her.

With or without Zimmerman's potentially racist motive, this kill-at-will statue is a monumentally stupid law. It raises every altercation—every bar fight, every fender bender—to the level of a potentially lethal encounter.

Whatever happened to the good old days when you could have a fist fight with someone without one of you ending up dead?

Remind me not to go to Florida the next time it gets cold up north.

And while you're at it, remind me to get the bell on my bicycle fixed.

OtherWords columnist Donald Kaul lives in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Letters to the Editor

Supporting Libraries

The Multnomah County Library is one of our community's greatest treasures. Whether it's helping kids succeed with early literacy programs, connecting seniors to the world with home delivery of over 200,000 books a year, or providing critical resources for people searching for a job—our libraries are open and free to all, and provide a safe, positive place that makes a real difference in our lives.

The Library Levy is how we fund our Library. The Levy—Measure 26-125—provides over 65 percent of our library's funding. If it is not renewed in May, it will expire, and that funding will disappear. The loss of that funding would mean devastating cuts, the closure of neighborhood library branches, reduced library hours and the elimi-

nation of important programs at a time they are needed most.

As the Oregonian's editorial board stated in their endorsement of Measure 26-125, "If the levy doesn't pass, the library system hardly would be recognizable." Let's not let that happen.

Measure 26-125 is not a tax increase, it's simply a renewal at the current rate. Voting begins in less than a week, and we need your help to reach more voters. Please help us keep our Library's doors open with a contribution of \$25, \$50, \$100 or more if you can today.

We cannot afford to lose this asset in our community. Thank you for your support, and don't forget to vote YES for our libraries!

Jeff Cogen
Multnomah County Chair

Voting for Ying

Helen Ying has the experience connecting under-represented communities to their government.

Much of Metro's power comes from its ability to collaborate with other governments and community groups, and right now Metro lacks a voice that can reach everyone.

Our region is growing more diverse, but so much of that population growth is taking place in areas that lack parks, reliable public transit, shopping centers, and other amenities.

Helen Ying will be that voice that Metro needs. Join me in voting for Helen Ying.

Mike Verbout
North Portland

Tubman School Closure Not Worth Loss

To Superintendent Carole Smith and the School Board:

I was shocked to learn that the Harriet Tubman Young Women's Leadership Academy is on the block for closure. In light of parent testimonies in the Portland Observer and elsewhere, closing Tubman appears to be merely a symbolic gesture, not a great saving, not worth the loss. I urge you to reconsider.

The culminating story in my recently published book, "First Families of Vancouver's African American Community," tells of a young single mother of three with no income, no education, and no hope who volunteered in her daughter's kindergarten class at Portland's Eliot School in the 1960s and was given a chance by the school's principal Bob Harold to work as a teacher's aide.

Nine years into that job, Idamae Bain Greenidge earned her degree and certification at Portland State University and became an elementary teacher for Portland Public Schools, retiring in 2001 after 34 years with the district.

It has been a satisfaction to Mrs. Greenidge to watch the Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy for Young Women taking root over the last five years on the grounds of the former Eliot School, where she got her start. There was nothing like that for her when she needed it.

After being shut out of ninth grade as "a bad influence" for being pregnant, then passed into the 10th grade unprepared, then shut out again, she possessed no sense of her gifts until Bob Harold happened to notice them. She was lucky, and so were her future students.

The Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy, likewise, is planting seeds with young women that will benefit the entire community, and it should continue to grow and mature.

A Tubman parent said "we don't have the history, the community support or a champion in the district like other schools." Here is a single strand of deep-rooted history, one life story, when woven into the achievements of countless other women during the same period, should serve as illustration why Tubman should be encouraged, not closed.

Tubman is an opportunity for Portland Public Schools, not an obstacle. Why uproot this effort when it is just beginning to flourish? What side of history are we on?

Jane Elder Wulff
Battle Ground

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CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015

news@portlandobserver.com

ads@portlandobserver.com

subscription@portlandobserver.com

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