

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

Letter to the Editor

Opinionated Judge

Really excellent review of Alien Boy by Judge Darleen Ortega in the Portland Observer (Opinionated Judge, new arts & entertainment column, Feb. 20 issue). I chatted with her at the media screening and she said she was going to write something. I laughed thinking her claim was some judge-vanity thing. And it is, but she sees good movies, has good taste and good hard opinions. Very nice. You need to set her up with screeners for next year's African Film Fest. There are always gems there but set amidst junk. She could pick it out and direct us (we film watchers) to get to the best.

Jason Renaud, Mental Health Association of Portland - and producer of Alien Boy: The Death and Life of James Chasse

Don't Lose Focus on Justice Issues

Progress celebrated with much work still ahead

BY DR. ELSIE L. SCOTT

This year, we are celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington. As African-Americans, we are pleased that this country has progressed from the forced enslavement of our race to the removal of the Jim Crow laws and practices.

We are also celebrating the reelection of a man of African descent to a second term as President of the United States. There is a lot to celebrate in 2013, but there is still much work ahead.

One area that is seriously flawed

and that requires the attention of more than the progressive movement is the "justice system."

It is commonly known that the U.S. incarcerates more of its citizens than any other industrialized country. The fact that a disproportionate number of the persons arrested, convicted and imprisoned are African-Americans is troubling.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2010, 4,347 out of every 100,000 black males were incarcerated in a state, federal or local facility. This number is seven times higher than the number of white males incarcerated.

In 2010, African-Americans, at 13.1 percent of the U.S. population, made up 38 percent of the total state prison population. Hispanic-Americans, at 16.7 percent of the U.S. population, made up 21 percent of the state prison population. Compare those statistics to white Americans, at 78.1 percent of the U.S.

population, made up only 34 percent of the total state prison population.

A review of the arrest data also indicates that blacks are more likely to be convicted and sentenced to time in prison than whites. Similarly, an examination of felony conviction data shows that black felony convictions are more likely to result in incarceration than white felony convictions.

Why are such large numbers of blacks in prison? To answer that question one needs to drill down into the issue of race, arrests and convictions. Almost any black man can tell a story of being stopped by the police under questionable circumstances.

As long as many see the image of crime as a black man, this country will struggle with addressing race in the criminal justice system. Young black boys will continue to be placed in the prison pipeline, beginning with childish pranks until society

returns school discipline to the school system.

Prisons will continue to be full of black men until investments are made in removing the barriers that are contributing to school dropouts because two-thirds of school dropouts end up in the criminal justice system.

In recent years, there has been a reduction in the number of persons incarcerated. Now, action must be taken to address the problems faced by persons released from prison. Laws and ordinances that prevent ex-inmates from securing housing and employment are impediments to them becoming productive citizens. Their paths to restoration must begin with reinstating their civil rights, especially their right to vote.

So as we celebrate the freedom and equality anniversaries, let us not lose focus on the justice issues that still loom before us.

Dr. Elsie L. Scott is founding director of the Ronald W. Walters Center at Howard University.

High Quality Pre-school for Every Child

Obama's proposal a proven strategy

BY MARC MORIAL

In his recent State of the Union Address, President Obama proposed one of the most important and proven strategies for expanding educational opportunity and closing the achievement gap in our nation's public schools -- universal quality pre-school that is affordable and accessible to all.

We applaud the President for making this a national priority.

The National Urban League and many others have long understood that if America is to achieve the vision of a globally competitive nation, we can no longer accept that the quality of education is based primarily on your zip code or the size of your bank account.

The availability of early learning opportunities for children is a significant predictor of the level of achievement they will attain throughout their academic careers. Early interventions for the youngest learners also provide a critical ladder to responsible adulthood and the jobs of the future.

Many affluent parents spend tens of thousands of dollars each year to provide quality pre-school experiences for their children, an expense

which most middle and working class families simply cannot afford. And because of funding inequities, many urban students spend their entire educational lives playing catch-up in run-down schools with over-burdened teachers.

This inequality is not only imperiling the futures of millions of public school children, it is jeopardizing America's ability to develop a workforce capable of competing in the 21st century global marketplace.

As Jonathan Kozol wrote eight years ago in his landmark book, *The Shame of a Nation*, "There is something deeply hypocritical in a society that holds an inner-city child only eight years old, accountable for her performance on a high stakes standardized exam but does not hold the high officials of our government accountable for robbing her of what they gave their own kids six or seven years before."

President Obama proposes to level the playing field. He envisions

a continuum of high-quality early learning for a child -- beginning at birth and continuing to age five. In a cost sharing partnership with states, government funded pre-school would be extended to all four year-olds from low and moderate-income families below 200 percent of poverty.

The President's proposal comes as the March 1 "sequestration" budget cut is fast approaching. If Congress and the White House fail to come to an agreement, our economy could face another recession and the education of many urban children will be further weakened. According to the White House, 70,000 young children would be shut out of Head Start and as many as 10,000 teachers could lose their jobs. We must not let that happen.

Last year, with the release of the National Urban League's eight-point plan to Educate, Employ and Empower, we made the point that any serious discussion about the

creation of jobs and economic opportunity must account for the basic shortcomings of our current national approach to education, from early childhood to adulthood and beyond.

We said that robust early childhood education for every child must be an essential part of the solution. President Obama agrees. We urge Congress to act quickly to make it a reality.

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



Advertise with diversity in The Portland Observer
Call 503-288-0033
ads@portlandobserver.com

Subscribe 503-288-0033
Attn: Subscriptions, The Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland OR 97208.
\$45.00 for 3 months • \$80.00 for 6 mo. • \$125.00 for 1 year (please include check with form)
NAME: _____
TELEPHONE: _____
ADDRESS: _____
or email subscriptions@portlandobserver.com

The Portland Observer Established 1970
USPS 959-680
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211
PUBLISHER: Mark Washington
EDITOR: Michael Leighton
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Rakeem Washington
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt
OFFICE MANAGER/CLASSIFIEDS: Lucinda Baldwin
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER: Leonard Latin
STAFF WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER: Cari Hachmann
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208
CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015
news@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com
subscription@portlandobserver.com
The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 2008 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. 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