

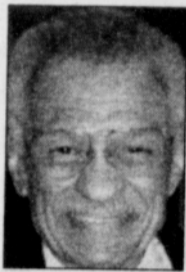
Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

Urgency of Now Taken Seriously

No stopping the battle for equality and justice

BY REV. DR. C.T. VIVIAN



We must take the urgency of now very seriously. Not just because of this year will mark the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, but because the future of America's people; especially those who have been long oppressed, depends on right now.

Since the beginning of this country, the one thing that has never been fully decided is who will truly determine this nation's future?

Will it be America's truly wealthy, the one percent who can decide every political and economic move in the richest and mightiest country in the world? And who, with the economic one percent of Europe and Asia, could take over every major decision in this global world? Would it be them or would it be "We the people"?

It is clear by studying recent events; coupled with patterns of history, that the democratic principle of "We the people" is

constantly endangered by plutocratic mindsets, those who are often controlled by greed and quests for power. Plutocracy, according to Webster, is one, "Government by wealthy people"; two, "A society governed by wealthy people"; or three, "A ruling class whose power is based on their wealth."

I caution that America could succumb to this social mindset, if we do not continue to stand guard using our democratic powers of "We the people" to the fullest.

Take the last presidential election, for instance. Mitt Romney, in his derogatory comment about the so-called "47 percent" of people who he claimed "are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims" and who "pay no income tax," appeared to dismiss nearly half of American voters. He even said, "... and so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives."

These derogatory comments appeared to signal a move to exclude people of a certain social status. Moreover, it appeared as a move to keep the concept of "We the people" alive while denying it in practice. What would have or could have happened had he prevailed?

It is important to note that throughout history, struggles for equality and justice in

America have continued to move from victory to setback and from setback to victory. In fact, about every 30 to 35 years, there's a new movement in this country. The civil rights movement was the last one. The one before that was the labor movement. Somewhere between 35 and 40 years, there's always a new people's movement. This time, it's the continuation of the civil rights movement, which includes the movement on behalf of the poor.

At the blessed age of 88, I recall the degradation of segregation and Jim Crow. I struggled for justice through the freedom rides and alongside Dr. King. I marched on Washington on Aug. 28, 1963 and I was there to ultimately rejoice at the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

And then we suddenly found ourselves mourning upon the assassination of my dear friend and brother, Dr. King, in 1968. He was only in Memphis for the cause of the sanitation workers, the poor, the struggling, and the oppressed who were suffering unequal wages and working conditions.

Fast forward, to see America elect and then re-elect its first black president nearly 50 years later is reason to rejoice. And yet even President Obama's inaugural speech called

for honest labor wages that "liberate families from the brink of hardship."

This is a clear reason that we must continue to march to the polls as well as to take up our banners and plead our causes. We must win our battles in the basic old-fashioned way that it has historically worked, with non-violent direct action protests, coupled with the vote. In doing so, our movement will continue to grow.

A newsman once asked Dr. King, "How many members do you have?" When Martin answered, the newsman retorted, "Well that doesn't represent much of Black America". But then Dr. King said something that is so very relevant in the 21st century. He said, "We don't operate through membership. We operate knowing that if we're right, people will follow us."

The state of equality and justice in America is a continued struggle for the poor despite all of the strides America has made. The urgency of now is to maintain the power and sanctity of the vote, which has become the greatest power held by the poor. As Dr. King said, if we do what is right, others will follow us. This is the power of "We the people."

The Rev. C.T. Vivian is national president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Trayvon Martin One Year Later

Standing with victims of injustice

"We're here to let the community, and particularly teenagers, know that they have a right to walk in peace without being followed, without being harmed and without being killed,"

-- Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin.

BY MARC MORIAL

A year has passed since that awful day when 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed while walking to a family member's home from a convenience store in Sanford, Fla.

Trayvon Martin was an unarmed

African American teenager wearing a hoodie. The shooter was George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old neighborhood watch volunteer, who called 9-11 to report a "suspicious" person and then ignored a police dispatcher's order not to follow Trayvon.

Moments later, Trayvon was shot dead. Since then, thousands of other gun deaths and several mass shootings have elevated the issue of gun violence to the top of the national agenda.

But the death of Trayvon Martin remains especially disturbing to many of us because of what it says about the racial profiling of young black males, police departments that are often slow to protect their rights, and a fatally flawed law that gives people -- possibly even criminals --

the right to shoot first and ask questions later.

It took a while, but the wheels of justice are turning in the Trayvon Martin case. In the wake of widespread criticism of the nearly six-week delay in arresting and charging Zimmerman with a crime, former Sanford police chief, Bill Lee was fired last June.

Former Elgin, Ill. deputy police chief, Cecil Smith is set to take over as head of the Sanford police force on April 1. Zimmerman's second-degree murder trial begins on June 10. It is believed that he and his lawyers will base their defense on Florida's troubling Stand Your Ground law which states that anyone in fear of his or her life could be justified in using lethal force against a potential or perceived attacker.

Thousands of citizens have rallied in recent days to mark the one-year anniversary of Trayvon Martin's death. On Feb. 9, four days after what would have been Trayvon's 18th birthday, his parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, sponsored an "I am Trayvon Day of Remembrance Community Peace Walk" in North Miami-Dade County.

Students at Florida State University in Tallahassee have rallied for a repeal of the Stand Your Ground law. And on Feb. 26, the one-year anniversary of his death, a "Million Hoodie" candlelight vigil was held in New York's Union Square that was attended by hundreds, including actor Jamie Foxx.

While attention now turns to the upcoming trial, as the father of a 10-year-old son, I cannot help but re-

call what Sybrina and Tracy said about their son a year ago: "Trayvon was our hero. At age 9, Trayvon pulled his father from a burning kitchen, saving his life. He loved sports and horseback riding. At only 17, he had a bright future ahead of him with dreams of attending college and becoming an aviation mechanic. Now that's all gone."

Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin have formed the Justice for Trayvon Martin Foundation to honor their son and to "advocate for all victims of injustice and senseless crimes throughout the world."

Like millions of Americans, we continue to stand with them. We will not rest until justice is done.

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

The Portland Observer Established 1970

PUBLISHER: Mark Washington

EDITOR: Michael Leighton

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Rakeem Washington

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

OFFICE MANAGER/CLASSIFIEDS: Lucinda Baldwin

ADVERTISING MANAGER: Leonard Latin

STAFF WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER: Cari Hachmann

USPS 959-680

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

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

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