

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](mailto:news@portlandobserver.com).

# OPINION

## Immoral, Biased and Ineffective

### Brutal practice of capital punishment must end

BY BENJAMIN TODD JEALOUS



Two years ago, the state of Georgia ignored the facts, doubts and pleas of hundreds of thousands of people and killed Troy Anthony Davis. On the anniversary of his execution, we rededicate ourselves to ending the immoral, biased and ineffective practice of capital punishment.

For 15 years, we fought alongside Troy to clear his name for the killing of Savannah Police Officer Mark Allen MacPhail. Troy remained adamant about his innocence to his last breath. As explained in the new book *I Am Troy Davis*, by author Jen Marlowe and Troy's sister, Martina Davis-

Correia, the case against Troy lacked conclusive evidence after many of the key witnesses recanted testimony from the time of the original trial.

In the last weeks of Troy's life, the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles received 663,000 petitions from people imploring the group to reconsider the execution given the sheer amount of doubt surrounding the case. World figures, including Pope Benedict XVI and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, human rights groups and commentators urged the execution to be halted - all to no avail.

In the hours before his death, the NAACP held a rally and lobbied the Department of Justice to intervene on the grounds of a civil rights violation. The glimpses of sadness and quiet resolve I saw on the faces of Troy's family when his death became imminent will stay with me forever. The last time I saw Troy, he told me "This movement started before me, and it

needs to continue, no matter what, until we destroy the machinery of death."

While many of the supporters who stood in solidarity with Troy have put away their signs and returned home, the battle to end the shameful practice of capital punishment wages on in his name. Side by side with Troy's family, we remain on the frontlines of this fight to abolish a system that is ineffective and steeped in racial bias.

Racial disparities pervade every component of the justice system. A report from Amnesty International concluded that 77 percent of people executed since 1977 were people convicted of crimes involving white victims, compared to only 15 percent of people executed for killing blacks. A full 42 percent of the 3,100 inmates on death row are people of color.

Furthermore, we know that the death penalty is a poor deterrent of crime. FBI data shows that all 14 states without capital punishment

in 2008 had homicide rates at or below the national rate.

The only effective way to deter killings in our streets is to ensure justice is swift and certain. In order to do so, we must ensure both that we have police leadership that builds strong partnerships and trust with all communities and also that they have enough officers and detectives to ensure every homicide in every community is responded to with the requisite resources to find and catch killers quickly.

Since Troy's death, we have made definitive strides in our effort to end the death penalty. We have worked with a diverse and multifaceted coalition of advocates including Amnesty International and the National Coalition to Repeal the Death Penalty fix our nation's broken justice system.

Last year our work led to Connecticut repealing the death penalty. This year, Maryland became the first state south of the Mason-

Dixon Line to do the same. Those two states now join New Jersey, New York, New Mexico and Illinois as the fifth and sixth state in six years, and the 17th and 18th in the nation to abolish the death penalty.

Our strategy is clear. Our strategy is simple. We will outlaw capital punishment in a majority of states, and then we will go to the United States Supreme Court and make the argument that the punishment is cruel by its very nature but also unusual because most states have passed laws against it.

"I Am Troy" reminds us that each year on the Sept. 21 anniversary of his death will serve as both a solemn anniversary and a call to action. It is and will continue to be an annual reminder that justice and common sense dictates that we end this brutal practice of capital punishment.

*Benjamin Todd Jealous is the president and chief executive officer of the national NAACP.*

## Good for Football and Good for America

### Another barrier in sports is falling

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Sports is one of the most race-neutral meritocracies in America. From the record-shattering feats of Jesse Owens to the transcendent accomplishments of Serena and Venus, there is no doubt that African Americans can excel at the highest levels in any sport if given a chance.

Historically, that chance has rarely been given to aspiring black professional quarterbacks. For decades, the prevailing view seemed to be that while African Americans made good runners, blockers and

receivers, they did not possess the ability or intellect to be quarterback -- the on-the-field CEO -- of a National Football League team.

At one time, a black NFL quarterback was as unthinkable as a black American President. But, what was once a rarity is now becoming the norm.

In 1920, Frederick Douglas "Fritz" Pollard became professional football's first black quarterback, leading the Akron Pros to victory in the NFL's inaugural championship game. It wasn't until almost 50 years later on the first Sunday of the 1969 regular season that James Harris, playing for the Buffalo Bills, became the first black professional quarterback to start on an opening day -- and subsequently the first black NFL quarterback to be a full-time starter at that position.

From 1969-1977, with the exception of a six-game start in 1974 by Joe Gilliam for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Harris was the only starting black quarterback in the NFL. In 1988, Doug Williams became the first black quarterback to win a Super Bowl. A stellar few have joined them in the modern era -- Warren Moon, Randall Cunningham, Steve McNair and Donovan McNabb come to mind.

But according to a 2012 article in *Pro Football Weekly*, "Surprisingly, based on the overwhelming majority of black players in the league, only four, or 12.5 percent, of the 32 starting QBs in the league on the final day of the 2011 regular season were black."

The 2013 season has seen that number more than double.

The third week of this year's NFL season saw nine starting black quar-

terbacks take the field for their teams -- the most in history. They include: Robert Griffin III (RG3) in Washington; Russell Wilson, Seattle Seahawks; Terrelle Pryor, Oakland Raiders; Colin Kaepernick, San Francisco 49ers; EJ Manuel, Buffalo Bills; Geno Smith, New York Jets; Michael Vick, Philadelphia Eagles; Josh Freeman, Tampa Bay Buccaneers; and Cam Newton, Carolina Panthers.

The trend is accelerating, and the new class of black quarterbacks is making history. Jason McIntyre, co-founder of *The Big Lead*, a popular sports website, predicts that "It is conceivable that by week one in 2015, half the 32 NFL teams will have a black starting QB."

This is not to imply that we should only root for black quarterbacks. I began this column by noting how sports is largely a color-blind

meritocracy. I still root for Drew Brees on Sundays, and most of the black NFL quarterbacks will tell you themselves that race doesn't matter. Their only goal is to compete and win.

But as we celebrate 50 years of African American progress, I cannot help but note that another barrier in sports is falling. More black quarterbacks are getting a chance to excel on the field and earn the dignity, big salaries and endorsements that come with their success. That is good for football and good for America.

Think about that as you sit back and enjoy another weekend of NFL skirmishes. And may the best man -- the best team -- win.

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

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

ADVERTISING MANAGER: Leonard Latin

REPORTER/PHOTOGRAPHER: Donovan M. Smith

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](mailto:news@portlandobserver.com)

[ads@portlandobserver.com](mailto:ads@portlandobserver.com)

[subscription@portlandobserver.com](mailto:subscription@portlandobserver.com)

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