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OPINION

Last Thursday is our Public Square

Mayor Hales just wants Last Thursday to follow the same requirements as every other street festival in Portland. What's the big deal? This is a lockdown on culture, a censorship of grassroots art, and artists, and the process of government and business will not work this out by just making us consumers. Last Thursday is our public square.

Fees, registration and placement become barriers. They do not invite the public to freely participate. It denies the child, restricts creative movement for happenings and bars those that cannot afford. It eliminates spontaneity and stifles interactions.

LT is and has been the only free stage for artists for 17 years. This platform has fostered the most creative, unusual, exciting and unsterilized event in Portland, landing it into travel guidebooks, international magazine articles and exploding in popularity bringing over 80,000 people to the Alberta District during its 5 monthly evenings.

Now understanding its popularity and what a special gem this event could be (although currently a tad bit rough on the edges) is the true trick. Why is the mayor denying giving the event special designation for street vending such as permitted for the Rose Festival? Why is he not supporting the Alberta community to sustainably be the rightful hosts and owners of LT? Why not

provide financial support rather than declaring governance?

The former LT community group of volunteers asked for financial assistance. The festival had been allowed to reach such a peak without ever needing to become a "legitimate" permitted event. They were stuck holding a very large bag that had never needed to follow the rules. The offer was for a non-profit to run the event with their help of \$5,000 per event that would have been enough support to bring about an arts-focused, cultural and tourism diamond.

Alberta is a true model of a downtrodden neighborhood's success in bringing people and commerce to the street. LT soon became the economic engine for businesses before becoming the iconic urban festival of Portland. What a story of grassroots urban process and change. Support for this neighborhood to preserve the true nature of LT would have been a nice feather to put into the mayor's hat. At the very least the event deserves a more respectful political association.

Count the number of restaurants and bars on Alberta and note that it was LT that brought a lot of business to their doors. Bartenders could reportedly make rent with at least three of the summer LTs. This trend has had a boomerang effect leaving Alberta

Street with over 50 liquor licenses in a 20 block strip. This of course, has added to the alcohol related problems. Although when you look at the statistics and ratios it hasn't been bad in the face of abundance. This ratio is a question for the OLCC and how it does business but instead has prompted Hales to create the Late Night Tax.

LT is a public gathering. Business owners started LT as an attempt to take back the street and invited the public to share it with them and this has continued for 17 years. Last Thursday produced a public space that has crossed cultural boundaries, backgrounds, values and associations. From their struggles came Alberta's artistic cultural identity. They used their creative resources to build community and it is inclusive. This is something honorable, inspiring and truly grassroots in a neighborhood that has had to do it themselves having survived discrimination by zoning and accustomed to being forgotten, separated and disinvested. It is a marginalized community using urban space to redefine their economic and cultural well-being.

No. Now is not the time to take the event and govern it into the ground, making it manageable enough to place under your thumb. The lies have been spun and there is no eating crow. I just want to remind our

readers why Friends of Last Thursday stepped down last year; they refused to comply with closing the street only to 27th Avenue, excluding four Alberta galleries. Nor were they prepared to pay for the newly required count of 80 toilets, a 200 percent increase of costs placed on the organization a week before the event. They were open to the third requirement to end the event at 9:30 p.m., but would not "be a party to reopening the streets with street cleaners carrying pressurized water hoses." I have seen photos of the amount of city vehicles used that evening to clear the streets. It was obviously due to your fear of a riot, again proving your misguided understanding and heavy hand of this whole affair. Were those added requirements in parallel with other street fairs?

Last Thursday demands a novel approach in order for the Alberta District to keep their cultural identity. The challenge is to mediate between those with and without power within the context of a broader perspective for both citizens and the city. This will take initiative by the community, LT artists and government leaders. It is placemaking at its finest. Nourishing creative culture is the answer.

Maquette Reeverts, former president of Friends of Last Thursday.

Mississippi Freedom Summer Pilgrimage

An atrocity we must never forget



BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN AND JULIA CASS

The site along a back road near Philadelphia, Miss. was the final stop on our step-by-step journey through the final tragic day of Freedom Summer volunteers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Our guide was Leroy Clemons, a longtime local leader and activist whose family was involved in the civil rights movement who is prominently featured in the excellent documentary "Neshoba: The Price of Freedom."

We both took this journey on June 25 with a group of about 400 young people, including young women participating in the Children's Defense Fund's summer leadership institute for young black women. Our buses were escorted by state troopers. For a split second, that almost seemed like an honor until we quickly wondered why we needed a police escort. The site is just down the road from the families of two of the Ku Klux Klan members involved in the murders, and as the buses stopped to see the murder site, riders on some of them said that pickup trucks rode by, back

and forth, in a presumed effort at intimidation.

In a flash it brought back the absolute reign of terror faced by black people in Mississippi in those days. We're certain all of us gathered at the murder site—we went in small groups—couldn't even begin to imagine the terror the three young men felt that night as Clemons, from his study of histories, articles, court records, and his own interviews with still-living Klan members, told us what happened.

Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were stopped and arrested by Klan member and deputy sheriff Cecil Price as they drove away after speaking with members of a black church that had been torched a few days earlier. Price and the Klan knew that civil rights workers had been at the church several times to talk about having a Freedom School there—especially Michael Schwerner, who had been working in the area for some time, and they were looking for him.

Chaney, the driver, was charged with "speeding" while Goodman and Schwerner were booked for investigation, and all three were taken to the former jail—a squat non-descript building which was our second stop. After the Klan had time to gather, Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were released around 10 p.m. and told to drive back to Meridian, Miss. where they were staying.

As they were driving Deputy Price stopped them, the Klan members drove up, and they took the

three young men to that back road spot. They selected this place, Clemons said, because Edgar Ray "Preacher" Killen, the ordained Baptist minister and local Ku Klux Klan leader who was eventually accused of directing the murders, lived on this road and wanted to see the place they were killed whenever he came and went.

About 20 Klansmen, drunk and full of "blood lust," chained James Chaney to a tree and beat him with chains. When they unchained him, he fell to the ground, and then they castrated him as Goodman and Schwerner watched. Then they shot him. Schwerner came up and cradled Chaney in his arms. A Klansman asked, "Are you that nigger lover?" and he said, "Sir, I understand your concern." And they shot him in the heart. Andrew Goodman ran and they shot him too.

They then took the bodies to a dam a little further down the road (private property so we couldn't go there) where a tractor had already been deployed to dig the graves. Evidence suggests Andrew Goodman was buried alive. The bullet hadn't quite killed him because an autopsy showed red clay dirt in his lungs and also grasped in his fists from trying to dig his way out. The next day, Edgar Ray Killen took all the weapons and bullet casings to the Meridian Police Department, which destroyed them. The department was made up of Klan members.

We listened in horrified silence. Being there made the brutality vividly real and present.

The Freedom Summer veterans on our pilgrimage used the courage of the three young men and the other young men and women and local black citizens who participated in Freedom Summer to urge today's young people to pick up and carry on the movement in this era of racial profiling, stop and frisk, chokeholds, and mass incarceration. Although much progress has been made, great danger lurks for so many in our community and the prospects for poor children of color in Mississippi and across our nation are diminishing.

It is time for another transforming movement to honor the sacrifices of those who went on before us. We must all finish the job Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Septima Clark and Medgar Evers and so many other civil rights warriors struggled and sacrificed for.

We must make sure that our children and all of us know our history and that the atrocities that wiped out the lives of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner and countless others who died for freedom and justice during the Civil Rights Movement—including eight other black men whose bodies were only found as the FBI dredged Mississippi rivers and swamps searching for these three young men—do not ever happen again. We must all do our part to create a safe and hopeful nation for every child.

It is way past time for all adults to step up to the plate and make sure that the backwards slide for poor children is stopped and light

a fire under ourselves to combat with all our might the continuing discrimination, dehumanization, and lack of public support and concern for children and youths of color and poor children in America.

The need for the Children's Defense Fund was first evident in Mississippi when the state turned down Head Start money in the new anti-poverty program after the summer of 1964 because they were trying to push poor black people out of the state and make sure poor children would not get the skills they need to survive in the economy and to become informed citizens.

We do not want to go back to those days again. We do not want to return to the old days when powerful segregationist members of Congress could eviscerate food programs for poor sharecroppers who attempted to vote, and when child hunger to the point of starvation was evident in Mississippi in 1965 and 1966 and 1967.

We must move forwards and not backwards to the not so good old days during that extraordinary summer of sacrifice that transformed America in positive and fundamental ways. It is time for a new transforming movement to end child and family poverty, hunger, homelessness and illiteracy in America.

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