

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

Racial Profiling: Fruit from a Poison Tree

Community fabric won't repair itself

BY REP. LEW FREDERICK

As events have unfolded over the past weeks, I've struggled to put together the right words, because on some level my emotions are indescribable. I want to yell, loud, over and over. Then I am just sad. And then I realize that I want fervently not to inflame or incite. Then it starts all over again. I know too well that it's safer to be quiet while such emotions rage. But being quiet would be wrong.

Every person of color in America knows profiling. That is the context here. We know it.



It is a reality that we walk out the door into every day, the first thought at the beginning of any encounter with law enforcement: "Am I going to die today?" It's a reality that becomes a special terror when we become parents, and our children go out into the same reality.

No matter what happened on that street in Ferguson, or that sidewalk on Staten Island, if you tell me that it wasn't the fruit of the poison tree of profiling, I'm going to have to ask you to prove it. That might have been sorted out in trials, with the evidence for all to see. But that door was closed, those opportunities lost.

How many times must this happen? Every time profiling is studied, it is confirmed, and people like me think, "Well I could have told you that." And yet, every case follows the same predictable trajectory, as if it

doesn't matter that the story has been repeated countless times.

"Protect and Serve." I yearn for a world in which we can all believe it, a world in which the tools of law enforcement are the tools of peacekeeping, and a world in which all of us can look to the uniform and badge for protection. I have to believe it's possible. But it's not our world now. It's not our country now. Folks, it's not our city now. What are we going to do about it?

And "we" doesn't just mean people of color. It doesn't just mean civic leaders. It doesn't just mean the Portland Police Bureau. It doesn't just mean white people either. It means all people of conscience. We need each other, now and always.

Our pain and our grief at a time like this may not be the same pain and grief, but every person of conscience feels it. There are police officers of con-

science. They are victims, too. The fact is that when the fabric of our American community is torn or frayed, we are all in danger, and no arsenal or fortification will protect us when the danger comes from within.

Abiding and obvious respect for all human lives must be a fundamental qualification for the job of police officer. The mere suspicion that the tools of law enforcement are perceived or deployed as instruments of domination rather than peacekeeping and protection frays that fabric. Nothing about these grand jury processes quelled that suspicion; in fact these failures just magnify all the failures that have come before. Every additional case makes it harder to evaluate the next as anything but another confirmation of systemic oppression.

The fabric of our community

will not repair itself. We either weave trust and respect or we rip them apart. There is no neutral position.

I have to believe we are better than this. I believe that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. I'm frustrated with how long the arch is, and along with our President, I believe that, "It bends because each of us in our own way puts our hand on that arc and we bend it in the direction of justice...." These conditions did not fall out of the sky. They are the result of decisions made by human beings. And human beings, people of conscience, can decide to change them. The question isn't, "Can it be done?" The question is, "Are we up to it?"

Rep. Lew Frederick represents north and northeast Portland in the Oregon Legislature

Racial Bias Diminishes Optimism of Latinos

Growing less hopeful about future

BY BARBARA FERRER

Migration of Latino families to America is an inspiring story of men, women and children leaving their native countries, often searching for better opportunities and safety for their families. Yet, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's recent poll of Latino families also reveals that a different narrative develops -- frustration from racism and discrimination is wearing down Latinos over time in the United States.

The newest Latino immigrants are brimming with hope, as they pursue opportunities to better educate their children, improve personal finances and find affordable housing. Meanwhile, those and social services, but as they assimilate into American society, they enjoy the expected



immigrant who have travelled a similar path - Latinos with generations of family roots in the U.S., as well as those with more education and higher incomes - are decidedly more sceptical and disappointed.

Clearly, a significant gap exists between the life experiences of Latinos and those of many other immigrants. Historically, immigrants arrive on American shores and the prospects for their life outcomes vastly improve. They may harbor initial fears and anxiety about finding jobs, housing experience of having their quality of life improve for each generation.

But that narrative is reserved for mostly white immigrants.

For people of color, and as the survey demonstrated, especially for Latinos, there is a far, far different reality. The longer Latinos are in the U.S., they grow less and less hopeful about their opportunities in this country.

Our poll discloses that as Latinos face discrimination at individual and institutional levels, their fears and anxieties increase

over time.

For instance, while Latinos respect police and cite a need for law enforcement, they are deeply concerned about police brutality - 18 percent said they know a Latino friend or relative abused by police. Moreover, an astonishing 68 percent fear that police will use excessive force against Latinos, and 37 percent said law enforcement officers treat Hispanics unfairly. But racial bias is not limited to law enforcement. Latinos also fear they may face discrimination in the workplace and virtually anyplace they may go in public, such as stores and restaurants.

For America to progress, this must change. How can a nation be perceived as just and fair, when it's fastest growing demographic lives in such fear?

As a nation, our first step should be to abandon talk of the mythical "colorblind society" and instead focus on understanding the diversity rooted in our communities and the strength that can be drawn from these different cultures. Immigrants should feel respected in this country

and invited to fully participate and engage in our society, and in making it a better society.

Here is a stunning example of how racism, or just the perception of bias, plays out: asked how they would proceed if facing difficult financial problems, 47 percent of Latinos earning between \$40,000 and \$75,000 a year said they could not depend on a loan from a bank or credit union, while 38 percent earning more than \$75,000 also had no confidence they could turn to this traditional means of financial help.

Energized by the hope and promise of this nation, Latinos are coming to the U.S. wanting to be vibrant members of their new communities.

Furthermore, Latinos clearly care about their children's future. The vast majority of Latino parents are attending parent-teacher conferences and school functions, as well as volunteering at the schools and working with administrators and teachers. For Latino parents of pre-K through second grade students, 89 percent attended teacher conferences, 77 percent contacted

teachers about academic performance, 74 percent had meetings with a counselor or principal, 71 percent attended events and 63 percent volunteered for class projects.

Still, their participation would increase and be broader if the schools did more to welcome parents. Survey respondents noted that more translators should be available, especially for school board meetings, PTA meetings and other policy-setting sessions. All parents must feel welcomed in the schools their children attend.

Our poll has identified the role discrimination plays in diminishing optimism and opportunities for many Latinos. In reality, when one group is held back, it hurts all of us; we need everyone's best effort to build a secure future. As we learn from each other, we recognize that our strength is our diversity. Addressing discriminatory practices and policies is paving the way for a better United States of America.

Barbara Ferrer is chief strategy officer for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.