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OPINION

Mayor and Council Step Back on Police Reform

City appeal should be rescinded

BY DR. LEROY HAYNES

While every major city and various small cities throughout the nation are crying out for justice and police reform, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and the city commissioners voted unanimously to take a step backwards to appeal a condition set by Federal Judge Michael Simon to have annual periodic hearings on the progress or non-progress of the Portland Police Reform Settlement Agreement.

Are we on the same Planet?

Civil disobedience is breaking out throughout the nation, including Portland saying "Enough is Enough," calling for an end to the use of excessive force by police departments. Activists are saying that "Black Lives Matter" as do the lives of people with mental illness and the lives of every citizen including those who police our streets.

Not since the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s have we seen such a mass movement throughout America.

Instead of the mayor and commissioners leading the way to create a true community policing model that will give the nation a solution on how to reform a city police force with all parties at the table, they make a political decision out of self-interest, rather than the public interest, public health, and the moral character of the city. They are masking a legal argument over a requirement to have hearings to report on the progress of the reforms by asking for "clarification" of the authority of a federal judge to review periodically the implementation of the Settlement Agreement.

In other words, they don't want any unbiased, independent authority like a federal judge to review what they are doing. They want to keep it under their control in order to cover-up or not implement parts of the agreement.

What the mayor and city council just don't get is that the stakeholders and the

public do not trust them to put away political self-interest over the public welfare and moral character of the city. Why? Because past city councils and our present one have failed to do it.

The Police Reform Settlement Agreement was initiated after a great outcry from the citizens of Portland and led by the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform and other stakeholders. It followed a 10 year struggle to reform the Portland Police Bureau with such police shooting cases as Kendra James, Jose Mejia Poot, James Jahar Perez, James Chasse, Aaron Campbell, Keaton Otis and many others. Later a suit was filed by the U.S. Department of Justice in response to the voices for justice in the city.

The Justice Department determined that Portland Police have engaged in patterns and practices of using excessive force against people with mental illness or those perceived to have mental illness.

The settlement was worked out by involving parties from the Justice Department, city of Portland, the Portland Police Association, and the AMA coal-

ition. The agreement is not a panacea for a final solution, but it offers a historical opportunity to reform police training, policies, practices, investigations, accountability structures and other major areas.

There was much public testimony on the agreement before Judge Simon that expressed feelings of mistrust and weakness in the settlement, but the AMA coalition believed that it still provided a model toward true community policing to create a "more perfect union" in our city.

Now the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform along with other organizations have launched a community grass-roots campaign to have Mayor Hales and the City Council rescind their appeal to the 9th Circuit Court.

We should keep the periodical hearings and push forward with all deliberate speed in implementing the Settlement Agreement that will create a model for Portland and our nation.

Dr. LeRoy Haynes is chair of the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform.

The Need for a Truth and Reconciliation Process

Healing from the long history of racial trauma

BY FANIA DAVIS

The killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner have sparked a national outcry to end the epidemic of police brutality against black men. I believe our greatest hope lies in creating a truth and reconciliation process—starting in Ferguson, Missouri—that can get to the roots of a long history of racial trauma and open the way for healing.

I say this as someone with direct, personal experience of the shock, pain, and grief of racial violence.

I grew up on Birmingham, Alabama's, "Dynamite Hill," so-called because of the bombings of black families like ours who moved into this previously all-white neighborhood. The Ku Klux Klan killed two of my close friends in the 1963 Sunday School bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church.

In 1969, police broke into my home in Del Mar, Calif., and shot and nearly killed my husband—because of our involvement with the Black Panthers. And in 1970, the government framed my sister,

Angela Davis, on capital murder charges in an effort to silence her calls for racial and social justice.

I have also felt fury. I have been a combatant in the civil rights, black power, women's, and most of the major social movements of my time. I spent years organizing an international movement to save my sister from prison and possibly execution. Later, as a civil rights trial lawyer, I worked to protect people from racial discrimination.

After more than three decades of fighting, I felt burned out. I began studying with African and other indigenous healers, and this ultimately led me to the restorative justice work I do today in Oakland, Calif.

Every day, I see teens of color coming of age in a culture that criminalizes and demonizes them. Black youth in the U.S. are fatally shot by police at 21 times the rate of white youth. Children of color are pushed through pipelines to prison instead of put on pathways to opportunity. Some make it through this soul-crushing gauntlet. But many do not.

In Oakland we are seeing glimmers of hope. A broad cross-section of the community, including police, is participating in restorative justice trainings. Residents and police are working together to keep children out of prison. Racially inequitable school suspension rates are decreasing.

Youth and police are sitting together in healing circles, building new relationships based on increased trust and recognition of one another's humanity.

A Ferguson Truth and Reconciliation process could likewise bring our communities together to search for the truth about the causes and consequences of police violence, and for ways to put an end to the killings. Youth, families, police, and communities affected by the violence and allies could partner with the federal government to establish commissions in communities throughout the country.

South Africa's 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be a guide. The entire nation watched, riveted, as the traumas of the previous decades were recounted, and apologies and calls for reparations and institutional reform made. Though far from perfect, South Africa's process is hailed for helping the country to transition from apartheid to democracy without bloodshed.

In communities across the United States, a Truth and Reconciliation process could create safe public spaces for survivors of police violence to share their stories. Law enforcement would have opportunities to accept responsibility for their actions. Everyone involved could co-create plans to "make things right," including, for example, official apologies, restitution, public me-

morials, police training and demilitarization, new police policies that prioritize hiring community residents, new curricula, etc. The stories told, truths learned, and recommendations made would be shared nationwide.

The commission's task would include facing and beginning to heal the massive historical traumas that damage us all but take the lives of black and brown children. The killings today are only the most recent expressions of a long history of unhealed racial traumas that reaches all the way back to the birth of the nation. Changing form but not essence over four centuries, this history has morphed from slavery to sharecropping and lynching, from Jim Crow to convict leasing, to mass incarceration and deadly police practices.

It's time for us to take on this history, tell the truth about how it continues to harm our whole society, and respond with a justice that heals. Taking a page from the great Nelson Mandela's book, a truth and reconciliation process based on restorative justice principles offers the greatest promise. Let's roll up our sleeves and start the messy, challenging, but hopeful work of creating a more just society.

Fania Davis is a civil rights attorney and co-founder and executive director of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth.