

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

Black Lives and a \$15 Minimum Wage

Proposal confronts poverty and racism

BY TERESSA RAIFORD

The church massacre by a white supremacist in Charleston has re-injected racist violence into the national discussion.

The grisly underbelly of our country has been totally exposed by the steady stream of racist police killings, including the recent murder of Walter Scott in North Charleston. The Emanuel AME deaths serve as a tragic exclamation point.

Racist violence is not just the work of bigoted individuals. Racism and its violent enforcers were created to



justify the horrific --yet profitable -- economic system of slavery that the United States enshrined in its constitution.

When slavery was abolished, Jim Crow segregation took its place, which kept black people powerless and trapped in non-union, slave wage jobs. Under slavery and Jim Crow a tiny elite flourished amidst poverty and degradation.

After segregation was crushed slave wages were maintained by other means. In her book 'The New Jim Crow,' Michelle Alexander convincingly argues that a caste system has been created in the U.S., based on a mixture of poverty, mass incarceration, and the myriads of discriminatory policies and racist attitudes that maintain a dynamic where 1 in 4 black males are involved in the crim-

inal justice system, while 1 percent of the population lives in complete luxury.

In Oregon 41 percent of blacks live in poverty, helping ensure that the 'school to prison pipeline' will be the fate of many young people robbed of real opportunity. In communities where there is sub-standard education, few jobs, and even fewer living wage jobs, people are inevitably pushed into the 'informal economy' where police harassment, detention, humiliation and violence is waiting for them.

Fortunately, in Oregon there is a concrete, realistic way to directly confront poverty. Oregonians for \$15 has filed a ballot initiative for a statewide \$15 minimum wage, which, if passed, would lift up as many as 650,000 Oregonians.

A \$15 minimum wage is a necessary first step, and should be enthusiastically supported by all groups fighting racism. It's no surprise that throughout most of the country the 'fight for \$15' is a Black-led movement.

Once we pass \$15 we'll feel our power. And powerful people demand better conditions. We need rent control, a public jobs program and real affirmative action that provides real opportunity.

We are in a moment where bold demands can inspire people to action, and this moment must be seized. Oregon is ready for \$15 and not a cent less.

Teresa Raiford is a former candidate for Multnomah County Commission and a leader of Don't Shoot PDX.

Ghost of Osama Rises with US Militarism

BY IBRAHIM S. BAHATI

Since Osama bin Laden's death in 2011, the official account of the Navy Seals' raid has been challenged, most recently by journalist Seymour Hersh, alleging that "Wash-



ington's official account of the hunt for Bin Laden and the raid that led to his death was a lie."

In fact, there have been more "conspiracy-factual theories" about this event than there are on Illuminati. Was OBL there? Was he even alive then? Is he still?

Indeed, mere days after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, George Monbiot wrote in the Guardian that "If Osama bin Laden did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him" since "his usefulness to Western governments lies in the power to terrify," enabling the continuous unleashing of billions of dollars in military spending—on any given day, all year.

No wonder the ghost of Osama rises from Pakistan, from Sudan, from Afghanistan, or from the open ocean. A lie to gin up demand for obscene profits and power? That is easy to believe. The truth? That is tougher to find.

Since the collapse of the Soviet

Era in 1990, America found itself with all its threats seemingly neutralized. War, however, is always great business venture, not only for nation-states but for all manner of military contracting corporations, the gateway to amass profits at rates no legitimate business can produce. Enemies are required—real, imaginary, or manufactured. In 1995, Ray Moseley wrote in the Chicago Tribune: Could it be that NATO discovered the Islamic threat because, after the demise of communism it desperately needed a new threat to survive as an organization?

If the Pakistanis were left out of the operation as President Obama alleged, where does this leave us with the notions by Pakistani Ex-Spy Chief General Asad Durrani that "ISI probably knew of the al-Qaeda chief's whereabouts until his death"? The US has underwritten ISI by billions for decades. When will the US taxpayer start to wonder about the value of this?

And most interestingly, why has there come no vivid clinical information (rather than verbal claims) about Osama's DNA, his death-in-combat pictures and his burial. Obama asserted that Osa-

ma was given a proper Muslim burial. Says who? Says which Muslim authority? Which Imam was present? Where is it written that proper Islamic burial takes place at sea? Nowhere! It is as if we have settled for a reality that might have scored as a poor episode of 24.

Separating fact from fiction is an endless labor. Leaks by Edward Snowden that the NSA actually forced Google and Samsung to allow a Trojan horse to spy on Americans and international citizens shows the ongoing erosion of civil liberties. People are no longer citizens of their nations but instead are often "persons of interest" for entirely legal conduct.

Are we an autocracy or a democracy? Dictatorial regimes like Saudi Arabia have been massively supported under the banner of 'ally' despite their bad record on human rights and governance issues. In fact today's war on terrorism has played the total replica of the much worse unending, unfinished Cold War. We support state terrorists in the name of opposing non-state terrorists.

Whether events surrounding Osama's death were a spoof or as the Seal Team 6 claimed, questions continue and the US seems

arrogantly proud of its "global manhunting machine."

Osama's ghost has not rested. Seymour M. Hersh notes, "Obama today is not facing re-election as he was in the spring of 2011. His principled stand on behalf of the proposed nuclear agreement with Iran says much, as does his decision to operate without the support of the conservative Republicans in Congress. High-level lying nevertheless remains the modus operandi of US policy, along with secret prisons, drone attacks, Special Forces night raids, bypassing the chain of command, and cutting out those who might say no."

In 1969, Hersh was the young investigative journalist who broke the story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam after the Army covered it up and lied consistently about it; he is still on point today.

Whatever happened to Osama bin Laden, his ghost may be found in the spirit of ISIS and all other US enemies, real and imaginary, urging the US empire to crack its hull on the rocks of war and militarism and join him in a watery, bloody grave. Will we let bin Laden's ghost have the last laugh?

Ibrahim Bahati is a young peace scholar from Kampala, Uganda, and is syndicated by PeaceVoice.