



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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## Equity and The Power of Accusation

“Always, always first ask yourself,” our pop used to say, poking my sternum. “What do I know? Really know. And what am I assuming.”

That last part of his lesson was not a question. It was an admonition. “Hati-hati, Joh (Beware my boy)” he’d say. Then he blinked firm twice, turned my skinny shoulders clear around and sent me off.

Our father schooled his sons during anxious political and economic times. We grew up in a complex place — Indonesia spoke in 900 languages; neighbors were black and brown, yellow and white.

In those tense times and in that vigorous place, it was all parents’ quiet duty to teach acceptance and conciliation to wild kids like our pop’s boys. We were a densely peopled island so we either shared well or lived in hell. We either asked ourselves what we know, or we assumed divisive biases. Up to us.

Maybe it’s all a lot like now, like Portland. Probably I best poke my sternum daily, and we all ask ourselves: What do we know?

A familiar chill

A few weeks ago, a professor whose 30 years of good work I know well, caught my eye. And iced my porous bones. The chill started where our pop used to rap me. It followed my ribs out and around, then leached into my heart.

His web page named two iconically-acronymed federal agencies — one with jurisdiction over alcohol, tobacco and firearms; one tasked with taking out terrorists,

### EQUITY AND POWER

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kidnappers, interstate and international criminals. Both, he blogged “played important roles . . . in this serious campus security issue.” He thanked everyone for their care. That’s an avalanche of facts. Bad ones. On first impression. But here’s what’s known about what’s been said: University officials said that campus security

conflicted. I know how conscientiously this grad student leads interracial neighborhood conciliation and how consistently he contributes to local community-building. I know folks’ affection and respect for him. For sure.

More problems: I know his physician father. I know his Asian ma like I know ours. And getting to the core of my column: these two ladies are exactly like another mom I know real well — the one who 8 years ago looked straight

triggered by her accusations. Mainstreamers on one side, ethnic streamers on the other. Like with OJ and Kobe. Like with Sung Kim.

As a matter of American historical fact, we know that race matters. We know that power differences between races matter even more. Overwhelming institutions on one side, dread on the other.

What those of us favorably biased for this outspoken student and soft-spoken community problem solver know is that Oregon Health Science U’s examining psychiatrist cleared him after campus security cops locked him up. We know that the Portland Police Bureau’s examining detective did not charge him. With any crime.

We know Henry’s humiliated Asian family drove him straight home. We know they took their phone off the hook. For their shame. For the shame of it all.

We know those law schools that admitted him for fall semester, took their offers and their scholarships off the table. We know we’ve damaged Henry’s future, his family’s fine name, his community’s stubborn belief in American democracy.

“Always, always first ask yourself,” our pop used to poke my sternum. “What do I know? Really know. And what am I assuming.” His was an admonition for kids schooled during unstable times. Times when ordinarily generous societies lose their discernment. Times when dutiful adults should constantly ask ourselves what we really know, and what not.

‘University officials said that security officers said that a student said that her Asian classmate said that he wanted to shoot this Portland professor’

said that a student said that her Asian classmate said that he wanted to shoot this Portland professor. And we know the student owns guns.

That’s probably too many hearsay links to know what’s true, but I can say with certainty that it brought me straight back to our last two campus killers. Mentally ill kids with guns. Both Asian.

Another thing I can surely report is my dread over this Asian student’s face stapled to every campus lamp post, his face dropped into every kid’s, every teacher’s and staffer’s e-inbox. It’s a familiar chill.

My problem is that I also know Henry the young Portlander this professor said triggered all those muscular feds. And I know I am

into a KGW camera’s red eye and told Oregon that her boy did not kidnap or rape or murder that lovely young Corvallis coed. We know the cops and their prosecutors did not believe Dawn Kim, or her son.

Three years later, Joel Courtney confessed to the unimaginable sea of sorrow he caused Brooke Wilberger’s family. But no one’s taken responsibility for the terrible harm done Mrs. Kim’s family. For our assumptions. For our biases.

Our familiar ruts

About Henry’s situation, I haven’t done the science, but I’ll bet half my paycheck that a flash-poll of 1,000 Portlanders would net a racialized divide over what respondents assume happened between the accused, the accuser, and all those downstream officials

## Save Black Men – Get Your PSA Screening

Last week, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended that healthy men should no longer take a routine PSA blood test for prostate cancer because the procedure may lead patients to pursue unnecessary and potentially debilitating treatments for a disease that may never fully develop. This week, the National Urban League joins the National Medical Association, the Prostate Health Education Network (PHEN), the American Urological Association and other leading medical experts in rejecting that conclusion, especially for African American men who are 60 percent more likely to develop prostate cancer and twice as likely to die from it.

We agree that unnecessary medical tests should be avoided, but the evidence for eliminating PSA screenings for prostate cancer, especially for African American men, is inconclusive at best. Instead of abandoning PSA screenings for everyone, we encourage more education for both providers and patients that will allow men to make more informed decisions about the risks and benefits of the test. There are several reasons for our position.

First, while prostate cancer remains the second-leading cause of cancer death among men, we

TO BE EQUAL



Marc Morial

also know that advances in early detection and treatment have resulted in a 40 percent decline in prostate deaths in the United

States over the past two decades. The National Medical Association (NMA), the nation’s leading advocate for African American physicians and patients, has stated that PSA screening remains the best method to detect early stage, curable prostate cancers. The group endorses the American Urological Association’s guidelines for early detection, which include initial

PSA testing at 40 years and a multi-factorial assessment of risk based on age, ethnicity, and family history. Second, the NMA also points out that the USPSTF made its recommendation based on large clinical studies performed in Europe, Canada and the United States, which included very few African American men.

And third, while the USPSTF correctly states that a percentage

of men will experience harmful side effects from treatments following the PSA test, the test itself is risk-free. It simply alerts both doctor and patient to the possible presence of disease.

the USPSTF’s recommendation may actually be harmful to high-risk groups, which includes African American men. He said, “I think men at high risk...have the most to lose from not getting PSA tests. They are the ones who get the lethal cancers.”

In a letter accompanying the USPSTF recommendation in the May 21 issue of the Annals of Internal Medicine, D’Amico and other leading prostate cancer experts concluded, “The USPSTF has underestimated the benefits and overestimated the harms of prostate cancer screening. Therefore, we disagree with the USPSTF’s recommendation.”

So do we. Since 1922, the National Urban League has been a leading provider of health-related services in the African American community. We urge African American men to continue discussing the pros and cons of prostate cancer screening with their doctors. And we support more community-based education and early intervention efforts for low-income and minority patients who face barriers to consistent, quality health care.

“With the prevalence of prostate cancer disproportionately affecting our men, we must be vigilant to ensure aggressive testing continues for this most vulnerable population.”

— Cedric M. Bright, M.D., president of the National Medical Association

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League