

# OBSERVATION POINT

# DISSENT

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## Burt Gordin's Dream: The Handshake

By Philip H. Power

Burt Gordin was the type you'd figure would meet his end when the time came, quietly in bed at the age of 80. He didn't figure to be shot to death at the age of 50.

Burt Gordin had been executive director of the State Civil Rights Commission for the last six years, but police and his CRC associates doubt his killer was an assassin motivated by politics. They think it was an intended robbery, which is more logical.

The nicest thing I can say about Burt Gordin is that he was a man out of tune with the times.

THESE ARE TIMES of lawsuits. Whenever people lose a political battle, be it over taxes or some benefit they want, or even the policy decision of a school board — bam, right away they have to start a lawsuit.

The lawsuit mentality was even present in discussions about the environment at the Ann Arbor teach-in a couple of weeks ago. If you're unhappy about pollution, said one speaker, an attorney, "go sue somebody."

Burt Gordin liked to keep his work out of court.

These are times of confrontations. If you don't like traffic on your street, you blockade it with baby buggies; if you don't like the school board's decision on haircuts, you walk out of school; if you don't like the small size of your paycheck, you tie up the nation's mail.

You never saw Burt Gordin around a confrontation.

BURT GORDIN'S JOB was the enforcement of a section of Michigan's constitution that prohibits discrimination on the bases of race, religion, color or national origin. In his own thinking, though, I think he would have played down the words "enforcement" and "prohibit."

The tone he set for his department was to get compliance with the law. It was to get people to forget about skin color and religion and work together, do business together.

He didn't go for the idea of "plaintiffs" and "defendants" or the idea of "winner" and "loser" that are inherent in our current lawsuit-confrontation mentality. He held the wildly radical notion that this State of Michigan is big enough for all of us if we all will behave decently to one another.

It shouldn't be necessary to teach one side to "know its place" or bring another "to its knees."

HE GOT CRITICISM for this. A fellow you might check with in this is State Sen. Bob Huber, a hard-line conservative who is running for U.S. senator.

I can't remember the precise figures, but Huber's gripe may fairly be stated like this: Of all the complaints made to the CRC, 95% sort of evaporate, 4% go to

hearings before the eight-member commission, and 1% wind up in court.

Bob Huber wanted to see more cases go to court. He thought the CRC had too heavy a proportion of black faces, and that the CRC staff liberals were intimidating employers and property owners into giving up their liberty to be bigots. I think that's a reasonable summary of the senator's position.

Burt Gordin, on the other hand, was pleased that so few complaints ever went to the commission hearing stage and that even fewer wound up in court. To him, it meant that his staff was successful in sitting down with folks, politely explaining public policy, and appealing to their desires to be law-abiding citizens.

"Compliance" — not "arrests and convictions" — was what Gordin was looking for.

I HEARD HIM speak only a couple of times. He never spoke long, and he was no orator. There was no charisma. I pick my memory hard, but no striking phrase of his comes to mind.

He was occasionally inter-

viewed by the daily papers, though rarely by television, and the stories were generally on inside pages. Burt Gordin was practicing the policy of ignoring the loud-mouths of both races long before Pat Moynihan put it into a memo.

To a newsman, the Civil Rights Commission was tough to cover. If you got a tip that Mr. A had filed a complaint against Company B, you couldn't get that CRC staff to admit there was such a case, let alone tell you anything about it. It wasn't like dealing with a court, where it's all a matter of public record.

Every week or two, the CRC would send out reports of the cases it had handled at the hearing stage. It was rare to see more than one case. Burt Gordin was looking for "compliance."

USUALLY IT'S appropriate to conclude an obituary, a funeral or a gravestone with an inspiring quotation, either from the pen of the deceased or a principle he lived by.

Flamboyant words won't do for Burt Gordin. I think he would prefer that his symbol be a white hand shaking a black hand.

Handshakes don't make a lot of noise.

R.T. Thompson writes

## What's Ahead For Prep Cage Tourneys?

Michigan's march madness — the annual state championship basketball tournament — ended Saturday in East Lansing on a happy note for the four winners and sadness for the losers.

It was a spectacular two-day show which jammed the facilities of Michigan State University's ancient Jenison Fieldhouse Friday and Saturday and other courts in Lansing and East Lansing on Friday night.

It was high school basketball at its finest, and Garden City West, the lone representative of what we prefer to call Observerland, gave an overflow crowd something to remember for a long time.

WEST LOST to Pontiac Central in what those who have been regulars at the state finals for years called the most spectacular game in modern history. Garden City lost, but none of those in attendance will forget the standing ovation given All-Star Rick Drewitz when he fouled out in the final minute after scoring 42 points.

Then, for the followers of the class "A" teams, came the surprising victory by Detroit Pershing High over the unbeaten Pontiac Chiefs. It was a fitting climax to the state's most spectacular high school sports show.

There wasn't any kind of trouble during the two days and nights. True enough, the majority of the spectators traveled many miles to see their favorite teams play.

These were the semifinals and finals of the tournament. Only four teams remained in each of the four classes, and they were ranked as the best of Michigan's hundreds of prep quintets.

Perhaps that is part of the reason for the peaceful atmosphere. Folks came to see their teams win with the full knowledge that there had to be losers. Losses were accepted, and fans drove back home with the thought that their team had played its best but it wasn't good enough.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT one felt at East Lansing. It's too bad that the same feeling doesn't prevail in earlier rounds of the same tournament. Incidents that make one wonder just what the future is for high school sports and especially the cage tourney.

We remember the statement of a well-known sports broadcaster after giving scores of the district tournaments and telling of the riot and fights after a game in Trenton and relating the inci-

HE MARCHED TO A QUIET DRUM.



dents that found River Rouge playing games at unannounced times with a closed gate.

"Things like this cause the death of high school sports," was his comment.

We can't help but feel there is a great deal of truth in his words.

Only the fact that Trenton has an excellent, well-trained corps of special police officers kept the incident from reaching major proportions. As it was, there were several injuries and reports that some 100 were involved.

At River Rouge, school officials were placed in the embarrassing position of supervising a tournament at which their team was the favorite during a boycott of classes by a black bloc of students.

Police officials there ordered games played with no spectators or have the entire tourney played on another court. So a district meet was played behind closed doors.

Then when Rouge moved to the regionals at Ypsilanti, the games involving the school were played in late afternoon rather than in the evening as in the past.

TO ADD MORE pathos to an already sad situation, two of the

class "A" quarterfinals were played in Crisler Arena at the University of Michigan — the first at 3:30 p.m. and the second at 8 p.m. — to avoid possibility of trouble. In the past, the Ann Arbor games have been scheduled as a night doubleheader.

And what does this all mean? In the words of a regional tourney manager, "We don't need these tournaments. If trouble goes with these games, then we prefer that the tourney go to some other school. The sponsoring schools get little financial remuneration for handling the games. It isn't worth the trouble. Let someone else take a chance on having their school facilities damaged. We don't need it."

That adds up to the state association looking around for new sites come another year, and schools with gyms large enough to handle the crowds aren't that plentiful.

Perhaps the sportscaster knew of what he was talking. Perhaps the March Madness which has become a big financial bonanza for the association may kill the golden goose. It's time for the Michigan High School Association to evaluate the situation, take measures to correct the troubles or decide that the pot of gold isn't worth it.

By MRS. KENNETH JONES  
Plymouth

In answer to Mr. Daniel's editorial in the March 12 issue of the Observer Newspapers.

There is no bridge to build that could close the gap between those who get involved and those who use the terms "establishment" or "gap" to excuse "copping" out, be it in school activities or adult responsibility.

I've always had great admiration for the men who give of their time to teach our youth not only sports, but discipline, self control, health care, sportsmanship and the traits that go to make a better person.

PLEASE FORGIVE ME for not realizing that these traits are bad for our youth.

Certainly school coaches are paid for this service, but the time involved and the service rendered beyond called for, make it cheap wages. Not to be forgotten are the many men who give of their time free of charge in the community activities.

Mr. Daniels, you state that "athletics is being used as a tool by the establishment to mold the type of youth it thinks best for society." Perhaps with this line of thinking the National Anthem should be dropped at the start of the games. After all, it's just one more link in the chain.

Who is the "establishment" and what is this great, giant "gap" we hear constantly about?

There rightfully should be a gap between generations. It might be possible those who try to close the gap by behaving like youngsters when they should be examples of adulthood have added to the downward word "establishment."

THE "ESTABLISHMENT" is a much-used slur to mean our government, which is the citizenry of this country. I take it as an insult when that word is used to describe this government of people who vote, pay taxes and whose majority works for a better understanding between people, be they long or short, white or black, young or elders.

The government is "we," you and me, Mr. Daniels, and as the phrase goes—"Peace, let it begin with me"—so goes the same for love and respect.

There is a vital lesson to be taught in sports, that is the lesson of life itself.

To be a winner we sometimes have to lose to profit by our mistakes and go on from there, holding to the knowledge found in a victory, but avoiding false pride. And it's still true, win or lose, how you played the game is important.

So on with the games and "Hail to the Victors."

Pertaining to the remark about the typical American boy: some of the greatest athletes today are neither blond-haired nor blue-eyed, but they are beautiful! In my scorebook you really fouled out in attempting to score a point with your pen.

## Editorial & Opinion

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## A Reader Dissents

## Did 'Stroller' Treat Subject Lightly?

By MRS. KENNETH HOLMES  
Plymouth

Mr. Edgar's recent Stroller article on "Changing Times" I fear treats too lightly a serious subject. I object to his terms "If you take these charges seriously

I say there are no ifs about it, ecologists are serious, they have been serious for a number of years, and thank heavens people are starting to believe them. The emphasis on pollution is not simply a new social pattern.

What Mr. Edgar didn't mention is that in the early years of the industrial revolution the world supported a considerably smaller population. With much

less people, we could live in the worse squalor imaginable and the biological systems could take care of it. But man's technology in the 20th century has brought about a standard of living never before imaginable and in doing so he has shown a complete disregard for the checks and balances of nature.

PROBABLY THE BIGGEST change was wrought by the antibiotics. As we spread our knowledge of sanitation and medicine about the world the death rate miraculously was lowered but nothing was done about the birth rate. People kept breeding the way they did when only a few children in the family could expect to reach adulthood.

Probably our brilliant scientists and engineers can solve the problems of air and water pollution but it will take a lot of money and at best it will only be a temporary reprieve unless the real problem is tackled — population control.

Chambers of Commerce hail the growth of communities — as evidenced by your supplement, "You Live Here, the story of Detroit's Northwest Suburbs." But to me more people mean more schools, hospitals, police, houses, crime and pollution.

Our inflated paychecks will try to stretch even further to cover those increased taxes. I mourn the fact that when we moved to Plymouth five years ago, we were surrounded by

fields but now there are only houses and the open land that is left will be claimed by a highway.

I'm thankful we at least have the Hines Parkway so my children will see some uncultivated nature near their home.

CANCER is a growth, too. Uncontrolled population in a closed environment system will do the same thing to the earth as cancer does to the human body. So what can we do?

Speak up. Make it socially unacceptable and economically difficult to have more than two natural children per family. Write to our legislators stating we are in favor of repeal of the abortion laws.