

Judge Robert Bell talks about justice, black-on-black crime

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Judge Robert Bell, the jovial 37-year-old Baltimore Supreme Bench judge, leaned back in his chair and laughed as a reporter humorously expressed astonishment at the fact that he smoked.

"We're human too," he said. "Judges are just people who, because of their intelligence and their training, have been deemed qualified to judge others. But we make mistakes too."

The personable judge is currently campaigning to retain his seat on the Supreme Bench, to which he was appointed almost three months ago.

Although the judge was quick to point out that "I'm not a politician he sounded like a confident stumper as he described his campaign to this point.

"I don't really consider myself as a candidate running against other candidates," he said. "I take the position that I'm going to win because I deserve to. What's at stake is my record."

Besides Judge Bell, two other blacks are seeking a judgeship on the Supreme Bench. They are Alonzo Hairston and Wilham "Billy" Murphy, both local attorneys. Several political

observers feel that, since more than one black is running, there is a chance that all three will

cancel each other out. But Bell isn't worried.

"The fact that I'm running shouldn't stop anybody else from running. Everybody has a right to run for office. It's up to the voters to look at us all and determine who they prefer."

Bell grew more comfortable as talk turned to the current state of the judicial system.

A reporter asked Bell if he felt that the recent city court decision declaring the rent control bill unconstitutional may have served to enforce many citizen's negative perception of the judiciary.

In an almost pedantic style, Bell replied "Historically, the judicial system has never been a representative body. It is the part of government that settles disputes. It should maintain its

impartiality in resolving disputes. Every judge who decides a case should not be the subject of public pressure because he might respond to the pressure."

But Bell did agree that there has been a diminution in the public's

respect for and perception of the judiciary.

"Most people only see one perspective of the city court system. For example, they may go to traffic court, have a bad experience and infer that the entire system is not the color of his skin, but whether or not the law has been violated. If he's innocent I let him go, but otherwise I have to sentence him because it's my job. But here's the important thing to

remember, In every case, the decision to send someone to jail is subjective. If you see a pattern emerge, if a certain judge has two persons, one white, one black, before him, and both defendants have the same record, the same background, and are guilty of the same offense, but one receives a greater sentence than another, then it could be racism. But who can tell?" Only by analyzing the pattern can you be

sure that it is racism." "There's one thing you didn't ask me," said Bell, as a reporter prepared to leave. the judge's chambers. You know that the greatest victims of crimes by black people are black people?"

Bell explained that the main reason for this tragic phenomenon is "proximity and geography." "Who's responsibility is it? It's ours," he said emphatically. "We have

got to recognize the danger it poses to our community. Our community is being decimated. One of the main causes of death among young black males is the fact that they stand a good chance of being killed by another black youth. And many black youth can't do a thing to help us because they are in jail. All of that is not good if we plan on having a viable black community."

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