

Former president defends university's preference policies

NEW YORK (AP) — Lawsuits challenging the University of Michigan's affirmative action policies threaten to destroy what is now "the finest educational environment for all students," former President Gerald R. Ford wrote in an opinion piece published Sunday.

Ford, a 1935 University of Michigan graduate, wrote in Sunday's edition of *The New York Times* that the lawsuits could reverse a century of hard-won progress toward racial justice.

A victory by the plaintiffs "would scuttle Michigan's current system, one that takes into account nearly a dozen elements — race, economic standing, geographic origin, athletic and artistic achievement among them — to create the finest educational environment for all students," Ford wrote.

The federal lawsuits were filed in 1997 by three white applicants alleging that the university rejected them because of their race. With the guidance of a conservative legal group, the three are

seeking to force the main undergraduate college and law school to ignore race in admissions.

A federal appeals court is currently considering whether outside groups can intervene.

Ford recalled the racial climate of his senior year at Michigan in 1935, when he and his teammates were preparing for a football game against Georgia Tech.

"Among the best players on that year's Michigan squad was Willis Ward, a close friend of mine whom the Southern school reputedly wanted dropped from our roster because he was black," Ford wrote. "My classmates were just as adamant that he should take the field. In the end, Willis decided on his own not to play. ... His sacrifice led me to question how educational administrators could capitulate to raw prejudice."

"I don't want future college students to suffer the cultural and social impoverishment that afflicted my generation," he wrote.

Letter could offer proof that Abu-Jamal never confessed

Linn Washington
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The damning confession by Mumia Abu-Jamal trumpeted recently in mainstream media has self-destructed, ironically at the hands of the man who claimed he heard the admission from the mouth of America's most celebrated death row inmate.

Phillip Bloch claimed Abu-Jamal told him that he killed a Philadelphia policeman during a prison interview the pair had in the winter of 1992.

But Bloch sent a letter to Abu-Jamal in July 1993 endorsing Abu-Jamal's consistent claims of innocence.

Bloch's three-page letter discussing his personal accomplishments and philosophical views ends with Bloch saying, "When you get a new trial - I think there is a good chance of acquittal."

It is highly unlikely that

Bloch would beg Abu-Jamal to believe that "it is possible to get justice" months after hearing him confess.

Abu-Jamal found this hand-written letter in his files recently and provided a copy to his supporters and two reporters for the *Philadelphia Tribune*.

Abu-Jamal has consistently stated that Bloch's confession claim is a lie.

"Why would he write (this letter) to me over six months after my 'confession' to him? The answer is simple. There was no confession. By his own words he proves he is a liar," Abu-Jamal stated in a recent essay written from death row entitled, "Anatomy of the Lie."

The handwriting in this 1993 letter is identical to the handwriting in a letter Bloch recently sent to a *Philadelphia Tribune* reporter. The similarities in handwriting plus the inclusion in the letter of a personal artifact from Bloch



ABU-JAMAL negate claims that Abu-Jamal forged the '93 letter.

This letter from Bloch is a major embarrassment to supporters of Abu-Jamal's immediate execution who touted the confession as additional proof of Abu-Jamal's guilt in the 1981 killing of Philadelphia Police Officer Daniel Faulkner.

Philadelphia's police union, the FOP and Philadelphia's DA's office immediately endorsed Bloch's confession claim following its coverage in *Vanity Fair* magazine and on

ABC's "20/20."

Bloch told Faulkner's widow, Maureen, that Abu-Jamal had confessed to him, and she connected him with *Vanity Fair* and "20/20." Mrs. Faulkner and the FOP are allies waging a propaganda war against Abu-Jamal's worldwide support movement.

This letter from Bloch is also a major embarrassment to prominent mainstream media journalists, including ABC's Sam Donaldson, who dutifully followed Mrs. Faulkner's wishes and reported the Bloch claim without conducting basic background reporting.

Bloch says he was a Pennsylvania Prison Society volunteer when Abu-Jamal confessed to him in 1992.

However, the Society terminated Bloch over a year before this alleged conversation with Abu- (See *Abu-Jamal*, Page 18)

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