

CHIEF KLUXERS TELL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS JUST WHAT MYSTIC ORGANIZATION PROPOSES TO DO IN CITY OF PORTLAND



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The making of Whitelandia

Portland filmmakers take a critical look at the City of Roses' history of racism and resilience

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Over the course of their careers Portland filmmakers Matt Zodrow and Tracy MacDonald have travelled the country learning the histories and stories of Americans, but for their latest project, *Whitelandia*, the Emmy-award winning husband and wife team have turned their lenses to their home. Due in 2015, *Whitelandia* examines the history of state-sanctioned racism in Oregon starting with its inception as a whites-only homeland to the heavy Klu Klux Klan presence in 1920s, the height of redlining in the 40s, and the rapid gentrification we see today. The film is centered on the uncomfortable yet important question, "Has Oregon become the white homeland its founders intended it to be?" but also focuses on the strength and resilience of black Oregonians throughout history and today. Tracy and Matt and spoke to me over the phone from their Alberta Street neighborhood home where we discussed the black community in Oregon, the title *Whitelandia*, and their hopes for the film's impact.

Ann-Derrick Gaillot: *What first drew you both to this subject?*

Tracy MacDonald: We moved into the Alberta arts district about 12 years ago, and at that time, we were looking for a place where we could buy an affordable house — a place that was diverse, a place that had an artistic, creative feel to it. During the time that we have lived on this street, we have slowly watched a lot of the black businesses and a lot of the diverse businesses, but particularly black businesses that drew us to the street in the first place, disappear one by one. And we've watched the black patronage of the businesses disappear as the black population of the neighborhood has dwindled. Then we moved away for three years and when we came back the street was so drastically different from the street we moved into. We still feel very invested in this

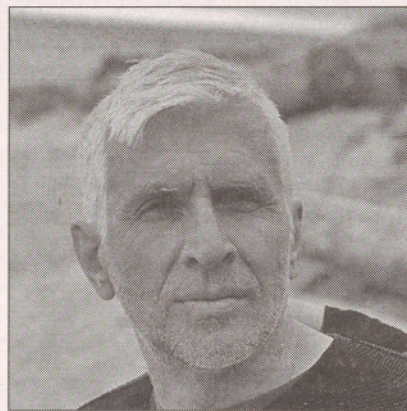


Filmmakers Tracy MacDonald and Matt Zodrow.

neighborhood. We love this neighborhood, our kids have grown up here. But the changes that we've seen and realizing how even as well-intentioned white liberals, or whatever, that we sort of stumbled into this gentrification without even really understanding what we were buying into. So "*Whitelandia*" for us is sort of a response to being part of this community and watching the changes that have occurred.

A.G.: *The title Whitelandia touches on a trend of putting -landia on different names, obviously from the TV show Portlandia. I'm interested to know why this film is important to make now and how pop culture is complicit in what you guys are finding.*

T.M.: For a show like "*Portlandia*" and the whole -landia trend to exist, there has to be a paradigm that supports that in the first place. There's sort of this mythologized hipster version of feel-good, cute, white liberalism that's ever present in Portland. And it seems so innocuous to kind of poke fun at it lovingly with a wink, and to poke fun at ourselves, but the paradigm that allows this whole -landia thing to exist to begin with is one that's imbalanced. And one in which the social construct is very much white-



dominated to begin with.

A.G.: *What do you hope viewers not from Portland come away with from the movie?*

Matt Zodrow: The outreach that we've done through Facebook and social media has gotten us feedback from all over the country, and one thing that we're hearing over and over again is that the story of Portland is mirrored in almost every major city across the country. The active redlining — taking a specific area of the city where minorities are sort of herded into, encouraged to live in — has existed in cities across the country ever since the 1940s or 1950s. It's common practice. So in seeing that reaction from people outside of Oregon we're realizing it's definitely a common theme. The difference in Oregon is that Oregon is almost the perfect example of gentrification because Portland itself has gentrified so successfully and continues to on a daily basis.

T.M.: One thing is that I really want white people, particularly white liberals, to think about is the idea of white privilege. I would like white folks to start to consider, what does my whiteness mean as I walk around this city? And I would like white folks

everywhere to consider that, because that's a relevant question all over the country. It's relevant here in Portland right here, right now, because we live here and because Portland is seen as this sort of mecca of liberalism; this mythical Portlandia place. I would like everybody to understand that, while we are looking at state-sanctioned discrimination and other forms of discrimination against black Americans, it's not just a story about that discrimination and subsequent victimization. It's also a story of the resilience of the black community and of black communities to resist and to continue to be here and to thrive.

M.Z.: One thing, too, that's important to note is that the film is going to have a pretty solid and straightforward historic timeline included in the narrative of the film. When you start to research black history in Oregon you really come up against some walls. There are a few people who have done timelines, who have looked at the history. But in general, it's tough to find. One thing that I really want to have happen is this film be a solid and researched documentation of the history of black Oregon from exclusion laws in the constitution all the way to the heavy Klu Klux Klan presence to Vanport to redlining — all the way up to the Trader Joes incident that's happening now. I want a solid history told and recorded that people can refer back to.

A.G.: *What has shocked you most, or surprised you most, over the course of your research so far?*

M.Z.: To me it's the way that the events, like the flooding of Vanport and then the exodus to Albina, are incredibly relevant experiences or issues in the lives of black Americans in Portland. It's not historic. It's discussed openly and the effects are still strongly felt. They're still feeling the effects of the expansion of the Emanuel Hospital, of the construction of the Coliseum, of I-5 going

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