

Although covert racism comprises a lot of intangible characteristics like micro-aggressions, there are clearer effects outside campus, such as the fact that there aren't really any cohesive communities for people of color in Eugene. One of the first things King realized about Eugene was that there were no ethnic neighborhoods. "There's not a Mexican neighborhood," she says. "Where's the neighborhoods?"

She also found that there was no community for black people outside of the church. "For black folks in Eugene who aren't religious, there's no solidarity network and I feel like that sort of depresses a lot of our blackness," King says. "I want to have a community connection with other black folks, but I don't want to have to go to church to get it."

She adds: "Other places where I've lived, black folks, we generally are happy people, enjoying life. Even if we're struggling, we have a community. I don't feel that here."

Eric Richardson is the president of the Eugene chapter of the NAACP. As a person who also isn't religious, Richardson agrees that there is "no place to hang out with black folks on a regular basis" outside of church.

WHITE UTOPIA

Frankly, the community members who inhabit the welcoming, idealistic version of Eugene so often put forth are the ones this town was built for — the white people who benefited from exclusionary property rights and sundown laws that literally banned people of color from living in Eugene, and Oregon as a whole, for decades.

Stanford educator Walidah Imarisha's conversation project, "Why Aren't There More Black People in Oregon? A Hidden History," addresses this history directly. Imarisha has taught at Portland State University and Oregon State University in the past, and still tours Oregon regularly for lectures and town hall series, speaking about Oregonian black history, especially in rural communities.

"The founding idea of Oregon itself, and the entire Northwest, was as a racist white utopia," Imarisha says. "When we look at demographics in the Northwest and Oregon, it's not a coincidence that it's overly white; it's by design."

She adds: "The fact that there are any black communities in Oregon in general is amazing."

Imarisha says people tend to talk about racism in Oregon as if it were an isolated event that happened a long time ago, not a living legacy that thrives to this day. But that history is not so distant.

It wasn't until 2002 that a ballot measure was passed removing discriminatory racial references from the Oregon Constitution, such as: "No free Negro, or Mulatto, not residing in this state at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall come, reside or be within this state, or hold any real estate, or make any contracts, or maintain any suit therein."

However, there has still been pushback to just let the past be the past, no matter how close in time our white supremacist tendencies can be traced. Here's an example of a letter to the editor from last summer (errors kept intact):

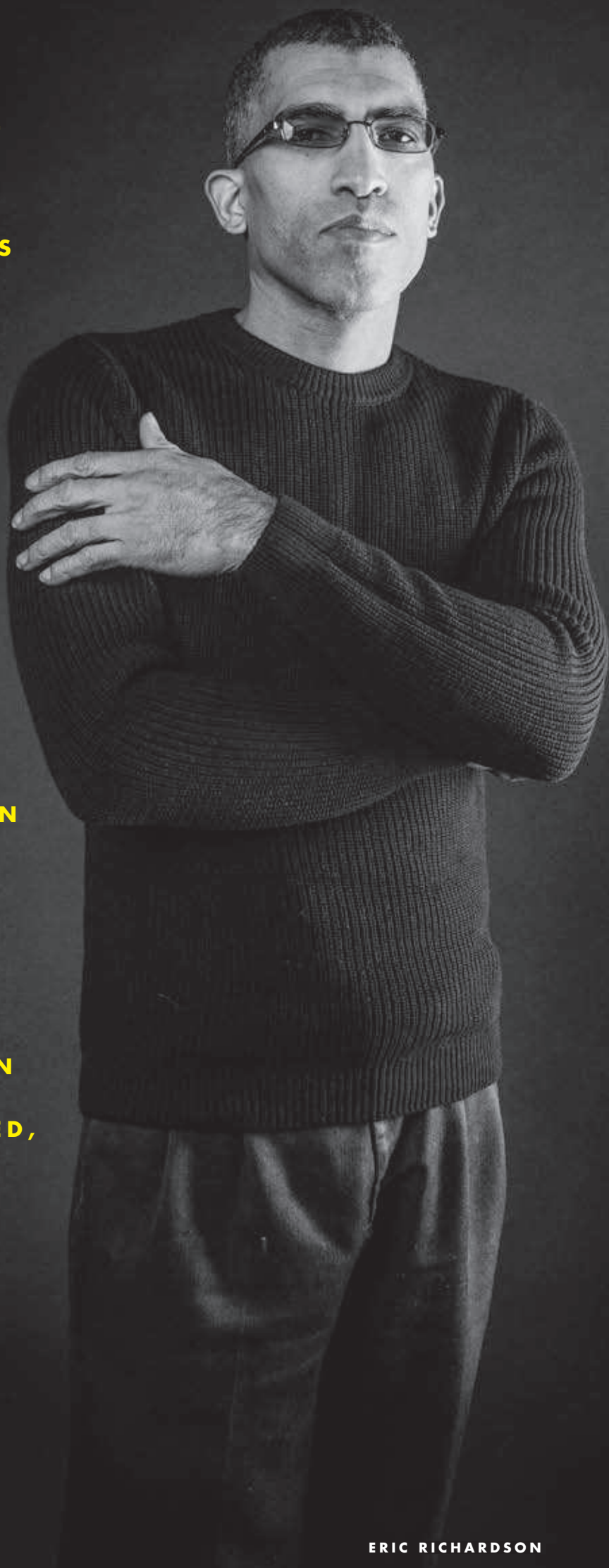
Dear feedback to Eugene Weekly:

we are sick and tired of listening to all this bull shit about how racist Oregon was and is. And it doesn't matter whether we get all this arrogant bull shit from white people or black people but it is coming from the Eugene weekly regularly.

If you guys at Eugene weekly insist on beating a dead horse, and continue to call Oregon a racist state, don't be surprised if a large group with money, decides to sue you for libel and shut down your newspaper because it is libelous against the state, and all the people in it. I warned you. Go ahead and keep libeling the whole state of Oregon and everyone in it, and you will end up in court. [Signed "Oregonian"]

Just because Eugene isn't a place that sees lynchings or burning crosses every week does not mean we're a community that's been liberated from racist ideologies and racist acts. It's important to realize, though, that overt racism *does* still occur in our city.

**UO PROFESSOR
NANCY SHURTZ
INEVITABLY
IGNORED THE
LENGTHY, PAINFUL
HISTORY OF
BLACKFACE THAT IS
STILL EXTREMELY
DAMAGING TO
BLACK PEOPLE.
AS EUGENE'S
NAACP PRESIDENT
ERIC RICHARDSON
POINTS OUT, THIS
SHOWS THERE IS
ONLY ONE VERSION
OF AFRICAN-
AMERICANS THAT
PEOPLE TEND TO
ACKNOWLEDGE: AN
OVER-EXAGGERATED,
LAUGHABLE,
BUFFOONISH
CARICATURE.**



ERIC RICHARDSON