

# The spirit of beauty

By Nyewusi Askari

A few months ago, this writer denounced the "Miss Black Oregon Pageant," as non-representative of Black women living in the State of Oregon. Particular attention was given to 1) the white-ish concept of the Pageant as it related to Black women living in the State of Oregon, and 2) the white-ish screening process adopted by the Pageant organizers to determine who was qualified to compete. And as expected, the Pageant was held, and a winner crowned.

My personal views about the Pageant have not changed, however, recently, it was my unexpected pleasure to meet the Black woman, who not only won the "Miss Black Oregon Pageant," but who also finished in the top ten of the "Miss Black America Pageant" held in the Black country of Jamaica, a few weeks ago. After talking to her, I gained a new respect for Black women who are able to compete in Pageants, and are able to retain their self-respect, dignity and Black womanhood. Meet Sonya L. Coleman, age 19, a graduate of Jefferson High School, a fashion model, singer, and music enthusiast.

Sonya's involvement with the "Miss Black Oregon Pageant," was not a personal goal or pre-planned effort. As she recalls, "I heard about the Pageant from friends and decided to enter a day before the deadline. I didn't know what to expect...yet, I felt that it might be educational and worth checking out."

As I listened to Sonya, I was reminded of brother Haki Madhubuti's analysis of "Some problems facing Black women." Here was Sonya, beautiful, young, and about to venture into the vanilla world of the "Pageant." Brother Haki tells us that, "the Amerikkkan system of white supremacy does not allow Black women to deal comfortably with their beauty, thus, frustrating many conscious Black women. You find the skilled and unskilled, attractive and unattractive - (attractive in the traditional western sense, which forces Black women to essentially become carbon copies of white women, a definition dictated through social pressures of white supremacy stressing conformity to white images; alteration of the Black woman's physical features.) - Thus, causing continued problems with the breakdown of the concept of attractive or non-attractive, the major problem being, our lack of definitions of what a beautiful Black woman is in the con-



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text of our own standards of beauty."

Surprisingly, Sonya's concept and definition of her beauty was indeed spiritual. The Pageant, she felt, would give her a chance to display her talents, skills, and give her the chance to meet other Black women involved in personal development. She feared getting caught up in "A flesh game," which is very typical of traditional western Pageants, thus she decided to concentrate on her talent as a singer. The pace of the pageant often didn't allow her to practice as often as needed. There were the fashion shows to participate in, there were community functions, dress rehearsals, personal appearances in the community, and finally, the adding up of points and the choosing of the top ten.

However, long before the choosing of the top ten, she found herself facing major problems, mainly: 1) lack of funds and 2) lack of sponsors. "I didn't have the

(Photo by: Richard J. Brown)

necessary experience to know all that was involved in being able to maintain momentum once I had decided to go all the way, as a participant. Luckily, a friend of mine whose wife had participated in a Pageant down South, suggested that I talk to community people about sponsoring my efforts.

"I then went to Portland's OIC office where one of the Pageant director's worked, and inquired about the availability of sponsorship papers. She said none existed, but that she would help me put together an individual sponsorship letter. After we got it together, I personally went to the Black Community seeking support. To name a few, Farmer Johns, The House of Sound, International Hair Design, Friday's Beauty Supply, and Reese's Oil Co. Their support helped me obtain a swimsuit, shoes, talent outfit, and do some very neat clothes coordination. This was the Black community helping me, and I really felt honored," she said, flashing a radiant smile.

Despite these accomplishments, Sonya did not expect to win the competition. "The Judges choose the top ten on a Wednesday, but didn't reveal the names, until the night of the Pageant. And believe it or not, I was the second to last to be called! I didn't have time to be nervous until moments before I was crowned "Miss Black Oregon!" she continued.

After being crowned "Miss Black Oregon," Sonya once again turned to the Black community for support. At this point, she understood clearly that winning the competition meant a trip to Jamaica. It also meant that the level of competition in the "Miss Black America Pageant," would be much stiffer, especially in the area of skill, talent, and clothes coordination. She knew she had prepare, and in a hurry.

The community responded quickly. Again, it is appropriate to quote brother Haki: "We live in a world of action which demands that we act; if we do not, we can be sure that we will be acted upon. We have always been the People Who Care. My concern is for honesty; for a

higher exchange of feelings that is not based upon lies and deceit." (end of quote.) Sonya found this higher exchange brother Haki talks about, in the talents of Bobbie Moore, her sister Jose, Lisa Cruse, and Viola Washington. And there were others too numerous to mention, however, it was they who are responsible for Sonya's total preparation for her trip to Jamaica. As Sonya puts it, "They were my heartbeat, and I could not have gotten better advice and coordination anywhere else."

After the crowning, a certain segment of the white business community responded supportively, particularly, Nordstrom, \$100.00; Fred Meyer, \$100.00; Zukors,

# What do you think?

By Paul McCoy

**Q. What do you think about this column?**

For three months now I have been writing on topics that I myself have been interested in. They have been met with some favor and some disfavor. I would like to take this time and explain a little bit about myself, the column, and a look at some of my findings.

**Q. Who is Paul McCoy?**

I am a Black male, age 24, 5 foot 11 inches and of this writing, am attending classes at Portland State. A communications major in my senior year, I intend to enter the communications field after graduation. I live downtown, where most of "What do you think?" answers are gathered. So now you know all about me, if you want to know more ask me sometime. On to the column.

The column was a brainstorm that sparked up during one of those quiet moments, when the most observant person would swear my mind was totally blank. It always fascinated me how there could be so many different attitudes and different ways of saying the same thing. It was and still is my contention, that people who read the newspapers, and/or who watch the evening news are in the minority. Most people I have talked to may watch the news every night, but they still can't tell you about the things that effect them the most. It's not only opening the paper and reading the headlines, or turning on the news and then the stereo and watching for the sports to come on. I don't want to get down on anybody because I too am guilty.

When the column first came out, I wanted to make sure that people would talk to me. So I started out very simple, like: The Miss Black America Beauty Pageant and What do you like to do in your spare time? Pay dirt, people would talk. About the beauty pageant, I was surprised. Most people thought it was a good thing. Mel Brown and Lind Calvin recieved the most feed-back about their responses. But, there were many that felt that it was not my place to give free advertising. The negative, to be honest, has been the main form of feedback that I have received.

My curiosity changed toward what people would say about Portland. Again I was surprised. Most people would not even talk to me and if they did they would not want to give their names or at least their real names. What could this person be afraid of? When asked, many would say that they either didn't need anymore trouble or that they just could not do it.

On topics dealing with general "light" questions, people seemed to speak up more and give their names more readily. The converse was the rule for questions that dealt with topics of national or Portland related activities. For the most part, many people did not know what I was talking about. Questions like: What is quality education? What about the BUF May 19th Boycott and What do you think about the Portland Police? were questions that not only raised eyebrows but a few tempers as well. Anger was not at me or the question, but the simple fact that the person did not know something they should have. Guilt.

Two interesting conclusions were quickly drawn. One: people in Portland are poorly informed and in some cases, very misinformed. Two: People in Portland for the most part are afraid to give their opinions and or their real names. They do not want to be identified.

This column has given me the opportunity to meet a great deal of diverse individuals who make up Portland's Black experience. It has been an education I will never

\$800.00 watch; Meier & Frank, \$100.00; Gloria LaVonne Modeling School, a \$595.00 modeling scholarship; American State Bank, Color T.V., and a gold necklace from the Governor of the State of Oregon, bearing the seal of the State.

For Sonya, the total accomplishment, was an accomplishment beyond her expectations. Next week, she tells us about Jamaica, its people and its influence upon her concept about the Black community.

(Continued next week)

forget. What I would like to see in the future is more feedback, be it pro or con. Your letters will be accepted and some, written in the column. At the end of this writing I shall include a list of future topics that I would like for you to answer by writing to THE PORTLAND OBSERVER 2201 N. Killingsworth 97217, Portland, Oregon.

Questions for the future, (not in this exact order).

What do you think should be the focus for Black people in the 80s? What are your plans for the future? What Portland officials do you feel represent you best? What do you see as the most important problems facing Blacks in Portland? What do you think of the media? What do

you think about interracial relationships?

These and more. I hope you will write and let me know what you think. Feel free to send in your own questions. Anything that concerns one concerns all. Thank you, those of you that took the time to talk to me. For those of you that had nothing to say, well what can I say? For the people who wanted to do me physical harm as well as verbal, I prefer the latter, and for the person who calls to tell me how messed-up I am, please, no calls after 2:00 p.m. At least I know you read it.

Well that's it in a nutshell. Hope to hear from you soon, and also include ideas on style and format of the column What do you think?

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