



OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES
BY Kathryn Hall Bogle

IT WAS DICK GREGORY Day in Oregon one day recently. It was Wednesday, February 23, during Black History Month, when the famous comedian, iconoclast, lecturer, author of 12 books, and human rights activist awoke at 4:00 a.m. Habitually he arises at this hour to walk and to drink in the early sun and to commune with his "God Force."

Later Gregory is to go on to Salem to keep speaking engagements there. But first, he is to appear on the Portland T.V. show, "A.M. Northwest," at KATU and on a pre-taping session for a later telecast at Ch. 6.

Arrangements for Dick Gregory in Oregon were made by the Minority Action Committee of the Third World Student Organization of Willamette University. Wanda Irving and Sam Irving are coordinators for this event. Carol Colley is Intercultural Student Counselor for the group. Sam Irvine and Dean M. Richardson acted as ambassador for the guest of honor.

The day's schedule as we arrive in Salem is full and tight. It starts with Gregory's speech before students and guests of the Willamette University College of Law. Gregory exhorts 200 rapt students to "ask questions," "examine the negatives," "He holds up for scrutiny the "super-rich" persons and families in America, he talks of the movie of "Ghandi," in which the life of Gandhi is depicted for three hours but, oddly, according to Gregory, "without a single scene showing that very devout man at prayer." "Why? Why?" Gregory asks.

The FBI also comes in for scathing remarks as Gregory reads from

copies of his own files kept by that agency: "Chicago should develop counter-intelligence efforts to neutralize him." Again, "Why?"

Racism and racial myths receive Gregory's attention—and that of his audiences through the day as he brings them to relax and to laugh at their own foibles. He poked fun at "soul food (it'll kill you)," and at life in the black ghetto where white people fear to come "(It's your country too.)"

Press conferences and talk show interviews were granted for mid-day. Lunch doesn't matter to Dick Gregory as he has already entered a 40-day fasting period in recognition of "World Hunger." He sips fruit juices instead, and turns inward to his "God Force."

A short rest in a dormitory room and Gregory is ready to be whisked by limousine to the Oregon State prison. A down-state reporter challenges Gregory's mode of travel and his sponsors explain that the ride in the limo, a Lincoln Presidential Eagle, is a gift, a courtesy tendered by the Prestige Limousine Service of McMinnville.

Gregory pulls no punches when he speaks to the some 500 inmates of OSP. He gives them the essence of his morning speech but adds a little extra jocularity, and he "walks that walk" as he holds the mike and talks.

No stranger to prisons, Gregory calls himself a "veteran occupant of some of the most prestigious jails in the nation." He has found himself behind prison bars many times, "twice serving 45-day sentences—once in the state of Washington as a result of demonstrating with the Nisqually Indians in their demand for full participation in American



DICK GREGORY

society, and once in Chicago for protesting de-facto segregation in the Chicago public school system."

Afterwards, the prison audience swarms about Gregory in adulation. He has given them a key to make life in prison more bearable by telling them about the availability of the "God Force inside" them where they are.

Prison gates open and close again and Gregory departs.

There is a little time for relaxation before the dinner meeting on campus. Gregory sips more fruit juice and takes a 15-minute nap to freshen himself. The dinner will be a gathering of some 125 persons to hear him.

Salem's Mayor Sue Harris, in her welcome to Dick Gregory, presents him with the Key to the City. Among the guests at the dinner party, hosted by Willamette's Third World Students, are Derrick Bell, dean of the University of Oregon Law School at Eugene, Dean M. Richardson, the Civil Rights law professor at Willamette, who is fasting this week in sympathetic tribute to the honored guest, Gladys

McCoy, Multnomah County Commissioner and William McCoy, state senator.

Vivian Richardson, Ronee Walker and Lynn Perry, with a vanload of Portland State University students, also made the trip to Salem to hear Dick Gregory.

Later, over 600 persons filled Smith Auditorium on the Willamette campus for the 8:00 p.m. address. He shocks this audience with his earthy language, he shakes them up with some little known statistics: "One pack of cigarettes has enough radioactivity to equal 300 X-rays if the tobacco was grown in a certain section of America; black folks spend 360 million dollars annually for wine and champagne, 79 million for chewing gum, 20 million for instant potatoes and 15 million for barbecue sauce."

Who collects all these figures? The Black Health Alliance for the Chain Store Age Supermarkets and the R.A. Johnson Associates of Brooklyn, New York.

Why do they collect them? To show that black folk do have financial power. What else?

Black people, white people, all together, crowd around Gregory to shake his hand, take a picture, ask for an autograph. He responds to each request quietly. He has been without solid food for five days now. He is hungry and thirsty and he draws on his God Force to see him through. He reflects on his belief: "The crest of life's highest purpose is singular and complete devotion to serving one's fellow man." The persons whose lives he has touched today will not soon forget his presence or his message.

The limousine slides up to the curb. Dick Gregory's Day in Oregon is complete.



Jeffrey Beaver, Balsa member; Dr. Derrick Bell, Dean, U. of O. Law School; and Hiawatha Givens, Willamette U. law student.

DICK GREGORY Day in Oregon became a mecca in Salem and the campus of Willamette University for those persons interested in the law and human rights. Hundreds of Oregonians flocked to Smith Auditorium on February 23 to hear Dick Gregory the great social activist when he made his major public address that evening under the auspices of the Third World Students organization.

From Eugene came Derrick Bell, dean of the U. of Oregon law school. He and Dean M. Richardson, professor of Civil Rights law at Willamette University, are promoting the formation of a chapter of Black American Law Students at Willamette.

Currently, the University of Oregon is the only Oregon law school with a Balsa chapter, although Balsa chapters are to be found at most American law schools. The five blacks at U. of O., according to Bell, organized their chapter a year ago. The students find the chapter serves as a hub around which their academic and social concerns revolve" Bell said.

Richardson, at Willamette, feels a Balsa chapter would be helpful to the eight law students enrolled there and he is encouraging them to affiliate.

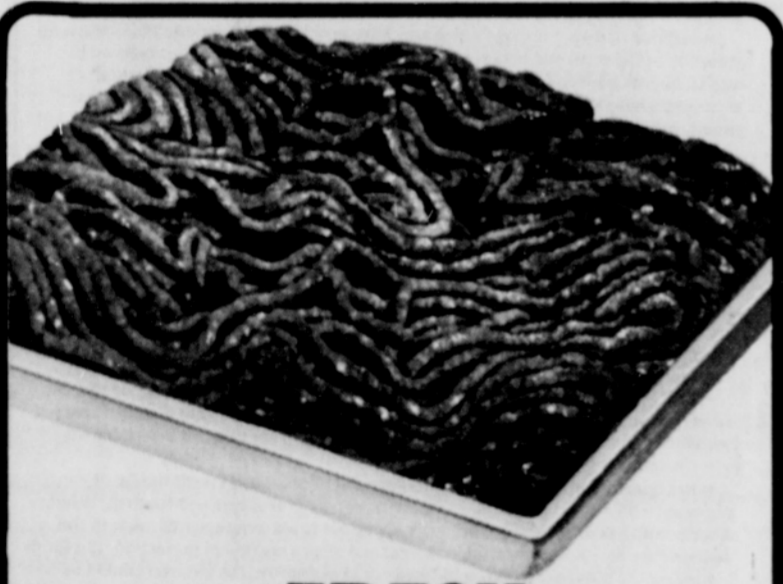
"The national organization serves to highlight legal issues which affect black people but may seldom be addressed in a white dominated law school curriculum," Bell stated. Richardson realizes this as well. Both Bell and Richardson feel that strong Balsa chapters will enhance the recruitment of more black people to Oregon's legal community.

The national conference of Balsa is to be held in Atlanta from March 23 to March 27. Since the economic difficulties facing the state of Oregon have touched its academic institutions severely, there is little assistance to be expected for financing travel expenses for students interested in Balsa.

Persons who wish to make a contribution to a Balsa chapter at either school may send checks directly to Professor Dean M. Richardson, c/o Willamette Law School, Salem, Oregon.



Dick Gregory signs autographs for PSU students Lynn Perry and Renee Walker following Willamette University address.



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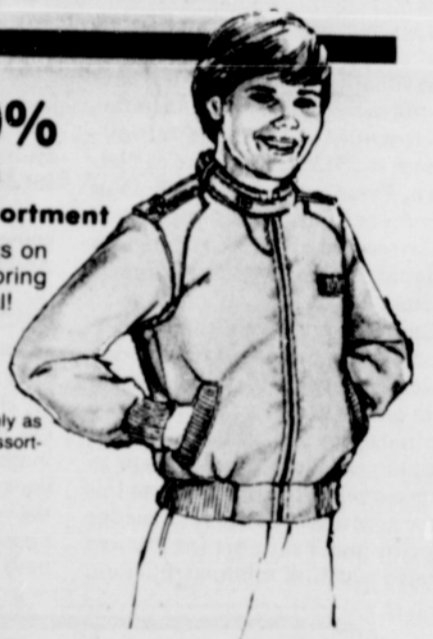
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