

Black bicentennial planned in '88

by Lanita Duke

GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W. — A week prior to America's Independence Day, Dr. Darrell Millner, Head of the Black Studies Department at Portland State University, laid the foundation for an Oregon Black Bicentennial celebration in 1988.

Two hundred years of Afro-American life in Oregon can be summed up in the title of Elizabeth McLagan's book on the Oregon Black Experience from the Wagon Train days of the 1840's to World War II. For Blacks, Oregon has been a "Peculiar Paradise".

According to the 1980 Census, Blacks make up 37,060 of the 2,633,105 total population in Oregon. In Portland, the total population is 366,383, with Blacks comprising 27,764 of that total figure. Millner said the small numbers of Afro-Americans in the City and State are not accidental. "There are historical reasons for this."

Millner said Blacks were excluded from settling in Oregon during its pioneer period. The law read, "When any free negro or mulatto shall have come to Oregon, he or she, shall remove from and leave the country...he or she may be arrested upon warrant issued by some justice of the peace, and if guilty shall receive upon his or her bare back not less than twenty nor more than thirty-nine stripes."



Getting ready for 1988 celebration are (l-r) PSU President Joseph C. Blumel; Dr. Darrell Millner, PSU Black Studies; Commissioner Charles Jordan; and Superintendent of Portland Public Schools, Dr. Matthew Prophet. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Millner pointed to another law which excluded Blacks from homesteading. The government gave, "Every white settler...the quantity of one-half section or three hundred and twenty acres of land."

Although Oregon did not experience segregation to the degree in the South, it had its share by prohibiting intermarriage of the races, lynching, theater and public accommodations segregation and Real estate practices which said, "No persons or person of African or Asiatic descent shall be permitted

to own or purchase the above described property."

Ironically, Millner added, the indirect influence of Blacks in other parts of the world led to the discovery of Oregon through the Louisiana Purchase. Napoleon sold Thomas Jefferson half of the west side of the United States because the slave revolt in Haiti ate up his resources and damped his ambitions.

Millner balanced the negative treatment Blacks received in the City of Roses by introducing history

which proved Portland to be more progressive than her fellow states. In 1950, Portland passed a comprehensive Civil Rights Ordinance, but it was overturned by referendum in the next general election. Oregon passed a Fair Housing Act, real estate practices changed and Oregon was finally on the way to entering the 20th century in the 1950's.

Some of the significant positions currently held by Blacks in Oregon are a City Commissioner, Dean of the University of Oregon Law School, Conductor of the Oregon Symphony and the Managing Editor of *The Oregonian* newspaper.

Millner wants to document Blacks impact on Oregon by utilizing existing organizations such as the Oregon Historical Society, Portland Public Schools, Portland State University and the local media.

The tentative structure of the Black Bicentennial commemoration is a saturation of events during the Black History Month—February, 1988, and a Markus Lopeus Day commemoration August 16, 1988. Lopeus was the first Black to set foot in Oregon and who was later murdered.

In 1942, Mayor Earl Riley said, "Portland can absorb only a minimum of Negroes without upsetting the city's regular life." In 1984, Dr. Darrell Millner said, "It will never be the same and we are still a part of the process."

Commissioners activate minority hiring

City Commissioners Margaret D. Strachan and Mike Lindberg jointly announced, this week, an effort to improve the City of Portland's hiring practices for women and minorities, and Commissioner Charles Jordan met with the Director and a Board Member of the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission to discuss their evaluation of the City's Affirmative Action hiring practices.

As evidenced by the report, the City is far from attaining its hiring goals for women and minorities which has resulted in underutilization in all but two categories of jobs, para-professional and clerical.

Paragraph three of the report indicates that the City has had opportunities to hire women and minorities and did not. Availability was not always the issue.

In response to a critical report from the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, Commissioners Strachan and Lindberg

said they would call for implementation of several MHRC recommendations, including the immediate re-establishment of the City's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Regulatory Committee and an overall review of the City's Affirmative Action Plan.

Strachan and Lindberg said they would ask the City Council to hold an informal Council session to reaffirm the City's commitment to affirmative action and to reassess the role of the City's Affirmative Action Office.

Strachan, who oversees MHRC, said she has instructed her Bureaus to hire qualified women and minorities who reach the top positions on Civil Service examinations, or to "meet with me prior to selection to justify 'why a woman or minority will not be hired."

"I am greatly disturbed by the report," Strachan said in a memorandum issued to her Bureau

managers. "This is an unacceptable situation. The City should be an example for the rest of the community in fairness of hiring practices."

The annual MHRC affirmative action review concluded that the City was well short of its goals in minority and female hires. Minority utilization for the City is 6.9 percent and 20.7 percent for women, MHRC found.

Commissioner Jordan said in a memo to Park Bureau managers that "effective immediately, women and minorities who are certified for positions in your Bureau, will be hired, whether there is an underutilization or not in any specific

job category.

"If, for whatever reason, you conclude that a certified woman or minority should not be hired, you will submit for my approval, the justification for your consideration(s) before filling the position."

Lindberg, who oversees Personnel Services and Civil Service, said he is "extremely concerned" about the findings.

Under Civil Service rules, the top three or five candidates for a position are considered equally qualified for a position. Any one of them can be hired subject to the judgement of the hiring official.

Utility watchdog measure on ballot

by Chuck Goodmacher

Nearly 90,000 signatures supporting the Citizens Utility Board initiative were delivered to the Secretary of State's office in Salem, Monday morning. The signatures were turned in shortly after jubilant supporters held a small celebration on the steps of the capital. Supporters said the 89,029 signatures ensure that the measure will appear on the November ballot. Only 62,000 are required.

Eric Stachon, chair of Oregonians for CUB and Utility Program director for the Oregon State Public Interests Research Group (OSPIRG), said two critical lessons emerge from the initiative campaign for the CUB. "The first," he said, "is that grassroots campaigns are alive and well in Oregon." He added that the petitions were circulated by close to 600 individuals without pay and that a wide range of consumer, senior citizen, environmental, civic, labor, religious, political and other organizations support the effort.

The second lesson, continued Stachon, "is for the utility companies whose total disregard for the consumer interest, and complete preoccupation with short-term profit has contributed to the current need for CUB." He described the signatures as "individual responses to the current system," and predicted the measure will pass with more than 60 percent of the vote in November.

Stachon added, "utility company credibility is so low that no one will believe their multi-million dollar

media campaign."

Lillian Herzog, Gray Panthers representative and chief petitioner for the measure, said, "There's an old saying, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Well, believe me, the system of setting utility rates in Oregon sure is 'broke' and it's time to 'fix it'. That's where CUB comes in."

If passed by the voters in November, CUB will be a statewide organization representing residential consumers of telephone, electric, and gas utilities. It will be supported by voluntary contributions of \$5 (provisions are included for those on low- and fixed-incomes to avoid this requirement) which will entitle consumers to voting privileges and support the hiring of full-time experts to stand up for them when rates and policy are being set. CUB will not be a part of the government and will not receive any tax dollars.

A unique feature of the CUB proposal will be the ability of the consumer group to have notices included in utility bill mailings along with the usual utility company promotions. Kerry Barnett of OSPIRG said this power will eliminate a major obstacle to consumer organizing; tens of thousands of consumers will be able to know that the organization even exists as well as what it is doing in their interests. He said the fact that 92,000 individuals in Wisconsin have joined a CUB there shows this to be true. CUB supporters say the Wisconsin CUB has saved consumers there \$285 million since 1980, when it was established.

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