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Two Sections

PSU's St. John's new book to come out

by Nathaniel Scott
Portland State University (PSU) professor's third book of poetry will be published in 1986.
Professor Primus St. John, a professor of English, contemporary poetry writing, Caribbean, African and Afro-American literature, wrote his third book of poetry while on sabbatical leave last academic year.
Dreamer, which should be published in the winter of '86, follows *Love Is Not A Consolation; It Is A Light and Skins On The Earth*.
St. John also compiled the anthology textbook: *Zero Makes Me Hungry*.
To write his third book, *Dreamer*, St. John decided to visit the Caribbean for a triad of reasons.
First, he wanted to change his "physical landscape" in order to do something about the "imagery" of his poems.
The second reason was to visit a place he was interested in. St. John not only reads a lot of Caribbean and African literature, but as a teacher of those literatures, he feels the experience enhances his teaching ability.
The third reason for going to the Caribbean: Puerto Rico, Martinique, Barbados and Saint Lucia, was to explore the possibility of setting up educational travel seminars to Africa and the Caribbean.
"I hope that over the years some positive relationships will develop between the University of West Indies at Cave Hill Barbados and PSU," he said, indicating that the initial groundwork had been laid.
Aside from, or in conjunction with, his organizational talents, St. John's strength is specific. He is deeply concerned about Black writing, particularly the African, the Afro-American and the Caribbean aspects of Black literature.
And second is poetry: His word songs that speak the language of love. But there is no common ground between the two; no separation: they are combined.
"There is that tendency for Black Americans to look at the Black experience as the Afro-American experience," he said. "The Black community is far larger and more diverse than we tend to think. And if we are going to use it as 'spiritual' fountain we will have to look at it more profoundly."
"Most of the poems (in *Dreamer*) are set in the West Indies, Africa and the 'middle passage' on soul ships," he said. "The 'middle passage' is the actual crossing over on the slave ships."
St. John said the major difference between the people of the Caribbean and Americans is the material wealth.
"The people in the Caribbean have modern conveniences but not to the extent that we do," he said. "There is high unemployment but there is also (an abundance of) 'spiritual' wealth."
The lifestyle of the people is more relaxed; people enjoy talking with each other, he said.
St. John said, "Barbados is a Black country on the basis of numbers and a Black country on the basis of officials, but the economic power is American, European and white West Indian."
St. John believes his job as a professor is to guide and offer students aids and devices that will help them gain an education. One has to educate him/herself, he said. "I can only assist them in the accumulation of knowledge."
"One of the problems with teaching is it is very dangerous because it can lead to an ego trip," he said. "A



PRIMUS ST. JOHN

good teacher is someone you confer with. What they give you is quality in service."
In regard to poetry, St. John said, "I think the writer of poetry requires a sense of sensibility and consciousness. One has to come to one's own self."
St. John believes that in order to become a writer, a person has to develop an infection.
"You have to decide if you are going to be directed by a passion," he said, adding, "A lot of people think everything they write is wonderful. There is a difference between everyone talking and talking with power. Writers talk with power!"
St. John has taught at PSU since 1973. He is a single parent with two daughters, ages 14 and nine, and in addition to putting on literature workshops, he developed a multi-cultural reading list for Portland's public schools.
St. John said, "I would prefer to write but I enjoy teaching." He added his next book of poetry would be about the Vietnam experience.

More ethnic teachers needed in Portland Public Schools

by Lanita Duke
GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W. — In its end of the year report to the Portland School Board, the Desegregation Monitoring and Advisory Committee (DMAC) submitted a proposal to stimulate the hiring of ethnic teachers.
Their proposal is in response to "the effort and lack of creativity exhibited by district administration staff responsible for hiring out-of-state teachers... (which) leaves a lot to be desired."
Maxine Selling, chair of DMAC's Staff Hiring and Training Subcommittee, issued a six-step plan to effectively promote, recruit and retain personnel of color in the district.
Selling proposed that the district personnel efforts target and communicate with large metropolitan areas with a concentration of non-whites.
She added that preliminary interviews should encompass information about Portland and School District I. An aggressive follow-up procedure should start and trail the student teacher until graduation. Once in Portland, new teachers will be met with a structured hospitality plan and process.
Other concerns addressed by DMAC throughout the year still trouble this committee which was set up in 1980 to monitor the implementa-



A flyer circulated at Portland's V.A. Hospital, targeting the Union President, who is a Black female.

Union harassment

by Lanita Duke
GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W. — A pattern of union harassment is alleged by Sylena Wilkes, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, Local 2157.
Wilkes, employed in the cardiology section at the Veterans Medical Center, said her effectiveness as a negotiator for employees' rights, wages and safe working conditions made her a

target of lower management harassment.
"My supervisor did not like the fact that at any time I could leave my worksite and perform union business," Wilkes said.

Supporters send ambulances to Nicaragua

by Robert Lothian
Nicaragua supporters adopted a hands-on approach Saturday. They gathered around an ambulance being donated to that troubled country by the people of Oregon and Washington and put their hands on it, to bless it and speed it on its way. Then they sang the Sandinista Hymn.
The occasion was a sixth birthday party for revolutionary Nicaragua sponsored by the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee.
The ambulance, one of 11 purchased with funds raised across the country, stopped in Portland and other cities on its way from Seattle to San Francisco. It will join a sister ambulance in San Francisco and leave for Nicaragua with a shipment of other goods worth \$100,000, said Bob Reed, Northwest coordinator of the ambulance campaign.
A nationwide fundraising drive led by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (American veterans of the Spanish Civil War), raised over \$200,000 for the ambulances, said Reed, a VALB member from Seattle.
Nine new Toyota ambulances will be shipped directly from Japan, he said. Two used ambulances, including the one that visited Portland, were purchased at a cut-rate price of \$5,000 each from a sympathetic Seattle ambulance dealer, according to Reed.
"These ambulances will save lives," Reed said. No conditions were put on their use. They could be used in war zones or in the larger cities where the roads are good, he said.
The Spanish Civil War veterans initiated the project, Reed said, because of similarities between the Spanish war and the war being waged

Employed by the V.A. since 1974, Wilkes quickly rose from shop steward to Union President in 1983. During her three-year reign she has filed 150 grievances. "That's a lot for a facility this size," she added. There are 300 dues-paying members, but the union represents all 1,400 employees at the V.A.
Wilkes documented a series of harassment and backbiting from her supervisor which culminated into a questionable accident while she was seven months pregnant.
On November 5, 1984, Wilkes used a step-stool to avoid reaching up. Since there was no written indication that the stool was faulty, Wilkes stood on it and fell backwards.
"The supervisor knew it was unsafe, watched me move the stool into the file room and later defended his actions by saying he instructed another employee to remove it," Wilkes said.
Wilkes received a concussion and a whiplash. Currently, this accident is under investigation.
As union president, Wilkes represents employees struggling with on-the-job harassment from supervisors and discrimination in job promotions. She also negotiates labor contracts and monitors bills in Congress that affect government employees.
"I started doing things that were perceived as stepping on people's toes. Rumors spread that they were going to try to break me physically or mentally," Wilkes added.

When she returned to work in May, a derogatory flyer picturing the Union President vaporizing out of a mop bucket labeled "scum bucket" greeted her.
Carl Printer, assistant chief of the V.A., said they were never able to pin the flyer down. "We did not know if it came from the outside or from union employees."
Printer refused to answer specific questions regarding harassment and

referred inquiries to Kim Cook, the public information official. Cook was unavailable for comment.
When Wilkes was first elected president, she said the head of Cardiology, Dr. Henry DeMots, instructed her supervisor to harass her. Lois Hart, Wilkes' supervisor at that time, refused. "DeMots asked me to keep track of ridiculous things. Also, when it came time to promote Sylena from typist to technician, DeMots did not want to do it. But that is how things were done and after I promoted Sylena he eliminated the typist position," said Hart.
DeMots denied Hart's statements and said he never experienced any problems with Wilkes. "If she has a problem, she can come talk with me," he concluded.



SYLENA WILKES

"For Sylena, the V.A. is an awful place to work because she will not put up with any mess. She knows the rules and regulations. Thus, she knows more than they (management) do," explained Hart. "Whenever employees have any problems they run to her."
In June, 1984, Wilkes' knowledge of occupational safety conditions led the Occupational Safety and Health

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Supporters bless ambulance bound for Nicaragua. (Photo: Kris Altucher)

against Nicaragua by counter-revolutionary contras.
He spoke in front of the ambulance, which had been pulled up on the grass in Wallace Park, in Northwest Portland. The shiny 1980 Ford Econoline was equipped with a complete set of emergency lights and oxygen fittings. A message of solidarity painted on its side read: "From the people of the states of Oregon and Washington, for peace and friendship and against North American intervention."
Also on hand was Multnomah County Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury, a member of the advisory board of the Corinto, Nicaragua, sister city committee. Projects like the ambulance campaign are appropriate for local communities, said Kafoury. "World peace will only come from neighbor to neighbor activities," she said.
The number of small contributions from around the country outstripped expectations, Reed said. A newlywed couple donated a check given to them by a well-wisher, and children in a day care center baked cookies and sold them to purchase a \$10 share. Portland raised about \$1,000 out of the \$32,000 total for the Northwest.
The two ambulances on their way to San Francisco will be packed with badly needed medical supplies such as surgical gloves and dressings, said Steve Clements, a Vietnam veteran and driver of the ambulance that visited Portland.
On Sunday, the ambulance was at Neighborfair. Its crew offered free blood pressure checks to those who stopped by.