

Black Women's Gathering Celebrates Five Years of Sisterhood

by Avel Gordly

'Bring It Back Home' was the theme of the 5th Annual Black Women's Gathering held Saturday, May 9th at Matt Dishman Community Center in Portland. The theme was defined variously as a return to our roots, African identity, cultural heritage, and as embracing our sisterhood.

The Gathering was originally the idea of Linda Williams, former reporter for the Oregonian, now working with the Wall Street Journal in Atlanta. A committee was formed in 1983 to plan an event that would help Black women deal with isolation, and fear and outrage surrounding the deaths of several young Black women in the community. The committee also looked at the need to develop an opportunity for Black women to network with one another whether or not they belonged to an organization or church and across class lines and other superficial barriers. And, they looked at the need to have a celebration of the spirit and survival of Black women against all kinds of odds and all forms of oppression.

A powerful highlight of the afternoon program of cultural entertainment and information was the outstanding panel presentation by state representative Margaret Carter, District 18, Portland; Debra Cook, Eugene activist and organizer for Clergy and Laity Concerned; Dr. Maxine Mimms, innovative educator from Evergreen State College in Washington State; and former Portlander Charlotte Rutherford, Attorney and Director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Black Women's Employment Program based in New York.

In their brilliant presentations, the panelists addressed issues such as AIDS, employment, education and youth. These were issues identified by respondents to a questionnaire distributed at last year's Gathering. The panelists challenged the Gathering participants to gain as many skills as possible, seek non-traditional jobs and educate themselves about AIDS. They were also challenged to be more supportive of one another, community organizations, and to support those Black candidates for political office who have earned their support.

The enthusiastic audience was invited to participate by asking questions of the panelists, as a Gathering committee member walked through the crowd with a cordless mike seeking comments. The panelists received a long standing ovation and all were quickly surrounded by appreciative well-wishers as they left the stage.

The day-long event also featured information tables and displays representing 25 community organizations and businesses. Information was circulated by these organizations on subjects as diverse as AIDS (NE Multnomah County Health), The Coca Cola Boycott (POSAF), The Black United Fund, NAACP, Travel Roberts Agency, YWCA and the Oregon Commission for Black Affairs. An extremely popular poster was the Free South Africa, Winnie Mandela poster of the Call to Conscience network.

Donations to the Gathering were received from over 80 individuals and organizations and 17 male child care volunteers entertained over 80 children with films, educational games and storytelling at nearby St. Phillips Church.

For the second year, community service awards were given. Five women were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the community: Seona Baldwin, Bobbie Foster, Geneva Knauls, Dr. Virginia Phillips and Cornetta Smith.

Janice Scroggins was Musical Director of the program which featured dance and song and many young people. The Reverend Henry Greenidge of Maranatha Church offered a Mothers' Day tribute which was followed by stunning African fashions and designs by Adriene Cruz, Chonitia Smith and Rolea Manyangai, all local designers. Other highlights included the deeply moving rendition of "Oh, Mary, Don't You Weep" by members of several gospel groups, and a speech by Benson High School student Zeenab Johnson.

Ten teams of mother-daughter hostesses helped register the participants and make sure that they found childcare and were otherwise comfortable during the day.

1987 Steering Committee members included Faye Burch, Antoinette Edwards (Co-Chair), Bobbi Gary, Avel Gordly, Pier Ormond, Mattie Peterson, Donna Maxey-Pomerantz, Pam Smith, Jean Vesup, Star Waters (Co-Chair), Faye Williams (Co-Chair), and Gina Wood. They were supported by 15 subcommittee members.

As women were leaving the Gathering, they referred to one another as 'sisters', as they had during the day. Many commented on what a positive, uplifting, and spiritual experience had occurred. One woman was heard to say, "I've been waiting all year for today and I can't wait until next year." Another woman said she was feeling guilty about not being involved in the community after seeing so many people involved with the Gathering and the other organizations present. As she wondered out loud how she might get involved, a member of the Black Women's Gathering Committee shared her phone number. Black women reading this article, wishing to get involved in the Gathering or other Black community organizations can call Avel Gordly at 503-230-9427 days.

So, Linda Williams, your dream of sisterhood and a day of celebrating our being, our spirit and our survival is alive and well in Portland, Oregon!



Charlotte Rutherford, lawyer with the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense Fund, was one of the panelists that spoke at the "Black Women's

Gathering". Other panelists were Margaret Carter, Debra Cook and Maxine Mimms. Photo by Richard J. Brown



In 1962, a seventeen year-old discovered the world.

Back when Patricia Lightfoot got interested in space flight, cars had fins, movies had double features and mathematically gifted Black girls had limited career prospects. But 1962 was the year Patricia Lightfoot won a scholarship to Howard University. And on the way to becoming a math teacher, she discovered a world of opportunities.

In the unique environment that historically Black colleges provide, Patricia Lightfoot learned that her dreams of becoming a mathematician were achievable. "At Howard," she says, "I learned how to learn. A Black college gave me confidence... and a support that was always there when I needed it."

That confidence helped Patricia master higher mathematics, computer science, graduate school and her own destiny. Today, as head of the Spacecraft Control Branch of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, she directs the design and development of ground support systems for vital satellite projects.

When you're considering colleges, doesn't it make sense to consider the ones that produce distinguished achievers like Patricia Lightfoot and 37% of the nation's Black college graduates? America's Black colleges. If you want to make a world of difference in your future, they can show you how.



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