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"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"

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Heroine Angered Over Media Coverage

by Nyewusi Askari

Although Catherine O'Hara appreciates her new title of a modern day heroine, a title she received after saving the life of 7-month-old Denoris McClendon, she is still fuming about the media's coverage and handling of the crisis.

On January 4, 1988, Ms. O'Hara, upon hearing from neighbors that a nearby house was on fire, rushed to the burning home of Andrea Jones. Unable to enter the burning house, O'Hara proceeded to administer first aid to Ms. Jones and then to her son, Denoris, who had been rescued from the house but had stopped breathing. With no thought in mind other than saving the life of the child, O'Hara spent the next 15 minutes desperately trying to revive him.

Her efforts paid off. Denoris started to breathe again and was rushed to the hospital.

O'Hara, who is white, said she never had second thoughts about helping the Jones family. So, when she received a telephone call from a local news reporter who wanted to talk about the subject of AIDS, she was dumbfounded.

"It was an over-the-telephone interview. This female reporter kept saying to me, 'Since you didn't stop to think about AIDS when this first happened, and now that the subject has been brought up, what do you think your actions in the future



A proud Virginia O'Hara shows the Red Cross lifesaving medal given to her mother, Catherine. O'Hara performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on 7-month-old Denoris McClendon, saving his life.

Photos by Richard J. Brown

would be?' I said, 'The same.' That's how I am. I said, 'If I was coming down a dark alley and found an amnesiated adult, I might slow down and think more, but I would still help,'" she said.

When O'Hara read about herself

in the newspaper, she found misquotes. But what really angered her was the suggestion that it might be alright to help small children in time of trouble, but not unhealthy-looking adults.

"I look unhealthy once a month,"

she explained. "When I get a cold, I look unhealthy. I don't want the public to think that they shouldn't help someone just because he or she looks unhealthy. Anyone who has stopped breathing looks unhealthy. I really feel mad that the media substituted their words for mine. They made it appear that I had said I wouldn't help an unhealthy-looking person if I had to do the same thing again. Sure, this time around I would be more cautious of things like bleeding, but I would still give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Now there is no evidence that you can get AIDS from mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

"They just assumed that because Andrea Jones was Black and I was white that she gave me AIDS. It's terrible because that is prejudice. The reporter said they had been in touch with the Fire Bureau, and they said that 'you (O'Hara) were concerned.' I was in such a shock. I had nothing on my mind but coming home. I was halfway up the alley to my house when a fireman with a bottle of peroxide said, 'Here is some peroxide.' He like said it three times and suggested that the Jones family didn't look all that healthy," O'Hara explained. "Later he said that the Fire Bureau didn't really think the Jones family had AIDS and not to worry about it."



"They didn't tell the mother to have her son checked because I might have AIDS." — O'Hara

"There was a Channel 2 editorial that I have not seen but was informed about that went on and on about the pros and cons of helping strangers, and at the end the guy is supposed to have said, 'Isn't a shame she has to be tested for AIDS.' Well, as a matter of fact, I don't have to do anything but die and pay taxes.

"I went to the hospital, not because I was concerned about AIDS, but to visit the mother and to see the little baby. They were real glad to see me. The father thanked me. He almost shook my hand out of its

socket. I asked him how the baby was and he shouted, 'Look, he's perfect, he's perfect.' He lifted up the hospital sheet and there was the baby all bright-eyed and happy."

On Friday, January 15, O'Hara was recognized as a heroine. She also received an American Red Cross Lifesaving award.

Ms. Andrea Jones and her 18-month-old son, Jalani, remain in serious condition at Emanuel Hospital & Health Center. Another son, 1½-year-old Maurice, died in the fire. Ms. Jones needs surgery to repair nerve damage to her arm, and Jalani needs skin grafts.

Seven-month-old Denoris McClendon was released from the hospital last week and is now living with his grandmother.

O'Hara doesn't regret helping the Jones family but feels that the uncle of Denoris didn't receive the recognition he deserves.

"At the scene, and then again in the paper, an article said that the uncle could be cited, too. He broke the bedroom window and got the baby out. Where was he on awards day? His name wasn't even mentioned on any of the television stations. He was totally forgotten about. He was there. He was as active as I was. I would have never been able to resuscitate his nephew if he hadn't gotten the baby out of the burning house," O'Hara said.

Oregon Report Card: A Black Perspective

by Nyewusi Askari

In the first paragraph of his Oregon Comeback Plan, Governor Neil Goldschmidt says, "The Oregon Comeback is a business plan — an agenda for action — for our state. It is a new approach to creating work and opportunities for Oregonians, transforming traditional values into actions that produce lasting investment in Oregon's future."

In the first paragraph of his "Portland Safer City Plan," Mayor Bud Clark says, "Crime is a community problem. It can be solved by the entire community working together to pool and coordinate resources. Citizens, businesses, police and virtually every agency of government can contribute by making Portland a safer city. The key strategy to achieving this goal is: identification of problems; allocation of resources in a coordinated assault; and a working partnership between citizens and police."

Good sounding stuff, especially in light of Portland's high crime rate and Oregon's need to get back on its feet economically. However, neither plan illustrates an understanding of the specific problems Black Oregonians face as they try to align themselves with the proposals. More importantly, neither plan soundly illustrates that the City of Portland and the State of Oregon know who its Black citizens are.

The Black Population

According to the 1980 census (the last time a count was taken), Oregon's Black population counted in at 37,060. 27,734 (75%) of these Black Oregonians lived in the Portland Metropolitan area, while 21,521 (58%) lived in what is now known as District 18.

When we look at the median age of Black Oregonians, we find it to be 24.4 years for the State of Oregon and 24.9 years for the City of Portland.

Statewide, the Black male population numbered 19,136 while the Black female population numbered 17,924. In the City of Portland, there were 13,594 Black males and 14,140 Black females.

Black Oregonians constitute a young, employable, educable population. However, because of a depressed Oregon economy, the lack of educational and job opportunities and distinct patterns of racism, many of these young Black Oregonians are not in the workplace. They are not in school. They are in a lot of places they shouldn't be.

When the 1980 census was taken, there were 12,102 (33%) Black Oregonians receiving public assistance, social security income, or both. Of this number, 4,166 were children under the age of 16. From age 16 to age 21, 1,439 were receiving assistance.

Statewide, there were a total of 8,440 Black families. 6,518 of these families lived in the Portland metropolitan area while 4,955 lived in District 18.

Black Community Profile

The largest population of Black Oregonians live in the Inner Northeast community of Portland. These Blacks find themselves living in a community that is predominately white (55%), with 1% American Indian, 2% Asian, 4% 'other'; with Blacks representing 38% of the community population.

In all other communities in the Portland Metropolitan area, Black people represent only 1% to 6% of the total population in their neighborhoods.

Perceptions

Based on the media's portrayal of Blacks in the areas of crime, one is easily led to believe that Blacks are committing the majority of Portland crimes. Local television stations never fail to grab the opportunity to show criminal profiles of Black people while newscasters talk about the crime problem. Our data paints a different picture.

As of November 1, 1987, white inmates constituted 79.4% of Oregon's prison population as compared to 13.3% Black, 2.9% Indian, 4.2% Hispanic, 1.2% Oriental and 3.6% 'other'. Out of a total number of 6,065 inmates, 4,695 were white, 785 were Black, 146 were Indian, 248 were Hispanic, 7 were Oriental and 21 were classified as others.

At Oregon State Penitentiary, Black inmates numbered 470 while Black female inmates totaled 75. At Oregon's state training facilities, young Black males numbered 71 while young Black females numbered 11. The average age of the Black male inmate is roughly estimated to be 24 years.

According to Police Bureau data, a record 70 homicides were committed in Portland in 1987. Of this number, 15 (21%) were Black, 37 (53%) were white, 9 were Hispanic, 5 were Asian, and 4 were American Indian. Police data reports that 22 of the murders were committed by acquaintances, 11 were committed by strangers, 10 were committed by a relative, 5 were committed by boy/girlfriends and 4 were committed by the police. Twenty-seven of the victims were shot, 19 were stabbed, 14 were beaten, 5 were strangled, and 3 were beaten and stabbed. Twenty-five of the murders occurred because of an argument/dispute, 9 of the killings occurred during a robbery, 4 were classified as drug-related, 4 as police self-defense, 2 as negligence, 2 as murder/suicide, and 1 each from rape and arson.

Oregon is experiencing the winds of change. These changes are occurring in every corner of the State. Black Oregonians are and will contribute greatly, however, the direction in which these winds will blow is going to depend on how well both the Mayor and the Governor construct, implement, and enforce programs that will contribute to the economic, educational and social advancement of its Black citizens.

As of yet, we haven't heard the Governor express how his government is going to deal with the issue of racism in Oregon. We have not heard the City Council of Portland nor the Multnomah County Commissioners state their position. We have not heard from business or educational institutions on how they intend to help motivate, employ or inspire Black youth beyond their present condition.

Much remains to be done. The question Black Oregonians are asking is: "Is Oregon willing, capable and ready to do its part?"

Next week: Black Oregonians express their views on the Governor's Comeback Plan.



Eric Barmach (R), son of Judy (C) and Neal Barmack, sits at the keyboard of the computer the family donated to the Saturday School. The computer will make the administration of the Saturday School a lot easier, said Angelyn Irving, a representative of the Black United Front Education Committee. Photo by Richard J. Brown

Last year, 140 countries commemorated Martin Luther King, Jr. On the African continent alone, 45 states observed the King holiday in 1987. In some places, the celebrations far surpassed those of the United States, which has been less-than-unanimous in its support of the federal holiday.

Last week in our "Saturday School Report Card", The Portland Observer misidentified Aisha Irving as "he". The 12-year-old Miss Irving is a 7th grader at McLoughlin Junior High School in Milwaukie, Oregon, with a 4.0 GPA. Miss Irving wants to be a teacher. Photo by Richard J. Brown

