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"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"

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African-Americans' History In Oregon: Past, Present, and Potentials for the Future

Editor's Note: The following guest article was written by Mr. David Nero, Chairman and CEO of Nero and Associates, of Portland, Oregon. It was presented by Mr. Nero at a luncheon address to the Institute of Real Estate Management of the Oregon Columbia River Chapter on February 28.

It is being printed in the Portland Observer with the permission of Mr. Nero because of its significance and historical data on racism in the state of Oregon.

Readers should take note of some of the early laws put into motion by Oregon lawmakers which set the stage for a pattern of perpetual racism that hovers over this state today.



David M. Nero, Jr.--Nero and Associates, Inc.

The racial history of the Oregon Territory in the pioneer period of westward expansion included features of severe legislative repression and social oppression focused on the area's ethnic populations. The African-American population in particular was victimized by laws that excluded them from migration into the area, prohibited intermarriage between the races, denied them the vote, and excluded them from service on juries.

It was in the 1840s that the first attempts to restrict the participation of African-Americans in the residential and real estate related activities of Oregon occurred.

Black Exclusion Laws as they were called, were adopted in Oregon in 1844, 1849, and 1857. The exclusion law of 1844 provided:

"That if any such free Negro or Mulatto shall fail to quit the country as required by this act... [He or she] shall receive upon his or her bare back not less than twenty nor more than thirty-nine stripes..."

This first law was soon modified and whipping was replaced by imposing forced labor on African-Americans. But it clearly set the pattern regarding issues of African-American residence in Oregon. African-Americans were also not allowed to vote under the first voting rights law which allowed only White male and "Half-Breed Indians" to vote. Nor could African-Americans receive the free land that motivated

many white pioneers to come west. The Oregon Homestead Act of 1850 declared, "There shall be, and hereby is granted to every white settler or occupant of the public lands, American Half-Breed Indians included..."

The denial of homesteading rights to African-Americans in the pioneer period is of critical importance in understanding the economic disparity between white and non-white populations in Oregon today.

Without knowledge of the early public policy it is easy and misleading to look around our society and draw a very ill-conceived conclusion. Because a larger proportion of African-Americans live in or near poverty today (although there are still many more whites than African-Americans in a state of poverty), some people erroneously conclude that African-Americans economic difficulties are a result of some innate lack of skill or competitiveness on the part of African-Americans as a group. This is not the case nor is it the source of present disparities.

The source more accurately is found in public policies. Such policies like homesteading being denied to African-Americans, created an "uneven playing field" - giving early white settlers and their descendants a clear and concrete economic head-start over non-white populations. Clearly such exclusion laws and prohibitions on the acquisition of land are management issues related fundamentally to the real estate issues of the pioneer era.

During the 1850s, there raged in Oregon a political conflict over whether Oregon was to be admitted to the union as a slave state or a free state. Oregonians voted to accept and submit to the Congress of the United States in 1857, a statehood constitution that outlawed slavery. This should not, however, be mistaken as a sign of sympathy towards African-Americans as a group or African-American individuals. Indeed, in that same election, the concept of **total African-American exclusion from residence in the soon to be created state, was also adopted by the largest margin of votes.** That original constitution included this language in Article I, section 35:

"No free Negro, or Mulatto, not residing in this state at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall come, reside, or be within this state, or hold any real estate, or make any contracts, or maintain any suit therein; and the legislative assembly, shall provide by penal laws, for the removal by public officers, of all such negroes, and mulattoes, and for their effectual exclusion from the state, and for the punishment of persons who shall bring them into the state, or employ, or harbor them."

Note in particular the ban on African-American ownership of real estate as a further example of the "uneven playing field" constructed against non-whites in the early stages of Oregon statehood.

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First Black Business Expo Held at PCC's Cascade Campus

More than 60 African-American entrepreneurs displayed their wares and services at the first Black Business Expo '90, held in the Portland Community College Cascade Campus gymnasium, Feb. 24. The expo provided an opportunity for African-American business owners to share their products with local residents and network with other business owners.

Businesses ranged from insurance and promotion to food products, jewelry and toy manufacturing.

Jean Drew organized the event for Black History Month under the auspices of PCC's Black History Committee. Drew is a PCC Small Business Development instructor who works on-site at Oregon Association of Minorities Entrepreneurs through a college partnership agreement.

Drew said approximately 2,500 people attended the event and 69 businesses and organizations were represented at the all-day fair. The Cascade gym was decorated with balloons, banners and posters. Live jazz



Phillip Jackson, (left), and Wansetta Grant, (right).

music was provided by Akbar DePriest.

"The booths were sold out," said vendor Phillip Jackson, owner of J.P. Media, an advertising and promotional products business. Jackson's business is located in the Small Business Incubator on the Cascade Campus.

"I think it's grown. It gives us a chance

to invite the public in and let them know what we do and to also meet and do business together," he added.

Ruth Scurlock, owner and operator of Ruthie's Fine Foods S-Corp., was also on hand to share her brand of barbecue sauce, Ruthie's Ribbit BBQ Sauce. "I'll be back," she said. "It's really a nice turnout."

Both Jackson and Scurlock are members of OAME, a non-profit organization which promotes and develops minority entrepreneurship and economic development in Oregon. OAME was a sponsor of the Feb. 24 event.

Other expo planners included Dennis Payne, president of the Black

Professional Network; Freda McEwen, OAME board member; Raleigh Lewis of the Oregon Business League; and PCC staffer, Margaret Smith.

"There was an overwhelming response," Drew said. "We plan to explore the idea of a Saturday-market concept—bring it to the Northeast on a weekly basis. That's the next stop."

Forty Additional Families to Participate in Portland Homestead Program Through Agreement Between PDC and First Interstate Bank Oregon

The Portland Development Commission has entered into an agreement with First Interstate Bank Oregon for \$1 million to fund its new Portland Homestead Program. First Interstate Bank Oregon has agreed to provide PDC up to \$1 million during calendar year 1990 for first mortgage financing for up to 40 Portland Homestead loans. PDC will blend the private bank funds with public Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to provide an effective interest rate to homesteaders of 6% on a 20-year mortgage.

PDC Chairman Harry Demorest praised the public/private partnership as an excellent example of PDC leveraging public money with a private lender to achieve community benefit. "The ultimate beneficiaries of this partnership will be our neighborhoods. Thanks to First Interstate Bank the program will make home ownership possible for 40 more families and individuals who previously had little hope of it."

The purpose of the new program is identical to PDC's 10-year old Urban Homestead Program: to reclaim vacant houses, to provide home ownership opportunities to low- and moderate-income families, and to stabilize neighborhoods. Unlike the Urban Homestead Program, the Portland Homestead Program lacks direct federal funding to offset property acquisition costs. A portion of these costs will be assumed by the homesteader under the new Portland program with the balance coming from local housing and community development funds. Average loan size for each Portland Homestead Loan is \$40,000. Total monthly loan payments will be no more than \$350.

Through the Portland Homestead Program, PDC acquires vacant homes in need of repair and transfers them to families and individuals who qualify to be "homesteaders." In return, homesteaders agree to make necessary repairs and to live in the houses for three years. After that time, the house is the homesteader's to keep or sell. There are qualifications for the program including

income guidelines, a good credit history and attendance at the Homestead Open House where the homes available for ownership can be applied for and viewed. Due to demand for homes in the program PDC selects qualified applicants by a random drawing. The next Open House is scheduled for April 1990.

The agreement with First Interstate is the second of PDC's current efforts to secure private lender funds to finance Portland housing programs for lower income families. In October 1988 PDC entered into an agreement for \$5 million with Security

Pacific Bank Oregon to fund a variety of housing programs effecting 500 houses.

In a recent Housing and Urban Development monitoring report PDC's Urban Homestead Program was praised for, "continuing to administer an innovative and client-oriented program." The report further praised PDC staff for delivering a program that is recognized as a model to the other 157 cities nationally with such a program.

The Portland Development Commission is the City of Portland's agency for urban renewal and economic development.

Tri-Met to Build Convention Center MAX Station

The Tri-Met Board of Directors announced Feb. 28 authorizing a \$3.4 million contract to build a MAX station at the Oregon Convention Center's front door and other improvements that will make transit more attractive to tourist in the Convention Center-Coliseum area.

Tri-Met General Manager James E. Cowen said the new MAX station is scheduled to be completed by September, in time for the grand opening of the Oregon Convention Center. Of two bidders for the project, the apparent low bidder is Slayden Construction of Stayton, Oregon, with a bid of \$3,374,421. Construction is set to begin in March.

In addition to the new Oregon Convention Center MAX station, the contract in-

cludes improvements to the Coliseum MAX station, including a new platform to serve passengers bound for downtown, and major improvements to the nearby Coliseum Transit Center where nine bus lines connect with MAX. The bus transfer center will move to an off-street location, just west of its present location at Occidental and Holladay, and will feature a covered walkway leading to the Memorial Coliseum.

The construction project includes \$1.1 million of improvements to Holladay Street, which will be funded by the City of Portland and Metro. The transit improvements, which account for approximately \$2.3 million of the contract, will be funded 75% by a grant from the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration, with Metro and Tri-Met paying the remainder.

Cowen told the board that the transit improvements to the convention center area were part of a partnership between Tri-Met, Metro, the Portland Development Commission, the Exposition-Recreation Commission, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and private interests.

The Portland Development Commission's plan for the Oregon Convention Center-Memorial Coliseum area includes such amenities as brightly lit pedestrian pathways, landscaping, street trees and ornamental lighting, a trolley museum, and a new viewpoint near the Steel Bridge. A \$1.1 million trolley barn for future vintage trolley service is already under construction near the Coliseum MAX station.

NWCP Minority Leadership Conference Unity 1990

Northwest Communities Project (NWCP) will hold a minority leadership conference Friday and Saturday, March 16-17, at the Benson hotel in Portland.

The conference will focus on how Hispanics, Asians, African-Americans and Native Americans can network and broaden their spectrum of concerns in their communities. Workshops will feature discussions on such subjects as coalition building, career opportunities, affirmative action, introduction to board and commissions, health issues, U.S. census update, and a youth round table.

According to Clara Padilla Andrews, Executive Director of NWCP, the National Hispanic Summit, the Asian-American Leadership Caucus, the African-American Lead-

ership Caucus will meet on Friday at 2:00 p.m. to "set an agenda for our journey to the year 2000."

Padilla Andrews, a Hispanic, was New Mexico secretary of state from 1983 to 1986 and was office manager of the re-election for Portland Mayor Bud Clark.

NWCP is a non-profit organization committed to increasing the participation of minorities in the American democratic process such as voter education and political involvement. It encompasses the Northwest and Rocky Mountain states that include Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska.

Guest speakers at the two-day conference will include Irv Fletcher, President of

the Oregon AFL-CIO; Alfredo Montoya, Executive Director of the Labor Council for Latin-American Advancement; Congressman Ron Wyden; Carmen Perez, Vice Chair of the Democratic National Committee; Gladys McCoy, Chair of the Multnomah County Commissioners; Mario Obledo, National President for the Rainbow Coalition; Pablo Sedillo Chair of the National Hispanic Summit; Patricia Barera Rivera, President of PBR; Raul Yzaquiere, President of the National Council of La Raza and possibly Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Registration fee is \$480.00 and includes all materials, reception, breakfast, lunch and banquet. For more information, call (503) 228-4185.

ANNOUNCEMENT

KATU-TV has re-scheduled the appearances of Dr. Darryl Tukufu, New Urban League (Portland) President; Donnie Griffin, Chairman, Portland Urban League; and Ron Herndon, Co-Chair, Black United Front, for Sunday March 11, 8:30a.m.