



African American Festival 1990

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How The "June-Tenth" Celebration Came to the Pacific Northwest

Photo courtesy of the Oregonian



By Prof. McKinley Burt

There are as many stories told in support of how the southern tradition of the June 19, celebration of "Emancipation Proclamation Day" came to the northwest as there are cases made for the import of black-eyed peas, Chitterlings, hog maws, Skins and tripe sandwiches.

Some say that it was first observed very early on by the African American loggers who were brought here by the giant Louisiana and Georgia Pacific corporations, when they branched out from the south to exploit the western forests. Historic photographs of these pioneers of the Rogue River Valley and other locations are to be found in the archives of southern Oregon historical societies.

Many Black families of the Pacific Northwest will celebrate this "holiday" next Tuesday, particularly those who, like myself, have southern roots. There will be picnics, dances, parties, barbecues, fish fries, and all sorts of family-centered gatherings of a gala and festive nature; though not at all observed here with the intensity and region-wide participation found in the southland of origin. In many parts of the southern states early June is still a month of busy preparation and scheduling for the upcoming events from rodeos and horse races to ball games, river boat excursions to prayer meetings. That's the way it was in my hometown of St. Louis, Missouri--people echoing the historic news of the end of slavery!

There is more, but first we need to ask how it is that since the official date of the "Emancipation Proclamation" was January 1, 1863, how is it that for over a hundred years African Americans have celebrated the occasion six months later on the 19th of June? We have it that President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that "...as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing rebellion...I proclaim for a period of 100 days from this date (Jan. 1, 1863) the freedom of all persons held as slaves within certain designated states and parts of: Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana [certain parishes excepted], Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South and North Carolina, and Virginia except the 48 counties designated as West Virginia."

For fuller details readers should see at the library, "Documents of American History", edited by noted historian Henry Steele Commager. It appears as Document No. 222, The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863 (U.S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XII, P. 1268-9). A short preface describes the American and international political and economic ramifications, as well as corollary references. But back to the question of why the six-month delay in celebrating such a momentous event. This can be most interestingly (and humorously) explained within a short narration of the adventures and contributions of a Black Texas school teacher to the history of the Northwest.

My dearest and most poignant remembrances of the June 19 holiday are in connection with Mr. Kelly Stroud who came here in World War II to work in the Vancouver, Washington shipyard as an electrician. If ever I were to write a book, "The Most Unforgettable Characters I've known", his story would be the lead vignette. A mentor, athlete, scholar, entrepreneur and pride-filled promoter of the African American heritage, he touched all our young lives in the most meaningful way.

The June 19 celebration would be well taken to also honor him and his supportive wife. A lasting contribution of theirs was a group of very talented children whom many of you have known, all of them scholars, innovators, entrepreneurs--from an early and committed involvement in the "Black Revolution" to a geodesic engineer updating topographical maps on the African continent, from originating the first "Flea Market" on the grounds of the Coliseum to designing and building the first Oregon "Dune Buggy" in which the family would ride down Union Avenue before taking off for the sands of the coast.

It was Kelly Stroud who with his sons formed the first African American owned Moving and Storage Company in Portland, located on N.E. Dekum. In the very apartment where I am writing this article, I visited one son a number of years ago and was startled to find a 3 month-old "lion cub" scampering around the living room playing with his infant son. I was not nearly as startled as the meter reader, who, after the growing beast was tethered in the basement,

encountered the lion and, hysterical, spent an hour on the telephone before convincing the gas company that he was not drunk. An army of police, sheriffs, firemen and zoo keepers descended upon the corner of N.E. 17th and Alberta and hauled off a playful "Leo" to the zoo.

June 19 took on new meaning and significance in this region when, toward the end of World War II, Kelly put a notice in the Vancouver Washington daily newspaper: "First Annual Marathon Race From Camas-Washougal to Vancouver to be Held on June 19." Details of rules and prizes followed with a solicitation of sponsors and advertisers. It was a success from day one and the entrants (all white except for our enterprising Mr. Stroud) came mostly from the area's police and fire departments. Naturally, Kelly, a superb athlete, won the race, receiving his trophy and prize money from the hands of Vancouver's mayor. (As a footnote it should be added that at the time Kelly was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as holding the record for running up Pike's Peak "backward".)

Now, Vancouver, Washington was not a city noted for racial harmony or "equal opportunity", but everyone seemed to go along with this--to the laughter of the Black population. But, when Kelly also won the race the following year, inquiries began to pour into the city's newspaper: "Why in the world was the date of June 19 chosen for such a popular event--why not the Fourth of July or Memorial Day?" After questioning Mr. Stroud, the paper reported to the readers that this was "Emancipation Day--Mr. Lincoln freed the 'Negroes'".

No sooner had a shocked populace absorbed this fact, then they immediately descended upon the newspaper offices to point out that, even given this unpleasant news, the correct date was January 1, 1863! Why the six months' delay? Again the question was shunted to Kelly Stroud. The following Friday, and apparently with tongue-in-cheek, the paper dutifully reported without further comment, "Mr. Stroud has stated that "IT TOOK THE MULE SIX MONTHS TO CARRY THE MESSAGE FROM WASHINGTON, D.C. TO THE DISTANT PLANTATIONS OF THE BRAZOS VALLEY IN TEXAS!"

PSU Unveils Program in Training and Development

Portland State University's newly designed Certificate Program in Training and Development begins this summer with a three-credit prerequisite course, Principles of Training and Development, being taught by Janet M. Bennett, Ph.D. The director of the Intercultural Communication Institute, Dr. Bennett specializes in adult education and organizational and intercultural communication. She has been training trainers for 13 years, as well as developing training programs for colleges and universities, corporations, and public agencies.

The Certificate Program in Training and Development was designed to provide a solid instructional background in skills and competencies needed to perform in a Training and Development role. The competency-based program will meet the needs of a diversity of adults with organizational experience who are committed to enhancing their professional skills in training and Development.

Jesse Jackson, Jr. To Join Summit for Black Teens at McDonald's Hamburger University



OAK BROOK, ILL.--Jesse Jackson, Jr., vice president of Operation Push, will join the 1990 "McDonald's Black History Makers of Tomorrow"--black high school juniors honored for outstanding character, leadership skills and scholarships--for the "McDonald's Leadership Conference," June 19-21, at the Company's Hamburger University in Oak Brook, Illinois. Jackson and Barack Obama, the first black president of the Harvard Law Review, are among a number of young black leaders who are scheduled to participate in the three-day summit.

Happy Father's Day!

Special
Career
Section

First Annual Gospel Jubilee Comes to Portland



Weaverly and Sheila Davis

The first annual Northwest Global Jubilee, a celebration of the culture and arts of the African American community, will take place Saturday, June 16, 1990 at 7:00 p.m. in the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

The Northwest Gospel Jubilee explores the history of gospel music from its roots in the early 1600's to today, with the presentation of vocal and instrumental music, African dance, Afrocentric theatre and educational narrations.

"This concert will be an annual, premier event to showcase and promote the culture and heritage of the African American community here in Portland," said Weaverly Davis, president and manager of the African American Festival Association, sponsor of the Gospel Jubilee. "We see this as an event that can involve youth, families, churches, schools and businesses, and we strongly encourage all to share in this celebration."

The Northwest Gospel Jubilee is a sanctioned event of the Rose Festival Association. "We are delighted about having the Gospel Jubilee as an official part of the Rose Festival," said Marie Dodds, director of Public Relations for the Rose Festival. "This is the

first time the African American community has come together and sponsored an event. Portland's Rose Festival is meant to be a celebration for the entire community and every year we seem to add another element to compliment its diversity," Dodds concluded.

Featured performers include: the Inspirational Sounds, a 50-voice choir under the direction of John Gainer from Eugene, Oregon; the Sermonettes, six female vocalists from Portland; soprano Mattie Ann Callier-Spears, a soloist from Portland who conducts a singing ministry outreach; Bruce Smith and the Northwest African American Ballet; and the Sojourner Truth Theatre.

Tickets for the Northwest Gospel Jubilee are \$9.50 and \$15.50 and can be purchased in advance at all G.I. Joe's ticket outlets. Tickets can also be purchased at the Performing Arts Center and will be available at the door the night of the concert. Group ticket sales of 10 or more can be purchased at a discount by calling 230-6702. To charge tickets, call 248-4496.

The Northwest Gospel Jubilee is a Rose Festival Association sanctioned event and is sponsored by U.S. Bank, Oregon's largest bank, B.E.T.A. and U.S. West Communications.

Two-Parent Welfare Ends for Summer

SALEM-Oregon's welfare program for two-parent households is soon to end for the summer. The program is ADC-UN, which stands for Aid to Dependent Children-unemployed two-parent household.

ADC-UN will resume in the autumn as a permanent, year-round program under welfare reform which is aimed at moving welfare recipients toward self-sufficiency. Welfare reform requires extended benefits for recipients in order to simplify their job training and work search.

ADC-UN will temporarily stop June 30. A special closing notice has been sent to all ADC-UN families informing them that their cash and regular medical assistance will soon end for the summer. Medical assistance continues all year for needy pregnant women and

children under 7 years of age.

This year, ADC-UN will restart October 1 with the implementation of welfare reform under the federal Family Support Act. Welfare reform makes ADC-UN mandatory throughout the year.

ADC-UN families who find themselves in immediate need--caused by such events as eviction from their homes or utility shut-off--may qualify for help through the Emergency Assistance program, also operated by Adult and Family Services.

Approximately 2,000 ADC-UN families receive cash and medical assistance from the Oregon Adult and Family Services Division and the Oregon Medical Assistance Program. Both operate under the purview of the state Department of Human Resources.

YWCA Holds Summer Plus Program for Children

The N.E. YWCA is holding its second annual Summer Plus Program from June 18 to August 17 for children age 6-14.

The Summer Plus Program offers your child an opportunity to meet new friends, explore their

community, arts and crafts, theater, storytelling, and esteem building activities, all in a fun and supporting environment.

For more information or to register your child in the Summer Plus Program, contact the N.E. YWCA at 282-0003.

The Portland Observer is the Official Newspaper of the African-American Festival