



OPINION

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The Portland Observer

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RON HERNDON SPEAKS

Narrow Reading of History Hurts Blacks

Ron Herndon speaks in a Portland Observer series featuring community leader and activist Ron D. Herndon. The interviews and editing are done by correspondent Yugen Fardan Rashad.

Yugen: Ron, you've talked about how important it is for a community leader to reference history and use it as a compass in terms of what works.

Herndon: Generally, this nation puts very little value on learning from the past. History is confined to books, and most of what we're taught or read, is a bastardized form of American and world history - very Eurocentric, episodic, and based on revisionist thinking. This narrow reading of history ends up hurting black people the most, because our history is distorted the most.

Yugen: What example would you give when self-conscience, unselfish leadership emerged and obtained a victory for Oregon's black populace?

Herndon: The question to ask in the beginning of the very first strategy planning meeting is, "What are you prepared to do when white folks tell you, 'NO'?"

Yugen: I suppose the 'N' word is what brings black people to this moment of redundancy, and impotence. So leaders need to be less arbitrary or reactive, and more

prepared with a plan that anticipates resistance (the 'N' word-NO), and takes the longer view.

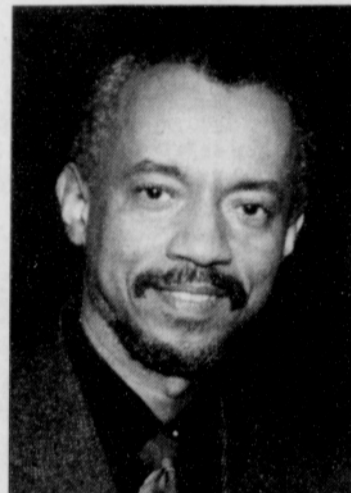
Herndon: White people in positions of power in Portland - when you go to them with your bill of grievances and they say no, what are you prepared to do? Are you going to write another letter, or go to the civil rights commission, what's your next step? And this is my point: Without study, or a critique of the past, we short-change our community. When vestiges of power said no to our entreaties for justice in the past, what was the response?

Yugen: So what are the lessons, or strategies to wage a successful battle on this front?

Herndon: Know that you're bringing people together to confront a status quo steeped in racism. So, if you're going to bring black folks together and marshal changes in politics, education, employment, business - most generals will study past battles, and say: "Okay. Now I'm going to lead you on to the battlefield".

Yugen: So, we should value past victories and review those strategies and tactics that worked.

Herndon: We don't chronicle even our local history, and end up lacking a practical foundation to make decisions, and evaluate the present, or future



Ron Herndon

progress. Just look back to World War II and the successes achieved by black workers from Portland and Vanport who organized at the (Kaiser) shipyards. Or passage of statewide civil rights legislation, which was pretty difficult. Or, the death of Tony Stevenson during the 80s, and the successful push to address police misconduct that resulted in some officers losing their jobs! The successful push to end one-way busing of black students in Portland.

Now, if you ask leaders involved in our community today, "What did you learn from these victories?" I would bet my paycheck it would be rare to find anyone who studied these examples of successes in this community. And there is no systematic effort to translate any of those efforts to our struggles of the day.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Progressives Back Bev Stein

I was very disappointed when the Rainbow Coalition took no position on the race for governor. I was thrilled when my letter carriers union endorsed Bev Stein

Several of us old-timers in the Rainbow Coalition felt that newcomers did not know enough about Bev, so were unable to make the obvious choice.

Here are a few quotes from past Rainbow press releases, when Bev ran for county chair, a race we were very involved in.

"Beverly has lived and breathed community organizing for the last 30 years. Whether as a legislator or as co-chair of our Rainbow Coalition, Bev has fought for and involved the grass-roots people, the left-out, the women, the people of color, the working people.

"The Rainbow expects Stein to use her consensus-building skills and vast network of community and government allies to bring new confidence and people-power to county government.

"A long time resident of inner-NE, she co-chaired the Rainbow Coalition with Maceo Pettis and spearheaded community crime-fighting, low-cost housing and anti-apartheid efforts. As a legislator from inner-SE, her human investment and community development strategies were nationally recognized."

In her term as county chair, I was privileged to work with her on successful community-based campaigns to raise the business income tax to benefit schools, to raise the living wage for county contracted janitors, security and food service workers and to oppose corporate welfare.

If we're about building people power, real democracy and a fair economy, the choice is obvious. Bev Stein for Governor.

Jamie Partridge
Northeast Portland

Use a Critical Eye on Tax Claims

Responding to the exaggerated claims about taxes, the Oregon Center for Public Policy is urging Oregonians to use a critical eye on the inflated claims of anti-government activists.

"Each year claims are made that taxes are too high and that they are rising even higher," noted Jeff Thompson, economist with the OCPP. "Nothing could be further from the truth - taxes on middle income Oregonians are not very high and they are actually declining."

Recent analysis of taxes demonstrates that both the federal and the state and local tax burdens have declined in recent years.

A study by the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shows that the federal tax burden of middle-income families is at the lowest point in many years. Families in the middle of the income distribution paid just 16.3 percent of their income for all federal taxes (including income, payroll, excise and other taxes) in 2001. This was the lowest level in the 22 years for which the data exist.

Additionally, the typical four-person family with two dependents paid just 6.8 percent of its income in federal income taxes, the lowest rate since 1957.

A separate study, released

earlier this year by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, showed that, as a share of income, state and local taxes in Oregon have also declined in recent years.

Additional analysis by the Oregon Legislative Revenue Office shows that the total state and

local tax burden on middle-income households is 10.8 percent.

"When read together, these two analyses suggest that middle-income Oregonians pay roughly 27 percent of their income for all federal, state, and local taxes," said Thompson.

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