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# Opening Legal Careers to All

# COURAGEOUS

AFRICAN AMERICANS



by Ron Weber

Some of the bravest men in our history were the first black lawyers. Despite all odds, they fought their way through white colleges. If they graduated from black colleges, Southern states often ignored their degrees, preventing them from entering the legal system. Black women had even a harder time.

John Mercer Langston was only the fifth African American man to graduate at Ohio's Oberlin College, a school founded in 1833 and the first American college to offer diplomas to women and minorities.

Langston was born in 1829, the son of a wealthy white plantation owner and a mother who was black and Native American. His mixed heritage would force him to endure much racism. But a large inheritance after his parents died when he was just five years old, paved the way for him to become educated.

The highly regarded African American leader Frederick Douglass took note of Langston when he was a young man and brought him to powerful events such as the National Black Convention and meetings with other powerful leaders.

At Oberlin, Langston was denied a formal college law degree, forced to stop after attaining a master's degree. However, his determination and influential



John Mercer Langston

Ohio where he won the election for Town Clerk. He is believed to be the first African American elected to a political office in the United States.

A decade later, Langston jumped right into politics again, something that most black Americans had little or no access to, when he won a seat on the Oberlin City Council and Oberlin Board of Education. He later shocked the nation when he won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Racists contested his victory for almost the entire two years he was a member of Congress. But he never gave up and enjoyed politics immensely.

Langston was also a military hero. As a chief military recruiter, he helped form the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup>, our nation's first all black regiments, along with the

friends did help him find a mentor, the noted attorney Philemon Bliss from Elyria, Ohio.

Under Bliss's tutoring Langston passed the state bar exam in 1854 and became the first black lawyer in Ohio.

Langston knew that he would have to move quickly to ensure himself a stable and lengthy legal career in such volatile times. Immediately upon passing the bar he established a law practice in Brownhelm,

Ohio 5<sup>th</sup> regiment.

After retiring in 1894, Langston wrote a book, "From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol".

Looking back at his own life, he said his highest moment was the day in 1867 when black men won the right to vote, knowing that the right of women to vote would soon follow. Langston died in 1897 at the age of 88. Both Langston University in Langston, Okla. and the town are named in his honor.

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## Cleveland Teacher Honored

Cleveland High School teacher Robert Schlichting has earned a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Schlichting received the honor earlier this month in Washington, D.C. during vis-

its to the White House, the U.S. Capitol and the National Academy of Sciences. He is the only science winner from Oregon and one of 100 seventh- through 12th-grade teachers nationwide to receive the award.

He received a \$10,000

grant from the National Science Foundation, the independent federal agency that administers the awards program on Behalf of the White House, and the all expenses-paid trip to Washington.



Robert Schlichting

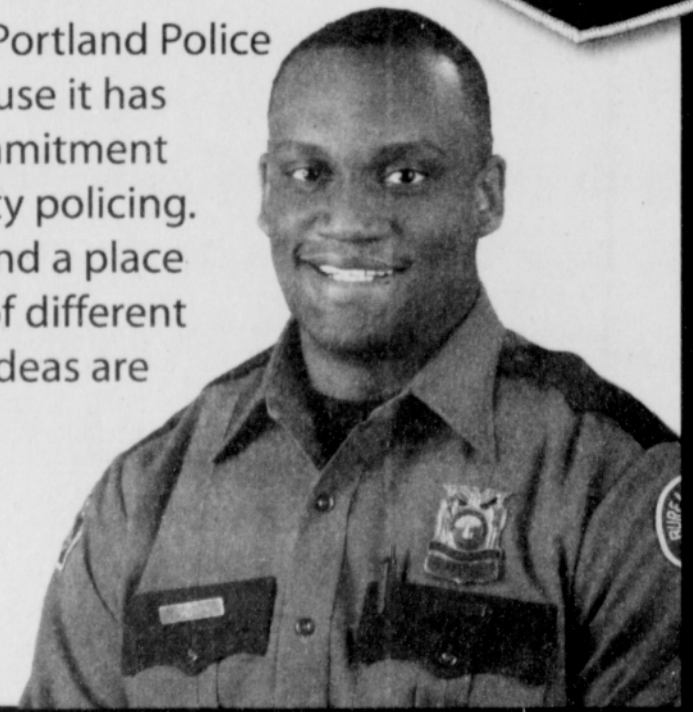
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## Barbecue Supports School Program

Area residents and business leaders are invited to attend a Thursday, May 25 Civil Rights Barbecue to support an after-school program at King School.

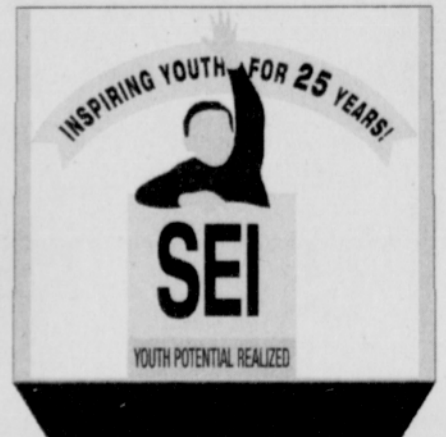
Entertainment will kick off the 6 p.m. event at the school

located on Northeast Sixth Avenue just south of Alberta Street. The barbecue is hosted by Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, a non-profit that works in economically unstable areas trying to equalize children's opportunities for education.

The after-school program aims to increase children's academic and extracurricular capabilities in a safe environment, as well as offering classes for parents and community members.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Annual SEI Academy

# Showcase!



Come and Explore the Academic Student Experience at Our End of the Year Open House!

Thursday May 25<sup>th</sup> 6-7:30pm

The Center for Self Enhancement  
3920 N. Kerby Ave. Portland, OR 97227

Contact: Natasha Butler @ 503-249-1721 ext 327