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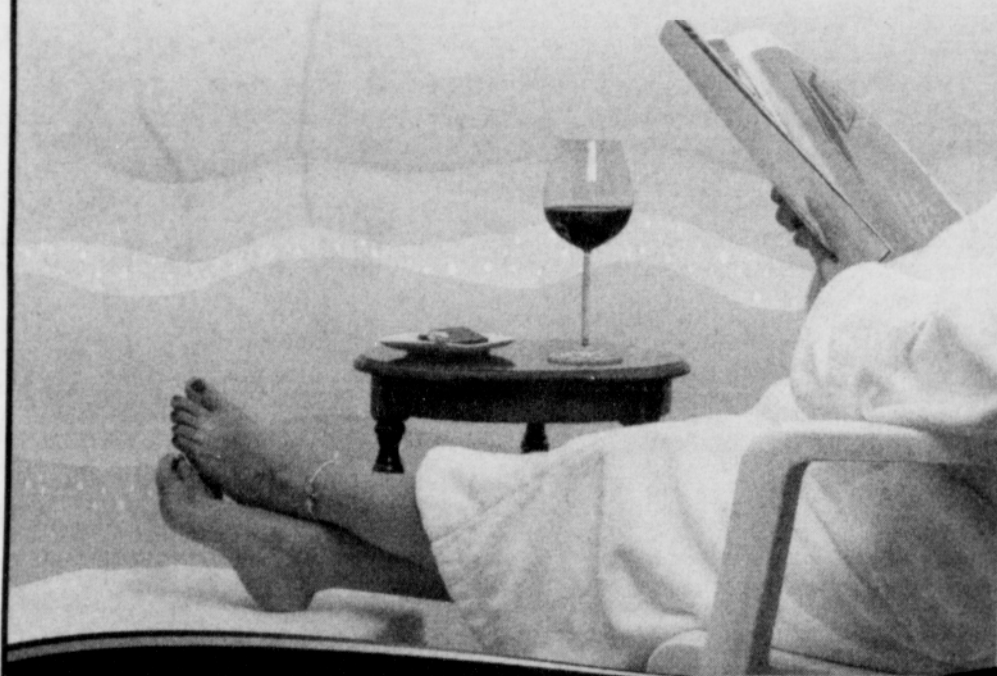
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PHOTO BY DONOVAN M. SMITH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland police escort marchers as they head toward Waterfront Park, downtown. The demonstration last Saturday marked the 50th anniversary of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'March on Washington' and his 'I Have a Dream' speech.

A Legacy of Activism

continued ▲ from front

Community organizers and city officials like Rev. Dr. LeRoy Haynes Jr., Rev. T. Allen Bethel,

Urban League of Portland executive Michael Alexander, City Commissioner Nick Fish, County Commissioner Loretta Smith, State Rep. Lew Frederick, and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, were among those in attendance.

Speakers addressed issues such as fair wages, gender equality, sexual equality, affordable healthcare, police brutality, and the ever-present racial bias in the justice system and biases among the general population.

Six people that were at the original March on Washington in 1963 also addressed the crowd. Most could only recall bits of the march now 50 years later, but still acknowledged the significance of honoring the historical protest which brought an estimated 250,000 people from across the country to the nation's capitol of Washington D.C.

As with the original marchers, the current group also pressed for the younger generations to battle the oppression faced by minority citizens.

Longtime community activist Renee Mitchell, and the 8-year-old daughter of Aaron Campbell who was shot and killed by Portland Police, led the crowd at the Waterfront in a back and forth rendition of the tune 'Freedom Fighter'.

Janet Rogers, one of the many faces in the crowd, said she was proud to join her 'spiritual mother' and grandchildren to witness the commemoration.

Rogers recalled how as a child she was one of the first students to be bused from northeast Portland to unsegregated schools in southwest Portland.

At the time, she said, the experience of not have other black students to bond with in the classroom made her 'afraid of being taught.'

"Looking at this march," she said, "I have brought my grandchildren down here to let them know that they can do all things. Anything they want to do, they can do it. And just by me standing in the legacy of Martin Luther King, being a bus driver, and going to Memphis, Tennessee to sit on Rosa Parks' bus. That really took a toll on me. I had to weep, because I am a bus driver, and I'm not sitting in the back of the bus, whoa."

Other highlights include a stirring recount of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, and a riveting speech by Pastor Tony Funchess, 36, entitled 'Wake Up'.

Funchess, with conviction asserted, "Our question today, is to question the oppressive system that has re-enslaved the black community, and it's called the American criminal justice system."

"Our challenge today is to dismantle discriminatory laws and practices that have allowed it to be open season on young children of color, where they are denied education, locked out of opportunities to employment, victimized and murdered in the streets of America," he said.

Funchess closed the speech by proclaiming "We can no longer dream of a better tomorrow. We must awaken our consciousness, awaken our convictions, and awaken our commitment to creating a better today. The time for dreaming is over. This nightmare we've been living is over. Our tomorrow begins today. Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!"



His Legacy Will Live On

Charles H. Washington

PUBLISHER AND
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF
THE PORTLAND
OBSERVER

Dec. 18 1951 -
Dec. 8 2012