

25 Years a Name

continued **▲** from front

returned to majority white. The gentrification, however is even deeper in some locales, like Alberta Street and Mississippi Avenue, a sore spot for a population that faced racism during the years around World War II when shipbuilding jobs brought a major influx of black workers, but whom also faced racist redlining in collaboration with real estate, banking, and insurance companies.

Economic revitalization projects in the North and Northeast corridor over the years, headed by the City and the Portland Development Commission, have been blamed for benefiting more affluent whites over blacks.

Economic elevation for poor people, especially for black Americans was a key component to Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement.

King is quoted as saying, "Many white Americans of good will have never connected bigotry with economic exploitation. They have deplored prejudice but tolerated or ignored economic injustice."

The Portland Observer spoke to King Neighborhood Association Chair Alan Silver about the significance of the Martin Luther King Boulevard naming.

As new residents arrive, particularly business owners, Silver who is white, says there has been some disdain shown toward the boulevard.

"I think I have a sense, in some way, in which folks wanna sanitize the boulevard," he says. "Perhaps they don't think of it as we're erasing black history, and the lack presence from MLK Boulevard, but the neighborhood association hears occasionally that [some businesses] struggle to make their business work if they use an MLK address. So perhaps the land has lower value to businesses along this boulevard."

Silver says that events like the celebration at the Boys and Girls Club can help people who may not understand the history of the neighborhood.

While acknowledging the complex racial realities of north and northeast Portland, Silver says it is also a must to acknowledge the necessities



PHOTO BY DONOVAN M. SMITH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

and desires of the people who reside there now.

"I think every time we have an opportunity to invite folks into the same space who might not see eye-to-eye but who are living together in the same neighborhood, in the same community, and have them talk about what their experiences are, and their sense of what they want for their neighborhood to feel like, and what they want it to be, I think that's great," he says.

Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative's Maxine Fitzpatrick, an African American leader for affordable housing, says since opening their doors in 1993, having their

headquarters on Martin Luther King Boulevard has been a priority.

The main offices for PCRI have moved several times since its inception, but every time maintained its presence on the throughway.

"This is where PCRI should be," says Fitzpatrick.

As economic development projects continue to advance in the neighborhoods, Fitzpatrick joins a chorus of other activists calling attention to the need to insure that black people of varied income brackets are able to remain in the neighborhood.

Ahjamu Umi, head of the black advocacy group Occupy Northeast

and the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party of Portland, accuses city government of being dominated by corporate interests, and said that creates a certain irony in naming the street after King.

"I'm not one to care about the street name," Umi says. "But I care if people are grasping the concepts that MLK was talking about, and I think the state of the neighborhood is a reflection that we're not."

He goes on to ask if people of African descent are "interested" in grasping the concepts the civil rights leader was talking about or simply using him as a figurehead to further individual agendas.

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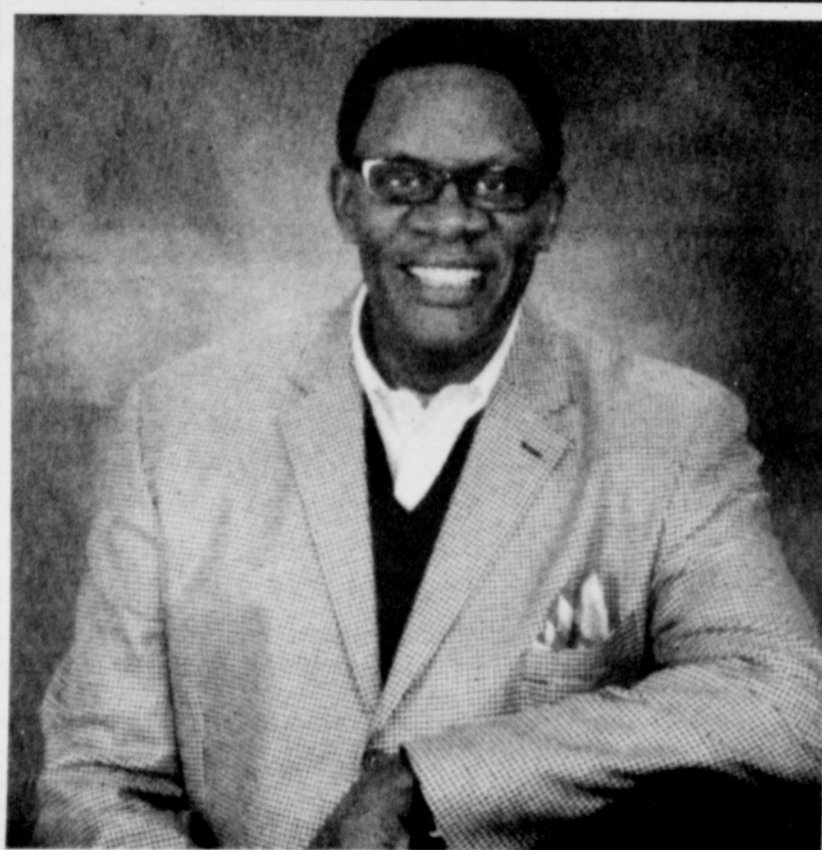
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