

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

Preserving Our Cultural and Natural Heritage

We can take nothing for granted

BY DONNY R. ADAIR

On the corner of Northwest Sixth Avenue and Everett Street in downtown Portland, the historic Golden West Hotel stands as a marker to the development of the African American middle class in Oregon – and the nation.



W.D. Allen, an African American businessman, bought the property in 1905, the same year Oregon officially became segregated. The next year, he built a hotel where African Americans could enjoy comfortable rooms, a candy shop, Turkish baths, a gym, and much more. Many travelers came to stay, including entertainers, businesspeople, and railroad porters.

Some of these porters came from Chicago's Pullman neighborhood, site of the first African American union: the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Many porters were former slaves. The Pullman porters contributed significantly to the development of the African American middle class in America, and the



The Golden West Hotel in northwest Portland is culturally significant to African-Americans.

Civil Rights Movement. President Obama declared the Pullman area of Chicago a national monument last month, during Black History Month, using his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906 – coincidentally the same year Allen opened

Golden West Hotel. The president has been proactive in establishing new national monuments that attempt to right-size the inequalities of the national park system. A 2014 analysis found that only 24 percent of our nation's

national parks and monuments are dedicated to diverse communities, or commemorate minority figures or events. Of the country's 461 national park units, only 26 are focused on African Americans, 19 on Latinos, eight on women, and two on Asian Americans.

The Antiquities Act is a critical tool for preserving our nation's natural, historic and cultural sites. Sixteen presidents have used their authority under the law – half of them Republican, half of them Democrat – to protect everything from the Grand Canyon to the Statue of Liberty. Recently, President Obama established Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument in Maryland, Cesar E. Chavez National Monument in California, the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument in Ohio, and the Honolulu National Monument in Hawaii. The Pullman Porters National Monument will be the fifth by Obama to recognize America's minorities. I am pleased the president will be designating the Pullman monument to recognize the porters' contributions to America.

I am also pleased the president is supporting our nation's public lands, working to designate places where Americans from all backgrounds can get aside. As an African American who loves to go outdoors hunting, fishing, hiking, and

photographing our beautiful country, I also support his work to designate new national monuments in Organ Mountains Desert Peaks in New Mexico, San Gabriel Mountains outside Los Angeles, and the San Juan Islands in Washington. Public lands are vital to protecting access to the outdoors, and thus to preserving America's fishing and hunting heritage.

While the president's ability to continue preserving our nation's cultural and natural heritage seems secure, we can take nothing for granted. Already, in Congress' first two weeks in office, members introduced measures to revoke the president's authority under the Antiquities Act. These proposals did not pass, thanks in part to votes cast against them by Oregon's U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. I am grateful Oregon has leaders supporting our president, and defending against the attacks on America's public lands.

I celebrated Black History Month in part by remembering how far we have come, while also remembering how much work there is still to be done, and supporting our leaders to keep the arc of history bending toward justice.

Donny Adair is a lifelong resident of Portland and a former chair of the Portland Black History Month committee.

Grading Students Changed My View of Education

A crash course on reality and higher standards

BY JILL RICHARDSON

I was always one of those kids who got As in school.

Give me an assignment, I'll do it. A test? I'll take it. Lecture to me, and I'll absorb every word.



Now that I'm back at school 11 years after getting my college degree, though, I suddenly find myself in a very different place. In addition to being a student seeking a PhD in sociology, I'm a teaching assistant with students of my own.

My view of education changed the first time I had to grade my students.

It was a difficult assignment, and I hadn't prepared them adequately for it. I naively thought that because the material was easy for me, it would be easy for them, too. I assumed that

because my students didn't ask questions, they understood it.

That wasn't the case. Suddenly, I found myself handing out bad grades and thinking, "I earned this grade too. These are our grades, not just theirs." I had failed to teach every bit as much — or more — as they had failed to learn.

And what good would the grades do? How does punishing students for not learning help them learn?

My teaching has evolved since that first mishap. My attitude as a student has changed too.

Becoming a teacher affected my studies like becoming a parent helps adults understand their own childhoods. I suddenly find myself holding my professors to a higher standard than before.

Why am I required to learn things I won't ever use on the job? Why must I take closed-book tests when I'll never need to do anything in my career without having books, col-

leagues, or the Internet as references?

Teaching requires focusing on how students really learn and providing them the opportunity to do so. That might mean not running the class in the way that's most convenient for the teacher, like lecturing. It might also mean covering less material, but covering it well.

After all, how many marathon cram sessions did you have before tests? And how well did you remember any of that material afterward?

It'd be nice if students could retain endless amounts of information simply by attending lectures all semester. Actually, it'd be even better if we could just plug a little chip into them and upload the content directly into their brains. But neither is possible.

We'll have to settle for reality and teach students in a way and at a pace that will help them to actually learn. We should also allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the material in a meaningful way that contributes to their learning and won't result in cramming and

forgetting everything later.

This approach, which can require more initial effort from a teacher but with the promise of better results for the students, has a name: student-centered learning.

It's a shame that actually teaching your students is such a novel

idea that it's worthy of a special name. It should just be called "teaching."

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.

THE LAW OFFICES OF Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney

Attorney at Law
1549 SE Ladd
Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080
Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081
Facsimile: (503) 244-2084
Email: Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com