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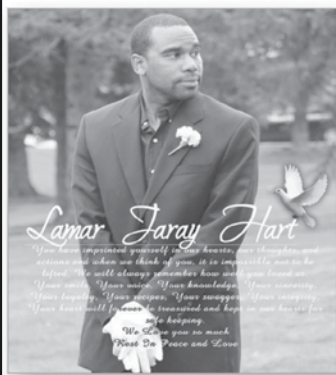
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World Stage Theater actors recreate the historic 'March on Washington' and Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech during a performance of 'Who I Am Celebrating Me.'

Who We Are

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11
Americans lived in housing built for building war ships in Portland and Vancouver, including the city of Vanport, the town on the banks of the Columbia Slough. It flood-

ed in 1948, displacing the community to mostly north and northeast Portland.

Later, a combination of urban renewal projects, gentrification, and soaring housing costs contributed to the black community

needing to find other options, and now African Americans are deeply spread out across the Portland metro area.

Sims herself moved east from north Portland to Troutdale in 2002. In a predominately white neighborhood, she felt distanced and isolated, and wanted her children to have a sense of kinship like she did growing up.

Having studied and practiced theater throughout her education, she decided to create a production of her own in the hopes of building community. That is how Who I Am was born.

In addition to performing every February, the actors and crew bring the play into Portland metro schools as a way to teach black history in an unbiased manner.

Sims herself is a professional artist, but she is proud of the fact that the majority of the cast are not professional. "They are community members who want to make art and perform, and we give them that opportunity," she added.

Sims' hope for the festival is that it brings people together, and that it makes more people aware of black history, including the African American community.

Sims said that she didn't start learning more about black history until she was an adult. "I'm black, I went to Jefferson High, I was aware of my culture, but not necessarily my history," she noted. She wants young black people to walk away from the festival inspired that they "can do something to change history for the better."

And her hope for non-black people who attend is that they learn more about black history in America so they are not "in denial," she said, noting that we cannot change the course of this country's future if we do not know about the past.

Sims takes pride in the fact that the festival is gaining a lot of buzz, and that many companies and local black-owned businesses are supporting it.

"I'm glad that the community is excited to have a space to celebrate our heritage, and I'm excited to welcome anyone who wants to learn," she said.

Tickets to Who I Am, and a schedule of all festival events, can be found at blackhistoryfestival.org.

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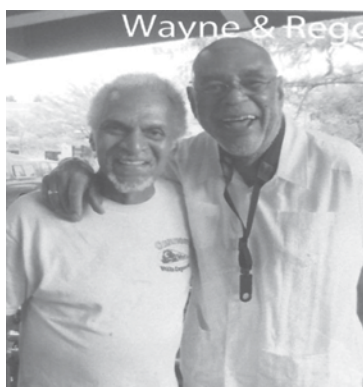
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