



Minority Business

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Power Through Community Economics

Leaders of NAMC-Oregon and Black Business Association of Oregon

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Oregon's complex and often contradictory history inspires both pride and derision. For every policy achievement Oregon has earned, there has been an equal and opposite reaction. The 33rd state has a unique history that, when laid out, clearly blueprints the foundation of Oregon's modern struggles.

In 1859 we were admitted to the Union as a Free State, a fact that is an undeniable good. However, in the writing of our state constitution, lawmakers inserted a clause stipulating that Blacks were prohibited from making contracts, owning property, or even living in the State of Oregon. This clause made an indelible mark on our state's political and civic cultures, influencing how Oregonians interacted with People of Color.

Throughout its 163 years, the state has

systematically marked the Indigenous Tribes of the region, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and many other ethnic groups for exclusion and legal discrimination. As late as the 1970s, towns in southern Oregon, such as Grants Pass, had signs crudely threatening Black Oregonians into leaving the town by sundown. That is in living memory and speaks to the fact that Oregonians of Color had been prevented culturally and politically from establishing meaningful economic roots.

By restricting and barring entire ethnicities from participating in the economy, Oregon worked to establish sheltered markets where select companies could figuratively divide Oregon's economic engines amongst themselves. Industries like timber, construction, farming, and fishing were protected from non-white competition, leaving profound social and economic scars that have been excruciatingly slow to heal.

This history comes as a surprise to many. Still, to Oregonians of Color, that history is so tangible that sometimes, it seems to stubbornly stick like glue to whatever it touches. And that

history has clung to Nate McCoy, the Executive Director of the Oregon Chapter of the National Association of Minority Contractors, and Lance Randall, Black Business Association of Oregon (BBAO) Executive Director.

Both believe that equity will come from economics. As a native Oregonian, Mr. McCoy has witnessed the rise, fall, and rebirth of some of Portland's cornerstone businesses of Color. This experience shepherded him to understand how community-focused economics can serve as the beating heart of thriving, vibrant communities.

However, McCoy learned that success for People of Color in Oregon is built from a foundation of mutual trust and a shared vision. From his experience, he said it is fundamental to build "real relationships with people who have gotten a chance to understand your struggles, your stories, your opportunities, and your vision." He believes that a proper "vision must be clear for any business or growing company. And NAMC is a great

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