

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Black Pioneers' New Exhibit Tell Stories of the Civil Rights Era

“Racing to Change” will be on display at the Oregon Historical Society January 15 – June 2018



Department of Employment, Oregon State Employment Office, Job Placement Office. January 11, 1968 Williams Ave district.

By **Melanie Sevcenko**
Of *The Skanner News*

Starting on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the Oregon Black Pioneers will invite Oregonians to join them in what they do best — looking to their shared past.

The historians’ newest and largest exhibit to date, “Racing to Change: Oregon’s Civil Rights Years,” will open on Jan. 15 at the Oregon Historical Society and will offer visitors an opportunity to experience the struggles and achievements of the 1960s and 70s in their home state.

For the past two years, the all-volunteer non-profit organization based in Salem has been collecting stories and overturning artifacts to compile a history of conflict, courage and change of a volatile time.

The exhibition picks up chronologically where its last one, “Community on the Move” — which examined Black Portland life in the 1940s and 50s — left off.

Triggering a Movement

“We had just come out of the ‘50s, where there were certain (protective) laws that had been enact-



McDonalds, Union & Fremont. Voter registration drive. Nate Proby administering oath.(president, United Minority Workers), Voter is Francis Newman. April 18, 197

ed, but the discriminatory practices were still roughly the same as they had been before,” Black Pioneers secretary Gwen Carr, told *The Skanner*. “And so people were still struggling with trying to get an education and a job and a home.”

It was those racist attitudes and policies of exclusion faced by Oregon’s Black population that spurred the civil rights movement, which was largely reflective of what was happening on the national stage.

Nevertheless, through the dedicated efforts of volunteers, the Pioneers have composed a regional portrait of the struggle towards equality from various archives, private collections, and personal and public stories. The result is a larger cultural and legal context of discrimination and displacement at that time.

“It’s important to point out that the photo work in (the exhibit) is really of Oregon’s time and Oregon people,” said Black Pioneers president Willie Richardson, who noted many civil rights movement retrospectives focus on southern states. “You’re going to be looking at your hometown folks who were activists.”

A New Black Identity

In the 1960s, Black culture went through tremendous change, giving rise to a new sense of Black identity with Afro-centric style. So part of the fun of the exhibit, the Pioneers told *The Skanner*, is seeing how the some of the movers and shakers of Oregon communities — including Portland State professor Darrell Millner and education advocates Ron Herndon and Joyce

Harris — looked back then.

“I think one of our lessons learned from prior exhibits is that because there is so much material, and so much to say , that you tend to want to say it all,” said Carr. “And yet in an exhibit, you have to find that balance between saying it and showing it - or having people experience it.”

In addition to rare photographs of the movement’s key players, “Racing to Change” includes artifacts, captions and quotes in place of heavy texts; as well as interactive components, including a chance for visitors to act out scenes from the Sidney Poitier classic film, “A Raisin in the Sun.”

Students as Catalysts for Change

Visitors can also experience a mock dormitory room — decorated with posters of Black Power icons and various paraphernalia of the era — to get a sense of what a college campus might look like back then.

“A lot of what was going on then was centered on college campuses, so you’re looking at eastern Oregon, southern Oregon, that’s where the action was taking place,” said Carr. “The more research we did, the more we found how important young people were as a catalyst for that across the state.”

With historically Black neighborhoods and businesses being demolished, and school integration measures proving to be more disruptive than intended, students became exceedingly frustrated with the lack of progress and so made their voices heard.

Carr herself was actively involved in the civil rights movement in Los Angeles, where she

Museum to Charge Free Admission on MLK Day

In celebration of the opening of the “Racing to Change” exhibit, admission will be free for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday. Museum hours are 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Jan. 15.

The museum is open seven days a week, Monday – Saturday from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sunday from 12 p.m. – 5 p.m. Admission is \$11, and discounts are available for students, seniors, and youth.

Admission is free for OHS members and Multnomah County residents.

attended a small private college.

“So seeing this again and talking about it brings back memories,” said Carr. “When you’re in college you’re trying to figure, ‘what can I do?’ But we hit the streets with signs, we had forums and we had allies.”

Bridging Generations

The exhibit will also cover how media, in addition to other forms of communication and expression in Black communities, became more influential at that time — including theater, newspapers, radio stations, and even the churches — particularly with the Vietnam War that spanned the era.

Aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds, the inclusive exhibit works to bridge the generational gap and will feature activities for children, as well as offer a corresponding curriculum for teachers.

“Racing for Change”
See EXHIBIT on page 12

Loretta Smith: A Voice for the Most Vulnerable.

"Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In honor of his legacy, I am proud to announce my campaign for Portland City Council.

Loretta for Portland Campaign Kickoff

Saturday, January 13, 2018
9:30am - 12:00pm

Loretta SMITH
FOR PORTLAND CITY COUNCIL

LORETTAforPORTLAND.COM

Urban League of Portland -
Multicultural Senior Center
5325 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Portland, OR 97211

For More Information, please contact:
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Paid for by the Committee to Elect Loretta Smith

MLK
50 years

The 50th Anniversary of Dr. King's Assassination

On View: **Black History 101 Mobile Museum**
Visiting exhibition of artifacts representing (but not limited to) slavery, politics, Jim Crow, science, religion, education, music, sports, and civil rights.
10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Guest Speaker: **Professor Griff**
Co-founding member of the hip hop group Public Enemy.
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 17
Clark College

Gaiser Student Center
1933 Fort Vancouver Way
Vancouver, WA 98663
www.clark.edu/cc/mlk

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