

Understanding the Civil Rights Movement through VR

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University is giving students and faculty the opportunity to virtually step through time to 1968 and witness events of the Civil Rights Movement during Black History Month.

The EOU Library, in collaboration with history faculty and the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion, is providing two educational virtual reality programs during the month of February: “I Am A Man” and “Driving While Black.”

“The ‘I Am A Man’ virtual reality experience is an immersive documentary that focuses on archival primary sources. It has recordings from the time period, both video and audio. It has archival images from newspapers, photographs, pamphlets and materials that have been collected around the time,” said Sarah Ralston, associate professor of library.

Talks between the library and history department began in the fall with planning and set up beginning in January. The VR rigs were originally planned for set up in the library, but moved to the Multicultural Center to increase student accessibility and to prevent large queues.

“We talked about setting it up in the library, but we don’t get quite the same amount of foot traffic as (Hoke Union Building) gets, so it was a good idea to have it hosted over there by the Multicultural Center so people can just drop by and try it out,” Ralston said.



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

The Multicultural Center at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, is hosting a pair of educational virtual reality programs during the month of February: “I Am A Man” and “Driving While Black.” Two Oculus virtual reality headsets are available, one for each program. A separate screen is available in the Multicultural Center to view the programs while students experience them virtually.

“I Am A Man,” created by Derek Ham, puts users on the ground during the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike and cycles through various computer-generated scenes and locations, culminating in the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The experience lasts 10 minutes and uses a mix of animation and archived images with some interactivity.

“Basically, the experience takes you through a few scenes. In the opening scene, there’s a garbage truck and garbage can and you’re able to pick up the can and dump it into the truck,” Ralston said. “It’s meant to set the stage to where you’re participating in events leading up to the sanitation workers’ strike. There’s a scene where there are actual strikers marching down

the streets with signs and there are tanks going up and down the street.”

“Driving While Black,” a virtual reality experience created by Felix & Paul Studios, includes more real-world imagery and functions similarly to an oral history, as the user is being told personal stories while sitting in a restaurant booth.

“It provided a completely different kind of experience. Have the

set on and look to your left and you see an actual person rather than a computer-generated person. To me, ‘Driving While Black’ left more of an impression just because it felt like I was really sitting next to someone in a coffee shop,” said Mika Morton, interim director of Student Diversity and Inclusion.

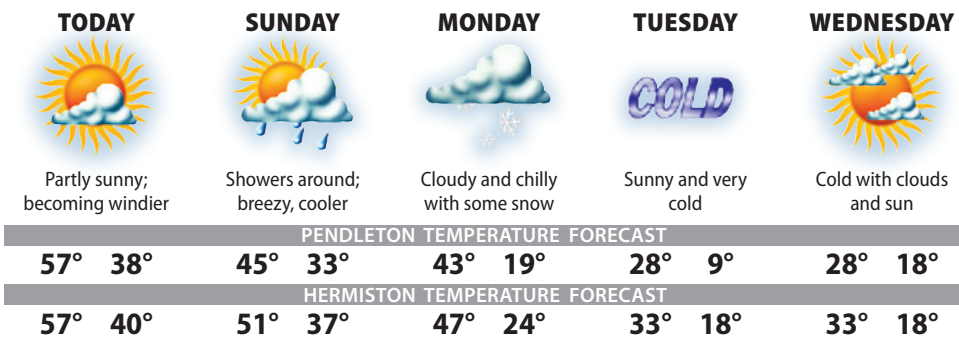
Both experiences are part of a greater Black History Month project to provide students context to Civil Rights Movement events, along with the greater cultural, social and historical impact of the era.

“Part of advancing and promoting equity and inclusion and moving the DEI needle is being able to experience and really listen and try to understand other perspectives. If you don’t understand what others are experiencing, that could lead to dismissing somebody else’s experience as less than yours,” Morton said.

The VR set-ups are meant to act as a jumping off point for greater student curiosity. Morton hopes that the greater ease of access and the unique in-person experiences will generate more student interest in the history of civil rights and racial inequality.

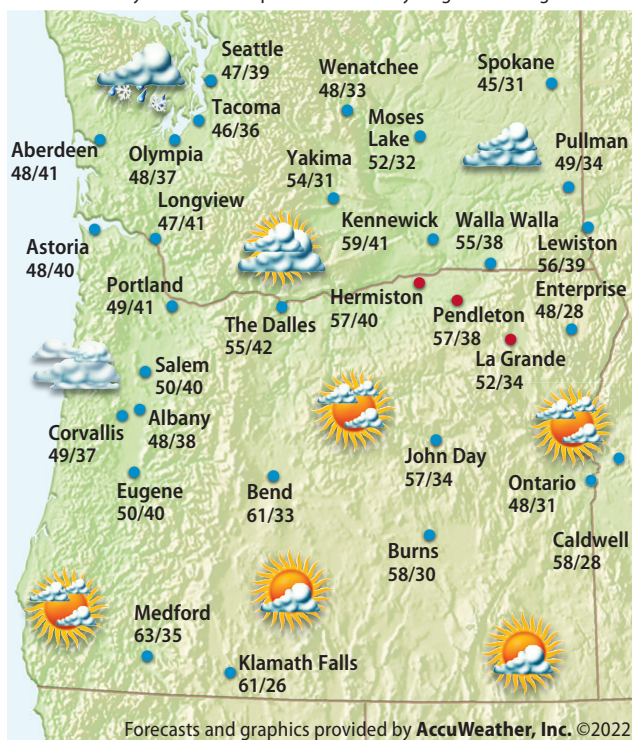
“I hope that students will take it as a learning opportunity and really consider what they hear and what they see in either one of the apps, and that it will be thought-provoking for them,” Ralston said. “Whether or not they are able to emphasize and put themselves in somebody else’s shoes, it can’t not make them think twice about looking at history in this particular way.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	60°	32°
Normals	48°	30°
Records	76° (1902)	6° (2006)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.26"
Normal month to date	0.75"
Year to date	1.79"
Last year to date	2.89"
Normal year to date	2.29"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	58°	28°
Normals	50°	29°
Records	71° (1930)	5° (1929)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.03"
Normal month to date	0.58"
Year to date	0.96"
Last year to date	1.08"
Normal year to date	1.72"

WINDS (in mph)

Today	Sun.
Boardman WSW 10-20	WSW 8-16
Pendleton W 10-20	W 10-20

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	6:51 a.m.
Sunset tonight	5:28 p.m.
Moonrise today	9:03 p.m.
Moonset today	8:31 a.m.

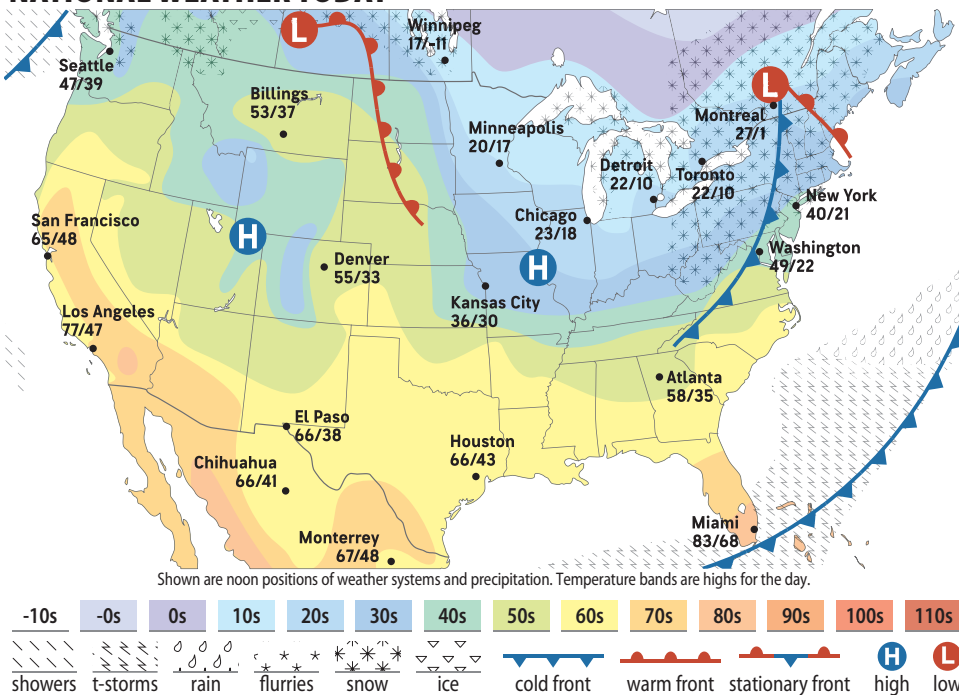
MOON PHASES

Last	New	First	Full
Feb 23	Mar 2	Mar 10	Mar 17

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 90° in Immokalee, Fla. Low -38° in Seagull Lake, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Supporters appeal Oregon secretary of state's ruling on initiative proposals

By HILLARY BORRUD
The Oregonian

SALEM — Supporters of campaign contribution limits on Wednesday, Feb. 16, asked the Oregon Supreme Court to reverse a decision by Secretary of State Shemia Fagan that would effectively end any chance of voters weighing in on contribution limits in November.

Fagan, a Democrat elected in 2020, said she had to disqualify a trio of ballot proposals that would have set contribution limits due to a 2004 Oregon Court of Appeals ruling that initiatives must include the complete text of the law at issue.

Members of Honest Elections Oregon and the Oregon League of Women Voters filed the three proposed ballot initiatives that would set contribution limits and require transparency on who truly pays for political ads. Two of the proposals were negotiated with labor unions and other political groups that tend to support Democrats.

Elections officials at the Secretary of State's Office reviewed the proposals and allowed the petitioners to start moving through the lengthy process to get on the ballot.

But on Feb. 9, Fagan announced she would disqualify initiative proposals 43, 44 and 45 from appearing on the November ballot because she said they did not meet the requirement in the state Constitution to include the “full text of the proposed law ...”

Previous secretaries of state had interpreted the Constitutional requirement to apply only to the portion of a law that would be amended, not the sections of it that would be left unchanged, and courts had generally agreed.

In filings with the Supreme Court, supporters of contribution limits said that the 2004 Court of Appeals ruling that Fagan cited is not a binding precedent. The Supreme Court agreed to review the 2004 decision, but supporters of

the proposed initiative in the case subsequently failed to gather enough signatures to get it on the ballot. The high court decided not to annul the appeals court decision, noting that because the case had become moot, secretaries of state would not be bound to follow the Court of Appeals ruling.

Portland attorney Dan Meek is asking the Supreme Court to take up the challenge of Fagan's nullification decision, bypassing lower courts, because any delay further jeopardizes campaign limits supporters' ability to gather the necessary 112,020 signatures for each initiative to qualify for the ballot. “The built-in delay for actions by government officials and opponents of the initiative petition add up to at least 48 business days, equivalent to 9.5 weeks ... just to get to the point when a ballot title challenge is filed in this court,” Meek wrote on behalf of chief petitioners Jason Kafoury, James Ofsink and Rebecca Gladstone.

IN BRIEF

Portland's famous elk statue to return by early 2023

PORTLAND — After months of bureaucratic back-and-forth, Portland officials have agreed to return the city's iconic elk statue to its longtime home along Southwest Main Street in downtown by the end of this year or early next.

The beloved public sculpture, which protesters badly damaged during weeks of demonstrations and riots in 2020, will no longer perch atop the large granite fountain that served as its base for more than a century, officials told The Oregonian.

Instead, a narrower pedestal will make space for a bike lane and give buses more room to pass by on the two-lane, one-way street.

Jeff Hawthorne, Portland's arts program

manager, said the city on Tuesday, Feb. 15, began to take steps affecting the statue and its base — officially known as the Thompson Elk Fountain — that are required due to their status as historic landmarks.

Under the timeline, a design review process for the bronze creature's new base would commence in June and include public feedback.

The elk would reappear downtown no later than early 2023 and atop a pedestal with a significantly smaller footprint than its granite predecessor, according to officials.

In July 2020, protesters repeatedly defaced the sculpture with graffiti.

The nonprofit Regional Arts and Culture Council, which has overseen the care and upkeep of the elk for decades, removed the statue and has kept it in hiding ever since.

— The Oregonian

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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