

Oil & Water Do Not Mix!

The OCA and the African-American Community

By Cecil Charles Prescod

The increased activism of the political right in Oregon, as symbolized by the OCA, is the latest example of a historical assault on the civil rights of oppressed people in general, and the African-American community in particular. African-Americans have found it a necessity to maintain a vigilant preparedness against those who would deny all Oregonians full and equal rights, since before the time of the adoption of Oregon's constitution (which codified the exclusion of African-Americans from full citizenship), through the 1920s (when the Klan exercised unprecedented influence in electoral politics), and continuing today when full social, economic, and political power is at best a hope rather than a reality.

The OCA is only the most recent development of the political right; the modern foundation of this movement can be located in the Goldwater campaign for president in 1964. One of the important themes in Goldwater's campaign was opposition to the burgeoning civil rights movement's demand for an end to legal segregation. Many people in that anti-civil rights campaign later supported the efforts of George Wallace and Ronald Reagan to become president. Subsequently the Oregon Citizens Alliance was formed in 1987. What ties these various campaigns and personalities together is an underlying commitment to retreat from the civil rights gains of past decades and return to a society in which equality under the law is denied to certain groups in our society.

The increased sophistication of the political right has caused this movement to adopt a new tactic, taking a "kinder and gentler" approach to advance their agenda. While the OCA recognizes that it is not advantageous to appear blatantly racist, it does not take much effort to uncover its racist agenda. Under the benign sounding rubric of "No Special Rights" the OCA seeks to reverse the gains of social inclusion of people who had previously been excluded from full legal access and protection. For the OCA, "No Special Rights" means opposition to affirmative action. For the OCA, "No Special Rights" means opposing Oregon's divestment from corporations doing business in South Africa. For the OCA, "no special rights" means opposition to state aid for pre-kindergarten programs. For the OCA, "no special rights" means opposition to gun control. In summary, the OCA's agenda is an anti-Black agenda.

African-Americans ought to be outraged that this anti-civil rights group has attempted to coöpt the language of the civil

rights movement in order to advance its anti-civil rights program. While the political right has labeled itself as a "victimized minority," it has sought to establish policies which are the antithesis of the goals of the civil rights movement. The society that the OCA envisions is one in which the dignity of only some people is affirmed; a society in which many citizens are denied the right to fair housing, regardless of their ability to pay; a society in which many citizens are not allowed to obtain jobs or may lose a job, regardless of their qualifications; a society in which many citizens may be denied access to medical information regardless of their need; in short, a society in which certain groups are not allowed to participate as full citizens.

In recent months the OCA has sought to improve its image in the Black community. This organization's political endorsement and financial support of a Black candidate for mayor of Portland and its attempt to appeal to Black churches are cynical efforts to divide our community. The OCA seeks to advance its anti-democratic program using disingenuous methods of misinformation, exploiting the justified worries of an economically oppressed community, and obscuring its explicit anti-civil rights platform.

The current OCA ballot initiative did not develop in a vacuum. The assault on lesbians and gay men's civil rights is only the latest attack upon human equality. It will not be the last. African-Americans know from brutal experience what it means to be the victims of individually and societally sanctioned attack upon their humanity.

African-Americans have been on the receiving end of bigotry and hate-inspired violence since the time our ancestors were brought to this continent in chains. It is because of our experience of being the recipients of discrimination that African-Americans have been in the forefront of the struggles for justice for all people. We have recognized that to deny any individual group equal protection under the law threatens our security. We cannot afford to remain silent when any person or group is targeted for discrimination; but experience teaches us that we must continue to be in the vanguard in the struggle to affirm the dignity of all people. We must oppose those who seek to establish a society in which some people are designated as second class citizens or worse. We do not have the luxury to remain silent and wait to see who will be the next targeted group. We affirm our humanity when we affirm the humanity of all people.

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Who Supports Equal Protection For All People? AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERS SPEAK OUT FOR DIVERSITY

"Lesbians and gay men come from every part of society and from every stripe of the rainbow, and are an integral part of the quilt that is America. They are Black, Latino, Catholic, Jew, farmers, unemployed, homeless, students and parents. As citizens of this great country, lesbians and gay men must be afforded all the rights the Constitution provides. We support the current Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights Bill in the U.S. Congress, which calls for an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation. We support the implementation of a Presidential Order banning anti-gay discrimination in the federal government and the military."
— Rev. Jesse Jackson

"The civil rights and human rights community affirms and reaffirms its uncompromising support of the civil and human rights of all

citizens in this country, including members of the gay and lesbian community. [And] many of us here expressed our support for legislation now before the Congress...which called for the extension of the protection of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which grew out of the 1963 March; an extension under this law to the gay and lesbian community."

— Joseph Lowery, President
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

"We believe that the rights of all people must be protected and guaranteed. We believe that the gay and lesbian community must be supported in their civil rights as well as their right for their own sexual preference."
— Coretta Scott King

"The costly gift of freedom only counts when it is extended to all people. Only when rights are truly unfettered, without any strings attached, is a republic truly represented. The reason why the United States as a nation has lasted for 215 years is because of the freedoms that we collectively enjoy. As a defender of these freedoms and of our sacred Constitution, it only follows that I would co-sponsor

legislation [that] would ban discrimination on the basis of sexual affection. This is a beginning. I, for one, will not be caught 'talking loud and saying nothing.' Because, sometimes, your actions speak so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying. When you embrace a doctrine that says someone is of an inferior race, you embrace a doctrine of ignorance and genocide. When will we, as a people, get to the promised land that Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about? Certainly not before we include all of God's children — Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, gay, and lesbian."

— Congressman Craig A. Washington, Texas

"All human beings have a fundamental right to privacy and to define their own sexuality. Attempts by the state to restrict these rights are among the most unfair and unjustified actions it can take. Unfortunately, lesbians and gay men must still fight for their most basic rights. It is a disgrace that this debate is even necessary. Our government has continually denied lesbians and gay men labor rights, housing rights, health care rights — indeed civil rights. Thus, it is up to the people, once again, to force the government to accept the rights of lesbians and gay men."
— Congresswoman Maxine Waters, California