



# Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



## Black History in Portland

*Despite daunting barriers and discrimination, Black Portlanders have made many important contributions.*

This article was produced in collaboration with [The Skanner News](#). For 35 years, The Skanner has reported local news on the issues that matter to [African Americans](#) across the Northwest.

Black pioneers were among the earliest non-Native people to settle in Oregon, but it was not until World War II that thousands of African Americans migrated to the Northwest to find work in the shipyards and keep the railroads running. Today, Portland is home to more than 41,000 Black Americans, most living on the east side of the Willamette River.



Despite daunting barriers and discrimination, Black Americans have made important contributions to Oregon in politics, medicine, the environment, sports, [culture](#) and the arts. Portland's many parks, for example, make the city one of the greenest in the nation. That's thanks largely to [Charles Jordan](#), a former city commissioner who championed green spaces in cities, far ahead of his time. In July 2012, the city renamed a [community center](#) in Jordan's honor.

### Notable Black Portlanders

Notable Black Americans in the Portland entertainment scene include actor [Danny Glover](#); pianist [Janice Scroggins](#); Grammy-winning jazz bassist [Esperanza Spalding](#); saxophonist [Mike "Philly" Phillips](#); jazz drummer [Mel Brown](#); jazz singer [Julianne Johnson-Weis](#); R&B singers [Liv Warfield](#) and [Andy Stokes](#); funk performer/producer [Tony Ozier](#); and rappers [Cool Nutz](#), [Rose Bent](#), [Soul P](#), [Luck One](#), and [Illmaculate](#).

### More Community History

This section was produced in collaboration with [Flossin Media](#).



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## Black Americans in Oregon Politics

The early 2000s marked a historic milestone as three Black people, former state senators Margaret Carter, Avel Gordly and Jackie Winters, served in the Oregon State Legislature simultaneously. These three senators made landmark reforms for both [Black communities](#) and Oregon as a whole, including removing the last remnants of anti-Black exclusionary legislation from Oregon's constitution.

[Margaret Carter](#) became the first Black woman elected to the [Oregon Legislative Assembly](#) in 1984. She advocated for education for those most in need, and legislation to observe Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a state holiday. Carter retired from the Oregon Senate in 2008 to head up the Department of Human Services. In 2011, her alma mater and former employer, [Portland Community College](#), named the [Senator Margaret Carter Technology Education Center](#) in her honor.

Portland native [Avel Gordly](#) was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1991 and became the first Black woman elected to the Oregon State Senate in 1996. She served a total of 17 years before retiring from office in 2008 to become an associate professor in the Black studies department at her alma mater, [Portland State University](#). As senator, Gordly helped pass legislation requiring statewide multicultural health service. In 2008, [Oregon Health Science University](#) renamed its behavioral health center the [Avel Gordly Center for Healing](#), and committed to meeting mental health needs in the Black community. Gordly published her memoir in 2011, "[Remembering the Power of Words: The Life of an Oregon Activist, Legislator, and Community Leader](#)."

Senator [Jackie Winters](#) moved to Portland with her family during WWII along with many other Blacks

who sought gainful employment in the shipyards and railways. Her father launched a short-lived daily newspaper, which helped shape Winters for public debate and advocacy. As an adult, Winters moved to Salem, Ore., and gained acclaim for her regional restaurant chain, Jackie's Ribs. Winters was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1998, becoming the first Black Republican ever to serve in the Oregon Legislative Assembly. She won election to the Oregon Senate in 2004 and still holds office. She advocates for increased state

education funding and helped create the Oregon Food Share Program, which has grown to include a statewide system of food banks. She sits on the powerful ways and means committee that oversees the state budget and is a popular guest on many national television forums.





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## Black Americans in Portland Education

[Portland Community College](#) (PCC), Oregon’s largest and most diverse college, has been helmed by three Black men since 2004. [Dr. Preston Pulliams](#) is PCC’s fifth district president and CEO. In 2010 he was named the Regional CEO of the Year by the Council for the Advancement of Support of Education. [Dr. Algie Gatewood](#) was president of the Cascade Campus in [Northeast Portland](#) — one of PCC’s largest, most diverse campuses. Harold Williams, a self-proclaimed “junkyard dog,” has staunchly helped create and defend policy for more than 20 years as chairman of the board. Though it is not their primary objective, these men have played a part in paving the way for minority leadership.

Another notable Black-led education program is [Self-Enhancement Inc](#) (SEI). Tony L. Hopson Sr. started SEI in 1981 as a summer basketball camp for at-risk youth. Some 30 years later, it is a fully accredited academy serving primarily Black students ages 8-25 in urban [North](#) and [Northeast Portland](#). In 2010, SEI partnered with former NBA star [Alonzo Mourning](#)’s charity to replicate its program in Miami.

## Making Strides Through Sports

Black Portlanders have come a long way since Bobby Robinson and Charles Williams broke color lines as high school sports stars in 1924, playing before huge crowds at the old Multnomah Stadium in Portland. Both went on to be the first Black athletes to play at the [University of Oregon](#).

Since its inception in 1970, the [Portland Trail Blazers](#) NBA team has featured scores of Black players. [Michael Harper](#) and [Brian Grant](#) are just a few who still work with the organization and call Portland home. In 2007, the franchise hired [Larry Miller](#) as their first Black president. Miller was also the first Black executive at Jantzen Sports and Nike’s first Black vice president. In 2011, the Trail Blazers appointed their first female Black chief operating officer, [Sarah Mensah](#). Mensah received national press and helped establish a Portland chapter of the National Association of Black Sports Professionals.

Beloved former Blazer “Rasta man” [Brian Grant](#), who still calls Portland home, was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 2008. Since then, the [Brian Grant Foundation](#) has hosted a popular event to raise funds for Parkinson’s education and awareness. “[Shake It Till We Make It](#)” consists of a celebrity gala and golf tournament, and has featured Michael J. Fox, who lives with the disease, and Muhammad Ali (who passed away in 2016).





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## Playing a Role in Portland’s “Official Festival”

One of Portland’s most celebrated events is the world-famous [Portland Rose Festival](#), held each year in May/June with highlights such as the Rose Festival Parade, a waterfront carnival and the selection of a queen from among princesses representing every Portland high school. In 1980, Robin Marks became the first Black Rose Festival Queen. This honor includes a college scholarship and has since been bestowed upon several other Black women.

In 2007, the Portland Rose Festival reached two notable landmarks: celebrating its 100th anniversary and being led by its first Black president, [Leslie Goodlow-Baldwin](#). Leslie led the festival to top honors that year, winning the highly coveted Grand Pinnacle Award from the [International Festivals & Events Association](#).

### **Black History Month Resources & Articles**

[How Black History Month Started](#)

[Black History: Facts, People & Month](#)

[Black History Month in Portland](#)

[Black History Month in Hillsboro](#)

[Celebrating Black History Month in Oregon](#)

## **Save the Dates (Registration Opening Soon)**

**April 6, 2024: OSAA Student Leadership Conference @ Camp Withycombe, in  
Clackamas, OR**

**April 27, 2024: Oregon Girls Sports Leadership Summit @ OES**

### **Contact the OSAA**

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