



Amanda Cowan, Corvallis Gazette-Times

Calvin Henry, a longtime Corvallis area NAACP official, discusses race relations in Oregon and the United States in an interview April 22.

Calvin Henry: Agent of change

Corvallis resident honored by NAACP for his long fight to end discrimination

JAMES DAY
CORVALLIS GAZETTE-TIMES

Calvin Henry has been involved in political activism and race relations in Oregon since he came to Oregon State University in 1969 after a stint in the Air Force.

Henry helped start the Corvallis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and has worked with numerous agencies, public and private, on issues such as



affirmative action, education, social justice and legislative action.

On April 15 the

longtime Corvallis resident was presented with a "history maker" award by the national office of the NAACP. The award was

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THE HENRY FILE

Military career: Served as a captain in the Air Force and Oregon Air National Guard

Education: Bachelor's degree from Wiley College (Marshall, Texas); master's and doctorate from Oregon State University

NAACP work: Helped organize Corvallis chapter and assisted establishment of Salem and Eugene chapters; received the national chapter's "history maker" award earlier this month

Other positions: Started Oregon Assembly of Black Affairs (1977); helped start Oregon Commission on Black Affairs; helped start Black Student Union at OSU; served on the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry, the Oregon Council on Civil Rights, the Oregon Governor's Task Force on Equality and was business manager in the Oregon Secretary of State's Office

Henry

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presented at the grand opening of the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center at OSU. Harris was the first director of OSU's Educational Opportunities Program, which was set up to attract and retain black students.

Last week, Henry sat down for an interview with the Gazette-Times. A recurring theme in the conversation was his conviction that, although we've made some strides toward ending racial discrimination in the United States, we still have a long, long way to go.

Here are excerpts from the discussion (edited for clarity and length):

On the new center:

"When (Harris) was here people were reluctant to recognize the injustice. We could have had even more impact. I'm pleased that (OSU President) Ray was willing to name the center for Harris."

On education:

"(People) don't get the full aspect if they think education is training. They don't understand what it

can do to help people lead a wholesome life. We have to teach all children. Our educational institutions have failed. Education is more than training. We need leadership to meet the needs of students. Students are ready to go, but many people in teaching may not be ready to take them there. We think that what we have here is always going to be here. And it's not. We need to learn how to live together and work together."

On his role: "I'm a change agent. You have to be able to recognize you are going to have setbacks and failures. Sometimes you fail yourself to change. You don't know the history of the United States until you know black history. You don't know about Oregon until you understand how blacks were treated here. You have to be willing to stand up and stand out and recognize that you aren't always going to get your way. One has to listen and observe and come to terms with it.

"I live here in Corvallis. My home is here. My wife taught here. I can't do it by

myself. I just want to make things better?"

On affirmative action: "People are trying to claim that affirmative action is a new thing. It's always been there for white males. It took a commitment to do that (start affirmative action). Some people paid a heckuva price for standing up for what's right. And white women have been big beneficiaries (of affirmative action). We might not have had women governors as fast as we did if not for affirmative action."

On state-sanctioned discrimination: "Many people say those days are long gone. They're not. If we can't get people to understand state-sanctioned discrimination, it's going to be difficult. We've made some strides, don't get me wrong, but when you see what those strides are (how little distance we've come) you're shocked."

"State-sanctioned discrimination exists in the constitution and everyday life. We can make this country greater than we've ever been before. But

we have to fix this. I was three-fifths of a person (slaves counted as three-fifths of a person under U.S. Constitution rules on proportional representation). The rules were not nullified until after the Civil War.

"Laws were created to deny me opportunities. They don't want blacks to vote today. We don't want to talk about it. We don't want to discuss it. Look at the attitude of elected officials. Race relations ... let's look at it. We want to pretend that there is no state-sanctioned discrimination against black Americans. But there is. You see it as well as I see it. And people get scared. Young people are finding out all the stuff they have been talking about isn't true. Then they want to change things. This (concept) will help you understand that what happened in Ferguson was no accident."

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