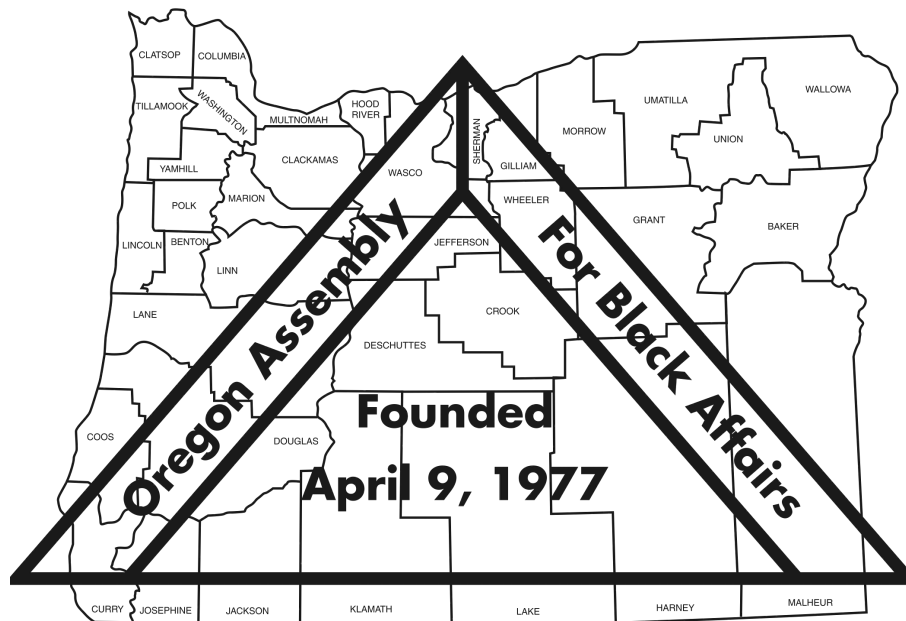
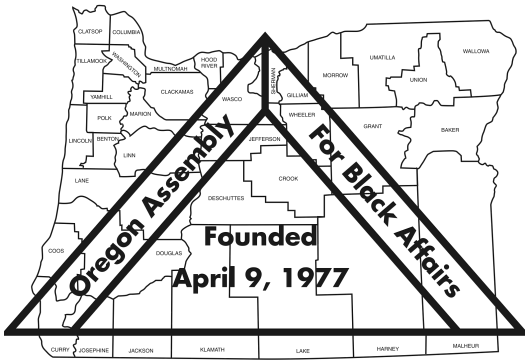


# 2014 OBPC Interns – Their Reports In Their Own Words

June 21, 2014



**OABA-OBPC**  
P. O. Box 12485  
Salem, Oregon 97309



# Oregon Black Political Convention

P. O. Box 12485  
Salem, Oregon 97309

<http://www.oaba.us>  
[oaba@peak.org](mailto:oaba@peak.org)

## 2014 OREGON BLACK POLITICAL CONVENTION (OBPC) "Building Influence and Mobilizing Our Voices"

The 2014 Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC) was held on **April 11-13, 2014**, at the **Crowne Plaza Convention Center-Portland, 1441 NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR 97232**.

The Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC) is a nonpartisan convention, and it is educational. It is held during the spring of election years and is hosted by the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA) through its Political Action Committee. The purpose of this convention is twofold. One is to serve as a forum for delegates to discuss issues and conditions, and to establish, through resolutions, the positions of the Black Community, collectively, on these issues and conditions affecting it. The other is to endorse candidates running for public offices, during the Primary Election, who are sensitive and responsive to the issues and conditions of Blacks in Oregon.

The convention is statewide in its focus. OBPC is open to the public. Any individual or organization addressing the concerns of Blacks in Oregon may be a delegate to the convention. The delegates carry out the business of the convention. OBPC seeks to engage students as interns to learn and participate in political processes that would benefit themselves, their colleges and society-at-large. The actions and endorsements of the Oregon Black Political Convention are the positions of the convention and not those of the Oregon Assembly For Black Affairs (OABA). What is done at this convention to help Black Oregonians benefits all Oregonians.

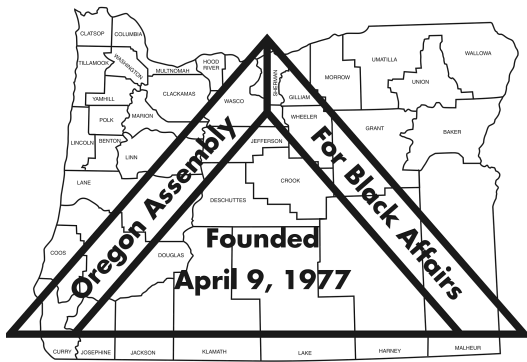
Understanding the role of the citizen in politics is essential to change. Politics plays a key role in everything we do. It is the view of OABA that the OBPC can assist Black Oregonians to understand their issues and to develop their positions on the needs and aspirations of the Black Community by using their power of citizenship to build futures for themselves and their children as well as this nation.

### 2014 OBPC SPONSORS:



ROY JAY





## Oregon Black Political Convention

P. O. Box 12485  
Salem, Oregon 97309

<http://www.oaba.us>  
[oaba@peak.org](mailto:oaba@peak.org)

### **2014 OBPC College internship Program**

The 2014 OBPC College Internship Program is an internship program whereby the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA) is working with Oregon's colleges and universities to set up non-paying internship programs for college students who want to assist in the planning and preparation of the 2014 Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC). Politics plays a key role in everything we do. Understanding the role of the citizen in politics is essential to change. Many Black American students are conditioned to not be political or to not fully understand the political processes that drive the education discipline in which they are engaged. These students attend a college, yet they do not see themselves as really being a part of the college. Oftentimes, their early schooling has not taught them how to be a part of something, what it means to be a part of something and how to share their identity and humanity with others. The faculties at these colleges need to teach and encourage Black American students to understand process as they work through their situations of getting an education. The purpose of this internship program is to get Black American students interested in the political processes and to encourage the colleges and universities to work with Black students and the Oregon Black Community. This internship involves the student working with other citizens from Oregon and candidates running for public offices as well as developing issues and positions of Oregon Black Community. Getting these students to know, understand and use politics and process (2Ps) will benefit the college, the students and society-at-large. This program will give these students some hand-on experiences in dealing with the political processes that will affect them at the college that they attend and for the rest of their lives. The internship is open to all students. The internships are for the 2013-2014 Year (Fall, Winter and Spring Terms) at colleges and universities in Oregon.

Students who want to participate in this internship must be enrolled in one of the colleges or universities in Oregon. The students will receive training about politics and process from OABA contact for interns. They are required to write an internship paper on their fieldwork and activities. They will provide a copy of the paper to their professors and the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA). OABA will share this report with its members and participants of the OBPC.

The 2014 Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC) was held on April 11-13, 2014, at the **Crowne Plaza Portland Convention Center**, 1441 NE 2nd Avenue, Portland, OR 97232.



The 2014 OBPC interns are: Crystal H. Brown from the University of Oregon and Edmond Owen LeSesne from Oregon State University. Their reports in their own words are parts of this document.

# OBPC Internship Response Paper

Crystal H. Brown

Submitted to OABA President: Dr. Calvin O. L. Henry &  
University of Oregon Professor Joseph Lowdnes

06/13/2014

	UNIVERSITY OF OREGON	<b>Crystal H. Brown</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PhD student in Political Science at the University of Oregon.</li><li>• Originally from Chicago</li><li>• A resident of Oregon since 2012</li></ul>			

## Internship Experience and Response

The Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC) is one method that African Americans in Oregon have developed to engage in civil society to solve issues related to Black people. Racial Politics in the United States has had a tremendous impact on civil society. How people engage in the political process is contingent upon their position in society and their knowledge of the political process. When the Founding Fathers created the U.S. Constitution in 1787 they were creating a new government system. The power of the government came from the people not through the military, but through free and fair elections by citizens. The political process kept certain Americans from voting and engaging in politics over the span of the history of this country, however, now after gaining civil rights, it is the responsibility of citizens to engage in the political process to gain access to their rights as outlined by the United States Constitution. OBPC supports the idea that Black Oregonians should engage in politics to advocate for social justice.

The goal of the OBPC is twofold; it establishes the position of Black Oregonians on political issues (e.g. resolutions) that they see as pertinent to the Black community and it endorses candidates running for a political position. Once the OBPC establishes the resolutions, they present them to the political candidates along with an endorsement. The idea is to endorse candidates who have a political stance that supports the ideas of the OBPC and to put pressure on the candidates to recognize relevant issue for African Americans in this country. As an intern with the OBPC I learned a lot about the political process in the United States and the history of racial politics. This paper will look at the historical path that led to the development of the political process and racial politics in the United States. It will then focus specifically on the politics of Oregon as presented by the OBPC. The central arguments of this paper are that history matters in civil society, knowledge about the political process is important for groups to gain political authority and engagement in the political process is important to obtaining social justice in the United States.

My internship with OBPC taught me that the political process is important. The political process is the act in which citizens engage politicians in dialog, politicians, open forums, and talks to implement policies that are most supportive of the group. African Americans have been engaged in the political process informally

before they became citizens of this country. They used the system that was in place to fight for their own freedom. Racial politics is a crucial part of the story of American political development and social justice movements. The story of *Amistad* is one of the official accounts of active rebellion against slavery where the courts ruled in favor of the oppressed.

The story of *Amistad* demonstrates how African Americans, really any group in the United States, can use the political process to change their situation. This means by engaging politicians, using the courts, and acting collectively as a group, the negative situation of unemployment, racial profiling, and housing discrimination, etc. can be eliminated or significantly reduced if the Black community engages politics. In the story of *Amistad* Shengbe Pieh was kidnapped from his home country in Sierra Leone to be sold into slavery in Cuba. He was being transported on the ship *Amistad* from Havana to Puerto Principe, a settlement down the coast in Cuba, when he led a rebellion and demanded that the transporters take them back to Africa (Rediker, 2013). In the middle of the night the navigator secretly led the ship northeast and the boat was intercepted by the United States ship *Washington* (Rediker, 2013). The Africans were taken from the ship and put on trial for murder in New Haven Connecticut. The Supreme Court eventually freed them and ruled that their enslavement was a violation of international treaties (Rediker, 2013). Pieh was returned to his home country in Sierra Leone in 1842. The successful *Amistad* rebellion changed the very nature of the struggle against slavery (Rediker, 2013). Stories like these indicate how it is important to engage in the political process in the United States. Pieh was able to use the high courts to gain his freedom and return to his home country. In the same way, we as people living in the United States also have to use the political system to fight for rights and equality. The OBPC suggests that the only way to advocate and change politics in the United States is to actively engage the political process. The first step understands the role of citizenship.

### **Historical Development of Racial Politics**

A key component to the philosophy of OBPC is citizenship and political engagement. OBPC promotes the ideas that politics plays a role in every aspect of life. The organization held its first convention in Portland, Oregon in 1978; towards the end of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. OBPC was created by Dr. Calvin Henry as a nonpartisan organization that presents the concerns of Black Oregonians to elected officials who are responsible for creating and implementing policies. Many people do not understand the role of a citizen in the political process. Citizens are supposed to facilitate change in society and engage politicians in a way that will work in their favor. This means laying out the problems in the Black community and asking politicians to help solve them.

Citizenship is important because it gives people the authority or legitimizes their actions within a country. Only citizens can pressure government officials to change policies by threatening not to vote for the political actor in the future. If the politician does not act in their favor, they (citizens) have the collective authority to vote them out of office by voting someone else in. Citizenship highlights the power individuals have when they collectively challenge the government on issues that are pertinent to them. Citizenship is both something that empowers citizens, but, at the same time it disempowers people who are not citizens. There are two definitions of citizenship that I will examine in light of civic engagement. The first is state citizenship which encompasses the legal status within a nation-state and the second deals with welfare rights or access to state resources.

Citizenship has two points of departure that scholars highlight as important. The first perspective is that citizenship is a social contract which carries with it rights and responsibilities. In this concept citizenship is about a legal and political community (Stewart, 1995). People who have legal status are included in the membership while people who do not have legal standing are excluded from participating in many factors of society (Brubaker, 1990). In the past, ex-slaves and women living in the United States did not always have access to legal and social standing or the political process; they were not full citizens. They could not give a formal opinion about how government should operate or use their group collectiveness to influence policies to

reflect their interests as members in society. The formation of the modern nation-states that exists today cannot be understood without the institutionalization of citizenship (Steward, 1995). Countries are membership institutions and delimiting itself by its jurisdiction over a group of people. Citizenship often links itself to inclusiveness and universality but Brubaker points out that citizenship is a paradox (Brubaker, 1990). On the one hand citizenship confirms full rights, privileges, on members; however, isolates people who are not considered members of the group or community.

The second perspective came from Thomas Marshall and is about democratic citizenship and social welfare. This involves right-claiming citizens who use the government, policies, or the law to promote state provision of social services. Citizens are right-claimers who advocate for government resources to benefit their situation over others. Government is no longer simply enforcing the law in terms of land and property ownership, but, has expanded to include lawing making ability, allocation of resources i.e. how government should spend taxpayer dollars. The focus of citizenship has changed from creating a collective national identity to preserving the rights of the individual in the country. In a sense, citizenship has become institutionalized and a norm in society which allowed for individual human rights to spring forward. Many formal rights now focus on preventing social inequality related to class, sex, and race. Focusing on this aspect of citizenship suggests that only liberal democracies that preserve individual rights promote full membership in society. Political activity has become subject to citizens and the desire for protection over certain aspects of the individual such as rights to access to free fair treatment in the workplace, equal housing opportunities, equal education for children and a host of laws that were enacted during the Civil Rights movement.

Citizenship is important because it requires a membership in society that allows one to fully participate. It also entails using one's power collectively to impact politics. In the first case, citizens have the right to vote, participate in political activities, and the right to receive protection from the country and are bound by laws established by the country. It is a formal legal status that developed with the modern nation-states. The second case citizens have the right to demand for social welfare by collectively influencing government to use resources in a way that serves their interests. Not only does government have to use resources to protect certain protective classes in society but they also have to use resources in a way that citizens think is the most important at the time.

The Civil Rights Movement created a pathway for citizens to advocate for social justice and for government to create and enforce anti-discrimination laws. Civil rights have developed to mean that citizens should be protected against discrimination based on class, sex, and race. The first way that citizens were able to become members of society was with the change in voting laws. The road to freedom from slavery also paints the picture of what the process was like for African Americans to again access to actively participate in the political process. Most of the history begins with the history of the Constitution and who had access to the right to vote or not. The next section will discuss the change that occurred to allow African Americans full access to vote.

### **Voting Rights, a Pathway to Active Citizenship**

Voting is important in history because it establishes who has access to change the political system and who does not. OBPC supports the idea that citizens should actively engage in politics by using their votes to signal to politicians (elected and appointed officials) the necessity of listening to Black voices. Blacks have to use their voting power to signal to the political leadership their desires as a cohesive group. If people do not have access or the right to vote they cannot help determine how government will expend collective resources or the restraints it will put on individual behavior. The amount of money teachers receive, the zoning of school districts, the treatment of prisoners, and resources that go to the poor are all decisions made by elected officials. Elected officials respond to people who vote because they want to be re-elected or they want their party to be re-elected the next year. Voting rights in the United States have not always been open or available to African Americans.

The U.S. Constitution in 1787 established that the power to govern would be established by citizens who voted to determine who would govern society. This was supposed to be an inclusive practice, but, in fact it was far from inclusive. The biggest complication from the beginning was who had the right to be citizens to have access to vote and who did not (Gross, 1999). Voting is important because it dictates who has the right to the political process. The political process deals with citizenship and engaging leaders who are supposed to represent the people. The people in power at the time established that since the role of the government was to protect property and personal freedom, the people who would be citizens should have a stake in each factor (Mann, 2012). This meant that free White Protestant men, who were already in positions of power as landowners and property owners, would have access to vote and participate as full citizens (Keyssar, 2009). While on the other hand, Blacks, Jews, Native Americans, Asians, women, and non-Catholics were excluded from full membership. Only about 6 percent of the entire population had access to vote and officially engage in politics.

Throughout the politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were significant shifts of power that forced government to be more inclusive. Groups that were previously excluded became involved in the political process. The elimination of restrictions related to religion and owning property extended the franchise to all white men (Keyssar, 2009). Then after the Civil War ended in 1865, the government was pushed to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment was established by government in 1868 which gave citizenship to all persons born in the United States giving them the right to life, liberty, property, and the equal protection of laws by the federal government (Keyssar, 2009). The Fifteenth Amendment restricted the federal and state governments from discriminating against voters because of their race, color, or previous conditions of servitude (Keyssar, 2009). Oddly enough, these policies were not extended to women and only African Americans had access to vote.

Women were able to legally vote in 1920 with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment which said that sex could not determine a person's eligibility to vote. Although African American men had the right to vote in 1868, systemically they were barred from voting (Keyssar, 2009). Many southern states implemented literacy laws such as the grandfather clause which required literacy tests for people whose ancestors were not voters before 1868 (Keyssar, 2009). Other methods to systemically exclude blacks were the poll tax and physical intimidation which lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After years of fighting under the Civil Rights movement that started in the 1950s, some argue it actually started in 1919, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was implemented which outlawed unfair electoral procedures and required the federal government to monitor voting procedures in the south and in other states that had discriminatory practices (Keyssar, 2009).

### **Civil Rights Movement and Social Justice**

OBPC continues the mission of the Civil Rights Movement by promoting the fact that Black Americans need to continue to play a role in the political process. Most of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s touched the entire nation. However, the movement of people to influence politics had been taking place since Amistad when slaves were revolting against unfair treatment and demanding to be sent back to their home country. Even in the 1919 African Americans returned soldiers armed in self-defense fought to protect the African American community, Blacks were using the courts to ban lynching, and in 1946 World War Two veterans also protected the black communities against bloody race riots. The Civil Rights Movement eliminated segregation and caused the federal government to create programs that promoted racial, economic, social, and political equality. A key component in the changes that occurred during the Civil Right Movement was the role of the Federal Government and politics.

African Americans during the time of the Civil Rights Movement had to use systemic factors of power like the federal government to facilitate change in an unequal society. Although things have changed significantly in the United States and African Americans have rights today that they did not have in the past, we still need to continue the fight for equality. Most discriminate today takes place in the form of housing

discrimination, policing laws, and in education. OBPC in its resolutions this year attempted to address these issues. My role in the internship was to assist the Convention Moderator, Robert Phillips, with the resolutions workshop. The convention attendees during these sessions went over the resolutions that we would later present to political candidates. I learned from the Convention that resolutions are issues that members of OBPC wanted political leaders to focus on as goals to resolve in the future. Most of the issue we focused on have been right that people from the Civil Rights Movement have been advocating for since the beginning of the movement; equal access to education, fair housing laws, and safety for Black children and adults. OBPC although very modern in its approach seems to be continuing to fight for justice in these issues.

My personal experience with the organization helped me understand grassroots level activism within a political framework. OBPC is trying to expand its franchise to focus specifically on the political process in order to facilitate change. They call upon African American citizens and citizens who are interested in advocating for justice in general, to engage politicians on relevant issues for Blacks in Oregon. OBPC is interested in engaging university and college level students to participate in the organization. The OBPC is a powerful nonpartisan organization in Oregon that is able to bring together people who support Black issues. It was a privilege to work alongside so many knowledgeable and talented people who have a passion for justice. I moved to Oregon specifically to pursue my PhD in Political Science at the University of Oregon. People warned me before coming here that there were not many Black people in Oregon. Now that I have been here for two years, I see there are not many Blacks in Oregon due to systemic factors and historical exclusionary laws, but, the Blacks here do have a voice. OBPC is part of that voice as they are leading the way by signaling to elected-officials the needs of Black Oregonians.

### **Final Thoughts on OBPC and Internship**

OBPC is a political organization that brings attention to the needs of Black Oregonians. They do this in three ways; by identifying the needs of Blacks in Oregon, by creating a list of resolutions that outline these needs, and by endorsing political leaders running for office who seem to have an agenda that supports these needs. The last step is actually sending the list of resolutions (political demands) to the people running for office to let them know what the organization expects them to do if they are elected.

The main purpose of the convention is to discuss issues that impact Black Oregonians and to think of ways that elected officials can address these issues. The organization is headed by Dr. Calvin Henry who is very passionate about citizenship in the United States. Interacting with Dr. Henry taught me that in order to be an active citizen in this country; we have to engage in politics collectively to voice our opinion to elected officials. Citizenship is about exercising our rights to hold elected officials accountable to meet the needs of all Oregonians including the Black population.

While engaging in the convention, I learned about the needs of Black Oregonians and how to advocate for policies to meet those needs. The convention provided a venue for members of the Black community and people who support Black issues in Oregon to come together to set a platform for how they wanted candidates to create policies. We set resolutions urging candidates to support issues related to racial profiling, access to fair and equal education, allocation of state resources, gun violence, Black youth in Oregon, civil and human rights related to affirmative action, community development, economic and business development and a host of other things.

My experiences with the OBPC were very enlightening. I learned about the political structures in Oregon and how to advocate for justice. I mostly helped the OBPC steering committee arrange the convention. We met in Salem, Oregon about once a month to plan for the convention. In the beginning stages of organizing I had to give feedback about OBPC's resolutions and give insight in to how to reach more people to attend the convention. We all decided that they best way for the interns to get people to attend was to reach out to students directly at our various Universities. The later part of organizing the convention centered on helping the steering committee plan the three day convention in Portland.



To arrange the convention in Portland, we delegated tasks for the board members to carry-out. We all were responsible for editing all documents that were distributed to the public. We developed platforms, arranged convention schedule, we created the food menu for the three day event, discussed guest speakers and political leaders to invite. At the convention I co- facilitated sessions where we edited and created resolutions that OBPC felt were important for candidates to address once they were elected in to office. We also discussed and voted on the candidates we would endorse the upcoming elections.

The OBPC is a place where Black Oregonians and people who support Black issues can come together to set resolutions to present to state legislators, e.g. elected officials. OBPC endorsed certain political leaders after a lengthy discussion to encourage these leaders to initiate policies that would reflect Black Oregonian needs. The entire experience was very valuable to me because I learned about politics in Oregon and how it shapes who has access to resources. I truly enjoyed working with everyone from OBPC. I hope to continue to engage with the organization for as long as I am in Oregon.

### Bibliography

Brubaker, R. (1990). Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany: A Comparative Historical Analysis. *International Sociology*, 5(4), 379–407.

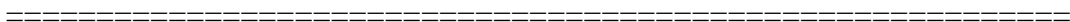
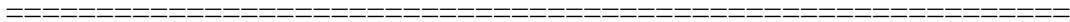
Gross, F. (1999). *Citizenship and Ethnicity: The Growth and Development of a Democratic Multiethnic Institution*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Keyssar, A. (2009). *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (Revised Edition edition.). New York: Basic Books.

Mann, M. (2012). *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (2 edition.). Cambridge University Press.

Rediker, M. (2013). *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (Reprint edition.). Penguin Books.

Stewart, A. (1995). Two Conceptions of Citizenship. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 46(1), 63–78.  
doi:10.2307/591623



## A response to the idea of a “Post-racial” World

Report by Owen LeSesne. OSU’s OBPC intern  
Submitted to OABA President: Dr. Calvin O. L. Henry &  
OSU Professor Kathleen Stanley  
June 10, 2014



### Edmond Owen LeSesne

- Junior at Oregon State University
- Political Science Major with an focus on Law, Politics, and Society with a minor in Sociology



### OBPC Testimony

Being an Oregon Black Political Convention (OBPC) intern was an honour that I am incredibly grateful for. Not only did it mean that I got the chance to work beside amazing and educated individuals, but it gave me the chance to examine my own values and identity with a sociological perspective. It is a well-known fact that not many in the Black community know and care much about politics, and fewer still actively get involved in the political process. OBPC is designed in a way that makes such participation possible, informative, and accessible for many Black people – especially students.

I am a mixed Black college student. I know that I am privileged to be able to go to school and get a degree. I know that many people before me fought so that I could get that opportunity and I know that there are still many in the Black community that don’t have the option. Even then, not many Black students choose to go into political science or attempt to go into law with the intention of working with public interest and politicians. But for those that do, networking and learning more about the social and political world that you would be entering is even more vital.

It is because of these realizations that I am even more thankful to OBPC, because it has given me an opportunity to look out into the Black community and find that I am not alone in my passions. There are others that support me, others that encourage me and there are those who are willing to network with me so that I can get more access to life-changing resources. Between the OBPC Steering Board members, a group of Black publically elected officials, and the many political candidates that I interacted with, I got the opportunity to ask questions. I got to say my piece and I had the chance push for my own additions into a growing political organization with the power to back representatives.

The work is not over, this is not a post-racial America despite what liberals and conservatives claim. I call out to any Black student, and any person who sees the problems we face in our community, to

join the movement. Let us stand together and make strides to combat oppression of all forms, be it: racism, sexism, adultism and ageism, homophobia, or classism. I call on people of all identities because even in the Black community we have individuals who cross into multiple spheres of self. Students should consider OBPC. They should apply to be an intern and work with these amazing people. It is a decision that will not be regretted and one that will impact an individual's life in many profound ways, as it did mine.

### **The importance of “racial” identities**

That was my testimony for the final pamphlet printed for the Oregon Black Political Convention. I figured that that would be the best start for this paper as it sums up my involvement and my experience during the entire internship in a simple message for future students. But while that is a summary, it fails to address the full implications for why the Oregon Black Political Convention is necessary and how my experiences, both academically and socially, contributed to it.

But this summary also fails to connect how my experiences at the OBPC respond with the books I was required to read for this internship. Both of these books cover a wide range of issues in regards to racial politics, which is currently a very heated topic in the United States. “Colorblind” by Tim Wise and “the Bridge over the Racial Divide” by William Wilson both examine disparities among the races in terms of politics. But while Tim Wise's perspective calls for more of voicing practices of discrimination and racism towards Blacks and other minorities, William Wilson calls for a broad multiracial uplifting despite past racial injustices. ***It is my position that Blacks need to become more involved in politics to increase awareness and attention on issues within our community and that racial identities matter in political action.***

As a student with many different identities and viewpoints who happens to be in Political Science, I can say that nothing is ever easy in life. Particularly when it comes to politics. I am a mixed male, but one who is generally considered Black by society. I identify with the LGBTQ community in a heteronormative world, and with a non-monotheistic religion in a predominantly Christian environment.

At the same time, I'm a liberally minded individual and have always been registered as a democrat. And let's not forget, I am a young college student. By these factors alone, my very existence is controversial, especially in the political field should I choose to run for office one day.

It is important to state that my position is going to focus on racial politics from a position supported by Tim Wise's “Colorblind”. The argument in his book centers on the increasing need for racial awareness to expose and destroy situations of discrimination and bias. I agree with his major stance that racial and ethnic identities do matter and that in this day and age we cannot live by a colorblind philosophy. Tim Wise's viewpoint, and my own, will most likely come off as critical to William Wilson's argument in his book “The Bridge over the Racial Divide”. That is to say, that Wilson believes that we need to move past previous racial tensions in favor of an across-the-board, multiracial upliftment similar to that used in “Post-Racial” ideologies. I do agree with Wilson when he argues that we should consider similarities with people of different “races” and ethnicities, but this should not be done without confronting issues and discrimination based on racial differences.

In order to begin my analysis and argument, I thought that it would be prudent to state what my idea and definition of politics is. I used to believe that politics was the constant struggle for power between major figures in governments and corporations. But ever since working with the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA) and its president, Dr. Calvin Henry, I don't believe that this definition is completely accurate. Instead I choose to write this paper with the understanding that politics simply is: “the ability to influence someone”. That influence can be used to see changes in society, whether it affects individuals, certain groups, or society at large. But do not mistake me, politics affects everyone in one

shape or another and by that definition I have to agree with Dr. Henry that, “politics is everything, and everything is politics”.

With that mind, I do have to say that we as a society live in a very complicated time. Like I stated briefly above in my testimony and which is one of the main messages that Tim Wise covers: we are not living in a “Post-racial” America. The election of President Obama did not prove to be an end of prejudice and discrimination on the basis of race. This is the same understanding that the repelling of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) didn’t stop discrimination against LGBTQ people and that Title 9 did not stop discrimination against people based on sex.

For many Blacks (and I include myself even though I identify as mixed), there are still situations of bias and discrimination based on skin color. Tim Wise and I share the position that this stems from historical racial tension and the current ways of portraying Blacks in society. Even though I would love to say we are in that “Post-racial” liberal world, I can’t. Regardless of what liberals and conservative voices say, it is not a matter of being color-blind in today’s society as one cannot be color-blind in today’s society.

Like it or not, we have to ask ourselves what are the first things that we notice about a person? Is it their perceived sex and gender expression (including the clothes they wear and the way they behave)? What about their age? These characteristics are visible and sometimes they are tangible. But on top of those examples we notice right away a person’s skin color.

My understanding of “Race”, which is one commonality with William Wilson in his book “The Bridge over the Racial Divide”, is that it is a social construct. However, it is one that has been made real over time in the United States today in that it carries weight. Like many other societal cues, it is ingrained in what assumptions are made often with noticeable binaries. With sex, there are the assumptions and questions of whether the person in front of me a “he” **or** a “she”? With age, “Are they young **or** are they old”? But with “race”, there is the question of “do they look like me” (i.e. are they the same skin color, complexion, or features), **or** “do they look different”?

From what I have seen in our society, what is written about in our society, and what is said about issues in our society, the topic of “race” is a very touchy subject. It has the potential to and succeeds in making people extremely uncomfortable, especially White people. It was Mellody Hobson<sup>1</sup>, one the very few major Black businesswomen in the United States, that recently equated the topic of “race” as being a “conversational third rail” in a Ted Talk in 2014.

For those who don’t know what the term: “third rail” means, it is a metaphor for “any issue so controversial that it is “charged” and “untouchable””. And Race is just that. It is a topic has come under such fire and has such venom that many politicians have deigned to claim that we should not be aware of color. It is because of its ability to make white people uncomfortable that Wilson argues that for any sort of progressive action to be passed, color must be left out of the equation. In this way, he stands with politicians, mostly White over any minority, in claiming that we should adopt a colorblind or multiracial approach to policies.

In a speech in 2004, Illinois state senator Obama stated: “There’s not a liberal America and a conservative America; there’s the United States of America. There’s not a Black America, a White America and Latino America and Asian America; there’s a United States of America”. As a country, it is good to consider that we should have pride, unity, and the chance come together to move into the future. But by

---

<sup>1</sup> Financial/Investment Management Executive; president of Ariel: a Chicago investment firm that manages over \$9 billion in assets

saying there is no “race” in America, we are ignoring the social construct that has been formed over countless years. By ignoring that construct (that society has grown to accept and use) we throw away factors that make up the Culture(s) and identity(ies) of our country. We essentially ignore all the differences between groups so that we can focus on commonalities rather than addressing the differences for what they are.

By living the lie that we are in a “post-racial” America, we fail to recognize the many differences that have become inherent in U.S. citizens. These differences, as fate would have it, could give us strength if given the chance to be worked out. This causes us to fail to see the many problems that still, exist in our society between those with different skin colors. These are problems such as the existing racial discrepancies in general wealth, in income levels, in health care, in jobs, and in housing.

On a personal note, before this year, I never truly felt much connection to the black community. I once bought into the “Post-racial” America propaganda - because that’s all it is: propaganda. I once believed that race didn’t truly matter. Even if it did matter, at that time I held little connection with the Black community because among that community, I felt ostracized.

I grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood. Most of my friends have been White. Even my father (who is Black/White mixed), looked more like a White person. In school I hardly ever interacted with other Black students. Mostly because they had a reputation as being more an athlete than they were a student (a problem in its own right). I job was at the City of Everett pool and the Naval base pool. Both of which didn’t have very many black employees so even there I had not interacted with many Black people. In fact I haven’t been influenced much by the Black community outside of the church that my mother took me to. And for being a person who identifies with the LGBTQ community and a non-monotheistic religion, that interaction was less than positive.

### **The continued negative views of Blacks in a “Post-Racial” society**

In talking with Dr. Henry, I’ve started to realize that many in the black community have lost touch with themselves, or their “Black humanity” as Dr. Henry describes it. As a mixed heritage person, one who has both Black and White blood, I find this to be true. I’ve been taught by society to consider myself as an African-American. It doesn’t matter if I may not be fully Black; I still have to fill it out on any legal form.

But continuing with problem of filling out “African-American” is that it doesn’t truly represent my identity, and it may not represent other people’s identity either. As Tim Wise makes apparent, “racial” and ethnic identities matter and are important in a person’s view of self. For me, my history and family ties are about as separate from Africa as can be imagined. My family would have to trace our lineage back a long way before we even caught a glimpse of that possibility. We are people of color in America, not Africa, and even if society would rather claim us as “African-American”, we identify more as “Black”.

But then, it’s almost as if being Black in the United States is considered a bad thing. Take for example the dictionary definition as it is still written today, using Merriam Webster’s Dictionary. Some of the definitions still refer to Black as being “Dirty, soiled”, it is considered to be “Characterized by the absence of light”, “Thoroughly sinister or evil”, or my personal favorite: “Connected with or invoking the supernatural and especially the Devil”. Now how can anyone who is Black honestly consider themselves to be supported by society when society still thinks that being Black can relate to being “thoroughly sinister or evil” or connected to the Devil? And why do we still have this definition?

Before I get criticized for “taking this definition out of context”, regardless of what order it is used in a dictionary, people still have the reference in the back of their mind. Tim Wise and William Wilson, despite having opposite solutions to racial disparities, point out that most studies on racial relations depict people having the view of Blacks as being “lazy”, “prone to violence”, and “more likely to prefer

living off welfare". Whether it is subconscious or not, people still relate those definitions to what they see and interact with on a day-to-day basis.

If anything society's refusal to talk about "race" has made it possible to continue to describe "Black" as negative. Sometimes even in the Black community there is the identification of the term "Black" as negative. There is the push that it is more politically correct to consider oneself "African-American" even if our history has multiple generations of deviation from Africa.

But what is really interesting is that the same dictionary that was used to describe "Black" as negative, portrays "White" in a completely opposite light. "**Free** from color", as if color is a bad thing, that one needs to be free from. White is "Marked by upright fairness", or "Free from spot or blemish". There is no wonder I hear more White people willing to call themselves "White" than Black people willing to call themselves "Black".

Wilson also points out that "many whites rated the majority of blacks as possessing negative qualities and the majority of whites as possessing positive qualities" (the Bridge over the racial divide, pg. 20). Whiteness is held in our society as "normal" or "good". In literature it is "marked by upright fairness" and "free from spot or blemish". The same references are not true in literature about Black.

Dr. Henry has made me question if all of this "Post-racial", "African-American" rhetoric is all just a subtle means to get the Black community to be even more detached from our country in regards to society and its political systems. He points out that by being "African-American" it's as if we are a part of this country in name only. All the while we are considered to still have strong cultural ties to Africa.

With the "African-American" label and the generally negative connotation of "Black", Blacks are left out from functioning as well as we could in society. And with the rise of the "Post-racial" America, the political world in the United States has limited access for the Black community. It is especially closed up and bunkered down if we want to raise any awareness of the disparities in society related to race.

Why is it that the Black population as a whole is declining, except for our prevalence in the prison system? Blacks are no more inherently criminal than any other "race" (save for in popular literature). Studies both referenced in Wise and Wilson's books have shown that Whites, who are more likely to commit the same or similar types of crimes, are typically overlooked or given less time than their Black counterparts.

Why is Education in predominantly Black neighborhoods filled with inadequacy? And why is education in general tougher for Black children? Media reporters and news journalist like Jessie Jones and Michelle Tullo<sup>2</sup> have detailed the general treatment of how Black students and children are more likely to suffer more punishments or suspensions than their white counterparts for similar circumstances.

Why are there so many Blacks who lack Health Care? Blacks are at a higher risk of developing terminal diseases that could have been avoided with proper treatment. Tim Wise shows evidence that even wealthy Blacks are less likely to have adequate health care as compared to poor Whites. He shows that doctors are more likely to spend more time and give more attention to White patients than with Blacks patients.

---

<sup>2</sup> In U.S., black preschool students "punished more severely", Michelle Tullo, [http://www.caribbean360.com/news/in-u-s-black-preschool-students-punished-more-severely?utm\\_source=Caribbean360%20Newsletters&utm\\_campaign=d354ddec7c-Vol\\_9\\_Issue\\_079\\_News4\\_21\\_2014&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_350247989a-d354ddec7c-37939731#axzz2zYJ2Fpcb](http://www.caribbean360.com/news/in-u-s-black-preschool-students-punished-more-severely?utm_source=Caribbean360%20Newsletters&utm_campaign=d354ddec7c-Vol_9_Issue_079_News4_21_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_350247989a-d354ddec7c-37939731#axzz2zYJ2Fpcb)



Why is it so hard for Blacks to get jobs or housing outside of ghettos or packed inner-city public areas? Joblessness runs rampant in those areas and many studies have shown that people with “Black” sounding names are less likely to get a call back to those with “White” sounding names, even when they have identical resumes and experiences. Whites with a criminal record are on average considered more than Blacks *without* a criminal record.

All of these are valid questions that need to be addressed; but because of society’s reluctance to talk about race, they are ignored or more often shifted towards a pure economic standpoint. But even then there has to be the recognition for what Black community has done for the United States. Black blood built up the economic power of the south and the east. That was off the backs of thousands of Blacks during slavery. Over time, Black people have been forefront in making innovations and creating new inventions that greatly benefit society (Potato chips, Light bulb filaments, and gasmasks to name a few). Yet all these advancements are not common knowledge. In fact some are even assumed to have been given by a White person.

But what is most troublesome is that as in the past, Blacks are still being discouraged from getting involved in politics. Whenever a Black politician or community member points out injustices, they’ve been called “Uppity”, “Loud”, and told “to stop pulling the race card”. Even today we have seen examples in social media with Sarah Palin’s comments about President Obama<sup>3</sup>. There is a worry in the black community about being seen as “too Black” because Black is still considered a bad thing.

### **Racial awareness in Internship experience**

At the beginning of my junior year, I was concerned with finding an internship just to meet the requirements for my major. I was so caught up in grades and completing college that I was willing to do just about anything just to get the credits. Whatever internship could get me connected with more people was considered a bonus. But looking back at it now I see that I was misguided, selfish, and just plain wrong. From a social justice lens, we need to focus on bridging the racial divide but not through ignoring races or just focusing on only broad multiracial policies. The Oregon Black Political Convention is meant to get more Black organizations connected. To do that, we needed to get more Black people together so that we can confront these issues on level ground. That was my first job as an intern, one that I must say I didn’t fully accomplish in the first round.

In truth, I never knew just how many people or groups were on our campus that was meant to support Blacks in college. Sure I knew about the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center, and of course everyone knows about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but that was about it. From the start of my college career, not many others were recommended to me by my advisors (an issue that should be brought up later). Not many were talked about in passing or in discussion. Added to that fact, was that I was self-constricted and focused only on academics over joining many social organizations.

During the first months that I worked with the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs, I spent my time trying to locate more Black organizations on campus. In the end, my search had resulted in groups such as: The African Student Association, the Black Student Union, the National Society for Black Engineers, the Black Graduate Student Association, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

---

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Palin Celebrates MLK Day By Urging Obama To Stop 'Playing The Race Card', [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/20/sarah-palin-mlk\\_n\\_4632831.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/20/sarah-palin-mlk_n_4632831.html)

Some of these groups were interested to hear more about the Oregon Black Political Convention, but most never returned a single email or made any action to reciprocate my visits. But that is not to put the blame on them over me, because looking back I could have tried harder. I could have gone to every one of their meetings, I could have made more of an effort to speak with them in person, or I could have pestered them until they agreed to see me. That is on me. But two of the groups did agree to hear what I had to say and both the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center (LBHBCC) and the Black Student Union (BSU) were willing to have me come out and give a presentation on the OBPC.

In both of those meetings, there was general interest in registering for the convention, but unfortunately the BSU was in the midst of several events and planning their own retreat. Had I got to them sooner, I may have gotten a few souls to come out. But in the end, the LBHBCC was the only group that actively sent four members, one of which was their External Coordinator.

How is it that even though so many people had interest, we were only able to get a small group of four people? I know that while I could have done more, it was not exclusively my fault. Then I remembered one Dr. Henry's argument the first times that we met.

### **Challenging Fear and Apathy in racial involvement**

Dr. Henry had argued that many Blacks have felt that they shouldn't be able to influence change or speak up as to what they felt should be implemented. Part of this was because there was a false belief that they could only do so with a White person's approval, but most of it was because they were scared. In fact, Dr. Henry has a theory on the phenomenon that exists in our community: the S.D.S theory. People in the Black community are **scared**, but they **deny** that they are scared, and this denial leads them to become **silent**.

It is a reasonable understanding for people in the Black community to be scared. We've seen all the things that affect us in this world simply because of the color of our skin. I personally see discrimination in the covert and overt acts of racism perpetrated by others around me. The Black community as a whole can see it in discrimination and biases in workplaces and we see it in how many Blacks suffer from inadequate levels of education and healthcare but overrepresentation in the prison system.

But one truly blatant example is how media and almost any News broadcast portray Blacks. Any violent crime or drug charge often shows scary Blacks faces being arrested and convicted of crimes. Tim Wise points out accurately that this happens more often than any other group of people. But whenever any of these fears are brought up, many Blacks are quick to defend themselves and claim that they aren't scared. They steel themselves and put on a tough act as if there is an unspoken idea that to have fear is to be weak, even when it is perfectly rational to have fear.

Fear is an emotion that has kept so many people alive. In dangerous situations there is always that feeling in the back of your mind that lets you know that: "you should leave" or "Don't do that, you'll get yourself hurt". Survival is closely linked to fear, yet at the same time the most heroic acts are committed *in spite* of having fear. But even then fear is viewed as a weakness, something that makes us inferior to others. So in an attempt to appear strong, Blacks deny that fear and stay silent.

We don't point out the issues that we face. On average we don't make as big of a fuss about the obvious disparities (or rather media is unlikely to cover such topics), because in doing that, we're "pulling the Race card" as Sarah Palin is so apt to criticize. We end up being seen as "Too Black", once again pointing to the idea that to be Black is a bad thing. Therein lies the idea that we take it upon ourselves to fix a problem by bunkering down. But by relying solely on ourselves, we get involved without using politics, and most of the time it is a problem that can only be solved with politics.



This is why I think that many of the Black communities on campus neglected to get back to me about registering for the Oregon Black Political Convention. I understand that we're all students and being a student is hard work, but other than that, our society (both as a whole and in the Black society) has played an integral part in shutting many Blacks out of the political process. We're scared, we deny that we're scared, and we're silent because of it.

But one thing that I encounter all the time on top of the S.D.S people is the negative response to politics in the Black Community. Because of our lack of visual representation many Black students think that politics is a waste of time. This is paramount in the fact that hardly any students, myself included, could name any black elected officials in Oregon. Because of the void that we see, there seems to be a call for Blacks youth to abandon politics altogether.

### **Black student involvement in Politics**

Just recently I had an encounter with a Black student who identified themselves as an engineer. I was talking about the Oregon Black Political Convention and how I had wished more students from OSU had gotten involved. That was when the student told me that Blacks shouldn't get involved in politics. When I asked why, the student replied that "politics is a waste of time". Their focus was that Blacks couldn't do anything in politics and that politics didn't contribute to anything or make any real changes the Black community.

Going off this reasoning the student told me that Blacks should focus solely on getting involved in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S.T.E.M) programs. It was their reasoning that it was "more logical and factual, and politics isn't involved in it"; that science made progress only for the benefit of society and that it came without any political influence.

I agree that Blacks should get involved in S.T.E.M programs. In fact those in the Black community should get involved with all programs and all fields and we should not limit ourselves to any one particular field of study. But what I can't agree with is the idea that politics doesn't affect S.T.E.M programs. If we used the definition of politics that I applied at the start of this paper, it becomes clear that politics, and social climate, play a part in everything. Who funds technological advancements? Who considers when we need to advance and in what way we should go about it? The answer is society, and by that logic, it extends to governments and corporations who have been given power by society. Much of the decisions and funding for projects rest in the hands of government and corporate leaders. Their decisions influence what gets discussed, what gets taught, and what is considered the norm. But then society dictates the extent to what governments and corporate leaders can do.

### **Interaction between students and teachers linked to Blacks and government**

To give me an example of this, Dr. Henry once asked "whose responsibility is it that you receive an education?" Of course my first thought was that it was my responsibility: that I alone could hold the keys to my future success and it was up to me to get what I want, when I wanted it. However this is not the case. Dr. Henry shook his head and asked me the same question again.

Needless to say, at this point I was confused. I had grown up with my parents telling me that no one in the world would care if and how I got an education. They told me that I was responsible for my own learning. I thought for a minute on how I might answer his question if the correct answer was not the one I had given. Taking a shot in the dark, I replied that it was my professor's job and the job of the President of the University.

That was the right answer, but only part of it. Dr. Henry stated that it was the President of the University's responsibility that I get an education and that the school and its teachers were at a quality to help me achieve my goals in life. Dr. Henry related the school to a business (an example I can see

especially with amount of money I'm spending), and one that needs both sides to maintain balance. The school needs students in order to get the money and prestige in order to be a school. At the same time, students need the school in order to get the education necessary for the outside world. It is the students that paid for the services that contribute to the school being open; therefore, it is the students' goals that need to be achieved with the help of professors. In order to do this, students have to know what their goals are. It is the students that have the responsibility to tell their teachers what they want and how they want to get there.

This is the connection to government and politics. This is the link for why people, especially Blacks, need to get involved in politics. Government has the responsibility to safeguard the rights of people and to lead society for the betterment of all people, not just the majority. They in this sense are like the professors in Dr. Henry's example. Citizens, like those in the Black community, are like the students.

Government teaches (they pass laws that dictate and govern society) but without society and those that they lead, government have no purpose and no really power. Citizens in this way give power to government and state their goals for how they wish to be governed. So Blacks have a responsibility to tell government how they want to be governed and to hold government accountable in the way that it governs.

To reinforce this concept, I relate the example back to what my sociology class called the "Banking" style of learning. In the "Banking" style of learning, students are considered to be just receptacles and the teacher (or the professor) sees fit to impart their knowledge and wisdom to fill them up. In this style, individual wants, desires, and goals hold no meaning as the teacher is the one who decided what should and needed to be taught. This is a style from industrialization that many in our society have been raised with.

What Dr. Henry was proposing was similar to what my sociology class described as the "Problem Posing Education". With Problem Posing Education, neither side knows all there is to know about every situation, but each individual had their own background experience to contribute. The teacher in this style poses a problem or a question and the students work together (with the teacher) *symbiotically* in order to solve it. This way a student's own goals could be realized and put forth so that their advancement could be achieved with the help of the teacher.

Students are so accustomed to the "Banking" style that they don't realize how much their own voices matter. This is true in the fact that the students don't vocalize what they want to learn or how they want to learn it. Sure we pick which classes we are going to be taking, but then it's up to us to follow the teacher's planning and style of how they want us to learn. After all, many classrooms are still set up so that all desks face a focal point where the professor stands and instructs. The same can be related back to the Black community, we don't recognize how much having a voice matters and the system is set up in a way where we don't question it.

But by going along with a "Problem Posing Education" and the spirit of symbiotic problem solving, it is necessary for the Black community to work with other groups to advance our cause. In this way, what William Wilson proposes in making a multiracial coalitions makes sense. We need our allies, whether it is from the Latino community, the LGBTQ community, the Women's community, or some other population I have not mentioned. That is why when Dr. Henry gave me the platform statements for the convention I tried to read and shape it into a document that any political action group could support.

### **The improving of language in terms of racial politics**

There are eleven platform planks in the political stance of the Oregon Black Political Convention.

Among these are: 1) Political Action, 2) Black Youth, 3) Civil And Human Rights, 4) Community Development, 5) Law Enforcement Accountability And Reform, 6) Education, 7) Access To Justice 8) Economic & Business Development, 9) Health Care, 10) Black Employment, and 11) Local, State, Federal and World Affairs. Reviewing all of the planks, their wording, and the resolutions for each of the topic issues, took longer than I would have thought possible. I spent days going over each one trying to comprehend what was being said and what could be inferred from the language. Regardless, I found a few of the lines didn't have the best inclusive language.

For one, there were places where more information or better language could have been used hold to those with a different economic status accountable. In reading entirety of the planks, I couldn't seem to find any reference to the issues of class and economic status, both of which a highly prevalent in our society today. Both Tim Wise and William Wilson, make references to Blacks and people of color predominantly being in lower classes. At the same time, Whites occupy most of the upper classes and what we normally see as the governing class. Also, the difference between sex and gender could have been made more apparent. Being a member of the LGBTQ community, I know for a fact that there is a difference between the two and that they are not interchangeable.

Many of the potential symbiotic alliances could exist in similar areas of our platform. These include our stances in areas such as Political action, Education, Access to Justice, Healthcare, and Employment. I know that OBPC was meant to help uplift those in the Black community but we don't have to shoulder the burden alone. The ideas and wording that I proposed were meant to include everyone, sometimes even our White allies. This was done in a way where we can work together in a multiracial coalition similar to Wilson's ideas, but one that discusses the differences and past discriminations that Wise focuses on.

It was in our third meeting that Dr. Henry suggested that because our society has a focus on competition, we as a people have lost the understanding of what it means to work together and be united. Being united doesn't mean that we ignore our difference, or completely put them aside, but we learn to work together and celebrate those differences. Unfortunately, those in power or those maintaining the status quo rely on causing those that would change the system to be as disconnected or as contentious as possible. Make no mistake, communication among and between minority populations are already fractured. By competing against one another and playing the "Oppression Olympics", we waste our resources and play into the hands of those maintaining that status quo instead of facing the larger issue.

### **Politics and language in action**

Ironically enough, the hardest amount of cooperation came from getting those that attended the convention to come up with language and terms that we could all agree with. When the actually convention started much of the discussion was on what context and what intention we wanted each phrase to be seen in and how best to word it. Contention rose often and each person had varying beliefs. Discussions that were originally supposed to take 10 minutes started taking up 20 to 30 minutes to finish.

The rules of order were disregarded and much of the conversations erupted into personal experiences and past difficulties. Granted that was the whole purpose of the Convention: to express the difficulties in the Black community. Only then could we come up with resolutions to those problems (Which were also the purpose of the convention). But we spent more time on the issues than coming up with solutions. And from this I gathered that many in the Black community in Oregon didn't spend time communicating with each other issues. This miscommunication that is present in our community shows why we need events like OBPC, and shows what more we can do for ourselves and others.

At the start of the convention, Dr. Henry made reference to why we need events and organization like OBPC to be a voice in politics. Among other things, each member of convention was given a packet

containing the agenda and a booklet of the topics we would be going over. To begin, we were asked to read a page highlighting the 4Cs and R.A.P.:

“Indigenous Black leadership must be **responsive, accountable, and productive** to Black America. This indigenous Black leadership must be willing to **communicate, coordinate, and cooperate** with others in defining and presenting the needs and aspirations of Black America.” (Calvin Henry, Are you COMMITTED?, 1/1/97)

Above all, OBPC strives to foster commitment to our community, and while I was at OBPC I saw that commitment. Out of the thirty people that were present at the Friday night activity, publically elected officials in Oregon that were also in the Black community showed up. The Multnomah County Commissioner, Loretta Smith; a city councilor in Eugene, Greg Evans; and a Beaverton School Board Member, Donna Tyner were among many in the community that came out. Mariann Hyland, the Director of diversity for the Oregon State Bar, and even my mother: a School Board Member of the city of Everett in *Washington* was present.

These were people in the community that knew that politics was a necessary pathway for Black people. They knew that communication was vital to show how more people could become involved in the issues that we face. They knew that our current level of communication (or lack thereof) was why we needed to organize during the Oregon election cycle. I learned more about politics and process from them, than I feel I have from any of the classes that I have taken up to this point. Not only that, but I also got some amazing contacts and references for when I look into grad school and a job after that.

The amount of discussion on the issues made it evident that there were many intelligent and opinionated people at the convention. Between members, volunteers, leaders, and students in the community, I heard many reasons for why different phrases could be more impactful than others. For example, a simple word like “Urges”, used in the phrase: “OBPC urges young Blacks...”, could be switched to: “OBPC calls upon young Blacks...” to make it a more prominent call to action.

But situations like word choice were not the only thing that caused a great amount of debate. Out of all the eleven planks on our platform, there were none as hotly argued as Education, Access to Justice, Economic & business Development, and Health Care. Those four planks were almost the death of my sanity Saturday night and Sunday morning because of the circular discussions we engaged in.

As far as the Education plank went, we had one member who was very adamant about school closures. They talked about various schemes to defund black schools in favor of private and charter schools in white upper-class neighborhoods. It was interesting because I learned more than I thought possible about all the gerrymandering of school zones in Black neighborhoods in the Portland area. I learned about the school closures that were happening and the abundance of busing lower-class children to less funded schools all over the city.

Pretty much all that was said highlighted issues pointed out in Tim Wise’s book “Colorblind” and brought home all the factual data provided about the discrepancies on Black students in America’s education system. But what was added to Tim Wise’s critique was that many at the OBPC addressed the lack of education of Black history in the curriculum of United States History and in other core advancements. Both Donna Tyner of the Beaverton School Board and my mother Pamela Thrower-LeSesne of the Everett, Washington School board, pointed out that it was hardly ever implemented in the current K-12 curriculum. Needless to say, this sparked more of a discussion on how we should phrase what we wanted to be enacted for school districts.

Access to Justice was also a heated discussion, but mostly for wording and whether or not certain figures had the power to do what we were asking. The courts and the prison systems have a heavy effect

on Blacks in our society. Fears on racial profiling and harsher penalties given to Blacks were openly discussed. Living in a supposed “Post-Racial Society” would have made it a surprised to find just how many people had been the victim of racial profiling. Many of those in attendance voiced advice and emphasized more of what *not to do* around police officers.

But none of these topics were as feverously discussed as the problems surrounding the Health Care planks. What with the Affordable Health Care Act, it seems like everyone had something to say about health care and who can blame them? Blacks have historically suffered when it comes to health care, many can’t afford it and those that can often times have worse health care than any other race. OBPC supports the Affordable Health Care Act (or what is more infamously known as “Obama Care”). I argued that health care was a basic and fundamental right and it should not be denied to anyone and many people agreed with me. So it came to no surprise just how many people had stories of the impacts of health care. Even though as a whole, OBPC was nonpartisan, many people expressed their resentment of republicans on this issue (especially when it came time to endorse candidates).

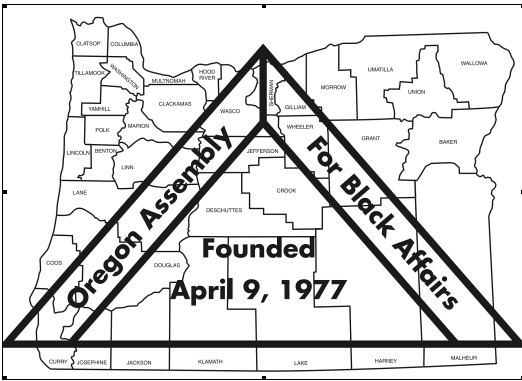
**A call for more involvement**

Overall, the Oregon Black Political convention was a marvelous opportunity and learning experience for me. I felt that I got a chance to grow academically, professionally, and personally. I got to interact with amazing people and learn their perspectives on issues that affect the Black community and me individually. Many of the things that I learned connected with concepts from my political science field, with “Colorblind” by Tim Wise (while opposing “The Bridge over the Racial Divide” by William Wilson), and observations that I had on society. There were many aspects that went well. These include: the many political candidates that convention members got to interact with, the discussions held with publically elected Black officials, and the venue of choice, being the Crowne Plaza in Portland. Among those examples of what went well, where examples on things that we could be improve in 2016. One of the Improvements would be getting more people, especially from the colleges involved. I highly encourage more Black students to look at OBPC. I highly encourage OSU to be mindful and aware of this internship opportunity and help get Black Students involved with politics. You never know what you might learn or whom you might get connected with. But that’s the fun of it all.

=====



=====



## Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA)

P. O. Box 12485  
Salem, Oregon 97309

<http://www.oaba.us>  
[oaba@peak.org](mailto:oaba@peak.org)

June 21, 2014

### Thank you!

The Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA) recognizes that whoever teaches the Black American college students will have a tremendous impact on how they see themselves and the world around them. OABA knows that the faculties at these colleges and universities need to teach and encourage Black American college students, as well as all students, to understand politics and process (2Ps) as they work through their situations of getting an education. Getting the faculties and academic departments involved in enabling Black American college students to learn, understand and use the 2Ps will benefit the university, the students and society-at-large. OABA owes a debt of gratitude to Oregon State University and the University of Oregon for working to do just this!

**Crystal H. Brown and Edmond Owen LeSesne:** On behalf of the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs (OABA), I want to commend you for being the 2014 OBPC Interns. You have given us your reports in your own words, and we thank you. Your work on the 2014 OBPC Steering Committee was very significant to the planning and preparation of the 2014 OBPC. Your participation in the discussion and activities of the Convention was very noteworthy. Also I want to thank you for your reports about your field experience and about your understanding of how politics and process will benefit you, your universities and society-at-large. OABA is confident that you can be a great recruiter for the university that you attend. Yours was a job well done!

**OSU Professor Kathleen Stanley and University of Oregon Professor Joseph Lowdnes:** OABA sincerely appreciates your willingness to serve as internship advisors for Edmond and Crystal. Your leadership in this program has been critical.

**OSU President Ed Ray and University of Oregon President Michael R. Gottfredson:** OABA acknowledges the support and participation of Oregon State University and the University of Oregon as sponsors of the 2014 Oregon Black Political Convention and for their involvement in the 2014 OBPC College Internship Program. Your leadership of your respective universities sets an outstanding example of how we should, and ***how we must***, work with our Black American college students, as well as all students, to learn, understand, and use politics and process to benefit themselves, the university, and society-at-large. Thank you!

Sincerely,

*Calvin O. L. Henry*

Calvin O. L. Henry, Ph.D.  
OABA President

