

## **Bridging Divides between Oregon Communities and Black Visitors**

People of African descent have been coming to Oregon since the 1500s, but African Americans are rarely featured as part of Oregon's statewide cultural heritage. It is easy to blame this the small size of Oregon's Black population (just 2.2%), but this ignores the reasons *why* Oregon's Black population is so small.

### **Some Hard Truths**

- The Oregon Trail was a forced march across the continent for dozens of enslaved African Americans who ended up in the Willamette Valley and Southern Oregon.
- Oregon's provisional, territorial, and state governments all passed laws restricting the rights of Black people, at a time when they counted less than 0.5% of the population.
- Oregon had the highest Ku Klux Klan membership per capita of any state in the nation.
- Over 4000 Black Oregonians were displaced by the 1948 Vanport Flood. Hundreds more were displaced again by "urban renewal" projects in NE Portland between 1950s-1970s.

***In spite of attempts to keep us out of Oregon, we are here, thanks to our elders.***

Black Oregonians have been part of many of Oregon's most important cultural legacies:

*Railroads, Athletics, Farming and Ranching, Music, Art, Theatre and Dance, Labor, Maritime, Cowboys, Logging, Food, Military, Politics, and much more.*

Industry Representatives—these are your entryways to developing heritage tourism experiences for African Americans.

Before you attempt to market your experiences to Black audiences, you need to ask yourself some questions:

### ***What is the Black history of my town?***

- Were any Black people run out of town here?
- Could Black children go to the local school?
- Is there anything in town named for a local Black person?
- Are there any photos or objects of Black people in your local museum?

### ***Will Black visitors be safe and respected here?***

- Are there businesses or parts of town you think Black visitors should avoid?
- Might the sight of a Black visitor wearing a "Black Lives Matter" t-shirt prompt an altercation?
- Are Black visitors likely to see any local Black residents during their visit?

### ***Why would Black visitors want to come here?***

- Have any prominent influencers, athletes, or others figures been to your place?
- Is there anywhere closer to Black population centers that offers what you offer?
- Are there relevant art, music, culinary, or cultural activities available?

***If you don't know the answer to these questions, you are NOT ready to build relationships with Black communities.***

Closing Words

**We do not need to be flattered, we just need to be respected.** You do not need to change the demographics of your town or erect monuments to obscure Black figures from 100 years ago. Just do the following:

- Tell the truth, and the whole truth, about the past
- Consider our physical and social needs
- Connect our community interests with our cultural traditions
- Don't guess. Work with (and hire) Black people to develop these experiences

Zachary Stocks

Executive Director  
Oregon Black Pioneers

[zachary@oregonblackpioneers.org](mailto:zachary@oregonblackpioneers.org)

[www.oregonblackpioneers.org/](http://www.oregonblackpioneers.org/)

