

The Oregonian

March 21, 2007

“Recognizing those who blazed trails”

Trails of truth can be evasive, sometimes. When the weeds of neglect take root and cover the paths blazed so long ago, we forget that we've been here before. We assume what is here has always been and the last to discover is the first to arrive.

And yet, over the years, too many women and folks of color have been left out of our public memory. That negligence affects how and from whom we draw our inspiration.

"Each time a girl opens a book and reads a woman-less history," writes Myra Pollack Sadker, who pioneered research into gender bias in public schools, "she learns she is worth less."

In honor of Women's History Month, In Other Words Books & Resources is holding a series of talks about various feminist-led movements. The discussions are intended to remind us: OK, we've been here before.

What have we learned? What does this teach us about the possibilities of what women activists can accomplish in the future?

"It's really important to talk about civil rights and how the civil rights movement isn't over," says facilitator Roslyn Farrington, a women's studies instructor at Portland State University and former director of the Oregon Commission for Women. "That's the legacy we want to leave for other people doing civil rights work. That it can be done but you have to commit the time to do it."

On Thursday, the bookstore is bringing together Kay Toran and Chris Poole-Jones, two longtime Portlanders, with the current members of Sisters In Action for Power, the only Portland nonprofit training low-income girls, ages 13 and up, to organize social-change campaigns.

The young activists have organized a Support Our Schools and Students campaign, which lobbies against biased testing and public school budget cuts.

"We live in a culture and in a society that doesn't prioritize women and girls, definitely not girls of color or low-income girls," says Sisters' executive director Terenie Faison. "The girls that are working on these issues are directly affected by these issues in their lives."

Thursday's event, titled "The Shape of the Struggle; Black Women and Civil Rights in Portland," begins at 6:30 p.m. at 8 N.E. Killingsworth St. (Info: 503-232-6003)

Portland State University is also raising awareness of community members who have contributed to Portland's history.

Organizers of the Walk of the Heroines, though, are about \$1.7 million short of what they need to fulfill the original concept: a gorgeously designed walkway with fountains, an outdoor stage with seating, benches, art pieces and interactive kiosks, all honoring women.

This month, Johanna Brenner of PSU's Women's Studies Department kicked off a campaign to preserve the particular legacy of black women pioneers from Portland. Recognition includes two engraved panels on the Walk of the Heroines. The list includes:

Kathryn Bogle, who helped pass Portland's Public Accommodation Law in 1953; Beatrice Morrow Cannady, Oregon's first black woman lawyer, newspaper editor and founder of several chapters of the NAACP; and Lois Tolbert Sayles, first black librarian to work for Multnomah County, the Oregon State Library, and local public schools.

"We really want to get other communities to come forward and start a similar campaign," Brenner says. "Or get together to say, 'Here's who we want to honor.' "

Our society still requires opportunities such as the Walk of the Heroines, Women's History Month or February's Black History Month. These set-asides give us yet another opportunity to submit testimony from the voices that have been forgotten, silenced or short-changed. It allows one more chance to balance the recollection of our collective past.

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