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Obama's Historical Run

Black Studies
professor
brings insight

BY CHARITY PRATER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Sen. Barack Obama's nomination for president ranks with some of the greatest historic markers for equality in the United States such as the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and the birth of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1929.

Now just a month away from the Nov. 4 General Election there is a real possibility that we will see the first black president elected.



Darrell Millner, a 33-year veteran professor of black studies and U.S. history at Portland State University, is hoping to witness such a glorifying event, but like other unknowns there are doubts.

“My generation grew up with racist policies as the norm, Millner told the Portland Observer. “It’s hard to believe that this country would elect a black man as president, but I think we are finally ready for that step.”

Millner compares the heated 2008 election to 1860 when Abraham Lincoln ran for the presidency.

Many Americans are praying that Obama wins, especially many older African Americans.

“If Obama wins then many people will feel invigorated, where if he loses many will lose hope in our political system,” Millner said.

On his educated prediction of the outcome of the contest, he replied, “If enough older Civil

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PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Darrell Millner, long-time Black Studies professor at Portland State University and student Kyra Maples count-down the days to register to vote in a national election that could result in the first black president.

Obama's Historical Run

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Rights-era Americans have gotten replaced by younger people that weren't taught racism then Obama has a great chance at victory."

Millner said the first factor working against Obama in this race is that he lives in a country where race has been overwhelmingly important throughout most of its history.

"This election will tell us how the United States feels about race today," said Millner, "Obama isn't just a gesture to the ethnic community like Jesse Jackson, but a serious candidate that can improve the situation in this country."

Millner notes how Obama has energized young voters through his campaign.

"People born after the 1970s have heroes like Michael Jordan and Bill Cosby and accept blacks and women as normal contributors to political positions," he said. "My children see the election as how elections should be, without race being an issue. Eventually, blacks in politics will be non-news items."

Millner is convinced that this election will be decided by the young and independent voters rather than older voters and those affiliated with the Democratic and Republican parties.

"Involvement of new voters is very important in this election," he said. "Obama has the ability to mobilize and energize youth. "The younger voters have the ability to overthrow the older voters. The balance of these two groups is very different. The younger generation is unpredictable, while older blacks are still suspicious about the possibility of Obama winning this election."

Millner said Obama is gaining traction by his consistent calm and purpose-

ful demeanor, easing the concerns of some who may not have voted for a black person in the past.

"This is a historical event in America right now, yet it is too soon for people to appreciate it," he said. "There hasn't been a real landslide election since the early 20s. Many people wonder if this one has turned into a landslide due to skin color."

Millner said he would like to see Obama win, but wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't.

"I don't know if this country can handle four to eight more years of Bush policy politics," he said. "On the other hand, I don't know what the country will be like if Obama wins but it will definitely be better than what we have now."

Expert at PSU since 1975

Darrell Millner was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1946 and raised in the Los Angeles area where he graduated from California State Polytechnic University in 1969 with a degree in English.

He moved to Eugene in 1970 to attend the University of Oregon where he earned a Doctorate in Education. In 1975, he was hired to teach Afro-American Literature and History at the Black Studies Department at Portland State University.

He was chairman of the black studies department from 1984 to 1995. Currently, he is a full time professor, serving on many local, regional and national boards and organizations including the Editorial Board of the Oregon Historical Society.

Millner is an expert on the history of African-Americans in the western movement with a special focus on the Oregon and California trail experiences; early Oregon and California Black history; and the history of the Black Buffalo Soldiers in the Indians Wars. He is also an expert on Black cinema history and the development and perpetuation of negative racial stereotypes.

He has served on the "frontlines" of the multi-cultural and diversity controversies as the Director of Multi-cultural education for the Portland Public Schools and has an extensive background in teacher training and curriculum development for inner city schools and disadvantaged youth.



Darrell Millner