

Re. SB 776 Public Hearing
Submitted by Daniel Portis-Cathers
Feb. 28, 2023

To:
Senators Frederick, Jama, Manning Jr. and Woods and
Representative Nelson,

I am a 67 year old White male Portlander. I am active in my community as a board member for Southeast Uplift, the Portland NAACP and my local neighborhood association.

I was taught for almost 60 years to see the Black community as responsible for their own financial, medical and educational conditions - that their lack of economic resources and frequently poor health were of their own doing. While we must all accept responsibility for our individual behaviors, it has become clear to me that most of the financial and physical damage done to the Black community has been engineered by outside forces. Those forces are often invisible to people who look like me - which is, of course, by design.

The United States has a long history of affirmative action for Whites - from the various land acts, to Indian, Negro, Mexican, Chinese and Japanese removal acts to the G.I. Bill to redlining by the federal housing authority. My personal ancestors have benefitted from these at almost every turn.

As part of that process, the price for access to the American Dream has often been for me to look the other way. I have been systematically dissuaded from asking, "Who benefits and who loses?" But the data is clear. We don't need to do any more studies to answer that question. The cost has been real to the Black community and it is time for a society that claims to care about justice to deliver the goods.

The irony is that Whites also suffer all sorts of damages from practices devised to divide us from People of Color. But policies don't have to benefit some and hurt others. That is a lie perpetuated by the worst instincts of Capitalism. Policies can and should be structured to help everyone.

Thankfully, the soul of the Black community is strong and vibrant. Social connections are deep rooted and real. Creativity, ingenuity and innovation thrive in spite of a frequent dearth of financial and physical resources. We all stand to gain from feeding those strengths.

For the White community, education about the sources and depth of generational injustices is critical, but it's not enough. Somehow, we must become conscious of the impact of racism on our own lives, that it's effect is ultimately dehumanizing. I believe the arts - literature, music, theatre and fine art - have a big role to play in this effort. Knowledge is not enough. Caring is also required.

Obviously, addressing the long term damage of racism is critical and complicated. The task is enormous. But reparations are long overdue. There is no excuse for further delay.

Thank you for sponsoring SB 776. I look forward to learning how I can play a part in moving it along.

Respectfully,



Daniel Portis-Cathers