

Submitter: Donovan Scribes

On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal  
and World Affairs

Measure: SB776

Dear Senator Manning and members of the committee,

My name is Donovan Scribes, and I'm an award-winning writer, artist, producer and speaker I am also a fourth generation Black Portlander which may explain why in whatever form my works have taken they have examined in great depth my state's history, particularly with Black people and finding through-lines to how it effects our conditions today.

A few years ago I took a DNA test. Many amazing things were discovered about my lineage in the results. One of the most fascinating findings was my third great-grandfather, a man named Samuel J. Ballard, born in a town just south of Galveston, Texas, the town whose Black residents learned of their legal freedom two years late of Lincoln's "emancipation" birthing the current day celebration Juneteenth. Samuel's estimated birth was just a couple months before in 1865, in Panola County, Texas - a place whose name is quite literally an Indigenous word for cotton, where at the height of America's free-labor driven economy, a third of Panola's residents were enslaved. I haven't been able to confirm whether Samuel was born into slavery or not, but the suspicions are ripe enough for a betting person's chips. Samuel's Census records a few decades after his birth show that he could not read, nor write; his occupation was listed as sharecropper, a common occupation for former enslavers to employ formerly enslaved people for reduced/near-free labor in the ashes of legalized bondage. The Census also shows that Samuel's kids, kids, stayed in Panola until my grandfather Nerbun Ballard eventually came made the decision to come to Portland where he would have a little girl who would become my mom. History matters. Slavery is not some trump card, but a binding fact of American society . William Clark of "Lewis and Clark" brought a man named York whose ownership he inherited with him along the Oregon Trail that birthed the very place we all call home right now. York was fundamental to the trail, well liked, had voting right along with the other "patriots" along the trail, a master hunter and when the trail was concluded, records are shotty but many historians believe that while the White "explorers" received acres of land and great praise, York was instead leased by Clark back into slavery, never to see his family again dying sometime in the 1830s. Just a few decades before my great-great-great grandfather Samuel J. Ballard's birth. History matters.

And that's why I am pleased to voice my strong support of SB 776, so that our state can begin the work of deeply reckoning with the roots that have birthed the strange fruits of our divides and disparities with the hope that a more whole sense of

ourselves can prevail.

Thank you,  
Donovan Scribes (fka Donovan M. Smith)