Racial Segregation at Portland State &
The $20,000 Colored Only Cocktail Party

*Issue Brief #8 (January 2023)*
Summary of Issues

- Portland State University on November 2, 2022 hosted a racially discriminatory community cocktail party which is estimated to have cost at least $20,000 and had no connection to the university’s research and teaching mission.

- The organization behind the party, Partners in Diversity, represents a new model of neo-segregation in American society that is based on core conceptions of racially-specific affinity groups, political virtue-signaling on racial issues, and race-based spoils systems.

- The hosting of the event reflects a shift to neo-segregation as the basis of university operations at Portland State University as seen in race-based student activities, a race-based conception of the university, and race-based procedures for university administration, teaching, and faculty hiring.

- In addition to its harmful effects on American society, neo-segregation is unlawful when practiced by a public sector body, violating constitutional guarantees of equal protection and injunctions against the discriminatory use of public funds.

- By promoting a neo-segregationist vision of Portland State University, president Stephen Percy and his aides are undermining the university’s future viability, tarnishing its reputation, and violating their accountability to university alumni, parents, and Oregon taxpayers.
A $20,000 Cocktail Party for Colored Only “Honorees”

At a time of budgetary crisis, lagging performance, and growing evidence that campus radicalism is dissuading top students from attending, Portland State University hosted a racially segregated community cocktail party on November 2, 2022 at an estimated cost to the university of $20,000.

The so-called “Say Hey!” event was organized by the Portland-based non-profit group Partners in Diversity (PiD), which describes its mission as the promotion of “diversity influencers and professionals of color.” In all, 419 people attended the November 2 event and 31 “honorees” were recognized. Honorees must be non-white (Appendix Item 1). The attendees enjoyed both gift items as well as catering (Figures 3 and 4). The participants were mostly not affiliated with the university.

A PiD video Tweet shows the colored “honorees” marching across the stage as their names are read to wild applause. A separate event video highlights the “needs” of the honorees for things like “safe spaces” and “allies”. PiD states that the events, held four times a year in different locations, are “open to professionals of color and allies.” Photos of the event highlight its overwhelming segregationist character (Figure 1). PSU president Stephen Percy and the university’s diversity czar, Ame Lambert, attended and made remarks (Figure 2).

Following the event, the Oregon Association of Scholars submitted a public records request concerning the cost of the event to Portland State University. In response, the university provided two receipts. One was the renewal of Portland State’s “platinum” membership in PiD, which carries an annual cost of $4,000 (Appendix Item 2). The organization cites a benefit of the platinum status as the “opportunity” to host one of its Say Hey! events. A proper accounting, therefore, should include the four years of membership ($16,000) from the last time the university had the “opportunity” to host a PiD Say Hey! cocktail party, in March 2018.
The second receipt provided by the university was for the event room and staff charges, which came to $2,988 in total, split 50/50 between the university’s administration and its School of Business (Appendix Item 3).

There was no record made available concerning the costs of the gift items distributed at the event. Nor was any record made available about the costs of catering. We have very conservatively estimated these total costs at $1,000, or about $2.50 per attendee.

In all, then, the estimated direct use of public funds for this event was at least $20,000. This excludes unbilled staff time devoted to the event as well as the opportunity costs in terms of university’s educational mission for the resources diverted towards it. In other words, $20,000 represents the minimal direct accounting costs of the event, but is far less than the fully-accounted costs.

Neo-Segregation, Virtue-Signaling, and Race-Based Spoils

PiD is one of many “diversity” organizations that have sprung up in the face of widespread racial anxieties in the United States that seek to revive segregation in American society. The organization promotes a neo-segregationist view of community in which “people of color” voluntarily revert to segregated civic associations and networks that are redolent of the era of segregation in American history. Such neo-segregation has been identified in left-leaning cities like Minnesota where racially-specific schools and housing have been promoted by Democratic politicians as a means to strengthen within-group social capital and to cultivate pro-segregationist sentiment among Democratic voting blocs.1 While critics have long bemoaned segregationist tendencies among whites, they have been enthusiastic about segregation for non-whites being promoted by groups like PiD.

PiD advances neo-segregation in its work, through so-called professional “affinity groups”, often euphemistically called “employee resource groups” or “community resource groups.” (see Figure 5) The affinity group model of neo-segregation is based on claims that non-white individuals are permanently disadvantaged in the United States because

of their inability to form networks and social capital due to widespread “white supremacy”. To overcome this alleged disadvantage, segregated professional groups are supposed to create within-race networking and social capital that can serve as a substitute for the unavailable access to “white power”. As an empirical matter, there is no evidence that racial “affinity groups” benefit non-white groups in a public setting like education.² PiD runs four different race-based CRG’s and states that participants “must self-identify with a particular demographic group.” The Say Hey! event paid for by Portland State brought together the different affinity groups into one setting.

Alongside neo-segregation, PiD delivers to its corporate and community members a form of certified virtue-signaling for major organizations anxious about being identified as insufficiently engaged in contemporary racial issues. The organization describes the benefits of membership in these terms: “It signals to your employees and to others in Oregon and southwest Washington that your organization embraces diversity, equity and inclusion and is doing the work needed to make everyone feel like they belong.”

Finally, PiD promotes race-based spoils in the workplace for non-white employees in areas like retention, promotion, salary and benefits, and workplace behavior. It’s Diversity Retention Project lays out a series of race-based spoils and metrics that it advocates be adopted by private and public sector employers in Oregon and southwest Washington. PiD promotes the idea that all white managers in such organizations should be required to gain “equity certification” in how to dole out race-based spoils by participating in its anti-racist trainings. Oddly, it suggests participation in its non-white affinity groups as one way to gain certification.

² Rick Hess, “No, the Evidence Does Not Support Racial ‘Affinity Spaces’ in Schools,” Education Week, September 1, 2021.
Neo-Segregation and White Erasure at Portland State University

The hosting of PiD’s Say Hey! colored only honorees cocktail party was consistent with a recent shift of Portland State University to embrace neo-segregation. The rise of neo-segregation in both K-12 and higher education in the United States has been noted elsewhere, including in a 2019 report on the practice at Yale University issued by the National Association of Scholars.³ Portland State University has emerged as something of a national leader in the practice.

Under President Stephen Percy, Portland State University has shifted from an institution that upholds the core American value of universal equality to one that promotes race-based education and socialization.⁴ In 2022, it began to call itself a “majority BIPOC serving” institution (despite the student body being 50% white) in order to qualify for grants and federal programs. This has led to the rise of segregationist activities sponsored by the university such as “BIPOC Climbing Nights” (Figure 6) at the university’s recreation center. The university is also promoting race-based student scholarships and racially-specific curriculum and course content.

Throughout 2022, university leaders convened a series of “affinity conversations” where campus members were invited to sit in groups divided by race (Figure 7). Unlike voluntary student, staff, or faculty groups, these events were university administrative actions intended to formulate policies for university operations. They thus represented a non-voluntary and non-escapable imposition of racial categories as the basis for university operations. This is a clear example of neo-segregation and discriminatory public sector behavior.

The events highlighted the normalization of segregationist practices at the university. At a November 4 event,

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³ Dion J. Pierre and Peter Wood, Neo-Segregation at Yale (National Association of Scholars, 2019).
⁴ Oregon Association of Scholars, Portland State’s Anti-Educational “Equity” Plan (Issue Brief #6, January 2022)
organizers created separate “White” tables for participants. This constitutes a double assault on the principle of non-discrimination because in addition to being racially segregated, the “white” tables, according to affinity group theories, are intended to highlight the oppressive character of all white people, who are instructed to deconstruct their whiteness and share their white guilt.

In the words of two scholars, the purpose of white groups at such an event is so that white penitents can “identify and rectify hidden and unconscious forms of bias”, “highlight White culture and define privilege”, “acknowledge their own racist or oppressive attitudes”, “talk about the experience of being White in a racially structured society”, and discuss “privilege as bait that lures one into supporting the oppression of others.” At the same time, they should avoid “imposing their own ideas and beliefs about what equity should look like, thereby reifying the very privilege they [are] attempting to disavow” which is “grounded in Eurocentric thought and habit.”

Thus, neo-segregation at Portland State has taken a sinister turn to include a new emphasis on white erasure by encouraging whites to disavow their European heritage. This white erasure is now institutionalized in the university’s self-description as a “majority BIPOC serving” institution.

At the November 4 event, PSU President Percy sat at one of the “white” tables (Figure 9), where he presumably hoarded power and excluded colored people from his white social capital. At least three other “White” tables were in operation at the event (Figure 10) where participants would have been encouraged, according to white affinity group theory, to “acknowledge their own racist or oppressive attitudes” while not “imposing their own ideas and beliefs.”

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Use of Public Resources for Racially Discriminatory Ends

In a free society, people can associate with anyone they want to, and they don’t need to justify themselves to anyone. Even in a public university setting, it is also normal and often productive for students to form voluntary student groups centered on shared interests or backgrounds, such as a “Taiwan Students Association” or a “Catholic Students Association.” But public institutions are held to a different standard in the formal procedures guiding their operations. University operations and principles may not be based on ascriptive identity categories, or any other categories, since it is not for the public sector to impose its conceptions of identity onto citizens. The core constitutional principle in any liberal democracy is of a neutral and colorblind equality. Just as the public sector cannot force cosmopolitan racial mixing onto society, it cannot force segregationist racial division. It must adhere to colorblind practices and procedures without regard to race (or other categories), except where provided for by law.

All of the racially-discriminatory events and programs run by Portland State under President Percy are potentially liable to legal challenge and damages under constitutional and legislative provisions that prohibit discrimination based on race, especially Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The PiD Say Hey! cocktail party as well as the segregated “macro-convening” policy process are only the most egregious examples.

The slide into white erasure is particularly sinister and potentially catastrophic for the future of the university in a state whose population is 75% to 85% white. As previously documented by the Oregon Association of Scholars, the university’s diversity czar, Ame Lambert, a native of Nigeria, has compared her mission to the “truth and reconciliation” processes following major episodes of human rights abuses in African countries. Contrite university members who belong to oppressive race groups, she promised at one event, would receive “amnesty or release from punishment due” if they atoned for the group blood debt of their racial identity. Those failing to atone, she suggested, would be punished.

Neo-segregation and the associated “diversity and equity” ideology at Portland State University thus appear to have reached something like the stage of a revolutionary process where “Revolution or death!” becomes the rallying cry of the reckless Robespierres leading the movement. Without immediate and rapid external intervention, the university is on track to achieve one or the other, which may amount to the same thing.

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Recommended Actions

- Portland State University should seek immediate reimbursement for the $20,000 estimated cost of the November 2, 2022 racially discriminatory community cocktail party from the private sector funders of Partners in Diversity, the organization behind the party.

- Portland State University should desist from further involvement with Partners in Diversity and other organizations promoting a neo-segregationist conception of American society.

- The Portland State University Board of Trustees, alumni members, and parents as well as Oregon state legislators, advocacy groups, and concerned citizens should intervene to prohibit the university’s institutionalization of racially discriminatory practices in its administration, teaching, and faculty hiring.

- In its search for the replacement of Stephen Percy as university president beginning in the 2023-24 academic year, the Portland State University Board of Trustees should prioritize a candidate committed to upholding the core American values of colorblind equality in institutional procedures and institutional neutrality on contentious political and social issues.

About

The Oregon Association of Scholars is the Oregon affiliate of the National Association of Scholars, a network of scholars and citizens united by a commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in American higher education. Membership in NAS is open to all who share a commitment to these broad principles. NAS publishes a journal and has state and regional affiliates. Visit NAS at www.nas.org, and OAS at www.oregonscholars.org. Contact: Dr. Bruce Gilley, OAS President, info@oregonscholars.org
Appendix Items

Item 1: Racial requirement for PiD Honorees

Become an Honoree

Each quarter, we introduce professionals of color who recently moved to Oregon or southwest Washington at Say Hey! We have a limited number of spots available each quarter for Honorees.

To be eligible as an Honoree, you must:

1. Identify as a person of color.
2. Moved to Oregon or southwest Washington from another state or country between September 2021 and February 2023.
3. Never have been an Honoree in the past.

Item 2: PiD Platinum Membership Renewal Invoice to Portland State University

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TOTAL: 4000.00
Item 3: Say Hey! Event Room and Staffing Invoice to School of Business Indicating Shared Costs

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<td>Event Contact: Amanda Monroe</td>
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<td>Phone: 530-757-5644</td>
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Event 8: Say Hey!

**Wednesday, November 2, 2022**

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**Grand Total**: $17,480.00

Academic classrooms are booked six months in advance. If the furniture configuration cannot be changed and the room must be left as it was found. Do not remove valuables. Unauthorized attendance is prohibited. All additional equipment or belongings brought to the event space must be removed upon conclusion of the event. Trash must be disposed of in waste receptacles. Do not leave in the room, or if furniture is in disarray following the event. Additional charges may be applied. If the room is booked at the time of reservation, please contact OAS at 530-752-6407.

For weekend events and weekday events after 5pm, all building entrances are locked except the following entrances:

- Cramer Hall: South entrance on Montgomery Street
- Fibonacci Student Hall: Both entrances on S. Colonnade Street
- Karl Miller Center: West entrance on E. Broadway

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**Country’s Cabs**