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Alameda County
Supervisor Keith Carson, Fifth District

For Immediate Release
Press Release

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Supervisor Keith Carson Hosts “Family Journeys” Black History Event

The Great Migration of African Americans to the Bay Area is a vital aspect of our collective history, yet many youth and adults are not familiar with the story of their ancestors. To bring a glimpse of those stories to community members during Black History Month, Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson sponsored a unique event on Saturday, February 19 at the Black Repertory Theatre in Berkeley.

Family Journeys: The Migration of African Americans to the Bay Area and Intergenerational Dialogue was opened by Supervisor Carson, who noted that “between the years of 1915 and 1970, about 6 million African Americans migrated from the South to other parts of the country. A lot of those individuals relocated and migrated here to California and the Bay Area.”

The stories of those individuals came to light in the ensuing panel discussion with Professor Oba T'Shaka, Former Chair of the Africana Studies Department at San Francisco State University; Pastor Martha Taylor, Elmhurst Presbyterian Church; and Betty Reid Soskin, Outreach Specialist at the Rosie the Riveter WWII/Home Front National Historical Park. Davey D of Hard Knock Radio moderated the event.

Professor Oba T'Shaka discussed the struggles of the Blacks who migrated to San Francisco, and the fight for equality in employment and housing. “We were frozen out of the economy,” he told the audience. “In the South, the issue was political apartheid. In the North, the issue was economic apartheid.”

“The San Francisco civil rights movement grew out of the migratory patterns” as African Americans left the South to seek employment in the Northeast and here in California, T'Shaka said.

During the World War II years, African Americans arrived with hundreds of thousands of other migrants to work in the shipyards and support the war effort.

“Can you imagine what we were going through?” asked Betty Reid Soskin, who described her experience working in segregated union halls during those years. “I know Rosie [the Riveter] as a white woman,” she noted. “There is a story of Rosie the Riveter that needs to be told. It is the story of the emancipation of white women. But women of color have been working since slavery. The war did not emancipate any of us.”

At the age of 89, Ms. Soskin now educates members of the public about her story at the Rosie the Riveter WWII/Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond. “I knew that this was not my story. And if this park was going to be paid for, and was going to enshrine places that I knew of as segregated, someone needed to know that.”

As panelist Professor Oba T'Shaka noted, “part of the reason you don't know this history is because part of it was blacked out of the media and we don't teach it.”

Reverend Dr. Martha Taylor discussed the role of the Black church in Oakland and the East Bay in the early 20th century. “Women played a significant role in the development of the Black community,” Taylor said, especially the Black women's clubs, which grew out of the Black church.” Taylor noted that there was a separate YMCA and hospital for Blacks as they were not allowed in others.

Following the panel, audience members participated in an intergenerational breakout session in which youth and elders shared knowledge about family histories and African American culture. Youth participants from the Berkeley High School African American Studies Department, McClymonds High School Culture Keepers, Beyond Emancipation and Berkeley Youth Alternatives listened as elders spoke about Civil Rights

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luminaries like C. L. Dellums, a Pullman porter who later became a key organizer for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. When asked, “Who is your hero?” one youth answered “My Mom. It’s amazing that she raised us and went to school at the same time.”

The *Family Journeys* event kicked off a semester-long project that will introduce high school youth to the study of genealogy and get them excited about documenting their own family histories. With the help of experts from the African American Genealogy Society of Northern California, the youth are learning about research tools and resources, interviewing their relatives, and documenting their findings with web and video tools. Each student will produce their own family tree and tell the story of their ancestors through pictures, documents and video. The results will be presented in a final event in May that will showcase the youth projects front and center.

Family Journeys was supported by Supervisor Carson, The Socially Responsible Network, The California NAACP and The Oakland Black Firefighters Association.

For more information about how to research your family history, visit:

<http://www.ancestry.com/>

<http://www.aagsnc.org/>

<http://www.oaklandfhc.org/>