

My first experience in the Oregon State University Archives was in 2006, when I was compiling a primary source paper for History 310. For that project, on the breakdown of the 'dry-zone,' prohibiting the sale of liquor, around the Oregon State University campus, I spent most of my time poring over microfilm of old *Barometer* issues and leafing through assorted documents in ASOSU records. Archivist Karl McCreary actually suggested the project, and he was particularly helpful during the few hours I spent doing archival research. While I barely scratched the surface of the resources available in the University archives during that earlier project, I had the opportunity to delve very deeply into a specific collection while researching the paper I am submitting for this award.

Dr. Marisa Chappell, my History 407 instructor, initially piqued my interest in the Urban League Collection. When I ran into her at a coffee shop on Monroe Street two weeks before the first day of class, she happened to mention how hopeful she was that someone in our upcoming 407 class, covering the "Sixties in America," would use the Urban League Collection that had recently been donated to the archives. I resolved then at least to take a look. I stopped by in early October and archivist Erika Castaño helped get me started.

The Urban League Collection is large and I initially had no idea what to do with it. After a few hours looking over meeting minutes, an idea began to take shape. It was clear to me at this point that the Portland Urban League was the dominant civil rights organization in Portland during the 1960s. This realization developed into my final paper, "Leading the Way to Real Progress: The Portland Urban League, 1964-1970."

Over the next few weeks, I spent thirty to forty hours poring over the Urban League Collection. I focused mostly on internal memoranda, meeting minutes, and newspaper articles to decipher the role played by the League in the struggle for civil rights in Portland during the 1960s. I enjoyed looking over these minutes of the monthly meetings of the League's board of directors. It was like watching a television series with each month advancing the plot a bit. Though the entire collection occupied sixteen large boxes, it was easy for me to find information that was pertinent to my project because the materials in the collection are very well organized. Erika was able to give me a detailed list of what each box contained and this allowed me to narrow my search considerably. Additionally, within the boxes, the materials are separated into clearly marked folders which allowed me to save even more time. Though I still spent a considerable amount of time with the collection, I am grateful that it was so well organized.

In addition to the University Archives, I used the database, American: History and Life [I think quotation marks rather than underlining?], to uncover scholarly articles and book reviews that I used in my paper. While very little has been written on civil rights in Portland during the 1960s, I was able to use this database to find information about the National Urban League and its Executive Director, Whitney M. Young, with which I was able to zoom out and compare the national situation with the local. These scholarly works also helped me to contextualize the Urban League's ideology and activities and to recognize both the similarities in League activities across the nation and certain unique features of civil rights activism in Portland and the Northwest.

Throughout my time in the archives, I was impressed by the helpfulness of the staff. If I got stuck on a particular problem, they were always able to point me in the

right direction. Furthermore, the array of library resources at my disposal allowed me to complete this original research project in only ten weeks. This experience has certainly sharpened my research skills, expanded my knowledge of library resources, and prepared me well for future research during law school.

Leading the Way to Real Progress:
The Portland Urban League, 1964-
1970

By Andrew M. Seher

HST 407 – 60s in America

“Americans,” said Whitney Young, Executive Director of the National Urban League, in 1961, “have choices to make. Either we make [blacks] constructive citizens, productive and healthy, or they are going to be destructive dependents,” and if Americans chose the second option, he added, “we [shall] pay the cost of our shortsightedness.”¹

Two years later, in 1963, Young advocated an initiative which called for a commitment of large sums of money to improve the condition of blacks across the nation and “overcome the damaging effects of generations of deprivation and denial.”² The National Urban League (NUL) called it the “Domestic Marshall Plan,” eliciting memories of the expensive but very successful reconstruction of Europe following World War II.³

The National Urban League was, and still is, a practical organization. While other civil rights organizations in the 1960s, such as the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sought to challenge the existing power structures through radical direct action or to change them by bringing lawsuits and putting pressure on elected officials, the League took a more moderate stance, working within the system to improve the everyday lives of urban blacks in a more substantial way. In Portland, OR, due to the lack of other significant civil rights organizations, such as CORE and the NAACP, the Urban League took the lead on civil rights. Very little historical research has been done on racial relations in Portland. This essay endeavors to fill in part of this gap with an examination of the Portland League in the 1960s. Under the League’s utilitarian leadership, the civil rights issues that got the most attention in 1960s Portland were de facto school segregation, fair housing, and job placement.

The Portland Urban League was founded in 1945, the same year that the *Journal of Social Work* declared Portland the "Worst Northern City in Racial Relations."⁴ This terrible reputation "partially explains why over a million blacks migrated to California between 1940 and 1970, while only 24,000 chose to move to Oregon in the same period."⁵ It was this climate of racism that the Portland League sought to change.

In 1945, Edwin C. Berry, formerly of the Pittsburgh Urban League, was hired as the Executive Director of the new Portland Urban League.⁶ The first orders of business, for Berry, were fair housing and decent employment for blacks. In June of 1945, the first two black teachers were hired by the city of Portland as a result of League influence.⁷ Also in 1945, the League determined that "restrictive agreements between property owners and regulations of the Portland Realty Board render it practically impossible for Negro families to buy or rent outside certain designated areas."⁸ Indeed the forming of the "Black district" in Portland was well underway in 1945 and, in fact, was encouraged by the Portland Housing Authority.⁹ Following the flooding of Vanport in 1948, and subsequent relocation of 5,000 blacks to the Albina district, Portland really began to look like a segregated city.¹⁰ By 1955, when Berry accepted the position of Executive Director of the Chicago League, most of the approximately 17,000 black residents of Portland were crammed into the "misery and squalor" of Albina.¹¹

Despite the housing problems, Berry's tenure saw several improvements to the condition of Portland blacks. The League pushed for the enactment of fair employment legislation and in 1949, the state legislature passed the Fair Employment Practices Law of Oregon, which "created an avenue for complaints to be filed by employees who were discriminated against."¹² In 1954, the Oregon Public Accommodations law outlawed

discrimination in Oregon restaurants, hotels, and amusement parks.¹³ The "Berry Years" saw many positive changes which resulted in more personal and professional freedoms and opportunities for Portland blacks.

In 1956, William H. Boone took over for Berry as the new Executive Director of the Portland Urban League. Under Boone, the League continued to focus on housing, employment, and education, and it achieved limited gains in these areas.¹⁴ The late 50s and early 60s were, however, a comparatively quiet time for the Portland Urban League. Membership stayed at about 2,000 persons and few new programs were initiated.¹⁵ This was, however, the proverbial calm before the storm. By 1963-64, the combination of the new leadership of Whitney Young at the National Office and the government money that came flowing in with Great Society legislation led to a surge in the activity of the Portland League.

Even prior to the 1960s, the National Urban League identified employment as one of the keys to racial equality.¹⁶ Throughout the 1950s, the League allied itself with labor unions in the hope of securing good, stable employment for blacks. It advised black workers to "get into somebody's union and stay there."¹⁷ In 1961, when Whitney M. Young, Jr. took the helm, the League funneled even more of its resources into job placement and training through its "National Skills Bank," and other programs designed to create new opportunities for blacks.¹⁸

Whitney Young's background set the stage for the development of the moderate, results-oriented approach to civil rights that would become his trademark. Whitney M. Young Jr. was born in 1921 into a middle-class family in Kentucky.¹⁹ His father, Whitney Sr., was the principal of the Lincoln Institute, an all-black boarding school

affiliated with the all-white Berea College.²⁰ Whitney Sr. rose to this position that was traditionally occupied by white men because he, according to Nancy J. Weiss, "honored the rules of the white man's game...in a way that preserved his dignity."²¹ His son, according to Weiss, would take the lessons learned from his father and translate them into his own terms.²²

Young enrolled at Lincoln when he was thirteen and graduated as valedictorian of his class.²³ From there he moved on to Kentucky State Industrial College and completed four years of study there just in time to see his graduate school plans interrupted by World War II.²⁴ His military service placed Young, for the first time, in a position to mediate racial disputes. He was quickly promoted to sergeant and, in this position, he often served as an "informal liaison" between black soldiers and white officers in a black army battalion.²⁵ After World War II, he received a master's degree in psychology from the University of Minnesota and then accepted the position of industrial relations secretary in the St. Paul Urban League.²⁶ After a short time, he left St. Paul in order to accept the position of executive director of the Omaha Urban League, where he got more experience working as an intermediary between whites and blacks.²⁷ After leaving Omaha, he accepted the deanship of the Atlanta University School of Social Work.²⁸ The League could not bear to lose him and in 1961, at age 40, Young was offered the reins of the entire organization, in the form of the executive directorship of the national organization. He accepted.²⁹

Young brought his practical, integrationist *modus operandi* to the National Urban League. He led the League into the heart of the civil rights movement, seeking to "educate powerful whites in business, government, and the foundations about the

pressing needs and demands of black Americans.”³⁰ According to Vanderbilt professor Dennis C. Dickerson, “[Young] developed specific programs to involve [whites] in efforts to allay racial tensions and to ameliorate the black social and economic condition.”³¹ Additionally, he used his skills as a mediator “to maintain the delicate balance between acceptability to powerful whites and credibility with grassroots blacks.”³² He did not always succeed in walking this fine line. After his famous chastisement of the more militant and radical League members at the 1968 NUL conference in New Orleans, he was subject to much public criticism regarding his close relationships with influential whites.³³ Young, however, was no “Uncle Tom”; while he worked hard to maintain alliances with white business leaders, he also pushed those same powerful whites to “finance unprecedented social and economic programs to benefit the black population.”³⁴

Young continued working with powerful whites to address the needs of blacks throughout his tenure as Executive Director of the National Urban League. He empathized with whites who were just coming to grips with the civil rights movement, noting, “it is extremely difficult for a society that has only recently begun to adjust itself to affording equal opportunity for all its citizens to find itself suddenly called upon to offer special treatment as well.”³⁵ Still, Young pushed hard to get such “special treatment” for blacks. In 1963, the League called for a “Domestic Marshall Plan,” which, in keeping with the pragmatic philosophy of Young and the League, called for “special effort,” in the form of large sums of money to provide better housing, health care, and jobs for blacks, in order to “overcome the damaging effects of generations of deprivation and denial.”³⁶ Young and the League continued to advocate the Domestic Marshall Plan

and other social programs while working closely with the government and other groups of powerful whites in the face of opposition from white conservatives and black power radicals alike. By doing so, the National Urban League and its allies were able to finance programs to address local problems.

In the early 60s, the Urban League of Portland was coping with the same problems outlined by the national organization in its 1963 Domestic Marshall Plan. The Portland League considered a lack of job opportunities, de facto segregation in schools and housing issues to be the primary problems faced by Portland area blacks.³⁷ Indeed, a large percentage of Portland blacks were unemployed and those that had jobs were mostly working for low wages with little opportunity for advancement. Additionally, some Portland schools were attended almost entirely by black students because of unfair housing practices which funneled their parents into certain areas of the city. The Portland League considered itself primarily a social service organization which took practical community-based steps to address these civil right issues. According to a statement released by the League on Nov. 16, 1964, "The Urban League of Portland is a community social service agency with professional staff, engaged in a community-wide program to promote interracial understanding and to establish equal opportunity for all citizens in education, housing, employment, and all other areas of community life."³⁸

The Portland Urban League began vigorously working on the problem of "de facto segregation" in Portland schools in the early 60s under new Executive Director E. Shelton Hill. In 1964, seven percent of the city school population was nonwhite.³⁹ Due to racial imbalances as a result of housing discrimination, however, most nonwhites lived in older, more dilapidated areas which concentrated them in the same schools.⁴⁰ Certain

elementary schools in and around the Albina district were nearly 90 percent black and at Jefferson High School, in north Portland, the vast majority of students were black.⁴¹

Considering that blacks comprised less than eight percent of Portland's population, these statistics revealed disturbing levels of racial inequality in Portland even after all the strides that had been made since 1945.

At the urging of the League, the largest school district in Portland, School District No. 1, established a Committee on Race and Education in 1964.⁴² The stated intent of the Committee on Race and Education was "to improve conditions which have special bearing on the status, well-being, and achievement of children of minority races."⁴³ The school district couldn't do anything about the housing situation but the Committee on Race and Education was an attempt to address racial inequality in Portland schools as best it could. Just after the school board established the Committee on Race and Education, at the committee's invitation, the Urban League submitted a list of recommendations about what to do about the most pressing problems confronting black children in Portland's schools.

First, and foremost, the League insisted that something needed to be done about the prevailing racial imbalance in schools. Recalling the logic of *Brown v. Board*, the League argued that setting blacks apart from whites has a negative psychological impact on children of both races. While black children may develop a sense of inferiority as a result of being set apart, white children may wrongly conclude that they are being denied interracial contact because they need to be "protected" from blacks.⁴⁴ In order to address the striking racial imbalance in School District No. 1, the League suggested that the school board "adopt such means as will achieve the widest possible dispersal of nonwhite

children and those who are classed as culturally disadvantaged.”⁴⁵ In order to accomplish this, “a major change in the present pattern of assigning pupils to schools” was required with the goal of “[distributing] the nonwhite enrollment proportionately to every classroom in School District No. 1.”⁴⁶ Presumably, the school district could have accomplished this by dividing the district by some other means than students’ home addresses.

While the League felt relieving the racial imbalance in Portland schools to be of primary importance, it also submitted several other recommendations to the Committee. Concerning individual students, the League argued that black children are often handicapped by their community environment and, as such, should receive special help.⁴⁷ To address this, the League suggested remedial programs to give special attention to raising achievement levels of disadvantaged blacks. Additionally, the League recommended that the school district purchase textbooks which included “pictures and other content designed to represent all the major racial and ethnic groups in the American scene,” and present this material “in a way that will avoid racial and group stereotypes.”⁴⁸ It also recommended that the “contributions of various ethnic groups” be recognized in other forms, including but not limited to, films, posters, and pamphlets.⁴⁹

Beyond students and textbooks, the League also had recommendations regarding the supreme arbiters of learning, the teachers. The League encouraged the hiring of “Negro and other nonwhite teachers,” of which there were still very few in School District No. 1. A good benchmark to work toward, the League suggested, was the placement of nonwhite teachers in every school in the city and at multiple levels within each school.⁵⁰ In addition to the hiring of nonwhite teachers, the League endorsed

training programs for teachers, both white and nonwhite, in "matters of race and intergroup relations."⁵¹

The Committee on Race and Education took the League's recommendations under advisement and, in the report it prepared for the school board in November of 1964, incorporated many of the League's suggestions, including hiring more nonwhite teachers, investing in textbooks that respect cultural diversity, and offering special programs for disadvantaged minorities.⁵² The League did not feel, however, that the Committee's recommendations went far enough toward breaking up "concentrations of Negro students."⁵³ Though allowances were made for transfers, the proposal included no plan for redistribution of students in a less segregated fashion.⁵⁴

Though School District No. 1 did not follow through with all of the Urban League recommendations, the school board worked very closely with the League throughout the 60s. In February of 1965, the Portland League organized a telephone lecture with the one-and-only Executive Director Whitney Young at Wilson High School.⁵⁵ Following a racially-charged altercation at Jefferson High School in October of 1966, the League took the lead in organizing a public forum for students and parents to talk openly and honestly about racial relations at Jefferson.⁵⁶

Despite its close working relationship with the District No. 1 School Board, by the late 60s, the League was growing increasingly frustrated with what they saw as a lack of improvement in the schools. In 1968, it submitted a set of resolutions to the school board as goals to work toward. Most of the resolutions centered on an acceleration of integration in high schools. No high school, the League asserted, should be more than 25% black.⁵⁷ Moreover, staff members in schools should be chosen "based on their

ability to work in an integrated setting.⁵⁸ The school board made some effort to implement these resolutions, mostly through creative busing. These measures, however, did little to break up the dense concentrations of black students in Albina area schools.⁵⁹

The League often pushed the school district to implement programs in schools that addressed issues that were particularly appropriate for poor minority students. In the fall of 1964, twenty-four girls returned to Jefferson High School pregnant; the vast majority of these girls were black.⁶⁰ The League immediately pushed the school district to pursue more extensive sexual education programs. In 1965, working alongside the school board, the Urban League itself began providing sexual education sessions for eighth graders to combat the high pregnancy rates at Jefferson High.⁶¹ In 1968, frustrated with the sad lack of black students pursuing a college education following high school graduation, the League set up a counseling program for minority students to provide aid in the process of applying to prospective schools and pursuing scholarship money.⁶² With League help, fifty students, mostly blacks from Albina, were able to obtain financial aid totaling over \$115,000 and enroll in various institutions of higher learning, including eighteen who matriculated at Oregon State University.⁶³

While the League worked hard to improve the situation for black students in high school, it also realized that younger students from disadvantaged backgrounds needed special help to even begin to function on the same level as their more privileged peers. To this end, the League pushed to get Head Start programs in Albina schools. Head Start is a government-funded program, introduced in 1965, that provides pre-elementary school education to disadvantaged children. Due largely to the efforts of the Portland Urban League, Head Start programs started running in Albina area elementary schools in

1968.⁶⁴ Another interesting program that focused on young black girls was spearheaded by the Urban League Guild, a woman's affiliate of the Portland Urban League. In a move that might be considered sexist by today's standards, the Guild organized "Charm Clinics" for eighth-grade girls in order to "teach them how to use make up and fix their hair properly before they enter high school."⁶⁵

While the Urban League pursued various initiatives to improve the lot of disadvantaged minority students in segregated schools, the root problem behind the segregation was the concentration of Afro-Portlanders in specific areas of the city, particularly Albina. This concentration, largely a product of unfair housing practices in the 40s and 50s, was exacerbated by the Vanport flood in 1948.⁶⁶ Throughout the 1960s, the Portland League considered pursuing and securing fair housing for minorities among its highest priorities.

In early 1962, the Portland Housing Authority (PHA) approved construction of the Daisy B. Williams Apartment Court in the Albina area.⁶⁷ Daisy B. Williams was designed as a low-cost housing project that would likely attract more poor minorities to the Albina district. Those opposed to the project, including the Portland Urban League, argued that building this facility in Albina would further segregate Portland, concentrating even more poor blacks in Albina. One League member asserted, "Although a shiny new ghetto may be better than a sordid old one, it is still a ghetto."⁶⁸ In contrast, those in favor of the project contended that Daisy B. Williams was a way of providing low-cost housing to those who needed it most, and added that those who opposed the project did so for largely "political reasons."⁶⁹

The Urban League of Portland vehemently opposed Daisy B. Williams from the beginning and built a coalition of allies to stop construction of the project. The anti-Daisy coalition, which the League worked to construct, included the NAACP, the Catholic Council of Human Relations, the Albina Neighborhood Council, the Oregon Association of Club Women, the Albina Ministerial Association, and the Democratic Committee of Multnomah County.⁷⁰ While the League conceded that there was a need for more public housing in Portland, Albina was not the place for it.⁷¹ The League employed fiery rhetoric to drum up opposition to the plan. "Anybody favoring the project," said John Holley of the Urban League, "would be in a position of favoring segregation of Negroes."⁷² After a long and heated battle, the Portland City Planning Commission, adopting a staff recommendation from the Urban League, determined that the Albina District was not "suitable for any low cost housing project."⁷³

Though the Portland League and its allies won the battle over the Daisy B. Williams project, the struggle for fair housing and integration continued throughout the 60s. In February of 1964, the League began working on a pilot program to take 25 families out of Albina and disperse them throughout the city.⁷⁴ Interestingly, while researching possible destinations, the project committee stumbled upon a restrictive housing clause in the Cedar Hills area of Portland. The League appealed to Governor Hatfield to meet with the Cedar Hills real estate men and get pledges from them to discontinue their discriminatory housing practices. It is unclear whether any such meeting actually took place.⁷⁵ As for the pilot program, it is unclear how it turned out. That the League did not continue the program after 1964, however, suggests that it was not very successful.

In order to fund additional fair housing initiatives, The Urban League began considering a high profile grant in December of 1965. The Ford Foundation was offering Operation Equality grants to local urban leagues across the country to be used for counseling minorities looking for housing and sponsoring new projects to facilitate fair housing.⁷⁶ Grant size was determined according to city size and Portland stood to receive \$68,879 per year for three years.⁷⁷ Of course, not every city was entitled to one of these generous grants. There were two caveats. First, in order to be eligible for the grant, the League had to raise local support equal to one-third of the grant money. This meant \$23,000 per year for three years from local sources.⁷⁸ Additionally, only six grants were to be awarded, one for each region of the country.

Portland's northwest location put it in direct competition with Seattle for the grant. The Seattle League was larger and had a greater resource base, but the Portland League rose to the challenge. Over the course of the following year, it successfully raised over \$11,000, which was "better than most leagues"; however, the Seattle League was successful in realizing its entire financial obligation and became only the second city to receive a prestigious "Operation Equality" grant.⁷⁹ The Portland League made lemonade out of the lemons of defeat, however, as it used most of the money raised to fund an expansion of its Albina field office.⁸⁰

The League continued to pursue integration through various means and it was always a struggle. It supported the construction of the Hillsdale Terrace low-rent housing project in the largely white area around Wilson High School despite intense opposition from the residents of the area.⁸¹ Several Urban League board members also sat on the steering committee for the publicly-funded Greater Portland Fair Housing Council,

working toward open housing policies in all areas of Portland.⁸² Moreover, the League facilitated the development of fair housing committees in neighborhoods throughout Portland.⁸³ The Civil Rights Act of 1968, which explicitly prohibited all forms of housing discrimination, was a great boon to fair housing initiatives in Portland because it provided an avenue for victims of housing discrimination to seek redress.⁸⁴ Despite all of the League's work, however, by the end of the 1960s, it was still a long way from its goal of a wide dispersion of the black population throughout the city. Even today, Portland remains a remarkably segregated city; most of its blacks are still concentrated in a small part of the north side.

Regardless of unfair housing policies, many blacks could not *afford* to move out of the ghettos they were concentrated in. Unemployment among Portland blacks was high and those who did have jobs were mostly confined to menial, low-paying work. Inequality in employment was the third of the big three issues confronted by the Portland Urban League in the 1960s, in addition to inequality in education and in housing.

It was President Johnson's War on Poverty that really allowed the League to develop and fund programs to help Portland blacks get the training necessary to pursue more and better employment opportunities. Initially, in September of 1964, it was estimated that Oregon would receive \$1.5 million from the first wave of anti-poverty legislation.⁸⁵ At this point, the League was not sure if it would have access to any of this money. Early in 1965 it was confirmed that the newly established Office of Economic Opportunity was funding a "Job Development and Training Program" that the Urban League of Portland would oversee.⁸⁶ The stated purpose of this program was to "expand and develop job opportunities through neighborhood based job counseling and pre-

employment training clinics.”⁸⁷ The Job Development and Training Program was successful in generating new opportunities for poor minorities. In its first month of existence, the program generated 139 referrals and secured 29 new placements for minority applicants.⁸⁸ It also secured the placement of the first black electrical and carpenter’s apprentices in Portland and ran a class that taught clerical skills to poor applicants who otherwise could not afford such instruction.⁸⁹

Despite the modest success of the Job Development and Training Project, it was discontinued at the end of 1967 to be replaced by the Department of Labor-funded Labor Education and Advancement Program (LEAP).⁹⁰ The Urban League again was given the responsibility of running the program. In contrast to the previous program, LEAP placed special emphasis urban youth.⁹¹ A sub-program under LEAP, Project Outreach, had particular success placing black workers in apprenticeship programs for skilled trades. A year after its inception on November 13, 1968, Project Outreach had placed 27 youths as apprentice craftsmen, while LEAP placed hundreds of others in unskilled positions.⁹²

Though the League took the lead on many of the job training and placement programs in Portland in the 1960s, there were a couple of other notable efforts that were successful without direct League support. “Opportunity Line,” a television program developed in Chicago which was successful in placing some 2000+ minority applicants in jobs there, aired its first episode on KOIN-TV on September 27, 1967.⁹³ “Opportunity Line” was a series of half-hour television shows designed to reach unemployed and underemployed people within a city and offer them opportunities for both jobs and job training. Each episode was built around a theme relating to employment, training or education. During the show, job openings in several occupations were listed and viewers

were encouraged to call the "Opportunity Line" if they were interested in jobs or training.⁹⁴ Though a compelling idea, "Opportunity Line" was only minimally successful in Portland. Through three episodes of its single-season run, it had only generated 16 new hirings out of 879 responses.⁹⁵

A non-Urban League employment program that saw much greater success was the Portland Concentrated Employment Program (CEP). Funded to the tune of over \$2 million and headed by Cleveland Gilcrease, the Portland CEP was very successful, placing "650 previously unemployed persons in full-time jobs" within the first six months following its initiation.⁹⁶ The CEP paid particular attention to Albina and many of those it placed in full-time jobs were minority applicants. By the turn of the decade, employment programs funded by the War on Poverty, both League-sponsored and otherwise, had helped thousands of poor, uneducated nonwhites both by securing jobs for them and by providing job training that would have been otherwise impossible to obtain.

Despite the relatively small black population in Portland, The Urban League of Portland was, throughout the 1960s, a very visible player on both the local stage and within the national organization. Locally, the League organized at least two large events each year, for its Annual Portland Meeting and for Equal Opportunity Day, in addition to countless smaller forums and workshops. At the 1965 Annual Meeting, huge crowds came out to see Jackie Robinson, the famous Brooklyn Dodger who was first to break down Major League Baseball's "color barrier," as the keynote speaker.⁹⁷ In 1966, Whitney M. Young brought down the house at the Annual Meeting.⁹⁸ Later in 1966, a miniseries on racial relations in Portland aired on KPTV featuring the League.⁹⁹

In the summer of 1967, the national spotlight was on Portland. On the night of July 31, Portland had its very own race riot during which nearly fifty people were arrested.¹⁰⁰ Portland gained much more desirable press a few weeks later as the National Urban League Conference descended on Portland from August 20-24.¹⁰¹ Delegates from leagues all across the country gathered in the Rose City to discuss what direction the national organization would take the following year. Just two months later, the League brought in Henry Ford II to speak to a sold-out crowd on Equal Opportunity Day.¹⁰² It was an action-packed year.

The Urban League of Portland was at the forefront of almost every major civil rights speech, rally, forum, initiative, and program in Portland during the 1960s. It retained its focus on pragmatic, practical solutions all the while. The National Urban League in general, and the Portland League in particular, shunned "protesting" and preferred instead to organize programs that led to tangible benefits for underprivileged blacks. Western Regional Director, Henry A. Talbert condensed the purpose of the Urban League into one brilliantly succinct statement during a 1967 visit to the Portland League. "In summary," he said, "there are people and problems. Something has to be done. The UL has been working for 56 years to do something about them."¹⁰³ The Portland League exemplified this simple statement of purpose. In 1960s Portland, there were people and there were problems. The people were the disenfranchised, often uneducated nonwhites concentrated in dilapidated ghettos like Albina. The problems that beset them were unfair housing practices, de facto school segregation, and poverty that resulted from a lack of occupational opportunity. The Urban League of Portland worked to do something about the problems for the people.

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- ⁴ Stan I. Burton Jr., "The Portland Urban League: 1945-1965: Two decades of Change in the Pacific Northwest." Essay for a *HST 407: African Americans in the West* course taught by Professor Quintard Taylor at the University of Oregon, 3. Urban League Records, Box 7, OSU Archives.
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- ¹⁰ Burton, 10.
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- ³⁸ Statement from Urban League of Portland to the Board of Directors, School District No. 1, Nov. 16, 1964, Box 1, Folder 3, OSU Archives.
- ³⁹ Urban League of Portland Board Meeting Minutes, 16 Jan 1964, Box 1, Folder 3, OSU Archives.
- ⁴⁰ Urban League of Portland Board Meeting Minutes, 12 Mar 1964, Box 1, Folder 3, OSU Archives.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Urban League of Portland Board Meeting Minutes, 16 Jan 1964, Box 1, Folder 3, OSU Archives.
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- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
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