

## **Albina's Story**

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I completed the paper entitled 'Albina's Story' for my History 407 Seminar course, the capstone class for History majors. Although the majority of my research was completed at the Oregon Historical Society, I was able to use many sources from the Oregon State University Library. I was able to locate a very rare source in the Special Collections department at the OSU library by Elizabeth McLagan. The book was entitled *A Peculiar Paradise: A History of Blacks in Oregon, 1779-1940*. Unfortunately the work ended in the period, the nineteen forties, which my paper picked up the Albina story in. McLagan's book did, however, provide me with an excellent understanding of the history of African Americans in Oregon. I was unable to make photo copies of the source but I was able to bring in paper and a pencil, as policy in the Special Collections department, to copy down any quotes that I wanted to incorporate into my paper. I used quotes from the beginning sections of McLagan's work to support my argument for the unique element in Oregon regarding the minute African American population leading up to World War II.

When I began the project for my History 407 course, I was originally thinking of focusing my research on the African American population at Oregon State University. I met with Erika Castano in the Archives department at the library to discuss sources that might pertain to that topic. It was Erika who suggested instead looking at housing in Northeast Portland. Following our conversation I followed my curiosity by searching the general library database, located through the OSU library homepage, to see what sources I could find regarding African Americans in the Portland area. I was able to locate about ten sources but only one fit within a time period I could incorporate. I was able to locate a dissertation from a University of Santa Clara student regarding the history of legislation and race in Oregon. Franz Schneider wrote "The 'Black Laws' in 1970 and the work gave me a sense of the early racism which African Americans faced when attempting to settle out West. I was able to draw from this source an

understanding of the reasoning behind the extremely small Black population, which still stands true in modern Oregon.

Through using the 'American History and Life' database with EBSCO, I was able to find many great articles and book reviews to help further my research efforts and complete various assignments for my History 407 class. By searching an author's name on the EBSCO database, I was able to locate a specific article, recommended by a professor, regarding the history of the Civil Rights movement in Scappoose, Oregon. The document was unavailable via the internet but I was able to request it via the Inter Library Loan database using the Journal name, volume and page number. I was able to locate to book reviews from the 'American History and Life' database, which I use to complete my Historiography assignment for the History 407 course and to research which books would be the most informative on my topic. The database was extremely easy to use and allowed me to access a variety of articles from different journals. I was then able to search the Inter Library Loan database to request any articles I was unable to locate online or through the Oregon State University Library.

I was also able to make ample use of the Oregon State University Archives. Erika Castano, who is on staff there, was an amazing resource to help point me in the direction of sources. I met with her twice and exchanged emails with her almost weekly. I was also able to use the Urban League Collection at the Archives for some of my research. In the Urban League Collection I was able to use the specific box dedicated to the organizations work with the Albina area. Although most of the documentation of meetings and councils occurred after the period I was researching, there was a folder of newspaper clippings which stretched back into the time period I needed. I was able to find multiple documents from local papers which helped shed light on the various building and Urban Renewal Projects. I used two of these clippings as primary material to show how Urban Renewal Projects were operating in Northeast Portland. Thank you for your time and consideration for my paper for this amazing award opportunity.

# Albina's Story

Meaghan Josh

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On July 30, 1967 racial tensions in Portland reached a boiling point in the hot sun of the inner city, erupting in a riot that took control of the streets of the city's African American neighborhood of Albina. Black youth reacted to what they saw as unjustified policing by setting buildings and cars ablaze, breaking windows of local businesses, looting, and mocking the police who took control of the urban streets for the following week. It was one of the first times Portlanders witnessed violence regarding race in the Rose City. The media portrayed the riot as a premeditated insurrection planned by Black anarchists seeking to overthrow white power. In reality, the conflict began when police and National Guardsmen surrounded a peaceful meeting of black activists in Irving Park, a local park in the Albina neighborhood of Northeast Portland. The media reacted to the incident by portraying a 'racial riot' in Portland's black parks, when really the incidents happened hours after the original park meeting. The media's portrayal of the incident as a community riot would further anger black Portlanders members, who felt the media's coverage was only perpetuating racism in the city. The dramatization of the 'disturbance' and its portrayal by the city's media was a reflection of the overall tensions created in the city by practices of racism and segregation.<sup>1</sup>

The city erupting in the flames of racism was the same city local officials presented as the beacon for the federal government's 'Model City' program, an effort to revive dilapidated inner city communities. Portland's urban renewal effort had begun in the early sixties as a neighborhood program aimed at revitalizing the Albina community. The initial goal was to reform not just housing but schooling and employment opportunities for African Americans. But as the 1967 riot suggests, Albina residents were

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<sup>1</sup> "Rapping About Albina 'Disturbance,'" "Portland- Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

less than satisfied with the results. Urban renewal efforts in the Albina community were unsuccessful because the Portland Housing Authority, City Planning Commission and local Portland governmental systems failed to address the city's deeply rooted racial disparities, a system of segregation and blocked opportunities that reached back to Oregon's early settlement. Without addressing the racial prejudice which existed in the city systems of Portland, planners of the Urban Renewal projects continually ran up against walls of apprehension and resistance.

### A Pattern of Black and White

In a 1961 report conducted by The League of Women Voters, white Portlanders told interviewers asking about integration in Portland, that African Americans "should have [their] own neighborhood, [even though] it may be wrong."<sup>2</sup> The League of Women Voters, a group of middle class white women who were concerned with the welfare of minority communities, examined attitudes throughout the Portland metropolitan area regarding the recent passage of The Fair and Equal Housing Act and the impending integration of the city's neighborhoods. The findings of the study uncover a resistance to the desegregation of the black neighborhood of Albina, "Most negroes are not buying in white areas. They wouldn't fight hostility but wait to move into segregated areas."<sup>3</sup> There was a peculiar attitude among white Portlanders of "They don't bother me and I don't bother them," regarding the city's black population.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1961 the tides were

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<sup>2</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 14.

<sup>3</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 15.

<sup>4</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 14.

turning and white Portlanders would be forced to face their largely ignored black neighbors head on. As one Portlander concluded regarding the newly unlawful practice segregation, "Negro neighbors could not have bought without the backing of the law-neighbors would have pressured to keep them out."<sup>5</sup> The League's study found an alarming prevalence of racism in the attitudes of white Portlanders, but these beliefs and systems of segregation to support them were nothing new to the Rose City. A pattern of segregation had been used by white Portlanders since the founding of the state in order to deal with what many viewed as Oregon's "Negro problem."<sup>6</sup>

Beginning with the settlement of the Oregon territory, white migrants who derived mainly from the South, established strict racial codes and laws. As the Oregon and California trails became established routes for migrants to enter the new western territories, thousands of Americans hit the road with dreams of cheap land and riches ahead. Many of the migrants who headed West during this period came from the Southern states, where slavery was still a legalized social system. Southern migrants brought with them ideologies derived from a racially based hierarchy, in which African Americans were seen as naturally inferior and subordinate. These racial ideologies were injected into the new settlements by Southern migrants, establishing them in both practice and law in the early Oregon territories.<sup>7</sup>

Although Oregon was admitted to the Union in 1859 as a free state, this meant little to African Americans who were banned by law from settling in the territory until the

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<sup>5</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Franz M. Schneider, "The 'Black Laws' in Oregon" (Master's of Science diss., University of Santa Clara, 1970), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Franz M. Schneider, "The 'Black Laws' in Oregon" (Master's of Science diss., University of Santa Clara, 1970), 1.

late nineteenth century. Leading up to the Civil War, an Oregon law barred any African American, free or enslaved, from living anywhere in the Oregon territory. As Franz M. Schneider argues, "One way in which white Oregonians attempted to deal with the question of Negro status prior to the Civil War was by avoiding Negroes."<sup>8</sup> Although there were cases of some African American settlement in Western Washington, Oregon remained predominantly white until after the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

Due to bans on African American settlement leading up to the Civil War, the population of blacks in Oregon remained minute in comparison to other states of the period. The lack of varied ethnic groups in Oregon mixed with the racist ideologies brought with early settlers created a racially prejudiced tone. It is important to understand these early racial relationships and how they influenced later interactions between African and White Oregonians. As Elizabeth McLagan argues, "It quickly became evident that the history of a small minority had to be placed in the larger context of the history of attitudes of the white community of Oregon in an attempt to uncover, if not fully explain, the peculiar and persistent prejudice against black people that existed in Oregon," referring to the later significance these early racial relations would play in the development of African American settlement in Oregon.<sup>10</sup> The early establishment of segregation would result in a disproportionate African American population in Oregon until the shipyard boom of World War II.

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<sup>8</sup> Franz M. Schneider, "The 'Black Laws' in Oregon" (Master's of Science diss., University of Santa Clara, 1970), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Franz M. Schneider, "The 'Black Laws' in Oregon" (Master's of Science diss., University of Santa Clara, 1970), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth McLagan, *A Peculiar Paradise: A History of Blacks in Oregon, 1778-1940*. (Imprint Portland, OR: The Georgia Press, 1980), vii.

World War II opened hundreds of employment opportunities in industry, drawing massive waves of African Americans to the shipyards of Portland. The war required an immense commitment of the American armed forces, which required unprecedented amounts equipment as two battlefronts raged in the Pacific and European theatres. Shipyards began producing vessels and equipment at unparalleled rates, particularly the West coast facilities because of the locality to the Pacific theatre. African Americans flooded the booming Northwest shipyards looking for work. These migrants were welcomed by employers seeking cheap labor in the large quantities needed to fill the wartime demand.

African Americans who migrated in unprecedented numbers, mainly from the Northeastern section of America, created Portland's first true black community in an area called Vanport. Today, the Portland Race Tracks lie on the ruins of what was once Portland's largest Black neighborhood. As the National Register of Historic Places notes, "During World War II, Portland gained a large influx of African-Americans to work in the shipyards and many were allowed to live in" adjacent communities, "but were segregated from other surrounding neighborhoods."<sup>11</sup> The low swamp lying lands were zoned for the community of Vanport by the Portland Housing Authority due to its easy access to the shipyards and the fact that the lands were deemed to have less than desirable conditions.

Within months of the community being established, a few thousand African Americans had erected shelter for their families. Most of Vanport's structures were tents or small shacks constructed from wood scraps, creating living conditions that were hardly

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<sup>11</sup> National Register for Historical Places Continuation Sheet, "Portland- Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 3.



tolerable in the wet Oregon climate. An article in the *Oregonian* in 1949 recalled the unsanitary and dangerous conditions in Vanport: "Here occur the fires that burn babies in their beds; here are the high rates of tuberculosis and other sickness; here grow up the American children whose homes are so unsatisfactory for work and play that their chances of becoming productive, law-abiding citizens are greatly impaired."<sup>12</sup> The argument above uses the families of those living in Vanport to raise the issue of decent low income housing, claiming poor housing will result in a population of unproductive and unlawful citizens. The article does not, however, make any direct reference to race in regards to the poor living conditions experienced by those living in Vanport. Instead the League of Women Voters focused on poverty as the root cause for the poor quality housing in Vanport.

By segregating the new black community to the neighborhood of Vanport, which lay adjacent to the city, Portland city planners were able to contain the new workforce and the culture they brought with them. White residents were not forced to face the "Negro problem," which had traditionally been avoided through segregation policies.<sup>13</sup> Segregation had once again provided an answer to the issue of "the unfamiliar presence of a large black population" which "presented a challenge for race relations" in Portland.<sup>14</sup> African Americans seemed content living in Vanport to white Portlanders, but in reality the families were enduring horrible living conditions due to their lack of options and inability to reach or form organizations to solve their issues.

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<sup>12</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Franz M. Schneider, "The 'Black Laws' in Oregon" (Master's of Science diss., University of Santa Clara, 1970), 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet for the Elliot Neighborhood MPS, "Portland-Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 8.

African Americans originally drawn to Vanport because of its close vicinity to the waterfront shipyards, found themselves locked inside the neighborhood by the Portland Housing Authority and Portland Real Estate Board. The Portland Housing Authority zoned the area as the only neighborhood with low income housing, meaning the only area most migrants could afford to reside in. The Real Estate Board wrote bylaws aimed at banning integrated neighborhoods or any sale which could damage the profit margins of a white homeowner, making Vanport their only choice for residence. Two African American residents recalled the issues they face in when searching for homes in the white regions of Northwest Portland, "This was a new house. The real estate agent said the house was tied up," and further stating "I inquired if this was open house. He replied yes. We went to the house and was refused entrance."<sup>15</sup> By 1940 there were around "13,160 temporary war houses" that "must be replaced," as deemed by League of Women Voters, with new adequate housing needed for the families of these dwellings.<sup>16</sup>

When Vanport flooded in 1948, African Americans were left without housing and no government aid while white Portlanders were left with a 'black' housing crisis. "On May 30, 1948, in a few minutes' time, 5,948 families were made homeless in the city of Portland," most of these African American migrants who had come to the city looking for wartime jobs in the shipyards.<sup>17</sup> Most of the rickety shacks of Vanport were quickly washed away and any structure left was water logged for weeks with mold and mildew

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<sup>15</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 15.

<sup>16</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>17</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

remaining on every surface. A few thousand African American families flooded into the city looking for housing to replace their destroyed homes.

City planners had to work quickly to find temporary shelter for the poverty stricken refugees. The Portland Housing Authority zoned areas along the city limits of Portland, including Guilds Lake and Park Side, for sites where temporary shelters would be erected.<sup>18</sup> Trailers and small tents became the only forms of shelter in the camps, these being “intended only for brief stop-gas use,” rather than as a permanent solution for the current housing crisis.<sup>19</sup> These trailers were unsuited for the “wet winter weather.” Further, “space is extremely limited, children in many families are divided among several trailers,” and “sanitary facilities are poor and their use by many families presents a moral problem.”<sup>20</sup> The housing crisis created by the Vanport flood became a central issue in Portland as the city entered the postwar years of the 1950s.

The Albina neighborhood provided the perfect answer to the Vanport refugee housing crisis in the eyes of the Portland Housing Authority. Albina had originally sprung up in the mid-1800s as the experiment of three business minded men. Named for one of the men’s daughters, the city soon grew to a commercial boomtown due to the “sawmill and engine and machine work” and eventually the railroads, all of which were all located in the region’s waterfront district.<sup>21</sup> The company’s employees also found

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<sup>18</sup> “League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings” by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>19</sup> “League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings” by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>20</sup> “League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings” by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Albina Scene Sixty Years Ago,” *The Oregonian*, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

residence in the community, thus creating Albina's first population, "German and Irish and Finish and Russian" immigrants drawn by the employment offered in the industrial fields.<sup>22</sup>

In 1891 Albina was integrated into the city limits of Portland, making it a district rather than an independent city. In many senses these early working class families were also segregated to Albina by the Willamette River, which separated the Northwest white neighborhoods from the Northeastern district, and by social codes. Following the onset of the Great Depression, employment opportunities in Albina vanished. By 1948, the Albina neighborhood consisted of cheap, dilapidated housing built around the turn of the century and failing businesses on shabby, urban streets. As an *Oregonian* article from the mid-1950s reflects what attracted the attention of the Portland Housing Authority, "Its houses fell into disrepair and thus were available for the sale to persons of low income."<sup>23</sup>

As Earl Spinney, a former Albina resident wrote in 1952 referring to Albina, "Death, old age, hard times and frozen rents have forced the sale of many houses needing repairs... They have been bought mostly by new coming Negroes."<sup>24</sup> Housing costs were a main factor Portland City Planners used to segregate African Americans into the dilapidated Albina neighborhoods. Most working families could not afford a house in the suburbs or on the Westside of Portland and there were "no funds available, federal or local," to begin assisting families displaced by the flood in Vanport.<sup>25</sup> For working class

<sup>22</sup> "Albina Scene Sixty Years Ago," *The Oregonian*, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Albina Scene Sixty Years Ago," *The Oregonian*, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>24</sup> "Albina Scene Sixty Years Ago," *The Oregonian*, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>25</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

minority families, affordable and decent housing were two separate ideals. City leaders hoped the movement of flood victims to Albina would solve the housing shortage while confining the black community.

The city's administrative bodies, such as the Portland Real-Estate Board and the Portland City Council, perpetuated segregation throughout the post World War II era with policies that placed racially based restrictions on housing. Showing the connection of Portland city administration and the real-estate community to the practices of segregation, the Albina population "became greater due to the lower cost housing and imaginary lines drawn by the real estate interests."<sup>26</sup> The Portland Real-Estate Board continuously reinforced segregation policies in its work by refusing to offer homes located in 'white' neighborhoods or suburbs to minorities. The Vice President of the Portland Real-Estate Board, Jeffery Holbrook, argued in 1954, "Reality boards do not under any circumstances have anything to do with segregation... We have only one thing in our code of ethics and that is never to sell property so that it will reduce the value of other properties in the area, and there can be a variety of reasons. It is the residents of the neighborhood who make the ruling."<sup>27</sup> However, a 1957 Portland Real Estate Board "Code of Ethics" declared that, "A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood."<sup>28</sup> The discrepancy in these two statements illustrate both

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<sup>26</sup> National Register for Historical Places Continuation Sheet, "Portland- Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Jeffery Holbrook to *Oregon Journal*, May 17, 1954, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>28</sup> "The Negro in Portland" by the City Club of Portland, May 8, 1957, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 62.

the perpetuation of segregation by the Portland Real Estate Board and other Portland reality groups, while also demonstrating the changing national attitudes against racism and segregation.

In the mid-fifties the national focus switched towards domestic issues, including housing, in reaction to the Cold War. Various community organizations in Portland, including the Urban League and League of Women Voters, began to look into the both poverty and the segregation occurring in the city's housing. The League of Women Voters was comprised of middle class women concerned about the welfare of minority and poverty stricken groups around nation. In Portland, the group became highly involved in the plight of the Vanport refugees following the destruction of the community. The group wrote numerous articles in local Portland newspapers arguing that it was the duty of the local government and community to provide aid to those in peril. As one article from the League argued, "If we want public housing in Portland, we have to have a complete survey of our housing needs, make our own request from our own local housing authority for funds, and submit our own concrete plans for project construction. The entire initiative must be local."<sup>29</sup> The group proposed using "prefabricated houses" with the federal government helping the "reduction of construction cost" by "giving credit to producers of new materials."<sup>30</sup> The local community would be able to make the "determination of specific income limitations

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<sup>29</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>30</sup> "League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings" by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

related to local conditions,” in regards to aid distribution.<sup>31</sup> Although this specific proposal had no mention of integration, the League of Women Voters would one of the first to introduce the idea of local initiative in Portland as a means of dealing with the issue of poverty and low income housing opportunities.

Where the League of Women Voters sought out local means to combat poverty, the Urban League of Portland was a group dedicated to the causes of African Americans and racial equality in Portland. In the early 1950s, the group began surveying the Portland community to uncover its racial attitudes. The survey was planned in response to Portland’s city government’s developing interest in integrated housing. The city government sought to establish Portland as the beacon for the Model City program, a part of Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ plans, in addition to bringing federal funding to Portland. As the Urban League stated in the introduction to the study’s report, the survey was to investigate the “treatment of Portland’s non-Caucasian citizens in the housing field,” which they found to be “a matter for shame and disgrace.”<sup>32</sup> The survey set up two test areas, one located in an all white neighborhood and one located in a previously established integrated neighborhood. Surveyors traveled door to door through the two test areas to ask community members their views on race and integrated housing. The study’s authors concluded that “Respondents were about equally divided between those who favored and those who opposed integration in housing.”<sup>33</sup> However the conclusions for “prejudice expressed” found “35 per cent showing little or no prejudice, 32 per cent

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<sup>31</sup> “League of Women Voters Committee Outlines Need for Slum Clearance and Building of Low-Cost Dwellings” by Cynthia Wentworth, *Oregonian Sunday Edition*, April 10, 1949, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Nonwhite Neighbors and Property Prices in Portland, Oregon,” 1956, Urban League of Portland, PAM 362.84 072 non1956, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Nonwhite Neighbors and Property Prices in Portland, Oregon,” 1956, Urban League of Portland, PAM 362.84 072 non1956, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 17.

moderately prejudiced and 33 per cent extremely prejudice,” suggesting that many Portlanders continued to express racist beliefs in the post World War II era.<sup>34</sup>

The studies done by local community groups reflected the racial tensions in Portland and helped establish the case for housing integration. The City Club of Portland, a predominantly white male group established to compose reports and debate topics regarding various governmental issues in Portland, published another study focusing on “The Negro in Portland”.<sup>35</sup> The study looked at all aspects regarding African Americans in Portland, including background of racial relations and economic opportunities in the city. In regards to housing in Albina, the group found there was, “segregation and compression of Negroes into restricted living areas being forced by Portland realtors and the Portland Housing Authority,” connecting Portland’s local government and housing systems to the segregation policies represented in the community.<sup>36</sup> The City Club added that these discrimination policies were “dangerous by creating a whole tension area, and further is the beginning of a slum area which can become extremely costly to our entire community.”<sup>37</sup> These findings reflected the importance of addressing the issues regarding housing segregation as a form of discrimination.

One of the most important details listed in the conclusion of the study found, “a tendency on the part of our city authorities to minimize the present racial situation.”<sup>38</sup>

The findings of these two reports conducted in the fifties would also play heavily in the

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<sup>34</sup> “Nonwhite Neighbors and Property Prices in Portland, Oregon,” 1956, Urban League of Portland, PAM 362.84 072 non1956, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 17.

<sup>35</sup> “The Negro in Portland” by the City Club of Portland, May 8, 1957, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library,

<sup>36</sup> “The Negro in Portland” by the City Club of Portland, May 8, 1957, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 69.

<sup>37</sup> “The Negro in Portland” by the City Club of Portland, May 8, 1957, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 69.

<sup>38</sup> “The Negro in Portland” by the City Club of Portland, May 8, 1957, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 69.



later passage of the Fair and Equal Housing Act in 1961. The reports established the fact of segregation in Portland's Albina community while also addressing the issues facing the African American population within the community regarding poverty and decent living conditions. Portland's black community and their allies was faced with fact based reports calling for change in Albina, and it would be the choice on the part of city authorities to ignore rising racial tensions that would fuel the later racial problems that would come to a boil in the mid 1960s.

### **From Fair and Equal to Urban Renewal**

Beginning in the late 1950s, Portland aimed to establish itself as the national wide example for the federal 'Model City' program, focusing on race relationships and the integration of housing and in the workplace. The 'Model City' project one of the components of the 'Great Society' federal programs created Lyndon Johnson. President Johnson sought to continue Kennedy's War on Poverty with a new direction of change, beginning with the people and leading up to the government. The project was founded upon the idea that federal social welfare programs could be used to "get the poverty out of the people – and afterward the people out of poverty."<sup>39</sup> The plans of the Great Society project focused on providing poverty stricken Americans with the tools of "job training, education, cultural enrichment, political activism," and more in order to provide new opportunities to raise themselves out of poverty.<sup>40</sup> The 'Model City' program gave American cities funding to rehabilitate urban areas, eliminating the slums which plagued the cities and housed most low income families. These cities were instructed by the federal government to invest the designated funds into these impoverished urban areas,

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<sup>39</sup> David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 106.

<sup>40</sup> David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 106.

with the goal enabling the integration of the slums and suburbs to create a contemporary utopia.

Portland's city leaders were attracted to the 'Model City' program as a means to place their city on the national radar, attracting Americans to the area for economic and political growth. The city requested federal aid to implement the 'Model City' project, beginning their efforts by tackling the issue of segregation in Portland. The Portland Housing Authority selected a handful of African American families to relocate throughout the city. These families were scattered into traditionally all white neighborhoods in an attempt to physically desegregate the communities, while also attempting to open minds to the idea of integrated neighborhoods. The experimentation began in the late fifties and was evaluated around 1960, with mixed results derived from the findings. Looking at a population survey taken in 1960, it is clear that the majority of Portland's black community still resided in Albina. Black dots are used to represent African American households located in Portland city limits. The survey shows a dark cluster of points in a region of about twenty city blocks, representing the Albina community. On the population survey there are random points representing the families who were participating in the Model City Project.<sup>41</sup> Over a period of about three years, the project accomplished little in regards to city wide integration and even less with racist attitudes held by white residents.

Portland's government treated integrated housing as a social experiment, rather than aiming efforts at beginning the movement towards completely integrated neighborhoods. In 1961 the Oregon state legislature passed 'Oregon's Fair and Equal

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<sup>41</sup> "Distribution of Negro Population," 1960, Stella Morris Collection, MSS 1585, Box 11, Folder 10, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

Housing Act', partly as a result of groups such as the Urban League and League of Women Voter's work and as a result of Portland's city leadership's desire to develop Portland as the racially integrated model for the nation. An the Executive Director of the Albina Improvement Project *Oregonian* article reflected on the desire of Portland to become the national standard, "representatives of other cities come here to see how it's done."<sup>42</sup> The national Department of Housing and Urban Affairs also commented on Portland's role, stating in 1966 that the 'Model City' driven projects were "one of the outstanding neighborhood rehabilitation programs," later adding the project was "on its way to becoming the model project in the western United States."<sup>43</sup>

The interest of Portland's city leaders in the 'Model City' program would eventually culminate in the passage of the Fair and Equal Housing Act in Portland in 1961. Oregonians were encouraged to show the nation that the state was on the forefront of modernity by voting for a bill which focused on integration and equality efforts. A 1960 by Multnomah County Administrators found that "Negroes in the Albina area comprises 95% of nonwhites" in the entire city.<sup>44</sup> Similarly a study by the League of Women Voters Portland chapter found "11,000 Negroes" located in the "Albina district," with the "second largest percentage of Negroes" living in areas "adjacent or near to the Albina area."<sup>45</sup> Oregon's state government introduced the bill to voters as a means of correcting these statistics to model integration and equal treatment of minorities for the

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<sup>42</sup> "Albina's Rehabilitation Draws National Attention," "Portland- Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

<sup>43</sup> "Albina's Rehabilitation Draws National Attention," "Portland- Neighborhoods- Albina," Vertical File, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

<sup>44</sup> "Some Social Facts Relating to Public Assistance in the Albina Area" by Multnomah County Officials, Stella Morris House Collection, MSS 1585, Box 1, Folder 14, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, 1.

<sup>45</sup> "A Study of Awareness of the Oregon Fair Housing Law and a Sampling of Attitudes Toward Integrated Neighborhood Living" by the League of Women Voters of Portland, Oregon, 1961, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 36, Oregon Historical Research Library, 20.