

THOSE WHO DESIRE VERY MUCH TO STAY: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND
HOUSING IN VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON, 1940 TO 1960

By

MELISSA E. E. WILLIAMS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of History

AUGUST 2007

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
MELISSA E. E. WILLIAMS find it satisfactory and recommend that it be
accepted.

Chair

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis reflects an effort to uncover an intriguing yet little-known history of my home city. I could not have pieced together this significant slice of the past without the work of local historians and renowned scholars who have dedicated their personal and professional lives to uncovering the roles of African Americans in the Pacific Northwest.

I am grateful to Dr. Laurie Mercier who has encouraged and positively challenged my research and writing, and a special thanks to Dr. Patricia Schechter and Dr. Robert Bauman for their enthusiasm and feedback through this process.

Assistance from these individuals made my research process interesting and rewarding: Jorge Lizárraga; Steve Towell of the Vancouver Housing Authority; Ken Pearrow of Clark County Geographic Information System; Lanny Weaver at the State Archives, Southwest Washington Branch; Andrew Penta of Clark County; Raelyn McJilton of the City of Vancouver; staff at the University of Washington Special Collections, the Washington State Historical Society, and Washington State University Libraries; and Earl Ford of the Vancouver Branch of the NAACP. I am particularly grateful to my narrators who invited me into their homes and shared with me some of their brightest and most difficult life experiences.

My mother and father have shared valuable life lessons, encouraged me to walk my own path, and expressed an unwavering belief in my talents and abilities – for those things, and so many more, thank you. Nancy Norris, my late grandmother, valued education, embraced cultural diversity, and impressed upon me the importance of civic responsibility. I hope I have done her proud.

To my good friend Katherine Olson, a heartfelt thank you for your time and emotional support, for countless late-night conversations, your pragmatism and humor, and your relentless cheerleading. You are a rock in the swiftest currents.

THOSE WHO DESIRE VERY MUCH TO STAY: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND
HOUSING IN VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON, 1940 TO 1960

Abstract

by Melissa E. E. Williams, M.A.
Washington State University
August 2007

Chair: Laurie Mercier

This study explores housing conditions for African Americans in Vancouver, Washington during and after the Second World War. Vancouver's African American history has been overshadowed by local historians and scholars who study the Portland metropolitan area, as a result, the social conditions and contributions of Vancouver's black residents have not been fully explored in context of World War II, the Cold War, nor the early Civil Rights Era. This thesis is the author's attempt to initiate scholarly research about blacks in Southwest Washington State.

Vancouver's black population boomed from 18 in 1940 to nearly 9,000 in 1945 as war industries drew thousands of African Americans to the Pacific Northwest. Vancouver created a housing authority to accommodate all newcomers, in the process initiating the city's first public housing, which was racially integrated.

At the war's end, the Housing Authority sold many of its temporary units to scale down its property management, forcing many residents out of its projects and into private homes or to other cities. The permanent units the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA) had maintained for returned veterans and low-income tenants fell away in 1958 when the Authority turned over its properties to the City of Vancouver.

Because city officials found public housing undesirable their 1950s urban renewal plan platted suburban communities where VHA housing once stood. This redevelopment impacted those black residents who no longer had access to affordable public housing. Concerned citizens in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and local churches mobilized during late 1940s and into the 1950s to garner social and municipal support for black homeownership.

Yet despite efforts on the parts of African American individuals and social and civil rights organizations, Vancouver's black population dropped dramatically as a result of the waning war economy, the loss of affordable public housing, and incidents of racial intolerance. Many African American migrants who had wished to stay in Vancouver after the war's end found it impossible to settle permanently in the city.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
 CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. MIGRATION AND THE WAR YEARS	19
The Shipyards	25
The Creation of the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA)	31
Race and Vancouver's War Housing	36
3. POSTWAR PROSPECTS	40
The VHA's Shift Toward Permanency	41
Surveying Black Tenants	46
Employment Prospects	53
Social Realities for African Americans	57
4. SOCIAL ACTION, THE POSTWAR VHA, AND CITY PLANS.....	64
The VHA Purchases Wartime Properties.....	71
Urban Renewal	80
Civil Rights Action.....	84
5. THE PRIVATE MARKET	88
Neighborhoods and Race	91
The VHA Closes	97
6. CONCLUSION.....	103

BIBLIOGRAPHY	110
--------------------	-----

APPENDICES

A. THE AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION OF VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON, 1900 TO 1960	121
B. RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE WASHINGTON STATE OMNIBUS CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1957	122
C. EXCERPT FROM JEAN GRIFFIN INTERVIEW	123
D. EXCERPT FROM FLORENE DUFRESNE INTERVIEW	124

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

During and after the Second World War the United States experienced remarkable economic and social change both as a result of wartime and postwar climates and in spite of them. For millions of African Americans the 1940s and 1950s provided solid ground to push for financial and social opportunities, yet in those decades blacks also met indifference and resistance to their efforts. Those national themes played out in the Pacific Northwest, a region with few African Americans but diligent interracial groups that fought for equality in employment and housing. For Vancouver, a city in the southwest corner of Washington State, housing became the most pressing challenge when thousands of black and white migrants flooded the city to work in Kaiser shipyards, and other war-related industries, beginning in 1942. Over the next twenty years, Vancouver wrestled with the prospect of housing new residents, particularly its African American citizens whose postwar number dropped but comprised the largest nonwhite population the city had ever accommodated.

The West appealed to wartime migrants who had lived through the Depression and were lured by the promise of steady employment and affordable housing, at least for as long as the war lasted. Though historians have documented northward movement of blacks out of the South beginning in the 1910s, many, such as Neil Wynn,¹ neglect to discuss westward movement beginning around the same time and

¹ Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, rev. ed., (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), 14. Wynn's research offers a view of the war's economic, social, and psychological effects on blacks, but the study is an overview of national trends, which leaves little room for regional examinations. Though he give attention to westward movement, his focus is on California.

continuing into the 1950s.² Two million blacks relocated to northern and western industrial areas during the 1940s alone,³ that movement increased those regions' populations by 85 percent.⁴

Those who have researched blacks in western states during the Second World War have focused heavily on race transformations in the largest cities – Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. Medium-sized cities such as Richmond and Oakland, California and Portland and Vanport, Oregon⁵ have received adequate attention from Quintard Taylor, Stuart McElderry, and Rudy Pearson but those scholars have not broadened their scope to consider the impact of wartime population booms on lesser-known cities or suburbs of the larger cities on which they focus.⁶ Vancouver, Washington is most often subsumed in studies of the two Oregon cities because of its close proximity to Portland and where Vanport once stood. Vancouver and Portland straddle the northern and southern shores of the Columbia River; their prewar citizens had traveled between the two for work and recreation for decades by a ferry system operated by Pacific Railway, Light and Power Company and the Interstate Bridge,

² Quintard Taylor, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest 1788-1970" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1977), 238.

³ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," Princeton University, <http://www.princeton.edu/~jconley/ushistory/korstad> (accessed July 1, 2007).

⁴ Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Live Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 79.

⁵ Manly Maben's *Vanport* is the most recognized work on the city, which was a Housing Authority of Portland war project and the state's second largest city until the Columbia River washed it away in a 1948 flood. Manly Maben, *Vanport* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1987). Vanport receives mention or significant discussion in a number of works devoted to the Northwest and is also a common thesis subject, one of the most insightful is Charlotte Lee Kilbourn's 1944 survey of city residents in *Factors Conducive to the Migration to and From Vanport City*. Charlotte Lee Kilbourn, "Factors Conducive to the Migration to and from Vanport City" (master's thesis, Reed College, 1944). See also Lillian Kessler, "The Social Structure of a War Housing Community—East Vanport City" (master's thesis, Reed College, 1945).

⁶ Amy Kesselman explores Portland and Vancouver but her focus is on women in shipyard work. She does not address Vancouver's community or housing in depth. Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

erected in 1917.⁷ Despite the shared populations the cities developed strikingly different racial histories. Though historians who research Washington may find it awkward to include Vancouver in their studies because of its distance from the state's other major cities – Olympia, Tacoma, Seattle, and Spokane – they have done a disservice to Vancouverites by neglecting their stories or assuming their World War II narrative mimicked those of Portland and Vanport.

Similarly, scholars have devoted significant attention to those cities that experienced extreme racial residential segregation and conflict during the World War II and postwar periods, ignoring those cities that had less dramatic experiences. Neil Wynn relies heavily upon incidents of racial violence in American cities to support his argument that wartime race relations became frigid largely over housing shortages.⁸ African American migration during those decades is typically discussed in terms of how their movement prompted massive disruptions or violent culture clashes, but not all cities inundated with black migrants responded by segregating – or reinforcing existing segregation in – public accommodations, housing, and employment. The major cities on which historians prefer to focus grappled with conspicuous, large-scale racial conflict rather than the covert or ambiguous racial intolerance smaller cities faced.

Researchers' decisions to focus on the most extreme examples of racial intolerance is an effective way to illustrate the magnitude of difficulty Afro-Americans faced in some circumstances, but the amplification of extreme events overshadows smaller cities such as Vancouver in which blacks experienced a relatively smooth transition into a racially integrated and nonviolent environment. Laying a foundation of dramatic racial upheaval may be one way in which historians explain the emergence of

⁷ "History of Interstate-5 Bridge," *Reflections: A Look Back at Clark County's History*, columbian.com <http://www.rtc.wa.gov/media/bridge.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸ Wynn, 63-73.

the 1950s Civil Rights Movement and can explain the fixation on extreme racial upheaval. However, Vancouver's black activism demonstrates African Americans need not have experienced *de jure* segregation or racial violence in northern or western cities in order to contribute to the World War II and postwar narrative. Not all northern and western cities reacted hostilely to back newcomers, nor did black migrants use racially tolerant environments as an excuse to abandon of the struggle for equality.

Equality in education, employment, and housing topped black Americans' wartime and postwar concerns in the 1940s and 1950s. During conflict, blacks asked, if the U.S. government could devote millions of dollars and lives to fight racism and fascism overseas, should it not also promote racial equality and democracy within its own borders? The Double V campaign was evidence of the black community's simultaneous commitment to the war effort and to civil rights. Historian Frederick S. Voss explains the roots of the campaign and its popular slogan and symbol which were promoted after a man wrote to the *Pittsburgh Courier* to suggest the wartime slogan "V for Allied Victory" be doubled for African Americans.⁹ The *Courier* adopted the idea and created a graphic of an eagle above two large vees and a banner that read "Double Victory." "DEMOCRACY" hovered over the bird and the phrase "AT HOME - ABROAD" sat at the bottom. The *Pittsburgh Courier* was the nation's most widely circulated black newspaper, so when it featured the emblem on the front page of its February 7, 1942 issue, word of the clever slogan spread. Voss notes "letters poured in

⁹ Frederick Voss, *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1994). For more on the role of the black press during the Second World War, see Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975); Carl Senna, *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: F. Watts, 1993); Patrick Scott Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press During World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); C. L. R. James et al., *Fighting Racism in World War II: A Week by Week Account of the Struggle Against Racism and Discrimination in the United States During 1939-45*, ed. Fred Stanton (New York: Monad Press, 1980).

congratulating the *Courier* on its double-barreled challenge to oppression at home as well as abroad.” He explains the theme’s popularity, as it began to appear on posters and sheet music; some women even wore a Double V hairstyle.¹⁰ The fervor can be explained by the significance of the slogan not just as a clever adaptation of existing wartime rhetoric, but as a philosophy.

Millions of African Americans refused to devote their money, time, and lives to the government’s effort to transplant American freedoms abroad while it denied nonwhites many of those freedoms at home. As a group, blacks had to reconcile their patriotism to a Jim Crow nation – a country with segregated armed forces, unequal access to public accommodations and education, mechanisms to squelch the black vote, and federal permission to enter defense industries only under the threat of a massive protest. The Double V campaign reminded blacks of their twofold mission to assist in the war effort while fighting for equality; they used their wartime gains and experiences to launch the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Inclusion in the defense effort and practice in making demands for civil rights gave a foundation and experience from which blacks could draw in postwar struggles for equality.

African Americans had to rally merely for the chance to participate in the war’s defense industries. A. Philip Randolph is credited with having prodded the federal government into opening the door to black employment in war-related industries.¹¹

¹⁰ Stanley Nelson, *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords*, VHS (San Francisco: Half Nelson Productions, 1998).

¹¹ Randolph was one of the nation’s most prominent African Americans. He co-founded *The Messenger* magazine in 1917 to address issues pertaining to African Americans and to challenge the ideas of President Wilson, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Randolph is best known as a tireless labor and civil rights activist who established the first black labor union – the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters – in 1925 and the man who persuaded President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 in 1941. He also served as vice president of the AFL-CIO in 1955 and co-organized the 1963 March on Washington. His life and work is detailed in Jervis Anderson’s *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); Andrew Edmund Kersten’s *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the*

Randolph's 20 years of experience in African American labor guided his 1941 attempts to convince President Roosevelt to mandate all war industries employ and retain black workers. He wrote an article in January of that year suggesting 10,000 blacks march in Washington, D.C. to "demand the right to work and fight for our country."¹² The call caught the attention of other black leaders including those with influence in the capital, such as Walter White, who suggested to F.D.R. that he meet with Randolph. Randolph was denied a meeting with the president until he finally agreed in June – due in large part to Eleanor Roosevelt's influence – at which time White warned Roosevelt of a mobilization of 100,000 blacks to the nation's capital.¹³

Upon advice from advisors who relayed nothing short of an executive order would correct discrimination in war industries and government, the president signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. Randolph called off his march. Though Randolph and others had pressed for racial equality in government and the armed forces as well as industry, most blacks were satisfied with E.O. 8802's ban only on "discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries of Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin."¹⁴

Those African Americans interested in war industry work walked through every door Executive Order 8802 opened. Between April 1940 to the same month in 1944 the number of blacks in the nation's work force rose from 4.4 million to 5.3 million, even though Afro-Americans were not allowed to reap the benefits of the war boom until the middle of 1942 because white workers took precedence for the decade's first year and a

Vanguard (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); and Paula F. Pfeffer's *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

¹² Wynn, 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

half.¹⁵ But by 1942 industry growth and the siphoning of workers into the military provoked industries into calling upon all possible manpower, which included women and African Americans.¹⁶ War jobs paid well. Wynn explains as a result of war work the average American weekly earnings nearly doubled from \$23.86 in 1939 to \$44.39 a mere six years later, and notes that incomes of the nation's lowest paid workers increased by 68 percent.¹⁷ That increase was meaningful for the disproportionate number the country's black citizens who occupied that bottom rung of wage earners.

The Pacific Northwest had a history of lucrative wartime jobs, but only the scale of World War II industries and their high wages attracted mass numbers of African Americans to the region – nearly 9,000 to Vancouver between 1943 and 1945,¹⁸ most of whom worked in Henry J. Kaiser's Vancouver shipyard. Vancouver, Washington was a natural choice for shipbuilding not only for its proximity to the Columbia River but for its ready-made port and experience providing materials and labor for defense purposes. During World War I army personnel and civilians in Vancouver processed spruce lumber for wooden framed, cloth-covered planes under the auspices of the Spruce Production Division, a federal agency.¹⁹ The city was also home to a shipyard whose wooden cargo ships carried supplies to Europe for the Great War.²⁰ Once again, to fill

¹⁵ Ibid., 55. For details on wartime black employment see Robert C. Weaver's articles, "Negro Labor Since 1929," *Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 1 (January 1950): 20-38; "The Employment of the Negro in War Industries," *Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3, *The American Negro in World War I and World War II* (Summer 1943): 386-396; "Recent Events in Negro Union Relationships," *Journal of Political Economy* 52, no. 3 (September 1944): 234-249; "Negro Employment in the Aircraft Industry," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 59, no. 4 (August 1945): 597-625; "Racial Employment Trends in National Defense," *Phylon* (1940-1956) 2, no. 4 (4th Quarter 1941): 337-358; "Racial Employment Trends in National Defense, Part II," *Phylon* (1940-1956) 3, no. 1 (1st Quarter 1942): 22-30.

¹⁶ Wynn, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸ June Herzog, "A Study of the Negro Defense Worker in the Portland-Vancouver Area" (master's thesis, Reed College, 1944), 78.

¹⁹ City of Vancouver, Washington, Vancouver Housing Authority, *Housing in War and Peace: The Story of Public Housing in Vancouver, Washington* (1972), 6.

²⁰ Ibid.

the Allies' demand for war materials, industry needed labor, which it attracted to its manufacturing centers. Seattle's Boeing Company had 4,000 employees on its payroll in 1939; a number which soared to 10,000 in June 1941, 20,000 in September, and 30,000 by the time the nation declared war in December.²¹ In September of 1940 the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) opened a Vancouver plant that was the first in the western states to produce aluminum by hydropower, made possible by recently constructed Columbia River dams. Alcoa would soon dedicate its successful aluminum production methods to the World War II effort.²²

At the same time Washington industries accelerated, the defense machine began churning for Vancouver's neighbor. In 1940 Commercial Iron Works received Portland's first defense contract, followed the next year by Albina Shipyard and Willamette Iron and Steel.²³ These companies quickly absorbed local labor, which prompted a movement of non-Portlanders into the city, Vancouver accommodated much of the spillover.²⁴ Such industrial growth for the allied defense in northern and western cities explains the movement of Southern migrants in 1940 and early 1941, well before the United States entered the global conflict. Anchoring war jobs was bittersweet for many blacks, as earning wages high was satisfying, but contending with challenges in finding homes in centers of war industry proved frustrating.

In Wynn's treatment of African Americans and wartime housing, he illuminates the limitations blacks faced in securing it. White residents determined to keep African Americans out of their neighborhoods often enforced racial restrictive covenants or

²¹ Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 161.

²² Ted Van Arsdol, *Vancouver on the Columbia* (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1986), 52-53, 118-19.

²³ Rudy Pearson, "African Americans in Portland, Oregon, 1940-1950: Work and Living Conditions - A Social History" (PhD diss., Washington State University, 1996), 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

used intimidation and threats to prevent nonwhites from moving into their communities. Realtors often refused to show homes to blacks and banks often refused to give loans.²⁵ Housing in the private market provided no relief, as there was a shortage of homes and those available in white neighborhoods most often went to whites.

Donald O. Cowgill and Robert C. Weaver agree that housing conditions for blacks in a number of cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, and St. Louis, worsened as their concentration in ghettos became denser.²⁶ Proof of unimproved housing opportunity lies in the fact that two out of three urban Afro-Americans lived in “rented poverty” by 1947 despite an increase in non-farm home ownership during the war years.²⁷ Housing conditions for black Americans, as a whole, did not improve in the 1940s because of limited government action and, despite their improved purchasing power, the refusal by homeowners, realtors, banks, and potential neighbors to assist or accept would-be African American homeowners.²⁸

Though government housing appeared to be a solution to private discrimination in wartime, it proved equally elusive. The National Housing Agency (NHA), created in August 1942 to oversee federal housing projects, operated under a policy of non-discrimination, but had no way to enforce its requirement. The NHA’s racial tolerance was also ineffective in persuading private financiers and influencing local laws, which

²⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, vol. 1, (New York: Harper & Brothers 1944), 622-627.

²⁶ Wynn, 65.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cowgill and Weaver provide more thorough expatiations than Wynn of why black Americans did not experience wartime housing prosperity. Donald O. Cowgill, “Trends in Residential Segregation of Nonwhites in American Cities, 1940-1950,” *American Sociological Review* 21, no. 1. (February 1956): 43-47. Robert C. Weaver, “The Employment of the Negro in War Industries,” *Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3, *The American Negro in World War I and World War II* (Summer 1943).

prohibited integration in some areas.²⁹ Those elements helped to restrict black access to defense housing throughout the war. Cowgill's 1956 study of racial housing restrictions revealed that segregation increased during 1940 and 1950, a finding that other historians support.³⁰ Wynn provides the figures:

In 1941 only 4,600 or 1.4 per cent of the total number of privately and publicly financed homes for war workers were for Afro-Americans although it was said that more than 20 million dollars were being spent on homes for blacks. By the end of 1944, 8.6 per cent or 115,389 out of the total 1,336,141 privately and publicly financed homes were for blacks. These figures obscure the fact that blacks received a greater number (and a greater proportion) of the publicly financed homes than they did of those privately financed: only 4 per cent, approximately 19,000 of the privately financed homes were for Afro-Americans in 1944, compared with 16.4 per cent or 96,461 of the public housing.³¹

The statistics indicate a disproportionate amount of housing aid to white workers. The Federal Public Housing Authority³² was responsible for the slight improvement in numbers for both whites and blacks, but overall neither the government nor private industry could supply homes as quickly as war workers needed them due to low revenue and a shortage of building materials.³³

Fortunately for black migrants to Vancouver, Washington public war housing provided accommodations with few of the problems other cities faced. The City established the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA) in early 1942 to house workers and their families, which it did in 12,000 affordable rental houses and apartment units. The dwellings accommodated over 50,000 people at any given time and boasted the

²⁹ Wynn, 64.

³⁰ Ibid., 65; Wendy Plotkin, "'Hemmed In': The Struggle Against Racial Restrictive Covenants and Deed Restrictions in Post-World War II Chicago," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94, no. 1 (2001): 39-69. Wendell Bell criticizes Cowgill's findings in "Comments on Cowgill's Trends in Residential Segregation of Non-whites," *American Sociological Review*, xxii (April 1957): 221-222. Bell concludes that because Cowgill used a small sample size, his figures erroneously indicate there was *less* segregation than truly existed.

³¹ Wynn, 65.

³² Formerly the U.S. Housing Authority.

³³ Wynn, 65.

lowest rental rates of any government housing on the Pacific Coast.³⁴ Black arrivals had access to homes under an official policy of racial integration; however, it did not take long for some black residents to suspect the VHA of *de facto* segregation within its housing projects. Though suspicious residents resented the inequality, they did not mobilize to force integration. Rather, they mobilized after the war to secure affordable private housing once VHA residents were phased out of public housing.

Housing in Vancouver's private market appeared open to all regardless of color or ethnicity throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The City did not write race-based restrictive codes to redline certain areas of town as black areas. There is only scant evidence to suggest the Vancouver Realty Board coordinated efforts to prevent sales to African Americans in wartime and after 1945, and though some individual sellers and landlords were reluctant to allow blacks to purchase or rent homes, the residential structure remained officially open.

Upon learning of those few instances of private housing discrimination such groups as the Vancouver branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Mayor's Committee on Open Housing acted to address racial intolerance. The NAACP's vocal dedication to housing concerns might suggest that city officials could not have ignored racial strife, and the existence of the Mayor's Committee might also suggest contentiousness on the part of city officials, but Vancouver City Council meeting minutes reveal no concerns. Council minutes from 1942 to 1961 reflect no discussion of race and housing, or even black citizens, save for two entries.

³⁴ "Housing in War and Peace: The Story of Public Housing in Vancouver, Washington," (Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority, 1972), 50. Though it housed 50,000 people at any given time, the Vancouver Housing Authority tallied over 190,000 people lived in its facilities during the war due to high worker turnover rates at the shipyards and Alcoa. "Housing," 32.

City councilmen's failure to address race matters is curious and may correlate with the callousness with which they refused low-income housing to postwar residents who were forced to vacate Housing Authority units. A disproportionate percentage of African Americans relied on the VHA for postwar shelter, as many lost their war industry jobs and their replacement jobs, on average, paid less than those of their white counterparts. Limited affordable private housing meant a substantial number of blacks would have benefited from access to low-rent homes in the 1950s, but the city chose not provide them due – at least in part – to negative public response to proposed low-income housing in the late 1940s.

One might argue perhaps the City Council did not recognize the degree – however slight compared to major cities' racial conflicts – of racial residential problems because the city did not enact *de jure* segregation. Yet the NAACP so persistently appealed to the community, state groups, and agencies in its efforts to lobby for fair housing that it seems unlikely the City Council was not aware of the call for action. Municipal apathy was a common wartime reaction to African American problems across the nation, according to Wynn, and that neglect may have factored into Vancouver's climate and carried into postwar years. Perhaps council members were unwilling to help resolve the problems blacks faced, or perhaps council members recognized isolated occurrences of race discrimination in housing and simply believed the problems too few and far between to justify official action of any sort.

But action was precisely what the national NAACP and other civil rights organizations demanded of municipal governments and the federal government during the global conflict and afterward, particularly with regard to access to affordable, decent housing. The NAACP strengthened its commitment to securing education, employment, and housing for African Americans during the war years by bolstering its

nationwide membership from 50,000 in 1940 to nearly 500,000 in six years' time.³⁵

During the Second World War and Cold War the Association stepped in stride with the goals its founders set in 1909 – advocating equal opportunity for all Americans in every aspect of social and political life.³⁶ In Vancouver, the local branch of the NAACP pushed for affordable postwar housing above all else, agreeing with Gunnar Myrdal's assertion that "housing is much more than just shelter."³⁷

Sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's consideration of the fair housing fight during the first half of the twentieth century reveals that housing is, indeed, more than shelter. They found that African Americans' unequal access to housing has played a significant, perhaps the most significant, role in keeping many blacks poor. Even more than inadequate opportunities in education and employment, residential restrictions have contributed to African American poverty.³⁸ Realtors and municipal ordinances that hemmed blacks into certain areas of cities had a profound impact on African Americans' psychological, social, physical, and financial health. Myrdal's analysis of the non-financial consequences of racial residential segregation and black concentration in selected areas presented a dim portrait of the mental toll of overcrowded living conditions, the emotional weight of social isolation from and

³⁵ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," Princeton University, <http://www.princeton.edu/~jconley/ushistory/korstad> (accessed July 1, 2007); Laura Clark and Chris Bryan, "Historian Discusses Past Racial Hypocrisy," *Baylor Lariat*, <http://www.baylor.edu/Lariat/news.php?action=story&story=13310> (accessed June 30, 2007); August Meier and John H. Bracey, Jr., "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America,'" *Journal of Southern History* 59 (February 1993): 3-30, 21.

³⁶ For general NAACP history see Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Darren Rhym, *The NAACP* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002); Risa Lauren Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (London: Routledge, 2007).

³⁷ Myrdal, 375.

³⁸ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

rejection by other racial groups, and the increased rates of illness and disease among blacks in dense urban areas.³⁹

Weighing on those detrimental effects were financial limitations. Massey and Denton recognize the financial inequality that results from barring blacks from certain areas and densifying them in others – preventing African Americans from purchasing valuable real estate in desirable areas denied a large number of them the chance to invest and grow their resources, as historically property ownership has been the most effective means for Americans to achieve financial security. The sociologists conclude racial residential segregation has been a significant cause of black urban poverty in the twentieth century and that African Americans have been disproportionately affected when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Having long been aware of the detrimental effects of racial residential discrimination, members of the NAACP pledged to improve the status quo. Their early dedication to housing access is evidenced in part by a successful 1917 challenge to a Louisville, Kentucky ordinance that required residential segregation in *Buchanan v. Warley*.⁴⁰ The NAACP's nationwide commitment to the issue continued through the war years and peaked during the postwar years, during which time the number and affordability of homes in the private market became a foremost issue. The local Vancouver branch was founded in 1945 by an interracial group of citizens concerned with civic relations and racial justice in Clark County. In fact, the group may have

³⁹ Myrdal.

⁴⁰ The year 1917 is significant in the black struggle for rights. In that year A. Philip Randolph, the consummate African American leader, coined the term the "New Negro" to describe the vigor and impatience with which blacks organized and lobbied for civil rights in the period after World War I. Many activists could trace their vigor to their war experiences and their fight for American democracy, as well as their exposure to positive race relations in Europe. Returning veterans determined to have for themselves the privileges and rights for which they fought in Europe responded to white attacks on home soil with more militancy than older generations of African Americans, prompting Randolph to introduce the phrase the "New Negro." Rollin Lynde Hartt, "The New Negro. When He's Hit, He Hits Back!" *Independent*, 15 (January 1921): 59–60, 76.

formed for the express purpose of addressing housing needs, as almost immediately upon its formation members discussed housing, as evidenced by a May 1945 entry in a branch meeting notebook in which a member recorded “There will be permanent houses in the area for all accordinily [sic] to... [a] housing authority director.” The branch secured 378 members in its first year⁴¹ and its 1945-1946 meeting notebook offers brief but numerous discussions of housing throughout the year indicating it was a pressing concern for members and a frequent topic of conversation.⁴²

Though the organization never retained more than 400 members at a time, the group became a force in opposing residential segregation in Vancouver and ensuring equal opportunity for homeownership. The NAACP worked with local and Washington State agencies and organizations to promote fair housing. As a unified body, the country’s local branches created a powerful national NAACP which proved instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s⁴³ during which citizens across the country continued to rally for fair status under the law, for adequate education, and decent living conditions.

John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss offer an overview of African American life during the Cold War era that reflects the ambiguity of the period. The two categorize the 1950s both as a time of solid gains in the effort to secure rights – in public accommodations, education, employment, and voting – and as a time of vocal

⁴¹ Membership Record for NAACP Region 1, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 4, Folder 12, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁴² NAACP Vancouver branch meeting notebook, 1945-46, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 4, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁴³ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 461.

opposition from many whites in response to those gains.⁴⁴ A backlash grew from white labor and other individuals who organized into such groups as the National Association for the Advancement of White People and the White Citizens' Council to protest school desegregation and thwart the black vote. While those anti-black organizations rarely posed a significant threat to Afro-Americans, one element of the white backlash proved particularly harmful to civil rights action.⁴⁵

Some Southern politicians took advantage of the 1950s Cold War climate to impede the NAACP's progress by denouncing it as a subversive organization. One Arkansas Congressman submitted forty pages of "evidence" to support his claim that NAACP officers and members were promoting un-American ideas. Tactics such as that of the Congressman proved effective, for by 1956 several southern states had effectively shut down branches through legal action. In Louisiana the NAACP was prohibited from holding meetings until it submitted to the secretary of state a complete list of its members and⁴⁶ in Alabama a judge granted an injunction against all further NAACP activities.⁴⁷ The NAACP's top officers fought back declaring their organization democratic and supportive of American ideals. They argued that the most virile threat to American society rested not in their efforts to obtain equal rights, but in the unequal status conferred upon African Americans on the world stage, in open view of foreign dignitaries and leaders who criticized the United States for claiming to fight for democracy abroad while relegating millions of its own people to second-class citizenship.

⁴⁴ Hope and Moss, Jr., 461-470.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 467.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 468.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Because of the freedoms and opportunities blacks secured during wartime it became increasingly difficult to accept the second-class citizenship under which they had lived for generations. Inadequate access to housing in the 1940s and 1950s was one of the most conspicuous indicators of how much further Afro-Americans had to push for equality. Although both Vancouver's war projects and private housing were open to them, and the city seemed a safe place for blacks to integrate themselves into white neighborhoods, there were subtle expressions of racism from individuals who did not want to live among black neighbors. Yet how significant a role those incidents of bigotry played in influencing African Americans' postwar movement out of the city is impossible to determine.

A number of other factors, including temporary intentions for migration, economic conditions, and the lack of affordable housing in Vancouver's new postwar suburbs likely weighed more heavily on African American residents' decisions to leave the area since most had already gone by 1950. There need not have been incidents of explosive violence, the emergence of white protectionist associations, white flight, nor legal decrees barring blacks from purchasing homes in order for them to decide to move out of Vancouver permanently. Those who left the area surely had many reasons for doing so, as did those who chose to stay have many reasons to attempt to plant themselves permanently, however difficult.

Though a large number of African Americans desired to stay in Vancouver after the war, economic and social circumstances hampered most of their efforts to make the city a permanent home. Vancouver's economic opportunities were few compared to larger cities along the west coast, such as Portland and Seattle. War industries offered the surest employment, but such a heavy concentration of blacks in war work resulted in high unemployment at the conflict's end, as well as the loss of affordable wartime

homes in VHA projects. From 1943 into the 1950s most of Vancouver's African Americans rented units in the projects but were forced to move as the VHA shrunk its operations and eventually ceased its role as a municipal landlord in 1958. Throughout the 1950s the city refused to provide or support comparable low-cost housing as the VHA scaled down. In fact, city officials' postwar efforts at urban renewal pointedly discouraged low-rent housing in preference for idyllic suburban communities. Additionally, resistance from some whites to live in Vancouver's integrated postwar neighborhoods led to tense, though not violent, racial encounters which also may have prodded blacks to leave the city.

CHAPTER TWO

MIGRATION AND THE WAR YEARS

When President Franklin Roosevelt declared December 7, 1941 “a date which will live in infamy” few Americans must have imagined that the day would initiate one of the largest migrations in U. S. history and provide the impetus for extreme social change, largely regarding issues of race.⁴⁸ For western states World War II migration boosted economies yet burden communities, not just with the logistics of rapid population growth but with racial dilemmas as well. The southern black exodus during war years is often summarized as northward movement, though demographic shifts in the black population cannot be sufficiently explored without also acknowledging westward migration, as it marked an unprecedented trend.

By 1945 never before had western states been home to so many African Americans. From 1940 to 1947 Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington cumulatively experienced a 169 percent increase in residents, both white and nonwhite.⁴⁹ Oregon gained 39.2 percent of its population while Washington gained 28.6 percent.⁵⁰ Though the statistics include migrants of all racial groups, African Americans represented a decent portion of those who moved westward. A number of historians, most notably Quintard Taylor, have studied 1940s Afro-Americans’ westward movement and residency, though none treats the city of Vancouver in depth, if at all.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Wynn; see also Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, eds., *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ “Population Trends, United States: April 1, 1940 to July 1, 1947”, map, Clark County Historical Society.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ A compilation of sources on black migration to and residence in the western United States can be found in Lenwood G. Davis’, *Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1972: A Bibliography of Published Works and of Unpublished Source Materials on the Life and Contributions of Black People in the Pacific Northwest*

However, it is important to note rapid minority population growth in small, majority-white cities like Vancouver in order to consider a broader range of the African American experience. To understand housing and social conditions for blacks during the war one cannot rely solely on the experiences of those who lived in large cities or northern cities, as rural, suburban, and western living offer as compelling a context for understanding Afro-American struggles and triumphs.

Nationwide, housing became an early concern for the thousands of American workers who flocked to manufacturing centers for wartime employment. The heavy concentration of populations in defense areas forced the federal government to resolve housing shortages by the most effective means possible, leading to a reallocation of public housing units as defense housing units.

The government reassessed low-rent public housing projects for their possible contribution to national defense programs. Projects under construction in defense industry centers were converted for use solely by war workers and their families, and local housing authorities in strategic defense areas quickly converted unfinished projects from public housing to defense housing.⁵²

Nationwide by 1942, more than 65,000 low-rent public housing units that had been under construction or ready for occupants in late 1940 were converted to defense housing.⁵³ That so many thousands of public housing units existed for the federal government to absorb has its roots in the Depression-era United States Housing Authority (USHA), a New Deal agency created to lend money to states or communities for the construction of low-cost housing in an effort to provide both jobs and homes.

(Monticello, IL: Council of Planning Librarians, 1972); and in George H. Junne, Jr., *Blacks in the American West and Beyond—America, Canada, and Mexico: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

⁵² Paul R. Lusignan, "Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949," *CRM* 25, no. 1 (2002): 37, <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/25-01/25-01-16.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2007).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The United States Housing Act of 1937⁵⁴ laid the foundation for public housing protocol in two significant ways during the three-year mandated term from its inception to 1940: first, it reinvigorated the “federal commitment to providing decent, affordable housing for America’s urban poor” and, second, it set precedence for locally operated, federally funded public housing programs.⁵⁵ The latter, in addition to the Lanham Act, became particularly important in providing defense housing. The 1940 Lanham Act dedicated \$150 million to the Federal Works Agency to erect housing in “congested defense industry centers.”⁵⁶ Federally-constructed housing under the Act was managed by municipal housing authorities and provided units to renters regardless of income.

The promise of new, affordable homes enticed as many blacks west as steady employment. Clark County’s population nearly doubled in size during the war years from just shy of 50,000 residents to 99,000;⁵⁷ the city of Vancouver estimated its prewar population at 18,000 and received an additional 50,000 during the war years, approximately 9,000 of whom were African Americans at the peak of black residency in 1945.⁵⁸ Though the number of migrants to Seattle and Portland dwarfs those statistics, the influx was astronomical for Vancouver.⁵⁹ Housing the workers and their families would be the largest challenge the city had ever faced. Those blacks and whites hopeful for war work eagerly relocated to the area without much concern about housing,

⁵⁴ “United States Housing Act of 1937,” THOMAS, Library of Congress, http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&sid=cp106ZeUOR&refer=&r_n=sr410.106&db_id=106&item=&sel=TOC_445726& (accessed May 4, 2007).

⁵⁵ Lusignan, 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mark Foster, *Henry J. Kaiser: Builder in the Modern American West*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ The Vancouver Housing Authority estimates the city’s prewar population at 18,000 and an addition of 50,000 people during the war years. “Housing in War and Peace,” 22.

⁵⁸ Franklin and Moss, Jr., 41.

⁵⁹ “A Survey of Negro Tenants; Conducted Under the Direction of Milton Bona, by E. Shelton Hill, Lou M. Smith, Floyd L. Standifer and Juanita Harris,” (Vancouver, WA: Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1945), 5.

comforted by the assumption they would be able to afford public housing, if not private. Municipal governments from coast to coast experiencing population increases wasted no time taking advantage of federal monies allotted to cities for the creation or bracing of existing housing authorities to absorb the swell in populations.

The first wartime migrants to arrive in Vancouver in 1942 found a slow-paced town that supported itself by agriculture and light industry.⁶⁰ Maintaining a strong rural identity, many Vancouverites first considered themselves residents of Clark County than residents of the County's largest city and seat. In 1940 Vancouver's population was 92 percent native-born white; the remaining percentage included fewer than 20 African Americans and 89 other non-whites, including Native American, Chinese, and Japanese residents.⁶¹ The overwhelmingly white makeup of the city belied a slice of its past which reveals a racially and ethnically diverse community in the nineteenth century. In 1825 the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Vancouver near the north shore of the Columbia River as regional headquarters for the massive fur company.

⁶⁰ The County proudly stressed its farming economy and rural identity. Prunes were especially important to these identities as evidenced in part by efforts to bolster the prune. The fruit was an important agricultural export for the area from the 1880s to the Great Depression. A civic group called the Prunarians promoted the local industry in the 1920s with a slogan and a claim that Clark County was the prune capital of the world. "Strawberry Knoll, Prune Hill, and Fruit Valley (1883)," *Proud Past*, Clark County Washington, http://www.co.clark.wa.us/aboutcc/proud_past/PruneHill.html, (accessed July 2, 2007); and "Prunarians," *Local History*, columbia.com, <http://www.columbia.com/history/prunarians.cfm> (accessed July 2, 2007).

⁶¹ Baynard O. Wheeler and the City of Vancouver, Washington, "An Economic Analysis of Vancouver, Washington and its Environs (Part 1 of The Vancouver Plan)," (Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission and Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1947), 18. Wheeler was the Regional Economist for the Federal Public Housing Authority and was based Seattle in 1947.

In M. Reid Hanger's report, "An Economic and Industrial Report on Vancouver, Washington," he gives a slightly different prewar racial demographic: "[I]n 1940, 99.6 of the total population was white and 91.7 percent were native born. The 7.9 of foreign-born was largely made up of Germans, Scandinavians and Finns. Of the 0.4 percent non-white, most were Indians and Japanese." M. Reid Hanger, "An Economic and Industrial Report on Vancouver, Washington (2)," (Vancouver, WA: City of Vancouver, Washington, Vancouver Housing Authority, December 1947), 24.

Hudson Bay's Columbia Department spanned territory from Russian Alaska to Mexican California and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Sea travel most often included visits to the Hawaiian Islands. Such expansive territory ensured cultural encounters between several groups of people. In the 1840s Fort Vancouver employees and contractors were English, Scottish, French Canadian, Native American from more than 30 tribes, Métis, and nearly two-fifths of the Fort's laborers were Hawaiian.⁶² Fort Vancouver also employed a few African Americans.⁶³ One hundred years later a mostly white native population of British, German, and Scandinavian descent had replaced that diversity.⁶⁴ The late twentieth century brought only a few people of color to Clark County; the U.S. Army stationed black Buffalo Soldiers at Vancouver Barracks in the late 1800s and Vancouver was home to a handful of Chinese residents before 1940.⁶⁵ World War II would introduce race to the city in a manner some residents might have described as an overwhelming barrage.

For several generations Vancouver's population had been mostly white but the war significantly altered that racial makeup.⁶⁶ The 1930 census recorded the African

⁶² "A History of Fort Vancouver," *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/fova/history.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007). "African Americans and the HBC," *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/african-americans-and-the-hbc.htm> (accessed June 13th).

⁶³ "African Americans and the HBC." History notes two employees of African descent at Fort Vancouver. George Washington is noted on a Company employee list as a laborer in 1839 and 1840. Two reverends noted Washington's ancestry upon meeting him at their arrival on the ship *Lausanne*. Chief Factor James Douglas hailed from the South American British colony of Demerara (now Guyana) in 1805 to a Creole mother and Scottish father. His may have been a slave.

⁶⁴ "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed May 30, 2007).

⁶⁵ "Buffalo Soldiers at Vancouver Barracks," National Park Service, *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-at-vancouver-barracks.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007). "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population," *Volume II Characteristics of the Population*, U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2007).

⁶⁶ Most of the Asian population lived in and around Seattle. For a discussion of Asians and African Americans in Seattle, see Quintard Taylor's *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 106-134.

American population at 50, which dropped to a high estimate of 18 in 1940.⁶⁷ Local historian Joseph Franklin suspects the Great Depression spurred the dip in the black population as many left in search of jobs.⁶⁸ Still, there were Vancouverites of color in the city prior to the war, though reports vary on those prewar populations. Estimates range from one African American man before 1940 to 30 black people in the city that year. Florene DuFresne, Vancouver's "grandmother of civil rights,"⁶⁹ was one of the city's most respected activists. She was born in Vancouver in 1907 and devoted most of her ninety-five years to social and political justice. Though she lived in the city most of her life she recalled just one African American resident.⁷⁰ Franklin notes the difficulty in reconstructing a portrait of blacks in Vancouver between 1900 and 1940 because of their low approximate numbers – 10 in 1900, 47 in 1910, 29 in 1920, a peak of 50 in 1930, and down to 18 in 1940.⁷¹

Undoubtedly Vancouver was an overwhelmingly white city near 1940 but in four years' time it would serve as home to more than 8,825 African American residents, a staggering increase.⁷² Most of those black migrants came from the South.⁷³ By the time the United States joined the world's conflict in December 1941, rural Southerners in general were adept at migrating in search of more favorable economic conditions – as

⁶⁷ Hanger reports 10 African Americans in 1940, Wheeler reports 15 in 1940.

⁶⁸ Joseph Franklin, *Exodus, Journey to the Promise Land: African American Migration, Settlement, and Activity in Clark County and Vancouver, Washington 1825-2000* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 2004), 35.

⁶⁹ Kelly Adams, "Rights Activist DuFresne Dies at 95," *Columbian*, February 10, 2003.

⁷⁰ Florene DuFresne, interview by author, Vancouver, WA, April 11, 2001.

⁷¹ Franklin, 27.

⁷² Herzog, 78. The Vancouver Housing Authority arrived at 8,825 black tenants by multiplying the number of its black families by 4.5, the approximate number of people per household, though not necessarily members of one family, as residents doubled-up.

⁷³ "A Survey of Negro Tenants."

many had during the Depression⁷⁴ – and African Americans became particularly mobile in efforts to find social and economic opportunities and refuge from Jim Crow.⁷⁵

The Shipyards

Just as war industry employment in the Pacific Northwest absorbed thousands of workers from 1940 well into 1941, migrants arriving in 1942 found even more opportunity after the United States' officially entered the global conflict. Henry Kaiser's shipyards became Vancouver's largest single employer. The successful industrialist began shaping the western economy in the 1930s with massive dam projects. Kaiser was an unlikely entrepreneur in the industry; he had never seen a ship launched before 1940.⁷⁶ In the late 1930s the federal government was reluctant to expand shipbuilding for fear of upsetting voters' isolationist sentiments while Roosevelt positioned for a third term. Roosevelt was determined to supply aid to European allies and participated in the Lend-Lease program under which the United States produced ships and munitions for allied Europe.⁷⁷

Kaiser realized the Maritime Commission was eager to expand shipbuilding on the west coast so Kaiser's Six Companies joined two other shipbuilding corporations to pursue, and win, a federal contract which marked Kaiser's official venture into shipbuilding.⁷⁸ He chose Richmond, California as the site of his first shipyard and Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington for other sites, the latter two he assigned his son Edgar to manage. The foundations laid, once the United States declared war, the

⁷⁴ James Gregory explores Depression-era migration to the West in *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷⁵ Franklin, 37.

⁷⁶ Foster, 68.

⁷⁷ "The Lend-Lease Act," *American Memory*, Library of Congress, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=71> (accessed May 1, 2007).

⁷⁸ Foster, 69.

shipyards merely expanded in size, drafted more workers, and sped up production rates. An early 1941 issue of *The Oregonian* revealed Kaiser's plans for a Portland shipyard on the Columbia River, and a year later he built a second yard in Portland and the first in Vancouver.⁷⁹ Thousands of men and women found employment in Vancouver's Kaiser yard yet jobs were so plentiful the shipyards could not fill labor demands. Kaiser set an employment goal of 45,000, hundreds worked at Alcoa, and still many more found jobs unrelated to defense that kept the city's infrastructure operating – grocery stores, department stores, schools, utility companies, city and county jobs. Work was abundant but housing was not; the city's housing authority would have to rapidly bridge the gap.⁸⁰ City officials in Vancouver, Washington struggled to meet the demands wartime migrants placed on their city and worked to ease the area's transition from a white light industrial and farming community to a bustling war city with thousands of African Americans citizens.

Company recruiters traveled by train around the country to sign and transport eager workers via one-way train fare to California or the Pacific Northwest. Many migrants arrived by their own means as well, proving the effectiveness of press announcements and word of mouth. One African American woman, Fannie Chatman, recalls what she heard as a young lady in Louisiana about Vancouver's housing from her husband's cousin, who had recently moved to Oregon for war work:

[W]e'd feared defense work because people left home and said they had no place to live, the housing was bad, no food. [My husband's cousin] told [my husband that] there was plenty of housing out there; there was plenty of food but you had to get up and go get it. The housing situation was a crunch but she lived there and she worked for people who had a house or something in the back so she could stay on their premises. She said if you're going into defense work they have places you can stay, the projects, and she went through all that and told us

⁷⁹ Ibid., 74, 75.

⁸⁰ "Housing in War and Peace" 22.

about it. [My husband] said, "I think I'll look into it," so he did and [defense work representatives] told him that they had housing.⁸¹

Though Portland-Vancouver area officials expected the onslaught they did not have time to prepare. By war's end 45,000 blacks had been lured to the Pacific Northwest's boom not only in shipbuilding but also aircraft manufacture and offshoot industries such as aluminum and plutonium production.⁸² Fifty thousand people recruited by the Kaiser Company alone reached Vancouver and quickly occupied every spare room, apartment, and house. Landlords rented their properties, homeowners took in boarders, and families opened doors to friends and relatives, yet still many new arrivals were forced to live in their vehicles, "in empty store buildings, stables, tents, and trailers."⁸³

In February 1942 Mayor A. N. Stanley queried federal authorities on the necessary steps to convene an appraisal board with the power to assess and fix maximum rates for the purpose of curbing exorbitant rent for workers with low fixed incomes.⁸⁴ Most complaints came from those renting rooms and apartments and those spurred the mayor into action; one woman reported her house rent shot from \$18.00 to \$38.00 in one month.⁸⁵ Unprecedented rent hikes, Stanley claimed, put undue burden on non-defense workers.⁸⁶ However, while the Mayor and other city officials scolded greedy landlords for taking advantage of Vancouver's residents, longtime and migrant,

⁸¹ Fannie Chatman, interview by author and Keri Conway, Vancouver, WA, April 26, 2001.

⁸² Gordon B. Dodd, *The American Northwest: A History of Oregon and Washington* (Arlington Heights, IL: The Forum Press, 1986), 262, 265; Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 159; Robert Bauman, "Jim Crow in the Tri-Cities, 1943-1950," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (2005): 124-131.

⁸³ "Housing in War and Peace," 28.

⁸⁴ "Boom in Rents Hits Vancouver," February 28, 1942, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

they also praised those individuals who offered spare rooms and apartment units at \$12.00 to \$18.00 per month who did so not to earn money but to help in the war effort.⁸⁷

By March the Mayor announced his fair rent board to stave off action by the federal Office of Price Administration (OPA).⁸⁸ The board's men and women represented various interests and income levels, it consisted of a former prosecuting attorney, an appraiser and realtor, a home economist, a rent expert who worked with the Red Cross, secretary of the metal trades council, a representative of a senior citizens group, and the editor of the *Clark County Sun*.⁸⁹ Though it had no legal power, Stanley explained if landlords refused the board's recommendations for reasonable rent he would appeal to the OPA which would in turn freeze all rents at the June 1941 level.⁹⁰ The Mayor emphasized his reluctance to initiate a freeze, as landlords had the right to reasonably raise their rents, however, he would not tolerate "rent profiteering."⁹¹ The Board held its first hearings in May, in which four cases were settled amicably.⁹² Later that same month the OPA confirmed its cooperation with the Board in enforcing fair rents, at which time 30 complaints of exorbitant rent had been submitted by Vancouver residents.⁹³

Providing space for thousands of new residents was difficult enough without considering race relations, but in 1942 neighborhood racial intolerance could develop into violence. Historians often cite Detroit's 1943 race riot to illustrate the explosive

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "'Fair Rents' Objective at Vancouver," March 1942, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Decisions in Rent Hearing Cases Pend," May 2, 1942, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

⁹³ "Rental Board Gets Backing of OPA Chief," *Columbian*, May 5, 1942.

consequences of unchecked racial tension.⁹⁴ In June of that year, African Americans' dissatisfaction with recreation, jobs, and housing conditions helped fuel a deadly riot in which hundreds of whites and blacks fought throughout the city for more than thirty hours.⁹⁵ President Roosevelt declared a state of emergency and dispatched 6,000 soldiers to keep order but not before 34 people died, 25 of them black.⁹⁶ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. note, "Other Northern cities as well as large metropolitan areas in the West feared that they would have the same experience as Detroit, and numerous efforts were made to prevent interracial clashes."⁹⁷ While African American newcomers may have been uneasy living beside those who had not experienced an interracial community, they preferred it to the Jim Crow South or the conspicuously racist communities in eastern states from which they came.

But researchers have not explored in detail the racial conditions in Vancouver, making it difficult for scholars to reconstruct life for nonwhites in that period. Vancouver was not littered with "whites only" signs, had no race-based restrictive covenants, and no "Coontown" or ghetto. Sources indicate housing was open to all regardless of racial or ethnic background and no official prohibition to black property or home ownership existed. However, there were indications that realtors enforced *de facto* policies of residential segregation and signs that race relations between neighbors were tense, though not hostile.

This relative acceptance of African Americans into the community might be attributed to its historical demographic, the prewar black population having been so

⁹⁴ Franklin and Moss, Jr., 453.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Rudy Pearson notes the Detroit race riot is often cited in text books as the most explosive manifestation of nationwide racial tension during the Second World War. Pearson, 10.

⁹⁷ Franklin and Moss, 453.

small that whites did not feel threatened by the prospect of having one or two black neighbors, particularly in an area of low population density.⁹⁸ In a pattern established in many American cities, and explained by Wynn, Vancouver's prewar African American population was so insignificant it had not posed a threat to white privilege or advantage which allowed whites to feel comfortable with black residents. However, so few blacks also meant little opportunity for interaction between the races and that unfamiliarity bred uneasiness for both groups when they encountered each other in large numbers during the war.⁹⁹ Over the course of the conflict white residents had no choice but to adjust to 9,000 black neighbors. Regardless of how white Vancouverites and white transplants felt about them, Afro-Americans stayed because they recognized the city offered substantial economic and social opportunities.

When thousands of blacks moved to the Vancouver beginning in 1943, many longtime residents were uneasy with them but they were also uneasy with the total influx of 50,000 migrants, regardless of color, some because of class, others due to negative stereotypes about Southerners. When research director M. Reid Hanger compiled a postwar report for the Vancouver Planning Commission and the Vancouver Housing Authority in 1947 he found that even half a decade after the influx not all prewar residents welcomed migrants: "A sizable proportion of Vancouver's long-time residents express nostalgia for the quiet, residential city of pre-war years. They resent the 'outsiders,' and believe they should be encouraged or even coerced to leave. 'Let's quit giving them cheap rent; let's clear out the war houses on the hill. Then all these

⁹⁸ The 1940 population density for Clark County was 76.6 per square mile and pretty evenly distributed. In 1947 the county's density is 135 per square mile "with that for the 10-mile square including Vancouver having reached somewhere between 570 and 600." Hanger, 24. One can reasonably assume population density before 1940 was less than that of 1940.

⁹⁹ Wynn.

newcomers will fade out fast enough.”¹⁰⁰ The statement reveals native Vancouver residents identified affordable housing as an anchor for newer residents; employment and housing brought the migrants, but housing alone would keep them. Though many African Americans planned to stay in the Northwest temporarily, those who planned to stay would have to depend heavily on public housing.

The Creation of the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA)

Even before the events at Pearl Harbor, Washington State law provided a housing authority for all the state’s cities and counties; municipalities simply had to form authorities and cooperate with state and federal mandates in order to officially operate them. On February 5, 1942, sixty days after the events at Pearl Harbor, Vancouver’s City Council passed Resolution Number 65 to create the Vancouver Housing Authority and invested it with the responsibility to develop housing for those participating in national defense activities.¹⁰¹ Mayor A. N. Stanley immediately appointed a five-member board and two days later D. Elmwood Caples, Edwin Winter, Fred Ward, Reverend Walter Givens, and Earl Anderson held the Authority’s first meeting to initiate the largest construction projects in the city’s history.¹⁰²

The Authority tackled the monumental task of predicting Vancouver’s population surge, scouting appropriate locations for construction, applying for federal monies, purchasing land, coordinating building industries, placing residents, collecting tenants’ rents, and maintaining properties. By the board members’ estimate, \$18.5 million in federal funds would begin the projects – \$15 million for demountable units

¹⁰⁰ Hanger, 4.

¹⁰¹ Franklin, 39.

¹⁰² “Housing in War and Peace,” 6.

and \$3.5 million for permanent dwellings.¹⁰³ They applied for that amount under the Lanham Act in February 1942 for 4,000 temporary homes and an additional 1,000 temporary units for the city to absorb at war's end.¹⁰⁴ The funds were granted but not soon enough for Vancouver to begin its projects, so the Housing Authority appealed to the City for a \$4,000 no-interest loan to begin construction until federal monies arrived, which the city council approved.¹⁰⁵ The only major objection to the first war project site came in April 1942 from the Vancouver Realty Board, which objected to the annexation of an area called Fairview for the construction of temporary homes, as the area had been reserved for finer homes and public housing on prized land did not appeal to the realtors, nevertheless, development commenced.¹⁰⁶

With its federally-awarded money the Authority immediately purchased 1,000 acres¹⁰⁷ of land on a hill east of the city which consisted of dairy farms, a garlic farm, and golf course, and named it McLoughlin Heights, it would become the most permanent of the VHA's projects.¹⁰⁸ Yet, well before completion of The Heights the VHA realized 6,000 temporary and permanent units would not be enough to house the newcomers and quickly planned more. The Authority purchased land at Fruit Valley to erect three hundred permanent homes,¹⁰⁹ then built 2,000 apartment units in a development named Ogden Meadows, 200 permanent homes in Fourth Plain Village, 2,100 apartments at Bagley Downs, and 1,500 units in the row houses at Burton Homes

¹⁰³ "Work Halted for Lack of Materials," *Columbian*, May 15, 1942.

¹⁰⁴ Franklin, 39.

¹⁰⁵ "Council Gives \$4,000 Loan for Housing." Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹⁰⁶ "Protest House Project Area," *Columbian*, April 16, 1942.

¹⁰⁷ The Vancouver Housing Authority reported 1,000 acres; some local newspapers reported 800 acres.

¹⁰⁸ "Housing in War and Peace," 28.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

– collectively these projects were known as the “Six Cities.”¹¹⁰ The Vancouver Housing Authority also operated 5,000 dormitory units constructed near the shipyards for the Maritime Commission.

Dormitories aside, Vancouver erected a total of 12,396 units with capacity for 50,000 people, but due to high war industry employee turnover during the course of the war – about five percent per month¹¹¹ – 190,000 people would actually live in the city’s government housing.¹¹² The state acknowledged the strain quick population growth put on cities and allocated the monies to aid in planning processes. In April of 1943 the City submitted an estimate of its increase in population to the State Planning Council, which accepted the estimate as a basis to award Vancouver its share of \$1,000,000 from the state.¹¹³ The Washington legislature agreed to set aside those funds for cities that could prove a more than three percent increase in population over the 1940 census in 1943. Seattle, Kelso, Longview, and Bremerton also earned shares of the funds, which were paid in annual installments over four years. Vancouver estimated its 1943 population by calculating ration book records, school enrollment, and demands on the postal service among other factors.

Vancouver’s projects, though inexpensively constructed, provided modern amenities some had not before had, particularly blacks. In 1940, the top five home states of most of Vancouver’s black migrants – all of which were southern states – had a combined average of 13 percent of their populations with running water in their dwellings, an average of 16 percent had bathtubs or showers in their homes, and an

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Vancouver’s ‘Boom Era’ of Heights Housing Over,” *Columbian*, October 17, 1958.

¹¹² “Housing in War and Peace,” 32.

¹¹³ Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

average of 15 percent had electric lighting equipment.¹¹⁴ In contrast, a significant number of prefab units erected during the Authority's later waves of construction were equipped with coal ranges and ice boxes due to scarce materials, but the VHA's first homes – the single-family and row houses – were furnished with electric stoves and refrigerators. Coal heaters warmed all housing units.¹¹⁵ Executive director of the Housing Authority, W. K. Peery, announced in 1943, "the government decided to equip these units because of the inability of tenants to purchase their own [furnishings]."¹¹⁶ Row house units were equipped with beds, "victory" springs – so-called because their wood-framed construction conserved metal – mattresses, chests, wastebaskets, couches, chairs, desks, dinette sets, and mirrors; tenants had to supply their own dishes, utensils, linens, and rugs.¹¹⁷ Rent also "included utilities, such as lights, water, coal, and garbage collection."¹¹⁸ Despite its often flimsy construction, VHA housing must have been a dramatic improvement over many newcomers' former homes.

In addition to its attempt to create comfortable homes, the Housing Authority made an effort to design enjoyable and convenient communities with recreation and administration centers, day care facilities, schools, libraries, shopping centers, churches, transportation, professional space for dentists and doctors, and fire and police stations. Most facilities operated 24 hours a day, at least for a few months at a time, to accommodate day, swing, and night shift shipyard workers. Community events enlivened social life year-round by way of county fairs, movies, boxing and wrestling, parties, acrobatics shows, a McLoughlin Heights Victory Fair, libraries, and teen

¹¹⁴ "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed May 30, 2007).

¹¹⁵ "Housing in War and Peace," 34.

¹¹⁶ "Row Houses to Include Furnishings," 1943, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

dances.¹¹⁹ A June 1943 article in *The Columbian* noted the active community life forming at Ogden Meadows. Tenants there acting as volunteer organizers coordinated dances, game clubs, sports clubs, and encouraged the arts with an orchestra and dramatic club.¹²⁰

Community facilities and events in all housing projects were racially integrated, however, the immensely popular teen dances may have been thorny affairs. A July 1943 *Columbian* newspaper article announced the first McLoughlin Heights dance for teenagers to take place Friday nights, which were “open to any high school or junior high school age person.”¹²¹ But if the atmosphere in Vanport, Oregon is any indication, Vancouver’s dances may have created racial conflict. When a black band played a Vanport dance, black dancers attended, and when white bands were scheduled, whites attended. Though this segregation evolved unofficially, many residents and police officials in Vanport expressed grave concern over the prospect of interracial dancing.¹²² In Vancouver mixed dances may have also been a point of contention.¹²³ Willard Nettles, Jr., who moved with his family to Vancouver in 1944, recalls his community’s stance on interracial gatherings:

Even though I had white friends in junior high and high school, interracial party mixing was not in style. I didn’t start to experience that much until my early years in college, which was the mid-sixties. Up until that time it was pretty much blacks with blacks and whites with whites in my geographical location – Vancouver, Washington and Portland, Oregon. You could still have a meaningful dialogue with somebody outside of your race, but as far as relationships went you kind of stayed within your race.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ “A Tale of Six Cities and How They Became a Permanent Part of Vancouver, Washington,” (Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority).

¹²⁰ Wilma Morrison, “Community Life in Housing Areas Taking Shape as Many Residents Volunteer to Aid,” *Columbian*, June 15, 1943.

¹²¹ “Dancing is Now Open to Teen-agers,” *Columbian*, July 9, 1943.

¹²² Charlotte Lee Kilbourn, “Factors Conducive to the Migration to and from Vanport City” (master’s thesis, Reed College, 1944).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁴ Willard Nettles, Jr., interview by Carlos Delcid, Vancouver, WA, March 28, 2001.

Many community members expressed concern about race relations early on. In late 1943 the Vancouver Council of Churches formed an interracial council to “study charges of discrimination and promote justice and good will among the various race elements – namely colored and Caucasian – now employed in the area.”¹²⁵ The Council elected permanent officials in November 1943, which included a county welfare employee, a Teamster and union executive, and a reverend to represent the Negro members.¹²⁶ The reverend’s presence was no surprise, as church leaders and congregations played a significant role in the push for peacefully integrated housing.

Race and Vancouver’s War Housing

The Housing Authority and local historians are proud to boast of the city’s integrated war housing, and it appears most Afro-American residents who lived in the projects were content in the environment. Fannie Chatman recalls Vancouver housing was integrated and remembers a white couple from Maryland who lived above her and taught her about kindling wood. Chatman was unaccustomed to starting her own fires as she had grown up with gas heating and cooking in Louisiana, but her Northeast neighbors “knew all about coal and slack” and showed her how to use the new coal range in her Bagley Downs home.¹²⁷ Chatman’s positive experience is likely similar to those of many African American residents, but there were black tenants who suspected the VHA adhered to a policy of racial segregation, however loose.

¹²⁵ “Inter-Racial group to Hold election Soon,” *Clark County Sun*, November 19, 1943. “Inter-Racial Ballot Slated,” *Columbian*, November 19, 1943.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Fannie Chatman, interview by author and Keri Conway, Vancouver, WA, April 26, 2001.

The Housing Authority admits certain projects, namely Bagley Downs and Burton Homes, housed more black migrants than the others but explains the tenant placement by arrival date rather than race. As Kaiser recruiters traveled by train around the country, they signed workers and gave them one-way train tickets to the Pacific Northwest. People tended to arrive in Vancouver from any given area at about the same time, explained the VHA, and that group movement resulted in the emergence of “little Texas,” “little Arkansas,” and so on, in Vancouver housing projects as workers signed up to be placed in units.¹²⁸ The vast majority of newcomers applied for public housing and were assigned units as they arrived which resulted in them living near each other. When black workers and their families arrived together they, too, were housed in close proximity merely by chance.¹²⁹

Valree Joshua and Jean Griffin recall a large number of black tenants living in the same VHA buildings while other projects had all white residents. Joshua, a teacher, and her husband came to Vancouver in 1942 from Gilmer, Texas and settled into an apartment at Bagley Downs.¹³⁰ Her husband’s parents had already relocated to Vancouver to work in the shipyards and returned to Texas after they saved money. Joshua recalls her apartment building had mostly black residents but was not positive whether racial segregation in Bagley Downs, or any of the Housing Authority projects, was mandated or not. Jean Griffin moved with her mother to Vanport, Oregon in 1944 from Oklahoma before moving to Vancouver in 1948 and has recollections similar to Joshua’s, though Griffin suspects the VHA played a role in racial separation:

I think [racial segregation] was probably [by] the Housing Authority. Just like when you get a job some people might say to the management, “I don’t want to

¹²⁸ “Housing in War and Peace,” 32; “A Survey of Negro Tenants,” 1.

¹²⁹ “Housing in War and Peace,” 40.

¹³⁰ Valree Joshua, interview by author and Mary Byrd, Vancouver, WA, March 25, 2001 and April 19, 2001.

work with that person," so they will take the person's feelings into consideration, and maybe it was the same way about the housing. Maybe there were people who stated they didn't want to live around blacks so the blacks lived in Bagley Downs and Burton Homes and the whites lived in The Heights. For something like that to occur you know it has to be from the management. People expressed that they didn't want to be with blacks.¹³¹

According to the VHA as a result of the arrival date groupings the first African Americans to apply for war housing were placed in Bagley Downs but the unit was never entirely black, and when it filled blacks were placed in Burton Homes or anywhere units were available, as were their white counterparts.¹³² Integration did not please all tenants: the VHA noted "[racial integration in the projects] brought initial cries of outrage from, say, 'little Texas,' but protest died away when it was suggested that if the complainer didn't like it he was always free to find housing he thought more suitable off the project."¹³³ Though racial integration in the 1940s was a rarity, most tenants did not fuss about the color of their neighbors in Vancouver's wartime housing. The VHA reported the most common complaints were a longing for home and about the Northwest weather rather than neighbors,¹³⁴ and even despite those dissatisfactions in 1943 three-fifths of those surveyed indicated they would like to live in the area permanently.¹³⁵ In November of that year the Housing Authority reported its population was growing by 1,000 people per week; the agency predicted that by the end

¹³¹ Jean Griffin, interview by author and Christal Jenkins, Vancouver, WA, April 30, 2001.

¹³² "Housing in War and Peace," 40.

¹³³ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁴ Griffin, interview. Upon arriving in Vanport, Oregon from Oklahoma in 1948, Vancouverite Jean Griffin recalls, "When I first came here I didn't want to go anywhere because it was raining and they said, 'Well, if you don't go when it's raining you gonna be in all winter,' but I didn't like it. I wasn't used to it raining all the time. The day we got here it was raining and it didn't stop because we came in October and that's when the rainy season starts." Kilbourn's 1944 survey of Vanport residents indicates the weather was a significant factor in migrants' displeasure with the area.

¹³⁵ "Housing in War and Peace," 42.

of the year all 12,389 of its units would be occupied.¹³⁶ All units were, indeed, occupied in 1943 and throughout the course of the war, and each VHA project proved to be a financial and social success for the City by the conflict's end.

Clark County had a population of 50,000 in 1940 and grew to accommodate twice as many residents during the war, a transition that proved bumpy in many aspects including race. Despite a past with notable racial diversity under the dominance of the Hudson's Bay Company and the presence U.S. Army Buffalo Soldiers in the late nineteenth century, by 1940 the city of Vancouver had maintained an overwhelmingly white population for well over one hundred years. The Second World War and Henry J. Kaiser's shipyards transformed the area into a desirable industrial center that attracted some 50,000 whites and blacks to the county during the war, doubling its 1940 headcount. Housing the city's newest citizens fell largely on the shoulders of those at the Vancouver Housing Authority, which by war's end had constructed over 12,000 units that housed more than 190,000 people. Unlike other housing authorities, Vancouver's did not segregate its projects nor its employment or social functions. Most African Americans found VHA housing modern and comfortable, though some suspected it covertly maintained a loose policy of racial division, a suspicion the Authority refuted. Race relations were amicable compared to those in many west coast cities that raced to manage the westward movement of black migrants from the South. How cities like Vancouver coped with their wartime populations played a crucial role in whether or not their newest residents of color would settle permanently and whether or not they would be welcome in a postwar climate.

¹³⁶ "41,000 Now in Housing Areas Here," *Columbian*, November 23, 1943; "1000 Persons Local Growth Per Week," *Clark County Sun*, November 26, 1943.

CHAPTER THREE

POSTWAR PROSPECTS

The demand for housing prompted cities across the country to devise urban renewal plans to accommodate wartime migrants who decided to settle permanently, and returning servicemen and their families who set their sights on domestic life. Those cities who created or expanded housing authorities in the 1940s found it simple to use the agencies for postwar residential planning, so cities like Vancouver implemented urban renewal plans with a zest for accommodating modern, middle-class families with higher standards of living than those of previous generations. During the late 1940s and through the 1950s, Vancouver citizens witnessed a slow but dramatic transition from public to private housing. As for black residents, nationwide three factors precipitated displaced or ill-housed blacks in the late 1940s into the 1950s: the slump in construction of private housing, dissatisfactory defense housing, and racial discrimination. Vancouver's African Americans would contend with all three.

If wartime tenants feared they would have to leave Vancouver Housing Authority units immediately after V-J Day, anxieties settled for many when they learned the Authority would continue to rent to residents. The City of Vancouver and VHA committed to maintain wartime housing for those current tenants who chose to stay and offered units to these returning servicemen searching for homes. Immediately after the war the VHA assessed that 60 percent of its occupants preferred to stay in Vancouver.¹³⁷ The nationwide migration of blacks from the South to the North and West continued after the war bringing the number of those migrants to 3 million from

¹³⁷ "Housing in War and Peace," 46.

1940 to 1960, but Vancouver's black population did not reflect that trend. Before the war, without considering in-migration, Vancouver officials estimated 34,800 citizens would remain after the conflict and 70 percent of wartime tenants would be in the market for new homes, which calculated to a demand for approximately 6,000 postwar units. At the time, officials proposed even more families might stay in the area if the war lasted another few years.¹³⁸ By the summer of 1945 the City managers knew they needed a plan to reshape neighborhoods from public to private housing; their strategies would have a heavy impact on African Americans.

The VHA's Shift Toward Permanency

The demise of wartime Housing Authority properties took over a decade, from the middle 1940s to 1958. The process was slow in part because the Authority did not evict tenants but rather allowed a natural decrease in population, which correlated with the decrease in war industry jobs. During the early years of the process, 1944 to 1948, the VHA simply decommissioned projects as vacancies occurred when tenants left the city in search of jobs, moved out of public housing into private homes, or moved out of temporary VHA housing into permanent VHA housing under a new lax policy. In May 1944 the VHA had more than 2,000 vacant temporary homes, row houses and apartments, due to a drop in war industry employment and a wave of temporary housing tenants transferring to permanent housing under revised occupancy restrictions.¹³⁹ *The Sun* explained the policy change in a May 1944 article:

Under the new ruling, any person may buy permanent homes built with private capital and any family or individual may rent apartments in projects built with public funds. Occupancy in all housing projects formerly was restricted to war

¹³⁸ "Survey Conducted by Authority Shows Workers Want Jobs; Like Idea of Remaining in this Area," Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹³⁹ "2,000 Homes in this Area are Vacant," *Clark County Sun*, May 20, 1944.

workers and their families. Officials of the national Housing Agency said the units were made available... to ease congestion in the Portland area.... They said the change resulted from the stabilization of employment at local industries below the level originally foreseen.¹⁴⁰

That year, temporary row houses and apartments in five of the Authority's six projects sat empty – Bagley Downs, Burton Homes, McLoughlin Heights, Fruit Valley, and Ogden Meadows.¹⁴¹ However, permanent and single-family demountable homes – newly open to all residents regardless of the essentiality of their jobs to the war effort – filled to capacity.¹⁴² For all its 12,000 wartime units the VHA had only constructed 1,000 permanent homes to sell at war's end and they sold immediately.¹⁴³ Katherine Walker of the VHA emphasized those on the waiting list for permanent homes would be placed on a first come, first served basis, though war workers still enjoyed the highest consideration in order to have homes closest to their jobs.¹⁴⁴ For a population of African Americans who sought housing, the VHA's policy on placing residents by order rather than by race brought relief. Willard Nettles, Jr. remembers:

Everybody had houses and those people who couldn't get houses usually moved in with their relatives until a house was available. When we first moved out here we stayed with another family or another family stayed with us; it was just people helping people until they got on their feet.¹⁴⁵

The Nettles later secured a home of their own in McLoughlin Heights project, as did hundreds of other families.

¹⁴⁰ "Public Use of Housing Areas OK'd," *Clark County Sun*, May 15, 1944.

¹⁴¹ "No Vacancies in Permanent War Housing," *Clark County Sun*, May 19, 1944.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Milt Bona, "WWII Social Phenomena Not Fully Understood," *Columbian*, February 23, 1975.

¹⁴⁴ "No Vacancies in Permanent War Housing," *Clark County Sun*, May 19, 1944.

¹⁴⁵ Nettles, Jr., interview.

In December 1944 over 11,000 families lived in Vancouver's housing projects, 1,730 of whom were black.¹⁴⁶ That year (1944) the VHA began to decommission units in Burton Homes, a project that had housed many African Americans.¹⁴⁷ Even before the war ended Burton Homes shut down as the shipyards scaled back its workforce. Burton Homes had begun to deteriorate despite the units' construction just 18 months before its close. Workers dismantled the homes for shipment to other cities in Washington such as Pasco, Forks, and Morton where housing shortages were still critical. Most families who moved from Burton Homes relocated in other areas of the city.¹⁴⁸

Despite how well the Housing Authority had treated residents of color over the years, it would not operate forever, thus blacks prepared themselves for the loss. A 1949 report from chairman of the NAACP Housing Committee, W. H. Underwood, explained how African Americans could better their chances to live in the city permanently:

Remember also that this is no longer a temporary war housing area. It is now regarded as a permanent housing area. Thus you must accept the demountable or permanent type house, first: to ensure complete integration in housing. Second: you must assume the obligations, and responsibilities of a permanent resident of this area. Third: you help the Vancouver Housing Authority to properly discharge its duties efficiently. And fourth: you improve yourself, by raising your standard of living and contributing to the progress of this area. I would remind you also that under the Lanham Act, row-houses must be de-programmed by Jan. 1, 1950, and you may find yourself, and family without a house.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Roberts, Part I of II.

¹⁴⁷ "Another 250 Burton Homes Units to Go," *Columbian*, ca. October 4, 1944 Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹⁴⁸ "Housing in War and Peace," 48. "Another 250 Burton Homes Units to Go," *Columbian*, ca. October 4, 1944 Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington. "Buffer Zone on H...", November 6, 1952, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹⁴⁹ Vancouver NAACP Report on Housing Committee, September 25, 1949, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

Another Housing Committee report that year focused on the annexation of McLoughlin Heights and encouraged NAACP members to attend an annexation meeting and actively participate by taking notes, asking questions, and noting who supported and opposed annexation plans.¹⁵⁰ Those with an active eye on local policymakers knew postwar Vancouver would shift to a suburban, middle-class area and remained hopeful that the transformation would not exclude people of color.

Like many postwar communities, Vancouver officials maintained a vested interest in preventing slums. Years after the war, the Housing Authority explained:

It was determined at the start that most of Vancouver's war housing was to be a temporary thing. Old-time residents had a strong fear that the 11,000 temporary units would deteriorate into a perpetual slum, breeding social problems for generations. Property owners also feared values would plummet and again bring community problems if speculators grabbed up the land after the war and developed it willy-nilly.¹⁵¹

To prevent sections of the city becoming private slums with cheap housing and low-income residents the VHA drafted and submitted a proposal called the Vancouver Plan to the federal government in 1945. The VHA convinced the Public Housing Authority of the plan's value and sent representatives to present it to Congress; with minimal revision the House and Senate enacted the plan.¹⁵² In fact, the plan became part of the federal Housing Act of 1949, legislation that went into effect the following year. It was also known as the Urban Renewal Program and it allocated federal money to cities for redevelopment.¹⁵³ The plan included six criteria to guide Vancouver's demolition

¹⁵⁰ Vancouver NAACP Report on Housing Committee, March 27, 1949, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁵¹ "Housing in War and Peace," 47.

¹⁵² Ibid., 48.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 48, 50. Celebrating 60 Years of Service to Clark County (Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority), 9.

and maintenance of VHA units, neighborhood development, and authority over property:

1. Recognition of local authority.
2. Recognition that most VHA property had salvage value only. War housing served its purpose “and with exceptions such as meeting the immediate needs of returning veterans,” should be demolished.
3. A provision to assist those who were not financially capable of leaving VHA housing with out an amount of time to find postwar employment and gather resources. These tenants needed schools, health, and welfare facilities.
4. Row houses were to be immediately deconstructed, as they provided emergency dwellings and required a disproportionate amount of maintenance to provide adequate housing.
5. Communities could use or acquire community facilities, such as recreation parks, buildings, schools, and shopping centers, as they served the city’s needs postwar needs.
6. The federal government deemed local authorities were responsible for the disposition of property as needs arose. No federal agency existed nor was created for this purpose, the reasoning behind it that no outside agency could possibly know the conditions of or demands made by specific communities.¹⁵⁴

The plan would allow Vancouver to transition from a war boomtown to a socially and economically stable postwar community. Politicians in many cities adopted the federally-approved Vancouver Plan in response to lingering wartime residents. Those communities most concerned with preventing ghettos brainstormed strategies to either accommodate their swollen populations, force an exodus, or let a natural weeding occur when public housing disappeared. Long-time residents in communities like Vancouver often expressed distaste for public housing even during the war and particularly after. The low-cost housing, many reasoned, would attract the poorest Americans to their cities and concentrate them in apartment complexes that would become slums. City redevelopment allowed municipalities to absorb swollen populations and gave aesthetic merit and property value to certain areas of the country,

¹⁵⁴ “Housing in War and Peace,” 47-48.

but city planners often used redevelopment opportunities to manipulate populations in order to foster permanent, white middle-class communities.

Considering the history of urban restructuring and its often detrimental impact on African Americans, not all praised Vancouver's redevelopment plans. The local NAACP said of the program: "[A]lthough magnificent planning is being done for growth development of our city in terms of physical use of land, streets, and public utilities in connection with accelerated building of new residential areas, this progress does not include the Negro citizens...." Whether the NAACP referred to exclusion of blacks in terms of the cost of housing or direct discrimination in rentals and sales is unclear, but cost did weigh heavily on their concerns.

Surveying Black Tenants

Though living conditions in Vancouver were among the best many tenants – white, black, and others – had ever experienced, for African Americans it was essential, and the majority were reluctant to consider moving out of VHA housing after the war. A 1945 study of black tenants revealed a turnover rate considerably lower than that of whites.¹⁵⁵ Even when wartime prosperity turned to economic bust in the late 1940s, African Americans held on. In his postwar report, M. Reid Hanger identified three reasons underemployed Vancouverites of all races preferred not to leave the city even in the midst of tough financial circumstances: 1) many weathered unemployment with savings, 2) Vancouver's abundant war housing provided security, and 3) "[t]he nearly 1,000 negroes know the housing to be the best most of them have ever had, and they are bending every effort to hang on, regardless of scarcity of well-paid employment – a

¹⁵⁵ A "Survey of Negro Tenants," 3.

condition which is no stranger to them.”¹⁵⁶ Hanger’s focus on black residents reveals one of the city’s attempts to track the movement and employment prospects of blacks in the area. Whether the reports aided Vancouver’s politicians in developing strategies to push blacks from the City or whether the reports assisted them in planning accommodations for African Americans is unclear, as the City took no official stance on black residency.

The Vancouver Housing Authority also made an effort to determine black residents’ postwar plans. In November 1945 VHA interviewers went door to door to poll African American tenants; the survey results would allow the Authority, and City, to assess how many blacks might stay in Vancouver, in which industries they might find employment, and where they planned to live. The Authority made no attempt to cover the purpose of the study: “After the questions were answered, and the interviewer left, he was asked to make personal observations about the family which would be helpful in arriving at conclusions about the adaptability of the family to the established community.”¹⁵⁷ For historians “A Survey of Negro Tenants” provides a portrait of the conditions and concerns of black Vancouverites who faced important choices about their postwar lives. At the time of the survey nine months had passed since the VHA’s peak black population of 1,730 families.¹⁵⁸ By November the Authority housed 1,200 black families, or 5,400 individuals, who may not have been the best representative sample of wartime blacks, but who comprised those postwar blacks who

¹⁵⁶ Hanger, 2.

¹⁵⁷ “A Survey of Negro Tenants,” 1.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 5. The researchers note it would have been more accurate to use the term “households” rather than “families” due to doubling-up; “A Survey of Negro Tenants,” 8. Traditionally, doubling-up has been a common practice among African Americans and something to which many are accustomed. Myrdal, 376.

would make decisions that shaped the racial makeup of the city for the next twenty years.

Researcher for the Housing Authority used the interviewers' data to compile an eight-page report gathered from a 23 percent cross-section of black families at Bagley Downs, McLoughlin Heights, Burrton Homes and Ogden Meadows housing projects to learn, among other things, from which states its black residents came, the types of war work in which they had engaged, employment status, whether they were skilled or unskilled workers, family composition, adaptability to the community, and attitudes concerning discrimination.¹⁵⁹ The report's authors were careful to note the accuracy of their sample size in surveying just 276 of 1,200 African American families asserting that fairly accurate conclusions can be made from a 20 to 25 percent sample size of 1,000 families.¹⁶⁰ The researchers calculated a three percent deviation upon comparing the information they gathered on home states to that on file with the Authority. E. Shelton Hill¹⁶¹ and three of his colleagues conducted the survey under the direction of Milton Bona.

Milt Bona worked as a local newspaperman before managing public relations for the Vancouver Housing Authority in 1942. Though born in New York, Bona spent most of his life in Washington State, having graduated with a degree in journalism from the University of Washington and becoming editor for the *Camas-Washougal Post-Record* in 1931. By the time he supervised the VHA survey on black residents he was known as a

¹⁵⁹ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 1.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ E. Shelton Hill resigned to become Industrial Secretary of the Portland Urban League at which time Mark A. Smith, president of the Vancouver branch of the NAACP, was appointed as Tenant Relations Advisor for the Vancouver Housing Authority. Clipping from unknown newspaper, NAACP 1947-1948 scrapbook.

local county historian and as a “stickler for accuracy.”¹⁶² Bona’s researchers for this project included E. Shelton Hill, who was one of the first African Americans to work for the Housing Authority as an executive before becoming Industrial Secretary of the Urban League of Portland.¹⁶³ Two years after the survey, Hill would reference its findings in a speech to the Vancouver Civic Unity League detailing the City’s housing shortage and how race would factor into postwar housing.¹⁶⁴

Hill led staff in compiling the questionnaire data, which yielded a significant demographical profile. Most black postwar tenants had migrated at least a year before the survey, 78 percent of them from south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The top five home states were Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri.¹⁶⁵ The typical family consisted of four people and most adults (47 percent) were between 19 to 30 years old, however, these young black families had fewer school-aged children than whites,¹⁶⁶ indicating that many children were left in home states with friends or relatives while parents sought work. Because so many left children in their home states, it follows that many workers planned to move back home after war work ended to reunite with their children. A substantial number of migrants likely intended their lives in the Pacific Northwest to be temporary, not intending to make a home but to earn money.

According to the National Association of Home Builders in 1944 black Americans accumulated over \$18 billion in savings through employment and war bonds, eager to

¹⁶² “Milton Bona,” *Clark County Ancestors*, columbian.com, <http://www.columbian.com/history/profiles/bona.cfm> (accessed May 10 2007).

¹⁶³ “E. Shelton Hill,” Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Archive, <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/> (accessed May 10, 2007).

¹⁶⁴ Vancouver Civic Unity League Folder, 1947, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 5, Folder 2, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁶⁵ “A Survey of Negro Tenants,” 2, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Public school records tallied .48 students per black household in contrast to .74 students per white dwelling, “A Survey of Negro Tenants,” 3.

invest in homes.¹⁶⁷ The following year, VHA researchers' findings on black tenants' economic status refuted the stereotype that African Americans spent money as quickly as they made it, for most of those surveyed had been thrifty.¹⁶⁸ Researches fell short of speculating whether or not those tenants saved a large amount of money, but cited a nationwide study in *Fortune* magazine that year which indicated that 26 percent of black Americans saved enough money to support themselves for six months.¹⁶⁹ Because *Fortune* magazine's survey accounted for blacks in all parts of the country and in all types of work, VHA staff supposed about 50 percent of blacks in the area have saved as much. The same questionnaire revealed that each family surveyed had an average of 1.4 workers contributing to household income, a 15 percent higher average than whites.¹⁷⁰

"A Survey of Negro Tenants" revealed that while Afro-American VHA residents had been successful in securing war work, one-third of them had been laid off from war industry jobs by late 1945.¹⁷¹ At the time the survey began, 800 of 1,200 families were employed and only 12 percent of them were employed in work unrelated to the war which the VHA categorized as permanent or semi-permanent, such as packing plants, railroads, restaurants, and hotels.¹⁷² The 12 percent employment figure did not include those working in housing, recreation, or commercial centers in the Authority's projects because those jobs were considered war-related, thus temporary.¹⁷³ The small number of blacks employed in non-war related industries meant that in November 1945 eighty-

¹⁶⁷ Meyer, 82.

¹⁶⁸ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. This statistic may be best explained by doubling-up, a term used to describe the common practice of non-family members living together in one household. Often several working adults shared residences and pooled their incomes.

¹⁷¹ During 1945 the VHA calculated that one in three blacks in its projects had been laid off from war industry jobs, but statistics improved by November of that year, after 10 percent of blacks moved out of war housing the number of unemployed dropped to one in four. "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 4.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

eight percent of employed African American tenants depended on war industries for their sole incomes, yet those workers were due for dismissal at the end of the year when defense contracts expired.¹⁷⁴ Though researchers concluded that a decent number of African American families managed to save money, they calculated the average family only put away enough for six months.¹⁷⁵ Under these grim employment statistics VHA surveyors wondered if, and how, blacks would stay in the area.

Fifty-seven percent of black families surveyed planned “definitely to remain in the Vancouver area,” while 24 percent planned definitely to leave as soon as their current employment ended; approximately one in five families were undecided or indicated they would remain if there was work.¹⁷⁶ To determine how heavily employment status played on families’ decisions to stay or leave the conductors divided questionnaires by those who were working and those who were unemployed and discovered that 22 percent of employed blacks planned to go elsewhere when their jobs ended, as opposed to 33 percent of unemployed families who planned definitely to leave.¹⁷⁷ In other words, predictably, those who were out of work indicated they were more likely to leave Vancouver than those who still had jobs. Those who planned definitely to stay in the area shared three main reasons: they were satisfied with housing facilities, they enjoyed the climate, and they “had confidence in the future of the Pacific Northwest.”¹⁷⁸ Of those who had definite plans to leave, 15 percent implicated job opportunity, discrimination, and the white population’s general attitude

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

as the major factors, but those 15 perfect represented just 3 percent of the total black residents in VHA projects.¹⁷⁹

The report's authors carefully noted that though over half the families surveyed planned to stay in the area, in reality, many were simply not able to do so.¹⁸⁰

Researchers were accurate in their predictions. By December 1945, only one month after researchers compiled the survey results, the number of blacks in war housing dropped almost by half to just 681 families.¹⁸¹ The population of their white counterparts also dropped in the six months following the war, from 11,345 families to 6,025.¹⁸² Though the dip in VHA tenants in late 1945 occurred three weeks after heavy shipyard layoffs, it did not drop by the same proportion as those laid off, which was 67 percent since the war's end; VHA occupancy decreased only by 33 percent in comparison.¹⁸³

The Authority gave four reasons for that discrepancy: many shipyard workers found employment in other industries, others drew unemployment compensation or lived on savings, housing shortages across the nation prompted many to stay put, and veterans and their families moved into the housing projects as other vacated.¹⁸⁴ For those tenants who could afford to buy VHA homes or homes in the private market at war's end, the demise of the VHA presented no problems. For others, however, vacating public housing signaled a loss of safety, particularly for those who found themselves recently unemployed as war industries scaled down.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁸¹ "Housing Area Population is Down Sharply," December 1945, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ "Occupancy in Housing Area 23,000" January 1946.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Employment Prospects

During the VHA survey, interviewers asked respondents about their work experiences to determine their likelihoods of securing postwar employment in Vancouver and in which types of work they would engage. In comparing the types of work blacks performed in their home states to that performed in Vancouver, the Authority determined that African Americans secured work with higher skill levels than they had before the war. In their states of origin most migrants surveyed had been farmworkers, truck drivers, cooks, mechanics, laborers, railroad workers, sawmill employees, maids and carpenters, janitors, laundry employees, or teachers.¹⁸⁵ The Authority surmised that most prewar work was unskilled, but that skill levels rose during the war when those surveyed adopted work as welders, shipfitters, chippers, painters, pipefitters, scalers, janitors, buffers, or tank cleaners.¹⁸⁶ The researchers seemed impressed with the abilities of so many unskilled workers to learned new trades, yet in assessing the types of work respondents appeared most qualified to do after the war the Authority condescendingly determined the majority would fit best into unskilled jobs as laborers, domestics, welders, mechanics, truck drivers, cooks, janitors, farmworkers, and sawmill employees.¹⁸⁷ On an encouraging note, the report explains:

Although their former occupations ran heavily to personal services, domestic and menial tasks, there is a good representation of the mechanical, business and professional skills needed in a normal community. Consequently, if this area kept any sizable number of Negro families, it could expect to have adequate Negro sales personnel for stores, service station and garage proprietors and employees, barbers and beauty operators, restaurant workers, teachers, recreation workers and even a politician or two!¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," Table I.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Table II.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Table III.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 6.

After the war, a local newspaper reported a racially mixed group of Vancouver leaders who drafted a postwar action plan for the city with regard to employment opportunities for African Americans. Lieutenant Lawrence Oxley, an African American specialist with the Federal Employment Service, warned of the consequences of not preparing a plan to accommodate blacks new to the area. He was familiar with the effects of low employment for postwar Afro-Americans, as he had conducted a study of west coast black war workers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Vancouver, and Puget Sound. He noted, "No great migration of our race to northern urban centers has ever gone into reverse and there is no reason to expect that this wartime movement of colored workers to the coast will prove an exception."¹⁸⁹

Housing Authority researchers admitted the difficulty in forecasting a postwar black population and employment prospects. At the time of the VHA's November 1945 report shipyards were slated to close in two months' time, thereafter the Authority expected a decline in both the white and black populations of its units. The authors surmised Vancouver's total postwar black population would not exceed 300 families, 100 of whom would be without work,¹⁹⁰ but they also suspected the black population might grow as employment opportunities opened and as whites became accustomed to blacks.¹⁹¹ The authors supposed by 1950 the city's African American population might grow to 500 families – approximately 1,350 citizens – or 3 percent of Clark County's forecasted population.¹⁹² That was not to be, as the Census recorded the 1950 black

¹⁸⁹ "Interracial Group Heads Plan Action," Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

¹⁹⁰ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 8.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

population at just 879 persons.¹⁹³ The authors also believed families would find or create jobs in Vancouver or perhaps Portland yet continue to keep residence in this city, as researchers discovered respondents preferred Vancouver's housing to that across the river.¹⁹⁴

Those African Americans surveyed demonstrated a "realistic" outlook regarding job opportunities and interviewers were convinced blacks would "follow employment in any direction except the deep South."¹⁹⁵ The report stresses the supposition that an estimated 250 black families who would be out of work after the war would not become dependent on the community, as "the last to lose their jobs generally will be those who have been here the longest [due to seniority at industrial yards and plants], they will have earned a fair-sized unemployment benefit, and will, in the main, have put aside some savings."¹⁹⁶

In late 1946 the VHA again recorded employment information from its black residents which E. Shelton Hill reported to Urban Renewal Director Floyd Ratchford. The VHA tallied 181 Afro-American tenants, 125 of whom were eligible and receiving adjusted rent and 79 of whom were employed. Assuming the 56 who did not apply or were ineligible were working, the Authority totaled 135 employed, or 74 percent.¹⁹⁷ That number indicated 30 percent, or 54 family heads, were unemployed and researchers predicted that number would rise as seasonal work ended unless job opportunities increased. Of those employed, approximately 50 percent worked near Portland and commuted daily. The largest single group employed in the Vancouver area worked for

¹⁹³ "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed May 30, 2007).

¹⁹⁴ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 7.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Although the researchers believed 70 percent to be a more accurate statistic.

the Spokane, Portland and Seattle (SP & S) Railway as track laborers, employment the researchers expected to continue for one to three years. Many blacks also secured work for the Civil Service at Barnes Hospital and some in private businesses or at a cannery, and a few women with families.¹⁹⁸

Clark County boosters touted Vancouver's postwar economic opportunities but jobs were not as easily secured by Afro-Americans as by others. Roy Rickey, Industry Manager of the Chamber of Commerce, addressed local employment at "tourist school," a Chamber-sponsored event in June 1947.¹⁹⁹ Rickey emphasized the roles tourists – by whom he meant war workers and servicemen – living conditions, and industry played in making the county a favorable place to live. The number of war workers and military men who opted to stay in the area after the war, Rickey claimed, illustrated the importance of certain industries to tourists. He highlighted the success of the area's diversified industries and attributed it to the rich natural resources available for commercial exploit, recreation, and leisure:

To be successful industrially, any section of the country should be a great place in which to live, work and play. There are few spots in the United States where a working man can enjoy winter sports after a short drive, or the beach in an hour's drive in a direction. This is important in the happiness of the industrial family....²⁰⁰

Rickey also noted the County's largest employers: Crown Willamette Paper Company, the Camas paper mill, the Aluminum Company of American (Alcoa), Columbia River Paper Mills, Vancouver Plywood, Washington Cannery, Jantzen Knitting Mills, Interstate Brewery, the California Packing Corporation, and Battle Ground's cheese

¹⁹⁸ E. Shelton Hill to F. S. Ratchford, September 12, 1946, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 1, Folder 4, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁹⁹ "Combination of Resources and Happy Living conditions Here are Held Ideal Industrially," *Columbian*, June 24, 1947.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

plant.²⁰¹ What Rickey failed to address in his claim that those industries anchored war migrants and servicemen to the area was that a significant portion of those citizens – African Americans – had already left the area by 1947. Just 200 black families remained in the housing projects that year, down from approximately 8,900 in 1945.²⁰² The area's major employers did not successfully retain black workers, perhaps because they favored white labor.

Social Realities for African Americans

According to a local October 1946 newspaper article, the Negro population in Vancouver's war projects reached its lowest point at 180 families, or 10 percent of the crest of nearly 1,800 families in early 1945.²⁰³ Of the total population of all Vancouver housing projects, 60 percent, or slightly fewer than 11,000 persons, moved into the projects prior to 1946. The remaining 40 percent, approximately 7,250, moved in during 1946 and 1947. Between March and April 1947, 341 families moved into McLoughlin Heights, only six of them black and four of them of unnoted racial background. Ninety-three percent of the total number of move-ins during this period were veterans and their families and about 65 families were new arrivals to the Portland-Vancouver area indicating continued in-migration regardless of scarce job opportunities.²⁰⁴ Of the 12,350 Authority's wartime units few more than one-third were still available for rent in June 1947.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Franklin, 41.

²⁰³ "Housing Area Population Up Slightly," *Columbian*, October 8, 1946.

²⁰⁴ Hanger, 36.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 34.

The City showed little interest in offering low-rent housing but the Vancouver Housing Authority did adjust rents for low-income tenants. Between March and April of 1947 an average of 1,074 families per month benefited from rents scaled down proportionately to their incomes. Of 790 white families on adjusted rent 618 were unemployed, 172 had work. In contrast, of 151 black families on adjusted rent 81 were employed.²⁰⁶ Those numbers indicate white workers who were employed earned higher wages than their African American counterparts; taking wages into account, the significance of affordable housing for African Americans is clear.²⁰⁷ That the VHA instituted a program for low-income renters indicated to some Vancouverites that the units would become just what they feared – projects with high concentrations of unemployed or underemployed residents. Many worried low-income tenants had low commitment to civic pride and would raise crime and occupy dilapidated rental units as buildings aged.

Meanwhile, other Vancouver residents, such as those members of the NAACP, vigorously supported low-cost housing and employment opportunities in the immediate postwar years. The branch received limited support from local and state government, most work took place at the grassroots level even as membership ebbed and flowed in postwar years. In 1947 Washington State was home to seven local branches in Bremerton, Vancouver, Tacoma, Seattle, Yakima, Walla Walla, and Spokane.²⁰⁸ Vancouver's postwar membership fluctuated from 378 in 1945 to 163 in 1946, and 281 in 1947; the dip may be explained by the movement of blacks out of the

²⁰⁶ It is important to note the figures on unemployment based on adjusted rent cannot accurately illustrate unemployment totals among VHA tenants, for Hanger reported "ample evidence" indicated considerable joblessness existed among those renters who never applied for adjusted rent.

²⁰⁷ Hanger, 37-38.

²⁰⁸ Membership Record for NAACP Region 1, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 4, Folder 12, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

city and the surge by the increasingly pressing predicament of limited affordable housing for nonwhites.²⁰⁹ No matter how many members, the Vancouver NAACP's role in addressing equal housing opportunities was indispensable, as it was the city's only civil rights organization. While Portland boasted both an active NAACP and Urban League, Vancouver's African Americans depended upon the NAACP's experience and expertise in communicating with government agencies, attorneys, churches, social organizations, and businesses to secure support for its efforts.

Appealing to businesses may have been a particularly effective tactic in addressing unequal employment opportunities. By 1948 shipyard work for thousands was just a memory and securing work in other industries must have been difficult. That year Vancouver Alcoa workers and Boeing employees in Seattle went on strike for higher wages; if decent wages were difficult for white men to attain African Americans likely fared worse. Postwar jobs remained elusive for many blacks as they competed with unemployed whites and returning servicemen for work. A letter from the Vancouver NAACP to the proprietors of New Method Cleaners gives insight into the City's unequal employment opportunities:

The Vancouver branch of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, congratulate you on the democratic step taken by you in employing three of our capable young women in your progressive establishment.

Your forthright action is encouraging to all of us who believe in the democratic process. Many white employers are beset with fear when first they hire colored workers in a previously all white business. They foresee [*sic*] incidents, loss of customers, riots and everything else. Usually none of these ever happen and in a little while nobody remembers that some workers are colored[,] some white.

It has been our experience that in very few instances has there been any customer objection and in these few cases the complaints were trivial and on the same level as the ordinary complaints received by any store any day of the week.

²⁰⁹ Membership Record for NAACP Region 1, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 4, Folder 12, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

You have done a great service to us and to the community as a whole. We wish there were more courageous and farseeing business people as you are. Again [c]ongratulations and our best wishes for continued success in your business and to your employees that are continuing [to be] loyal to you.²¹⁰

Branch members thanking white employers for hiring blacks speaks to Vancouver's racial tension and suggests African Americans faced discrimination in employment regularly, even though by 1948 the community had had a decent-sized black population for half a decade. Misconceptions about Afro-Americans no doubt caused many business owners and managers to pass up black job applicants, and perpetuated social stigmas as well. Social perceptions certainly affected the community's interracial relations.

To figure how well African Americans would transition into the larger community, Housing Authority investigators noted impressions of each family they interviewed in their postwar poll:

They were asked especially to note whether the persons interviewed could be expected to adjust well in the community, and if they would contribute toward eventual community acceptance of Negroes. Education, personality and personal appearance were particularly watched for by the interviewers. The result was that fully one third of the families visited were listed as above the average and likely to adjust.²¹¹

Because social perception played an important role in whether or not blacks were accepted by whites, Edwin Berry addressed racial stereotypes and misconceptions in an address to the American Association of University Women titled "Race Relations and

²¹⁰ Vancouver NAACP to Mr. & Mrs. Miller, May 19, 1948, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1948 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA. Vancouver and its immediate surroundings' total population in January 1944 was 95,000, Clark County's grew to over 130,000. City of Vancouver, Washington, Vancouver Housing Authority, *Housing in War and Peace: The Story of Public Housing in Vancouver, Washington*, 1972, 32.

²¹¹ "A Survey of Negro Tenants," 7.

American Democracy" in April 1948.²¹² Then a professor of sociology at Vanport College, Berry became a well-known and respected member of Portland's black community as Executive Secretary of the Urban League of Portland. Berry's lecture addressed prejudice, the role of media in racism, and unemployment. The stereotypes he noted as most common were that all Negroes were lazy, carried razors,²¹³ were vicious, had body odor, and all had rhythm.

Berry believed literature, film, and the media perpetuated those myths by depicting black characters as "servants, ignorant bafoons [*sic*] or entertainers," and newspapers sometimes referenced race as if "it were part of the evidence against [a person] should the case in point happen to concern a misdeed."²¹⁴ Some years earlier in a letter to Mark Smith, then president of Vancouver' NAACP, Washington State Representative William Jones commented on racial coverage in the *Columbian*, Southwest Washington's longest running and most widely circulated newspaper. Jones asked Smith and others to begin a letter campaign for anti-discrimination bills: "These letters I regard as extremely important. Perhaps some favorable newspaper publicity in the *Sun* and the *Columbian* (extremely unlikely in the latter's case, I believe) would go a long way."²¹⁵

Others likely agreed with Jones' perception of incidences of biased reporting in the local paper, but print media also favorably covered African Americans and events

²¹² "Negro Professor Addresses University Women on Race Relations and Democracy," *Columbian*, April 14, 1948.

²¹³ The rumor that black youth carried razors or knives must have been prevalent. Florene DuFresne recalled a white woman who moved to Vancouver from North Dakota for war work who had never seen a person of color. She feared sending her children to school because she heard all the black students at Hudson's Bay High School carried knives. DuFresne, interview.

²¹⁴ "Negro Professor Addresses University Women on Race Relations and Democracy," *Columbian*, April 14, 1948.

²¹⁵ William Jones to Mark Smith, February 2, 1945, Records of the Vancouver Branch of the NAACP, Box 1, Folder 4, University of Washington Special Collections.

of particular interest to them. *The Columbian* announced NAACP meetings, noted interracial group gatherings, and occasionally highlighted black youths' successes in athletics and academics. Not all news was slanted, but, as Berry acknowledged, many articles unnecessarily mentioned the word "Negro" when an African American was involved with a story.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, to emphasize gains in racial equality, Berry applauded the U.S. Supreme Court's efforts to protect civil rights, public schools that addressed misinformation about black Americans in their texts, and the Vancouver Housing Authority for "the justice and consideration it has shown the colored population."²¹⁷

The Housing Authority in postwar years continued to serve its African American population. After 1945 the City of Vancouver vowed to maintain its projects and allow tenants -- even those with high enough incomes to move out -- to remain in VHA units. But in 1958 the Authority closed, liquidated its assets, and the City moved forward with plans to develop McLoughlin Heights, the largest public housing project, into a middle and upper class suburban development. Though Vancouver's suburban redevelopment plans included all residents and barred none based on race, the city's newest postwar homes best suited those with comfortable incomes. By the time several suburban neighborhoods sprawled across the city in the late 1950s, most black residents had already left the area as a result of having lost their wartime jobs. The VHA took interest in how many blacks might stay in the city even before its projects shut down. A 1945 survey revealed to researchers that though more than half of black citizens planned to stay in Vancouver they acknowledged that permanent residency depended heavily

²¹⁶ "Negro Professor Addresses University Women on Race Relations and Democracy," *Columbian*, April 14, 1948.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

upon employment opportunities, which were at risk in the postwar industrial gear-down.

Employment would be the largest push factor for blacks moving out of Vancouver; by 1950 just 879 African Americans called the city their home and found mostly low-paying jobs. The local NAACP's concern between the discrepancy of blacks who had indicated they wanted to remain in Vancouver and the low number who did prompted the branch to conduct its own survey to assess how many remaining blacks could continue to afford to live in the city in the midst of upscale suburban development. The survey indicated some Afro-Americans could afford homes in new exclusive areas, but most fell within moderate to low range buying power.

Vancouver's residents of color were grappling with the same issues as many of their counterparts across the country in cities that implemented postwar neighborhood redevelopment plans. Wherever cities went upscale, blacks were less likely to afford to live. Civil rights organizations and social action groups concerned with racial equality combated the gentrification whenever possible to allow African Americans the chance to participate in the 1950s American ideal of homeownership. For in that decade homeownership was one of the most significant symbol of the nation's prosperity in the Cold War era.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL ACTION, THE POSTWAR VHA, AND CITY PLANS

Historian Mary L. Dudziak explores 1950s race integration as a Cold War policy for the U.S. government, which was desperate to project an image consistent with the democratic ideologies it claimed to defend for the world.²¹⁸ Dudziak notes the impact of American race policies on international relations with regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. “U.S. government officials,” writes Dudziak, “realized that their ability to sell democracy to the Third World was seriously hampered by continuing racial injustice at home.”²¹⁹ She explains how the notion of racism as un-American informed scholarship, politics, and popular culture during and after World War II, and how international watchdogs monitored and publicly scrutinized the United States’ race policies and relations if for nothing else than to produce propaganda to repel America’s influence and fight against U.S. dominance.

Foreign politicians, diplomats, business people, and journalists demanded to know how a nation claiming to promote democratic ideals could so blatantly deny rights to its citizens of color. Negative press in South America, Haiti, Britain, India, the Soviet Union, East Asia, and even Fiji concerned Roosevelt’s and Truman’s administrations. Dudziak supports the idea that pro-Civil Rights Cold War legislation was, in large part, strategically driven to polish the United States’ global image. Though Dudziak highlights the 1954 landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* as the nation’s most significant step in combating racial injustice, she acknowledges the significance of

²¹⁸ Mary L. Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War imperative,” *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1, (November 1988): 61-120. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²¹⁹ Dudziak, “Desegregation,” 64.

desegregated housing as well.²²⁰ For residential equality bolstered the wartime and postwar idea that racism was un-American.

In postwar years black Americans enjoyed some of the most significant achievements in housing rights since the *Buchanan v. Warley* decision in 1917.²²¹ Not only did African Americans have more money to invest in housing markets, they entered a period in which many white Americans reexamined their racial prejudices in light of “the democratic Creed” and the war against Germany and Nazi racial theories.²²² This self-examination ushered integration in several arenas, housing included. Stephen Grant Meyer notes popular cultural events such as “Jesse Owens and Joe Louis defeating Teutonic heroes merged with anti-Nazi rhetoric [made] many Americans more sensitive to racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.”²²³ Those examinations of attitude combined with the dismissal of racial hierarchies in the social sciences, and with recognition that racial prejudice could have such extreme consequences as the Holocaust, paved the way for new race perceptions.²²⁴ In this environment, conditions were fertile for a modern civil rights movement. Opportunities to purchase homes in the private real estate market expanded for blacks in many neighborhoods.

The unconstitutionality of racially-based restrictive covenants marked a monumental victory for blacks with regard to homeownership and financial security. Property and homeownership have represented the greatest personal wealth for Americans and in the postwar era they had more money than ever before to invest in

²²⁰ Dudziak, “Desegregation.”

²²¹ Meyer, 79.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

single-family houses and blacks, too, participated in this pursuit of the American Dream. However, owning one's home symbolized more than wealth and security in the postwar era; it represented a national prosperity that many Americans believed could only exist in a nation dedicated to democratic ideals and a free market economy. This Cold War belief in the significance of home owning defined, in part, what it meant to be American.

In Vancouver, the notion that racism was un-American played a role in housing blacks after World War II. In 1958 Reverend Soltman attributed his fight to secure equal housing opportunity for blacks in Vancouver to his Christian ethics but also acknowledged a patriotic motivation "[t]o tell any man where he must live... is an affront to the traditions of the people and the nation." Reverend Soltman's allusion to American ideals and the negative effects of racism thereupon emphasize how the racial Cold War consciousness Dudziak describes seeped from the federal government to the country's neighborhoods.

Like Soltman, other concerned community members, like those in the NAACP, hoped City agencies would continue to work for and with African Americans in fair housing but did not rely upon the City alone to ensure equal opportunity. In addition to creating a Committee on Housing, the branch hosted lectures on the topic, which were open to all community members. In February 1950 the branch made housing the focus of its monthly education meeting. The meeting featured guest speaker Robert Pitts of the Office of the West Coast Regional Public Housing Administration in San Francisco who addressed how Vancouver's new housing program would serve non-whites, and how non-whites could improve their chances of moving into better homes.²²⁵ In the

²²⁵ "Negroes' Stake in Public Housing to be Discussed," *Columbian*, February 1950.

same week the NAACP hosted a meeting with John G. Dunmore, manager of the VHA's permanent housing sales, and Miss Lou M. Smith of the Authority's tenant relations department to learn about the agency's upcoming plans.²²⁶ The NAACP branch's initiative to bring attention to housing issues reflects the Association's tireless commitment to ensuring equality for Vancouver's non-white residents. Branch members mobilized particularly in regard to housing believing, as most Americans did, that safe, affordable housing set the foundation for family cohesiveness and financial strength.

In 1951 the city's NAACP listed 200 members and maintained its activism by organizing meetings, social events, and political action to draw attention to Vancouver's housing problem as it impacted low-income families and African Americans.²²⁷ In April of that year the Vancouver chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) chose to highlight the city's race and housing problems in observation of National YWCA Week.²²⁸ Brazzola Reddick, a longtime member of the Vancouver NAACP and chairwoman of the Vancouver YWCA public affairs committee, arranged for a city planning consultant to present findings on Dr. Bayard Wheeler's research of the Vancouver area, which he conducted for the City Planning Commission and the Housing Authority.²²⁹ Wheeler's study earned national attention for its postwar analysis of a city facing housing shortages and unemployment. It presented an economic assessment of Clark County and forecasted its employment and housing needs. In a newspaper article announcing the event, Reddick emphasized the need for housing for

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Vancouver's 200 members in 1951 compares to 700 in Portland, 750 in Seattle, 100 in Tacoma, 100 in Spokane, and 75 in Bremerton. 1951 Vancouver NAACP Membership, 1951, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 4, Folder 9, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²²⁸ "Housing Problem Being Emphasized for YWCA Week," *Columbian*, April 1951.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Vancouver's citizens, the significance of interagency partnerships, and the vital importance women could play in community planning.²³⁰

Women were, in fact, instrumental to progressive social action and planning in Vancouver. Not long after the war, Etta Andrews, chairwoman of the Inter-racial Council's Inter-racial Studies Committee, proposed an investigation to "arouse public interest in the race problem, and inspire public co-operation in solving the problem."²³¹ Female members of the NAACP and YWCA designed and hosted civil rights events from the late 1940s through the 1950s, as well as conducted surveys and compiled their information to share with others. Women's experience in these postwar campaigns for access to housing and other issues paved the way for leadership roles as NAACP officers in future decades. Instrumental female officers in the NAACP's more recent past owe much of their skill to the organization's dedicated early officers, Mark Smith being one of the most influential.

In June of 1951 NAACP branch president Mark Smith drafted and released an appeal for urgent action from those interested in improving housing conditions. He asked Vancouverites to telegraph and write to senators to protest an amendment to the Independent Offices Appropriation Bill adopted by the House of Representatives that would allow for the construction of no more than 5,000 public housing units nationwide beginning in July 1951. Smith and other housing advocates insisted 5,000 units were simply not enough and expressed dissatisfaction at the federal government's reluctance to provide more. Smith believed citizens should pressure "the Public Housing Administration of the Housing and Home Finance Agency the power to assist in the construction of the reasonable number of low-rent housing units authorized by the

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ "Race Study is Proposed," Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

Housing Act of 1949.” Proponents of public housing had been hopeful about the Act but it fell to the wayside in 1950 as Congress turned its attention to the war in Korea.

Smith, like other members of the NAACP, insisted on the value of public housing because it “ha[d] shown itself to be the only means by which thousands of American families secured an adequate roof over their heads.”²³² More to the point, Smith addressed the closing of the regional field branch of Housing and Home Finance Agency in Seattle and the loss of the Racial Relations Service (RRS):²³³

Experience leads us to be keenly aware of the value of competent racial relations services in assisting private developers, Public Housing Authorities and local communities, alike, to provide more living space fairly distributed, maximum progress toward non-segregation, and balanced neighborhoods instead of standardization by class or race. The elimination of the Seattle Office at this time would deny us sorely needed direction in the fast growing Pacific Northwest. For the sake of the community benefit and a necessary continued improvement in race relations we deem it indispensable that the service of this office continue. To do otherwise would be an utter disregard for the vital needs of this area.²³⁴

Warren Magnuson of the U. S. Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce acknowledged receipt of a letter from Smith on that very issue in June 1951 in which Smith “urge[d] appropriations sufficient to permit Pubic Housing Administration to maintain its racial relations personnel and work.” Magnuson matter-of-factly replied that the decision to close RSS offices around the nation had been made and no reopenings were planned.²³⁵

²³² Mark A. Smith to Fellow Citizens, 1951, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1951 Scrapbook, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²³³ Meyer, 83. For a concise history of the Race Relations Service see Arnold R. Hirsch, “Searching for a “Sound Negro Policy”: A Racial Agenda for the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954,” *Housing Policy Debate*, Volume 11, Issue 2, Fannie Mae Foundation, 2000, 393-441, http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hpd/pdf/hpd_1102_hirsch.pdf (accessed July 3, 2007).

²³⁴ Mark A. Smith to Fellow Citizens, 1951, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1951 Scrapbook, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²³⁵ Warren Magnuson to Mark Smith, June 12, 1951, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 1, Folder 4, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

By the time Smith lamented the loss of a regional Racial Relations Service office, African American activists across the nation had been protesting its slow demise for years. In 1947 Robert Pitts, Chairman of the Housing Committee, wrote to Frank McIntosh, President of Washington State Branches of the NAACP, to explain that many RRS offices were dismantled in cities across the country and that “[t]he recent elimination of the Racial Relations Service from the Federal Public Housing Authority and the Federal Housing Administration has brought protests throughout the country. Branches of the N.A.A.C.P. and the Urban League have combined their forces in bringing pressure to bear on this matter.”²³⁶

The Racial Relations Service was a remnant agency from New Deal reforms that attempted to promote racially just practices among local authorities that used federal monies to create and maintain housing projects and fund urban renewal development into the 1950s.²³⁷ Though it lacked legal authority, it played a significant role as watchdog and advisor to other government agencies and municipalities from coast to coast.²³⁸ NAACP branches across the country applauded the RRS’s efforts to promote racial equality in housing, so when Vancouver’s closest office in Seattle closed in 1951 blacks in the region must have felt their footing slip in the fight for fair housing.

The following year Mark Smith continued to express his concern in writing to Harry Cain of the U. S. Senate Committee on Armed Services to express opposition to the House of Representatives reducing to 5,000 the number of units of public housing to

²³⁶ Robert Pitts to Frank McIntosh, June 20, 1947, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 1, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²³⁷ Arnold R. Hirsch, “Searching for a “Sound Negro Policy”: A Racial Agenda for the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954,” *Housing Policy Debate*, Volume 11, Issue 2, Fannie Mae Foundation, 2000, 393-441, http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hpd/pdf/hpd_1102_hirsch.pdf (accessed July 3, 2007).

²³⁸ Ibid.

be built in fiscal year 1952. Cain replied to reassure Smith that the federal government planned to erect houses under H.R. 3880,²³⁹ but Smith must have suspected construction would be inadequate to meet demands; even President Truman criticized the resolution as providing for too few public units while the demand for defense worker housing – this time in preparation for war in Korea – was high.²⁴⁰

The VHA Purchases Wartime Properties

While Mark Smith and others eyed the nation's progress, or lack thereof, in public housing, Vancouver planned to purchase its federally-owned property to redevelop for private buyers. The Vancouver Housing Authority moved to purchase its leased land and buildings from the federal government in the early 1950s, an action local authorities were required by law to pursue anyhow. All postwar local housing authorities were ordered to dispose of federally-funded units or purchase them from the government, as a peacetime Washington, D.C. would not infringe upon the private housing market by acting as a permanent landlord for families who did not qualify as low-income.

The Housing Act of 1950 legalized the sale of federally owned temporary war projects to local authorities under certain financial terms. In 1952 the VHA purchased from the government wartime land and over 3,500 dwellings and structures for the price it paid in 1942. For ten years the VHA had operated under a lease agreement with the federal government, earning a profit every year but its first, and this successful

²³⁹ Harry Cain to Mark Smith, 1952, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 1, Folder 3, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²⁴⁰ Harry S. Truman to Senator Maybank on the Limitation on Public Housing in the Appropriations Bill, May 22nd, 1951, *The American Presidency Project*, americanpresidency.org, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=13790>, (accessed July 1, 2007).

financial record continued under Authority ownership from 1952 to 1959.²⁴¹ The Housing Authority's revenue from rentals and property sales during those seven years provided the VHA's annual payments to the federal government.²⁴²

Once it owned the property the VHA could dispose of, develop, rent, or sell it as it saw fit in conjunction with the City's overall plans. The City's objective was to clear temporary housing to allow for new developments that encouraged homeownership, and to prevent slums and blight. A three-pronged plan to sell vacant buildings, determine land use, and sell land under new use policies operated simultaneously. Through the 1950s the Authority advertised its prefabricated temporary units throughout the Pacific Northwest and appealed to buyers in need of farm housing and temporary shelter for construction workers on public works projects; other buildings became mountain or beach cabins for summer homes. The VHA's property manager was responsible for sales and for finding buyers in other parts of the state who might purchase prefabs for farmworkers or laborers on reclamation and power projects.²⁴³

Fewer than ten percent of the projects' prefabricated units were re-erected in Clark County and even that small number were relocated under a strict policy drafted with cooperation from city and county commissioners mandating that only one temporary dwelling could be re-erected per acre of land within two miles of Vancouver proper – and only if certain improvements were made to the structure – “to protect the city from a fringe of substandard housing close to its limits.”²⁴⁴ This provision

²⁴¹ “A Tale of Six Cities.”

²⁴² Neal Jones, “Vancouver Housing Agency to Acquire Heights Tract,” *Oregonian*, September 26, 1952.

²⁴³ “3 Heights Areas to be Cleared Slowly...,” Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁴⁴ “Housing in War and Peace,” 50. “One-mile Radius for City Agreed,” Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

prevented a concentration of small, outdated structures in a city attempting to modernize for postwar families.

Though the City was eager for suburban development, fortunately for VHA tenants, the Authority had no plans evict residents or change rental rates in order to carry forward the City's redevelopment plans.²⁴⁵ D. Elwood Caples, Chairman of the Board of Housing Commissioners, affirmed the City had no desire to put out families: "We do not feel it would be in the public interest to evict families in large numbers until there is adequate private housing for them here.... [W]e will take no action that would bring hardship to local families."²⁴⁶ Caples reiterated for the public and press that the McLoughlin Heights project would remain open for current tenants regardless of income, but that those earning \$4,000 a year could easily afford homes outside of the VHA project.

He reflected the City's desire to slowly scale back its public housing operations while encouraging home construction in the private market and freezing, then liquidating, housing in McLoughlin Heights, the city's most permanent and desirable project. This cooperation between tenants, the VHA, and the City guaranteed families living in the 2,434 occupied Heights project – even those with high incomes – secure living for the next few months or even years. The Housing Authority's only proposed restriction at this time was its refusal to accept any of the 1,000 Housing Authority of Portland tenants who had recently been evicted from that city's war housing for having high incomes.²⁴⁷ Race continued to be an insignificant factor in VHA tenant policy.

²⁴⁵ "No Eviction or Rental Changes Due," November 30, 1952, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁴⁶ "No Eviction or Rental Changes Due," November 30, 1952, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

In early 1953 the Columbia River Youth Presbytery of First Presbyterian Church of Vancouver invited local NAACP president Mark Smith to speak on what made a good citizen. Smith undoubtedly emphasized the unimportance of race in determining who was and was not a good neighbor.²⁴⁸ The discussion was particularly relevant that year, as the City planned new residential developments that would be open to all residents, as its war projects had been. Through a partnership, the VHA and City government developed a master plan for postwar suburban communities, particularly the McLoughlin Heights area. Consideration to Vancouverites desires played into the planning. A postwar Housing Authority survey indicated that 70 percent of those VHA tenants polled wanted to remain in the city after the war, and the same percentage preferred to buy a home as opposed to rent, or were undecided. Almost as many people, 61 percent, indicated they wanted suburban homes or small farms as opposed to city homes or large farms, or were undecided. Of the one-third respondents who revealed how much they were willing or able to spend on a postwar home, 63 percent replied they would like a home in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 price range, but 21 percent indicated they would spent \$5,000 or more. As for the preference to escape city living, interviewers explained: "The trend away from the cities to suburban and rural prosperities is a search for security on land that will grow a garden, pasture a cow and support a few chickens, to augment the worker's industrial income...."²⁴⁹ The survey results highlighted the trend away from rural expectations to a preference for suburban life, which city managers were eager to provide.

²⁴⁸ Kathy Duncan to Mark Smith, March 21, 1953, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 1, Folder 3, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²⁴⁹ "Survey Conducted by Authority Shows Workers Want Jobs; Like Idea of Remaining in this Area," Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

To accommodate the suburban neighborhood trend the Housing Authority revealed the details of its development plans for a 75-acre pilot section of the 800-acre Heights called area No. 2 at a City Planning Commission meeting in late 1953.²⁵⁰ Local newspapers reported the event and the Authority's plans to break the Heights into lots for individual purchase for those looking to build homes there. Planners estimated the pilot area would provide approximately 135 lots, including 14 exclusive sites with views of the Columbia River.²⁵¹ Area No. 2 would accommodate 600 people on plats ranging from 80 by 100 feet to 150 by 435 feet. A three-and-a-half-acre community playground at the neighborhood's center would make the development family-friendly and indicates the new project was geared toward young families and those with healthy enough incomes to afford homes in the area, which planners estimated could rise to as high as \$75,000.²⁵² Harlan Nelson of VHA planning staff noted the high cost of the project, though he did not offer a figure. City planners overwhelmingly supported the plan but disliked its neglect to straighten The Heights' existing "meandering, curved streets," Nelson warned against road development, as the cost of replacing sewer and water lines would be high enough.

In 1954 the Authority offered its first suburban development properties, forty-one lots in the southeastern corner of McLoughlin Heights platted for homesites accommodating houses in the \$10,000 to \$18,000 price range.²⁵³ Southcliff homesites, in McLoughlin Heights' southwestern corner, were sold next; these lots were slated for

²⁵⁰ "Vancouver Housing Tract Plans Aired," *Oregon Journal*, November 10, 1953. "Heights Plan for Future is Revealed," November 10, 1953, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² "Vancouver Housing Tract Plans Aired," *Oregon Journal*, November 10, 1953.

²⁵³ "A Tale of 6 Cities."

homes in the \$35,000 to \$60,000 price range and also sold quickly.²⁵⁴ The speedy sales encouraged the VHA to develop additional subdivisions, which it did in and around the McLoughlin Heights area from 1954 to 1959.²⁵⁵

The Vancouver Housing Authority Sales Office advertised its planned community homesites in McLoughlin Heights beginning in 1954. The lots carried numerous city zoning restrictions including prohibitions on existing homes placed on lots, subdivided lots, multiple-family dwellings, homes taller than two-and-a-half stories, garages accommodating more than two cars, and construction lasting longer than one year.²⁵⁶ The restrictions were guaranteed for 25 years, to extend automatically for ten-year intervals thereafter unless a majority of property owners voted to change the terms. The covenants, the VHA assured, were for residents' protection and were the only prohibitions the Housing Authority mandated; no restrictions on residents' races or national origins were drafted.²⁵⁷ This open housing model allowed African Americans to purchase land and build homes in majority-white neighborhoods if their resources allowed. By 1959, the VHA had redeveloped a total of 1,650 homesites that could comfortably shelter 7,500 people, a small number compared to the estimated 50,000 families the Housing Authority accommodated over the course of the war.²⁵⁸ The city that once had only a small business center surrounded by lightweight industry and heavy farming had transformed into a bustling center of war industry, and now

²⁵⁴ "A Tale of 6 Cities." The home prices were substantial considering the nationwide median yearly income in 1954 was \$4,200. "Current Population Reports," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/income.html> (accessed June 1, 2007).

²⁵⁴ Milt Bona, "WWII Social Phenomena Not Fully Understood," *Columbian*, February 23, 1975.

²⁵⁵ "A Tale of 6 Cities."

²⁵⁶ "Andresen Highlands: 25 Select Homesites in McLoughlin Heights," Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁵⁷ "A Tale of 6 Cities."

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

reinvented itself yet again into a sprawling area of suburban communities. City council members applauded their efforts in transforming Vancouver.

Interestingly, the ambitious postwar plan included many wartime objectives but with a modern, permanent goal in mind. Two sections of McLoughlin Heights, Lieser Crest and Southcliff, were redeveloped with major streets, spaces for churches, shopping centers, schools, parks, playgrounds, and greenways similar to those in the war projects.²⁵⁹ But the new subdivisions were divided into large lots for families and boasted residential streets to promote quiet communities that linked to major arterials and to Portland. Property owners speedily constructed up-to-date neighborhoods with sewer connections, streetlights, manicured lawns, paved streets, and electricity to perform jobs coal once had. These groomed community-oriented subdivisions symbolized the City's ideal in postwar living. They promoted postwar values: family cohesiveness, modernism, and homogeny.

Nationwide, racial integration posed a serious threat to those white Americans expecting homogenous neighborhoods in the 1950s. Charles Abrams traces wartime and postwar racial residential restrictions to nineteenth century reactions to immigration, early twentieth-century responses to black and Mexican migration, and details how private prejudices have influenced government to the point of "break[ing] the American democratic structure."²⁶⁰ Abrams views race-based housing restrictions as a blow to the nation's democratic ideals. Black activists believed the same, which is why so many targeted the practice of denying prospective black homeowners by restrictive covenants. Race-based covenants in particular played a significant role in limiting black residential choices in many of the nation's middle-sized and large cities in the 1940s and

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 9.

1950s. Banks, realtors, and white residents supported the covenants in an effort to protect property values they believed would drop if people of color moved into white neighborhoods. The restrictions typically “ran with the land,” meaning regardless of the number of subsequent buyers or whether or not subsequent buyers specifically agreed to the covenant, it was enforceable, having been grandfathered in by those parties who originally agreed to it, whether the previous year or decades before.

In countless instances, whites banded together in neighborhood associations to prohibit blacks from buying land or homes. In Seattle during the mid-1950s the Madrona-Denny Blaine Neighborhood Association campaigned to keep African Americans out of its area for fear of declining property values, crime, and trouble in public schools.²⁶¹ Association members voted to uphold its prohibition of nonwhites in its bylaws in February 1956. But in a rare turn of events neighbors who favored integration began to discourage panic selling and sold to black and Asian families, with encouragement from the Civic Unity Committee and the Central Seattle Community Association. Historian Quintard Taylor notes the Madrona-Denny Blaine model represented an isolated victory as other communities without organized integrationists remained embroiled in bitter race debates. In Portland, some white neighbors were so reluctant to allow African Americans into their neighborhoods that Jewish or white friends offered to purchase homes on their behalves.²⁶² A group of black men even formed a cooperative to find compassionate whites who would front for black buyers allowing the group to secretly buy property around the city.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Taylor, *Forging*, 180-181.

²⁶² Pearson, 156.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157.

In some cases white homeowners took more drastic measures to prevent people of color from moving next door than merely forming defensive neighborhood associations. One of the most violent instances of race-based residential opposition on the west coast occurred when O'Day Short and his family attempted to move into a home in Los Angeles in late 1945 at which time a mob firebombed his house instantly killing his wife and young children and fatally wounding Short, who died two weeks later.²⁶⁴ Though the severity of white opposition to black neighbors ranged from faint-hearted protests to extreme violence, the mindset behind the actions stemmed from the fear of an African American presence in all-white neighborhoods and the perceived problems a black presence would bring.

Historically, residential restrictive covenants prohibited any number of activities or changes to neighborhoods, and before 1948 they were lawfully used to enforce racial segregation in American communities. Under the protection of restrictive covenants realtors, white homeowners, and landlords could refuse to show, sell, or rent houses to nonwhites in order to keep neighborhoods free from minority residents. Though organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP chiseled tirelessly at residential segregation, progress was slow. However, a series of legal victories, most notably *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, secured leverage. When the Shelleys, a black family, purchased a home in a white St. Louis, Missouri neighborhood in 1945 they were unaware the property was under a 1911 covenant barring Negroes and Mongolians.²⁶⁵ When neighbors sued the Shelleys to prevent them from taking possession of the property a countersuit, filed by the NAACP, made its way to the Supreme Court of

²⁶⁴ Meyer, 77.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 92-95. Clement E. Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 100-121.

Missouri which affirmed the white residents' rights to uphold the covenant, citing its merit as a private agreement between the original parties in 1911 rather than a municipal or state law to enforce segregation. In Michigan, the McGhee family also took legal action when they encountered racial residential restriction after an attempt to build on land they purchased in a white neighborhood.

The United States Supreme Court combined the two discrimination cases in order to determine, firstly, whether race-based restrictive covenants were legal under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, and, secondly, whether courts could enforce them. In 1948 – after arguments from attorney Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's Chief Counsel – the Court ruled that racial restrictive covenants were valid under the Fourteenth Amendment only when private parties voluntarily agreed to their terms without seeking legal support. Seeking court enforcement would constitute state-condoned racial discrimination, a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The decision made it illegal for cities and states to enforce race-based restrictive covenants, a hard-won victory for African Americans. Yet even though non-white citizens were lawfully allowed to move into white communities they often faced a backlash from their new neighbors either by protest, white flight, or violence – that is, assuming they could afford access to newly developed suburban neighborhoods at all.²⁶⁶

Urban Renewal

After the war, as a group, African Americans were in better positions to buy homes than they had ever been – having saved money from well-paying war work – but whether or not cities' urban renewal plans would take black residents into account

²⁶⁶ For instances of violent backlashes against blacks in white neighborhoods, see Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

played out differently in different areas. Many historians have noted the often devastating effects of urban renewal on African American populations in large cities over the past sixty years. Because cities targeted ghettos and other areas of blight, urban renewal projects revamped locations in which the poorest and least valued citizens resided – typically this meant Afro-Americans. In smaller cities, such as Vancouver, with no black ghettos or major slums, urban renewal still affected cities' landscapes and residents of color in less conspicuous ways; urban and suburban development may have been one such method of pushing black residents out of the area.

Many have explored the impact of municipal urban renewal programs on minority and working class displacement. Portland's urban renewal plans may have pushed some of its black residents to Vancouver in the late 1940s. Jean Griffin's family relocated to Portland after having been washed out of their Vanport apartment by the 1948 flood. They moved to Vancouver because their options in Portland were few:

After the flood we moved over on Larrabee [Street], that was close to where the Rose Garden [Arena] is now and they wanted to put up the Memorial Coliseum so they bought out all those houses around there. Of course, that house was just temporary anyway, we were there because we didn't have any place else to go. The City decided they wanted to put the people from Vanport into trailers; they had trailers located way out somewhere, probably in St. Johns. We decided we didn't want to live in a trailer so that's when we decided to move [to Vancouver] and I'm glad we did.

Two of Portland's massive 1950 renewal projects – the construction of the Memorial Coliseum and a section of the Interstate 5 freeway – interrupted a black section of the city. Portland officials defended the projects from criticism by those who claimed the plans purposefully removed African Americans living near the heart of the city and forced them to relocate further away from downtown. Though most displaced blacks moved north to another long-established African American neighborhood, the Albina area near Williams Avenue, some, like Griffin, moved to Vancouver.

But Vancouver had renewal plans as well. A year and a half before the war's end the city had set its sights on postwar development. A November 1943 article in *The Columbian* announced a Clark County Development Council (CCDC) meeting which all county residents interested in postwar planning were encouraged to attend. The Council's general chairman of the executive committee explained the CCDC was open to all citizens and looked forward to hearing from diverse groups from different areas of the county.²⁶⁷

For years Vancouver's civic leaders had rallied for the transfer of property ownership from the federal government to local Housing Authority for fear of an upset in real estate values and poorly planned subdivisions if the federal government sold off the projects as it saw fit.²⁶⁸ Under local control, the City could develop the area as it desired, which it did when the Authority cooperated with the City to plan residential developments for a modern Vancouver. To meet this goal the City devised the Workable Program, a plan to solve unemployment, prevent slums, limit low-cost housing, and create desperately needed new housing. In addition, it would allow neighborhood analyses and outline the necessary studies to inform the analyses in terms of land usage, land subdivision, old central areas, emigration of high and middle incomes, rising density of population, housing shortages, and population characteristics.²⁶⁹ Under the direction of Mayor Henry Schumacher, the Workable Program was the first urban renewal plan from Washington State submitted to the Housing and Home Finance Agency, which commended the city for its program to eliminate and prevent slums and blight. The Agency also praised the city for "new

²⁶⁷ "Public Asked to Attend Plan Meeting," *Columbian*, November 26, 1943.

²⁶⁸ "U. S. to Sell to Authority," October, 26, 1952, Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

²⁶⁹ "Summary of the Workable Program for the City of Vancouver, Washington" (Vancouver, WA: City of Vancouver, Washington, April 26, 1957).

planning and urban renewal legislation, which had just been passed in the 1957 session of the State Legislature” and “ [t]he City’s further interest in metropolitan and regional planning [which] denote[d] a keen foresight in the objectives and benefits of long-range planning on a realistic basis.”²⁷⁰ While Vancouver’s officials concerned themselves with suburbanization others concentrated on how change would affect residents.

In 1957 NAACP chapter president David Baugh wrote to the Housing and Home Finance Agency to inquire whether or not Section 221 mortgage insurance would be available for Vancouver families displaced as a result of the defunct Lanham Act. He was no doubt pleased to learn that the City’s Workable Program, having been recently approved by the Housing and Home Finance Agency, was a prerequisite for aid under Section 221 of the National Housing Act.²⁷¹ Section 221 insurance provided aid “as needed for the relocation of families from urban renewal areas and in relocating families to be displaced as a result of governmental action in the community and who would be eligible to rent or purchase dwelling accommodations in properties covered by mortgage insurance authorized under such Section.”²⁷² The Vancouver Housing Authority and Vancouver City Council applied to the Home Finance Agency for the insurance.²⁷³

Vancouver was the first city in Washington to secure the insurance to finance 150 units of low-cost private housing for families displaced by the McLoughlin Heights urban renewal project, the demolition of some temporary war housing, city code

²⁷⁰ Housing and Home Finance Agency to Honorable H. L. Schumacher, May 24, 1957, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1957 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁷¹ Housing and Home Finance Agency to David Baugh, May 28, 1957, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1957 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁷² “Housing and Home Finance Administration’s Workable Program Determination and Certification of the City of Vancouver, Washington” (May 22, 1957), NAACP Collection, 1957 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁷³ Jack Roberts, “Vancouver Hires Negroes: Low-Cost Housing Policy to Help in Resettlement,” Part II of II, *Oregon Journal*, January 1958.

enforcement, and highway construction. Funding the relocations of those displaced from VHA housing was of concern to the Authority. Katharine Walker, VHA rental manager, conducted a survey in the late 1950s to determine how many families would be impacted by the forced removal.²⁷⁴ She calculated that the 221 federal mortgage insurance would care for 150 or more uprooted families, including black families, and she discovered other black families had enough money to make down payments on or rent more expensive houses and apartments.²⁷⁵ Walker also noted 590 additional families would have to move due to city code enforcement, the City's urban renewal program, and highway relocation.²⁷⁶ Many families found ways to stay in Vancouver . More than half of those Afro-Americans who moved out of McLoughlin Heights in 1957 moved to other areas in the city. That marked a higher percentage of blacks who stayed than in previous years; in 1956 just four of 29 families who moved from The Heights resettled in Vancouver.²⁷⁷

Civil Rights Action

The local NAACP continued its work as it kept a watchful eye on urban development. It collaborated with state agencies and organizations such as the Washington State Board Against Discrimination (WSBAD) and the Washington Citizens Committee for Civil Rights Legislation. The Washington Civil Rights Act of 1957 created WSBAD, which was headquartered in Seattle. The governor appointed the five-member board for the primary purpose of:

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Roberts, Part I of II.

(1) receiving, investigating and passing upon complaints alleging unfair practices as defined in the 1957 Act because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

(2) issuing publications and results of investigations and research that will tend to promote good will and minimize or eliminate discrimination because of race; creed, color, or national origin.²⁷⁸

The Board assigned field representatives who traveled the state to educate communities, organizations, and local governments about its work and about state and federal laws regarding discrimination against minority groups in employment, public accommodations, and housing.

WSBAD handled complaints of alleged violations of the Washington State Law Against Discrimination and advocated on behalf of minority groups through negotiation and the courts. It also shared information about pertinent discrimination cases, such as that of a Seattle African American school teacher who purchased a home in Edmonds, Washington in 1959 only to receive violent threats from white neighbors. The buyer and seller agreed to the transaction and the house was covered by a G.I. loan, thus WSBAD insisted the aid and abet clause in housing discrimination could be applied because of the federal financing. The clause stipulated that any violent action committed by neighbors could carry legal penalties beyond the standard punishments. After the Board informed neighbors by letter that aiding and abetting discrimination carried its own penalties the new homeowner enjoyed his house without incident.

Citing the Edmonds case as an example of legal recourse in instances of housing discrimination, the Board urged intergroup agencies statewide, including the NAACP, to immediately report to the Board threats and hostility against minorities purchasing

²⁷⁸ "Washington (State) Omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1957," *blackpast.org*, University of Washington, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primarywest/washington-state-omnibus-civil-rights-act-1957> (accessed May 10, 2007).

or renting homes.²⁷⁹ In 1958 WSBAD reached an agreement with the Veterans Administration and the Federal Housing Association to cut off benefits from those two agencies to anyone in violation of the State Law Against Discrimination. Rex Jones, a Board field representative, wrote to Washington State branches of the NAACP of the agreement:

We believe that this will help to give opportunity to minority group persons to obtain better housing. One of the important things is that minority group persons know and understand the law, and how to implement it. In this respect, we offer the services of our office to help in any way that is possible for us. We would like you to let us know what you [sic] particular housing problems are, and other problems, of course; so that we might be able to counsel minority group persons in how to go about obtaining better housing.²⁸⁰

From July 1, 1957 to December 31, 1958 WSBAD received 20 complaints of suspected racial discrimination in housing, none of which originated in Vancouver.²⁸¹

The 1950s brought nearly as much change to Vancouver's neighborhoods as the decade before. The City's housing authority had facilitated the community's demographic change during war and more than a decade later – as the VHA faced permanent closure – the City again ushered in massive change. The purchase of wartime properties from the federal government allowed local officials to design and construct suburban communities that appealed to financially comfortable families, most of whom were white. In fact, by the time homeowners moved into the city's new suburban developments in the middle 1950s, fewer than 900 black families called Vancouver home, and that number decreased as the decade progressed. Dismayed by the drop in the African American population, the local NAACP and other civic groups

²⁷⁹ Sidney Gerber to Intergroup Agencies, October 1, 1959, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1959 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁸⁰ Rex Jones to Branches of NAACP in Washington State, November 28, 1958, Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1958 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁸¹ Washington Citizens Committee for Civil Rights Legislation, "1959 Civil Rights Amendments," NAACP Collection, 1959 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

lobbied for affordable housing and Section 221 relocation insurance to ensure that those blacks who wanted to stay in the redeveloped Vancouver were able to do so. Despite their efforts most black families simply could not afford to live in the city's newer housing and their exodus left the area a middle and upper class, racially homogenous community.

Predominantly white postwar neighborhoods sprouted up in middle-sized and large cities across the country during the Cold War era. Their development mirrored the protectionist stance many Americans took during a time in which anti-communist and segregationist rhetoric often meshed to stress the importance of safeguarding American ideals from subversive leftist influences. Despite the global significance of domestic race policy and a number of Cold War era gains in civil rights, African Americans nationwide continued to struggle against currents of discrimination and segregation in public accommodations, employment, and housing. Just as it had vigorously lobbied for equal access to public war housing, the national NAACP shifted its focus to racial equality in private housing during the 1950s.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRIVATE MARKET

Nationally, a valuable postwar private housing market developed from high demand amid scarce building materials, and this competitive formula may have played as significant a role in the racial concentration of blacks in certain areas as deliberate segregation. In 1955 Charles Abrams wrote of the private market:

The key factor in majority-minority tension is the housing shortage. Failure of the home-building industry to provide enough houses creates an intense competition for dwellings and a real estate market which trades on fear, insecurity, rumor, and deception. The end-product is dangerous tension between groups which, but for the shelter shortage, might live in mutual respect.²⁸²

The shelter shortage limited developers' abilities to construct as many homes as they preferred, so they often chose quality over quantity. In Vancouver, the decision to erect relatively few expensive houses rather than a decent number of modest homes excluded low-income and working class families, which are where most African American families fell on the economic stratum. Finding a home in the expensive postwar climate would prove challenging for Afro-Americans in Vancouver.

In the middle 1950s the Vancouver NAACP chose to determine how significant private housing was to black Vancouverites before developing strategies for equal access to homes. Branch members were reluctant to rely on Vancouver Housing Authority surveys alone to calculate postwar race-related demographic trends. In early 1955 branch members discussed what actions the organization should take or delay with regard to housing, to which President Mark Smith recommended a survey to discover black residents' needs because there had been none, save for those of the VHA,

²⁸² Abrams, *Forbidden*, 278.

to establish the overall number of families moving out of the city. Smith suggested the branch's Housing Committee compile a questionnaire and visit nonwhite families to "determine their needs and aptitudes for renting and purchasing homes."²⁸³ It is unclear whether the branch followed through with its plans to conduct a survey in 1955, but it did conduct a survey in 1957 – the year before the VHA permanently closed its projects. Researchers discovered that of the 54 black McLoughlin Heights families polled eight planned to move out of Vancouver when they left, 18 preferred to rent in the city, and 36 wanted to buy. Of those families who wanted to buy

- 1 could make less than a \$300.00 down payment
- 6 could pay \$300.00 to \$399.00 down
- 4 could pay \$500.00 to \$599.00
- 6 could pay \$600.00 top \$799.00
- 4 could pay \$800.00 to \$999.00
- 3 could pay \$1,000.00 to \$1,199.00
- 6 could pay \$1,500.00 to \$1,999.00
- 6 could pay \$2,000 or more²⁸⁴

In 1958, the NAACP Housing Committee again attempted to track the whereabouts of black families who moved out of McLoughlin Heights. Forty African American families left The Heights that year; 31 of them moved into private housing in Vancouver. Of the 31 families surveyed, 16 rented homes, seven built homes, three were in the process of building at the time of the report, one family was in the process of buying, and three families were unaccounted for. The 1958 findings mirror the survey of black families who exited McLoughlin Heights in 1957. Of 46 families, 28 moved to

²⁸³ Minutes of Executive Board Meeting of the Vancouver Branch NAACP, February 16, 1955, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 5, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²⁸⁴ "Fact Sheet on Negro Families Moving out of McLoughlin Heights," NAACP Collection, 1958 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

private housing in the city, 15 moved to Portland, and three left the Portland-Vancouver area.

The 28 families who remained in the city built, bought, or rented new residences. Of the 54 black families who remained in The Heights at the time of the 1957 survey, 8 planned to move out of Vancouver when they left, 18 preferred to rent in the city, and 36 hoped to buy. An October 1958 survey of African American families indicated that an equal number of those polled worked in Portland and Vancouver, thus many former VHA residents may have moved across the river to Portland, an exodus of which Fannie Chatman and her family were a part.²⁸⁵

The Chatmans arrived in Vancouver from Shreveport, Louisiana in 1943 and were immediately housed in Hudson House under the auspices of the VHA.²⁸⁶ They then lived in a Bagley Downs apartment while Mr. Chatman earned a living in the shipyards and Mrs. Chatman worked as the city's first African American public school teacher and raised their children. She later worked for the for the Vancouver Housing Authority for two years as the last of the projects, including Bagley Downs, closed after the war. When Bagley Downs closed the family moved to McLoughlin Heights for a short time and then to Portland where Mrs. Chapman became active in the Urban League to secure "job opportunities, fair employment, [and] housing" for black Portlanders.²⁸⁷

Those who had not saved enough income to secure a down payment on homes had slim chances of purchasing houses in Vancouver, including the VHA's lower cost

²⁸⁵ "Fact Sheet on Negro Families Moving out of McLoughlin Heights," NAACP Collection, 1958 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

²⁸⁶ Hudson House was a dormitory of studio units for single occupants so why Chatman and her husband were housed there is unclear. Couples may have been assigned to Hudson House while the Housing Authority secured more appropriate homes for them.

²⁸⁷ Chatman, interview.

homes, which were in short supply. As late as 1958 the City and Housing Authority were still simply discussing the need for and implications of low-rent housing rather than operating low-cost units for families. One local newspaper reported:

The federal government required that families moved from an urban renewal area must be housed in “safe and sanitary” housing. Surveys here indicate that such housing is unavailable at rents many families can afford, Urban Renewal Director Floyd Ratchford said. Housing Authority commissioners told city officials they were reluctant to agree to low rent housing unless there was community support for it. A 300-unit project planned 10 years ago²⁸⁸ fell by the wayside when local citizens secured an injunction against it, commissioners reminded the city officials.²⁸⁹

That failure a decade earlier prompted city managers to revision Vancouver as an aesthetically pleasing postwar city populated by middle-class suburbanites, rather than lower-class residents who required low-income, government-funded housing.

Neighborhoods and Race

In his study of segregation and racial conflict in American neighborhoods, Stephen Grant Meyer attempts to broaden typical treatments of the Civil Rights Movement from Martin Luther King, Jr., school desegregation, bus boycotts, and voting rights to include what may be the more significant racist facet of United States history, that of race-based conflict over residential space and the sociopolitical and economic inequalities that result from inequitable housing and neighborhoods. Meyer opposes the thesis Charles Abrams proposed in his 1955 book *Forbidden Neighbors*. Abrams asserted that government and industry caused residential segregation rather than individuals’ ideological beliefs and deep-seated racism.

²⁸⁸ Circa 1948 or 1950.

²⁸⁹ “Public Housing,” Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file, City of Vancouver, Washington.

Meyer argues residential segregation has always stemmed directly from personal racism that manifests itself in the public arena. Meyer chose fitting words from Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 work *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* to bolster his claim: "Probably the chief force maintaining residential segregation of Negroes has been *informal* social pressure from whites" [emphasis original].²⁹⁰ Though Meyer explores the twentieth century, he gives considerable weight to wartime and postwar African American housing, insisting "[t]he conflict over space did not end with the war. Rather, despite significant advances in law, economic and political opportunity, and the philosophy of racial tolerance, in many ways the housing conflict grew worse during the postwar years."²⁹¹

Other scholars of African American history have also given considerable attention to race dynamics in postwar American neighborhoods and the economic consequences of racially integrated communities have received much of the attention. Since the early 1900s the notion that nonwhites in white neighborhoods caused property values to plummet justified residential segregation. In a trend that repeated itself in countless towns and cities across the country during the twentieth century, those whites fearing a drop in property values upon blacks moving into their neighbors often sold their homes to move to out of the area, a demographic pattern known as white flight. When white families left neighborhoods they withdrew revenue and spurred a drop in property values. Lower home prices allowed families with lower incomes, often families of color, to move into areas in larger concentrations, thus a once affluent white or mixed-race neighborhood became a less affluent community through this process.

²⁹⁰ Myrdal, 622.

²⁹¹ Meyer, 78.

The myth that property values in white neighborhoods crash when African Americans move in had been propagated for decades, yet in the 1950s even mainstream media began to address the misconception with candor. In 1953 *U. S. News & World Report* ran an article in response to the Supreme Court's ruling on restrictive covenants that examined the accuracy of the notion that property values drop when minorities move into exclusive areas.²⁹² An expert noted several instances – in New York, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco – in which neighborhood values climbed or sustained once nonwhites moved in. A 1955 article in *Redbook* magazine featured a New Jersey neighborhood in which a handful of white residents resolved to educate themselves about property values in mixed-race neighborhoods before making hasty decisions to sell after a handful of Afro-American families moved in.²⁹³ In 1954 Teaneck, New Jersey's very first black residents experienced no white retaliation nor caused property values to drop. The following year, when more black families moved in, local real estate agents, eager for commissions, began knocking on doors to convince white residents to immediately sell their homes, citing the financial threat that nonwhite neighbors posed.

Citizens who refused to move from the neighborhood quickly realized those homeowners who hastily sold at the behest of real estate agents were in fact to blame for plunged property values, not nonwhite residents, so conscientious neighbors, black and white, organized against panic selling. The Teaneck Civic Conference formed to educate other communities about housing discrimination and property values with information from the Urban League and the National Committee Against Housing Discrimination. Members held interracial block meetings to plan strategies to

²⁹² "'Restricted' Area: Does it Pay?" *U. S. News & World Report*, 1953, 52.

²⁹³ Selwyn James, "'We Refused to Give Up Our Homes,'" *Redbook*, December 1955.

discourage white residents from selling their homes. The movement was a success. Those homeowners who refused to sell to badgering real estate agents set NOT FOR SALE signs in their windows and posted printed signs on their lawns that read: NOT FOR SALE, we LIKE our HOME... our COMMUNITY... we cherish our DEMOCRATIC BELIEFS. Teaneck did not succumb to the gloomy economic fate real estate agents had forecasted.

Though the Vancouver Realty Board had no official race policy,²⁹⁴ perhaps some realtors abused the same fear tactics as those in Teaneck, for in 1952 NAACP president Mark Smith went before a full assembly of the Realty Board to present documented materials that combated the notion that property values declined when nonwhites moved into neighborhoods.²⁹⁵ The NAACP Housing Committee reported that after Smith's presentation several Vancouver realtors sold to blacks in white areas.²⁹⁶ The Housing Committee outlined other activities in its 1952 housing report. Committee members tracked changes in black families' tenancy and discovered few vacancies in private housing and little new construction within a reasonable price range. The Committee report attacked residential separation, participated in housing conferences, and supported every effort to improve housing conditions for the city's African American population.²⁹⁷ Activists at the state level functioned with the same goals in mind.

²⁹⁴ Roberts, Part II of II.

²⁹⁵ Vancouver, Washington Branch of NAACP Reports for 1952, Housing, 1952, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²⁹⁶ Vancouver, Washington Branch of NAACP Reports for 1952, Housing, 1952, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

²⁹⁷ Vancouver, Washington Branch of NAACP Reports for 1952, Housing, 1952, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records 1914-1967, Box 2, Folder 7, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

Members of the Washington Citizens Committee for Civil Rights Legislation operated statewide to tackle residential discrimination in their corner of the country. In 1959 the Committee suggested amendments to the 1957 state Civil Rights Law pertaining to employment, public accommodations, and housing.²⁹⁸ The 1957 legislation prohibited owners of publicly assisted housing from refusing to sell, rent, or lease to any person due to race, creed, color, or national origin. It also outlawed racial discrimination in a variety of other publicly assisted housing- related negotiations.²⁹⁹ The law marked a step in the right direction, but the Citizens Committee wanted its protections extended to all housing, not just publicly assisted housing. The Committee's 1959 proposal identified problems with the state's housing, namely, the law did not apply to enough housing units, as only 5 percent of publicly assisted apartments in Seattle, for example, were covered by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) even though more than one-third of that city's non-white population lived in such apartments.³⁰⁰ Furthermore, the Committee noted, a large percentage of new homes in medium price brackets were covered by the FHA and Veteran's Administration, but those homes were mostly in outlying districts and few were older, affordable homes.

²⁹⁸ Anne Frantilla, "Housing Segregation and Open Housing Legislation," *Digital Document Library*, Seattle Municipal Archives, <http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/doclibrary/OHousing/narrative.shtml> (May 15, 2007).

Frantilla notes that also in 1959 Seattle began a campaign for open housing that would span the next nine years. The event that sparked the movement began when an African American man named Robert L. Jones attempted to buy a home from John O'Meara in 1959 but was denied. The Washington State Board Against Discrimination determined O'Meara refused to sell the home to Jones because of his color. A court case climbed to the Supreme Court of Washington in which justices upheld O'Meara's right not to sell the property in a 5 to 4 vote citing the FHA loan was not considered publicly assisted housing. The Court's decision in *O'Meara v. Washington State Board Against Discrimination* sparked the open housing campaign spearheaded by the Seattle branch of the NAACP. Fair housing activists would wait until 1968 for the city to pass a housing ordinance for which they had worked for nine years. Three weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination the City Council unanimously passed Ordinance 96619.

²⁹⁹ "Washington (State) Omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1957."

³⁰⁰ Frantilla.

This was inadequate, as consumer demand called for housing within the city and particularly for less expensive and older houses.

The Committee dedicated the majority of its report to dispelling misconceptions about integrated housing and its effects on communities. One such misconception regarded the assumed drop in property values when nonwhites moved into white neighborhoods. The report relayed results from studies conducted in major and middle-sized American cities – Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Portland, Oregon – that disproved the myth of diving property values. The two Portland studies, the first conducted by the Citizens League for Better Homes in April 1950³⁰¹ and the second by the Urban League of Portland in 1956,³⁰² both confirmed minority groups in previously all-white neighborhoods stabilized or raised property values.

Groups in Vancouver also continued to study the relationship between race and housing. In late 1956 the Committee for Social Action of the Council of Churches voted to study racial discrimination in housing and, to better understand the problem, contacted the NAACP to clarify its concerns with regard to the issue.³⁰³ The Committee sought to understand whether the cost of homes acted as a barrier to equal opportunity or whether racist real estate policies bred discrimination; whether the NAACP could cite specific instances of discrimination; and if the Association knew of any realty or banking practices concerning discrimination. The NAACP's response is unknown, but it is likely that a combination of those factors identified by the Committee impacted

³⁰¹ "The Effect of Public Housing Adjoining Property Values in Portland, Oregon" in Washington Citizens Committee for Civil Rights Legislation 1959 Civil Rights Amendments, Appendix i. Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1959 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

³⁰² "Nonwhite Neighbors and Property Values in Portland," in Washington Citizens Committee for Civil Rights Legislation 1959 Civil Rights Amendments, Appendix i. Vancouver NAACP Collection, 1959 Folder, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

³⁰³ Committee for Social Action to David Baugh, December 8, 1956, Vancouver NAACP Collection, Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, WA.

opportunities for blacks to rent and purchase homes in the area. The Council of Churches likely initiated a study on housing that year in response to the VHA's decision to freeze rentals and to set a permanent closure date.

The VHA Closes

In the fall of 1956 the VHA determined temporary housing had served its postwar purpose in providing stopgap housing until private industry caught up with demand; it ceased to accept new families into what were left of its wartime homes.³⁰⁴ Authority officials chose to maintain the freeze until the Authority's permanent closure date, which they set for December 31, 1958.³⁰⁵ The closing deadline affected 880 families who still lived in McLoughlin Heights, the last project, although the last family was able to move out nearly three months ahead of schedule in October 1958.³⁰⁶ By that year most black families had already left Vancouver, only 328 African Americans lived in the city and its environs in 1958.³⁰⁷ But for those blacks who chose to stay, securing residency in private housing became of utmost importance, along with employment.

A handful of black families successfully secured private homes not long before the Housing Authority closed. In a January 1958 two-part series for the *Oregon Journal* regarding Vancouver's housing integration efforts, Jack Roberts reported the experience of a black family who purchased what had been a public housing unit on Harney Hill:

[A] Negro family drove up to a neat home they had purchased in the Harney Hill area of the Heights. Their arrival in what had been an all-white neighborhood resulted in curiosity – and from neighborhood children stares and comments. But the family settled down to quiet living, and today the breadwinner can look back

³⁰⁴ "A Tale of 6 Cities."

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Jack Roberts notes 10,000 Black residents at the peak. Roberts, Part I of II.

on a personal example of good race relations and says: "We are all good neighbors."³⁰⁸

Other black families experienced similar acceptance in all-white neighborhoods, and if not acceptance at least not harassment. In 1958 an African American family bought the home they had been renting in a long-established neighborhood only to have a white neighbor visit to declare, "We don't want you to live here." Yet within a matter of months the same man again approached the family, this time to say, "I want to apologize for what I said to you."³⁰⁹ No matter how disgruntled some whites were, it appears no Vancouverites sought legal recourse to keep African Americans out of their communities.

In fact, many Vancouver residents, and others, applauded the City's integrationist efforts. In 1957 the National Civic League (NCL) declared Vancouver an All-America City, an award the NCL has bestowed annually to ten cities per year since 1949 to recognize "exemplary grassroots community problem-solving and communities that cooperatively tackle challenges and achieve results."³¹⁰ Certainly the city's efforts to promote racial cooperation fell under those categories. Reporter Jack Roberts noted city authorities believed efforts to racially integrate the population contributed to the city's appeal and helped secure the All-America City honor.³¹¹

But for all the instances of racial harmony, or tolerance, black Vancouverites did encounter residential racism in the private market. Jean Griffin recalls her experience with racial discrimination in private housing:

³⁰⁸ Roberts, Part I of II.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ "About the All-America City Program," *National Civic League*, <http://www.ncl.org/aac/about.html> (accessed May 20, 2007).

³¹¹ Roberts, Part I of II.

I remember when everybody had to move from The Heights you couldn't get a house anywhere because people wouldn't rent to you. My sister called somebody who had a house near Clark College. She called and asked if there was a house for rent and the person said, "Yes." I remember I went with my sister and brother-in-law to see it, and he parked the car and we began to get out but the man came to the door, looked, and shook his head.

I remember when we got ready to move from The Heights there was a house over on the west side, near Kauffman Avenue. I didn't like the place, it had a dirt basement, it was just an old bad-looking house. We called the people who were in charge of it and they said, "Well, we'll have to call the owner to see if we can rent it." They called us back in a few days and the man said no because he didn't want to rent to blacks. It was the same way for getting jobs. They wanted us to leave the area. You couldn't buy land or a house and that's the way it was.

People didn't want to rent to blacks because they said blacks are dirty. When we left our home up in The Heights I went back there for a sewing board I'd left, and the people were in the house getting ready to tear it down, so I asked for my board. A man said, "Did you live here?" I said, "Yeah," and he said, "You know, you really left this house nice," and we did. We'd cleaned it up before we left, but the way he talked you could tell blacks and whites left their houses really bad. That's the idea they had, that black people were dirty and all of that....

Though Roberts noted that information on instances of white upset was incomplete, he mentioned an incident in which a white housewife circulated a petition in her community in an attempt to force out a newly arrived black family in her neighborhood.³¹² In a separate 1957 incident a white woman protested her neighbor's plan to rent one side of her duplex to an African American family, but upon the family's occupancy no problems arose. In order to discourage anti-integrationist actions, Mayor Henry Schumacher formed a Committee on Open Housing in late 1957.³¹³ Reverend Soltman marked the closing of McLoughlin Heights as the impetus for Mayor Schumacher's committee; the closure forced African Americans into all-white

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

communities so the Committee members dedicated themselves to diffusing racial friction wherever it occurred, intervening in several instances.³¹⁴

Committee members included a reverend, a Roman Catholic priest, two attorneys, two realtors, and an African American.³¹⁵ Through its investigations the Committee discovered a pattern in white neighborhoods which Reverend Soltman described when a black family moved into a white-only neighborhood, white residents first opposed, often phoned the City, realtors, sellers, or landlords. But as time passed, reported Soltman, black families were accepted at least to the point where commotion settled.³¹⁶ The formation of a committee on open housing indicates encounters between the races may have been less than pleasant and that nonwhites did not have fair opportunities to purchase homes. Mayor Schumacher may simply have reestablished an existent housing committee established by his predecessor Mayor Ralph E. Carter, who served the city from 1952 to 1956. Florene DuFresne participated in Mayor Carter's Committee:

The mayor, Dr. Ralph Carter, and the City Council of Vancouver became concerned about possible neighborhood or personal rejection of occupation by people of color and that we might develop segregated areas for those who could not afford even medium-priced housing. The Mayor invited a group of Vancouver citizens to form the Mayor's Commission on Open Housing to facilitate the transition. About fifteen concerned citizens met every week to plan a voluntary assurance to counteract any unfair or prejudicial responses to people of color in the sale of property.

The Commission was integrated and diverse, and based on a code of human rights. We maintained a central phone number and volunteer staff. If realtors or individuals rejected buyers or renters for racial or cultural reasons, the matter could be reported to the Commission. As much as possible, we responded in teams of two. We were not confrontational but listened to complaints, answered questions, and appealed to people's good will. During the following four of five years we had many rewarding results.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

That was the first one they had and that was sometime later because it was when the housing authority was redistributing – breaking up the housing authority and selling the property to people who wanted to buy it. There were about fifteen of us who met at Clark College every week under appointment from the mayor of the City who was concerned that the real estate people would refuse to show property to blacks who wanted to stay here. Many people wanted to go back to the South or wherever they came from, but there were quite a few that had roots here and couldn't see anything they would be happier doing than staying here.

Many people thought, "If these people buy housing here the property's going down in value." So the mayor organized us and we were called the Mayor's Commission on Open Housing....³¹⁷

One might assume the creation of such a committee indicates a desire among city officials to address discrimination head on, though council meeting minutes from the City of Vancouver both during and after the war reveal a lack of attention to race matters. Virtually no discussions of race or race relations were recorded in council minutes, save for a December 1957 discussion about a letter from Reverend Soltman and an attached resolution adopted by his church titled "Racial Discrimination in Housing in Vancouver."³¹⁸ The Council minutes juxtaposed to Soltman's letter magnify Vancouver's dichotomous responses to African Americans and housing – while the City showed only surface interest in race concerns, community members often made earnest efforts to shape a racially just city.

Those citizens who appealed for affordable postwar housing and demanded race considerations play an integral role in suburban planning and development did not succeed as they had hoped. For the most part, Vancouver's black residents did not secure private housing in the city's new subdivisions, in fact, very few stayed in the area. By 1950 the African American population dropped down to 879, in 1960 just 494, a

³¹⁷ DuFresne, interview.

³¹⁸ The Council minutes show a May 1944 discussion regarding a letter from the Emancipation Celebration Committee asking the cooperation of the commissioners in promoting Juneteenth. Records of the Vancouver City Clerk, May 1944, Washington State Archives, Southwest Regional Branch, Olympia, Washington.

plummet from the peak population of over 9,000 blacks a mere 15 years earlier.³¹⁹ Scarce employment opportunities in the Vancouver and Portland areas surely factored into many families' decisions to leave, as other cities, such as Seattle, still offered jobs in the postwar years and continued to draw African American migrants.³²⁰

Limited employment coupled with race discrimination severely impacted Afro-Americans' abilities to participate in the competitive 1950s housing market in Vancouver and throughout the United States. By 1960, years of scarce job opportunities and racial bigotry had effectively barred blacks from Vancouver's middle and upper class suburban areas; the city reverted to the highest white majority it had had since 1941. The NAACP continued to rally for affordable private housing to assist the few hundred black families who stayed in Vancouver after the Housing Authority's closure in 1958, often with help from local churches, and the mayor's Committee on Open Housing. Those forces mediated race-based conflicts between neighbors, and diffused racial tension in communities by squelching racial stereotypes and promoting tolerance for diversity. Yet, African Americans -- feeling the push of financial uncertainty in the area -- continued to move out of the city during the 1950s, dropping the number of black residents to just 494 in 1960.

³¹⁹ "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed May 30, 2007).

³²⁰ Taylor, *Forging*, 160.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the efforts of the local NAACP, churches, and civic-minded individuals to secure equal housing and employment opportunities for -- as well as promote racial tolerance of -- African Americans in Vancouver during and after World War II, the city's black population plummeted immediately after the conflict and did not resurge. The dramatic rise in black population from just 18 in 1940 to approximately 9,000 in 1944 owed itself to the war economy which provided shipyard and offshoot industrial jobs to thousands of mostly Southern black migrants for most of the war's duration. The Kaiser shipyards alone hired most of Vancouver's black citizens and others found work at Alcoa and the local railroad yards. Work with those employers paid well and allowed African Americans to grow their savings accounts, many with the express purpose of buying homes in the area to settle permanently.

The few black residents who remained in Vancouver after the war were those who secured steady employment outside of war industries and they were a small percentage, for postwar employment opportunities were scarce for blacks in Vancouver and many may have relocated to Portland, Seattle, or other west coast cities to try their luck elsewhere. A significant number of black war migrants may also have headed home after 1945, for Vancouver school records indicate black families brought fewer young children to the area, suggesting they left them in home states in order to take advantage of temporary employment in the Northwest. No matter how temporary their stays in the Pacific Northwest, Afro-Americans escaping Jim Crow must have appreciated Vancouver's integrated community in the 1940s and 1950s. Vancouver had no history of black exclusion or race-based restrictive covenants, nor did it segregate

public accommodations, education, or housing. But the city's racially tolerant surface may have belied an effort by officials to make Vancouver unaffordable for postwar low-income families by stripping away public housing and constructing in its place expensive suburban developments. In addition, individual incidents of racial intolerance may have prompted some to leave the area.

In wartime, Vancouver's African Americans were lured and anchored by well-paying jobs; they relied almost exclusively on war industries for employment which proved unfortunate when the work ended. In the summer of 1945, 88 percent of Vancouver's black workers were employed in the shipyards or other closely related war work. By the end of that year those industries were slated to gear down their operations, and when that time came most black families were forced to leave the area for larger cities that still offered work, or returned to the South to mark the end of what had always been intended a temporary excursion out west. Nationwide, employment in the war industries allowed African Americans to earn and save a substantial amount of money, as a 1945 nationwide study in *Fortune* magazine indicated. Because of their high earnings during war years and their savings, when VHA researchers polled black tenants in Vancouver on whether they planned to stay in the city after the war, 60 percent indicated yes, not knowing the City's redevelopment plans would make their permanent residence less likely in years to come. Through the 1950s most blacks remained in VHA units; many took advantage of income-adjusted rents the Authority offered.

The Vancouver Housing Authority was the most significant agent in transitioning black newcomers into the city in 1942 and providing them affordable shelter until 1958. The VHA's role as municipal wartime landlord for over 12,000 units allowed the city's total population to balloon from 18,000 in 1940 to nearly 70,000 in half

a decade. Blacks found modern, affordable housing in the projects, and though some suspected the Authority segregated its units, there is no evidence to suggest the VHA penned, operated under, or enforced an official or unofficial race policy. During its 16 years in operation, the Vancouver Housing Authority provided integrated churches, recreation centers, schools, daycare facilities, and playgrounds without incident. As war industries waned and unemployment rose, the agency adjusted rents and did not evict families even as City planners set their sights on redeveloping the area where the largest project, McLoughlin Heights, stood.

When the City moved to purchase VHA property from the federal government in 1958 and immediately initiated suburban redevelopment projects. City developers set their sights on suburban development in a deliberate effort to clear away public and low-cost housing, which many citizens feared would develop into slums. At first renovations were paced. Only some sections of McLoughlin Heights were developed for private sale while the rest remained rental properties for servicemen, low-income families, and those who simply enjoyed living there. But when the Authority closed permanently in late 1958, all tenants, including African Americans, lost affordable housing in The Heights, the city's last remaining housing project. McLoughlin Heights became a middle- and upper-class suburban community with views of the Columbia River and pricey homes. The new development, and all subsequent planned communities, did not bar any families by race; however, the homes were too expensive for most blacks to purchase.

To combat push forces and encourage black families to stay in Vancouver, organizations such as the NAACP and the Council of Churches formed and remained active through the late 1940s to the late 1950s. Members promoted racial understanding and lobbied for equal opportunities in homeownership by partnering with and

appealing to the federal government, state and regional civil rights boards and agencies, and the Vancouver community. The NAACP and the Mayor's Committee on Open Housing, which was staffed by community members, were particularly active and influential in debunking myths about black neighbors and misconceptions regarding low property values in mixed-race neighborhoods. These years of activism marked the city's most ambitious period of nurturing racial equality, a spirit that dimmed in the late 1950s.

Vancouver's decline in black population during the 1950s and 1960s had substantial impacts on the city's culture and community. Fewer residents of color rendered the city far less culturally diverse than it had been for that brief decade between 1942 and 1952, and that absence denied white Vancouverites opportunities to meet neighbors of a different race and to confront prejudice and discrimination first-hand. The lack of interracial interaction and waning interest in promoting racial harmony is evidenced by the infrequency with which civil rights groups hosted activities by the late 1950s. The NAACP and YWCA had been active in planning and promoting diversity awareness events and public forums in the 1940s and to the middle 1950s, but those events became less frequent in the late 1950s as the black population continued to decline.

In those same years, the local NAACP lost its rigor, yet another consequence of Vancouver's declining African American population. The local NAACP lost many of its wartime members and its appeal to the public, which must have concluded a civil rights organization and its activities were of little importance in a city of approximately 35,000 whites and just 680 African Americans. The NAACP remained an integral part of its members' lives but lost its potency to the larger community as it significantly scaled down its advocacy for employment opportunities and equal access to housing by 1960.

Supporting groups dissolved, as well; namely church committees formed for the purpose of challenging racial discrimination in the early and middle 1950s. The number of African American residents in the city reached such a low that most Vancouverites saw no point or took no interest in race issues; a reversion to the city's racial apathy prior to 1942. In 1940, when only 18 blacks lived in Vancouver, likely few white residents cared to address the struggles African Americans faced. A mere four years later, as a peak of nearly 9,000 African American neighbors joined white Vancouverites, race concerns could no longer be ignored. Cities across the Pacific Northwest and the nation experienced similar race confrontations. The influx of thousands of black migrants and their families left city officials and white residents no choice but to address African American concerns in their hometowns.

African American westward migration is one of the most profound social legacies of the Second World War, yet smaller western cities receive little attention from historians. From 1940 to 1947 many cities in western states experienced 100 percent or more growth of their total populations, and the surge of migrants brought whites, and blacks, into confrontation with large-scale race issues for the first time. Historians often examine the nation's largest west coast cities as microcosms to highlight national trends or to note extreme instances of racial violence that did not typically occur in smaller cities. But in focusing on large metropolitan areas scholars often fail to explore how World War II subtly affected the residents of America's smaller communities, a critical narrative in understanding the impact of the war on all Americans. African Americans in Vancouver faced similar concerns as their counterparts in larger cities across the West and the nation. Like Vancouver, those cities with significant war industries and immigration were forced to address race issues on an unprecedented scale, as well as

develop strategies for housing thousands of workers who might not have wished to live together.

The war initiated tremendous social change with regard to race, in large part because many whites and nonwhites were forced into close proximity during the effort, and because organized African Americans in such groups as the NAACP and the Urban League in the 1950s successfully lobbied for civil rights on a federal level. As activists marked successes in the fight for equal rights, including housing, less subtle forms of unequal access to housing emerged in urban postwar development from coast to coast. The ideal 1950s homes and neighborhoods were larger and more expensive than those in previous decades to mark the prosperity many families enjoyed in those years. City officials looking to refurbish their communities after the war expressed a desire to prevent slums and blight as a result of public housing, and preferred to cater to white, middle and upper class families. The elimination of public housing and construction of expensive suburban neighborhoods effectively excluded many African Americans from purchasing homes in the 1950s despite the money they had earned and saved during wartime. Such was the case in Vancouver.

In addition to exclusion by way of buying power, or the lack thereof, would-be home buyers often experienced blatant racial discrimination by banks, realtors, sellers, and neighbors who refused to offer financing, show homes, sell to, or welcome black families. Because Americans' homes are typically their most valuable financial investment, denying African Americans access to middle and upper class neighborhoods kept them, as a group, poorer than their white counterparts. Being house poor carried more consequences than just failing to generate wealth through property. It also caused overcrowding in affordable neighborhoods, which sometimes became black ghettos, and ghettos had tax bases too low to allow public schools to

flourish. This cyclical pattern is the very one civil rights activists worked to thwart as they lobbied nationally for fair housing and employment in the postwar years. Racially progressive groups also combated personal discrimination by neighbors whenever possible, largely through education about property values and by debunking myths and stereotypes about black people.

The successes and disappointments of African Americans during the World War II and the Cold War eras materialized both as a result of the times and in spite of them. In their efforts to participate in the war and to take advantage of employment opportunities, millions of blacks uprooted themselves to work in industries in cities large and small. Most Afro-American migrants moved out of the South, mostly north, but also west, and transformed the communities to which they relocated. Though most supported the nation's efforts across the seas, they also hoped wartime would bring social change and the death of Jim Crow. As they worked to put food on their families' tables, they worked, too, for equal access to public accommodations, education, employment, housing, and respect from those of other races. Black residents' experiences in Vancouver, Washington during the war and postwar periods give a glimpse into the many ways in which interracial relationships and African American opportunities changed during and immediately after the war, and how they remained the same.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS, ARCHIVES, AND REPORTS

"2nd Workable Program for Urban Renewal; 1958-1959 Recertification." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1958.

"Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Seattle." Seattle: The Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, 1941-1950.

"Annual Report: Vancouver City Planning Commission, State of Washington." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission.

"Celebrating 60 Years of Service to Clark County." Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority.

"Characteristics and Housing Plans of Families in Temporary Public Housing Projects – Seattle, July-August, 1948; Housing Authority of the City of Seattle." Seattle: The Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, 1949.

Clark II, Dan E., and Associates. "A Survey of Housing in Portland, Oregon, Conducted for the Portland Housing Authority, 1949." Portland, OR: Housing Authority of Portland, 1950.

"From Roses to Rivets: Being an Account of the Housing Authority of Portland Oregon." Portland, OR: Housing Authority of Portland, 1946.

"A Guide to the Portland Redevelopment Program." Portland, OR: Housing Authority of Portland, 1952.

Historical Census Browser. University of Virginia Library.
<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed May 30, 2007).

"Housing and Home Finance Administration's Workable Program Determination and Certification of the City of Vancouver, Washington." Vancouver, WA: City of Vancouver, Washington, 1957.

"Housing in War and Peace: The Story of Public Housing in Vancouver, Washington." Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority, 1972.

"Miracle City: The Amazing Story of the Building of a New City of 25,000 Persons on McLoughlin Heights, Vancouver, Washington." Vancouver, WA: Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1944.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records, 1944-1960. Clark County Historical Museum, Vancouver, Washington.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Vancouver Branch Records, 1914-1967. University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

"Occupancy Statistics." Portland, OR: Housing Authority of Portland, 1954.

"Population Prospectus, Vancouver, Washington and Clark County, 1956-1975." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1956.

"Portland Housing: Report." Portland, OR: Housing Authority of Portland, 1946-1951.

Rainboth, Edith Dyer. "Survey of the Labor Force, Population, Housing, and Income of Vancouver, Washington, and its Environs, Directed by Edith Dyer Rainboth, Guy E. Rainboth, Robert W. Gibson." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission and the Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1947.

Records of the Vancouver City Clerk 1945-2002. Washington State Archives, Southwest Regional Branch, Olympia, Washington.

"Residential Land Use Plan, Adopted." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1957.

Schmid, Calvin F. and Lois Parker Utt. "Characteristics of Residents of Housing Projects in King County, Washington." Seattle: King County Housing Authority, 1945.

Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population. Vol. II. Characteristics of the Population. U.S. Census Bureau.
<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf>
(accessed May 29, 2007).

"Some Characteristics of Families Living in Permanent Public War Housing Projects Seattle, May, 1950; Housing Authority of the City of Seattle." Seattle: The Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, 1950.

"Summary of the Workable Program for the City of Vancouver, Washington." Vancouver, WA: City of Vancouver, Washington, 1957.

"A Survey of Negro Tenants; Conducted Under the Direction of Milton Bona, by E. Shelton Hill, Lou M. Smith, Floyd L. Standifer and Juanita Harris." Vancouver, WA: Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1945.

"A Tale of Six Cities and How They Became a Permanent Part of Vancouver, Washington." Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority.

Truman, Harry S. to Senator Maybank on the Limitation on Public Housing in the Appropriations Bill. May 22nd, 1951. *The American Presidency Project*. [americanpresidency.org](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=13790).
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=13790>, (accessed July 1, 2007).

"United States Housing Act of 1937." THOMAS, Library of Congress,
http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&sid=cp106ZeUOR&refer=&r_n=sr410.106&db_id=106&item=&sel=TOC_445726 (accessed May 4, 2007).

"Vancouver, Clark County, State of Washington: Columbia River's Port City for Homes and Industries: Report to the Citizens and the City Commissioners by City Planning Commission." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1945.

Vancouver Housing Authority newspaper clippings file. City of Vancouver, Washington.

"Vancouver's Plan for the Utilization of War Housing Project Located at Vancouver, Wash." Vancouver, WA: Vancouver Housing Authority, 1945.

Wheeler, Bayard O. "An Economic Analysis of Vancouver, Washington and its Environs: (Part 1 of the Vancouver Plan): Prepared for the City Commission and Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1947.

———. "A Statistical Appendix. Survey of the Labor Force, Population, Housing and Income of Vancouver, Washington, and its Environs, directed by Edith Dyer Rainboth, Guy E. Rainboth [and] Robert W. Gibson. Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission and the Housing Authority of the City of Vancouver, 1947.

"Workable Program for Urban Renewal, Vancouver, Wash." Vancouver, WA: City Planning Commission, 1956.

UNPUBLISHED WORKS

Gurley, Joseph Darnell. "African-Americans' 'Sense of Place' in the Inland Empire: 1890-1920." Mater's thesis, Washington State University, 2000.

Herzog, June. "A Study of the Negro Defense Worker in the Portland-Vancouver Area." Bachelor's thesis, Reed College, 1944.

Kessler, Lillian. "The Social Structure of a War Housing Community—East Vanport City." Bachelor's thesis, Reed College, 1945.

McElderry, Stuart. "The Problem of the Color Line: Civil Rights and Racial Ideology in Portland, Oregon, 1944-1965." Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, June 1998.

Pearson, Rudy N. "African Americans in Portland, Oregon, 1940-1950: Work and Living Conditions – A Social History." Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1996.

Taylor, Quintard. "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970." PhD diss., University of Minnesota. 1977, 1978.

NEWSPAPERS

Columbian (Vancouver, WA).

Clark County Sun (Vancouver, WA).

Oregon Journal (Portland).

Oregonian (Portland).

VIDEO

Nelson, Stanley. *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords*. VHS. San Francisco: Half Nelson Productions, 1998.

ORAL INTERVIEWS

Chatman, Fannie. Interview by author and Keri Conway. Vancouver, WA, April 26, 2001.

DuFresne, Florene. Interview by author. Vancouver, WA, April 11, 2001.

Griffin, Jean. Interview by author and Christal Jenkins. Vancouver, WA, April 30, 2001.

Joshua, Valree. Interview by author and Mary Byrd. Vancouver, WA, March 25, 2001 and April 19, 2001.

Nettles, Jr., Willard. Interview by Carlos Delcid. Vancouver, WA, March 28, 2001. Vancouver African American History Project, Center for Columbia River History.

ARTICLES

"African Americans and the HBC." *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service. <http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/african-americans-and-the-hbc.htm> (accessed June 13th).

Bauman, Robert. "Jim Crow in the Tri-Cities, 1943-1950." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (2005): 124-131.

- Bell, Wendell. *American Sociological Review*, xxii (April 1957): 221-222.
- Berry, Edwin C. "Race Relations on the Pacific Coast." *Journal of Educational Sociology* 19, no. 3 (November 1945): 158-165
- Borstelmann, Thomas. "Jim Crow's Coming Out: Race Relations and American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, iss. 3 (September 1999): 549-570.
- "Buffalo Soldiers at Vancouver Barracks." National Park Service, *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service.
<http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-at-vancouver-barracks.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007).
- Clark, Laura, and Chris Bryan. "Historian Discusses Past Racial Hypocrisy." *The Baylor Lariat*. <http://www.baylor.edu/Lariat/news.php?action=story&story=13310> (accessed June 30, 2007).
- Clay, Phillip L. "Housing Opportunity: A Dream Deferred." *State of Black America* (1990): 73-84.
- Colbert, Robert E. "The Attitude of Older Negro Residents Toward Recent Negro Migrants in the Pacific Northwest," *Journal of Negro Education* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1946): 695-703.
- Collins, William J. "Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets." *American Economic Review* 91, no. 1. (March 2001): 272-286.
- Cowgill, Donald O. "Trends in Residential Segregation of Nonwhites in American Cities, 1940-1950." *American Sociological Review* 21, no. 1. (February 1956): 43-47.
- Darden, Joe T. "Black Residential Segregation Since the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Decision." *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 6 (1995): 680-691.
- DeGraaf, Lawrence B. "Significant Steps on an Arduous Path: The Impact of World War II on Discrimination Against African Americans in the West." *Journal of the West* 35, no. 1 (1996): 24-33.
- Droker, Howard A. "Seattle Race Relations During the Second World War." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1976): 163-174.
- Dudziak, Mary L. "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative." *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (November 1988): 61-120.
- "E. Shelton Hill." Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Archive.
<http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/> (accessed May 10, 2007).

- Frantilla, Anne. "Housing Segregation and Open Housing Legislation." *Digital Document Library*. Seattle Municipal Archives.
<http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/doclibrary/OHousing/narrative.shtml>
 (May 15, 2007).
- Fryer, Heather. "Race, Industry, and the Aesthetic of a Changing Community in World War II Portland." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96, no. 1(Winter 2004/2005): 3-13.
- Hartt, Rollin Lynde. "The New Negro. When He's Hit, He Hits Back!" *Independent* 15 (January 1921).
- Henderson, A. Scott. "Race Matters: The Folks Next Door." *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 1 (2001): 119-125.
- Hirsch, Arnold R. "Containment on the Home Front: Race and Federal Housing Policy from the New Deal to the Cold War." *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 2 (2000): 158-189.
- . "Searching for a "Sound Negro Policy": A Racial Agenda for the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954." *Housing Policy Debate* 11, iss., 2. Fannie Mae Foundation, 2000: 393-441.
http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hpd/pdf/hpd_1102_hirsch.pdf
 df (accessed July 3, 2007).
- "A History of Fort Vancouver." *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*, National Park Service. <http://www.nps.gov/archive/fova/history.htm> (accessed June 13th).
- Janken, Kenneth R. "Making Racial Change, Managing Radical Change: The Civil Rights Movement, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Race Relations on the World Stage." *Diplomatic History* 27, iss. 5 (December 2003): 717-724
- Kersten, Andrew E. "African Americans and World War II." *Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 13-17.
- Kilbourn, Charlotte and Margaret Lantis. "Elements of Tenant Instability in a War Housing Project." *American Sociological Review* (February 1946): 57-66.
- Korstad, Robert, and Nelson Lichtenstein. "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement." Princeton University.
<http://www.princeton.edu/~jconley/ushistory/korstad> (accessed July 1, 2007).
- Lusignan, Paul R. "Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949." *CRM* 25, no. 1 (2002). <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/25-01/25-01-16.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2007).
- McElderry, Stuart. "Building A West Coast Ghetto: African-American Housing in Portland, 1910-1960." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 92, no. 3 (2001): 137-148.

- . "The Vanport Conspiracy: Rumors and Social Relations in Wartime and Post-War Portland." *Oregon Historical Society* 99, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 134-163.
- Meier, August, and John H. Bracey, Jr. "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America'" *Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1. (February 1993): 3-30.
- Mohl, Raymond A. "Race and Housing in the Postwar City: An Explosive History." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94, no. 1 (2001): 8-30.
- Oliver, Melvin L. "American Dream? How Government Initiatives Made Blacks House Poor." *Crisis* 110, no. 5 (2003): 17-19.
- Pearson, Rudy. "A Menace to the Neighborhood: Housing and African Americans in Portland, 1941-1945." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2001): 158-179.
- Plotkin, Wendy. "'Hemmed In': The Struggle Against Racial Restrictive Covenants and Deed Restrictions in Post-World War II Chicago." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94, no. 1 (2001): 39-69.
- "Prunarians." *Local History*, columbian.com.
<http://www.columbian.com/history/prunarians.cfm> (accessed July 2, 2007).
- Smith, Alonzo, and Quintard Taylor. "Racial Discrimination in the Workplace: A Study of Two West Coast Cities During the 1940s." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 35-54.
- Souther, J Mark. "In the Shadow of the Suburban Dream: Black Struggles on the Urban Fringe." *Reviews in American History* 33, iss. 4 (December 2005): 594-601.
- "Strawberry Knoll, Prune Hill, and Fruit Valley (1883)." *Proud Past*, Clark County Washington. http://www.co.clark.wa.us/aboutcc/proud_past/PruneHill.html (accessed July 2, 2007).
- Taylor, Quintard. "Black Urban Development – Another View: Seattle's Central District, 1910-1940." *Pacific Historical Review* 58, no. 4 (1989): 429-448.
- . "The Civil Rights Movement in the American West: Black Protest in Seattle, 1960-1970." *Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 1 (1995): 1-14.
- . "The Emergence of Black Communities in the Pacific Northwest, 1865-1910." *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 4 (Fall, 1979): 342-351.
- . "The Great Migration; The Afro-American Communities of Seattle and Portland During the 1940s." *Arizona and the West* 23, iss. 2 (1981): 109-126.
- . "Swinging the Door Wide: World War II Wrought a Profound Transformation in Seattle's Black Community," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1995).

Trotter, Samuel, E. "A Study of Public Housing in the United States." *Journal of Finance* 13, no. 3 (September 1958): 429-430.

Weaver, Robert C. "The Employment of the Negro in War Industries," *Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3, *The American Negro in World War I and World War II* (Summer 1943): 386-396

_____. "Negro Employment in the Aircraft Industry," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 59, no. 4 (August 1945): 597-625.

_____. "Negro Labor Since 1929." *Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 1 (January 1950): 20-38.

_____. "Recent Events in Negro Union Relationships," *Journal of Political Economy* 52, no. 3 (September 1944): 234-249

Wiese, Andrew. "The Other Suburbanites: African American Suburbanization in the North Before 1950." *Journal of American History* 85, no. 4 (1999): 1495-1524.

BOOKS

Abrams, Charles. *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing*. New York: Harper, 1955.

Anderson, Jervis. *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

Bell, Derrick A. *Race, Racism, and American Law*. New York: Aspen Publishers, 2004.

Berg, Manfred. *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.

Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Botham, Fay, and Sara M. Patterson, eds. *Race, Religion, Region: Landscapes of Encounter in the American West*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2006.

Buchanan, Albert Russell. *Black Americans in World War II*. Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1977.

Davis, Lenwood G. *Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1972: A Bibliography of Published Works and of Unpublished Source Materials on the Life and Contributions of Black People in the Pacific Northwest*. Monticello, IL: Council of Planning Librarians, 1972.

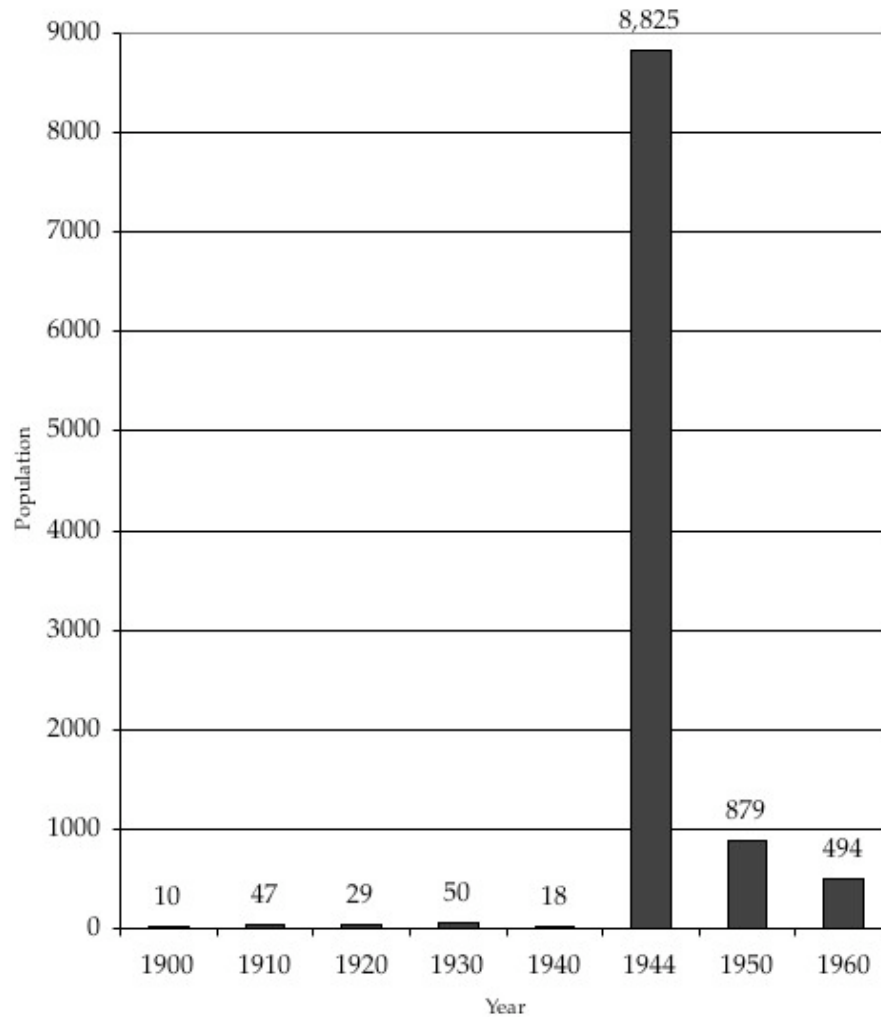
- Dodd, Gordon B. *The American Northwest: A History of Oregon and Washington*. Arlington Heights, IL: The Forum Press, 1986.
- Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Finkle, Lee. *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975.
- Foster, Mark. *Henry J. Kaiser: Builder in the Modern American West*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989.
- Franklin, John Hope, and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.
- Goluboff, Risa Lauren. *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Gregory, James N. *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- James, C. L. R. et al. *Fighting Racism in World War II: A Week by Week Account of the Struggle Against Racism and Discrimination in the United States During 1939-45*. Edited by Fred Stanton. New York: Monad Press, 1980.
- Jonas, Gilbert. *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Junne, George H. *Blacks in the American West and Beyond—America, Canada, and Mexico; A Selectively Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Kersten, Andrew Edmund. *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the Vanguard*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.
- Kesselman, Amy. *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II*. State University of New York Press, 1980.
- Maben, Manly. *Vanport*. Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1987.
- Massey, Douglas, and Nancy Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Meyer, Stephen Grant. *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1944.

- Nash, Gerald D. *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- O'Brien, Kenneth Paul, and Lynn Hudson Parsons, eds., *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995.
- O'Neill, William L. *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II*. New York: Free Press, 1993.
- Pfeffer, Paula F. A. *Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.
- Rhym, Darren. *The NAACP*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002.
- Schwantes, Carlos A. *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- Senna, Carl. *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York: F. Watts, 1993.
- Taylor, Quintard. *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.
- _____. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. New York: Norton, 1998.
- _____. "'There was No Better Place to Go' – The Transformation Thesis Revisited: African American Migration to the Pacific Northwest, 1940-1950." In *Terra Pacifica: People and Place in the Northwest States and Western Canada*, edited by Paul W. Hirt. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1998.
- Thomas, June Manning and Marsha Ritzdorf, eds. *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Van Arsdol, Ted. *Vancouver on the Columbia*. Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1986).
- Vose, Clement E. *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.
- Voss, Frederick S. *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.
- Warren, James R. *The War Years: A Chronicle of Washington State in World War II*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.
- Washburn, Patrick Scott. *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press During World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Wiese, Andrew. *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Wynn, Neil A. *The Afro-American and the Second World War*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993.

Appendix A
The African American Population of Vancouver, 1900 to 1960



Sources: Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 to 1960 and June Herzog, "A Study of the Negro Defense Worker in the Portland-Vancouver Area" (bachelor's thesis, Reed College, 1944), 78.

Appendix B

Relevant Sections of the Washington State Omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1957³²¹

The section of the state's Civil Rights Act of 1957 that is pertinent to housing reads:

- (1) For the owner of publicly assisted housing to refuse to sell, rent, or lease to any person or persons such housing because of the race, creed, color, or national origin of such person or persons;
- (2) For the owner of any publicly assisted housing to segregate, separate or discriminate against any person or persons because of the race, creed, color, or national origin of such person or persons, in the terms, conditions, or privileges of any such housing or in the furnishing of facilities or services in connection therewith;
- (3) For any person to make or cause to be made any written or oral inquiry concerning the race, creed, color, or national origin of a person or group of persons seeking to purchase, rent, or lease publicly assisted housing accommodations;
- (4) For any person to print or publish or cause to be printed or published any notice or advertisement relating to the sale, rental, or leasing of any publicly assisted housing accommodation which indicates any preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination based on race, creed, color, or national origin;
- (5) For any person, bank, mortgage company or other financial institution to whom application is made for financial assistance for the acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, repair or maintenance of any publicly assisted housing to make or cause to be made any written or oral inquiry for the purpose of discrimination concerning the race, creed, color, or national origin of a person or group of persons seeking such financial assistance, or concerning the race, creed, color, or national origin of prospective occupants or tenants of such housing, or to discriminate against, any person or persons because of the race, creed, color, or national origin of such person or persons, or prospective occupants or tenants, in the terms, conditions or privileges relating to the obtaining or use of any such financial assistance.

Nothing herein shall be deemed to prevent a bona fide religious, sectarian institution, or fraternal organization from selecting as tenants or occupants of any housing operated by such organization, as part of its religious, sectarian or fraternal activities, adherents or members of such religion, sect, or fraternal organization exclusively, or from giving preference in such selection to such adherents or members.

³²¹ "Washington (State) Omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1957," *blackpast.org*, University of Washington, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primarywest/washington-state-omnibus-civil-rights-act-1957> (accessed May 10, 2007).

Appendix C
Excerpt from Jean Griffin Interview

Jean Griffin describes her life in Oklahoma before moving to the Pacific Northwest and her thoughts on the opportunities the move to Oregon provided her and her family.

The fact that we came out here was really a blessing because my mother lived to be almost ninety-three and if she had been back in Oklahoma it would have been different. People back there had to work until they died, even if they take little carts and pick up scrap. Now, I don't know how it became after '44, after I left, but out here she paid into Social Security that was there for her when she got to be old enough. Although I wanted to go back to Oklahoma when I was younger I'm glad she didn't because I went back in 1996 and I went to this little house that we had lived in and it's still almost the same as it was. When she first built that house it was one room, a fourteen by fourteen, and we had four in the family because my father died when I was two years old. My brother was six months and my sister was four. My mother had to take care of us and she never did marry because she didn't want to have a step-father over her daughters.

I don't see how my mother made it because we had this old coal stove and she'd have to get up in the mornings in the cold and make the fire and get off to work so she could get the white people's kids off to school. Sometimes she'd make a hoecake with the coal stove because we didn't have an oven. It's biscuit bread you make by putting the skillet on top of the stove and you cook it in there and flip it after it browns on the underside. So, some days we would have hoecake and we would have molasses, then she'd have to go get their kids off and she had to work there until she did the job. Sometimes my mother would go out and wash and iron for about a dollar and a quarter a day, and clothes were starched then, you had to sprinkle them and iron them. Sometimes she'd look over into the basket [and think], *Well, gee, I only have three more pieces and then I can go home and take care of my kids and feed them*; we were really little then. Then when she'd get on the last piece [then] here'd come this woman with another bundle of clothes and my mother couldn't say, "Well, I just won't do them," because in order to get paid she had to stay and do them. Sometimes my mother would get home at nine o'clock at night and she would wake us up with a quart of sweet milk and a loaf of bread. We'd get our bread and pour the milk on and that would be our dinner.

She had to walk two blocks to the busline, and back then women didn't wear pants and sometimes it'd be so cold. Some of the coldest days I've ever seen was when the sun was so bright and it would be windy and cold. My mother went through all of that and I always told her I could never have done that. She had three kids to raise and she really did it too.

She and my aunt always stayed close together. My aunt was almost ninety-two when she died, my mother's oldest sister was ninety-seven, my mother's older brother was eighty-nine, and the youngest brother died the day before he was ninety. So I always say hard work won't kill you because they had long lives, and I take that same attitude too. It pays to do what you have to do, because a lot of people nowadays don't even work that hard but they don't take care of their kids. But it was a blessing that we came out here during the war and she decided to stay.

Appendix D
Excerpt from Florene DuFrense Interview

Florene DuFrense remembers her work on integrating Vancouver's postwar housing while volunteering for the Mayor's Committee on Open Housing.

Well, our [Committee] prevented the segregated type of housing. That didn't keep people from living next to each other and especially if they were people who had not had the privilege of much education. Some were reluctant to give up their own kind of neighborhood. During that time we had no neighborhood that had not been visited. If a person came to us and said, "I tried to rent or buy this house and I was told they didn't want people of color living in this neighborhood," we went in pairs to talk to people.

Talcaset Heights is up north of 39th Street, the nice cottage-type houses. They were built during the war and it was a very pleasant neighborhood. The [African American] person who wanted to buy the house there was somebody I knew. He had a family and grew roses. This man lived out in McLoughlin Heights but he had seen the houses up there. He wanted a house with more property for more roses, but ran into the opposition in the neighborhood.

Dr. John Soelling and I called there, and I was alone once when he couldn't come. We called on every person. We were not confrontational, we listened to their stories, we answered the argument that the property value would go down. We explained to them it went down because the white people would all move out and then it would become a segregated piece of property and then prices went down, so the people who could not afford better would move in. It was just a process. Realtors used the process and would turn around and sell the house to a black family regardless of whether people could take care of it or not.

I went to a house that was in a cul-de-sac and met a real pleasant woman who was a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church downtown, which was also very open, it has always been an integrated church. She said, "I've been expecting you. I just feel so bad about this because I know you're right and any other attitude is wrong, but" she said, "I'm so afraid to take a stand." Finally, she did and the man got his house, got his roses all planted. I went back and talked with her again and she said, "You've all been so nice about this. You're right, but I feel so guilty because I keep wishing it hadn't happened here."

This is the difference between taking a stance that you know is right and being glad you've done it rather than feeling guilty about it. I think he's died since then, but the place always looked nice, it was always cared for and I can't think of any instance where people were sorry [he moved in].

[Jamie Pittman] was one of the little girls [whose family wanted to move into a white neighborhood]; she was eleven years old when we made that call in her neighborhood. They were a lovely family, two children and a mother and father. Her neighbor had come here during the wartime to work and she came out of North Dakota and in all her life she had never seen a person of color, but she heard the stories that people told about Hudson's Bay High School and she was afraid for her children. She was scared to send them to school because she had been told the black students all carried knives.

We had a chance to talk with her, she said, "I can see I didn't have anything to be afraid of at all," and she pulled back all her – I call them fantasies – the kinds of

mischievous stories people tell, kids tell them and scatter it around. It gives them a weapon to use against people.

That's the kind of work we did. We really came out of that experience with black families able to buy homes and some of them still have those homes and some have gone on to other places, but I've always felt it was successful. It was a person-to-person meeting; we met with everybody personally.

The experience has enriched our community. The whole diverse concept of people living harmoniously has advanced, so even when we see room for improvement we can't overlook the good that people have done. Of every race and color there have been people who have been willing to expend themselves to help each other....