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I won't try to define progress, but I know it when I see it – to paraphrase that famous Supreme Court case on obscenity – and when we look back 50 years to the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act and compare those times to today, I'm not sure that what we see is progress.

The backdrop for the passage of the Fair Housing Act 50 years ago was the long, hot summer of 1967 when riots roiled through more than 150 cities across the country. Despite passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, black Americans continued to be frustrated by the oppression of police



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brutality and the inequities of segregation in communities.

In recent years, protesters have taken to the streets across the country, frustrated by the killing of African-American men in some of our country's most racially segregated cities, in places like Ferguson, Mo.; Baltimore, Md; and Milwaukee, Wis.

In 1967, riots prompted President Lyndon Johnson to convene the Kerner Commission, its charge

to examine the underlying racial tensions of the day. The Commission famously concluded: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."

"What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto," the commission found. "White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."

Decades later, a 2015 study noted that "segregation is manifesting itself in other ways – not disappearing." In Portland, statistical measures of segregation have dropped; but among the primary drivers has been the involuntary displacement of the African-American community out of the north and northeast Portland neighborhoods to which they once had been segregated.

In 1967, the Kerner Commission's views on housing followed the lead of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who gave rise to the open housing movement with his work in

Still seeking progress and justice in the fight for fair housing

Chicago a year earlier. The Kerner Commission went on to call for: "Opening up opportunities to those who are restricted by racial segregation and discrimination, and eliminating all barriers to their choice of jobs, education and housing."

This past December, an NBC News opinion piece titled "The Resegregation of America" outlined a series of continuing racial disparities in education, healthcare, environmental justice, and wealth accumulation resulting from residential segregation. Referring to education, the article quoted a 2016 report from the Government Accountability Office: "The promise of Brown v. Board of Education is unraveling."

In 1967, the commission recommended that the federal government "Enact a comprehensive and enforceable federal open housing law to cover the sale or rental of all housing," and a week after Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968, the Fair Housing Act became that comprehensive and enforceable federal open housing law, intent on ending the rampant racial segregation and discrimination of the mid-20th century.

Today, the homeownership rate for blacks nationwide has remained virtually unchanged since 1968, at approximately 40 percent, 30 points lower than it is for whites today. Right here in Portland, according to the Portland Housing Bureau's 2016 State of Housing report, white households are roughly 54-57 percent homeowners while African-Americans, Native Americans and Hawaiian-Pacific Islander households own homes at a rate of roughly 27 percent.

White Americans today have more than 10 times the accumulated wealth of blacks, a direct result of historical racially based

disparities in mortgage lending that denied the African-American community homeownership and the opportunity to build equity through home purchases.

Fifty years of civil rights protections have changed much of the landscape for protected classes, most notably creating significant gains in educational attainment.

Yet 50 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, we must acknowledge the persistent impacts of historical housing discrimination and segregation right here in Portland.

We have a history that divides us. We must embrace our shared commitment to an open and inclusive city to unite us.

The future of our community is at stake in this work we must undertake together. We know that integrated and

inclusive communities produce better outcomes for children and are more prosperous overall.

The tide of Portland's vibrant African-American community rises daily and demands that community development efforts across our city truly lift every boat.

Fifty years from now when the Broadway Corridor downtown or the Hill Block on North Williams Avenue have been redeveloped to respond to community needs, will we look back and celebrate having embraced our shared commitment to ensuring equitable outcomes for every resident of our city? Or will we still not recognize progress?

This is a tenuous moment across the country for the fair housing movement and for civil rights protections. Headlines marking the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act this month used words like "unfulfilled promise" and "failed."

In marking the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, former vice president

Walter Mondale, a co-author of the act, called it the "most contested, most ignored and, at times, most misunderstood" of the civil rights laws of that era.

The Fair Housing Act originally prohibited discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion and national origin. Sex, meaning gender, was added as a protected class in 1974, and disability and familial status (meaning families with children under the age of 18) were added in 1988.

In Portland, our housing affordability crisis already leaves many members of these protected classes facing a lack of housing opportunity. According to the housing bureau's 2016 State of Housing report, there are no Portland neighborhoods in which a typical black, Latinx, Native American or single-mother headed household could afford to live without becoming cost burdened by rent.

Our city's history of exclusion, redlining and displacement have left indelible impacts on our communities, molding a central core that continues to get whiter and more affluent while our communities of color are pushed to the less opportune edges of our city.

Today, hate and harassment creep into what should be our community's safe and stable housing. An already insufferable housing crisis is made worse for many members of protected classes most likely to experience discrimination during these times, including immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Fifty years on, the fight for fair housing – the struggle for open and inclusive communities, the right to housing opportunities for all, free from discrimination – is far from over.

Just as the riots fueled by racial segregation in 1967 and the assassination of Dr. King spurred the fair housing movement 50 years ago, so too should the frustrations over the lack of progress spilling onto our streets today spur our renewed commitment.

As the only organization in the state of Oregon whose mission is based solely on the tenets of the Fair Housing Act, we at the Fair Housing Council of Oregon urge you to join us in recommitting to the ideals of the fair housing movement and a renewed fight for justice.

And to once again turn that phrase: I won't define justice for communities harmed by a history of racial segregation, discrimination and displacement – but I'll know justice when I see it. And what I see now is not justice.

FAIR HOUSING, from page 7

discrimination and racism. Without addressing that gap, you're continuing to deny people a civil right, and you're continuing to exacerbate that black and white wealth gap.

S.H.: As we're seeing enforcement of the Fair Housing Act being scaled back by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under Ben Carson, and those protections in jeopardy, what's important to remember or know about the Fair Housing Act today?

L.S.: I think what's important to remember is the impacts that that legislation had, and that although, especially in institutional forms,

racism continues to exist and continues to force people to live in particular neighborhoods in some ways, segregation has been reduced. And the Fair Housing Act was really critical in facilitating the reduction in segregation levels that we've seen.

I'm not saying that we've achieved full integration in society by any means, but it was critical in making the advances that we have made in that area. And when you reduce segregation on a residential level, by neighborhood, you also reduce segregation in other areas, such as access to job opportunities, education, employment, things like that.

Just thinking about the foreclosure crisis and the recession, we really saw the continuing need for the Fair Housing Act in what happened there, because black and Latino homeowners were far more likely to lose their homes during the foreclosure crisis, and researchers found that black and Latino homeowners were being steered, even when they qualified for traditional loans through banks with fixed interest rates, they were being steered into these predatory forms of lending. That's what put people at risk of losing their homes. And so I think that shows us that the work of the Fair Housing Act hasn't been done, hasn't been complete.

