

Portland's Evolving African American Community Continues

gear and became a "congested war production center." 140,000 defense workers, most at the Kaiser yards in Vancouver, North Portland, and Swan Island, created a huge need for housing. More than 15,000 African Americans from the south would migrate here for jobs. The Albina neighborhood was spilling over. Whites protested at every rumor of more black families coming to Portland. However, without enough white males to do what was needed for the war effort, the government and large companies with government contracts welcomed African American labor. Unfortunately as the war ended, things changed quickly. Thousands who came to the Portland area to do shipyard work migrated back home, many from other states. Emergency housing for the workers would be dismantled. In Portland's Vanport area, a flood destroyed their homes. White families moved to the suburbs to live in tract houses. With most banks and real estate companies trying to keep African Americans out of

white neighborhoods, blacks were forced into already over-crowded North and Northeast Portland housing areas.

homes and businesses of blacks. During the war production period, the African American population grew more than ten times. The 2,000 pre-war population of black citizens



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The I-5 freeway was built in November 1961. (Courtesy of OHS)

I-5 Corridor

Making matters worse was the post war expansion in the city. During the 1950's and 1960's, Portland would expand in all directions. Federal monies also helped revamp downtown Portland and areas near it. Just over the Broadway Bridge, many homes were lost to the Memorial Coliseum and other businesses.

rose to over 20,000 in just three years. While many white workers returned to their home states after the war, many blacks had no place to return to. Portland was their home now. One of the major goals of the Urban League of Portland was to help with employment and housing issues for Portland's now swelling black population. There were many

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After World War II, discharged veterans went to meetings to decide their professional future. The local Urban League tried to secure jobs and a good education for them. (Courtesy of OHS)

The I-5 construction caused a several-mile stretch of homes and businesses to be torn down, right through the already over-crowded African American neighborhoods. Other Urban Renewal included the huge campus for Emanuel Hospital, disrupting several more blocks of

African Americans living in the Albina area, yet banks and real estate companies were still trying to "keep them over there." With the Vanport flood of 1948 displacing an additional 5,000 African Americans, "white Portland" was worried about where they would