

Parallel to New Orleans

continued ▲ from Metro

where blacks and whites lived in close proximity. He describes how "for that period of time, that was a remarkable experiment in the social structure of the United States, and we didn't have nearly the problems of the segregated South."

Harlem and Detroit also experienced significant strife in 1943, so it was particularly impressive that integration at Vanport "proceeded with little incident," according to historian Manly Maben.

"The racial tensions were lessened at Vanport because everyone was tired from working in the Kaiser shipyards," muses Skovgaard.

But the real reason for the peace between races, Skovgaard insists,

Vanport's housing was built to be temporary. And in both cases, communities were left asking the government why better preparations weren't made for disaster, why more permanent housing was never secured.

Even as the water lapped at the top of the embankment, the Vanport Housing Authority distributed a flyer telling residents, "Dikes are safe at present; You will be warned if necessary; You will have time to leave; Don't get excited." By sheer lack of preparedness, at least 15 people lost their lives on that Memorial Day, and Skovgaard recognized history repeating itself in New Orleans.

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— Dale Skovgaard

was Vanport's version of state-sponsored socialism.

"People had their personal items," he says, "but by and large everyone had the same things, so there wasn't any judgment."

The local government's role in bringing about the end of Vanport's experiment started even before the floodwaters and remains in question.

"They were taking out buildings as people moved out," Skovgaard says, "but there was no active conspiracy; it was just that the railroad fill (the city was built on a landfill) wasn't really built to last."

Like the Ninth Ward in New Orleans that was destroyed by Katrina,

people when they started worrying about the water coming through," Skovgaard says. "The bureaucrats were trying desperately not to look back, to try to be in control. Afterwards, all they could say was it was not my fault, it was that office's fault."

Vanport is still quite important in terms of how the community thinks about itself. Sasha Quintana of Portland Community College's Black Student Union says, "Vanport started the creed of Jefferson being a black school."

As a symbol of both good and ill, the unique housing project that was Vanport looms large in our history.



The rescue of flood victims from Vanport in 1948. The city was one of the nation's first multicultural communities. (Courtesy: Oregon Historical Society)



A Bonneville Power Administration photograph shows white and black residents working together to save lives when the Columbia River flooded Vanport in 1948. Many of those lucky to survive were put up in barracks and condemned trailers on Swan Island.

Obituary

In Loving Memory

James Ray Mitchell

James Ray "Mitch" Mitchell, 59 died April 9, 2007.

As a youngster and as a young man he sang with Gospel groups and traveled far and wide. He worked in security positions at the airport and Fred Meyer. He was a wonderful cook and enjoyed barbecuing ribs and chicken for his friends and neighbors. He was well loved and will be sorely missed by friends, family and his companion of 18 years, Marcia Cufton.

He had nine children but lost two early on. His daughters Mina and Nieci reside in the Portland area with his 4 grandchildren. Other survivors include at least two other



grandchildren; a brother Anthony of Las Vegas; a brother Sonny and two sisters, Annabelle and Laverne, all of Oklahoma; several other family members, including nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. Please keep the family in your prayers for a life cut short

because God needed him at home. In lieu of flowers, please help the family defray expenses, as Mitch will be returned to his native home in Oklahoma for burial. Donations can be made in care of any US Bank under the James Mitchell Funeral Donation Fund.

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