



**Writing to Make
a Difference**

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‘Left Hook’ to Displacement



PHOTO BY SHAWNTE SIMS

Displacement of African-Americans in 1970s Portland is captured in ‘Left Hook,’ a new play inspired by the Knott Street Boxing Club and the urban renewal projects that forced people out of their historical neighborhoods. The production premieres for the Vanport Mosaic Festival, a community wide festival that commemorates the 1948 Portland flood that displaced thousands of people of color. Pictured are cast members (top row, center) Shareen Jacobs; (middle row from left) Tonea Lolin and Jasper Howard; and (bottom row from left) Anthony Armstrong, Kenneth Dembo, and Jame Savannah.

New play premieres for Vanport Mosaic

BY DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A new play that touches on the history of displacement in 1970s Portland, where hundreds of homes and businesses were razed in historical black neighborhoods, will debut next week as part of the Vanport Mosaic Festival.

“Left Hook” is inspired in part by the history of the Knott Street Boxing Club and the urban renewal projects that disrupted a once vibrant neighborhood. It is a follow up to playwright Rich Rubin’s 2016 play “Cottonwood in the Flood,” which was about Vanport and the May 30, 1948 Memorial Day flood that destroyed the Portland town 70 years ago.

The new play focuses on a hub of thriving African American businesses and homes in the Albina District of north and northeast Portland where many former Vanport residents resided. Several blocks of the neighborhood were eventually razed when urban renewal projects spurred the expansion of Emanuel Hospital and prompted the demolition of about 300 homes of mostly African American families who were then forced to relocate.

‘Left Hook’ has an all African-American and local cast and uses the story of Knott Street to tell a story about a fictitious boxing gym whose future is made uncertain by the changes.

Damaris Webb, a Portland native and African American theater maker, is once again helping the role of director for Rubin’s play after bringing his Cottonwood in the Flood to life on the stage two years ago.

She is the co-founder and director of the Vanport Mosaic, a non-profit that engages the community through storytelling, art, education, and media about forgotten local histories. The effort was first started by Laura Lo Forti, a self-described ‘story midwife’ and ‘recovering journalist,’ who began working with elders in the commu-