

The Civil Rights Movement in Portland, Oregon: 1955-68

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In December, 1955, blacks in Montgomery, Alabama, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, organized a massive bus boycott to protest racial segregation.¹ By the following December, Montgomery's buses were integrated, and the civil rights movement had changed its direction from a concentration on litigation to enact change to the use of non-violent methods to protest racial segregation and discrimination.² This event marked the beginning of more than a decade of non-violent activism in the deep South.

Throughout the 1950's and '60's, there was a growth of civil rights organizations and a rise of new leaders to head them. Groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which were formed in 1957 and 1960 respectively, along with older organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) were the principal organizations behind the "Black Revolt" in the 1960's.³ Under the leadership of men like Martin Luther King (SCLC), John Lewis (SNCC), James Farmer (CORE), and Roy Wilkins (NAACP), blacks staged demonstrations that gave national attention to the problem of racial discrimination in the South and prompted responses in the North as well.

Events like the student sit-ins which started in Greensboro, N.C. in

1960, the Freedom Rides through the South in 1961, the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, Freedom Summer of 1964, and the Selma March of 1965, addressed the issues of discrimination in public accommodations, voting and segregation. These were the great events of the Civil Rights Movement in the South.

The subject of this thesis is the Civil Rights Movement in Portland, Oregon, during the period in which the above events were occurring, 1955-1968. It is not the purpose of this thesis to give a detailed account of all of the civil rights activity during this time. The limits of time and the availability of resources preclude such coverage. However, it is hoped that the reader can gain a sense of what was happening in Portland and a familiarity with some of the major civil rights issues in Portland during the time when the South was experiencing its mass marches and sit-ins.

It is important to look at the experiences of blacks in a city like Portland in order to better understand how Southern strategies of protest were applied in the North. Southern acts often sparked Northern responses, giving blacks an opportunity to express their local grievances. Often, the issues raised in the North were just as concerned with economic problems as with the issue of legal segregation, which was central to the movement in the South.

The City:

Portland, as a setting for civil rights activity, was distinctive in several respects. For one, the presence of a significant black population in Portland was relatively new. Before 1940, the population of blacks in Portland had not exceeded 2000.⁴ During World War II, however, workers were needed to fill defense related jobs, attracting great numbers of blacks to the Northern and Western cities.⁵ About 23,000 blacks came to Portland to fill jobs in the war industries, but many left when the war was over because only menial jobs were left available to them.⁶ There were about 10,000⁷ who did decide to stay, and the number of blacks in Portland continued to grow throughout the 1950's and '60's. From 1950 to 1960, the black population grew from approximately 10,000 to 15,637. By 1964, it had reached 16,500.⁸ This sudden influx of blacks intensified racial tension and made the need to establish equality more urgent.

Portland was also distinctive because it contained almost the whole black community for the entire state, all within the district of Albina, a small ghetto area in Northeast Portland. In 1960, it was reported that 78 per cent of Portland's blacks lived in Albina.⁹ This segregation of blacks also increased racial pressure, especially as the population grew. The fact that the black community was packed into so small an area, however, provided the potential for good communication, unity, and shared grievances among blacks which would be important to any concerted action for change.

Portland's attitude toward social change was not distinctive; for racism in Oregon, as in the rest of the U.S., was deeply rooted.

For a good deal of the state's history, it was illegal for blacks to come to Oregon. In 1837, the Oregon State Convention passed a law prohibiting blacks from entering the state, and restricting those already residing in Oregon from holding property or making contracts.¹⁰ Racial attitudes had not changed greatly by 1950, when Portlanders voted down a Civil Rights Ordinance which was proposed and approved by the City Council of Portland. The Ordinance would have guaranteed all races equal use of all public facilities and services.¹¹ The defeat of this proposal made it clear that the attitude of white supremacy was still strong in Portland.

Portland was typical in terms of the types of grievances its black community was expressing. The major issues in Portland were discrimination in housing and employment, and a poor educational system for blacks because of segregation. Outcries for justice in these areas were being made throughout the nation.

The Issues:

For Portland blacks, discrimination in housing was a major issue. Most of the black population resided in Albina where buildings were old, crowded, and unhealthy.¹² A 1966 report stated that 48.3 per cent of Portland's black families were living in housing rated as unsound by city standards.¹³ Blacks accused the real estate industry in Portland of being responsible for relegating blacks to Albina through their discriminatory practices.

According to the Urban League, the Realty Board had set the discriminatory policies as early as 1946.¹⁴ The Urban League reported that,

Article 34 of the Realty Board Code of Ethic states: 'A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.' The Realty Board interprets this article to mean that the presence of any non-white person is clearly detrimental to any residential neighborhood which has not been designated for non-white occupancy by the Board. The Realty Board exercises strict discipline over its members at this point. Penalty for disregarding the racial factor in selling property may culminate in fine or in suspension or expulsion from the Board. Furthermore, the Oregon State Real Estate Commission uses this same code in its instruction to all applicants for real estate licenses in this state.¹⁵

According to E. Shelton Hill, former executive director of the Portland Urban League, Portland realtors set the specific boundaries within which blacks could reside in 1948.¹⁶ That was the year when Vanport, the black settlement on the Columbia River just north of Portland, was washed away by a flood. This disaster drove a large number of blacks into Portland's city limits. Hill holds that it was at this point that the real estate board decided they would sell

housing to blacks only within the area between Oregon Street and Russell, and between Union and the river.¹⁷ This policy created the Albina district. There were no laws preventing the Board from setting such a policy in 1948,¹⁸ and it was apparently still in effect in 1957, when a report issued by the Portland City Club indicated that it was

common knowledge in many circles that 90 per cent or more of the real estate brokers will not sell a home to a black in a white neighborhood even though the prospective buyer can handle the deal financially.¹⁹

Blacks also complained of discrimination in the area of public housing. Civil rights groups accused the Housing Authority of Portland of practicing discrimination in their methods of choosing tenants and of promoting segregation in their planning of housing projects. In the statement of the NAACP on the Race and Education Committee Report of October, 1964, William McClendon wrote the following:

The Portland Housing Authority has continued to follow the pattern of rigid segregation in assigning dwellings. This has been unfair and has worked a hardship on Negro families...²⁰

Discrimination against blacks in employment was another major problem in Portland. Since blacks first started moving into Oregon, most of them were employed in menial jobs. In 1941, out of the 2,105 blacks living in the Portland-Vancouver area,²¹ the majority of those who were employed worked for the railroad as waiters, cooks, porters, and redcaps.²² The advent of the war opened up jobs for blacks, but most of these were menial.²³ A War Manpower Commission survey in 1944 indicated that 7,279 blacks worked in the shipyards.²⁴

In 1949, the Oregon Legislature passed the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEP), but it did not greatly improve job opportunities for blacks. In 1955, Mark A. Smith, the FEP administrator, reported some improvement in the employment practices of state agencies, but many firms in retail, trade, public utilities, banks, and textile manufacturing had yet to develop equal employment opportunities six years after the law was passed.²⁵ According to Labor Commissioner Norman Nilson, the ineffectiveness of the FEP Act was partly due to the fact that,

too few realize the FEP governs methods of worker recruitment including the use of application forms, promotions on the job, dismissals and other conditions of employment.²⁶

Some Portland labor unions also had a history of discriminating against blacks, either by setting a policy of white-only membership²⁷ or a policy of segregation within the union. For example, in the '40's, the Portland chapter of the Boilermakers Union, which had jurisdiction over most of the black workers in the shipyards, followed the policy set by their international constitution. This union set up an auxiliary local which segregated blacks from whites.²⁸

The third major issue that concerned civil rights groups was the quality of education that black students were receiving in Portland. By 1963, segregated housing patterns concentrated 86 per cent of the black elementary school students in 9 of Portland's 94 grade schools.²⁹ Civil rights groups held that the predominantly black schools were inferior to those that had mostly white students.³⁰ A report by the Committee on Race and Education of the Board of Education in 1964 found that the mean achievement of black students in Portland elementary

schools was lower than that of white students.³¹

Discrimination in housing, employment and education seemed to be the three issues which were the most important to Portland's black community. These three topics were the ones most frequently raised at meetings and rallies.

The Organizations:

Several organizations in Portland, both nationally and locally based, were concerned with these issues during the '50's and '60's. The NAACP and the Urban League of Portland seemed to be the two largest and most consistently visible civil rights groups during this time. Since the NAACP was an advocate of direct action as a method of expressing grievances, it was often the organizing force behind demonstrations.

The NAACP was founded in 1909 to work for full equality for blacks, and grew to become one of the largest civil rights organizations in the U.S.³² As a national organization, it had a centralized power structure, so its policies were determined at an annual convention by elected delegates from local units.³³ Local chapters of the Association, such as the one in Portland, had boards made up of 30 members which carried and planned out those nationwide policies.³⁴

The NAACP's stated goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination. The avenues they took to achieve this goal included litigation through the courts, legislation protecting civil rights, educational programs to promote brotherhood, and non-violent demonstration.³⁵

The Urban League was also a national organization. It was founded in 1910 as a charitable organization to work for equal opportunity and better living conditions for Black Americans.³⁶ Its goal was to use negotiations and persuasion to build an interracial alliance. The Urban League of Portland, which was established in 1945 at the request of local citizens, had almost 3,000 members in April, 1956.³⁷ It organized many conferences and seminars, and the leaders of the Urban

League of Portland, which were both black and white, often spoke out on racial issues.

There were also several local organizations which were involved in the civil rights struggle in Portland. Some were religious organizations, such as the Stella Maris House, which was affiliated with the Catholic Church. The Greater Portland Council of Churches and the Albina Ministerial Association, which were interfaith groups composed of various congregations, were also active supporters of the Civil Rights Movement.

The Albina Ministerial Association, for instance, was made up of congregations in the Albina area. All of the member churches of the AMA had black ministers whose congregations were predominantly black, although the Association was open to white churches as well.³⁸ All of the pastors in the Association were also in the Greater Portland Council of Churches.³⁹

As groups like the Portland Friends of SNCC, the Mississippi Civil Rights Volunteers of Oregon, the Action for Rights group, and others began emerging during the early '60's, civil rights leaders felt there was a need for one coordinating organization. In response to this need, The Citizen's League for Equal Opportunity (CLEO) was formed in August, 1963.⁴⁰ The members of CLEO were representatives from committees, organizations, and associations already in existence.⁴¹ CLEO had four working divisions: housing, education, employment, and community organization.⁴²

CHAPTER II. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN PORTLAND 1955-1962

Discussion, not action seemed to characterize the civil rights activity in Portland during the period of 1955-1962, as seminars and panels on race related topics were common. There were few organizations in Portland during the 1950's which advocated direct action as a method of protest. The Urban League, which emphasized education as a means to enact social change, however, was a major civil rights organization in Portland during that time. Its presence in Portland accounts for the concentration on discussion.

Meetings such as the one-day conference on "Housing Needs and Minority Groups," which was organized by the Urban League and held on February 12, 1955, received coverage in the two major white papers, The Portland Oregonian and The Oregon Journal. The purpose of this conference was to "draw representatives of community groups to share information and techniques for reducing discrimination in housing."¹ This meeting brought public officials, housing specialists, and community leaders together; as 200 people representing churches, schools, real estate firms, government offices, and many other groups attended the meeting.² Myron C. Cole, pastor of the First Christian Church, was the keynote speaker for the conference. In his address, he declared that "segregated housing is the last great

barrier to equal rights."³

Other examples of discussion oriented meetings concerning civil rights issues included a "Workshop on Integration in the Community," which was sponsored by the student YMCA-YWCA Councils of the Pacific Northwest in February, 1956.⁴ E. Shelton Hill and John Holly, who were officers in the UL, spoke and led discussion on residential discrimination in Portland and emphasized integration at this meeting.⁵

Later in 1956, the Portland Chamber of Commerce ran a series of TV and radio programs on integration.⁶

The UL had an annual meeting which usually featured a special speaker or panel. For example, in 1955, the UL invited Loren Miller, a civil rights attorney, publisher, and orator from Los Angeles, to address their meeting.⁷ In 1956, their meeting featured a panel of four religious leaders in Oregon who spoke on "Religion's Responsibility for the Improvement of Race Relations."⁸

Some of the gatherings that were covered in white newspapers were prompted by national events. The "Emmett Till" protest meeting, for example, organized by the NAACP and the Urban League, was held on November 10, 1955, in response to the August murder of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black youth whose attackers were acquitted by an all-white jury.⁹ The purpose of this protest meeting, according to The Oregonian, was to speak out against the "wave of injustice in the South," and particularly Mississippi where the murder occurred.¹⁰ This meeting was held at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which often was used for civil rights gatherings. It attracted a crowd of about 700 people.¹¹

This protest rally was one of several held in various cities in the nation as part of a campaign to arouse public pressure on Congress to "convince them civil rights legislation on the federal level is necessary."¹²

In November, 1961, national civil rights leader Martin Luther King spoke in Portland at the Urban League's Equal-Opportunity Day Program.¹³ His appearance at the UL's program drew an integrated crowd of 3500¹⁴ persons to the Portland Auditorium. As Dr. King described the success of the lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rides and his own experiences in Montgomery, he connected Portland with the national Civil Rights Movement and encouraged Portlanders to use creative, non-violent protest to achieve integration.¹⁵ King's speech emphasized the importance of non-violence with these words:

There must be people in this nation with a sort of divine content... In the days of guided missiles, it is no longer a choice between non-violence or violence, it is a choice between non-violence or non-existence.¹⁶

King attempted to link his audience to the broader vision of the movement by calling on President Kennedy to issue an executive order to end all discrimination, just as President Lincoln had used an executive order to free the slaves. His suggestion was that the order be based on the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.¹⁷

Portland Mayor Terry Shrunck and Oregon Governor Mark O. Hatfield both attended this event to greet King.¹⁸ Politicians were willing to give some attention to civil rights issues during this period. Besides attending meetings to greet national figures, Oregon lawmakers passed some significant anti-discrimination legislation during these years.

Before 1949, the state had no civil rights legislation. That year, however, the Fair Employment Practice Law was passed, prohibiting discrimination in employment because of race, religion, color or national origin.¹⁹ In 1959, the Oregon Legislature improved this law by passing two measures which gave the Bureau of Labor the additional duty of policing racial and religious discrimination in real estate transactions.²⁰ The real estate business was also targeted in 1959 by a measure that prohibited discrimination in all housing transactions involving any person engaged in the real estate business.²¹

Another area addressed by the Oregon Legislature was discrimination in places of public accommodation. In 1953, a law was passed in Oregon prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation, resort, or amusement. This established the right of all citizens to equal facilities.²² In 1961, the Public Accommodations Act was extended to include any place offering the public goods and services.²³

These improvements constituted major progress in the legal rights of blacks. They also indicated a degree of willingness on the part of political figures to face some of the areas of racial discrimination in Oregon.

Before 1963, civil rights activity in Portland laid the base for the events that occurred in the mid-1960's. By 1963, the important racial issues had been discussed, civil rights organizations were developing, and some important laws had been passed for blacks.

In the early '60's, new civil rights groups were forming--ones which used direct methods of protest. In the following years, civil rights issues received more publicity.

CHAPTER III. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN PORTLAND 1963-1966

From 1963-1966, the Civil Rights Movement in Portland took on a markedly different character than it had in the previous period. Civil rights groups began to speak out more emphatically and specifically, using more direct methods of protest and confrontation. This helped to define and clarify specific problem areas of discrimination in Portland.¹

Another development during this time was the growth in the number of groups which were active in the civil rights arena. Religious groups like the Stella Maris House, the Albina Ministerial Association, and the Portland Council of Churches became more involved in the early '60's. The Portland Friends of SNCC and the Mississippi Civil Rights Volunteers of Oregon also emerged at this time.

Events in the South continued to prompt reaction in Portland in the '60's. For example, the assassination of Medgar Evers, state secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi, on June 12, 1963,² sparked a response from Portlanders. A memorial service was held for Evers on Sunday, June 23, 1963, as well as a "March of Mourning" through Albina led by Mayfield K. Webb, leader of Portland's NAACP.

Although the demonstration was in memory of Evers' death, the protest march provided an opportunity to express local grievances. The 400 persons⁴ participating in this march protested housing policies,

a proposed housing project called Daisy-Williams II, segregated schools and the lack of jobs for blacks. Specific accusations were articulated after the march at the combination memorial service-integration rally which was held at the Church of the Living God.⁵

Black leaders accused the Housing Authority of Portland of using a "divide-and-conquer" approach to racial problems, because the HAP had proposed an all-Chinese housing project a few months earlier.⁶ They also blamed labor unions for being the "largest single source of discrimination in Portland."⁷

A national demonstration in which a group of Portlanders were directly involved was the march on Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963, which brought 200,000 demonstrators to the nation's Capitol to show their support for a civil rights law that was before Congress.⁸ Portland sent 38 demonstrators to Washington, D.C., on a "Jobs and Freedom" bus that left on Sunday, August 25, at 5 a.m.⁹ The departure was preceded by a rally that began at 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning, where participants sang songs such as, "We Shall Overcome." The riders were mostly young people, with both whites and blacks participating.¹⁰

This project was organized by one of Portland's newer civil rights groups, "Portland Friends of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee."¹¹ They began to organize this freedom campaign in July, but their efforts had almost failed because of a lack of funds.¹² The final \$2000 came through within the last three days, however, allowing them to carry out their plans.¹³

Other groups involved with the "Jobs and Freedom" bus included the Urban League and the Highland Congregational Church.¹⁴ The captain of

the bus was John Holley of the Urban League. Ralph M. Moore, who was the white pastor of the Highland Church, served as the leader of the group, and his congregation took the donations to finance the trip.¹⁵

Portlanders were also involved in the Black voter registration program in Jackson, Mississippi, during the summer of 1964.¹⁶ Volunteers were sent to Jackson to live with black families and help operate literacy projects, Freedom Schools, welfare distribution centers, libraries and recreation centers.¹⁷

The Portland Council of Churches was the main organizer of this project, recruiting volunteers and collecting donations to support their stay.¹⁸

The Southern event that invoked the greatest response in Portland was the violence in Selma, Alabama, in March of 1965. On "Bloody Sunday," March 7, 1965, voting-rights marchers in Selma were beaten and gassed by Alabama troopers and Dallas County deputies.¹⁹ Later that same month, March 21-25, Dr. King led a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. After that march, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, a Detroit woman participating in the march, was shot to death by nightriders.²⁰

Portland civil rights groups responded to the "Bloody Sunday" incident of violence by staging two protest marches. The first was called a "Sympathy March" for Selma civil rights workers.²¹ About 400 people participated in the non-violent march in Portland on Friday, March 12, 1965.²² The march was organized by the Portland NAACP, but religious leaders were also involved. Clergymen led prayers and gave speeches²³ in which local issues such as discrimination in housing, education and employment were aired.²⁴

A larger protest march was held the following Sunday, March 14, when over 1300 Portlanders marched through downtown Portland holding signs protesting the violence in Selma. This demonstration was sponsored by the Mississippi Civil Rights Volunteers of Oregon and the local chapter of the NAACP.²⁵

These events indicate a relationship between the national and local movements. In responding to national events, Portlanders were able to translate Southern methods of non-violent protest into their Northern setting. Through these demonstrations, Portland's civil rights groups were given the chance to express local grievances, linking issues in Portland to the dramatic events in the South.

The years from 1963 to 1966 were also central to Portland's Civil Rights Movement because this was the period when the complaints of the black community, which had only been addressed rhetorically and generally for at least the past 20 years, finally received some specific attention. The problem areas of housing and de facto segregation, especially, rose to the surface of public attention in a way that they had not done before.

The housing issue, for instance, was focused upon because of a well-publicized incident in the fall of 1963, when President John F. Kennedy cancelled his plan to preside at the dedication ceremony for a public housing project in Portland, the Northwest Tower, which was under fire from several Portland civil rights organizations. The controversy created by this incident was well-covered by Portland's daily newspapers, The Oregonian and The Oregon Journal. Editorials in these conservative white newspapers ultimately blamed black leaders for scaring the President away and for making unsubstantiated accusations.

The conflict between civil rights groups and the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) was not a new one. Civil rights groups had expressed their dissatisfaction with the policies of HAP as early as March, 1962. HAP had proposed a new housing project, called Daisy Williams, which was to be located near Albina. On March 8, 1962, a letter signed by several organizations, which enumerated the objections to the proposed site for Daisy Williams, was printed in the black newspaper, The Northwest Defender.²⁶

Briefly, these were 1) The site would be bad for children as it was too close to busy streets; 2) The area where the new project would be built was already overcrowded; 3) The project would perpetuate racial segregation, as the site was in the black neighborhood and only blacks would be likely to move in.²⁷ The letter also pointed out that the HAP had held no public meetings on the location decision and that only low-income people would qualify to live in the project.²⁸ This letter was signed by the NAACP, Stella Maris House, Albina Neighborhood Council, Albina Ministerial Association, Oregon Association of Club Women, and the Catholic Council on Human Relations.²⁹

Tensions flared again the summer of 1963 over HAP's plan to build another new housing project--Daisy Williams II--in the Albina District.³⁰ On June 23, 1963, in the Mourners' March for Medgar Evers anti-HAP organizations accused the Housing Authority of using discriminatory practices. They blamed HAP for promoting segregation by planning a "ghetto housing project."³¹ The complaint many blacks had against building the project near Albina was that it would keep the black population concentrated in the Albina District.³² To many blacks, building the Daisy Williams II project constituted segregation by 'public action.'³³ On June 11, 1963,

the American Civil Liberties Union sent a telegram to JFK complaining that this new project might as well be marked 'colored.'³⁴ Protest was also expressed that same day when representatives of the NAACP, Urban League, Stella Maris House, Albina Ministerial Association, ACLU and others met with Mayor Schrunk to voice complaints regarding the housing situation.³⁵

In early September, 1963, civil rights groups spoke out again. This time their protest was directed against the Northwest Tower, a project which the HAP was preparing to dedicate. Since President Kennedy was to attend the dedication, the CLEO, the NAACP, and the UL expressed their objections by sending a telegram to the White House Assistant Press Secretary Andrew Hatcher.³⁶ In the telegram, the civil rights groups charged HAP with "subtle segregation." More particularly they disliked the way the application list for Northwest Tower was established.³⁷ According to Mayfield Webb,

The first applications for the project were taken in 1959, but Negroes were not informed applications were to be taken until 1961. By that time there were enough applications to fill the project.³⁸

Dr. Walter Reynolds, co-chairman of the Citizen's League, agreed with Webb in charging HAP with practices that "retain racial and ethnic groups in specific parts of the city."³⁹

Gene Rossman, executive director of the Housing Authority spoke in defense of the agency. He claimed that HAP was the only metropolitan housing authority which had all of its projects integrated.⁴⁰ He argued that over 10 per cent of the project occupants were black, although blacks constituted only 3.5 per cent of the total population in Portland.⁴¹

The telegram which was delivered to Andrew Hatcher was also sent

to Representative Edith Green, and Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) Director Robert Weaver. It read as follows:

Delighted President will visit Portland but shocked at announcement of dedication of all-white high-rise public housing project called Northwest Tower. Stop. All responsible organizations on Portland race relations front have lost confidence in Housing Authority here because of long history of subtle segregation policies. Stop. We feel President would make great mistake appearing in support of project and would face demonstrations by groups otherwise wholly friendly and eager to help welcome him in Portland.⁴²

This stand against the Housing Authority came out of the civil rights groups' concern that the President's appearance at the ceremony would signify approval of Housing Authority policies and thus make it impossible to get HAP to change their practices. This concern was expressed by Mayfield Webb, President of the NAACP, when he said,

If the President makes this dedication, he would be patting the Housing Authority on the back. That would make them the untouchables.⁴³

Blacks felt that they had to speak out about this event if they ever hoped to change HAP's policies.

Black civil rights leaders were not the only ones concerned with the political impact of the visit. The President's stop in Portland, which was scheduled for September 27, 1963, was part of his eleven-state tour which had the stated purpose of inspecting conservation and recreation projects.⁴⁴ Looking at the President's choice of states and the number of speeches he scheduled, however, it is obvious that his motives were not purely "non-political." Seven of the nine Western states (including Oregon) that the President chose were states in which he had lost in 1960, and most of those states had Democratic Senators running for reelection that fall.⁴⁵ One reporter termed the trip a

"softsell" tour for the 1964 campaign.⁴⁶ The political factors involved in the tour are important in understanding the President's later decision to cancel.

In the arena of Oregon politics, Representative Edith Green and Portland Mayor Terry Schruck had the most at stake regarding the Presidential visit. Mrs. Green had conceived of the idea to invite the President to participate in dedicating the Northwest Tower.⁴⁷ She reportedly considered the Northwest Tower "tangible evidence" of the administration's concern for the use of human resources and thought it would fit in well with the President's conservation tour.⁴⁸ It was an honor for Mayor Schruck, of course, to have JFK stop in his city.

Given the political context of the Presidential visit, it is not surprising that the telegram sent by the three organizations set off strong reactions. Although the telegram's reference to a demonstration was not confirmed by black leaders as a definite threat, the local press and the participants in the controversy reacted as if the President would be picketed if he came to Portland.

Representative Green, a known supporter of civil rights,⁴⁹ reacted to the charges of "subtle segregation" by ordering two different authorities to investigate HAP.⁵⁰ Green said that inquiries by two Federal Housing Administration (FHA) officials found no evidence of discrimination in public housing.⁵¹ On Wednesday, September 18, Mrs. Marie McGuire, the Federal Housing Commissioner, gave a favorable report of the investigation that two of her staff members had done and said there was "no evidence to indicate any type of segregations, subtle or otherwise, practiced by the Housing Authority of Portland."⁵²

When the report from the FHA and a city investigation convinced Green that the Housing Authority's practices were above reproach, she turned to question the motives of those making the charges.⁵³ She suggested that they were "looking for headlines"⁵⁴ with the threat to picket the ceremony and pointed out that they had not picketed the Northwest Tower, the other housing project of the mayor's office. Mayor Schrunk was more vehement in his charges. He also found the segregation charges unsubstantiated and did not think JFK should change his plans. Schrunk said, "The President has been picketed before; I don't think he'd be embarrassed."⁵⁵

The Housing Authority, however, was concerned about the potentials of a demonstration. On Wednesday, September 18, Roy Round, chairman of the board of commissioners of the Housing Authority, sent a telegram to Representative Green requesting that the President cancel his visit.⁵⁶ The next morning, the White House announced that the President had decided not to come to Portland but did not say if the threat of a black demonstration was the reason.⁵⁷

To Schrunk, Green, the HAP and the white press, however, there was little question as to who was responsible for the cancellation. They blamed the civil rights groups, especially the NAACP, for trying to, as Round put it, "unjustifiably embarrass the President, the city of Portland, and the HAP."⁵⁸

The white newspapers, especially, portrayed a negative image of the efforts to promote civil rights in Portland as a result of this incident. Three editorials came out criticizing the civil rights groups.⁵⁹

One stated that:

The result is that Portland race relations and the Northwest Tower have become causes celebre without President or pickets. And the consequences will be damaging rather than helpful to the Negro's progress in Portland.⁶⁰

This same editorial also called the blacks' accusations "intangible grievances" and criticized them for using methods of intimidation.⁶¹ Mayfield Webb, however, felt the cancellation would help the cause of CLEO, NAACP, and the Urban League and was satisfied that the President had not given his sign of approval to the project.⁶² In fact, the NAACP immediately began to concentrate their efforts on removing HAP's administrators, Gene Rossman and Roy Round, from office.

This incident was significant in two respects. First, it illustrates the willingness of civil rights groups to confront issues more directly during the early '60's than they had before. These groups took risks in speaking out on an issue which was politically complex. Second, it illustrates a common white response in Portland of accusing blacks of going too far with their complaints and for unnecessarily disturbing the status quo.

Civil rights groups also began to address the issue of segregation in the Portland Public Schools during the early 1960's. By the '60's, de facto segregation in the schools had reached the point where 70 per cent of the black children in Portland were attending five grade schools. Four of those five schools, Boise, Eliot, Humboldt and King, were at least 85 per cent black.⁶³

On April 20, 1962, Robert Carter, acting as legal counsel for the national office of the NAACP, levied charges against Portland as being

one of the ten West Coast cities with segregated schools.⁶⁴ This accusation was part of the NAACP's campaign to end segregation in Northern and Western schools. The Association asked local NAACP chapters to request local school boards to eliminate school segregation.⁶⁵

The Education Committee of the Portland chapter responded on September 8, 1962, by sending a letter to the Portland School Board accusing it of sustaining a segregated school system that provided an inferior education to black students.⁶⁶ Portland's NAACP called on the school board to take immediate action to end the pattern of segregated schools in Portland and suggested that a citizen's committee be formed to deal with the segregation problem.⁶⁷

The NAACP's accusations were not new to the Portland School Board, but it had not been approached directly with the issue for at least six years.⁶⁸ The board was defensive about its policies and reluctant to take any significant action to address the problem. The board was not willing to recognize that it was their responsibility to deal with de facto segregation. Board members maintained their policy was to build the schools where the children live and that discrimination in housing and employment were the primary causes of de facto segregation. They felt these were problems for the entire city to wrestle with, not just the school administration.

The board also held that they were providing educational programs and services without partiality.⁶⁹ The NAACP, on the other hand, felt that segregation, no matter what its cause, created inadequate educational standards, unequal facilities and discriminatory educational practices.⁷⁰ Their position was based on the 1954 Supreme Court decision

in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, when the court held that de jure segregation in the educational system was unconstitutional.⁷¹ This decision made it the responsibility of the schools to provide equal opportunity and to implement desegregation.

The Oregonian sided with the school board on this question of where responsibility should lie. One editorial referred to the NAACP requests as "barking up the wrong administrative tree."⁷²

On Monday, September 24, 1962, the NAACP and several concerned black residents appeared at the Portland School Board meeting to ask that they end segregation.⁷³ The board again failed to recognize racial segregation in Portland as a distinct problem. This time they emphasized their belief that the blacks' educational problems stemmed from "Cultural deprivation," which, in turn, came from the economic conditions in which they lived.⁷⁴ One board member, Mrs. Rieke, commented that she liked the idea of a citizens' committee, but that its purpose should be to "improve cultural conditions in deprived neighborhoods."⁷⁵

As it was clear that the school board would be slow in making a move toward desegregation, if they made any at all, Portland citizens took it upon themselves to form a committee to work on re-distributing black students. The creation of Portland's Citizens' Committee on Racial Imbalance in the Public Schools, which was made up of 125 Portland residents, was announced on Wednesday, April 30, 1963.⁷⁶ Independent of any existing civil rights group, the committee was chaired by Dr. Paul Wright, minister of the First Presbyterian Church.⁷⁷ The position of this committee was similar to NAACP'S in that it also

looked to the school board as the body responsible for changing conditions. This led them to present a request before the school board in mid-May, when they asked for a study to determine whether or not black students were being educationally cheated.⁷⁸ The committee was not accusing the school board of using discriminatory policies, but it did ask for immediate action.⁷⁹

The board, which had only white members, again stood firm on its opinion that desegregation should be the responsibility of the overall community and delayed further discussion until the May 27 meeting. Some of the committee members saw this delay as side-stepping the issue. One member, Othal Lakey, minister of Allen Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, said that the committee's proposals had been in the board members' hands for several weeks, so there was no reason to postpone discussion.⁸⁰

It was not until June 24, 1963, that the school board satisfactorily responded to the request of the Committee on Racial Imbalance for an independent committee which would evaluate the education available to blacks in Portland.⁸¹ The plan approved by the board was to appoint a group of citizens to identify the nature of the segregation problem in Portland, its effect on the educational process and to suggest a remedy.⁸²

This committee, called the "Race and Education" Committee, was composed of 43 Portlanders, many of whom were from the Committee on Racial Imbalance.⁸³

In October, 1964, after a year of study, they issued a report. Although the committee found that the percentage of black students in elementary schools in Albina was 72 per cent, compared to 8 per cent in

the entire city,⁸⁴ they concluded that there was no deliberate discrimination by the school board in drawing attendance lines. They also found that facilities and equipment were of the same quality in all of the schools. The committee did find that students in some schools had lower achievement levels, but they attributed this to cultural factors.⁸⁵

The committee made recommendations for dealing with the problem of a high concentration of blacks in a few schools. For example, they denounced widespread busing on a quota basis as a solution, because they felt it would increase racial tension and educational and social difficulties, but they approved busing when moving students would improve education for students with low economic backgrounds.⁸⁶ The committee suggested that an open enrollment policy be adopted by the Portland schools which would allow students to transfer to other schools.⁸⁷

The study group also made recommendations outlining a plan of compensatory education which called for enriched programs to be maintained at ten low achievement schools. Six of these were predominantly black: Eliot, Boise, Highland, Holladay, Humboldt and Irvington; and four of them white: Buckman, Whitman, George, and Woodlawn. These would be referred to as "model schools" where special classes would be taught.

They also recommended that the school board reduce or avoid concentrations of students from low socio-economic backgrounds when constructing schools in the future.⁸⁸

The NAACP was not pleased with the findings of the study committee. Mayfield Webb said that he was disappointed that the study failed to

attack problems of integration directly.⁸⁹ According to Webb, the plan for compensatory education was unsatisfactory. He said, "The Supreme Court has decided that merely fixing up a school building or getting better books or teachers doesn't make the education equal."⁹⁰

William H. McClendon, who was the chair of the NAACP's education committee, also disapproved of the proposals. He stated, "The model school program, as proposed, is in essence a negation of all the past and current convictions of the NAACP."⁹¹

To the NAACP, the model school proposal would make black children earn the right to have an integrated system.⁹² Instead, the NAACP wanted the board to consider solutions such as pairing schools, closing Eliot and Boise grade schools, redrawing school district lines, reassigning children and providing transportation.⁹³

The school board, however, ignored the NAACP's criticism and approved the "open enrollment" recommendation of the Race and Education Committee on March 8, 1965. Beginning in the fall of 1965, students were allowed to transfer from one school to another as long as the receiving school had space. The transfer could be initiated by the request of a parent, in which case the parent would pay for transportation, or by the suggestion of a principal, whereby the school would give the student tickets to use the public bus system.⁹³

The school board went ahead with its plans, and in September, 1965, 450 school children, most of whom were black, were transferred to 50 schools⁹⁴ and the model schools were established. Board members were pleased with these programs and continued to implement them in 1966 and 1967.

Although the NAACP remained opposed to these programs, their efforts to change the board's policies diminished after 1965. The force of their campaign was partly hindered by a lack of support from black parents for the busing proposal. At Parent-Teachers Association meetings at Boise grade school on April 13 and April 23, 1965, about 50 parents voiced their preference for improvements in their children's schools as a solution over a busing plan.⁹⁵ This was a relatively small number of parents, but their remarks were consistent with the conspicuous absence of active support from parents and students for busing.

The NAACP also had cause to be discouraged by the school board's actions. The Association had campaigned for widespread busing to achieve integration that would place black children in schools where they could be treated equally to white students. Instead, they were given minor adjustments in the system which placed all responsibility for providing equal educational opportunities to blacks upon parents who could afford to transport their children to other schools, and upon students who could excel in special model schools programs which might eventually enable them to compete academically with whites and take them out of the ghetto. Since these had always been the responsibilities of blacks, the programs presented no significant improvements for them.

The white community, however, was satisfied with the results of these programs. An editorial printed in the July 8 edition of The Portland Oregonian reflected the common attitude of whites to black demands. The writer praised the school board for trying to improve

conditions for blacks and accused the NAACP of targeting Portland as part of its national strategy for ending de facto segregation without regard for local conditions.⁹⁶ The demands of blacks for equality in education, like those for equality in public housing, were viewed by whites as being too extreme and were thus denied.

CHAPTER IV. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN PORTLAND 1967-1968

In 1967 and 1968, there was another shift in Portland's Civil Rights Movement as new voices emerged to express grievances. There were incidents of violence indicating blacks' frustration with the slow progress that national organizations and moderate tactics were making. The shock of Martin Luther King's death was felt in Portland, just as it was across the nation.

In late July, 1967, an outburst of violence occurred in the Albina area. On the evenings of July 30 and July 31, black youths were engaged in vandalizing, rock-throwing, and fire-bombing in the Albina District.¹ Reports in The Portland Oregonian indicated that about 80 young people, mostly male teenagers, were involved in the disturbances which lasted from about 6 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. both nights.² There was a total of 100 arrests over the two nights but only five persons were injured.³ The youths' activity was mainly limited to vandalism, but they did start numerous fires, including a three-alarm blaze causing \$5000 damage at the Morris yards where city equipment was stored.⁴ Total property damage done during the two nights was \$50,000, mostly resulting from fires.

Compared to the riots in other Northern and Western areas like Chicago and Watts during the late '60's, the disturbances in Portland were very minor, not really deserving to be called "riots." However,

the outbreak did signify a new expression of racial tension by Portland blacks and put white and black citizens on the alert.

There was some anticipation of trouble in Albina, as rumors had circulated the previous week that demonstrations might occur on the week-end. These rumors stemmed from advertisements of a rally which was to be held in Irving Park on Sunday, July 30. This "Day in the Park" program had been advertised for at least a week. Leaflets distributed in Albina described the rally as featuring black art and culture--including "Black Art and Theater by the Black Arts Alliance of San Francisco." It also listed Eldridge Cleaver, the black militant, as a speaker.

Black ministers tried to prevent Albina residents from attending the park meeting. On Saturday, the Albina Ministerial Association held an emergency meeting to draft a statement to be read at church services on Sunday morning. The statement urged parents to keep their children off the streets and to stay away from the rally.⁶ Two black ministers had also worked to prevent the outbreak by visiting bars and pool halls during the previous week, where they tried to convince young men not to take part in the action.⁷

The outbreak on Sunday caused an overreaction from police and public officials. For example, Police Chief Donald McNamara ordered 200 officers into the area and had 200 more on standby when the disorders started Sunday night.⁸ A special riot squad was put on alert, and Governor Tom McCall had State Policemen and 500 National Guardsmen ready to move in within 15 minutes.⁹ Considering there were only approximately 75 teenagers involved in the disturbance, this was more than enough force to handle them.

There was much speculation as to the cause of the outbreak. Some of the stories in The Oregonian traced the disturbance to the Irving Park rally where much of the activity was concentrated.

On Sunday, blacks gathered in Irving Park, but the rally did not proceed as planned. According to a bystander, Erma Hepburn, a worker at the Neighborhood Service Center, there was little organization at the rally and Eldridge Cleaver did not speak.¹⁰ The park was the central location of the disturbances, but authorities never did determine the relationship between the rally and the violence that erupted.

Rumors also circulated that as many as 50 outside agitators from Seattle and California had come to Portland to trigger the disturbance.¹¹ These rumors also remained unconfirmed.

The need for jobs for young blacks was also commonly cited in The Oregonian as the cause of the episode. E. Shelton Hill, executive director of the Urban League, emphasized this factor and pointed out that the incident might "shake Portland out of its complacency."¹²

Whether the civil disorders on July 30 and 31 were inspired by outside influences or were merely the expression of festering tension, the incident did give a few black youths the opportunity to express their grievances. On Tuesday, August 2, about 20 black youths met with Mayor Terry Schruk to ask him to help them get 300 jobs and improve various conditions.¹³

The delegation was composed of blacks ranging in age from about 16 to 21. It was led by Beverly Williams, (20), who worked at "Operation Contact," a center in Albina that helps young blacks find jobs. The group voiced complaints about the discriminatory hiring practices of Albina businesses, the unnecessary number of police who patrolled Albina,

rat infestation in Albina housing, and the inferior school curricula in their district.¹⁴

These young people were very disappointed with the mayor's response. He gave them a vague commitment that he would do his best to help but couldn't make promises.¹⁵ This left the youths bitter and frustrated, feeling that the mayor had missed the real causes of the disturbances.

These young people did make an impact on the white news media, however. The Portland Oregonian hailed these youths as the "new voices" who were speaking for Albina, replacing the traditional spokesmen. One Oregonian writer saw the positive side of the violence in Albina to be the opening of new lines of communication between the black and white community.¹⁶ At least some of the young blacks felt like this was a needed change. For instance, one 20-year-old black, Oliver O'Ferall, said,

Let Tom Vickers (President of the NAACP) speak for himself and the NAACP. I speak for me. You want to find out what I think, ask me, not Tom Vickers.¹⁷

While the young blacks did not permanently replace their elders as the major spokesmen for the black community, they did add a dimension to civil rights activity that had been missing before. Their energy and frankness was refreshing to the movement.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. His death prompted violent responses across the nation as acts of burning and vandalism occurred in Washington, Chicago, Detroit and other major cities.

Large scale violence did not occur in Portland, however. The only immediate signs of unrest were at Jefferson High School, a school

in the Albina area which had a student body of 2000 students, 38 per cent of which were black.¹⁸ On Friday, April 6, classes at Jefferson High were dismissed early because students refused to attend class.¹⁹ That morning, fires were set in the laboratories of the school, and a fight broke out in which one girl was injured, but the real problem was that students were roaming the halls instead of going to class.²⁰ This put school officials on guard, causing them to call a two-day suspension of classes for Monday and Tuesday of the next week in order to relieve social tension.

The immediate reaction of Portland's black leaders to King's death was grief combined with a renewed commitment to unity in continuing the fight for equality. This was expressed, in part, by a statement made by Dennis Payne, president of the Black Student Union at Portland Community College. Payne spoke for Portland's Black United Front, which was a newly formed coalition of 21 established black organizations.²¹ Part of Payne's text read as follows:

Last night Martin Luther King, the black Moses, was assassinated. Last night the last peaceful hope of ending racism in the U.S. was eliminated. What we all must do now regardless of our individual differences in outlook and approach, is to unite around the points where we come together. We must work for the freedoms, the rights and the justice that our black brother, Martin Luther King died for.²²

Admonitions made by Jimmy Walker, who was the editor of a Portland black newspaper, The Clarion Defender, also expressed continued commitment to Dr. King's goals. In contrast to Payne, however, Walker retained the hope that a non-violent approach could achieve these goals. Walker warned against the spread of violence and called upon the black community to,

forgive the white race for the unjust things they have done to us in the past and work to fulfill Dr. King's wishes by gaining our just place in society, by taking advantage of the schools and opportunity available to everyone.²³

Peaceful demonstrations were also part of the reaction to King's death. On Saturday, April 6, 500 people participated in a memorial march through downtown Portland.²⁴ The racially mixed crowd carried signs with slogans such as "Don't mourn for America--Organize," and "Killing King Killed Non-Violence."²⁵

College students also organized a "silent march" through Portland to honor Dr. King. A group of 125 students from Portland State College, Portland Community College, University of Portland, Reed College, and other area colleges marched on Tuesday, April 9, 1968.²⁶ That same day, memorial services were held throughout the city in various churches. Portland public schools and all Catholic schools were closed, as were most Albina businesses.²⁷

The largest memorial service was held on Sunday, April 7, at the Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church. Over 1000 people attended the service where dignitaries, including Governor McCall and various clergy, spoke.²⁸

Occasional outbreaks of violence occurred in the summers of 1967, 1968, and 1969, but these incidents did not indicate a new militancy among Portland blacks. These outbursts and the emergence of new organizations such as The Black Student Union and the rise of new young leaders like Dennis Payne, Beverly Williams, and other black youths revealed underlying tensions and the desire of young blacks to speak for themselves.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The general progression of the movement in Portland developed from a period of discussion and little direct action, to a time of response to national events using non-violent, moderate methods of confrontation to protest grievances. This period was followed by years when blacks expressed their frustration with the failure of traditional tactics.

Although civil rights activity was slow in getting started in Portland, there were some significant actions taken by Portland blacks in the 1960's to protest racial prejudice. The marches which were held, for example, were small compared to those staged in the South, but they showed the determination of Portland's civil rights groups to air concerns and emulate methods of protest which were being used in the South.

National events and organization, particularly those in the South, played a significant role in Portland's movement. For example, tragedies like Medgar Evers' murder in 1963, the violence in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, and Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, prompted marches and memorials in Portland. These demonstrations enabled Portlanders to translate Southern methods of non-violent protest into their Northern setting as protesters carried signs and made speeches. These occasions also served to provide blacks with the opportunity to express local grievances.

National and local efforts also came together when Portland's civil rights workers had direct contact with campaigns outside Oregon. The "Jobs and Freedom" bus which sent 38 Portlanders to the great march on Washington, D.C., in 1963, and the volunteers sent from Portland to help with black voter registration in Mississippi in 1965, were two examples of this type of connection.

Another tie to the national movement came through the Portland NAACP which had its base in a strong national organization. When national policymakers for the NAACP decided to call for an end to de facto segregation in the schools in 1962 advocating busing as the solution to racially separated schools, the Portland chapter responded by leading the campaign for integration in Portland. In this case, decisions made on the national level directly resulted in action in Portland.

The non-violent idealism which was the basis for action in the South also prevailed in Portland. The NAACP, the Urban League, and the religious and community organizations involved in civil rights activity during the '60's advocated a non-violent approach to social change. The black newspaper, The Clarion Defender, also encouraged blacks to use peaceful methods of protest. Groups that advocated using any means to reach their goals, such as the Black Student Union, only began to emerge in Portland in the late '60's.

Despite black leaders' emphasis on non-violent, moderate tactics, the pattern of response to black demands by Portland public officials and the white newspapers was to deny the validity of their complaints and to refuse to take on the responsibility for making changes.

With respect to the issue of public housing, for example, the Housing Authority of Portland recognized that segregated housing patterns existed in Portland, but they did not think that it was their job to reverse those patterns through their policy decisions. They did not want to take on the responsibility of answering the requests of blacks to build low-income housing away from the Albina area in order to encourage integration.

The attitude of the Portland School Board was similar to the Housing Authority's when the board was accused of maintaining segregated schools. The board admitted that there was racial separation in the system, but they refused to acknowledge any inferiority in the education provided in predominantly black schools. Instead, they blamed the low performance of black students on "cultural deprivation." They also felt that it was the responsibility of the whole community to solve segregation in housing which was at the root of the school problem.

Even when the school board adopted plans that supposedly addressed the segregation issue, they enacted programs with major limitations inherent in them. For example, the open enrollment system mainly made provisions for parents with enough money to transport their children to another school to attend schools in white neighborhoods. This was hardly a step toward equal educational opportunities for low-income black families.

The failure of Portland's white community, as represented by public officials and the white press, to respond positively to the demands of blacks accounts for the lack of progress made in civil

rights in Portland. The demonstrations and protests of civil rights organizations can be counted as achievements because they brought racial issues to public attention, but in terms of tangible accomplishments for blacks there were very few, especially in terms of support from the Portland citizenry.

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