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The Guide
A Theatergoer’s Resource

Edited by the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

Clybourne Park
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Setting

Clybourne Park is a fictional neighborhood located in central Chicago. The first act is set in 1959; six years after the end of the Korean War and about a decade prior to violent race riots in Chicago that were sparked by the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The second act is set in the same neighborhood, but with a new generation of primarily African American residents in 2009.

Characters

**ACT I**
- **Russ Stoller**  white and in his late forties
- **Bev Stoller**  white, married to Russ and in her forties
- **Francine**  black, thirties, housekeeper for the Stoller family
- **Albert**  black, thirties, married to Francine
- **Jim**  white, late twenties, a minister
- **Karl**  white, thirties, president of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association
- **Betsy**  married to Karl, late twenties, deaf, pregnant

**ACT II**
- **Steve**  white, new homeowner of 406 Clybourne Street
- **Lindsey**  white, married to Steve, pregnant
- **Kathy**  white, Steve & Lindsey's lawyer
- **Lena**  black, great-niece of former resident of Clybourne Street
- **Kevin**  black, married to Lena
- **Tom**  white, Kevin & Lena's lawyer
- **Dan**
- **Kenneth**

Visit our blog for info on the cast & creative team: [www.pcs.org/blog/item/clybourne-park-cast-and-creative-team](http://www.pcs.org/blog/item/clybourne-park-cast-and-creative-team)

Synopsis

Synopsis reprinted by permission of Center Theatre Group's Education and Community Outreach program. http://www.centertheatregroup.org/

“In Clybourne Park, the First Act is a tragedy and the second part is a comedy because the people in the First Act all understand each other much more than the people do in the Second Act. In the Second Act everyone makes assumptions.”

—Bruce Norris

**ACT I: 1959**

**by**  Ronald McCants

Bev and Russ are middle class White Americans. They live in Clybourne Park, a White neighborhood of Chicago. They grieve the loss of their only son, Kenneth.

They can’t seem to break free from his memory because the house reminds them of his death. To escape his memory, they have decided to move. When we meet them, we meet a house full of boxes. There’s a large trunk upstairs that Russ plans to bring down, but Bev wants their maid to do it.

At the start of the play, Russ sits in the living room listening to music and eating Neapolitan ice cream. Bev and Russ banter and make small talk about the Neapolitan ice cream. They wonder and hypothesize where the name came from and why. The conversation is desperate and trying, but the effort is evident.

Meanwhile, Francine, Bev and Russ’ maid does much of the packing. Bev attempts to give Francine things that she and Russ wish to discard. Francine politely declines the offers. Bev reminisces on a joke that Russ told the Rotary club the year before, but Russ doesn’t care about it. He insists on severing his ties with the community.

Bev and Russ receive a call from Karl Lindner, a representative of their housing association. It’s evident
that this isn’t the first call from him. While Bev is on the phone, Jim, their youthful minister, lets himself in. Jim shares some stories with Russ to open him up to conversation. Bev asks him his thoughts on Neapolitan ice cream. Jim and Russ talk about Russ’ new office. Jim eventually turns the conversation to the topic of Kenneth. Russ doesn’t want to talk about it, but Jim pushes the issue. Jim’s lack of deep, empathetic understanding angers Russ so much that he tells Jim to “go fuck himself.”

Bev enters just as Russ blows up at Jim. They have a candid, but short, argument about Kenneth. Jim brings up the fact that he also served in the military, but Russ asks him how many people he killed. Russ implies that his son killed many people.

The door bell rings. It’s Albert, Francine’s husband. He’s here to pick up Francine. Against Francine’s wishes, Albert offers to help move the trunk for Bev and Russ. Albert opens the door to take some things out to the car before they leave and Karl Lindner is standing there, about to ring the door bell. They’re surprised to see Karl. He’s left his wife Betsy in the car. Karl is a representative of the Neighborhood Association and Betsy, his wife, is deaf and pregnant. They implore Karl to bring his wife inside. The group of neighbors talks about their problems and concerns. We learn that Karl and Betsy’s first pregnancy didn’t come to term because the umbilical cord was around the baby’s neck.

Karl tries to persuade Russ and Bev to reconsider selling their home revealing that they have unknowingly
sold their home to a Black family. Karl's concern is that the neighborhood is going to undergo White Flight and the property values will go down. While never stated explicitly, we realize that the Black family that has bought the house is the Younger family from A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry. A passionate discussion breaks out as the characters sift through their complicated feelings about living next door to a Black family. The White characters attempt to involve Francine, Bev and Russ’ maid, and her husband Albert. They are surprised to find that Francine and Albert have their own opinions and feelings towards White communities.

The emotions and the political heat rise until Russ has had enough. He commands everyone's attention as he begins to read the suicide note that Kenneth left. He chastises the community of Clybourne Park for their lack of empathy and support towards his family. He orders everyone to leave his house. When he and Bev are once again alone, the cycle of grief continues. We realize there is no answer for their suffering.

**ACT II: 2009**

Fifty years pass. Clybourne Park has become a predominately Black neighborhood. The once well-cared for house is in shambles. However, the neighborhood is beginning to undergo gentrification.

Lindsey and Steve, a White couple, are planning to buy the house and renovate it. They plan to completely change the architecture of the house. Before they can change the house, they have to meet with representatives of the Neighborhood Association. Lena and Kevin, a Black couple, are the representatives and they don’t want Lindsey and Steve to change the architectural integrity of the neighborhood. The characters go through the legal terms of the contract with the lawyer and real estate agent. Meanwhile, their contractor examines the house. We learn that the proximity of the house to the city, where Steve and Lindsey both work, is a major factor in their decision to move to the neighborhood.

Lena expresses her emotional attachment to this house. Her legitimate concern is considered momentarily before the conversation is derailed again. Lena convinces everyone to keep the meeting moving by turning off their distracting cell phones and sticking to the topic. She's waited patiently to express herself in a respectful way. They discuss the history of the neighborhood that goes as far back as German immigrants. Kevin is offended by how the conversation about the history of the neighborhood becomes an attack on Black people.

Steve asks for everyone to admit that the entire subtext of the conversation is informed by Race. His statement launches the characters into a fueled exchange about whether or not racism is part of the difficulty they are having in addressing the changes to the property. They challenge each other's notions of what is considered offensive. They accuse each other of being racists. The characters jab at each other with racial, sexist and homophobic jokes. They become offended when they feel that their particular group has been belittled.

During the damaging conversation, the contractor drags in a trunk. It was buried in the backyard. He found it while examining the septic tank. The conversation escalates to absurd proportions and matters regarding the house are unresolved. When the trunk is opened, it’s revealed that it belonged to Bev and Russ’ son Kenneth. When everyone leaves, Dan begins to read the suicide letter he finds in the trunk. The ghosts of Bev and Kenneth return. We realize we are witnessing the moments before Kenneth takes his life.
About the Playwright

Bruce Norris was born May 16, 1960 in Houston, Texas. He is the writer of several other plays, but 

Clybourne Park is thus far his most successful and highest profile play. He is described by many critics as a provocateur because he intentionally provokes emotion and discussion of controversial issues through his writing. His other plays include The Infidel (2000), Purple Heart (2002), We All Went Down to Amsterdam (2003), The Pain and the Itch (2004), The Unmentionables (2006) and A Parallelogram (2010). Each of his plays made their debut at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago.

Norris graduated from Northwestern University in Chicago in 1982 with a degree in theater and the intention to work in set design. He had a successful acting career in Chicago and later performed as an actor in three Broadway plays: Wrong Mountain (2000), An American Daughter (1997) and Biloxi Blues (1985-86). “Norris’ reputation – as a writer and as a person – is as a bluntly spoken contrarian,” wrote Robert Simonson in Playbill. “Despite his background as a performer, being liked is not something he looks for or expects.”

Words from the Playwright

“When I’m at a dinner table with a bunch of people and we’re talking about what they saw on TV or how their baby is doing, I’m so incredibly bored. I want there to be an argument, and so I start one. It’s incredibly easy to do.” Quoted in an interview with Boris Kaschka, New York Magazine February 14, 2010

“Not to be too grandiose, but I think in a larger sense, the topic of Clybourne Park is war and territoriality and why we fight over territory. And we do so for incredibly personal, inexplicable, ungraspable, indefinable reasons.” Quoted in the Los Angeles Times, January 2011

“So why the provocative revelation of the foibles of middle-class educated people? I get into these conversations a lot. People ask how come I don’t write plays about, say, people in housing projects, and I say, ‘Well, because those are not the people who go to the theatre.’ You can say, ‘We should get them to the theatre,’ but in actual fact, people who buy subscriptions to theatres like ACT are usually wealthy people. ... So why not write plays that are about those people, since those are the people who are in the audience? If you actually want to have a conversation with that audience, then you should address them directly. That’s what I always think.”

“We live in a society where speech is much more dangerous than activity – than action. ... No one knows that they should be embarrassed in the first act; everyone knows they should be embarrassed in the second act.” Quoted in an interview about Clybourne Park with Beatrice Basso in the American Conservatory Theater’s performance guide series, Words on Plays, October 2011

“My ideal audience response is to have them come out of the theater saying, ‘I don’t know what’s right anymore. I used to think I knew what was right, but I’m not sure I do.’” Quoted in an interview with Lincoln Center Theater, 2012
The “Clybourne Park” in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Bruce Norris’s play was inspired by Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 classic *A Raisin in the Sun*, and the two plays share a character in Karl Lindner. The below article from Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre provides background on the impact of Hansberry’s classic.

By Rebecca Rugg, Artistic Producer at Steppenwolf Theatre, (www.steppenwolf.org) and Harvey Young, Associate Professor of Theatre, Northwestern University

In January 1959, the national conversation about race centered on the topic of neighborhood integration, particularly that of black families moving into white neighborhoods. The discussion, which had been triggered by a series of earlier court battles (Hansberry v. Lee, 1940; Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 1954; Et. Al) was given new energy by playwright Lorraine Hansberry and her play *A Raisin in the Sun*.

The play concerns an African-American family, the Younger family, whose matriarch Lena is set to inherit $10,000 in life insurance from her late husband’s policy. The family of five—Lena’s daughter Beneatha, her son Walter Lee and his wife Ruby and son Travis—lives on Chicago’s South Side in a tiny apartment, with a shared bathroom down the hall. The prospect of the imminent inheritance engenders a furious storm of hopes, dreams, and impatient accusations. The family ultimately uses the money to buy a home in a white neighborhood of the city, which Hansberry fictionally names “Clybourne Park.”

Karl Lindner, the only white character within Hansberry’s play and a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, offers to buy the Youngers’ recently acquired home back from them. His efforts are motivated by a desire for a very specific type of population control—to prevent new black neighbors from moving to the white community. Although the offer is initially rebuffed by Walter Lee, an unfortunate investment that results in Walter being swindled of half of his father’s insurance money, prompts Hansberry’s protagonist to consider accepting Lindner’s money and, in so doing, to tacitly accept the Clybourne Park Improvement Association’s racist views.

“I’ll look that son-of-a-bitch right in his eye and say—‘All right, Mr. Charlie. All right, Mr. Lindner—that’s your neighborhood out there! You got a right to keep it like you want! You got a right to have it like you want! Just write the check and the house is yours.’ And—and I am going to say—‘And you—you people just put the money in my hand and you won’t have to live next to this bunch of stinking niggers!’”


With these words, Walter places a spotlight on the intersection of race and community. He gestures to the logic that supported six decades of Jim Crow legislation, that enabled “separate but equal” to exist, that justified the abuse of black bodies when they inadvertently crossed the invisible line that separated “their” and “our” sections of town, beach, bus, diner, store. He reveals the bias that lies at the heart of efforts to prevent African-Americans from ever becoming neighbors to white homeowners. Ultimately, the Youngers resolve to make the move and *A Raisin in the Sun* ends as the family moves out of their too-small apartment into a home with a yard in an unwelcoming, potentially hostile community. *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first black drama produced on Broadway, was an immediate critical and commercial success. Theater critics praised the 1959 production, cited its broad appeal, and frequently compared it to canonical theatrical works. As Brooks Atkinson observed in his New York Times review,
“You might, in fact, regard A Raisin in the Sun as a Negro The Cherry Orchard.”

Audiences, of all colors, flocked to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway and demonstrated through their presence and dollars that people were interested in seeing and hearing African-American experiences portrayed on the stage. The play established Lorraine Hansberry as a major playwright and a leading voice of the American Theater in the 1960s, enhanced the already lustrous reputation of film actor Sidney Poitier and launched the careers of a series of individuals who would actively reshape the look and sound of American theater over the next generation, including director Lloyd Richards and actors Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Glenn Turman and Douglas Turner Ward. Over the years, A Raisin in the Sun maintained its popularity and with every remount, revival and adaptation catalyzed a discussion of race in the United States by drawing attention to the tensions and anxieties related to neighborhood integration. In 1961, the original cast reunited to appear in a film version of the play. Twelve years later, A Raisin in the Sun was adapted into a musical, Raisin, which ran for two years on Broadway and received the Tony Award for best musical. Since then, Hansberry’s play has seen numerous productions, the most recent being the Tony Award-nominated 2004 Broadway revival with Sean Combs, Phylicia Rashad and Audra McDonald as headliners.

White Flight & Gentrification

From “Gentrification’s Third Way: An Analysis of Housing Policy & Gentrification in Providence”. This excerpt provided courtesy of Trinity Repertory Theatre. www.trinityrep.com/

WHITE FLIGHT

The American housing market mirrors the myriad economic, social, and racial problems plaguing the nation. From the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth century, government-sanctioned segregation policies in both the public and private sectors created neighborhoods defined by skin color. The growth of the automobile and the birth of American highways furthered physical divisions and lines of segregation, compounding the advantages of white Americans.
who had access to capital, land, and credit. In essence, developments in transportation facilitated white flight from the “inner city” to the sprawling expanse of the suburbs. 

The abandonment of cities had a disastrous effect on those left behind. With increasing housing demand created by a huge surge of African Americans coming to the North, landlords were able to charge high rents for dilapidated housing units sold after the white flight to the suburbs. 

In addition, a lack of urban political strength ensured that new public housing projects were built in poor areas, thus further consolidating impoverished citizens into the centers of American cities. The disappearance of wealth from the cities also impacted the quality of public education, as local school funding is intricately intertwined with property taxes and local housing values. Further, local businesses—already crippled by anti-urban discrimination from banks and insurance companies—fled city neighborhoods and followed consumer wealth to the suburbs, rendering both jobs and products inaccessible to city residents. A bleak cycle developed: local conditions created an environment in which education and good jobs were largely unavailable, and a wall of social and economic isolation prevented residents from improving their living conditions.

**GENTRIFICATION**

Gentrification—the flip-side of this deterioration—produces an upward trend in property values in previously neglected neighborhoods. Gentrification is a connotation-laden term, “conjur[ing] up images of yuppies stealing urban housing from rightful inhabitants.” It describes the economic, social, and political changes that accompany reinvestment in low-income, urban communities.

The process begins when a few “risk-oblivious pioneers”—often political radicals, artists, and students—move into a neighborhood. While these “pioneers” can usually afford to live in higher-income neighborhoods, they choose not to for various reasons including a desire to seek the bohemian lifestyle of artists and other creative workers. As these residents settle in, the once-neglected neighborhoods become hip, new destinations for young professionals known in the dialogue of gentrification as the “risk-aware” or the “fixer-uppers.” The “fixer-uppers” put sweat equity into their homes and use political connections to make zoning adjustments and win better terms on bank loans. The “risk-aware” develop relationships with the local police quickly and are likely to start or join local neighborhood associations.

Once this group grows to a critical mass, the local media begins talking about the “neighborhood transformation” that is taking place. At this point, businesses tend to move in to serve the “risk averse.” These are residents who wait for social institutions like coffee shops, restaurants, and neighborhood groups to be established and to solidify a cultural safety net before moving in to the “transformed” neighborhood.

**WHO GAINS? WHO LOSES?**

Supporters of gentrification assert that the process serves to break down the concentrations of poverty that are most responsible for urban problems. They espouse a “trickle-down” theory based in the assumption that a rising tide lifts all boats. “Gentrification rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle class,” one defender writes, “and in the process improves the quality of life for all of a community’s residents.”

Additionally, supporters of gentrification point out that increasing property values benefit all homeowners in the neighborhood and create political capital and an increased tax base, both of which lead to more effective and accountable city services and city government.
Critics assert that gentrification harms neighborhood residents directly through displacement and indirectly by pricing them out of the market. Because many low-income residents are renters, they find few opportunities to build an equity stake in their housing. A rising demand for housing means higher rents; as low-income residents become unable to pay these higher rents, landlords will increasingly evict them. Additionally, critics identify gentrification not only as a market force, but also as a divisive social force—often along racial and ethnic lines. While the earliest gentrifiers may embrace community diversity, later waves frequently pursue policies that marginalize low-income residents and drive out established communities of color. In other words, the white residents who once fled America’s cities now return to gentrify them, bringing harmful effects.

The Skanner News unveils our special tribute to the families who lost their homes and businesses over the years. (August 09, 2011)

Doctors’ offices, bike shops, groceries, churches and an ice cream store. Manufacturing, greenspace, boutiques, salons and plenty of affordable housing.

If ever the City of Portland wanted a model for a 20-minute urban neighborhood, Albina in 1956 was it. Until city leaders opted to bulldoze it for “urban renewal.”

The current debate about North Williams Avenue – once the heart of Albina’s business district – is only the latest chapter in a long story of development and redevelopment.

A FATEFUL ERA

For Albina, the district which included the city’s traditionally African American neighborhoods, 1956 represents the height of home ownership, business success and tightly-bound family connections.

It was a watershed year for other reasons as well: Terry Doyle Schrunk won election to mayor on an urban renewal platform, firmly laying the track for creation of the Portland Development Commission two years later – the arm of city government which carried out wide-scale demolition of neighborhoods for decades to come.

It was the year voters approved construction of Memorial Coliseum in the Eliot neighborhood, ensuring the tear-down of more than 450 homes and businesses.

It was also the year federal officials approved highway construction funds that would pave Interstates 5 and 99 right through hundreds of homes and storefronts, destroying more than 1,100 housing units in South Albina.

By 1962, the PDC’s “Central Albina Study” earmarked the area as “beyond rehabilitation.” The city document “History of Portland’s African American Community (1805-to the Present),” quotes the study: “Clearly, urban renewal, largely clearance, appears to be the only solution to, not only blight that presently exists in central Albina, but also to avoid the spread of that blight to other surrounding areas.”

The Polk’s Guide for that year shows scores of vacant properties along North Williams.

When it came time for local officials to win grant funds from the federal government to expand Emanuel Hospital, the 1966 grant application read, in part: “There is little doubt that the greatest concentration of Portland’s urban blight can be found in the Albina area encompassing the Emanuel Hospital. This area contains the highest concentration of low-income families and experiences the highest incidence rate of crime in the City of Portland. Approximately 75 percent to 80 percent of Portland’s Negro population live within the area. The area contains a high percentage of substandard housing and a high rate of unemployment.”

Portland won the grant, and demolition of buildings began in the late 1960s. Within a few years the federal money ran out for Emanuel Hospital expansion – after the demolition was complete.
CAUSE AND EFFECT

Contrary to popular belief, ghetto neighborhoods are not a chance occurrence, nor are they the natural evolution of “old housing stock” that hasn’t been properly maintained by its owners.


And the same thing happened all over the country.

“In cities across the nation, urban power brokers, with the help of the federal government, eagerly engaged in central-city revitalization after World War II,” Gibson wrote in “Bleeding Albina.” “Luxury apartments, convention centers, sports arenas, hospitals, universities, and freeways were the land uses that reclaimed space occupied by relatively powerless residents in central cities, whether in immigrant White ethnic, Black, or skid row neighborhoods.”

The study includes quotes from oral histories gathered decades earlier about the region’s history.

“Oregon was a Klan state—it was as prejudiced as South Carolina, so there was very little difference other than geographic difference,” said early civil rights leader Otto Rutherford, in 1978.

Gibson says her historical research uncovered a memo penned by a PDC official reassuring the federal Housing and Urban Development department about racial concerns in tearing out the homes and businesses for Emanuel Hospital expansion in the early 70s.

“The whole transition has been racial,” Gibson told The Skanner News this week. “People paid taxes in Albina – what did they get for their taxes?”

In 1956 area banks could legally deny loans to any Black customer who applied, making the NAACP Credit Union — one of North Williams’ lost storefronts — a particularly poignant marker.

“Race was used, and the stagnation and redlining was racially based,” Gibson said.

“White privilege means something – it means a difference in wealth and the fact that you could just come in and take over the boulevard,” Gibson said.

HOUSING DESTROYED DESPITE PROMISES

When the PDC, city of Portland officials and the federal Model Cities program rolled out the endgame on tearing down Albina homes and businesses for Emanuel’s expansion in 1971, many local residents did not realize the plans had been laid years before, according to “History of Portland’s African American Community.”

The Emanuel Displaced Person’s Association was
founded by Mrs. Leo Warren in 1970 after locals "were abruptly confronted with the expansion plans." The city required residents to move out within 90 days, offering homeowners a maximum $15,000 payment and renters a maximum $4,000.

A much-hyped agreement signed by the hospital, the PDC and the Housing Authority of Portland mandated they would use “maximum energy and enthusiasm” in replacing the lost housing within the Eliot neighborhood – none of which happened, according to “History.”

Mrs. Warren is quoted in the history document from an interview with the Portland Observer:

“Didn’t they have a long-range plan? After all, if your life’s investment was smashed to splinters by a bulldozer to make room for a hospital, you could at least feel decent and perhaps tolerable about it; but to have it all done for nothing? Well, what is there to feel?”

**URBAN PLANNING NOW**

Albina resident Lisa Manning was also quoted in “Bleeding Albina.”

“It used to be that living ‘far out’ was 15th and Fremont. Now it’s 185th and Fremont. A lot of people leave the neighborhood because they feel they’re leaving something that’s not theirs anymore anyway. It will never be that way again. There’s a lot of sadness. For a lot of us, it’s just too hard to stay and watch your history erased progressively over time. There are just too many ghosts,” Manning said.

Gibson says anyone weighing in on the current citizens’ advisory process for North Williams Avenue transportation safety should take a moment and look at past plans. She singled out the 1993 Albina Community Plan drafted under the leadership of then-Portland Planning Bureau Commissioner-in-charge Charlie Hales, who is now running for mayor.

[*note: Charlie Hales was elected as Portland’s mayor in November of 2012]*

“African Americans were heavily involved in the Albina plan,” she said. “The Planning Bureau should probably provide us with an update.

“There have been other plans, but for me the key for any of the plans is how well are they carried out? We should evaluate how well some of those plans play out in the end.”

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**Median Home Value, Albina District & Portland 1990-2010**

**Racial Transition in the Albina District 1940-2010**

*Note on 2010: Non Latino White 61%, Black 22%, Latino 9%, Mixed race 4%, Asian 2%, American Indian 1%, Other less than .05%*

*Diagrams from Karen Gibson’s “All New and Shiny? The Effects of Gentrification on Portland’s Albina District.”*
By the Grace of God

With the gentrification of North and Northeast Portland, churches hold the city’s African American community together. But how much longer can the bonds last?

by Aaron Scott, Arts & Culture Editor, Portland Monthly (March 2012)

It’s 7:35 A.M. on a fall Sunday, and the coffee shops on NE Alberta Street are just beginning to stir. But a block south, Johnny Bradford is already behind schedule. Dressed in a black suit, he climbs into a powder blue van in front of Emmanuel Church of God in Christ United, just around the corner from the Alberta Rose Theatre, when his cell phone rings.

“I’m running late,” he answers. “The devil hid my keys this morning.”

“He’s going to do that because you’re doing the Lord’s work,” replies a woman’s voice, before giving directions to her house.

Every Sunday morning, the Lord’s work for Bradford involves driving to the farthest reaches of Portland to pick up congregants who lack the means to get to the small, century-old building, with its rectangular steeple and fresh coat of cream paint, whether because of age, disability, or finances. He is part of a small fleet of van drivers dispatched from inner North and Northeast’s predominantly African American churches to round up their scattered flocks.

Bradford heads out past the lingerie shops on NE 82nd Avenue to Halsey Street for his first pickup—three kids. Then it’s past apartment buildings with generic names to SE 164th and Powell. “Used to be that nobody lived past 42nd,” he says as he turns and heads for Beaverton, 20 miles to the west on the other side of the metro area. “Now everybody stays out here because rent is cheap. But we’ll get God’s children wherever they’re at.”

The odometer rolls with the road beneath him. Off of Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway, he picks up Mary Grace, sporting a brown cape, immaculately coiffed hair, and the tubes of an oxygen tank. Everyone calls her Mother Grace.

Four stops, one and a half hours, and 50 miles later, Bradford drives back up Alberta. The street now bustles with people walking their dogs and babies, joggers in fancy spandex, and a line of biblical proportions gathered outside brunch institution the Tin Shed.

“I miss it here,” says Mother Grace quietly. When she first came to Portland from California in 1980, she settled on NE Dekum Street. But she moved to Beaverton 15 years ago in search of cheaper rent and to escape the pervasive influence of crime and drugs. “People won’t come visit me ’cuz I’m too far out. I don’t know many people anymore. So I go back for church, because everyone knows your name.”

Inside the unadorned, one-room church, the band jams, the spirit flows, and some 35 people, in pastel three-piece suits or heels and hats, sing, clap, and pray, as some of them have done since the church’s founding in the mid-1970s. There is no separation of choir and congregation: the whole house is song. Bishop William Marcus Pollard’s teal suit pops against the brown carpet and the altar pews’ worn cushions. He riffs between verses, finding blessings even in his flock’s distant homes: “You walk up to St. Peter and you say, ‘I’ve got a house on mansion lane.’ And St. Peter says, ‘Oh no, you got a two-bedroom out on 78th Street.’ But you don’t live in your car, so praise Him!” And grandmothers and granddaughters alike shake their tambourines.

When it’s over, people linger before most get into their cars or the van for the long drives back to Beaverton and Wood Village and Vancouver. It didn’t used to be this way. From the 1900s until the 1990s, the majority of Portland’s African American population lived in a small cluster of North and Northeast neighborhoods, many once part of the separate 19th-century town of Albina. In this tight-knit urban pocket, businesses, restaurants, schools, social clubs, and churches thrived by serving one of the nation’s smallest urban black communities. Although it had its troubles through the years, Albina was nonetheless a vibrant community with a cohesive identity. But no more.

Over the past two decades, the gentrification of
inner North and Northeast has displaced much of this community. Urban renewal policies and a broader trend in favor of inner-urban living brought a sea change for new residents—most white and Hispanic—into Portland’s historically black neighborhoods. An influx of trendy businesses, like those Alberta Street coffee shops, and upscale development followed. But as the neighborhood rose, much of its longtime population moved away, pushed into Portland’s hinterlands.

The 2010 census revealed that 7,700 African Americans moved out of inner North and Northeast Portland in the preceding decade. While a considerable black population remains in the area—some sections, like the Boise, Humboldt, and King neighborhoods, remain as much as 25 percent African American—it is rapidly fragmenting.

“You’re talking about people who were blocks from each other, and now they’re cities apart,” says Ronnie Wright, a member of Emmanuel’s choir. He grew up nearby but moved to Vancouver because he couldn’t afford a home in the area big enough for his family. “You don’t borrow a cup of sugar or check in and see if little Johnny’s OK. Primarily, the only time we see each other is church.”

In America’s cities, racial and ethnic enclaves come and go. New York’s Little Italy has been virtually swallowed by Chinatown, which itself is shifting white; Chicago’s “bungalow belt,” once the segregated heartland of that city’s white working class, is rapidly turning Hispanic. In one sense, then, the movement of blacks from North and Northeast Portland to the city’s fringes is merely the latest chapter in a 130-year history of forced dislocations of the African American community. Yet with no other black neighborhood to move to, the ramifications are greater, especially when it coincides with a troubling development: Portland’s African Americans now rank at or near the bottom of almost every socioeconomic measure, below Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Caucasians.

Stunningly, black Portlanders are actually worse off today by many counts than before the civil rights movement. Homeownership has dropped. The college education rate has barely budged, especially in comparison to its growth among whites. And per capita income has basically stagnated at $15,000 since 1979, while it climbed for whites from $25,000 to $33,000. Only two years ago, Oregon’s 12 percent unemployment rate sparked comparisons to the Great Depression, notes Karen Gibson, associate professor of urban studies and planning at Portland State University, who calculated these figures from census data from 2009. That’s nothing new for Portland’s black population: their unemployment rate rose from 12 percent in 1970 to 18 percent today. “The black community here has been in a depression state for over 40 years,” she says. “We pride ourselves on being the most livable city. But livable for who?” —Ed Washington

In the face of this social disaster, the neighborhood’s welter of black churches, mostly independent charismatic congregations steeped in the rich history of African American worship, persevere, although in service of widely scattered flocks. “Church keeps me tied to the community and keeps my spirits up,” says 46-year-old Portland native Melba Annoh, who for years rode to Emmanuel from her home in Vancouver. (She only recently switched to a nearby congregation.) “If it weren’t for the church, I’d just be alone.” Before the transformation of Albina into a thriving, albeit segregated, black neighborhood post–World War II, the churches served as the sole place where Portland’s small black community could gather and express itself. We’ve progressed through 65 years and a civil rights movement since then, yet once again the Rose City’s black population clings to a sense of community only by the grace of their houses of God.

Rita Ishmael grew up in an apartment where now sits Memorial Coliseum’s side entrance. After their building was torn down in the late 1950s for the coliseum in one of Portland’s earliest waves of urban renewal, her family moved often, she says, because they were poor. She finally left Northeast in 2001, after several years in an apartment full of mildew, mice, and roaches that was broken into several times—where rent went up but nothing got fixed. She now lives in a single-story apartment complex in Wood Village, out past NE 232nd Avenue, with her husband and granddaughter. The carpet’s wrinkled, the heater’s broken, and dents in the door recall an aborted break-in attempt. Every Sunday, when it’s not too cold, she drives to Emmanuel Church. She’s long sung in the choir, but at age 64 her health now prevents it—though she hopes to get back to it sometime. When her car’s broken, she makes a two-bus,
one-hour-plus commute.

Ishmael doesn’t know her predominantly Hispanic neighbors. No one comes to visit.

“I moved thinking I was coming to a better world,” she says, “but I came to the same thing and worse.”

While some of Portland’s African American population has scattered to Vancouver, Beaverton, St. Johns, and Hillsboro, most who have moved went east of 82nd Avenue, to the region colloquially known as “The Numbers.” The black population in East Portland alone grew 151 percent between 1990 and 2010, and the number of subsidized renters more than doubled in some areas, since rents are cheapest out east. “Places where we could never live—Gresham, East Portland—where no one would rent to us, now we call that ‘the new ghetto,’” says Roberta Tyler, who traverses the region every Sunday behind the wheel of the Highland Christian Center’s van.

Despite this mass migration eastward, virtually none of the African American community’s infrastructure followed it. Businesses that still cater specifically to blacks largely remain in Albina, meaning people must commute back to get their hair done, to visit restaurants that serve the food they grew up with, even to find nylons that match their skin tone. Culturally specific social and medical services haven’t followed, either. The commutes often come at a great cost for isolated, low-income people, if they can make them at all.

“I’m diabetic, I have to get to Emanuel Hospital regularly, but I don’t drive,” says Carolyn Anderson, who lives in a small duplex near SE 82nd Avenue and Holgate Boulevard. “TriMet cut bus times, which affects how I get to doctor appointments. I’m alone. If something happens to me, I don’t want to think what would happen.”

Black students find themselves a small minority in East Portland schools, where teachers and administrators can lack cultural competency skills, and where black history and black role models often go missing. One of Ishmael’s fellow choir members, Annoh, tells the story of how a school principal in East Vancouver called her in several years ago because her sons had afros. “When I see the way they look, I think gang members,” Annoh recalls the principal telling her. “I said, ‘Oh, no, they’re not gang members, but I can get you some if you want to see the difference. The problem is you don’t know the difference between being ethnic and being a gang member.’”

The ramifications are real: in 2010, only 47.5 percent of African American students graduated high school in Multnomah County—the number was as low as 38.5 percent for the Gresham Barlow District—and black students were more than twice as likely to be expelled or drop out as their white peers. Dismal graduation rates don’t mean that black kids are uneducatable, says Ann Curry-Stevens, the researcher behind the report “Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile.” “It means that the context in which they’re educated matters.”

Portland’s history of poor dealings with its African American population has deep roots and seemingly perennial blooms. In 1859, Oregon became the first state to enter the union with an exclusion law barring African Americans from residing, working, and voting in the state. In the 1950s and ’60s, Portland’s earliest urban renewal projects bulldozed hundreds of houses, along with lower Albina’s teeming black business core, for Memorial Coliseum and Emanuel Hospital. Even as late as 1990, the Oregonian exposed a form of “redlining” by banks and lenders who purposely denied African Americans loans to buy homes in North and Northeast Portland.

Yet that history goes largely unmentioned in the many national magazines and urban planning seminars lauding Portland as one the nation’s most desirable and politically progressive places to live, with the new Albina’s lively mix of indie culture and aspiring middle class often central to the city’s image. Three decades of liberal leadership under mayors Bud Clark, Vera Katz, Tom Potter, and Sam Adams has even led to claims that Portland is “postracial.” But that laurel of livability at best ignores and at worst comes at the expense of a black community struggling to hang together against decades of neglect, discrimination, and racism— institutional and interpersonal, overt and tacit.

“We’re not postracial when comparisons between white Portland and African American Portland are so disparate, especially when you measure it against our self-proclaimed values as an equitable and livable city,”
As the first new restaurants and art galleries sprouted on NE Alberta Street during the mid-'90s, Highland Christian Center, too, was growing. Fast. Drawn by a new charismatic pastor, Wilbert G. Hardy, the congregation swelled from about 30 people in 1996 to some 250 by 1999. With the pews overflowing in their original space at NE Ninth Avenue and Dekum Street, they moved to an old movie theater on NE 18th Avenue with dreams of expanding with day care facilities, a gym, and reading rooms. Hardy's ambition was to anchor the community all the way up to the Black United Front at NE 28th Avenue, resisting gentrification's march up Alberta. So they approached a real estate agent about buying a coffee shop on the adjacent corner, says Hardy, “just trying to stake out a spot.” Instead, their agent bought the building.

The congregation had labored hard to better the neighborhood, holding Saturday cleanups, working with the police to rout drug houses, and engaging the kids who were hanging out. But as more properties changed hands and newcomers arrived, nearly all white, new kinds of tension arose. Police calls about crack houses gradually were replaced by complaints about church services’ noise and the lack of Sunday parking.

“The new residents perceived all African Americans as a threat,” recalls Hardy. “They did not want religion. It was a rude awakening to realize what was once your neighborhood, once very warm and inviting, had become hostile.” No longer feeling welcome, Highland decided to follow its congregation’s eastward exodus. In 2006, it bought a new $6 million center at NE Glisan Street and 76th Avenue, joining a number of churches that either closed or left inner North and Northeast.

City policies sparked the neighborhood’s regeneration. Mayors Clark and Katz earnestly reached out to include prominent African American business owners and activists to shape efforts like the 1993 Albina Community Plan. But as sidewalks were rebuilt; new street trees, lighting, and banners went up; and the Portland Development Commission handed out storefront improvement loans, few blacks participated. The reinvestment, along with the booming economy and the cheap housing stock, unleashed a flood of buyers over the area. During the ’90s, prices more than quadrupled in some neighborhoods of Albina. The market burned so hot that homeowners received knocks on their door from buyers offering cash—or in the case of seniors like former State Senator Avel Gordly’s father, an offer at his hospital bed. Presented with cash figures many times what they paid in the ‘40s and ’50s, owners, especially seniors or their surviving children, often sold, only to learn later they were severely underpaid and couldn't afford to rebuy in the neighborhood.

“There’s anger because these people have no integrity,” says Gordly, whose sister recently received a letter from a young, white couple beseeching her yet again to sell the family home. “This kind of thing is still happening, and it’s outrageous.”

The greatest displacement, though, was of black renters, expelled by skyrocketing prices and dwindling rental stock as new owners moved in. The number of residents receiving rental assistance in the two zip codes constituting most of Albina dropped 58 percent in the first decade of the 2000s, according to Home Forward, Portland’s housing authority. In cases such as the Rose City Village, entire affordable-housing complexes were evicted so owners could make a few improvements and raise rents by hundreds or turn them into condos.

In 2004, MAX arrived. To provide the required local match to federal dollars for construction, the city formed the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area in 2000. Knowing demolition and displacement from previous “urban renewal” projects still stung the area, the PDC enlisted 54 community members to help draft the project’s plan. The adopted policies explicitly stated that any increased tax revenues from rising property values should primarily benefit existing residents and...
protect against gentrification and displacement. But in 2002, a recession hit. Tax activists won a court case limiting how PDC generated revenue. The agency suspended the plan’s 18 anti-displacement projects and small-business-assistance programs, proceeding only with reconstruction of the housing development Columbia Villa (now called New Columbia) and the one project that promised to speed displacement, the Interstate MAX.

“It left the rest of the district naked,” says Adams, then Mayor Vera Katz’s chief of staff. “If you put in light rail, without having enough control of property and programs in place and funded, gentrification will occur. And it did.”

More recently, the city adopted a new series of policies to slow displacement. In 2006, the city council added a requirement that 30 percent of funds generated by urban renewal areas be used for affordable housing. Last year, Adams led the creation of a new Office of Equity that has begun, for the first time, to formally measure the success of the city’s efforts to help its poor and racial minorities.

Many see progress. “One of the great things to me about the creation and even the thinking of the Office of Equity is that it’s normalizing a conversation about the disparities and the causes,” says Judith Mowry, coordinator of the Restorative Listening Project on Gentrification, who has strived to help new residents understand how their gain came at African Americans’ loss.

Critics see the talk of equity as merely politically trendy lip service. They say the Office of Equity’s plan lacks clear goals and the authority to enforce them, and that the PDC, despite its stated mission to benefit existing residents, doesn’t track its effectiveness in doing so. Instead, the agency remains focused on “affordable” developments, like Killingsworth Station, that aren’t actually affordable for the existing community. “We know how to make the speech,” says J. W. Matt Hennessee, pastor of Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church and PDC chair from 2003 to 2005. “We know what our minds and hearts need to do, but the question is: have our actions and resources followed it? No, they haven’t.”

Through some seven decades of troubled city policies, Portland’s African American churches have been the most consistent voice of advocacy for the community, whether through individual churches like Vancouver Avenue, the 54-year-old Albina Ministerial Alliance, or the new anti-gang coalition the 1145 Club. It’s a role churches have played, really, since the days of slavery, notes Senior Pastor Donald Frazier of Genesis Community Fellowship. “The church is the only land that African Americans could ever express themselves freely on,” he says. “It’s the only thing they can claim is theirs, and not have anyone tell them what to do or take it from them.”

But if displacement continues at its current pace, the churches’ ability to help may be waning. “The reason that we are still at some semblance of togetherness is predicated on those of us who remember when we were a community,” observes Ed Washington, the only African American to be elected to the Metro Council, serving from 1991 to 2000. “I use the word bleak—not for everybody—but for a lot of people it’s going to be pretty dang bleak. There will be a percentage that survive, and do fine. But having people out in the Numbers, it’s a real challenge.”

Inside the large, modern chapel of newly built and renamed Emmanuel Church near the intersection of N Alberta Street and I-5, everyone is singing. Not some solemn hymnal, but full-throated gospel. A five-piece band spins a swinging bluesy spell, a woman collapses in tears on the altar steps, and the others in the congregation, more than 150 people strong, holler and sing along.

The music slows as Bishop C. T. Wells, in a gray suit with cuff links, his shaved head reflecting the stage lighting, starts to speak from the edge of the altar. “I was driving out to East thinking, ‘What do we need to purge?’” he recounts, referring to a trip to Emmanuel’s small satellite church in Gresham. “I was looking at the
pine trees, and a man was on a ladder chopping off the old growth—those things that worked but no longer work.” His voice begins to boom. “Hanging and brown, the old growth was obscuring the new.”

In 2009, Wells surveyed the congregation and discovered only 5 percent remained within walking distance of the church’s location—a distant cry from the majority that long lived close to the church his father founded, originally on N Mississippi Avenue, in 1965. The ever-lengthening commutes, he says, wear heavily on church participation, meaning that many people only come in for service and stop attending other events or activities like choir rehearsal. But where the smaller houses of worship often ferry their flocks back in, Emmanuel Church is stretching its services eastward to a satellite it opened in 2009, little more than a storefront sandwiched between the Lucky Spot lotto and deli and a Supercuts in a half-empty strip mall at SE 148th Avenue and Stark Street. The energy is much more subdued: no band, no choir, only two dozen congregants. Even with the satellite, the church has had a difficult time reaching the dispersed black population.

Emmanuel Church isn’t the only church to take major steps to adapt to its changing community. Mt Olivet Baptist Church, one of Portland’s oldest and biggest black churches, now in Portsmouth, also holds a service at Southridge High School in Beaverton that’s packed with Nike and tech professionals. Other churches like Victory Outreach followed Highland Christian Center’s lead and simply moved east. The smaller churches, meantime, have expanded their van transportation services, set up regional Bible studies in people’s homes, and tried to provide many services that used to come from other institutions, like legal and financial classes.

For many of the remaining congregants, the church is their central, if not only, connection to the black community. “It’s the only thing that keeps me being able to endure that I’ve lost my car, I’ve lost my home, I’ve pretty much lost everything,” explains Highland van driver Roberta Tyler, who now lives in a ministry-run home in Vancouver and says weekly trips to Highland are her only interaction with the community she grew up in since the Vanport flood. “It’s my foundation.”

But for some churches, it’s a shaky foundation at best. “The churches are holding on to the edge of the cliff by their fingertips,” says Darrell Millner, a historian in PSU’s Black Studies Department, “better than any other black institution, but I think that’s only a reflection of how strong they used to be.”

This is not the first time Albina has witnessed a major shift in demographics. Before African Americans were funneled into the area by discriminatory real estate practices after World War II, it housed mostly northern Europeans. Many of the churches that are now predominantly African American were white Lutheran or Methodist then. Some have already converted back to predominantly white establishments, though hardly new churches. Emmanuel Church’s original storefront was most recently a bike shop, Emmanuel Church of God in Christ United’s first building has become N Mississippi Avenue’s German-themed beer bar Prost, and the Highland Christian Center’s Alberta Street building was razed, rebuilt, and currently houses the coffee boutique Barista and an Umpqua Bank branch.

Districts of cities like Washington, DC, and San Francisco are going through similar cycles, from white to black to white again. Beyond the difference of scale, however, Portland also seems to differ in how we choose to remember our history. Or don’t, to be more accurate. Neighborhoods like U Street in DC or Harlem in New York are hip and desirable because of their multicultural environments and black history. Real estate agents originally sold Alberta as Portland’s multicultural neighborhood, but N Williams Avenue, once the swinging jazz and commerce heart of black Portland—Jumptown it was called—exhibits total amnesia to its history.

“I don’t think people who are seeking the vaunted Portlandia lifestyle are always consciously excluding people of color from their vision of ‘the good life,’” says PSU’s Lisa Bates, associate professor of urban studies and planning, “but that vision certainly does not explicitly include people of color or racial diversity as a key feature.”

Not so for the churches that have remained in Albina, many of them showing a generosity and
openness to newcomers, even when it hasn’t been returned. The pastors firmly state that their churches should be viewed as multicultural, not black, churches. “I don’t look to see if it’s dominant black or white—those are things that have blinded us,” says Emmanuel Church of God in Christ United’s Bishop Pollard. “We’re a community of a lot of different people with a lot of different beliefs, and my job is to affect my community for the Kingdom of God.”

Failure to support Fair Housing Act leads to subsidized segregation: Locked Out, Part 1

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by Brad Schmidt, The Oregonian

A storm of outrage erupted last year over reports that African Americans and Latinos faced discrimination in Portland’s rental market.

How could landlords so frequently violate fair-housing protections? Why weren’t they being punished? Legislators called for action, a state agency investigated and Portland Commissioner Nick Fish unveiled a housing plan aimed at making things right.

But the episode only hinted at far more serious problems.

An investigation by The Oregonian has found that leaders across the metro area and beyond are failing to fulfill a fundamental goal of the nation’s 44-year-old Fair Housing Act: to give everyone, regardless of color, a fair shot at living in a decent neighborhood.

Taxpayer money meant to help break down segregation and poverty is instead reinforcing it. Agencies and governments are subsidizing housing in the poorest neighborhoods and commonly in areas with above-average minority concentrations. Poor people and people of color are being pushed from desirable areas such as Portland’s inner east side. They are all but banished from high-end communities such as Lake Oswego.

Portland prides itself on being progressive — on pursuing fairness, on welcoming diversity. Yet two generations after Congress approved the Fair Housing Act, a bedrock achievement of the civil rights era pushed through in the days after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, The Oregonian’s analysis shows the city and its suburbs are harboring a form of institutionalized racial inequity.

“We seem to see shadows or intimations of progress with this rhetoric toward equity,” said Karen J. Gibson, an associate professor at Portland State University’s Toulan School of Urban Studies & Planning. “But this segregation and concentration of poverty, this is dismaying. ... In a time of very limited resources, we need to have the guts to be committed to fairness and to enforcing the law.”

Agencies and governments serving Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties accept about $170 million a year in federal money for affordable housing. In doing so, under the Fair Housing Act, they are expected to try to spread affordable housing across neighborhoods. They are expected to avoid concentrating poverty or people of color. In taking the money, they explicitly promise to identify and dismantle barriers to those efforts.

That’s not happening.

Instead, residents who could most benefit from good schools, safe streets, abundant grocery stores, nearby parks and high-achieving role models are largely locked out of the neighborhoods that have them.
The Fair Housing Act

Signed into law in 1968, one week after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the law aims to replace segregated neighborhoods with “truly integrated and balanced living patterns” and to “advance equal opportunity in housing and achieve racial integration.” Housing practices, even if there is no discriminatory motive or intent, cannot be maintained if they deny protected groups equal housing opportunity or create, perpetuate or increase segregation without a sufficient legal justification.

What is prohibited? The law prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability. It covers intentional discrimination and practices that have a discriminatory effect.

Requirements: The Fair Housing Act requires governments that accept money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to “affirmatively further fair housing.” They must conduct an analysis to identify impediments to fair housing choice; take actions to overcome the effects of identified impediments; and maintain records reflecting the analysis and actions taken. Further, HUD says, they must analyze and eliminate housing discrimination; promote fair housing choice for all people; provide opportunities for inclusive patterns of housing occupancy for all; and promote housing that is accessible to all.

Fair housing vs. affordable housing: The concepts are different but often intertwined. Governments and agencies receive federal money for affordable housing — programs for households generally making less than 80 percent of the median income — and must comply with the Fair Housing Act. HUD notes that the “provision of affordable housing is often important to minority families and to persons with disabilities because they are disproportionately represented among those that would benefit from low-cost housing.”

Discrimination complaints: Oregonians have filed more than 2,450 complaints out of 193,000 nationally since Congress strengthened the Fair Housing Act in 1988. That puts the state in line with similar-size Connecticut and Oklahoma. About one-fifth of Oregon complaints involve race, compared with a nationwide average, heavily influenced by complaints in the South, exceeding 40 percent. Disability overtook race in 2004 as the most common complaint investigated nationwide. Complaints spiked in Oregon in 1993 at 216 and have stayed near 100 in recent years.

The consequences are far-reaching. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development spends nearly $35 billion a year on low-income rental housing programs. In Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, that money provides housing or assistance to at least 20,000 households.

People of color, because they are overrepresented in subsidized housing, are particularly affected. In Multnomah County, for example, more than 8,800 black residents — nearly 1 in 5 — rely on some sort of assistance from the housing authority.

“It’s sad,” said Myron Orfield, executive director of the Institute on Race & Poverty at the University of Minnesota. “They’re not thinking about the Fair Housing Act when they’re operating these programs. They’re just building the housing where it’s easier to build it, which is often in poor neighborhoods.”

“BASIC FAIRNESS”

A map of the metro area’s affordable housing puts the disparities into sharp focus.

Census tracts in east Portland and Gresham have an abundance of units. Close-in Southeast Portland and Washington County’s Sunset Corridor have few. Swaths of Clackamas County have next to none.

It’s impossible to know whether affordable housing is being shunned in nicer areas over issues of class, race or both. Residents of Lake Oswego, for example, fought for years to try to keep out a low-income project for seniors but voiced concerns only with traffic and density.

Yet the map makes clear that many people are being cut off from the best the region has to offer.

“As a matter of basic fairness, opening opportunity to people is important, and redressing the active creation of segregation is important,” said Craig Gurian, a civil rights attorney whose work led to a landmark 2009 settlement in which wealthy Westchester County, N.Y., agreed to break down stark patterns of segregation.

“We think that it’s a simple matter of justice.”

Portland lacks the entrenched segregation found in Detroit and Chicago. In fact, Portland “has experienced the greatest decline in segregation in the past 30 years of any major city, at least that I’m aware of,” said Brown University professor John Logan, who conducted a 2010 study. But that’s in part because gentrification has forced thousands of black residents out of Northeast Portland’s historically African American neighborhoods.

Residents of subsidized housing interviewed by The
Oregonian were far more likely to express gratitude than resentment. Having never lived in a tidy suburban subdivision or a charming cityscape, most were happy to have a park or bus stop nearby. But many expressed concern with neighborhood safety and frustration with limited options.

Amber Canterbury, 31, has a three-bedroom unit in a public housing complex on a dismal stretch of Powell Boulevard east of 122nd Avenue. She counts five taverns between her Hunter’s Run apartment and the nearest grocery store. Mold grows on a bedroom windowsill.

She pulled a chair into the parking lot on a recent afternoon to watch her daughter, Yasmine, scramble around a play structure with a white teddy bear. Canterbury won’t let the 3-year-old wander to a patch of grass out back, nor will she allow the girl and her two older children to play on grass near Powell.

“Powell is so bad,” said Canterbury, who is disabled with hip dysplasia. Without sidewalks, “it’s not safe, and when you have kids, it’s scary.”

Felicia Marques lives in a three-bedroom unit at Hillsboro’s low-income Montebello Apartments. A MAX stop is steps away, and computer and English classes are offered onsite. Marques likes the staff and is close to her job at a grocery store restaurant.

Marques, 37, said friends recommended the complex, operated by a nonprofit that serves a population that’s 98 percent Latino. Montebello is in a census tract where more than 25 percent of residents live in poverty, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates, and where nearly 80 percent are nonwhite, the highest in all three counties.

If she could choose, the mother of five said, she would live in Portland or Vancouver. “There’s more job opportunities,” she said through her daughter, Neyra, 20.

Kathy Moody, 41, usually asks one of her older daughters for a ride to buy groceries at WinCo Foods. From her two-bedroom apartment at Leander Court, on Portland’s Southeast 122nd Avenue, she finds it difficult to manage a 20-minute bus ride with her 8- and 2-year-old children.

Moody slept on friends’ couches before moving into the complex. “I just need a job now,” she said, “and then I’ll be set.”

**TROUBLING PATTERNS**

Moody’s optimism belies a system with troubling patterns, according to The Oregonian’s investigation.

Tens of thousands of people have found shelter in the region’s subsidized units, especially in Multnomah County. The problem is where those units are — and aren’t.

Subsidies for affordable housing come in many forms: Sometimes local housing authorities build whole buildings for the very poor. Sometimes they hold down rents in just some units of a complex. Other times they give people rental vouchers through the Section 8 program — the vouchers cover all or part of the rent — and leave it to the resident to find a place where the landlord will take the voucher.

Yet patterns persist across programs.

Home Forward, the housing authority that serves Multnomah County, increased Section 8 vouchers from 2001 to 2011 by nearly 2,100. A net 93 percent of the new vouchers went to rentals east of 82nd Avenue. That shift helped triple the number of African American voucher-holders in largely low-income east Portland and west Gresham to 1,193.

Affluent and overwhelmingly white Lake Oswego and West Linn have so few affordable options, just 0.1 percent of the three-county total by one tally, that they have nearly five times more million-dollar homes as affordable rentals.

Of 17,000 units in the three counties funded since 1991 through a state-administered federal tax credit program, 55 percent are in “poverty” census tracts and 20 percent are in “minority” tracts. Poverty areas are those where at least 20 percent live below the federal poverty line, according to federal definitions. Minority areas have nonwhite populations that exceed the metro average by at least 20 percentage points; locally, that’s nearly 44 percent, a high bar for a metro area that’s more than 76 percent white.

The program, which helped pay for the Montebello Apartments and Leander Court, gives developers more money to build in poor areas. Leander Court, like the Montebello, is in a census tract where at least 1 in 4 people are in poverty, according to Census Bureau estimates. More than 40 percent of residents are nonwhite.
“It would appear on the face of it,” said Jill Khadduri, who headed HUD’s policy development and research division for 16 years, leaving in 2000, “that the state agency that allocates tax credits in Oregon has not taken this as a priority, at least not in the Portland metro area, opening up opportunities for low-income people to live in low-poverty areas.”

Similar patterns are found in 4,700 units paid for through a $29 million state-administered rental program. Of residents, about two-thirds of African Americans and Latinos live in poverty tracts, compared with just over half of whites. Latinos and African Americans are twice as likely as whites to live in minority tracts.

The director of the state agency that oversees the tax-credit and rental programs, Oregon Housing and Community Services, chalked up differences to market forces and individual choice.

“As long as people have choice, I reject the notion that concentrations are always bad,” said Margaret Van Vliet, who is also the former director of the Portland Housing Bureau. “If people have choice and they’re not trapped, I’m not sure there’s an underlying problem.”

In Portland, officials have pumped city and federal money into at least 150 projects with more than 7,300 units. Outside downtown, where projects overwhelmingly shelter poor whites, people of color disproportionately live in worse neighborhoods, according to 2009 data.

Of residents in the units, 65 percent of African Americans and 85 percent of Latinos live in poverty tracts, compared with 46 percent of whites. In Southwest Portland — with just 136 units, all in low-poverty neighborhoods — whites rent 89 percent of units.

Among all the Portland units, African Americans are five times more likely than whites — and Latinos six times more likely — to live in minority tracts. Low-
income housing in North and Northeast Portland, where many black residents want to stay, are helping drive those numbers, as is a housing nonprofit in Northeast’s Cully neighborhood that serves Latinos.

“It turns out that for all the progress that’s been made, residential segregation is the toughest nut to crack,” Gurian, the civil rights attorney, said of housing nationwide. “There hasn’t been the political will, or frankly the pressure, on local governments to make change,” he said. “So the segregated status quo is able to remain in place.”

POLICY DROPPED

Portland, where last year’s local uproar started, has spent more than $150 million on affordable housing through its urban renewal areas, which require that 30 percent of the money generated go to such projects. But the city has a history of failing to follow through on other fronts.

In 1992, a Multnomah County task force concluded that extensive housing discrimination persisted. The group called for audit testing, in which whites and people of color pose as renters to look for different treatment. The City Club of Portland also recommended testing.

Portland contracted with the Fair Housing Council of Oregon, a nonprofit that pursues equal access to housing through education and other services, to conduct the testing but set aside no money. The tests didn’t happen.

“I’m sorry that 20 years later we’re looking at the exact same situation, except that it’s probably worse because of the economy,” said Judith Kliks, who was part of the City Club committee.

In 1993, the Portland City Council approved a “location policy” that prohibited placing affordable housing in the poorest parts of town unless leaders granted an exception. But city documents obtained by The Oregonian show that in 2003, city leaders realized the exception had “swallowed the rule.” Every developer who sought leeway got it. City housing officials dropped the policy last year.

HUD MONEY

How much local governments and agencies receive a year:

$85 million: Home Forward (the housing authority that serves Multnomah County)
$29 million: Rent-assistance contracts administered in the metro area by the state
$23 million: Washington County Housing Services
$15 million: Housing Authority of Clackamas County

$13 million: Portland/Multnomah County, Community Development Block Grant (not all CDBG money must go to housing projects) and HOME funds
$4 million: Washington County, CDBG and HOME block grants
$3 million: Clackamas County, CDBG and HOME block grants

Portland officials did hire the Fair Housing Council to conduct audit tests in 2010. In 32 of 50 tests, blacks and Latinos were treated differently from whites, according to results released last year. Legislators demanded action, and the state Bureau of Labor and Industries investigated. Ultimately, the agency found that the testing was too flawed for use in going after landlords.

In June 2011, amid community outrage over the test results, Portland Commissioner Nick Fish unveiled what he billed as the city’s first fair housing plan.

“Today with one voice we are here to say we will not tolerate discrimination in housing in Portland or in Oregon,” said Fish, son of the late U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish, who in 1988 helped put teeth in the Fair Housing Act. The plan, Fish said, would “get at the root of persistent problems in our community, which are barriers to housing choice.”

Officials listed the steps they planned to take through June 2012 and promised to be accountable.

Last week, city housing officials outlined their progress. But since the steps mostly involve intangibles such as outreach, better communication with other officials, and the adoption of “equity principles” to guide housing decisions, it’s tough to see any change on the ground.

Leaders did try to move ahead with one concrete step: to conduct annual audit tests. They set tests for this past April and May, at sites with a history of complaints and violations, not random sites as before. They planned to go after any discriminatory landlords by June 15.

But after three inexperienced companies offered to do the testing, the city postponed plans.

To date, no tests have been done.
Local Connections

PCS'S PERSPECTIVES POST-SHOW DISCUSSION SERIES
Please join Portland Center Stage for a series of 20-minute, post-show discussions following every weekend matinee performance of Clybourne Park. Hear and share personal reactions and thoughts inspired by the social issues, historical context, and themes found in the play, filtered through the perspectives of community leaders, historians, activists and academics well-versed on the topics of gentrification, fair housing, race relations and more. Speakers will have read the plays, visited rehearsal, attended the productions, and will be ready to share their thoughts on how these plays connect directly to our community. Dates: April 14, 20, 21, 27, 28 and May 4 and 5 following the 2 p.m. matinee performance.

For a list of speakers, visit PCS's blog: http://www.pcs.org/blog/item/perspectives-post-show-discussion-series/

FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL OF OREGON
The FHCO is a statewide civil rights organization whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination through access to enforcement and education. www.FHCO.org

- The cast of Clybourne Park went on FHCO’s Historic Tour of Discrimination as part of their rehearsal process. fhco.org/tours.htm
- Check out the FHCO’s “Anywhere but Here” display exhibit, which uses six interconnected panels consisting of photographs, text and personal quotes to chronicle the history of housing discrimination in Oregon. In support of our productions of The Whipping Man and Clybourne Park, PCS will be presenting the exhibit in the Armory lobbies through May 5. fhco.org/anywhere_but_here.htm

PRoud GROUND
From newly constructed or newly renovated homes, to financial tools and practical guidance, Proud Ground has worked since 1999 to give homeowners equity and stability, and our region homes that will remain affordable for generations to come. www.proudground.org

CARRIE MAE WEEMS: THREE DECADES OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO
Portland Art Museum
On display through May 19, 2013
Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, Carrie Mae Weems is internationally recognized for her powerful photography-based art that investigates issues of race, gender, power and societal class. Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video presents more than 200 photographs, videos and installations tracing the evolution of Weems’ career.

Pre-show Discussion Questions

1. What makes your neighborhood feel like home?

2. How has your neighborhood changed in the last five years? Do you & your family like the changes you see? Discuss why or why not.

3. Is there a neighborhood in Portland that you would love to live in? Is there a neighborhood in Portland that you would never want to live in? What makes you feel this way?

4. How does humor help broach difficult topics? Give an example of a time where you used humor to address a difficult situation.
Post-show Discussion Questions

1. What do you think should happen to the house in Clybourne Park? Do you think the new owners, Lindsey and Steve, should be able to tear it down because they own it? Or do you think it should be preserved because of its historical and personal significance?

2. What do you think the Clybourne Park neighborhood will be like in 50 years? What about your neighborhood?

3. Pick a character from the play. What advice would you give them on how to communicate better with the other characters?

References Cited

http://www.kingneighborhood.org/history/Bleeding%20Albina:%20A%20History%20of%20Community%20Disinvestment,%201940-2000.pdf


theskanner.com/article/Portland-Gentrification-The-North-Williams-Avenue-That-Was--1956-2011-08-09

www.reimaginingraisin.com


Other Great Study Guides for Clybourne Park:

www.centertheatregroup.org/uploadedFiles/Plays_and_Tickets/Productions/2012/Clybourne_Park/files/clybourne_educator.pdf

www.guthrietheater.org/education/play_guides/20122013_season/clbyourne_park_intro_guide