

# African Americans in Oregon

*By Staff*

Objectives: Identify the historical experience of African Americans in Portland and Oregon. Identify the legal and governmental actions that affected African American life. Analyze short and long term effects of laws on the African American community. Use primary and secondary source documents to analyze the African American experience. Standards Met: **History:**

Identify and understand significant events, developments, groups and people in the history of Oregon after 1900. **Civics & Government:**

Understand how government policies and decisions have been influenced and changed by individuals and groups. **Social Science Analysis:**

Analyze an event, issue, problem or phenomenon; identifying characteristics, influences, causes and both short and long-term effects. Materials/Resources Needed: Vanport City, 1943 Luncheonette Sign, "We Cater to White Trade Only," 1943 Bill Berry with Rose Festival Princess, 1946 Albina Riot, 1967 African American Community Protests School Board, 1982 Teacher Resources: Oregon Historical Quarterly Articles "Slaves and Free Men: Blacks in the Oregon Country 1840-1860" by Quintard Taylor. OHQ 83 (1982): 153-170 "Sources for History of Blacks in Oregon" by Lenwood G. Davis. OHQ 73 (1972): 196-211 Kathryn Hall Bogle's "An American Negro Speaks of Color." OHQ 89 (1988): 70-91. Anticipatory Set: Studies of African American history are often focused on southern states. This lesson provides a brief introduction to the events, laws and attitudes that affected African Americans in Oregon.

Begin lesson with this information on the board or overhead: "1844 – Slavery declared illegal in Oregon Country" Discuss the following questions: What was the status of African Americans in Southern states at this time? What does this law suggest about Oregon settlers? What do you think white settlers' attitudes were toward African Americans? What reasons could they have had for outlawing slavery? Compare life for African Americans living in the South at this time and in the Oregon Country? Lesson Description: Day One Introduce students to the early legislation in Oregon regarding African Americans. Arrange class in small groups. Have the students read A New Legal Landscape and discuss the following questions: How did the balloting on the proposed State Constitution in 1857 reflect the views on the slavery-race issues of the white male voters? Why do you think that the men voting in 1857 emphatically rejected slavery for Oregon but also voted overwhelmingly not to have "free Negroes" in Oregon? Does this appear to be a contradiction? Why do you think it took so long for Oregonians to rescind the wording of the 1857 Constitution? Who was eligible to own land according to the Oregon Donation Land Law of 1850? How did the provisions of this law reflect Oregonians' attitudes toward African Americans? Lesson Description: Day 2 Divide class into 5 small groups. Distribute the following readings and questions: **Group 1 – Vanport City – 1943**

Why was Vanport called "The Miracle City"? How was industrialist Henry J. Kaiser involved in the development of Vanport? What is the history of "The Miracle City"? How did the building of Vanport during WWII affect race relations in Portland? **Group 2 – Luncheonette Sign: We Cater to White Trade Only**

Why did Portland's African American population expand from 2,565 in 1940 to 25,000 in 1944? The article states that "blacks were hired freely for common labor and in all shipyards except Albina Shipyard." Why was this the case? Was the wartime (WWII) Fair Employment Practices Commission successful in buffering the racism that permeated Portland's private industry and local unions? What is the difference between the following messages: "**We cater to white trade only.**" **And "No shirt, no shoes, no service."** **Group 3 – Bill Berry with Rose Festival Princess – 1946**

The reading tells us that "despite wartime Fair Employment Laws, Portland and Oregon retained their reputation for hostile race relations." How did this situation contribute to the establishment of the Portland Urban League in 1945? What were some of the challenges facing Bill Berry, the first director of the Portland chapter of the Urban League? Consider how each of the following areas were /remain problematic for Oregon's black community: Jobs Housing Education Media Which

listed do you consider to be most important to decreasing the disparity between predominately white and black neighborhoods?**Group 4: Albina Riot, 1967**

How did the Albina Riot begin? What effects did groups from Seattle and San Francisco have on the situation? React to the statement: "(Governor Tom) McCall placed some of the blame for the incident on Portland's lack of inclination to finance educational programs that would get to the root of the sociological dilemma that caused poverty." Do you agree with Gov. McCall? **Group 5: African American Community Protests School Board 1982**

How did the following affect the school board protests: low test scores for African-American students; unaddressed needs of minority and low-income students; racist busing practices? Why was the African American community upset about the closing of Harriet Tubman Middle School? What role did a Reed College graduate play in the protest? Brainstorm ways to meet the needs of minority and low-income students in your city. Then assess which ideas have the best chance of working?

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