

Historical Timeline of African Americans in Oregon

1788

Markus Lopus becomes the first person of African descent on record known to have set foot on Oregon soil. (With the explorer, Robert Gray)

1805

York, William Clark's slave, comes west with Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery.

1844

Slavery is declared illegal in the Oregon Country. The infamous "**Lash Law**," requiring that blacks in Oregon – be they free or slave – be whipped twice a year "until he or she shall quit the territory," is passed in June. It is soon deemed too harsh and its provisions for punishment are reduced to forced labor in December 1844.

1848

Following the Whitman Massacre in 1847, Oregon's Provisional Government passes the first **Exclusion Law** in the Oregon Country. It is unlawful for any Negro or Mulatto (of mixed ethnic heritage) to reside in Oregon Territory.

1850

The Oregon Donation Land Act becomes law, granting free land to "whites and half-breed Indians" in the Oregon Territory. Blacks, however, are prevented from claiming land in Oregon.

1854

Oregon's Exclusion Law is repealed.

1855

Law is passed preventing mixed-race males from becoming citizens.

1857

A new **Exclusion Law** is added to the state constitution's Bill of Rights: African Americans can't reside, own property, work or vote in Oregon.

1859

On February 14, Oregon becomes the first state admitted to the Union with an exclusion law written into the state constitution.

1862

Oregon adopts a law requiring all Blacks, Chinese, Hawaiians, and Mulattos residing in Oregon to pay an annual tax of \$5. If they could not pay this tax, the law empowered the state to press them into service maintaining state roads for 50 cents a day. Interracial marriages between Blacks and Whites are banned in Oregon; it is against the law for Whites to marry anyone 1/4 or more Black.

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1865

The 13th Amendment, banning slavery in the United States, passes by referendum in Oregon.

1866

Oregon's citizens do not pass the 14th Amendment, granting citizenship to African Americans, and the state's ban on interracial marriages is extended to prevent whites from marrying anyone who is 1/4 or more Chinese or Hawaiian, and 1/2 or more Native American.

1867

William Brown attempts to admit his children to public schools and is denied because they are African American.

1868

The 14th Amendment passes in Oregon.

1870

The 15th Amendment, granting African American men the right to vote, is added to the U.S. Constitution, despite failing to pass in Oregon. The federal law supersedes a clause in the Oregon State Constitution banning black suffrage.

1872

As a result of William Brown's struggle for equal access to public education, the Portland school district votes to include African American schools in the public school system.

1883

An attempt to remove a ban on black suffrage from the Oregon Constitution fails, despite passage of the 15th Amendment. Further attempts to remove the language prohibiting blacks from voting were made in 1895, 1916, and 1927.

1914

The Portland chapter of the NAACP is founded—the oldest continually chartered chapter west of the Mississippi River.

1920s

Oregon hosts the largest Ku Klux Klan movement in the West.

1926

Oregon repeals its Exclusion Law, amending the state constitution to remove it from the Bill of Rights.

1927

The Oregon State Constitution is finally amended to remove a clause denying African Americans the right to vote.

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1929

Oregon pioneer Beatrice Morrow Cannady takes over as chief editor and owner of *The Advocate*.

1931

Due to the Great Depression, most African American-owned companies closed by 1931, making it even harder for African American people to find work.

1933

The Advocate folds. It is the last African American press company until after the Depression.

1934

Redlining neighborhoods came into existence through the National Housing Act of 1934. This practice, also known as mortgage discrimination, began when the federal government and the newly formed Federal Housing Administration allowed the Home Owners' Loan Corporation to create "residential security maps," outlining the level of security for real-estate investments in 239 cities around the United States. On these maps, high-risk areas were outlined in red. Many minority neighborhoods were redlined in these maps, meaning that banks would deny all mortgage capital to people living within them. This contributed to the decay of many of these neighborhoods because the lack of loans for buying or making repairs on the homes made it difficult for these neighborhoods to attract and keep families. Many urban historians point to redlining as one of the main factors for urban disinvestment and the decline of central cities in the middle decades of the 20th century

1937

Kathryn Hall Bogle writes an article in *The Oregonian* entitled "An American Negro Speaks of Color" addressing the few employment opportunities in professions for educated African American people.

1940-43 (WW II)

Thousands of African American workers were recruited and imported to work in Portland's Kaiser shipyards.

1941

The Portland Housing Authority is established to address housing shortages after WW II wartime shipbuilding efforts boost African American population tenfold, from about 2,500 to more than 20,000.

1944

GI Bill gave veterans education and training opportunities, guaranteed loans for home, farm, or business, job finding assistance, and unemployment pay of \$20 a week for up to 52 weeks if a veteran could not find a job. This law allowed millions of U.S. soldiers to purchase their first homes with inexpensive mortgages

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1945

The Urban League of Portland is established with Edwin C. Berry as its first director.

1947

Federal postwar housing mortgage insurance program issues maps using red ink (redlining) to indicate bad risk areas, including NE Portland.

1948

On Memorial Day, the Columbia River overflows and floods the Vanport community, displacing 5,000 African American Oregonians.

1948

The Oregonian ceases to use racial identification in its reporting and coverage of events.

1949

The Fair Employment Practices Law is passed.

1950

City of Portland anti-discrimination ordinance is defeated in referendum by petition in the general election.

1951

Oregon repeals its law prohibiting interracial marriages.

1952

Portland Realty Board changes code of ethics to exclude the view that "...the presence of African Americans depresses property values."

1953

Public Accommodations Law is passed prohibiting discrimination in any facility or service made available to the general public.

1954

Brown vs. Board of Education declares that separate public schools based on race denied African American children a chance of an equal education.

1959

Oregon Legislature passes the Fair Housing Act.

1959

Oregon voters finally ratify the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. (1870, prohibiting the restriction of voting rights "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.")

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1961

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the Urban League of Portland's Equal Opportunity Program.

1962

Local groups organize against and successfully stop a Housing Authority of Portland plan to build a 58-unit housing project.

1963

Organized resistance delays a Portland Planning Commission proposal to build a 135-unit housing project.

1964

Portland Chapter of NAACP reaches 50th anniversary.

1967

Members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) are accused of inciting racial violence on Union Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard).

1968

The Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity is charged with administering and enforcing fair housing laws.

1968

The Albina Corporation is established to help overcome shortcomings in the early government ghetto revitalization efforts.

1970

The Black United Front challenges school segregation in Portland Public Schools and the first African American superintendent, Dr. Matthew Prophet, is appointed.

1973

North Portland residents picket Emanuel Hospital after a 1970s urban renewal project that expanded patient capacity displaced many residents.

1977

The Community Reinvestment Act required banks to apply the same anti-discriminatory guidelines to their lending criteria in all circumstances. These acts did not completely stop discriminatory practices. The discrimination moved into more subtle techniques, including racial steering and misinformation given to African American prospective buyers.

1982

Members of the African American community protest the planned closure of Harriet Tubman Middle School in North Portland.

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1983

Black United Fund of Oregon is created to address the disproportionately low level of charitable dollars given to organizations serving communities of color.

1992

City Council adopts Albina Community Plan, a major initiative to raise economic and educational achievement of area residents.

2004

Portland Housing Authority selects Northwest Housing Alternatives to rebuild Columbia Villa Housing project in Portsmouth neighborhood.

2007

Barack H. Obama becomes the first African American to win the Democratic Party nomination for president of the United States.

November 4, 2008

Barack H. Obama is elected 44th president of the United States.

Further reading about Portland's racial history:

Gibson, K. J. (2007), Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment, 1940-2000. *Transforming Anthropology*, 15: 3–25.
doi: 10.1525/tran.2007.15.1.03