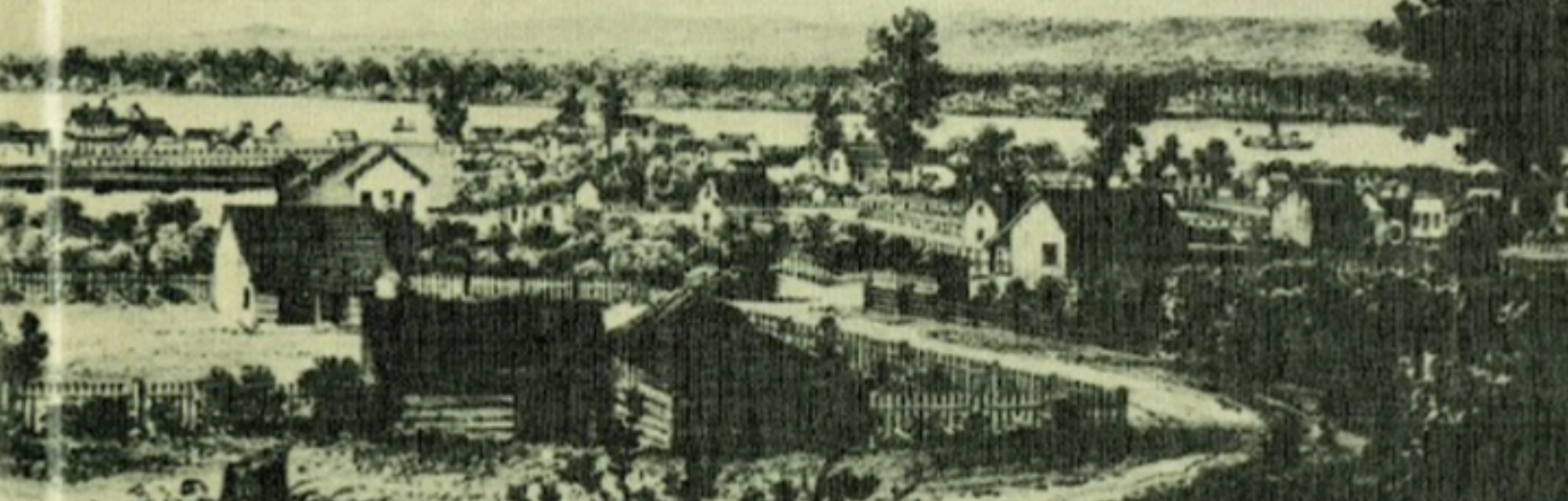


Race and Public Housing in Vancouver: 1940s to 1950s

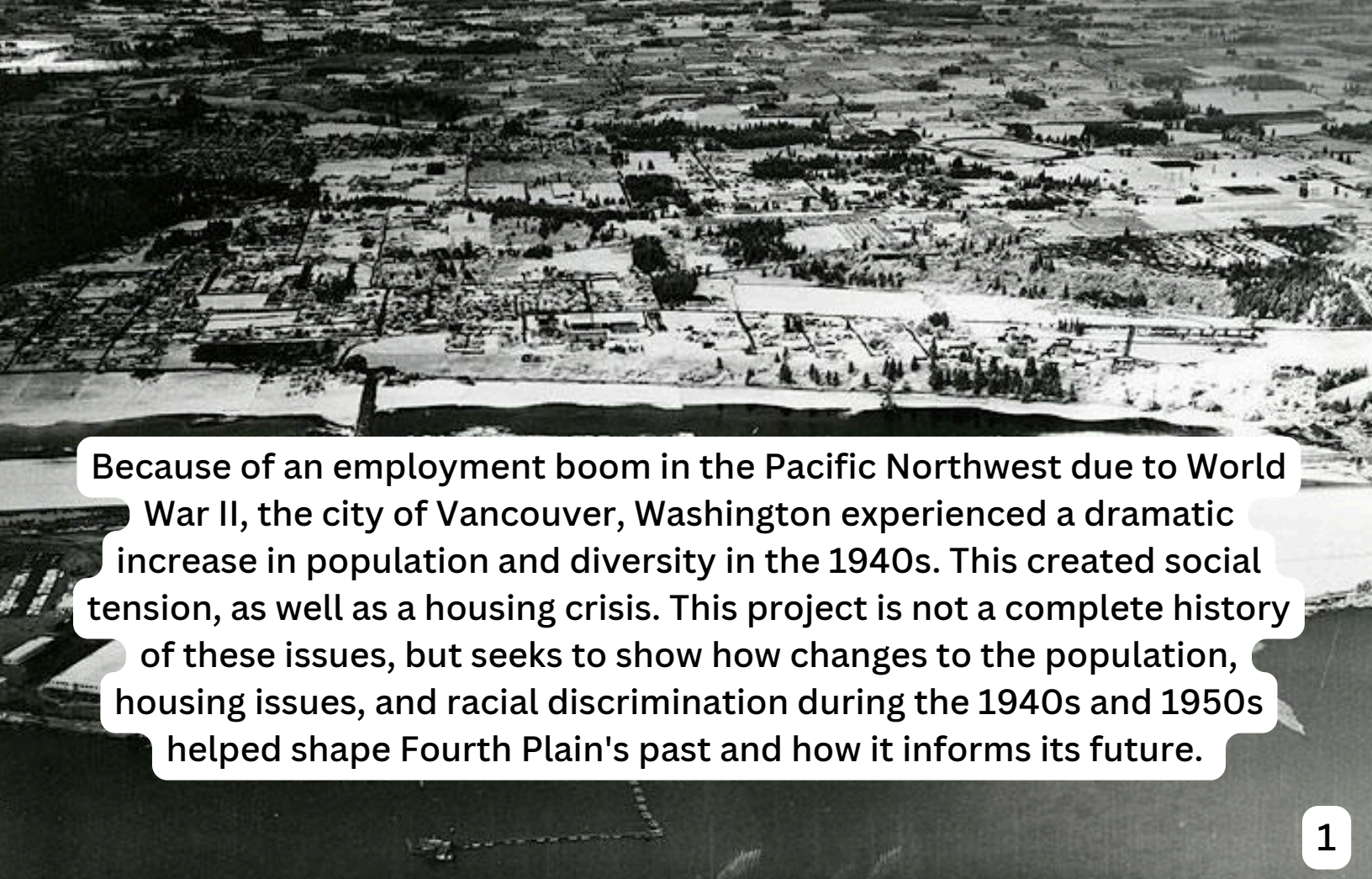
33,000 Now Residing in Housing Areas

Vancouver's housing areas are taking 1,200 people each week—a growth very nearly equalling the population of Washougal — and have maintained this intake rate for the past month. It is expected, housing officials say, that this rate of 400 families per week will continue until Burton Homes and Bagley Downs are filled.



This zine was created by Portland State History students in collaboration with Clark County Historical Society and Fourth Plain Forward.

Some quotes used in this document contain racially offensive or insensitive language. We chose to leave them as they were on official documents to provide proper context of attitudes of the time regarding race.



Because of an employment boom in the Pacific Northwest due to World War II, the city of Vancouver, Washington experienced a dramatic increase in population and diversity in the 1940s. This created social tension, as well as a housing crisis. This project is not a complete history of these issues, but seeks to show how changes to the population, housing issues, and racial discrimination during the 1940s and 1950s helped shape Fourth Plain's past and how it informs its future.

1

Wages and Jobs

Wartime industry paid well; the average American saw their weekly earnings nearly double from 1939 to 1945, while even the lowest paid workers saw a 68% increase. More than 1/3 of Vancouver's labor force lived in public housing.



New Vancouver residents relied on wartime industry, so there was concern that lack of jobs after the war would create issues. Most of those who remained after the war were considered "unskilled" workers

“It can lead to heavy relief loads, health problems, irreversible human deterioration and the development of festering rural slums with all their concomitants of social problems and human wastage”

(Industrial Vancouver 1947 Economic Survey, 54).

3



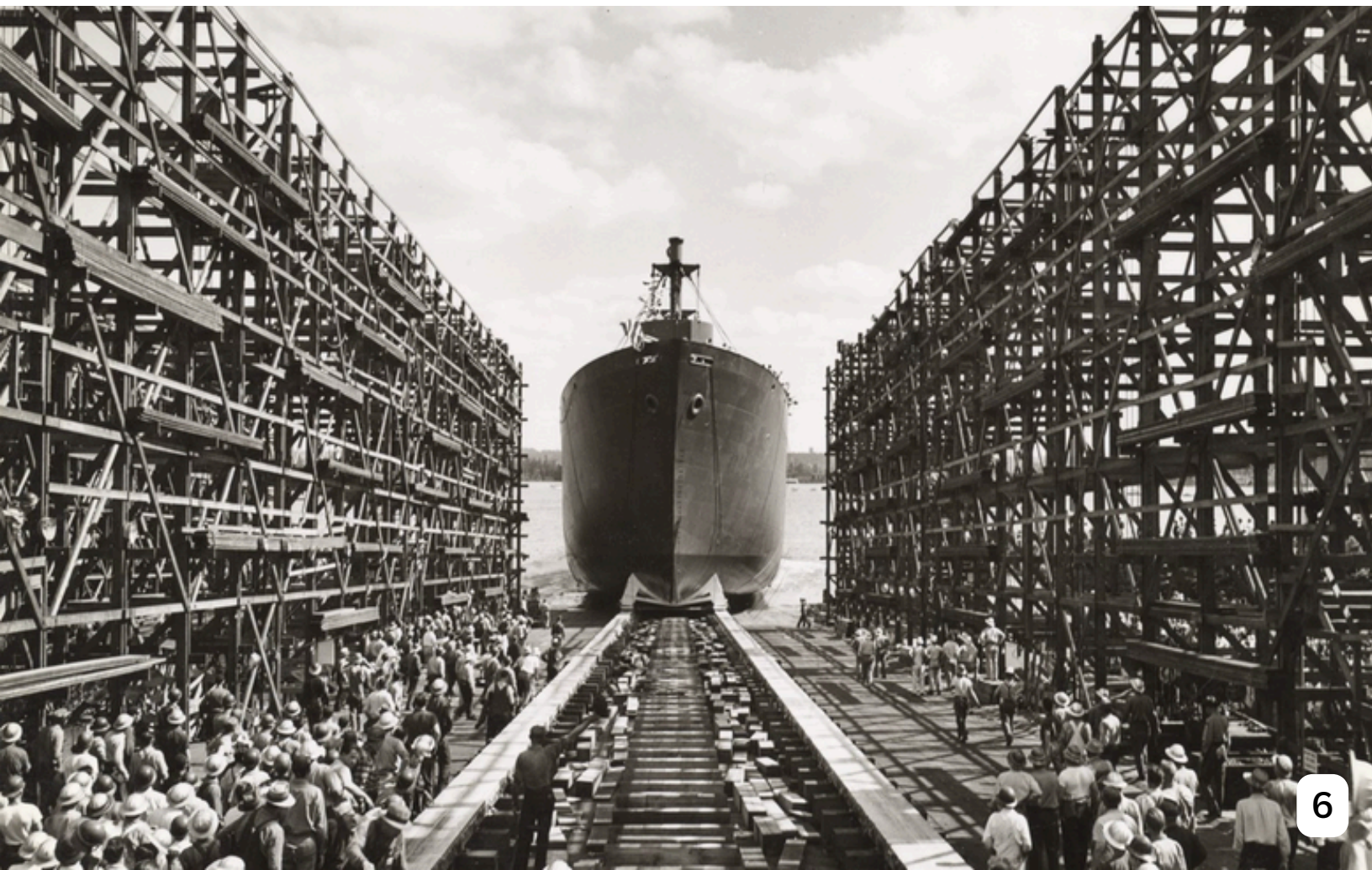
A Changing Population

Wartime industry attracted a large and diverse group of workers to Vancouver.

The population grew from 25,000 in 1940, to 85,000 during WWII, then fell to 55,000 in 1947.

The pre-war population was 99.6% white, but during the war Vancouver was home to over 8,000 Black residents.

After the war, jobs became scarce and many people left, but the population remained more than double its pre-war size. .



Kaiser Shipyards

5

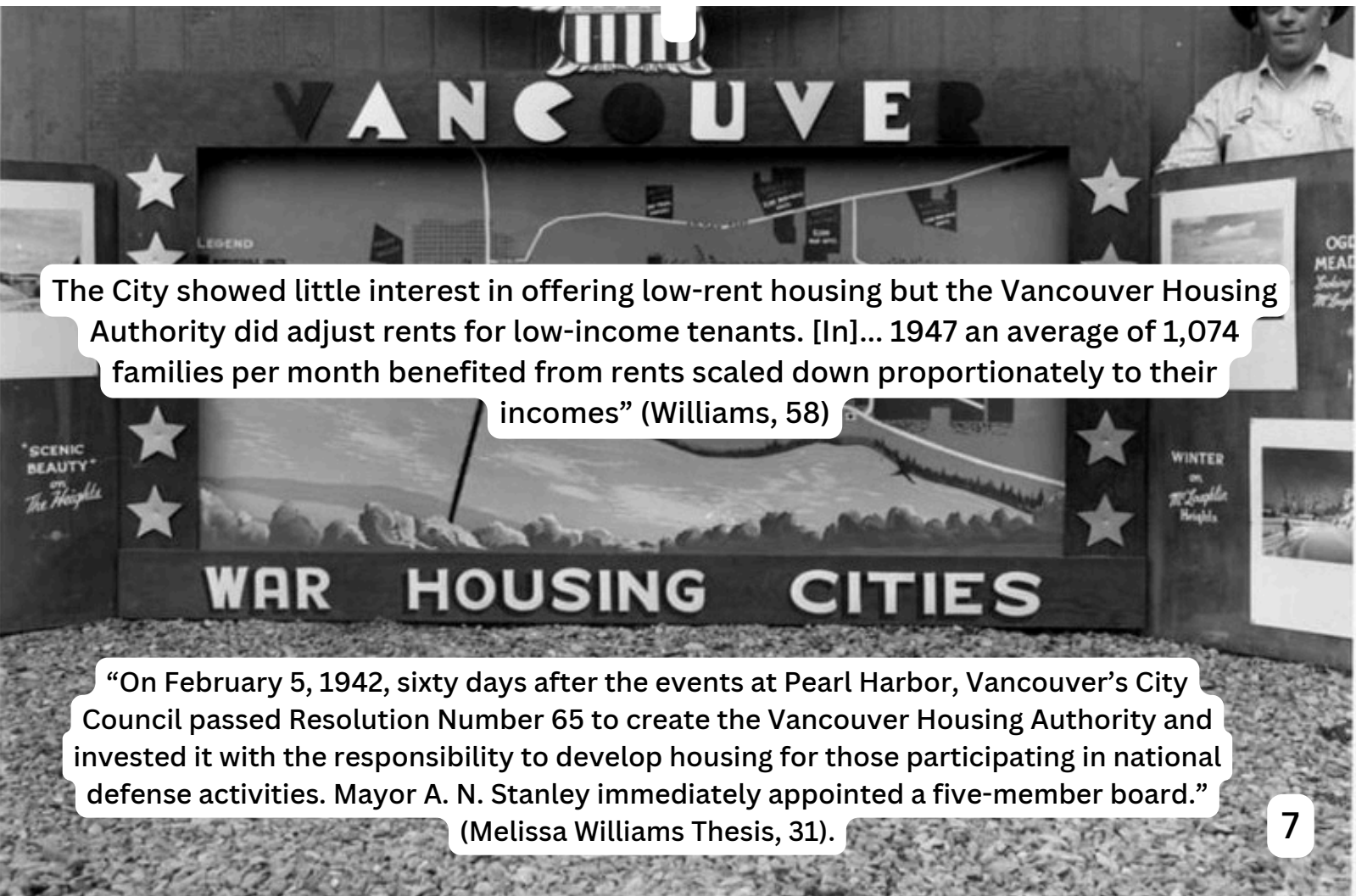
The Kaiser Shipyards, owned by Henry Kaiser, were a chief wartime industrial employer in the 1940s.

"By war's end 45,000 Blacks had been lured to the Pacific Northwest's boom..."
(Melissa Williams, 27)

"Work was abundant but housing was not; the city's housing authority would have to rapidly bridge the gap. City officials in Vancouver, WA struggled to meet the demands wartime migrants placed on their city..." (Williams, 26)

To give an idea of the Negro population change in Vancouver, the total number of families living in the various housing projects in Vancouver during December, 1944, was 11,170, of which 1730 were Negro families. Workers in the shipyards and other industries attendant with the war effort started to be laid-off in 1944. In August, 1945, of the total 8072 families, 1396 were Negroes. Families averaged four persons.

Oregon Journal - January 16, 1958



The City showed little interest in offering low-rent housing but the Vancouver Housing Authority did adjust rents for low-income tenants. [In]... 1947 an average of 1,074 families per month benefited from rents scaled down proportionately to their incomes" (Williams, 58)

"On February 5, 1942, sixty days after the events at Pearl Harbor, Vancouver's City Council passed Resolution Number 65 to create the Vancouver Housing Authority and invested it with the responsibility to develop housing for those participating in national defense activities. Mayor A. N. Stanley immediately appointed a five-member board."
(Melissa Williams Thesis, 31).

7

Prior to the 1940s, Vancouver and the greater Washington area were home to very few Black Americans. With the wartime population boom came questions of segregation or integration in housing.

"Restricted" in this instance is another term for segregated housing.

SOUTH CLIFF
A RESTRICTED RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT
ON MC LOUGHLIN HEIGHTS
HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

History of the VHA and its Initiatives

"With its federally-awarded money the Authority immediately purchased 1,000 acres of land on a hill east of the city... and named it McLoughlin Heights. It would become the most permanent of the VHA's projects. Yet, well before completion of The Heights the VHA realized 6,000 temporary and permanent units would not be enough to house the newcomers and quickly planned more. The Authority purchased land at Fruit Valley to erect three hundred permanent homes, then built 2,000 apartment units in a development named Ogden Meadows, 200 permanent homes in Fourth Plain Village, 2,100 apartments at Bagley Downs, and 1,500 units in the row houses at Burton Homes – collectively these projects were known as the "Six Cities."

(Williams, 32-33)

Vancouver Housing Authority

9

In 1942, The **Vancouver Housing Authority** was created with the purpose of creating **wartime housing for defense workers**

Directly following, the Authority purchased **1,000 acres of land**, which was named McLoughlin Heights

Although not favored by the city of Vancouver, in 1947 **1,074 families** were paying rent adjusted to their income

FEDERAL HOUSING INITIATIVES

Number of projects under construction or completed 585
Number of dwelling units 170,116
States represented 37
Total estimated development cost of projects..... \$803,489,000⁴

Weintraub and Tough, 157

"sub-standard construction and poor planning of some of the present developments will in a relatively short period reduce them to slums"... "housing built in defense areas will be of little value when the emergency is over"

Weintraub and Tough, 155

Project Statistics 1937-1941

5,100 Families Still Living On Projects

Year Saw Only Partial Liquidation of City's Big Wartime Housing Areas

HOUSING SHORTAGES

12

"Fifty thousand people recruited by the Kaiser Company alone reached Vancouver and quickly occupied every spare room, apartment, and house.—"

Summary Vancouver Housing Projects				
*Incomplete,				
DECEMBER, 1943				
Project.	No. Units	Completed	Occupied	Population
McLoughlin Heights ---	6,097	6,097	5,957	23,828
Ogden Meadows -----	1,992	1,992	1,925	5,600
Fourth Plain Village ---	200	200	200	800
Fruit Valley Homes ----	500	500	449	1,816
Bagley Downs -----	2,100	2,100	1,534	6,136
Burton Homes -----	1,500	1,500	768	2,304
Totals.....	12,389	12,389	10,833	40,484

"—many new arrivals were forced to live in their vehicles, 'in empty store buildings, stables, tents, and trailers.'" (Williams, 27)

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HOUSING DETAILS



Typical McLoughlin Heights row houses. These are built on concrete slabs, are equipped with coal ranges and heaters, and are completely furnished. Designed to conserve on critical materials, they are intended for temporary emergency use only.

"Row house units were equipped with beds, 'victory' springs—so-called because their wood-framed construction conserved metal—mattresses, chests, wastebaskets, couches, chairs, desks, dinette sets, and mirrors; tenants had to supply their own dishes, utensils, linens, and rugs. Rent also "included utilities, such as lights, water, coal, and garbage collection." (Williams, 34)

act, service
tation and
employees.

Fourth Plain Village, a 200-unit permanent project, is the only public housing area located entirely within the city limits. This project has a fine community center where tenants enjoy parties and attend classes in the arts. Many of the tenants of this project are employed by Bonneville Administration.



"The Housing Authority made an effort to design enjoyable and convenient communities with recreation and administration centers, day care facilities, schools, libraries, shopping centers, churches, transportation, professional space for dentists and doctors, and fire and police stations." (Williams, 34)

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Prejudice and Legal Discrimination

From the Editor's Desk —

NO NEGRO PROBLEM IN VANCOUVER

"If there is a Negro problem in Vancouver, I don't know anything about it," so stated Mayor Sinclair at a recent meeting under the sponsorship of the League of Women Voters.

This attitude is not peculiar to the Mayor, however, for it seems to be prevalent among a great number of Vancouver's long-time citizens. It is to be hoped that this attitude is due to lack of information and not indifference.

For the benefit of the people who "know nothing" about the Negro problem we would like to ask, "What about the policy of enforced segregation in the housing projects?" "What about the Jim Crow policies of some of the local unions which stand between a Negro and his getting a job?" "What about the restaurants which refuse to serve Negroes?" "What about the hotels and auto courts which will not accommodate Negroes?" "What about the difficulties Negroes face in trying to acquire property?"

Surely the Negro is entitled to the same rights as other members of our democracy. It is time people stopped thinking of the Negro as somebody "different" from other people and accepted him as a human being entitled to the same rights and privileges enjoyed by the majority of people in a freedom-loving country.

Civic Unity League, 1945

"A sizeable proportion of Vancouver's long-time residents express nostalgia for the quiet, residential city of pre-war years. They resent the 'outsiders,' and believe they should be encouraged or even coerced to leave. 'Let's quit giving them cheap rent; let's clear out the war houses on the hill. Then all these newcomers will fade out fast enough.' While such an attitude is understandable, it is unrealistic and could provide only a partial solution to the problem." (Industrial Vancouver 1947 Economic Survey, 4).

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Director, Region IX
 Mr. Frank H. Grutsinger
 Director, Region IX
 Federal Public Housing Authority
 Seattle 1, Washington

Dear Sir,

"Project 45124 used old form in error and did not show **segregation of white and negro population**. This is a permanent project and **does not house colored families at any time.**"

Very truly yours,
 HOUSING AUTHORITY OF
 THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

Memo from the Vancouver Housing Authority (1944)

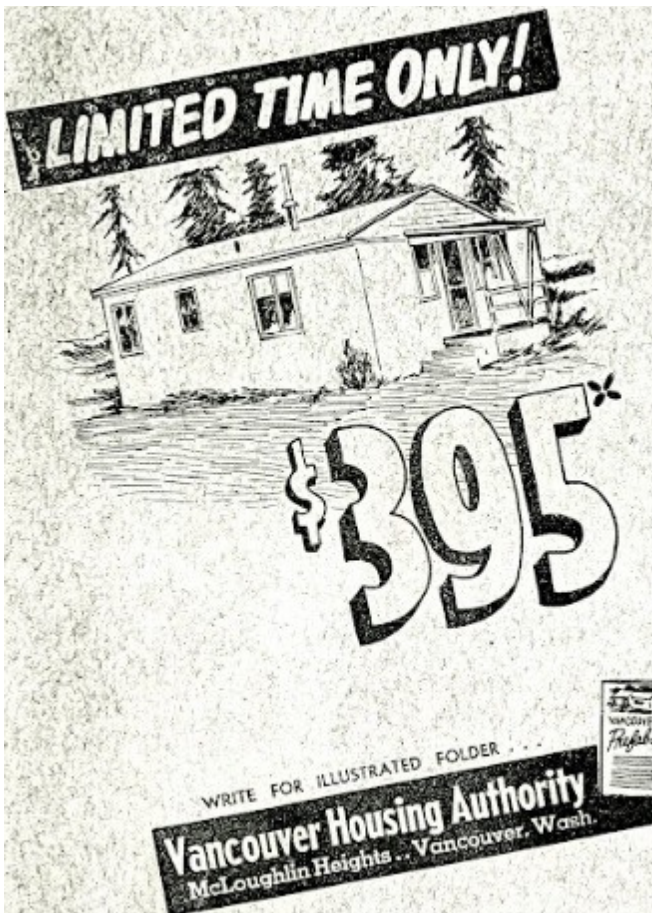
Private Housing

Black workers and families seeking housing had little choice outside of the VHA. Private housing complexes often included racial or economic covenants, barring sale to anyone who was not white. Racial covenants were declared unconstitutional in 1948 (Shelley v. Kraemer).

DEDICATION

We, the undersigned owners of the above described real estate, do hereby lay out and plat the same into streets and lots, as shown upon the annexed plat; said plat to be known as EDGEWOOD COURT, Clark County, Washington, according to the duly recorded plat thereof; and we hereby dedicate the said streets to the public use forever; but subject to the following restrictions and conditions which shall be considered covenants running with the land:

1. That for a period of 99 years from date of dedication none of said lots shall be sold, leased, subleased, rented or otherwise disposed of to any person not of the Caucasian race;



SUB-STANDARD houses were described as "affecting to some degree everyone in the community." Overcrowded conditions, lack of heat, light and sanitary facilities make such houses centers of contagion, centers of both juvenile and adult crime, and fire hazards, explained Mrs. Stokes. The consequences are borne by taxpayers at high cost.

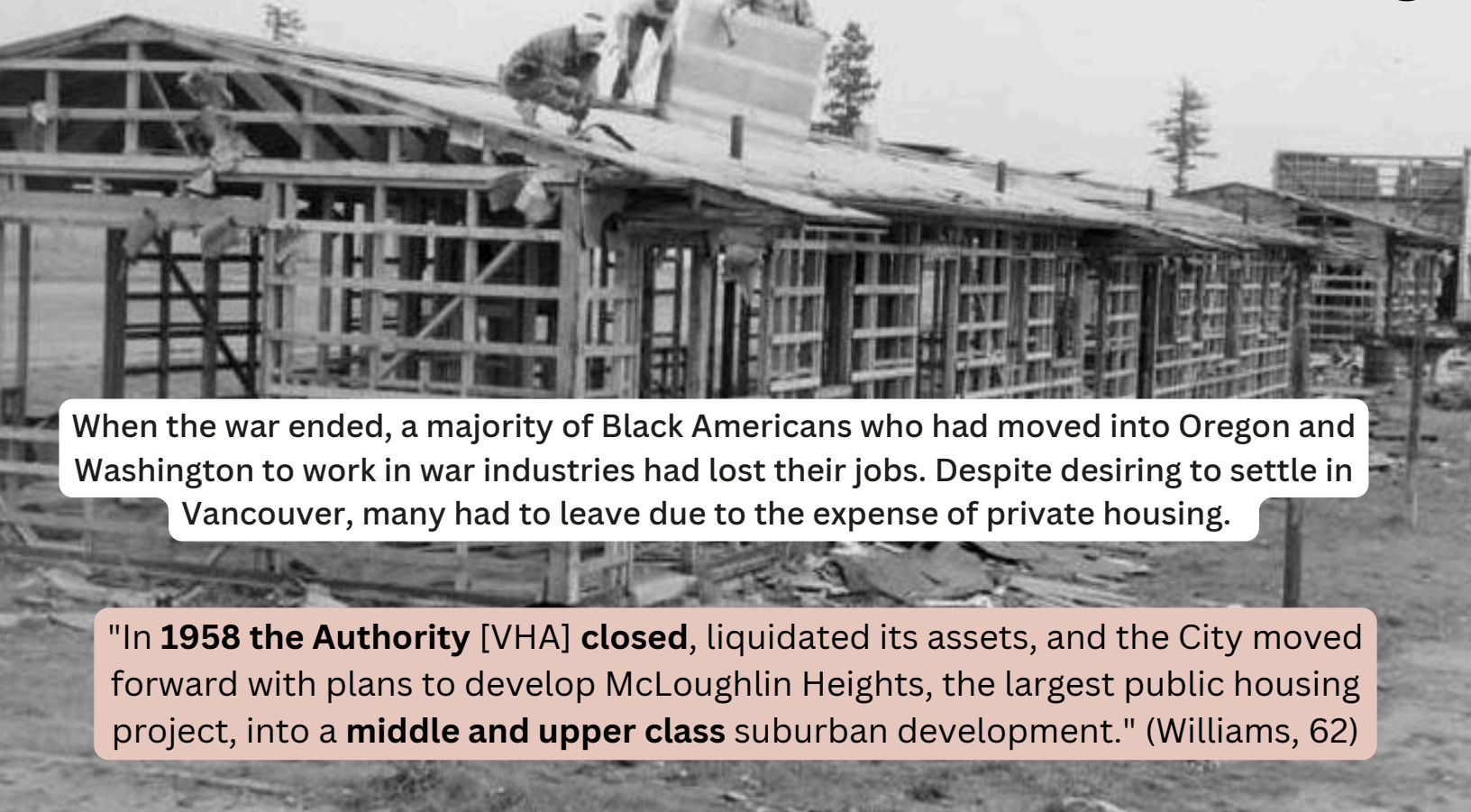
A survey of low-cost housing needs is much needed in Portland, she said, asserting that the league has requested the city to make such a survey. When our schools and our state institutions need funds badly, it isn't likely the legislature will provide any funds for a low-cost housing survey, she pointed out.

Oregon Journal, 1947

Dissolution of VHA housing

when the war ended...

There was a re-emergence of the traditional point of view of Congress that the government should not compete with private enterprise "In disposing said housing, consideration shall be given to its full market value and said housing or any part thereof shall not, unless specifically authorized by Congress, be converted to any public or private agency organized for slum clearance or to provide subsidized housing for persons of low income



When the war ended, a majority of Black Americans who had moved into Oregon and Washington to work in war industries had lost their jobs. Despite desiring to settle in Vancouver, many had to leave due to the expense of private housing.

"In **1958 the Authority [VHA] closed**, liquidated its assets, and the City moved forward with plans to develop McLoughlin Heights, the largest public housing project, into a **middle and upper class** suburban development." (Williams, 62)

McLoughlin Heights Tract Survives Shift From War

BY TONY BACON

Staff Correspondent, The Oregonian

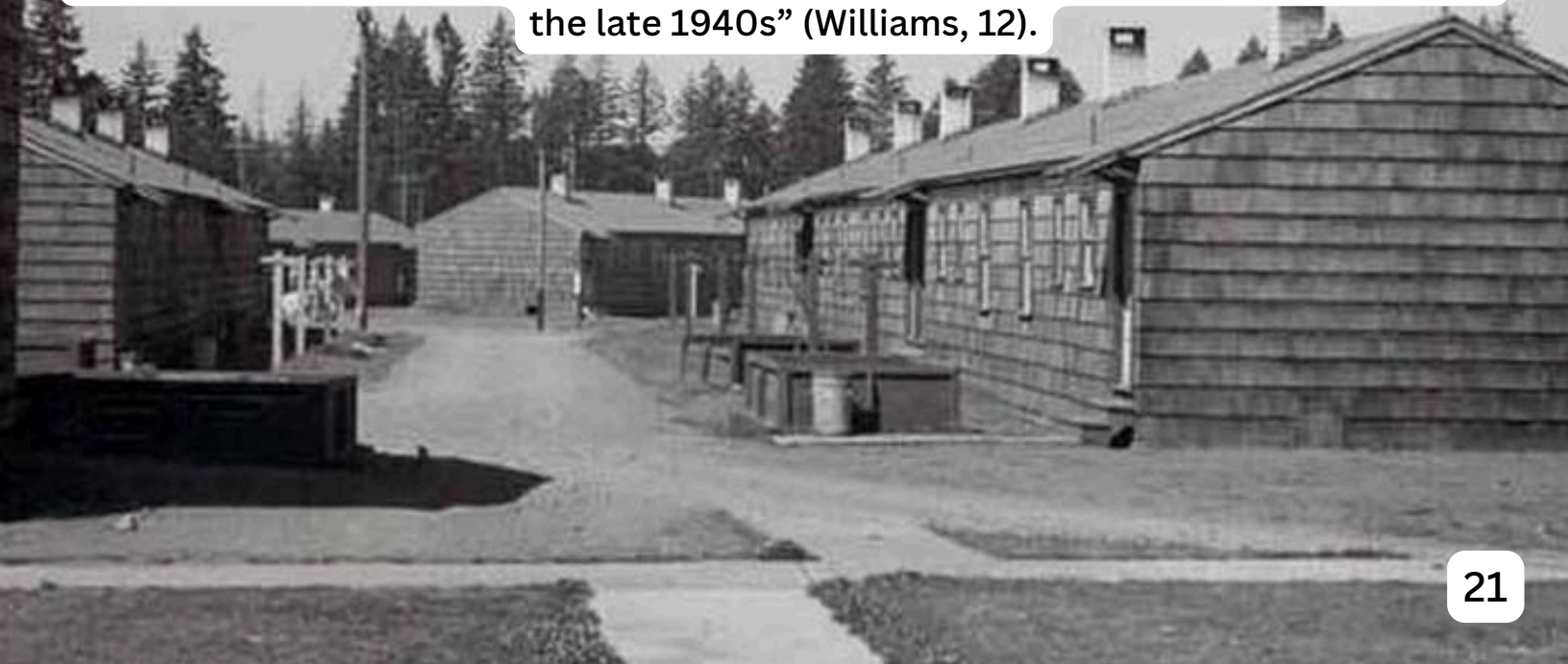
VANCOUVER, Wash. (Special)—McLoughlin Heights, Vancouver's war-time housing area boom community, is going through a renaissance, unique in the United States.

The 700-acre parcel of land, within city limits, is becoming the first planned community of its size in the nation.

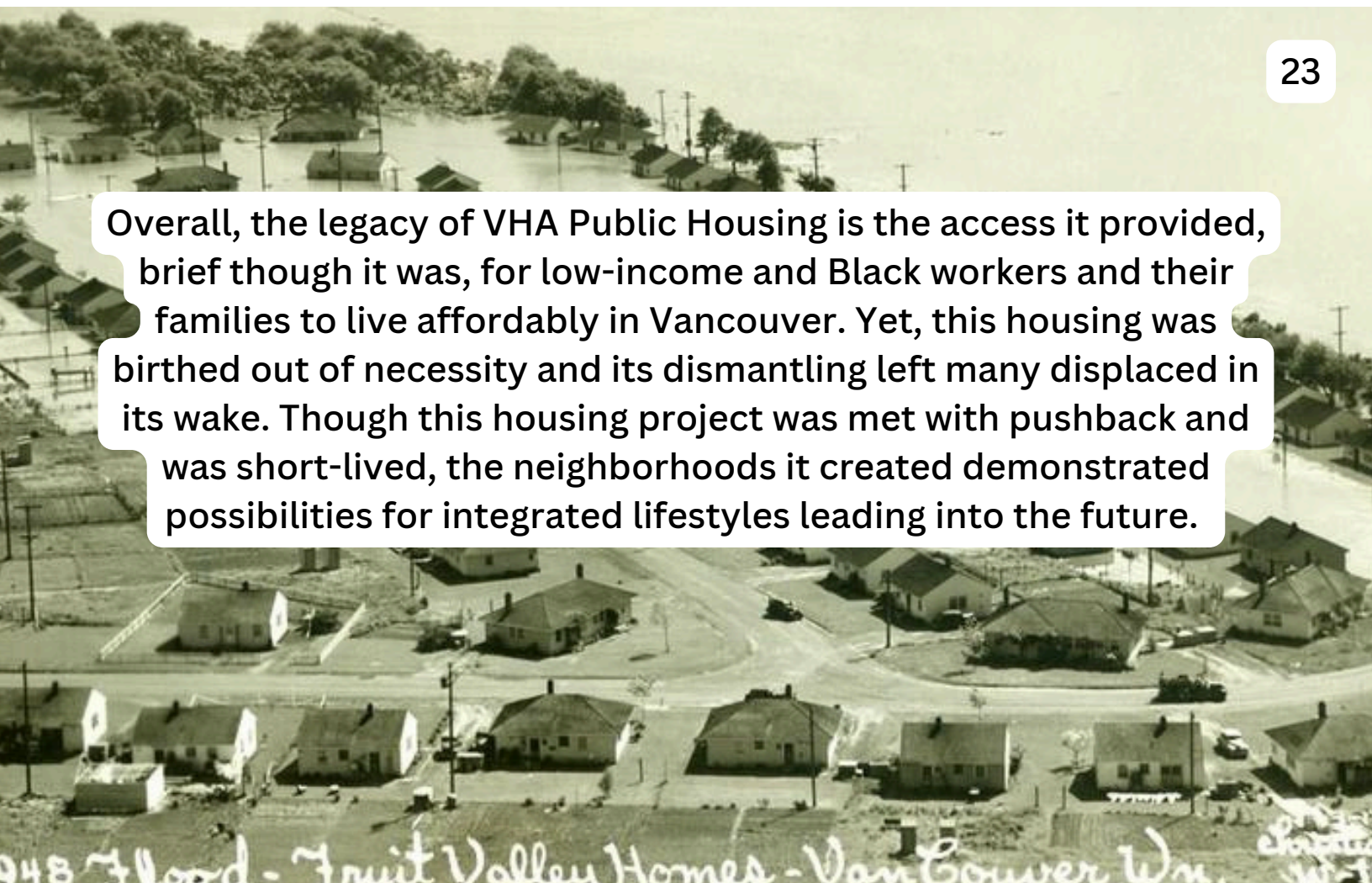
shopping areas and two minor shopping areas, a public use area for a library, post office and other public buildings and specialized church sites.

The church sites, to be sold on a highest-bidder basis are situated on corners of intersections to help prevent construction of gasoline stations on what are termed poor sites by planners.

“A disproportionate percentage of African Americans relied on the VHA for postwar shelter, as many lost their war industry jobs and their replacement jobs, on average, paid less than those of their white counterparts. Limited affordable private housing meant a substantial number of blacks would have benefited from access to low-rent homes in the 1950s, but the city chose not to provide them due – at least in part – to negative public response to proposed low income housing in the late 1940s” (Williams, 12).



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Overall, the legacy of VHA Public Housing is the access it provided, brief though it was, for low-income and Black workers and their families to live affordably in Vancouver. Yet, this housing was birthed out of necessity and its dismantling left many displaced in its wake. Though this housing project was met with pushback and was short-lived, the neighborhoods it created demonstrated possibilities for integrated lifestyles leading into the future.

1948 - 7th Road - Fruit Valley Homes - Vancouver Wn.

From Then to Now

The Fourth Plain Corridor has evolved into a diverse community with roots in many of these historic wartime housing developments. Today, this area is home to:

5 neighborhoods
23k+ Residents
150+ Local Businesses
10+ Languages Spoken

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Cover page background: "A Report to the Citizens of Vancouver", City Planning Commission (1945)

Newspaper Clipping: *The Columbian*, Vancouver, WA (Sept. 29, 1943)

World War II Shipyard industry image: Louis Vee, courtesy of Fort Vancouver NHS
WSU Vancouver Library- Digital Collections



Fourth Plain Forward is a non-profit organization working to strengthen the small businesses of Fourth Plain, create opportunities for residents, progress the community's safety and appearance, and promote inclusive developments.

Fourth Plain Forward has kicked off several events and festivals including the *Annual Fourth Plain Summer of Murals* and the *LCRG Multicultural Resource Festival*.

Learn more at: www.fourthplainforward.org

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Credits

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Portland State
History



CLARK COUNTY
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**FOURTH PLAIN
FORWARD**