Albina Mixer - Roles

Thelma Glover: I owned a house on North Commercial Street. Bought it in 1941. It was the first house I ever owned. I had it fixed up real nice, too—a new garage, a refinished basement. Then some white men showed up at my door in 1972 and told me that I'd have to sell my house and leave the neighborhood. I wasn't the only one. They told all the neighbors that we'd have to move. See they used what's called **the law of "eminent domain" to move all of the folks out of the neighborhood. They told us our houses were run down and "blighted." That's what they called it, "blighted." Like it was diseased or dying. Then they build something for the "greater good" of the community."** Here's how it happens, how a neighborhood disappears: First, banks refuse to give black homeowners loans to fix up their home, then the city comes in and says the homes are run down. Then the city tears down all of our houses and builds Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, the Memorial Coliseum and the school district office. They bulldozed 300 homes and businesses in the black community over by Williams and Vancouver Avenues. It's been 40 years and I still miss my neighborhood.

Mrs. Leo Warren: I created the **Emanuel Displaced Person's Association** in 1970 after the city forced the folks who lived in the Eliot neighborhood to move for the building of Legacy Emanuel Hospital, the Memorial Coliseum and Portland School District office. See the Portland Development Commission and the Housing Authority of Portland had been planning for all of this new development in the 1960's, but they never involved any of the community in the planning. Then the planners came knocking on our doors and told us we need to move out in 90 days. 90 days? "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?" I created the Emanuel Displaced Person's Association to make them give us a fair value for our homes. They offered a maximum of $15,000 to home owners and $4000 to renters. We got them to pay us what our homes were worth. But we still had to move.

Paul Knauls: I moved to Portland in 1963 to purchase the Cotton Club, a nightclub on Vancouver and Tillamook Avenues where African Americans settled after VanPort was destroyed by flooding. In a very short time, the Cotton Club became nationally known, being the place to be and be seen. On any given night you could walk in and hear some of the finest entertainment you would find anywhere in the U.S.A. Our local talent along with the talent we booked became nationally recognized artists. To name a few, Blues Singer Big Mamma Thirteen, The Whispers, Sundays Child with Ren Wood, Mel Brown and many others. Sammy Davis Jr., Joe Louis, Archie Moore, and many others visited often. Many of the black-owned businesses in my neighborhood were uprooted to make way for Interstate 5 and the Memorial Coliseum. The Cotton Club was part of a thriving area that include the Blue Ribbon Barbecue, Lew's Men's Shop, and the House of Fortune Cafe. All of that is gone now. All of that black history and black neighborhood was swept up in the building of the hospital, the Coliseum and freeways.
When I was growing up, Williams Avenue had doctors' offices, bike shops, grocery stores, churches, ice cream parlors, boutiques, salons, barber shops, night clubs, and restaurants. When I walk those streets, there "are too many ghosts… 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."

Ed Washington: I moved to Portland from Alabama in the 1940's. My family came to work in the Kaiser shipyards, like many African American families. We moved into VanPort, which was the 2nd largest city in Oregon at the time. It was a city built on the flood plains by the Expo Center and Delta Park, at the end of Denver Street. I used to go into the marshes and find frogs, build go carts, played baseball and roller skate with my friends—black and white—out there. I went to school in VanPort. The schools were integrated. We had our own school district and our own superintendent. VanPort had the first schools with African American teachers. When the housing authority wanted to segregate schools, the superintendent refused. He said, "These kids have gone through tremendous changes moving here. The schools will be a safe haven for these children. I want them all to have the best education possible. Segregation would not create that kind of environment."

Then the Memorial Day storm came and broke the dam. This was Portland's Hurricane Katrina. Memorial Day 1948. 18,000 shipyard workers and our families lost homes. Our family was resettled into the Albina area. I experienced a lot of racism in Portland. Not being hired because stores like Kienows or Kodak made it a policy not to hire blacks. **There were places that we couldn't live because of redlining, which means where real estate agents drew red lines around areas where people of color could and could not live.** We fought against all of those issues. Still do. I go back to Williams Street where I used to chase girls, and I don't even recognize it now. Where are the black people? They were pushed out for a second time.

Edna Pittman: My family was homeless after the flood and because we are black, we had a hard time finding a place to stay. **You see housing segregation was alive and well in Portland of the 1940s. And blacks recruited to work in the shipyards during the war found themselves limited in where they could live.** Even in Vanport, built to house the shipworkers, there were white areas and black areas, and some whites wouldn't live even on the edges of the black areas. The Kaiser Shipyards had recruited thousands of blacks to Portland to build Liberty ships. In 1940, the black population of Portland was about 2,500; six years later, it was estimated at about 15,000. When Vanport was flooded, white people were reluctant to allow black people to move into their neighborhoods. Although some white people offered blacks temporary places to stay, black citizens couldn't find permanent places of their own where they wanted: **There were restrictive covenants in the all-white "nice" neighborhoods. T This was called "redlining" — creating areas where groups people could and couldn't live based on their race.** The Portland Realty Board worked to confine blacks to Albina and the run-down areas of Northeast Portland, where they couldn't "negatively affect" property values. Property values were higher in all-white neighborhoods. After spending Memorial Day night in one of the many schools opened as shelters, my grandmother and my two siblings set out on the streets to find a place to stay. It was an exhausting process. We couldn't even find a room to rent. Our luck changed when we approached a cab stand of the only black-owned cab company in the area.

We stayed about a month with the Harts in their two-bedroom home. **Then we moved into a house on Northeast Lawrence, in an all-white neighborhood: My grandfather, Roosevelt Mitchell, had a fair-skinned black woman from the Urban League pose as a white woman and buy it for him.** The new house came with its own set of troubles. Our new neighbors didn't welcome us; I remember I could only play on the steps and sidewalk in front of my grandfather's house, as the neighbors didn't want black children playing in front of their property.

Willie Mae Hart: I broke a lot of barriers in my day. I became the first African American nurse at Physicians and Surgeons hospital. I owned the **Beacon Cab Company** of Portland, the first African American taxi company in the city. I let any black ride for free because of the flood. When I discovered the Pittmans needed a place to stay, I said: 'You don't have to look any farther. I'm going to open my house for you, and you are going to stay as long as you need to stay' "Blacks here opened their hearts and doors to Vanport victims...Many of them had money, but they could not have bought a home." And when Senator Kennedy came to town to campaign, I made sure he met the African Americans in the community.

Mrs. Willie Mae Ranson: I owned the Woodlawn Cleaners on Williams Avenue back in the day. There were many black-owned businesses on and around Williams Avenue. I remember the Fraternal Hall, Citizens Fountain Lunch Restaurant, Paradise Club, Scotty's Barbecue, Wallace Barbecue, where Doris' Café is today. Cotton Club was a popular dance club on Vancouver. Neighborhood Bill's Grocery Store made his own sausage. Johnson and Smith's record store was owned by two former railroad men. This was a vibrant community where African Americans were doctors, dentists, restaurant and dance club owners. Then came the Urban Renewal or "Negro Removal" was more like it. Over 3,000 members of our community were pushed out between 1960 and 1970. Most of these were black folks. The Portland Development Commission was given the power to promote industrial expansion and to remove "slums." We did not live in a slum. But we were moved to make way for the highway, the hospital, the memorial coliseum, Portland Pubic Schools office and the Fremont Bridge.

Karen Gibson: I am a professor of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University. I researched the history of Albina and wrote a book called *Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment*. The whole Albina "renewal" project was racial. "People paid taxes in Albina and what did they get for their taxes? Their homes and businesses torn down." **In 1956 area banks could legally deny loans to any Black customer who applied, making the NAACP Credit Union — one of the North Williams's lost storefronts — a particularly poignant marker.** "The whole thing has to do with race, and it has to do with real estate. White privilege means something. It means a difference in wealth and the fact that you could just come in and take over the boulevard. Because of the historic losses in this neighborhood, any current plans should cast a look backward at what happened to the African American Community, and then spend some time reading the plan they developed in 1993 for ideas about what should happen in their community. We need to examine new projects and allow more time for people to address institutionalized racism. "If it becomes a pivotal moment on racial inequality in the city, then right on....So what if it puts a stick in someone's bike spoke?"

Angel Bagley: I grew up in the neighborhood, played basketball at Jefferson, and when an injury put an end to my career as a basketball player, I became a barber. When I was growing up, my mother was a foster parent, and she didn't have money to take all of us kids to barber shops, so she handed me a pair of clippers and said, "Cut their hair." I cut hair when I was at Jefferson to make a little extra money. I opened Signature Cutz in 2007 on MLK. I installed new wood floors and hired two other barbers. I expanded to the adjacent storefront and built up a list of 60 regulars. I found out from the Oregonian and some of my customers that the guy who owns the building is selling it to a developer from Beaverton who's building a big apartment building. How can I afford to stay here?

Floyd Booker. I own the Courtesy Janitorial Service on Alberta Street. I'm one of the few black businesses left. You see everyone says, "Well, look Alberta Street was just run down, full of drug dealers and boarded up businesses. White folks came in and made this a thriving area again. We should all be thankful that there are new businesses." But what people don't realize is that black businesses wanted to move into those boarded up buildings, but they were unable to get bank loans or city grants. You want to look into why Alberta Street, Mississippi Avenue, Williams and Vancouver, MLK — everyone of the streets that used to have majority black businesses and you will find a stack of loans denied.

Donna Maxey: My family lost our home to the bulldozers of "urban renewal" back in 1961. I was only 12 years-old, but I still remembers every detail of that house – the pocket doors, the built-in china cupboards, the towering walnut trees in the yard. "I would dream about that house until I was in my 50s." It wasn't just the house that was lost, it was an entire neighborhood: the thriving African-American enclave of Albina, home to legendary jazz clubs and countless businesses, all within walking distance. No one locked their doors and everybody knew each other. "I liken it to *Ozzie and Harriet* meets *The Cosby Show*." In an overwhelmingly white state with an ugly history of discrimination against blacks, Albina was a haven of sorts. And then it was all destroyed to make way for interstate highways and a hospital expansion. I taught school in Portland, and I made sure that I always taught the history of this neighborhood and the history of redlining, which meant that blacks as well as other people of color were kept out of certain areas in Portlan

Michelle DePass: I was born in the Legacy Emanuel Hospital where a meeting about the current "revitalization" of N Williams was held recently to talk about the new bike lanes and new apartments, new grocery stores on Williams and Vancouver Avenues. I told those gathered in the room, "We have an issue of racism and of the history of this neighborhood. I think if we're trying to skirt around that we're not going to get very far. We really need to address some of the underlying, systemic issues that have happened over last 60 years. I've seen it happen from a front row seat in this neighborhood. It's going to be very difficult to move forward and do a plan that suits all of these stakeholders until we address the history that has happened. Until we address that history and…the cultural differences we have in terms of respect, we are not going to move very far."

Rudy Callier: They call me the "Sheriff of Russell Street." I lived on Russell Street from 1993-2007. From my perch on my "throne," my porch chair, I have watched gentrification work its way up and down Russell Street. I have watched most of my older, most of them black, neighbors move out - either through eviction or because they couldn't afford the property taxes anymore - and a new set of whiter residents has moved in across the street, into the row of gray and white condominiums with neatly manicured patches of grass. Now I am forced to leave as well because the owner of my home is selling the property. I received my 30-day eviction notice by mail July 18, 2007 and after having a neighbor read it to me because I'm blind due to glaucoma. "I feel like I'm just old garbage, set out on the curb. It's so frustrating and depressing." The private building owner, Bill Wainwright of Portland, told the Tribune: 'Rudy's been a good tenant. It has nothing to do with that. It's simply because the building is being sold.' Wainwright said he doesn't know what the new owner has in mind for the property. My home will be knocked down to make way for more condos. The market value of the 1912 building is $ 225,910.

Verdell Rutherford: My husband, Otto, and I were deeply involved in race issues in Portland for our entire lives. He was the President of the local NAACP for two terms in the 1950's. I was secretary of the NAACP for twenty years. We led the fight to outlaw discrimination in hotels, restaurants, hospitals and amusement parks. We used a hand-cranked mimeograph machine to copy thousands of letters to churches and organizations asking for their support. "Prior to the law's passage, African Americans were routinely banned from or segregated at many public places in Oregon, such as hospitals, hotels and amusement parks. Employment opportunities were limited to service jobs. Restaurants posted signs saying, 'We cater to white trade only.'…African Americans were not allowed to live in most Portland neighborhoods. In 1921, Otto's father bought the family home on Northeast Ninth and Shaver, then a white neighborhood, with the help of someone who could 'pass' for white." Our granddaughter, Amy Rutherford, graduated from Jefferson High School.

Regina Flowers: My friends and I walked over early that morning and the river was really, really high. I was 13 years old and living in Vanport with my family when the dike broke. "My brother came running home, screaming that the dike had broke," said Flowers. "My Mom threw some clothes and pictures in suitcases and we ran to higher ground, I looked back and saw the rushing waters." The river took nearly everything in Vanport. About 20,000 people lived in Vanport at the time of the flood. More than 40,000 people called Vanport home when shipyards along the Columbia were building liberty ships during World War II.
Homes, schools and entire recreation centers floated down river, even KGW's radio station tower was destroyed in the flood. The official government death toll was 15, but survivors believe it was much higher. "I saw people on rooftops," Flowers said. Some people said that dead people washed up on the shore down the Columbia for weeks after the flood.

Dr. Unthank: I was a doctor and civil rights activist who broke racial barriers in Oregon between 1930-1977. I was the only black member of the City Club. I was often barred from hospitals and excluded from medical societies because of race and my resistance. I protested the lack of public housing alternatives, which forced residents to live in substandard housing, and I criticized the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) for their hesitancy to build public housing in the face of a severe housing shortage for African Americans. But HAP and Portland Realtors, like their national counterparts, had two major reasons for refusing to integrate neighborhoods. First, they maintained that because, "Negroes depress property values," it was unethical to sell to them in a white neighborhood; and second, if they "sell to Negroes in white areas, their business will be hurt." I moved my family to the entirely white neighborhood of Westmoreland. Neighborhood representatives tried to convince me to move elsewhere and even offered me money ($700-$1500) to move away from Westmoreland. I refused and moved into the neighborhood. He and his family were the victims of broken windows, harassment, threatening phone calls, and general hostility. We had to move four times before we were able to settle down peacefully. Affordable housing for African Americans has been a key issues since this state was born. SEI now sits on the park built to honor my work.

Rosyln Hill: I have been called the Queen of Alberta Street. I grew up in Portland, graduated from Cleveland High School, then went to design school in San Antonio. I returned to Portland and saw the potential on Alberta Street. I put my design skills to work on the outside of buildings as well as the inside. "I like designing things," she says. I opened "Shades of Color" a coffee shop and small art gallery on Alberta at Northeast 14th in 1995, she didn't know it would be the start of a street renaissance. But along with Magnus Johannesson, the developer who initiated Last Thursday in 1997, and developer Eric Wentland, who renovated several properties along the street, I went on to buy and redesign several blocks, which now are street landmarks. "I bought the building where now Tin Shed (restaurant) is and I also bought the house on the corner of 16th and Alberta, the little red one," said Hill. "I built several buildings. I built the one where Imp is, the one where Fuel (cafe) is and the one where Mabel and Zora's (clothes store) is." Working with architects and infusing my artistic vision into every building I touched, I tried to create an environment that would attract pedestrians and appeal to artists. In my vision Alberta Street would become a multicultural arts area. "I think probably my one concern is that Alberta would stay diverse and maintain that diversity that that neighborhood has" she said. That is the responsibility of everyone who lives and works on the street, she says. Employers have to hire outside of their own groups and landlords have to seek out diverse tenants. "We all tend to mix with people who are more like us, so what happens is that when you do that you end up having an area that to all intents and purposes does rotate out certain people. I hope people in this neighborhood won't let that happen. Alberta is for all people."

The Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF): We are not a person, we are local African American leaders with significant professional experience in advocacy, social services, government affairs, fundraising, economic development, public education and health care. PAALF's primary goal is to enforce an action agenda that improves the health and well being of local African Americans. Its work addresses the unique and interrelated issues of poverty and disparities that challenge us as a community. We started in 2009. One of the issues we currently are working on is affordable housing for African Americans. We opposed the building of Trader Joes on MLK and Alberta. Our opposition is rooted in the well-documented and ongoing attempt to profit from development in inner N/NE Portland at the expense of Black and low-income individuals. Rather than invest in proven methods to stop displacement and empower the African American community, the Portland
Development Commission (PDC) and City of Portland have consistently supported projects that have displaced existing residents and attracted wealthier ones in their place. For example with Trader Joes, the city was preparing to sell the property on MLK and Alberta for $500,000. It was assessed at $2.9 million. This subsidy primarily benefitted the Roski family, one of the richest families in the country. It secondarily benefitted Traders Joes, a national corporation. It mandates no affordable housing and no job guarantees from Trader Joes. A new Trader Joes will increase the desirability of the neighborhood to nonoppressed populations, thereby increasing the economic pressures that are responsible for the displacement of low-income and Black residents. The choice to not provide family appropriate affordable housing above the proposed Trader Joes retail space is consistent with a long standing series of actions that between the 2000 and 2010 census displaced over 10,000 people out of Inner NE Portland.

Albina Mixer - Response Sheet

Name:

Read over your role. Were you involved in: VanPort? Albina "Urban Renewal" in the '60's and 70's? Contemporary gentrification? What are the issues you need to let others know about? Laws? Actions? Protests? **Please remember that these are real people whose lives you are sharing. Be respectful. Do not use accents. Write down key pieces about your role. See the terms below. You might be responsible for educating classmates about these terms.**

Interview at least **SIX** other characters. Find someone from: VanPort, Albina in 1960-1970, but also current gentrification. You also need to find out about the following terms or issues:

Redlining:

Eminent domain:

Protests:

Ways people got around redlining laws:

Names of businesses:

Loans to black business/homeowners

Intriguing details that will make a story more interesting.