

Re-imagining Portland Maine:
Urban Renaissance and the Refugee Community

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Re-imagining Portland, Maine: Urban Renaissance and the Refugee Community

“Change is the hallmark of American Society, as its cities and urban neighborhoods demonstrate” (Keating, 7).

The evening of April 25, 2009 saw a tragic scene in Portland, Maine. The events took place on Weymouth Street, a small and unassuming thoroughfare straddling the West End and Parkside neighborhoods—one a half-gentrified community of red brick town homes, Victorian duplexes and Shingle-Style houses, the other, part of the second largest White non-Hispanic ghetto in America. Lining either side of the street were rows of wood-frame triple-decker tenements and several-story apartment blocks that typified many dense, lower-income urban New England neighborhoods. A Latino Bodega abutted the upper corner by Congress Street, an edifice of Portland’s changing ethnic face. A 7:37 p.m. phone call to the Portland Police Department reported a seemingly intoxicated African-American man brandishing a firearm in the open street. The man described was David Okot of Portland, a 26 year-old Sudanese refugee who had come to America in his teens. When Police arrived on the scene they confronted Okot, who attempted to run into an adjacent apartment building. The officers pointed their service weapons at Okot and ordered him to show his hands. The official Police report indicated that Okot turned away from the officers, placed his hand under his shirt, drew a .22 caliber handgun from his waistband and pointed it at them. Officers Benjamin Roper and Joshua Wiseman fired a total of 16 rounds, most of which struck Okot. He died on the scene. Eyewitness accounts, however, claimed that Okot did not draw for or attempt to grab his gun in any

manner.¹ Despite the contested sequence of events that took place that evening, the result is unequivocally tragic—Okot lay slain, and an already deteriorating relationship between the Portland Police Department and the city’s Refugee community was further exacerbated. The discharging of firearms in the open street is a scene far more familiar to war-torn corners of Okot’s native Sudan than to Portland, Maine, a chic, progressive “citadel of blue America,” with one of the nation’s highest rates of residents with bachelors degrees (Conforti, 323). Unfortunately, it was merely the latest in a growing line of lethal altercations involving members of Portland’s refugee community, and would not be the last.²

In many ways, these shootings betray the idyllic Portland, the face the city extends towards the world—one of cultural and historic heritage, working class maritime New England charm, and an artsy destination replete with both independently owned businesses and a plethora of urban amenities. This is the ideal, but the reality of Portland is exceedingly complex. Its urban core is characterized by equal parts urban renaissance and urban dualism. It is perhaps more than symbolic that the David Okot shooting occurred at the border of Parkside and the West End, two communities that highlight competing visions of the “new” Portland. A portrait of contemporary Portland is encapsulated by the dissonance between its re-imagined self—the post-industrial success story of urban renaissance, and its lived self—the one experienced by its everyday citizens. Portland certainly envisions itself as a progressive, developing city. However,

¹ For further details concerning this incident, refer to MacQuerrie (2009).

² In introducing the concept of the refugee community, it is of paramount importance to understand that this terminology is by no means intended to construe this demographic as a monolithic block. Conversely, the most distinguishing characteristic of this population is its diversity. While certain patterns of settlement and spatial realities have materialized, it is important to recognize that attempting to consolidate such a vast array of cultures and experiences into a single “community” is ultimately self-defeating.

are “progress” and “development” measured in renaissance of the built environment, economic revival, or community development and social welfare? To better understand the intents and effects of urban development in Portland, we should take a page from the French philosopher Michel Foucault. He argues that examinations of power and justice, and in this case, urban planning, should not be “concerned with forms of power at their central locations, but rather with their forms of subjugation at the extremities, the peripheral loci...” (Hinkle, 50). Therefore, to learn anything about the normal is to examine its outlier. Examining the integration and experiences of the refugee community provides an index for the way in which Portland is re-imagining itself. The presence of the refugee community indicates the emergence of a new Portland, and it is imperative to study whether the city is embracing, navigating or truly providing for this future.

There has been virtually no scholarly literature documenting the socioeconomic and political integration of Portland’s refugee community, nor has there been any connecting the history of the built environment to the contemporary issues that they invariably affect. Several scholars including Wendy Cadge (2009), Ryan Allen (2006, 2007) and Vaishali Mangain (2003) have examined refugees in the context of Portland, but their perspectives have been limited to issues of political reception, or concerned with employment and wages respectively. John Bauman (2006) has chronicled the evisceration of the working-class Bayside neighborhood at the hands of urban renewal, but failed to connect this historical phenomena to the landscape that exists today and the subsequent paucity of affordable housing in surrounding areas. The bulk of available scholarly literature on Portland focuses on a three-decade process of renaissance and gentrification, but is either out of touch with the city’s contemporary situation (Fishman,

1980), or centers on the creation and spatial maintenance of the postindustrial, service sector economy (Lees, 2003; Knopp & Kujawa, 1993). The issues afflicting Portland's refugee community extend well beyond socioeconomics. As a demographic, their contemporary predicaments are inextricably linked to policy and planning decisions that preceded their arrival. Urban renewal and renaissance fostered a distinct economic framework of arts, culture and service-sector-led redevelopment in Portland. By combining statistics and scholarly literature with primary sources such as City Planning documents, newspaper articles and personal interviews, I seek to more thoroughly examine the experience of Portland's refugee community to assess how incorporated their needs and interests are into Portland's re-imagined, cosmopolitan identity.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines a narrative urban geography of contemporary Portland, familiarizing the reader with its current spatial and socioeconomic landscape. Chapter one then moves on to chronicle Portland's modern history, focusing on the city's urban renaissance in order to identify precisely how the city has re-imagined and reinvented itself to thrive in a service economy. This also sets the stage to understand the infrastructure of inheritance through which present day Portland is profoundly shaped. Chapter three focuses on the contemporary realities of Portland's refugee community, situating their experiences and desires within Portland's larger vision of renaissance, and examining the coalition of city and non-affiliated actors that strive to provide for them. In drawing conclusions, the relationship between Portland's re-imagined self and lived reality are framed in a comparative and neoliberal context. This examination of Portland's refugee community will ultimately frame a

constantly evolving phenomenon of urban development, capturing a moment of history as it unfolds.

Chapter I—Portland: An Urban Geography and Modern History

Traveling to Portland from either north or south, one invariably enters the city via the Interstate 295 freeway, which effectively bisects the city diagonally (see Appendix I).³ The first image that greets any visitor is the modest skyline of Portland's downtown, perched atop a ridge on the Machigonne peninsula, obscuring the extensive coastal views that lay beyond the Old Port on its other side. Commuters and tourists alike exit at Franklin Arterial, a ponderous, gashing thoroughfare—and product of urban renewal initiatives—that connects the freeway to Downtown, the Arts District and the Old Port, Portland's touted epicenters of urban renaissance. Portland's Downtown Central Business District runs along the corridor of Congress Street, the city's primary avenue.⁴ Downtown is dominated by mid and high-rise office towers, City Hall and its administrative branches. Venturing west along Congress Street, Downtown begins to blend seamlessly into the Arts District, a section of mixed use multi-story buildings, home to boutiques, coffee shops, restaurants, galleries and a variety of off-beat establishments that give Portland its quirky, cultured reputation.⁵ The Old Port, which extends downhill and onto the waterfront, is Portland's other economic motor, home to some five hundred firms and businesses, and the city's prime tourist destination.⁶ Originally a decrepit red light district of abandoned red-brick warehouses—relics of the city's maritime heritage—this area saw investment and initial revitalization in the 1960s from groups of young entrepreneurs.

³ Middle-class residential neighborhoods extend for miles to the north and west, eventually dissipating into outlying suburban and rural communities, while the urban core occupies the Machigonne peninsula, along the northern edge of which runs the freeway.

⁴ See Appendix II, Fig. 1.

⁵ See Appendix II, Fig. 2.

⁶ See Appendix II, Fig. 3-4.

Over subsequent decades development transformed it into both a mainstream consumer destination and prime location for swanky law offices and financial service firms.

A distinctive characteristic of Portland is its well-preserved architectural heritage, an aspect most conspicuously found in residential sections of its urban core, especially the West End. Home to the richest and most comprehensive range of housing stock in the city, this formerly working and lower-middle class area began seeing a heavy influx of gentrifying classes as early as the 1970s as the original destination for young urban professionals that were critical in engendering the city's urban renaissance. Certain sections near to the Western Promenade are typified by a variety of single- and two-family homes of predominantly Shingle-Style and Victorian architecture.⁷ Meandering through the West End's maze of angled streets towards Downtown and the Old Port, the urban fabric becomes denser, characterized by brick town houses, wooden tenements and multifamily apartment buildings hugging the sidewalk.⁸ Perched at the opposite end of the Machigonne peninsula is the East End and Munjoy Hill. The urban fabric is uniformly dense, comprised almost exclusively of wooden structures, primarily three and two-unit multifamily houses punctuated by Triple-Decker tenements.⁹ The neighborhood's architecture reflects the local vernacular: boxy, upright buildings with tall, pitched roofs set on miniscule lots. Its tight network of narrow streets evoke a cozy and communal atmosphere, which open up at various points to grand vistas. Its comparatively modest housing stock has rendered it a perennial frontier of gentrification as opposed to an epicenter like the West End. Just as Downtown, the Arts District and Old Port provide spaces for the "cultured" leisure and artist classes to consume, the East

⁷ See Appendix II, Fig. 5.

⁸ See Appendix II, Fig. 6.

⁹ See Appendix II, Fig. 7

and West Ends increasingly provide a “cultured,” edgy place to live. All of these areas comprise the idyllic Portland of cultural heritage, urban renaissance and postindustrial success. In the shadow of Downtown’s high rises and the elevated vistas of the East and West Ends lays the other side of Portland’s urban dualism.

Portland’s three most chronically impoverished neighborhoods, Parkside, Bayside and East Bayside, slope down the north face of the peninsular ridge away from downtown towards Interstate 295—the literal and figurative “backside” of the city. Commuters and tourists overlook these areas as slums and eyesores, as they pass through to Downtown and the Old Port via Franklin Arterial. Parkside occupies the western portion of the slope, separated from the West End by Congress Street. Parkside is characterized by extreme density, a factor of its ubiquitous tenements and three-to-five story apartment buildings.¹⁰ Bayside directly abuts Downtown, flowing down the ridge towards Interstate 295. This formerly a dense, vibrant working-class community was eviscerated by urban renewal. For decades it remained a desolate, visually depressing wasteland of decrepit housing interspersed throughout parking lots, light-industrial facilities and scrap-yards.¹¹ Due to its proximity to both Downtown and the highway, today Bayside is the latest locus of urban regeneration. Several new mixed-rate housing developments have been constructed, as have pockets of higher-end commercial establishments including both a Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s. Bayside forms the centerpiece of City Hall’s future redevelopment plans. East Bayside was severed from its western counterpart by the construction of Franklin Arterial, and sits at the basin of Munjoy Hill. East Bayside’s defining characteristic is its concentration of public housing,

¹⁰ See Appendix II, Fig. 8-9.

¹¹ See Appendix II, Fig. 10.

namely Kennedy Park, a sprawling, two hundred unit housing project.¹² As of 1994, Parkside, Bayside and East Bayside comprised the second largest White non-Hispanic ghetto in the United States, second only to South Boston.¹³ In 2000, these neighborhoods had poverty rates of 27%, 39% and 35% respectively.¹⁴ Former Mayor and City Councilman Nathan Smith states that “there’s a whole other side to the city, with families of two, three, four, or five people that are living on far less than 30,000 dollars. It’s scary,” (Smith). Beyond socioeconomic dichotomy, however, there is still another layer of complexity to Portland’s “other side”.

Hailing a cab from one of the Old Port’s hotels to Portland International Jetport, a visitor would likely find their driver from Somalia, and attendees at one of the airport’s shops or cafes to be of Sudanese or Ethiopian origin. Portland’s contemporary urban fabric has been supplemented and reconfigured by approximately 10,000 refugees hailing from a variety of nations. Given its rapid increase in numbers, to a visitor, this demographic would appear conspicuously absent from much of the landscape of the idyllic Portland—the Portland represented by the cobblestone streets and boutiques of the Old Port or the art galleries and lofts of Downtown and the Arts District. However, to anyone living in virtually any peninsular neighborhood or attending a Portland public school where some 53 languages are widely spoken, the presence of the refugee community is impossible not to notice. A resident of East Bayside—now the most diverse census tract in the state—would find over one-third of their neighbors to be foreign born, while similar figures apply for Parkside and sections of the East and West Ends.

¹² See Appendix II, Fig. 11.

¹³ For reference as well as full and detailed report, refer to Whitman (2003).

¹⁴ This compares to a citywide poverty rate of 14.1%. For both figures refer to City of Portland 2005-2010 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan, page 24.

Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services (CCMRIS) has been responsible for settling thousands of primary migrants—refugees for whom Portland is their first destination—beginning as early as the 1970s and 1980s. The earliest waves hailed from Southeast Asia, Cuba, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics, while more recently from war torn and politically unstable regions of Africa and the Middle East, namely Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda/Burundi, Iraq and Afghanistan (Cadge et al, 9). According to Vaishali Mamgain (2003), as of 2003 CCMRIS was settling an average of 200-250 primary migrant refugees in Portland per year (113), a figure that has been complemented by an explosion of secondary migrants within the last decade.¹⁵ Both primary and secondary migrant refugees choose Portland for the same reasons—the city’s small size and safety make it an ideal place to raise children, and its extensive welfare and social service infrastructure help their transition to life in America.¹⁶ Portland is considered a prime destination for refugees, reflected in the fact that in 2000 it had the seventh highest ratio in the nation of refugees as a percent of its recently arrived foreign-born population (Singer, 21).¹⁷ However, because no official census has taken place since 2000, and there exists no uniform database for documenting both primary and secondary migrant refugees to Portland, the total numbers of the current community are imprecise. Research by Cadge (2009) and Mamgain (2003) estimate this

¹⁵ The Department of Refugee Services, the city agency responsible for assisting and stabilizing secondary migrants, has acquired 2,992 clients since 2004. This indicates that a minimum of nearly three thousand secondary migrant refugees have settled in Portland over the last five years. In 2007 alone, the city received 668 new secondary migrants, a number that translates to over 1% of the city’s total population (City of Portland, “Refugee Services Program Year End Report FY 2009”).

¹⁶ For reference, refer to Ali (2010), Ngoal (2010), Nyhan (2009), Suru (2010), Phillips (2010) and Valenzuela (2010). Research by Singer (2006) illuminates that nationwide, secondary migrants most often relocate for these same reasons, such as community climate and better welfare benefits or training opportunities (10).

¹⁷ For reference and further information on Portland’s status as a refugee-friendly city, refer to Ali (2010), Cadge (2009), Smith (2010) and Valenzuela (2010).

figure to be over 10,000 people, roughly one-sixth of the city's total population. Their presence is most strongly felt in the city's public schools, with enrollment in English as a Learned Language programs exceeding twenty-five percent of the total student body (Valenzuela). The Portland to which these refugees have arrived has been quick to embrace this newfound diversity, but is also a city facing crucial challenges.

The depletion of Portland's housing stock during urban renewal and the astronomical increase in real estate value brought on by decades of gentrification has left a problematic legacy for the city today. Housing scarcities and real estate bubbles seem to be cyclically characteristic of Portland since 1975, but population growth has continually outpaced construction of new housing, leading to a particularly acute property crisis by the mid 2000s.¹⁸ The majority of housing units in Portland are rental (58%), but these are disproportionately concentrated on the peninsula.¹⁹ Refugees, who invariably arrive in Portland with little financial means and glaring needs, are by default relegated to these peninsular neighborhoods where rental housing is more abundant. Given their economic circumstances upon arrival, homeownership for this demographic would be virtually out of the question.²⁰ Affording an average rent for a two-bedroom apartment would necessitate earnings of over \$17.00 per hour, but the average service and retail job in Greater Portland—virtually the only sector available to refugee workers who often

¹⁸ Between 1990 and 2000 the city gained over 1,500 new households, but constructed less than 1,000 new housing units, driving the vacancy rate to .5% for homeownership and 3.6% for rental units (a healthy vacancy rate is considered to be 1% and 5% respectively)(City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*). Director of the Portland Housing Authority Mark Adelson asserts that over the subsequent five to eight years the vacancy rate for rentals as well fell close to 0% (Adelson).

¹⁹ Downtown, Parkside, Bayside, and large portions of the East and West Ends boast rental housing rates of over 80% (City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*).

²⁰ By 2003, a Portland household earning the median income of \$38,951 could afford a home costing no more than \$106,185, but the median home price had skyrocketed to \$190,000 creating a gap in affordability of a staggering \$83,185 (City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*).

possess limited English proficiency—pays less than \$10.00 per hour.²¹ Subsequently, one of the most common situations for refugees is to be housed in one of Portland Housing Authority’s (PHA) public and subsidized units.²² These complexes, like rental housing, are disproportionately found in peninsular neighborhoods, with especially high concentrations of units in East Bayside and the West and East Ends. Meanwhile, properties in the very same neighborhoods are selling for upwards of one million dollars.²³ This indicates the increasingly polarized nature of Portland’s socioeconomics—as the city is experiencing an influx of retirees, young urban professionals and creative types that stoke the demand for what they see as relatively inexpensive, urban market rate housing, it is simultaneously home to a growing a refugee demographic in need of affordable and subsidized housing. Even more problematic, these two general groups are jockeying for space in the exact same peninsular neighborhoods, each drawn, albeit for different reasons, by the benefits that an urban housing stock offers. Portland’s modern reality is clearly complex and at times contradictory, presenting difficult terrain for the refugee community to navigate, with or without an array of city-provisioned services. This socioeconomic geography does not exist in an ahistorical vacuum. The urban landscape of the present is indelibly shaped by prior policy decisions and dramatic shifts in the local economy. In order to understand present-day struggles over renaissance, Portland’s new social landscape necessitates an examination of how Portland’s contemporary map emerged.

²¹ Statistics drawn from the Maine Department of Labor and can be found in *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*, courtesy of the City of Portland.

²² Refugee households occupy 60%-70% of all PHA tenants (Adelson).

²³ According to Keller Williams Realty, multiple single family homes in the East and West Ends were listed at over \$1,000,000, with one such property in each respective neighborhood selling for a whopping \$2,400,000. Even in Parkside, townhouses were selling in excess of \$900,000.

A Modern History

“Both renewal and renaissance are reactions and remedies to a similar set of ills and trends in American economics and culture,”
(Fishman,53).

De-Industrialization

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution redefined the American cityscape.²⁴ Factories and sites of manufacturing, the largest concentrations of capital, formed the economic backbone and became the centerpiece of virtually every urban area.²⁵ Portland’s trajectory, however, was slightly different due mainly to its relatively unique coastal geography. While much of Maine’s early industries had developed around textiles and lumber, Portland relied heavily on maritime economies such as trade and shipbuilding. As its name would suggest, Portland’s port was historically its most important asset, bringing the city ample prosperity well into the first decades of the twentieth century.²⁶ By the great depression, however, its prominence had

²⁴ Urban studies scholars Anthony Orum and Xiangming Chen argue that “one of the inescapable facts about the nature of the modern city is how much its character has been shaped by the emergence and development of modern capitalism.” Celebrated American Sociologist Charles Tilly likewise asserts that “the very emergence of the city in the modern west has been decisively shaped by the formation of capital,” (Orum and Chen, 64).

²⁵ This necessitated the clustering of worker and working-class accommodations in the near vicinity. As industrialization accelerated, environmental quality inversely degraded, as smokestacks spewed pollutants into the air, and cramped tenement conditions became the breeding ground for epidemics. At this point America’s cities were teeming with immigrants from all parts of Europe, increasing labor surpluses, adding unprecedented cultural texture to urban environs, but also, in many cases, sparking xenophobic sentiments amongst more established populations. Thus, wealthier classes began migrating towards the peripheral and outlying areas of cities, spurred by transportation developments such as street cars and elevated trains, mirroring trends of decentralization that would follow half a century later. For further elaboration on the history and demographic patterns of the American industrial city, refer to Orum and Chen (2003).

²⁶ In 1823, Portland had the largest commercial fleet in the East Coast. As of 1918, it had 37 working waterfront piers, of which only a fraction exist today (Rice, McCracken). World War I temporarily bolstered Portland’s already thriving shipbuilding industry, and high volumes of timber and grain exports contributed to the city’s economic prosperity during this period. Both working wages and quality of life in Portland were considered to be “absolutely fabulous,” (Barry). Two major infrastructural developments were completed between 1915 and 1925, including the Million Dollar Bridge (1916), the first bridge across the Fore River to South Portland, and the Maine State Pier (1923), a wharf complex that allowed for improved volumes of commercial traffic (Barry, 18).

all but diminished.²⁷ During the 1930s the economy faltered, with trade and coastal shipping attempting to carry the city on its last legs, both of which effectively ceased by 1934 and 1941 respectively. Nevertheless, Portland's built environment reflected the former economic dominance of its port, with tight networks of working class housing and tenements concentrated in peninsular neighborhoods close to the waterfront such as Bayside, Parkside and the East and West Ends.

World War II fostered significant growth in many American cities.²⁸ Manufacturing intensified, elevating industrial cities such as Detroit to veritable boomtowns or, in wartime parlance, "arsenals of democracy," (Sugrue). World War II surprisingly favored the increasingly provincial Portland by temporarily reviving its stagnant shipbuilding industry. Due to its sheltered location and geographic position (closest American city to Europe), the armed forces ranked Portland the most important port in the continental United States, and the Navy selected it to be the site of one of its principal naval bases, becoming the headquarters for the Atlantic destroyer fleet (Conforti, 280-1). Defense spending increased fourfold while local shipyards received

²⁷ Several trends and events are accountable for this. The switch to more sophisticated shipbuilding technologies such as steel and steam power, rendered Maine-built wooden schooners obsolete (Colgan, 4). Secondly, Portland for decades had filled a critical trading niche as Montreal's winter port, but as the Grand Trunk Railway—the first extension of which ran between these two cities—was nationalized in 1923, this role was transferred northeast to the Canadian cities of Halifax, Nova Scotia and St. John, New Brunswick (Barry, 19). With newly imposed tariffs in place, Canadian importers could no longer afford to route trade through Portland, despite the success of the Maine State Pier (Barry). Portland also found itself having to compete with larger coastal ports further south on the Atlantic seaboard (Conforti, 275). Exacerbating the situation, the growing strength and solidarity of Longshoreman unions pressured ports to consolidate shipping at larger seaports in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, thereby removing small ports like Portland from the competitive picture (Fishman, 42). By the onset of the Great Depression, Canada-bound exports had all but disappeared from the city's waterfront. Portland's maritime economy, its former base, had effectively withered, and the city experienced little economic and demographic growth until World War II (Conforti, 275).

²⁸ As affluent white families were relocating outside of cities, there was a significant urban influx of poor and unskilled laborers due mainly to the depression, the dustbowl (which effectively ended small-scale farming in many states), and work opportunities for the war effort. For more information and reference on wartime migration patterns to northern industrial centers, refer to Sugrue (2005).

millions of dollars worth of defense contracts, the net effect of which created over forty thousand new jobs.²⁹ Employment opportunities exhausted existing skilled and semi-skilled labor, resulting in significant in-migration from rural areas and other states.³⁰ A 1943 report of migration patterns in wartime boomtowns placed Portland as one of the top-eight arsenals of democracy along with Detroit, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Wichita, Mobile, Los Angeles and Atlanta (Bruner, 39). Such demographic change affected an expansion of the built environment. As tenement and dwelling space in the urban core of Portland reached capacity, construction of housing began to extend further off-peninsula and accelerated in suburban communities (Conforti, 284). As the war ended, however, the shipyards closed and large-scale manufacturing all but terminated in the Portland area.

Industry had begun the process of relocating south and westward as early as 1930, a phenomenon that would ultimately devastate the cities of the North, Northeast and New England. Portland's temporary prosperity surrounding wartime manufacturing was short lived. As Jonathan Fishman notes, industry had "traditionally been limited in its locational flexibility by problems of transportation," (Fishman, 54). Dependence on rail and water for the transportation of goods confined industry to the central city, within close proximity to railroad hubs and port facilities.³¹ Mechanization and technical

²⁹ Conforti argues that federal spending on defense, not federal government aid to cities and towns ended the Great Depression. Defense spending on Maine increased from \$130,000,000 to \$500,000,000 between 1940 and 1941 (the majority of which was funneled to Portland), both reducing unemployment and raising personal income to record levels. Bath Iron Works, a major shipyard in Bath, Maine received a \$50,000,000 dollar defense contract from the British government to construct thirty cargo vessels at a site on the Fore river corridor, bringing five-thousand well-paying jobs to the Portland area. Almost immediately, the U.S. Maritime Commission signed a \$100,000,000 contract to build a second shipyard nearby on a nearby site. Employment with Bath Iron Works reached 30,000 persons, and additional defense contracts created some 15,000 jobs with other plants in the area (Conforti, 281-282).

³⁰ The population of Portland's core areas swelled 11% between 1940 and 1950 (Conforti, 283).

³¹ Industrial facilities had been further centralized by their necessity to locate within the proximity of their labor force, whose working-class neighborhoods were traditionally found in the inner city. For further elaboration, refer to Fishman (1980) pages 54-56.

innovations such as the assembly line method of factory production and the shift to the “palletization of goods in warehousing,” required long, single-level plants, rendering the traditional multi-storied industrial building obsolete (Fishman, 54). For the obvious reasons of acquiring the necessary land, rebuilding on the existing site was rarely an economically viable option. Furthermore, labor forces had become increasingly unionized and militant. Locating factories within volatile and politicized working class neighborhoods³² became increasingly unappealing, and corporations sought to insulate themselves in peripheral communities. Under the precepts of technological determinism—holding that technological innovation determines the outcome of society—automation fueled the decentralization of industry, first to suburban locations, then further to entirely different regions of the nation.³³ Thus began the process of capital increasingly freeing itself from labor, eviscerating the dynamic relationship that had indelibly shaped urban politics and morphology for nearly a century. Union activity was less pronounced in Portland than other major industrial centers, and automation had a less intense effect on the city’s manufacturing base. The latter of these was due largely to the fact that beyond shipbuilding—which had effectively ceased—Portland’s manufacturing base was inconsequentially small to begin with. Portland’s wartime industrial lifeblood flowed from external sources, and had dried up by 1945, necessitating a transitional economy.

The Post-War Era and Urban Renewal in Portland

³² The influx of African American laborers during the Great Migration (approximately 1880-1930) exacerbated racial and ethnic tensions, which often boiled over, leading to horrific episodes of violence and backlash, not to mention a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. For reference and elaboration refer to Sugrue (2005).

³³ The rise of mechanized labor over human labor effectively neutralized collective labor, with which, for corporations, friction had been mounting considerably for decades. For reference and elaboration refer to Sugrue (2005).

The most conspicuous edifice of urban renewal in Portland—Franklin Arterial—is also one of its most consistently utilized. Stretching from Interstate 295 into Downtown and the Old Port, this hulking thoroughfare cut mercilessly through large swaths of working class housing, and effectively destroyed Portland’s thriving Little Italy.³⁴ This is significant in that it indelibly altered the city’s built environment and ushered in a new ethos and era in transportation planning. Completed in 1967, its construction trailed processes of urban renewal in America by nearly two decades, and speaks volumes about the nature of how Portland re-structured itself during this crucial and formative period in the nation’s modern urban history (Smith).

Following its surge during World War II, Portland’s economy suffered through consecutive decades of severe decline, ushering in what historian Bill Barry terms “the city’s Dark Age,” (Barry). As Portland’s shipbuilding industry effectively terminated, the business communities that had relied on the wartime consumer base rapidly disappeared. Barry asserts that with “virtually no economic base to prop up the city,” people left the city and metropolitan region in droves (Barry). By 1960 the waterfront was all but abandoned, and the only edifices of Downtown commercial activity were a handful of local banks, struggling wholesalers and light manufacturing firms (Barry). With Portland dying before its own eyes, City Hall decided to move forward with a drastic plan of action: urban renewal initiatives.

³⁴ For more information about Franklin Arterial’s construction, refer to Bauman (2006), Smith (2010) and Barry (2010).

For other American Frostbelt³⁵ cities, the post-war decades were similarly characterized by decay and disinvestment, followed by overhauls of slum clearance and urban renewal in an attempt to revitalize failing urban cores. In most cases, these efforts ultimately proved deleterious, resulting in alienating cityscapes characterized by extreme concentrations of racial isolation and poverty. However, despite several initiatives, urban renewal on such an utterly devastating scale managed to spare Portland.³⁶ Clearly, it did not pass the city by altogether and several peninsular areas suffered damage to their housing stock and urban fabric, reverberations of which can be felt by both low income and gentrifying classes in the city today.

The post-war era marked the federal subsidization of industrial and residential decentralization, fueling a dramatically decentralized economic geography.³⁷ With their industrial base almost completely eviscerated, the cities of the northeast shifted increasingly to centers of administrative and corporate functions. With suburban locales posing considerable competition for the location of these burgeoning sectors, central-city private and administrative interests vied for the revitalization of downtown areas. Several factors minimized the destructive effects of urban renewal in Portland. One was that redevelopment and renewal in Portland trailed other major metropolitan areas by decades.

While high modernist zealots were utilizing federal programs to dramatically reconfigure

³⁵ The term “Frostbelt” refers to cities of the Northeast and Midwest United States that suffered heavily from processes of de-industrialization following World War II. For reference and more information, refer to Orum and Chen (2003).

³⁶ Perspectives vary significantly concerning the detriment of what measures were ultimately implemented, but the comparatively impeccable preservation of the city’s built environment should serve as a testament to this statement.

³⁷ Parallel plant policies, encouraging the relocation of major industrial facilities out of central cities had already accelerated the decentralization set in motion by automation. Homeownership was subsidized by the federal government, especially for returning G.I.’s, giving middle and working class families unprecedented access to private property ownership. The National Highway and Defense act of 1956 established the construction of the interstate highway system, making suburban and peripheral living exponentially more feasible. For reference and further information on the federal subsidization of decentralization, refer to Sugrue (2005).

cityscapes,³⁸ Portland's built environment remained comparatively untouched, devoid of such intense overhauls. Larger industrial manufacturing centers produced built environments predicated on divisions of labor and maximizing economic growth, but Portland's maritime-oriented economic-historical trajectory created a densely urban, slightly haphazard pattern of growth. Working-class housing in Portland was clustered in areas closest to the waterfront, and consisted of tenements and other high-density, generally substandard multifamily buildings.³⁹ Rather than "than being fired up by visions of Corbusian modernity,"⁴⁰ early interests in renewal were focused on this "moldering eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century housing stock," (Bauman, 331). Planning scholar John Bauman notes that in Portland "race never existed as a critical variable... it was, in fact, the epitome of a Yankee New England city," (Bauman, 330). In many larger, heterogeneous cities, the presence of racial "others" proved extremely volatile and polarizing, leading to a series of policy decisions that permanently inscribed

³⁸ The Federal Housing acts of 1949 and 1956 were targeted at the processes of slum clearance and urban renewal, also enacting the establishment of large-scale public housing to relocate displaced residents. Inner city residents often lived on centrally located, desirable plots of land that were deemed slum conditions, thus justifying their relocation. Sometimes entire neighborhoods were leveled in the name of eminent domain, and the land was subsequently sold to developers or utilized for the construction of highways to facilitate suburban commuting and transportation linkages to the wider metropolitan area. For reference and further information concerning urban renewal, slum clearance and federal housing policy, see Hirsch & Mohl (1993).

³⁹ The influx of World War II shipbuilders resulted in the further subdivision of tenement housing as well as infill construction to provide for the surging population, much of which was concentrated in the Bayside neighborhood. See Bauman (2006).

⁴⁰ Architects and planners during the era of urban renewal looked to the father of modernism, Le Corbusier for their direction and inspiration. His principles, as outlined in his manifesto, *Urbanisme*, called for the destruction of the traditional city center and its reconstruction in the modernist ideal, emphasizing light, air, open spaces, straight lines (as well as rational, geometric forms), and, most importantly, the presence of freeways. As Jonathan Fishman succinctly notes, "Corbusier was a Neo-Platonist, extolling the virtues of pure geometry as the means towards a more civilized ends," (Fishman, 58). Thus, the prominent morphology for public housing that emerged was the quintessential "tower-in-the-park" model of large, high-rises centered in green spaces, the vestiges of which are ubiquitous in northern cities, and the disastrous failures of which are unanimously accepted.

social and ethnic divisions across the metropolitan terrain.⁴¹ The absence of pro-growth coalitions further delayed the heavy hand of urban renewal in Portland, as the overwhelming majority of Downtown's former economic base had left the city.⁴² Without substantial racial divides and few Downtown development interests, Portland's cityscape remained relatively unaltered during the 1940s and 50s, a period of extensive destruction in other northern and northeastern cities.

Reiterating Barry's statement, the 1940s and 1950s were Portland's "Dark Ages," indicating that the absence of large-scale changes to the built environment was not a factor of economic stability, but instead quite the opposite (Barry). Portland "simply shriveled," and people fled the city in droves, believing there to be nothing left to resuscitate (Barry).⁴³ While many out-migrants left the metropolitan region altogether, some moved to surrounding suburban areas. Several Downtown commercial establishments immediately followed suit, relocating to the newly opened Maine Mall in South Portland.⁴⁴ With no economic lifeblood, the Old Port and waterfront areas were effectively abandoned, and many of its large, derelict warehouses became occupied by

⁴¹ For details concerning racially exclusionary policies such as racial zoning, restricted covenants, and redlining practices administered by the Homeowners Loan Corporation, refer to Sugrue (2006), Self (2003) and Hirsch & Mohl (1993).

⁴² In many cities, renewal projects were often implemented by public-private partnerships headed by heavy-handed planners such as Robert Moses. Pro-growth coalitions pursued private interests to resurrect the economic viability of downtowns, as opposed to producing a more livable environment for inner-city residents. For more on Robert Moses, pro-growth coalitions and urban renewal, refer to Berman (1983).

⁴³ Between 1950-1970 the city lost 16% of its population (Munroe, 50). However, this data is based on census records. William Barry illuminates that due the transient nature of the wartime population and constant turnover of people in the Naval Forces, Portland's population during the 1940's may have been as high as 100,000 as opposed 75,000 as was officially recorded (Barry). Thus, a decline of 16% is not fully indicative of the scale of out-migration.

⁴⁴ This includes Sears and Woolworth's, Portland's largest department stores and staples the Downtown retail economy. Shaw's and A&P, the city's two major in-town supermarkets, similarly relocated to South Portland (Barry). For reference and more information concerning Portland's economy between 1950 and 1970, refer to Barry (2010) and Barry (1982).

homeless squatters (Barry). Civic leaders, fearing further collapse, moved forward aggressively with plans for revitalization.

The first initiative came from the private sector in 1961 with the destruction of the historic Union Station—an important terminus for over a dozen railroad lines—to make way for a shopping center. This also marked the symbolic shift to an economy that favored automobile-centric development. The majority of Downtown’s former businesses and light-manufacturing had moved to several newly established peripheral Industrial Parks or the suburbs altogether (Barry).⁴⁵ The Dunlap Corporation, the only insurance agency in Maine that provided coverage for construction projects, was the largest and most notable firm to remain at its central Congress Street location.⁴⁶ In 1967, mayor Joe Menario hired renowned development planner Victor Gruen to assess and provide a renewal plan for Portland’s downtown, a decision that Dunlap helped leverage. The overarching goal of the initiative was to create ring roads encircling downtown, extend Interstate 295 along the northern fringe of the peninsula, and cut wide, multi-lane access arterials through existing parts of Bayside, the East and West Ends. According to Gruen, the practical objective was to open Downtown, Portland’s stagnant economic locus, to a wider consumer market and better connect it to the metropolitan region.⁴⁷ The opening of downtown was literal as well as metaphorical—the central business district lay encased in a maze of nineteenth century street patterns and a peninsular housing stock of which

⁴⁵ According to Barry, Downtown and the Old Port had been home to a number of small non-durable goods manufacturers (Barry). In 1951, products included shoes, tin cans, canned foods, fertilizers, rubber stamps and potato chips (Thoman, 351).

⁴⁶ For reference and further information concerning firms in Downtown Portland during the 1960s, refer to Barry (2010).

⁴⁷ For further elaboration, see Downtown Portland, Maine General Renewal Plan, courtesy of the City of Portland.

nearly 30% was deemed substandard.⁴⁸ Bauman laments that Bayside, the most immediately adjacent neighborhood to Downtown, was all but eviscerated, destroying in the process a working class community and intact network of low-income, multifamily housing. Franklin Arterial was the most imposing, readily visible vestige of the Gruen plan. This ponderous, pedestrian-unfriendly thoroughfare all but annihilated the center of Portland's thriving Little Italy.⁴⁹ Despite these negative aspects, former mayor Joe Menario stated that by directly connecting the CBD to Interstate 295, the Arterial's "contribution to the economic health of downtown Portland was equivalent to a successful quadruple bypass on a patient dying from clogged arteries," (Bell). An equivalent project, the Spring Street Arterial, was undertaken in the West End, connecting downtown to State and High Streets, two principle North-South thoroughfares that effectively link Interstate 295 to South Portland, Portland's largest suburban community. It too was a massive, four-lane, automobile-favoring access road whose construction resulted in the demolition of several blocks of housing. Opposition from the fledgling preservation group Greater Portland Landmarks halted the Arterial's construction short of its intended endpoint by three blocks. Still, Portland's Director of Historic Preservation Scott Hanson laments that in the four blocks that fell to the thoroughfare, the city lost "a veritable three dimensional museum of American architectural styles," dating from the late colonial period until 1900 in the name of

⁴⁸ For further elaboration, see Downtown Portland, Maine General Renewal Plan, courtesy of the City of Portland.

⁴⁹ Fishman describes Franklin Arterial as "a textbook example of the kinds of linear death valleys that were imposed on so many American cities in the 1950's and 60's—a concrete swath cutting indiscriminately through the city, with a vast, inhuman scale that seems appropriate only to cars, not pedestrians. The only thing it has achieved is the creation of a strong boundary where there previously was none." To traverse Franklin arterial is "to cross through a zone where the patterns and rhythms of urban fabric are temporarily suspended," (Fishman, 47).

eminent domain (Hanson). Ironically, these properties would have been astronomical in value today.

Federal urban renewal funds initiated the construction of large swaths of public housing in the East and West Ends. While Bayside was certainly the most explicit target of slum clearance, the majority of the East and West Ends' residents at the time were of lower income demographics, making the neighborhoods prime locations as well (Hanson). Initial Public Housing development accelerated over the decades, with most units concentrated in these peninsular areas. Similar funds erected the Reiche Community center in the West End, the construction of which also destroyed several blocks of multifamily housing. Though the Reiche facility provided playgrounds and fields for recreation (as well as a community pool), and, in some ways the centerpiece of the neighborhood, it's difficult to discern if these benefits outweigh what was lost. Smith laments that beyond the tangible housing units, slum clearance and renewal projects in the peninsula undermined the potential for organically developed mixed-use communities to emerge by altering the existing urban fabric. He states that "had renewal not come around, we may have had thriving commercial and residential neighborhoods similar to Georgetown in Washington D.C." (Smith). Photographs of Bayside's former Little Italy reveal that a charming network of multifamily houses clustered around tree-lined, cobblestone streets once stood where Franklin Arterial is today (see Appendix III).

While urban renewal may not have disastrously and irrevocably altered the cityscape and built environment in the vein of other cities, it left problematic legacies that became increasingly apparent towards the turn of the twenty-first century. Urban renewal activity in Portland between 1961 and 1972 effectively destroyed 2,800 units of housing,

the vast majority of which were affordable, and managed during that period to replace only 539 (Bauman, 348). According to Bauman, Bayside alone suffered a net loss of 1,148 units (Bauman, 348). Could it be a coincidence that thirty years later Portland began to suffer an affordable housing crisis as vacancy rates fell below one percent in the early 2000s? Former mayor and city councilman Nathan Smith believes that these actions are certainly correlated. After all, the city experienced a decline in population from approximately 75,000 to 64,000 between 1960 and 2000 (Smith). Regardless of gentrification and the emergence of an upscale housing market towards the end of the century, the destruction of affordable housing stock meant that sizable numbers of lower income residents would be forced to live elsewhere, potentially in other municipalities. The influx of thousands of refugees in the 1990s and 2000s exacerbated this predicament. Director of the Portland Housing Authority Mark Adelson concurs with Smith, but illuminates that such a relationship between urban housing renewal and a housing shortage is complex and not necessarily directly correlated; he cites that many substandard units that were demolished may have been too decrepit and shoddily built to retrofit with modern infrastructure today (Adelson). Nevertheless, the fact that federally funded programs ultimately targeted more dilapidated, low-income housing and left much of the Victorian and Federal stock preserved left an immediate legacy of who specifically was able to inherit the city. With much of Downtown and the embryonic Old Port left intact, as well as the majority of the West and East Ends, Portland became “prime breeding ground for the successor to cataclysmic urban renewal,”—renaissance (Fishman, 60). Portland’s historic and affordable housing stock presented a goldmine for young professional classes, setting in motion the process of gentrification.

Urban Renaissance

“When you say cities are having a renaissance, it’s true and that’s a good word because the other renaissance in Europe involved a very minute portion of the population... and while it’s not as dramatic as back then, it’s the same kind of thing: a very small proportion of the population is taking advantage of this new renaissance, while things for the rest of people are getting worse...” –Former Maine Congressman Tom Andrews during an interview with Jonathan Fishman (Fishman, 103-104).

The cultural and political rebellions of the 1960’s would ultimately usher in the rise of a generation of highly educated—and often professionally driven—upper middle class whites, determined to eschew the suburban lifestyle of their parents. For a substantial portion of this career-focused demographic, there was a strong disincentive to have children at earlier ages. Thus, they were even less inclined to invest in a family-friendly home with a yard in a quiet, suburban locale. The past thirty to forty years have seen successive waves of young professionals return to the city, fueling what is termed “urban renaissance.” This phenomenon certainly precipitated and facilitated the incipient phase of widespread gentrification, especially in eastern Frostbelt cities, which, in spite of extensive urban renewal, still possessed a substantial portion of their historical housing stock. Similar public-private partnerships that had bulldozed major swaths of their cities only a few decades before, began to immediately capitalize on these young professionals as a potential source for urban salvation.

As economic geographers Lawrence Knopp and Richard Kujawa (1993) elucidate, the “gentrification of transitional neighborhoods... was presented as an urban reawakening, while the request for government assistance from residents of distressed neighborhoods was characterized as impractical, selfish and regressive... it was argued that they too would ultimately share in the benefits of... revitalization,” (116). Some of

the most successful development projects during this period focused on regenerating derelict waterfronts and marketplaces. Three of the most acclaimed examples were Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall in Boston, South Street Seaport in New York City and the Inner Harbor/Harbor Place in Baltimore. Urban geography scholar Loretta Lees asserts that since the 1970s and 1980s:

“Schemes to attract the wealthy middle classes back to the inner-city have become central to urban redevelopment strategies. Such development programmes depend on a form of liberal romanticism and associated beliefs about the connections between diversity, vitality and urban space... They are driven by the belief that the decline of once vibrant inner-cities was precipitated by the post-war flight of the middle classes to secluded suburban enclaves and that to reverse urban decline it is necessary to entice the middle classes back to the city centres so as to make them more diverse, interesting and economically vibrant places,” (Lees, 613).

Fetishizing, marketing and catering to a romanticized notion of diversity and urbanity results in a Disneyland notion of urban space as opposed to a functioning cityscape.

Quincy Market, for example, while regarded as a prototype for successful urban regeneration projects, is nothing more than an outdoor shopping mall, a perversion of a heterogeneous urban commercial and market district. Such environments are carefully controlled so as to attract the demographics that can afford to enjoy these upscale consumption centers. By emphasizing high-end culture and consumption practices, these spaces inherently become socially exclusive.

It is paradoxical that the ethos of urban renaissance “promotes cultural diversity at the same time as promoting forms of conspicuous consumption and social control that limit diversity,” (Lees, 614). It is as if neoliberal interests managed to capitalize on and simultaneously undermine the egalitarian intentions of the gentrifying class, engendering instead a perverted version of Jacobean ideals of urban fabric. The urban renaissance managed to facilitate the transition to a postindustrial service economy instead of creating

a more vibrant, functioning and inclusive city. While Portland certainly capitalized on its urban renaissance by investing in its built environment, cultural resources and service economy, it attempted to distinguish itself by maintaining a “small-city” ethos of civic engagement (Smith). Examining the experience of the refugee community will illuminate whether Portland simply used this philosophy of cultural celebration and embedded liberalism as another selling point to strengthen its identity as a distinct center for leisure and consumption.

The Renaissance in Portland Pre-1980: The Incipient Stages

The same forces that fostered urban renaissance in larger cities affected Portland, but, as with urban renewal, the circumstances surrounding this process rendered Portland’s experience slightly different. The initial wave of gentrifying émigrés gravitated to Portland because of its affordability, small size and human scale, lifestyle opportunities, and proximity to nature, as opposed to more cosmopolitan parallels.⁵⁰ Thus, from the onset of this urban in-migration, these gentrifying demographics largely held a different ideal in mind than those that would have likely moved into Jane Jacob’s Greenwich Village community in New York City. Uncannily mirroring the phenomenon of urban renewal, urban regeneration in Portland bucked the wider national trend in its incipient stages, only to turn to more mainstream practices a few decades later. As Conforti highlights, “commercial prosperity and geography endowed Portland with assets that acquired new value in postindustrial economy: a scenic coastal location, maritime heritage, and distinctive built environment,” (Conforti, 322). The convergence of these

⁵⁰ Conforti (2005) describes this local variation as an urban counterpart to the back-to-the-land movement who “shunned the fast pace of large metropolitan areas not for rural life but for cities where life could be lived on a more human scale,” (317).

three qualities is most apparent in the Old Port, Portland's contemporary economic motor and center of consumption.

The development of the Old Port began in an exceedingly different manner than areas such as Quincy Market or South Street Seaport, which, undoubtedly, it would draw comparisons with today. Initially, the Old Port was a derelict, redlined, warehouse district, and its earliest entrepreneurs were not able to acquire loans to acquire property and establish their businesses. Left to themselves by the city, a variety of small independent shops thrived on the bottom floors of these warehouses, while their upper stories were utilized as loft and studio space.⁵¹ In this manner, the initial impetus spurring urban regeneration began as a low-level movement that preceded postindustrial regenerative planning techniques.

A collusion of private interests, however, caught on to the restoration taking place in the Old Port, and banks lifted their redlining policies, clearing the way for large commercial development that was antithetical to the pattern that had previously flourished. The original economic dynamic was irrevocably shifted overnight as warehouses were purchased wholesale. In these buildings, "upper floors were no longer left to be used as studio space, but became swank professional space for consulting firms and lawyers. Rehabilitation became a business in itself, and financed by investments of this scale, the necessary return forced rents upward," (Fishman, 89). Since this period, coalitions of independent business owners have fought doggedly to prevent the Old Port from becoming an outdoor mall, with mixed results. Portland's Old Port is widely known today for its comparative array of non-chain retailers and restaurants, but virtually every

⁵¹ For further detailed accounts surrounding early entrepreneurs in the Old Port, See Fishman (1980) Pages 83-86 and Barry (2010).

establishment caters to more upscale consumer preferences, and independent boutiques rub shoulders with Starbucks and Coldstone. While the proliferation of a handful of chain restaurants is both a minimal and extremely recent phenomenon, it is incontrovertible that private and city interests capitalized upon and commodified the construction of an off-beat, “independent” identity that had its roots in a fading commercial tradition. This fundamental change in the Old Port “announced the city’s transformation into a postindustrial place offering an array of services and venues for leisure, consumption and the arts,” but sadly displaced the unique, invaluable urban environment whose spirit it strived to capture (Conforti, 322). To put it colloquially, the city sold its soul to acquire the type of commodity that would allow it to thrive in the postindustrial economy.

Portland’s regeneration and revitalization spread to adjacent peninsular neighborhoods. Portland’s housing market became an asset valuable enough to rival the transformations occurring in the Old Port. Even during the incipient stages of urban renaissance in Portland, the West End was experiencing vigorous gentrification, prompting Fishman to assert in 1980 that the neighborhood would undoubtedly become homogenously elite within a few years.

This assertion ultimately had a more complex reality. By the turn of the century, the West End experienced heavy gentrification, yet there still remains a large native and blue-collar community, as well as a sizable population of refugees. Clearly unable to see the future, however, scholars such as Fishman focused on displacement of native populations as the most imminent and volatile issue surrounding the urban renaissance. He scathingly remarks that “low income neighborhoods are no longer assumed by public ownership through eminent domain, rather it is private investors and speculators who are

grabbing property, raising rents or delivering eviction notices... what is happening in the renaissance is not entirely different from what happened during the renewal with respect to the poor and lower-income people, it is only the methods and processing that have changed,” (Fishman, 97). Conveying the gravity of this issue to the populations most likely to be effected is a complicated task. As future Maine Congressman Tom Andrews (then a community organizer in Portland) stated in an interview with Fishman, “you don’t mention displacement to the poor... that’s a privileged and elite concept. You talk to them, rather, about jobs and rents and the costs of living,” (Fishman, 104).⁵² While predating the arrival of refugees for nearly three decades, these same incompatibilities of urban renaissance and low-income demographics demonstrate how the urban frontiers of gentrification result in contested notions of lived experience.

The Renaissance in Portland 1980-2000: Commodification of Place

Over the following two decades, trends in professional class in-migration continued unfettered, as did the full transition to a quintessentially postindustrial economy. By 1990, Portland had become an upscale financial and legal services center, finding a niche as a provider of back office functions for Boston-based firms, including Fleet Bank and Bank of Boston (Stein). By 2000, 9% of Portland’s jobs were in the FIRE (Finance, Insurance and Real Estate) industries, the highest percentage in the state and one of the highest in all of New England (Lees, 616).⁵³

⁵² Rephrasing the concept of displacement into more colloquial terms would not detract from its pertinence. Mean rent increased 300% between 1970 and 1980, the vacancy rate fell from 4.2% to 1.5%, and the cost of shelter rose from 50% to 75% of family income (Knopp & Kujawa, 120).

⁵³ The amount of class-A office space doubled between 1980 and 1990, with 1,000,000 square feet constructed between during the three-year period from 1985-1988 (Lees, 616). Three new office buildings alone in the Central Business District contributed some 500,000 square feet to this figure (Knopp & Kujawa, 118).

The gentrification that began in the 1970s ignited what became “one of the hottest real estate markets in the country,” by 1986 (Knopp & Kujawa, 118). Following a three-fold increase in mean rental costs during the 1970s, prices continued to escalate, doubling over the following decade, leading to an acute affordable housing crisis in thirteen of Portland’s fourteen census tracts (Knopp & Kujawa, 120).⁵⁴ Knopp and Kujawa assert that “central to the reinvestment process in Portland was the city’s commodification as a place. Its livability was frequently touted as its greatest asset, in spite of the unevenly distributed social costs associated with this development,” (Knopp & Kujawa, 122). Portland was changing from a sleepy seaside city ripe for gentrification to a more widely known lifestyle destination replete—for the first time in decades—with a burgeoning economy.⁵⁵ The city experienced an economic downturn in 1988 that halted the FIRE and construction industries in their tracks.⁵⁶ Portland managed to rebound over the following decade by investing in a new set of assets that would best serve it in a postindustrial economy.

As Sharon Zukin illuminates, “culture is more and more the business of cities,” (Zukin, 2). In this context, “culture” is an abstract concept that can be qualitatively inherent to a specific location by virtue of its history, customs and built environment.

⁵⁴ Homeownership saw similar problems. The median home price rose 108% during the 1970s (from \$20,000 to \$41,000) with mortgage payments sustaining a 236% increase (Knopp & Kujawa, 120). Between 1983 and 1989 this figure grew another 131% (from \$49,000 to \$113,000), while per capita incomes increased only 35% (Knopp & Kujawa, 122).

⁵⁵ Stein (2003) indicates that until the late 1980s a combination of local banks such as Bank of Maine, and Boston-based banks such as Fleet Bank were an instrumental component of the FIRE industries. Their lending activities largely fueled the real estate boom (Knopp & Kujawa, 120-122).

⁵⁶ This was largely precipitated by the closure of two of Maine’s largest banks, Portland-based Maine Savings Bank and Maine National Bank, a subsidiary of Boston-based Bank of New England. Ironically, both collapses were due to bad and defaulted real estate loans associated with Portland’s construction boom. These closures alone accounted for the loss of more than 1,000 jobs in the greater Portland area. For reference, see New York Times: “Woman Uses Wealth to Ease Maine’s Bank Woes (1992). Vacancy rates in Downtown office space climbed to a record high of 23% within three years (Diesenhouse). For further details concerning the effects of the 1988 economic downturn on property values and the service sector, see Knopp & Kujawa (1993).

However, in a postindustrial and increasingly consumer-driven economy, culture can also be cultivated if nourished by strategic investment. Holding Zukin's mantra to be true, Portland developed a business strategy that would make the city itself a proverbial *Fortune 500* company.⁵⁷ The 1990's marked a slight shift in Portland's ethos of renaissance. The city had effectively transformed from a quaint, livable haven for gentrifying young professionals into a service-sector boomtown that had temporarily gone bust. Portland was now poised to re-imagine and re-invent itself as a truly cosmopolitan destination, and, subsequently, jumpstart its economy. At the center of this reinvestment strategy was this notion of cultivating culture by targeting arts and entertainment institutions to stabilize the faltering—but established—FIRE industries.

Philanthropist Elizabeth Noyce—local matron and heiress to the Intel Corporation microchip empire—was instrumental in this process, almost single-handedly laying the foundation for the 1995 creation of the Arts District through astronomical amounts of investment and donations.⁵⁸ Two of her largest recipients were the Portland Museum of Art and the Maine Historical Society, two of the Arts Districts cultural anchors. Noyce's investments were vital in establishing the Portland Public Market, purchasing the Downtown property for \$13 million and supplying much of the \$9.4 million needed for construction (Rimer).⁵⁹ The Portland Public Market was nationally acclaimed, earning Portland the Downtown Achievement Merit Award from the International Downtown Association for “its demonstration of how philanthropy, small business and government

⁵⁷ Intriguingly, this metaphor is ultimately appropriate. In 2009 Portland was named the nation's most livable city by Forbes Magazine. For more information, refer to O'Malley-Greenberg (2009).

⁵⁸ Mrs. Noyce passed away in 1996, at which point she had donated \$75 million to Portland charities and institutions alone (cultural or otherwise), including the Portland Museum of Art, the University of Maine, and Maine Medical Center (Rimer).

⁵⁹ Noyce's vision was to create a farmer's market and retail space that would attract arts groups by making rents below market (Diesenhouse).

can create a forward-looking commercial enterprise,” (Lees, 618). By once again re-inventing its identity, Portland and its Downtown areas—Downtown, the Old Port and the freshly minted Arts District—experienced a decade-long period of prosperity. By 2000, these areas were home to over 500 businesses “from law firms to trendy boutiques and some of the best restaurants north of Boston,” as well as one of Maine’s most visited tourist attractions (Lees, 618).

Portland has remained relatively unique in that its regenerative strategy relied neither on tax payer-financed public works projects, nor on large-scale retail development projects akin to Quincy Market, South Street Seaport or the Inner Harbor (the Portland Public Market, despite catering to higher-end tastes, was anchored by an actual farmer’s market). As Lees states, “urban development in Portland has largely been market led and dependent upon individual entrepreneurial energy rather than large scale government initiatives... Rather than directing the redevelopment of downtown Portland, the City has been in the position of trying to steer, through the planning process, and capitalize on, through it’s place-marketing efforts, a commercially led and substantially grassroots process of entertainment-led reinvestment,” (Lees, 620). Phrases such as “individual entrepreneurial energy,” and “grassroots,” as contrasted to “large-scale government initiatives” infer that Portland’s “anybody-could-do-it” model for regeneration is prototypical, but not every city has their Elizabeth Noyce.

Beyond investing in arts, entertainment and cultural venues, Portland carried its philosophy of creating cosmopolitanism over into its city planning documents, where concepts of diversity, livability and urban vitality took center stage as the explicit key to

its next phase of regeneration.⁶⁰ Portland’s City Plan during this period espouses both a “Downtown for People—where people of all ages and all socio-economic groups find an exciting, friendly and compassionate atmosphere,” and a “Downtown for Opportunity’—where a bustling office and retail economy combines with a thriving and diverse cultural, entertainment, and visitor economy to provide a prosperity shared by the whole community,” (City of Portland, *Downtown Vision*, 4). These two approaches conveniently aligned a series of interests and ideas that are “not necessarily compatible,” but “rhetorically powerful,” (Lees, 621). Did this process indeed foster the win-win scenario for small entrepreneurs, corporate interests, arts, culture and the citizenry that City Hall touted? As Lees astutely notes, diversity “promises different things to different people,” and delivering on these promises proves exceedingly difficult (Lees, 621). The relatively conspicuous absence of the refugee community from both the commercial and consumer atmosphere of Downtown and the Old Port indicates that perhaps the city either overlooked the actual diversity of its citizenry when making that promise, or simply played favorites. A more reasonable explanation is none of the above—the forces that drove this renaissance were in place well before the refugee influx had reached critical mass.

In a matter of decades, Portland managed to ascend from an economically stagnant, provincial backwater to America’s most livable city and hottest real estate market, epicenter of urban renaissance, and renowned cultural destination. Had the city

⁶⁰ According to Lees, diversity assumed “an almost iconic status in the City of Portland Plan and other city planning documents,” during the late 1990s and early twenty first century. The city’s now outdated two-page draft housing plan “manages to invoke ‘diversity’ five times to describe four different dimensions of urban life: its ‘diverse job opportunities [. . .] [including] diverse coastal commerce activities’; the ‘amenities and services of a big city [...] diverse arts, cultural, and education offerings’; a ‘vibrant downtown [. . .] due to its interwoven mix of residential commercial, institutional, and cultural land uses’; a ‘diverse citizenry’ and a ‘culturally and ethnically diverse community that values its shared history, is proud of its cultural diversity and is working together for a cohesive community,’” (Lees, 620-621).

forgotten its modest, working-class roots and become an agglomeration of overeducated, self-ascribed “progressives” living in restored Victorian homes, perched smugly atop scenic vistas overlooking the Atlantic?⁶¹ The answer to this rhetorical question is an unequivocal no, for this would be a statistical impossibility for a city with a median income less than that of its own state, one of the poorest in the nation.⁶² Instead, these phases of Portland’s urban renaissance marked a series of deliberate decisions on the city’s part to re-invent and market itself in a very specific manner that would continually allow it to thrive in a constantly evolving postindustrial, service- and consumption-based economy. However, the most contemporary evolution of this ethos touts the cosmopolitan values of diversity, tolerance and culture as inextricable from Portland’s projected, re-imagined self. Examining the relationship between Portland and its refugee community will determine whether this cosmopolitanism and “celebration of diversity” is an empty gesture. If so, then Portland may have become figuratively schizophrenic, unable to distinguish between its re-imagined self and the reality of a New Portland taking shape in its streets, its public schools where over 50 languages are spoken, its neighborhoods, houses and housing projects alike—this is the actual arrival of the diversity the city is supposedly so eager to celebrate.

⁶¹ Referring to the fact that Portland has one of the highest rates of citizens holding a Bachelor’s Degree in the United States and is considered “a citadel of blue America,” (Conforti, 323).

⁶² Per capita income figures derived from Census Database, available from <http://www.census.gov/statab/ranks/rank29.html>.

Chapter III: The New Portland

Portland has no illusions about its contemporary reality. The Portland of the present is marked by three critical characteristics that have all been affected by and navigate economic and built environment legacies of the past. Two of these, the influx of some 10,000 refugees and an affordable housing crisis, were outlined earlier in the contemporary rendering of Portland. Complicating matters, however, is the fact that Portland's economy—despite all edifices of postindustrial success—is, as of the end of the decade, beginning to falter.

Despite the emphasis on cultural capital, the postindustrial urban economy is primarily marked by a dominance of the service industry and its subsequent bifurcation into high-end and low-end services. Manufacturing has all but dried up in the Greater Portland Area, leaving a variety of service sectors to dominate.⁶³ In 2008, nine of the ten largest industries by employment were in the service sector, construction (at 4.1%) being the only exception. The top five (in order) were health care, accommodation and food services, educational services, finance and insurance, and professional, scientific and technical services, which altogether accounted for 43.4% of total employment in the city of Portland. Portland residents hold only 61.9% of the city's jobs, and commuters provide for a daytime population change of +30,320 (a nearly 50% addition).⁶⁴ Given that Portland's metropolitan region is far wealthier than the city itself, it can be inferred that a large portion of this commuter population works in the high-end service sector. The

⁶³ Portland's 2005-2010 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan highlights that Maine has been hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs since 2000, accelerating a process that had been occurring for half a century. For the first half of the 2000s, Maine suffered the highest rate in the nation of manufacturing sector job loss (losing 19,000 in the first four years)(2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 66).

⁶⁴ For reference and more information, refer to "Work and Jobs in Portland, Maine Detailed Stats: Occupations, Industries, Unemployment, Workers, Commute" (2008).

wages of corresponding low-end services offer little consolation to Portland residents, often less than half of their high-end counterparts.⁶⁵ As then Urban Planning student Steven Munroe notes, “often overlooked in the regional transformation to a post-industrial economy, is the fact that many service sector jobs do not pay a wage commensurate with the manufacturing jobs they replace,” (Munroe, 76). Of these five largest sectors (which account for nearly half of all employment in Portland), accommodation and food service is the only one that is overwhelmingly low-skill, but it is highly seasonal, depending on summer tourism.⁶⁶

According to Munroe (2009), during the 1990s and early-2000s, the United States GDP consistently increased, but so did the income disparity between rich and poor (78). In effect, the increase in GDP reflected a decrease in average income and worker productivity. This can be construed as an affect of the postindustrial service-oriented economy in which the goods produced are overwhelmingly intangible. For all the rhetoric surrounding the creative industries, the notion of “culture” that it produces is what is ultimately valued.⁶⁷ The process of separating capital from labor and production from consumption that began during the early phase of de-industrialization seems to have come full-circle. The subsequent savings and loan crisis “crippled the sectors that rely on free-flowing credit,” exposing the vulnerability of the creative industries (Munroe, 77).

⁶⁵ For example, in health care, the largest sector in Portland, the mean salary of practitioners and technicians was more than twice as much as that of “support occupations” (\$56,350 compared to \$21,580)(“2000 Metropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Portland, ME MSA”).

⁶⁶ For reference and more information on the accommodation and food service industries in Maine as well as their relation to tourism, refer to Colgan (2006).

⁶⁷ Reflecting on the Economic Crisis of 2008, “one might argue that the root of our economic problems stem from the fact that, within the last two decades, the notion of economic productivity has been perverted into an abstract concept,” (Munroe, 78).

To date Portland's economy is in severe recession, and, as Nathan Smith asserts, "development activity has really ground to a halt," (Smith).⁶⁸

This vulnerability, however, was forecasted even before the crisis. Despite the touted—and superficially apparent—prosperity surrounding Portland's renaissance, the city's 2000 median income was \$35,650, lower than that of its metropolitan area, the state of Maine and the nation as a whole.⁶⁹ Conforti (2005) adds that in 2000, 28% of the city's households had an income of less than \$20,000 (320). Clearly the urban renaissance has developed unevenly. The peninsular neighborhoods, where the overwhelming majority of gentrification has taken place, have experienced far greater socioeconomic polarization than Portland's interior neighborhoods such as Deering, which maintain a less dense, reasonably priced housing stock (Smith). The contrast between the West End and neighboring Parkside prove that the extreme proximity of poverty and prosperity is not just a phenomenon found in the developing world. In 2006 the city sponsored a summit dedicated to the assessment and advancement of the creative economy. Despite the perception of a thriving creative/artist community, one participant claimed that, "the reality is that we [artists] are just getting by, and living in Portland and

⁶⁸ Several major development projects in Portland have either stalled or collapsed under the credit crunch associated with the Economic Crisis of 2008. In Bayside, a planned 3.5-acre development that included a 700-space parking garage, 80,000 square feet of office space and a 64-unit apartment complex fell through due to a projected lack of tenants. In January of 2009, developer Ocean Properties dropped plans for a hotel, offices and a cruise ship terminal at the Old Port's Maine State Pier. This scuttled a decade-long effort to redevelop this section of Portland's waterfront, leaving the city to find another way to pay for the \$18,000,000 it invested in repairing the site. Smith explains that "big development projects, specifically, have slowed down or stopped dead in the water," (Smith). For reference and further information concerning stalled developments in Bayside and Portland's waterfront, refer to Bouchard (2007), Richardson (2007) and Richardson (2009).

⁶⁹ Portland's median household income of \$35,650 lags behind Cumberland County (at \$44,048), the state of Maine (the 38th poorest in America at \$37,240) and the nation as a whole (\$42,151). For perspective, "according to recently released census data, in a comparison of median incomes during the periods of 1998-2000 versus 2001-2003, Maine's incomes have fallen (\$39,815 to \$37,619), while in Vermont they've increased (\$40,908 to \$43,527) and in New Hampshire they've risen sharply (\$48,029 to \$55,166)," (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 68).

surrounding areas is nearly unsustainable,” (City of Portland, *Portland’s Creative Economy*, Att 6, p. 13). If the creative economy is a keystone for producing the intangible yet highly coveted notion of culture—one of the foundations upon which Portland built its postindustrial success—then the implications of its contemporary fragility proves worrisome. Furthermore, the Consolidated 2005-2010 plan indicated that unemployment had risen marginally over the first half of the 2000s, wages were suppressed, and the rate of business start ups had began to falter, all symptomatic of a stagnant or unhealthy economy.⁷⁰ These indicators were largely overlooked or considered innocuous as a boom of large-scale investment in development and construction projects pointed to signs of economic vitality.

Does an economy that invests in cultural capital and high-end services necessarily create jobs in the low-end service sector by virtue of trickle down effects? Wage disparities indicate that the presence of low-end service work hardly guarantees a desirable quality of life for those employed. As evidenced by the Economic Crisis-induced stagnation, Portland’s cultivation of a thriving postindustrial economy is tenuous, capable of failing even those with a high human capital. Where in this equation could members of a refugee community fit in, finding themselves in a foreign nation, often times with little to no English proficiency or transferable skills and qualifications? How do Portland’s visions of diversity and renaissance contend with these seeming incongruities?

The Problems Faced:

⁷⁰ In 2002, Portland had the strongest small-business sector (and highest concentration of small businesses) of any metropolitan region in the United States by the American City Business Journal. For citation and details, refer to Thomas (2005).

For the refugee community, fitting in has been and will likely continue to be a tight squeeze. Portland's 2005-2010 Consolidated Housing and Community Development plan states that at the turn of the 21st century—during a period of relative prosperity for the city—the citywide poverty rate was 14.1%, and 40% of this population had incomes that were less than half of the poverty threshold, indicating utter destitution (24). Approximately one-third of the impoverished population were not U.S. citizens, yet foreign-born populations as of 2000 constituted less than 10% of the population. While these categories do not necessarily have congruous parameters, they can both be construed as generally indicative of refugee populations in the context of Portland, a city whose social geography otherwise largely homogenous and native-born.⁷¹ This statistic clearly illustrates that there are a disproportionate number of foreign born, non-naturalized Portlanders living below the poverty line, and it would not be farfetched to infer that the majority of this contingent was comprised of refugee populations.

All of the peninsular neighborhoods—generally the areas with the greatest concentrations of refugee populations—were above the citywide average for poverty level.⁷² East Bayside's landscape is dominated by the Kennedy Park/Bayside Terrace Public Housing complex, the largest in the city, and is also the home to the highest concentration of minority and foreign-born residents in the entire state (Adelson). Furthermore, minority-headed households in Portland suffer from dramatically lower median household incomes and rates of homeownership than do their white

⁷¹ Portland statistically has long had a large, native-born White non-Hispanic underclass, meaning that the large presence of impoverished foreign-born residents is a new phenomenon, as is the presence of a sizable refugee population.

⁷² Bayside, East Bayside and Parkside had poverty rates of 39%, 35% and 27% respectively (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 24).

counterparts.⁷³ Research by both urban studies scholar Ryan Allen and the City of Portland Department of Refugee Services indicate that the majority of Portland's refugees are visible minorities, claiming predominantly African and Middle-Eastern heritage.⁷⁴

The visible inequality that economic statistics highlight is further reflected in the access to housing, a problem that Director of Refugee Services Regina Phillips cites as one of the two greatest challenges facing the refugee community (Phillips). The Consolidated Plan illuminates that rates of homeownership in Portland are significantly lower for all racial groups (white non-Hispanic included) than their national averages.⁷⁵ While problematic, this comes as no surprise given that a minority headed household in Portland could afford a home no more than 39% of the city's median home sales price (City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*).⁷⁶ Furthermore, despite the 58% dominance of rental housing in Portland, a minority household could only afford 72% of the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment (City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City*

⁷³ In 2000 this demographic as a whole had a median income of \$26,266, just 59% of the metropolitan area's median income of \$44,707, 74% of the citywide median of \$35,650, and 72% of the white non-Hispanic median at \$36,287. There is considerable variance in this statistic between racial groups as well. Hispanic households had a median income of \$32,500, nearly the citywide median, while the figures for Asian, Black and Native American Households were considerably lower, at \$26,178, \$24,750 and \$17,353 respectively (Consolidated Plan 2005-2010, 24-25).

⁷⁴ Allen's (2006) research examined a wide range of refugees over several years and found 65% of the population studied to be classified as visible minority (10). Furthermore, despite the lack of precise statistics, the Consolidated Plan asserts that "Portland's minority residents are more likely to be foreign born... as recent immigrants or refugees," than "other minorities across the country," (Consolidated Plan 2005-2010, 25).

⁷⁵ Only white non-Hispanics and Asians managed to break 50% of their national average (and did so marginally), while the rate for Blacks and Hispanics was little more than a third of their national rates (Consolidated Plan 2005-2010, 25).

⁷⁶ This statistic assumes that the median income for minority headed households increased 9% over the first half of the 2000s (the rate of increase over this period for the citywide median)(City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*).

of Portland).⁷⁷ According to director of the Portland Housing Authority Mark Adelson, refugees occupy approximately 60%-70% of Portland's public and subsidized housing units, and comprise the majority of the 1000-plus families on the waiting list for public and subsidized housing (Adelson).

Vaishali Mamgain (2003) and Ryan Allen (2006, 2007) conducted separate studies of the employment patterns and opportunities available to refugees in Portland. While their results show that there is a wide spectrum in terms of human capital, technical skills and proficiency in English, virtually all refugees face hurdles that an American worker would not. Allen (2007) asserts that “the lives of refugees are marked by dramatic and unanticipated changes that occur in a short period of time. Regardless of former socio-economic class, educational attainment, or level of English fluency, virtually all refugees arrive in the U.S. with few material resources, shrunken social networks upon which to draw support, and plentiful and intense needs,” (58). New Mainer Choul Ngoal, whose father was an accountant in Sudan, recalls that his family literally arrived in Portland with nothing, an experience echoed by Dominic Suru and other members of the refugee community.⁷⁸

Many people involved with the refugee community, whether via the city or non-profit sector, agree that securing employment for members of the refugee community is the greatest challenge and top priority—even trumping housing. As Mark Adelson attests, current vacancy rates are nearly ten times higher than they were during the early and mid 2000s, but the issue now is that low income groups cannot afford housing despite its

⁷⁷ Average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in 2003 was approximately \$1,000 (City of Portland, *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the City of Portland*). According to Phillips and Adelson the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment as of 2010 is still between \$850-\$1000 (Phillips).

⁷⁸ For reference and further information, refer to interviews with Choul Ngoal (2010), Dominic Suru (2009) and other refugees profiled and interviewed in Nyhan (2009).

availability (Adelson). Grace Ming, Director of The Root Cellar, a faith-based community center in East Bayside, highlights that refugee clients come to her on a weekly basis asking for help finding jobs (Ming). She says that refugees “want to work and want to work hard,” while “there are a lot of [native-born] people in Portland who...would prefer to work the system,” (Ming). However, finding work in Portland’s contemporary economy required more than just motivation.

Attaining consistent employment has its own unique set of hurdles for refugees. Despite the fact that many refugees attained high levels of education in their nations of origin, a lack of English fluency can act as a barrier.⁷⁹ Another problem in finding employment for refugees concerns the application process, which is increasingly carried out online.⁸⁰ Many refugees have no access to a computer and limited proficiency in using one, putting them at an automatic disadvantage (Phillips).

Portland’s economy may have flourished in contrast to the rest of Maine, but the city still affords considerably less economic opportunities for low-skill workers than many other American cities. Allen (2007) notes that many of the low-skill jobs in Portland, especially much of the accommodation and retail industries, are connected to tourism and therefore seasonal (18). Furthermore, these opportunities yield very low average earnings.⁸¹ Allen (2006) discovered that economic success for recently arrived refugees was quite directly correlated to levels of educational attainment and English

⁷⁹ Regina Phillips highlights that “for example, a lot of Iraqi refugees that have come recently are doctors, lawyers and engineers, but do not have strong English skills, meaning they will probably never re-attain their professional credentials,” (Phillips).

⁸⁰ According to Phillips, everything from pre-application questionnaires to picking out benefits is carried out online (Phillips).

⁸¹ For reference and details on various wages across all sectors in Portland, refer to “2000 Metropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Portland, ME MSA”

proficiency as well as experience working in a developed economy (91).⁸² He also found that refugees who worked “consistently and stably earned substantially more and experienced greater economic mobility than those who worked inconsistently and unstably,” (Allen, 2006, p. 91).⁸³ While seemingly self-evident, this has significant implications if a substantial number of low-skill employment opportunities available to refugees are seasonal and therefore inconsistent. Allen’s (2006) research indicated that administrative and support service industries were the most important source of employment for refugees (91). However, the majority of refugees employed in this industry worked through temporary help service businesses, with one half of the study group utilizing these services for their first job, and approximately one fifth for their most recent (Allen, 2006, p. 91). Not only is employment via this method correlated with low earnings, but also indicates reliance on third-party sources for securing employment. This would be a viable option for first-time employment, but would not be an ideal source of labor to depend upon in the long run.

As both Allen’s findings and the Refugee Services 2009 Report point to, even with employment, refugees still are often subjected to low wages.⁸⁴ Allen (2007) found that the average inflation adjusted monthly earning (in 2005 dollars) of a refugee during their initial year of work was \$1,570, compared to \$1,790 in their most recent year, an

⁸² Intriguingly, experience in an economy that most resembled Portland’s was the most telling indicator of economic success, even in the face of lower levels of English proficiency. This was the case for many Eastern European refugees who utilized carpentry skills or previous experience as electricians and mechanics to achieve 25% increase in inflation-adjusted incomes during the study period, the highest of any regional cohort examined. For reference and more information on Allen’s (2006) findings, refer to pages 91-93.

⁸³ In Allen’s research “consistently” refers to hours per given period of time, and “stably” refers to duration of employment with a given employer (Allen, 2006, p. 91).

⁸⁴ Colgan (2006) points out that in 2004 Maine’s overall average wages (as well as the average wage of every sector) is below the U.S. average, and of the 93 NAICS industries, only nine had average wages above the national industry average (13).

increase of 14% (40). In comparison, an average worker in Portland would expect their monthly income to be \$3,146 in 2001, compared to \$3,195 in 2004, and increase of approximately 2% (Allen, 2007, p. 40). This indicates that Refugees experience on average a dramatic increase in their wages as they gain more work experience, but nevertheless would earn 45% less than an average Portlander. An average monthly wage of \$1,790 (and an annual salary of \$21,480) would be nowhere near sufficient to pay for an average monthly rent of \$850-\$1000.

As if refugees have not already overcome incredible adversity by making it to America in the first place, they subsequently find themselves in need of supplementary incomes, short of affordable housing and sufficient employment opportunities, and are often relegated to neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty. Furthermore, refugees' educational and professional qualifications rarely translate in the American system, dramatically diminishing their human capital and employment potential. Mamgain (2003) asserts that "occupational integration is key to overcoming poverty," (115). It is difficult to discern exactly how feasible "occupational integration" is for the Refugee Community in Portland. Does occupational integration constitute simply finding employment or does it imply opportunity for advancement? The economic dominance of the high-end service sectors makes the latter interpretations highly unlikely given that refugees' human capital often does not translate.

Inclusion: The Master Plan

To measure the dissonance between Portland's re-imagined self and lived experience, it is imperative to establish precisely what self-conception the city has.

Actions certainly speak louder than rhetoric, and the allocation of resources and investment illuminate true interests. However, given that Portland is well aware of its New Mainers, it is important to examine how the city endeavors to include their interests in its present situation and future. The novelty of the urban renaissance has worn off, and City Hall clearly understands that its diversity has arrived, requiring more than just celebration and promotion. Refugees are extremely multifaceted individuals who have survived unimaginable circumstances in reaching Portland—not a concept to be paraded around as a badge of cosmopolitanism. To observe how evolved Portland’s re-imagined self is, the natural place to look is its Master Plan, the city’s road map for future planning and service initiatives.

However, former mayor Nathan Smith, states that “in Portland there is no Master Plan, just a Comprehensive Plan. If anything it’s a general outline of what the city is thinking about doing and the direction it is going in,” (Smith). In my research I came to discover that the on-the-ground-reality and implementation of objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan were not always in accordance. This was, however, not necessarily problematic. The reality of city politics in Portland is that city agencies and services are not simply under one monolithic umbrella. Instead, and especially with regards to the refugee community, the city works in conjunction with a variety of quasi-coordinated agencies, some of which receive substantial sums of federal money, and virtually none from the city itself. In Smith’s words, “a lot of things on the operational side are not included in the master plan,” one example being the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs, which manages English as a Learned Language programs in the city’s public schools (Smith). Furthermore, refugees are constantly being resettled in

Portland. The Comprehensive Plan was published in 2002 and is painfully out of touch with Portland's current condition. For example, the Comprehensive Plan's housing component *Housing: Sustaining Portland's Future* thoroughly identifies the need for affordable housing and provides a feasible course of action, but mentions the word "refugee" twice in the entire sixty-page document. The *Public Facilities and Services* section of the Comprehensive Plan makes no mention of refugees or immigrants. By contrast, Portland's *2005-2010 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan* mentions the phrase "refugee" thirty-four times and "immigrant" twenty-seven times. This represents a significant change in focus over a three-year period, indicating that the city either experienced a wake-up call to its contemporary situation or perhaps has reimagined itself in closer alignment with its lived experience. Either way, utilizing the Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan would provide a more updated insight into Portland's political climate.

The plan specifically targets diversification of housing and built environment improvements in the peninsular neighborhoods as one of its primary objectives, a course of action that greatly benefits the refugee community. For example, large excerpts of the *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing* report are included in the 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, specifically, portions highlighting the discrepancies in income and homeownership rate between the average Portland resident and its minority residents. The 2002 Comprehensive Plan's *Housing and Population* section vaguely identifies a shortage of housing, but does not mention the phrase "minority," once in the entire document. The *Goals and Policies* section focuses on increasing the city's housing stock

to promote population growth and redeveloping the bayside district, but fails to include any reference to “refugee,” “immigrant,” or “minority,” populations.⁸⁵

Unlike the Comprehensive Plan, the *2005-2010 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan* explicitly recognizes that the majority of tenants in Portland Housing Authority public and subsidized units are refugees, and specifies that average annual household income for families in such units is a meager \$14,690 (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 79).⁸⁶ To help mitigate these related issues of affordable housing and poverty, the plan advocates distributing Community Development Block Grants specifically to “social service programs and housing activities designed not only to improve the lives of families and individuals in poverty, but also to facilitate their transition out of poverty,” citing that “helping families move out of poverty as opposed to simply serving those in poverty is an important part of the City’s Housing and Community Development Program,” (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 84). While this guiding ethos appears to be progressive, none of the “critical” programs and services they cite to achieve this goal involve employment training initiatives (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 84). Perhaps awareness of an issue is the first step toward reconciling it, but this assessment provides no solution to foster self-empowerment. Employment training would benefit any able-bodied member of Portland’s impoverished population, not just refugees.

The Consolidated Plan specifies the streamlining and revising of zoning, subdivision and site review regulation so as to “create opportunities for affordable housing which conforms to the quality and characteristics of our established urban

⁸⁵ In fact, *Goals and Policies* includes large excerpts from the 1990s *Downtown Vision* that Lees (2003) derided as loaded with empty gestures of celebrating diversity.

⁸⁶ The 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan recognizes that “over 50% of the residents in PHA’s family housing units are foreign born immigrant and refugees,” representing twenty different nationalities and speaking over forty different languages (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 79).

residential fabric,” (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 84). These changes were not only intended to speed up the approval process for housing development, but also updated the city’s zoning ordinances to allow for more dense, multifamily housing and infill construction (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 84).⁸⁷ Though seemingly trivial, allowing for The increased construction of affordable and multifamily housing not only relieves pressures associated with low vacancy rates, but invariably benefits refugee populations who have fewer housing options than most Portlanders. Nathan Smith, who sat on the city council when these ordinances were drafted, avows they were intended to foster “dynamic” development in Portland, the main beneficiaries being the middle-, working- and lower-classes, not gentrifying classes or empty-nesters. Even in the “hot” housing markets in peninsular neighborhoods, the spree of developments since its 2005 enactment have been uniformly mixed-rate, confirming Smith’s assertion. Furthermore, most of the zoning changes, according to Smith, were located in more middle-class, off-peninsula districts (Smith). The ability to create affordable housing in neighborhoods not characterized by socioeconomic extremes and higher indices of deprivation provides significant opportunities for spatial integration. Dominic Suru, a specialist for 211 Maine, a multicultural service hotline (and himself a Sudanese refugee from Portland), firmly believes that spreading affordable housing options into off-peninsula neighborhoods will “take the refugee community to the next level,” (Suru).

The distribution of funds for physical improvement priorities also reflected the city’s commitment to neighborhoods that statistically contained disproportionate numbers of economically stressed and refugee populations. These initiatives ranged from sidewalk

⁸⁷ According to the Consolidated Plan, this has allowed the city to facilitate the planning and construction of over 1400 units in multifamily developments over the past several years, most of which have been completed (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 84).

reconstruction and repaving to implementing new sewer and drainage infrastructure or improving lighting (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 40-43). The East End/Munjoy Hill, Parkside and East Bayside were allocated the greatest amount of funding for the 2005-2010 period with \$1,220,000, \$985,000 and \$820,000 respectively (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 40-43). This demonstrates the city's conscious commitment to improving areas that under a post-war planning ethos would have been considered "blighted" and either been left to neglect or razed altogether.

The 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan explicitly endeavors to service and provide for the specific needs of the refugee community.⁸⁸ Refugee service is most apparent in the section titled "Social Services Priority Needs." Five of the six "Highest Priority" objectives—Housing, Family Support Services, Health Care, Mental Health Care and Crisis Counseling & Case Management—contain specific clauses citing the need to provide these services for refugee and immigrant populations (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 52). The next level down, "High Priority" contains a refugee-specific objective pertaining to Employment/Education/Training.⁸⁹ Three of five "Priority" objectives specifically target the refugee community in the areas of Homemaker/Homecare Services, Recreational Programs and Legal Services (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 53). The hierarchy of these priorities, however, indicates that the city's primary concern is

⁸⁸ An excerpt of the 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan maintains that:

"Portland's growing refugee and immigrant families face the same issues as those born in America, but with additional cultural and language barriers. Recently efforts have been made to reach out with services to the refugee and immigrant community... Social service providers need to analyze their services to ensure that non-native born families can comfortably access them," (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan 50).

Once again, the city recognizes that its refugee community has a specific set of exigent needs that other citizens may not. However, they state that, as of 2005, efforts to reach out with services have only been made "recently," despite the fact that resettlement had been occurring for over two decades.

⁸⁹ This specifies the need for pre-employment, training and employment services for the refugee and immigrant community (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 53).

stabilizing refugee populations, with mental health care taking precedence over self-empowering employment training. This specific example of prioritizing mental health over employment training demonstrates a significant flaw in this hierarchy of services, and indicates that they were likely formulated from outside of the refugee community. Dominic Suru illuminates that most refugees in Portland come from societies where it would be unfathomable to meet with another person, let alone a stranger, and discuss one's mental issues. He states that "people in my community would only believe you have a mental problem if you were running around naked in the streets and yelling," (Suru). The experiences of various other refugees indicate that any mental health disorders associated with post-traumatic stress surface years after their arrival, following what Grace Valenzuela terms "the honeymoon period," (Valenzuela).⁹⁰ Native-born Americans, unable to comprehend the horrific experiences that refugees survived, would likely place mental health services as a "highest priority," while the refugees themselves would be in much greater need of economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, it is extremely telling that socio-cultural transitional services are nowhere to be found in this list of priority services, despite being a significant barrier to employment opportunities.

Allen's research (2006, 2007) illuminated that refugees face a difficult financial situation in Portland, and had limited opportunity for employment. Nathan Smith asserts that a potential key to furthering the socioeconomic integration of the refugee community is through encouragement and development of small enterprises, a path that many immigrants followed in Portland between the 1900s and 1930s (Smith). The 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan expounds on the importance of The Resource Hub, a "one-stop

⁹⁰ For reference and more information concerning the experiences of Mekara Meng and Khadija Guled, refer to Nyhan (2009).

business assistance center designed to serve as an entry point for entrepreneurs seeking to start a business and small businesses seeking to grow,” (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 66). Created by the City’s Economic Development Division, The Resource Hub is located on Congress Street—the main thoroughfare for virtually all of the peninsular neighborhoods—specifically to provide a “non-threatening environment and easy accessibility to all, including Portland’s minority and immigrant populations,” (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 66). By 2005, The Resource Hub aided more than 2100 clients, of whom one quarter were “people of color,” and the majority of who were women (2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 70).

The resource hub presents the most effective and logistically sound initiative put forth in the entire Consolidated Plan. The various infrastructural and housing policies have ample potential to benefit the refugee community in the near future, but are as of yet simply promises. Explicitly recognizing the refugee community’s disposition shows significant improvement from the city’s Comprehensive Plan, even the priority services lack a clear course of action for implementation. Furthermore, these priority services do not necessarily reflect the true nature of the refugee community’s needs. If the *2005-2010 Consolidated Plan* implies how Portland has re-envisioned itself as of 2005, then it would likely see itself as virtuously providing vital stabilizing services for its Newest Mainers and investing in their future through the construction of affordable housing. However, as a former mayor himself, Smith implies that these plans are extremely general, and that taking them at face value would portray a very incomplete picture. To measure the dissonance between Portland’s re-imagined self as compared to its lived experience, specifically that of its refugee populations, it is necessary to get a street-level perspective.

Opinions: A Collective Experience of Policy?

The index of dissonance between Portland's re-imagined self and its reality can be measured by whether there is a collective experience of refugee-specific policy and services. Opinions concerning how well the city has provided for its refugee community were generally indicative of how far removed one's line of work were from the refugees themselves. City-affiliated organizations were associated with stabilizing services, and consequently tended to be most satisfied, believing themselves to be doing their best within budgetary constraints. Community-oriented nonprofit and faith-based initiatives expressed far less satisfaction than city-affiliated agencies, due largely to the nature of the services they provided. These secondary or peripherally affiliated organizations and nonprofits often tackled the complex issues of socio-cultural transitions and socioeconomic integration. Both aspects of providing for the refugee community have their respective challenges, and both are forced to navigate the legacies of built environment changes, institutional structure, but issues of acculturation and socioeconomic integration are long-term in nature and cannot be facilitated by any single provision, such as housing or General Assistance (welfare). The refugees and immigrants interviewed believed city services to be misguided or only temporarily necessary, either way out of touch with the community's long-term needs.

Sociologist Wendy Cadge (2009) represents the furthest removed perspective, and, subsequently, the shallowest:

"We find that Portland is particularly welcoming to immigrants for several reasons... When post-1965 immigrants began to arrive, Portland was in the process of reinventing itself as a choice place to live and visit. As part of its redevelopment strategy, business and municipal leaders worked hard to create a welcoming context that included such things as requiring city agencies to devote resources to immigrants. The city's

reinvention also focused on arts and culture as economic engines, and its leaders were open to multi-ethnic displays and performances as part of being a progressive, culturally oriented city. In these ways, Portland integrated immigrants as part of working to recreate itself as a multicultural, welcoming, and tolerant place to live,” (3-4).

As this passage demonstrates, Cadge’s (2009) research, focused on Portland in the context of reception as indicative of the community’s overall experience. She highlights Portland’s cultural tolerance and progressive values as the most active agents in facilitating the integration of foreign-born populations. In her text, Portland was lauded as a model scenario, but this was in contrast to Danbury, Connecticut and Olympia, Washington, two cities that similarly experienced an unprecedented influx of refugee and immigrant populations, but did not receive this population with open arms.⁹¹ Thus, Cadge’s analysis overlooks the complexity of integration by focusing primarily on reception. Portland may have graciously welcomed the New Mainers, but this does not necessarily translate into effective integration. Furthermore, Cadge’s analysis appears to take Portland’s re-imagined cosmopolitanism surprisingly at face value, citing the city multiple times throughout her text as “progressive,” “tolerant,” and “culturally oriented.” While there is truth behind Cadge’s assertions, if she had actually interviewed members involved with the refugee community her analyses would likely not be so uncritical.

Mark Adelson, Director of the Portland Housing Authority, asserts that “Considering the lack of resources from the state, and these tough economic times, [City Hall] is doing everything it possibly can,” (Adelson). His office is directly affiliated with the city, and his response reflects this. As outlined in the 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, the city’s highest priorities are stabilizing newly arrived refugees. Beyond housing, Adelson cites shelters, General Assistance and minority healthcare as other refugee-

⁹¹ In the case of Danbury, politicians actually lead the charge in demonizing immigrants and refugees, making Portland appear quite tolerant merely by contrast. For further elaboration see Cadge et al (2009).

specific, city-provisioned services (Adelson). All of these, however, are preventative in nature as opposed to dealing with long-term issues, and developing skills or human capital of any variety. Former mayor and city councilman Nathan Smith echoed Adelson's more positive opinion, stating that Portland has both a "continuing willingness to set money aside for a variety of social services" that benefit the refugee community, and a "continuous flow of federal dollars" to provide the subsequent infrastructure (Smith). Like Adelson, Smith is affiliated with the municipal government. The central theme to both of their statements concerns budget and allocation of resources, indicating a highly structural and systemic perspective. Smith's response touches on an extremely important issue. The "continuous flow of federal dollars" that he refers to is a primary source of funding for these initiatives, a phenomenon that director of Refugee Services Regina Phillips emphasizes:

"I get very little city money... The city would not be able to handle the cost of this program. They wouldn't even be able to afford the salary of my employees. We get virtually all of our funding from grants, federal and otherwise, so I work very closely with the grant writers to make sure that folks do not get laid off. The economy is a factor at this point, which affects the city budget and the state budget. The state is in the hole 300 million dollars. City budgets reflect state budgets," (Phillips).

Surprisingly, a city agency responsible for providing vital services to the refugee community receives virtually no money from city hall itself. The complex reality of Portland's contemporary politics is reflected in how the city allocates its funds. Even before refugees arrived en masse, an extensive network of social services were in place, programs that drew "homeless adults, substance abusers, troubled teenagers and disabled people," from communities all across the state and region where "such social welfare programs do not exist," (Conforti, 320). In the 2007 city government payroll, welfare service was the second largest division in terms of full-time employees and was third

highest in funding.⁹² While poorer rural municipalities in northern and western Maine rely heavily on state funds, “property rich” Portland garners little sympathy from the capital and receives modest state funding, forcing the city to install high property taxes in order to finance its social services (Conforti, 320). Fiscally, the city is forced to be increasingly self-sufficient in order to provide for its overextended framework of welfare services. Furthermore, budgetary issues have consistently plagued the City in recent years, a problem exacerbated further by the economic downturn of 2008 (Phillips). However, initiatives that affect a broad range of constituents, such as housing and creating jobs, naturally take a central role, the benefits of which supposedly extend to the refugee community as much as any other demographic. From the city’s perspective, it has to act strategically by tapping into flows of federal money to ensure that all of its programs stay afloat.

Nonprofit and faith-based organizations voiced the greatest frustrations, having to provide for long-term needs of their clients, and having limited or inconsistent access to funding. These organizations are forced to plan systemically, as adequate funding is a constant problem, but overwhelmingly have to provide for social and personal issues, to which money is not an automatic answer. However, their qualms were not uniform and tended to reflect the nature of the services they provided. Jennifer M., an employee at the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs believed resources for schooling and adult education and to be the biggest issues facing the refugee community, one that the city has not provided for adequately (Jennifer M.). Grace Ming, director of the Root Cellar, a faith-based grassroots organization serving East Bayside and Munjoy Hill,

⁹² For reference and full government payroll for the City of Portland, Maine, refer to “Portland, Maine Profile” (2008).

contends that employment skills training should be the city's focus (Ming). She highlights that people come into her office on a weekly basis looking for help with jobs, but lacking skills and language proficiency to secure an interview. Abdullah "Pious" Ali has initiated and managed several nonprofit organizations for refugee youth in Portland, and believes that there is not nearly enough emphasis on programs geared towards youth, whom he believes are the key to prosperity and integration for the community (Ali). The one thing that they all agree on, however, is that acquiring adequate funding is a constant issue. Abdullah "Pious" Ali laments that the most grassroots organizations, such as his, are woefully under-funded despite providing some of the most valuable services (Ali).⁹³ Nonprofit, community and faith-based organizations have an ambiguous role in providing for the refugee community, having to navigate City Hall's politics and provide for the subsequent, difficult issues of acculturation, but face similar same budgetary headaches.

In contrast, refugee and immigrant perspectives are far less concerned with fiscal aspect of services available to them, and instead have a clear opinion of which initiatives are necessary or successful and how they can all be improved. As the figurative outlier, the success and availability of city services sustains their livelihood as opposed to facilitating systemic integration. Immigrants involved with the refugee community expressed the strongest disapproval with social-service initiatives, believing them to be misguided and overly paternalistic. Refugees themselves, however, invariably utilized these services at one point, and deemed them to be necessary. Grace Valenzuela, a Filipino immigrant, strongly disapproves of the city's welfare services-oriented approach. She believes they do not facilitate self-empowerment and instead relegate refugees to

⁹³ This is reflected by the fact that many of the organizations he has either managed or initiated have folded due to lack of funding, an experience he claims is shared by other workers in the grassroots and non-profit sector (Ali).

recipients of aid instead of key actors in their own success. Refugee families are “very proud,” and do not want to be constantly associated with General Assistance. She claims that “the reality is, if you talk to many of the leaders [in the refugee community], they’ll say ‘no we don’t use [services]... somebody else is getting the money but it’s definitely not me’...” (Valenzuela). Abdullah “Pious” Ali, believes that social and welfare services are in fact too geared towards refugee populations, and diminish in quality as more continue to arrive (Ali). Ali recognizes that as an immigrant, his circumstances and needs upon coming to Portland were different than those of a refugee, like Choul Ngoal and Dominic Suru. Ngoal believes that the city services helped stabilize his own family, but that problems arise because too many refugees simply do not understand that their stay in public housing and on General Assistance is meant to be temporary and transitional. He says that “for many [refugees] even an impoverished existence in America is far better than what they had in their home country, especially if they were farmers or came from a rural area,” (Ngoal). Ngoal finds this to be an issue of cultural differences, which would be easily mitigated by community engagement, an underemphasized aspect of the city’s social services (Ngoal).

Valenzuela, Ali, Ngoal and Suru concurred that formulating refugee-specific services without involvement from the constituents themselves is problematic. As Valenzuela colloquially states, the city’s approach is a “white” mentality, assuming that their notions of how to provide for the refugee community will effectively integrate them into Portland’s social landscape (Valenzuela). Instead, they cite mutual education and exposure between refugee and native born families as simple, imperative solutions. In this context, the concept of integration is freed from its systematic, dehumanizing

context, and put into tangible terms. Ngoal states that Portland Public Schools offered no courses that explored the literature, history and experiences of foreign cultures, and that despite their high levels of diversity, are extremely segregated.⁹⁴ New Mainers Abdullah “Pious” Ali, Khadija Guled and Dominic Suru assert that the schools’ English as a Learned Language programs are actually serve to further isolate multicultural students.⁹⁵ Suru highlights that students who arrive during high school ages are prematurely placed in ELL programs and kept there until graduation, leaving them with a seriously inadequate education (Suru). The ELL initiatives present a microcosm for the refugee experience in Portland: a seemingly invaluable service that is less than ideally implemented.

A study conducted by the Brookings Institution found that “the successful incorporation of refugees into the economic, financial and social mainstream requires local leaders to create an environment both informative to the receiving community and also culturally sensitive to the refugees,” (Singer, 26). The refugee’s perspective on city services indicates that their needs have not been fully engaged, creating a dissonance between Portland’s re-imagined self as outlined in the Consolidated Plan, and its lived experience. While the New Mainers’ opinions are vital in formulating political avenues and initiatives that best serve themselves, their differing perspectives exhibit that policy is not necessarily a shared experience in Portland. Furthermore, the opinions from City Hall and the variety of nonprofit, community and faith-based organizations reveal an unclear system of hierarchy and relations in which the latter groups ultimately provide

⁹⁴ Ngoal related a personal experience at Portland High School in which he discovered the school’s two cafeterias to be completely segregated. He states that “I could have sworn I was in the 1920s it was so bad,” (Ngoal).

⁹⁵ For reference and more information, refer to Ali (2010), Suru (2010) and Nyhan (2009).

many refugee-specific services. Intriguingly, this indicates underlying and emerging elements of neoliberal forms of urban governance.⁹⁶

Any indication of neoliberal leanings would literally turn Portland's re-imagined self on its head, as the city has long prided itself as a bastion of welfare services.⁹⁷ Re-iterating Conforti's earlier point, "property-rich" Portland receives little funding from the state (Conforti, 320). Portland's real estate market was one of the driving forces of its urban renaissance, but its success ultimately cut it off from state flows, forcing the city to become self-sufficient in financing its extensive services. By facilitating the transition to a service-sector and consumption-based economy characteristic of global neoliberal capitalism, Portland inadvertently acquired neoliberalism's most problematic legacy—a weakened urban government.

An oddly appropriate maritime analogy illustrates this phenomenon in the context of the city's refugee community. Having been cast adrift by state funding, Portland's proverbial ship is sinking under the tremendous weight of its own pre-existing institutional framework of services. Exacerbating matters, the hull is riddled with the holes left by neoliberalism's structural deficiencies. As Portland sinks deeper, the dissonance between its re-imagined self and its lived experience becomes increasingly apparent, and the refugee community, riding third class in the cargo hold, will be the first to drown.

City Hall and its extended coalition of nonprofits and community organizations—the acting captain and his crew—are frantically bailing the water out, but the problem

⁹⁶ A characteristic of the contemporary "neoliberal city" is a diminished municipal government flanked by a coalition of nonprofit and community-based organizations to provision social services. For Reference and more information, refer to Eick (2007).

⁹⁷ As recent as 2008, Education and Welfare Services comprised two of the three largest areas of budget allocation on the city's payroll. For reference and more information, refer to "Portland, Maine: Profile."

seems to be the ship's frame, not how hard they are working to save it. It is at this juncture that Portland is being examined. The city, slow to understand the ship's structural deficiencies, is still attempting to strengthen its hull by investing in the same service sector and cultural industries that proved infallible until now. To understand the lived experience of the refugee community, the city's outliers, it is essential to examine the grave conditions in the cargo hold. However, observing how effective the city's tools of housing and social services are at eliminating the water will further illuminate the lived experience of the refugee community, but more importantly, whether the captain needs to formulate a better plan, and fast.

Solutions and Resources: Housing and Services

Housing has become a central focus for Portland's contemporary city planning and policy initiatives, reflecting consecutive years of problematically low vacancy rates during the early 2000s. A paucity of affordable housing is an issue for all low-income residents, but, according to the 2005 *Impediments to Fair Housing* assessment, minority and foreign-born residents are disproportionately affected. The city, from its own perspective, has subsequently made a Herculean effort to ensure the stabilization and integration of the refugee community by providing and constructing affordable housing. According to a Portland Housing Authority (PHA) database there are 2,847 units of subsidized housing spread across the city, and of these, 1,722 are located in the peninsular neighborhoods.⁹⁸ These figures do not include several recent mixed-income

⁹⁸ For figures on subsidized housing in Portland, see "Portland Housing Authority Database of Subsidized and Affordable Housing."

housing developments, which would boost the total number of subsidized units by a minimum of 120.⁹⁹

Refugees occupy between 60%-70% of the units in PHA public housing, despite comprising a minority of the city's impoverished population. Refugee relocation agencies such as CCMRIS or the Department of Refugee Services are largely responsible for this, and proactively place their clients in public housing for two reasons. First, public housing is often the most affordable option, and secondly, there is no legal limit to tenure in these units, which particularly benefits refugee families who may need time to acclimate to their new life in America (Adelson). Three of the five largest public housing complexes, Kennedy Park, Danforth Heights, and Munjoy South have roughly 170 units each and are located in low-income areas of peninsular neighborhoods.¹⁰⁰ These three developments were products of poorly planned 1970s and 1980s public housing initiatives to replace units lost during urban renewal. Their sheer size disrupted the surrounding urban fabric, and ultimately served to concentrate poverty. Like most of the city's public housing, the majority of residents in these projects are refugees (Adelson). Grace Valenzuela, director of the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Affairs for Portland Public Schools, takes issue with how city and faith-based relocation services funnel refugee families into public housing. She emphasizes that larger complexes such as Kennedy Park are spatially and

⁹⁹ The total number of additional units remains slightly ambiguous because the exact number of subsidized apartments in the 43-unit, mixed-rate 53 Danforth St. development has not yet been released. Ascertained additions come from:

- Valley Street Apartments (West End): 24 subsidized units
 - Walker Terrace (West End): 22 subsidized units
 - Pearl Place (Bayside): 60 subsidized units
 - Casco Terrace (Bayside): 14 subsidized units
- (Adelson)

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy Park is located in East Bayside with 170 units, Danforth heights is located in the West End and has 165 units and Munjoy South is in the East End with 170 units. For reference and figures on subsidized housing in Portland, see "Portland Housing Authority Database of Subsidized and Affordable Housing."

socioeconomically isolated, exposing refugee residents to crime, gang activity and other negative influences (Valenzuela). City Hall shares Valenzuela's opinion, and contemporary patterns of subsidized housing construction follow a more integrated model, mixing subsidized units with market rate units.¹⁰¹ Also, many subsidized units are being added through small developments of 15 or less units, many of which are virtually indistinguishable in appearance from surrounding properties.¹⁰² Nathan Smith co-chaired Portland's 2002 housing initiative *Housing: Sustaining Portland's Future*, and contends that mixed-rate and spatially integrated developments will continue to be the future trend, ensuring that families with modest incomes continue to have access to housing in peninsular neighborhoods.

This pattern of development reflects an attempt on Portland's part to realize its re-imagined self as a city that provides for and invests in its diverse population. The emphasis on mixed rate development theoretically allows the housing market to flourish while keeping its volatile consequences, such as displacement, in check. Furthermore, creating integrated housing is one of the most fundamental manners in which it can invest in its future growth and infrastructure. The city's recent housing crunch was indicative of past planning and policy decisions that failed to mitigate the legacies of urban renewal, and embraced consistent waves of gentrification and a service sector economy. However, the title of the 2002 housing initiative, *Sustaining Portland's Future*, is indicative of the city's figurative identity crisis. On one hand, it implies that housing provides a space for

¹⁰¹ Walker Terrace in the West End, for example has 22 subsidized units and 18 market-rate, making for a nearly even distribution. Pearl Place, a 60 unit, fully subsidized development in Bayside was planned and constructed in accordance with a similar sized, fully market-rate project in the vicinity.

¹⁰² The PHA database cites 58 individual housing developments that include subsidized units on the peninsula, of which, 32 contain 15 units or less. Data available from "Portland Housing Authority Database of Subsidized and Affordable Housing."

all residents within the city's social landscape, and that retaining a socioeconomically diverse population is vital to the city's survival. However, in utilizing the word "sustaining," the city also implies that there is some pre-existing—and supposedly successful—framework in place, which must be continued to avert future issues.

Perhaps by emphasizing the future, the city is not taking into account the severity of current circumstances for low-income populations. A draft of Portland's 2010-2015 Consolidated Plan reveals an alarming statistic. In fiscal year 2009, the city's family-specific homeless shelter experienced a 53% increase in secondary migrant refugees requiring its facilities, totaling 300 individuals (Draft of Five Year Strategic Plan: 2010-2015, 77). The Department of Refugee Services indicated the arrival of 549 secondary migrants to Portland over the same period. For every two incoming secondary migrants to Portland in 2009, there was essentially one that was homeless for a period of time. Unless temporary shelters are considered adequate housing for Portland's newest arrivals, the provision and construction of affordable housing needs to become an even higher priority. While refugees and city politicians alike agree that spatial integration of subsidized housing is imperative, it appears that these smaller and mixed rate developments do not satisfy their current demand. This embodies the dilemma in planning affordable housing initiatives in Portland. While there are many negative aspects of large public housing complexes such as Kennedy Park, its 170 units as opposed to the 15 of newer developments could potentially be the difference between housing and temporary homelessness for refugees. Dominic Suru's believes that spatially integrating Portland's refugee community into will "take it to the next level," but it seems that choosing this "next level" could mean the lowest level for those left out of housing

(Suru). Recalling Foucault, examining the outlier's experience reveals the reality of the whole. In this paradigm, the struggles of the 300 homeless secondary migrant refugees would reflect on Portland's lived experience, even if 300 more were housed in new mixed-rate developments in the West End.

Both Choul Ngoal and Dominic Suru were housed in Kennedy Park when they first arrived in Portland as refugees, and have since moved out of public housing and into middle-class neighborhoods. They assert that their experience in Kennedy Park was certainly adequate. It provided the necessity of a roof over their head, but lacked enough in terms of quality of life to foster ample incentive to move out. In their opinions, motivated refugee families are perfectly capable of upward mobility and transitioning out of public housing. Ngoal believes that there are plenty of opportunities to be taken advantage of in Portland, and Suru says that there are resources available to refugee families to help them become successful in their new home, which Suru's organization, 211 Maine, serves to help refugees and immigrants access.

Secondary and non-profit organizations that work to provide a variety of social services, but their relation to the City itself, as indicated in the opinions section, can be complicated. Two organizations, for example, the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs and the Department of Refugee Services were initiatives developed in accordance with the City but receive little or no direct funding. As Regina Phillips of Refugee Services illuminated earlier, virtually all of her department's funding comes from refugee specific grants despite their location within the city's department of Health and Human Services. The Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs received no city money at its inception, likewise relying heavily on federal funds

(Valenzuela). According to Director Grace Valenzuela, despite a consistent stream of grant financing, her office's operational costs are now largely footed by City Hall, but this is always potentially subject to change (Valenzuela). Nevertheless, the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural programs provides the crucial service of managing the Portland Public Schools' English as a Learned Language programs, of which some 26% of the enrolled student body depends upon (Valenzuela). In 2009 alone these programs experienced a net increase of 430 new students, indicating that their reliance on city and federal funds is unlikely to diminish any time soon (Valenzuela). For both organizations, this relationship to their funding is far from ideal. Choul Ngoal, now twenty-one years old, spoke no English when he arrived in Portland at age twelve. An intensive summer language program provided by the Office of Multicultural Affairs allowed him to develop conversational English within two months, and after one full year of ELL courses, he was able to matriculate into mainstream classrooms. However, upon applying to a suburban private school in eighth grade, his public middle school initially refused to release his grades and encouraged him not to attend. Though the issue was eventually resolved, it surfaced that the school had allegedly acted manipulatively so as to retain diverse students such as Ngoal, which would better position them to acquire grant funding. While this is an isolated incident, it highlights institutional structures are not sufficiently supporting education, a public good, and this in turn fails the students themselves.

As its name implies, the City of Portland Department of Refugee Services is arguably the most refugee-specific organization in City Hall, and manages to consistently provide its constituents with a range of welfare services despite the intricacies of obtaining funds. Regina Phillips stresses that one of the most fundamental and difficult

tasks is finding housing for refugees and helping them to sustain it. Despite consistent construction of subsidized units, this process remains invariably difficult. With public housing at capacity and a waiting list of over 1000 families, Refugee Services must also hunt for units in the private market. Regina Phillips conveys the intricacies of this process, citing that the prevalence of large families in the refugee community complicates matters further:

“If a household of ten needs a five-bedroom apartment, we often cant find them one. A landlord may have two two-bedroom apartments right next to each other, so then we’ll rent them both to them, However, the landlord complains that he will lose money if he isn’t able to charge market rate on both units... these units are often two separate two-bedroom units for 1000 dollars each, meaning that this one family would have to pay twice as much... A household of four is getting only \$600 in General Assistance funds, so they’re not going to have enough to pay \$1000 in rent—they simply don’t have that kind of money... We [referring to herself] would have trouble with our own salaries providing for a ten-person family,” (Phillips).

Phillips explains that housing one refugee family may necessitate taking two units out of the market because of the family’s size. Not only does this exacerbates the already tight market for affordable housing, but many refugee families would have trouble affording one of these units, much less two. The Department of Refugee Services is not allowed to subsidize these extra units to appease stubborn landlords, who would have little incentive to rent two units for below-market rates (Phillips). Clearly a “hot” real estate market confers the majority of its benefits to demographics privileged enough to exercise choice in where they live. For refugees, who arrive in Portland with very little financial means, such “choice” is not an option. Despite all of Phillips’ efforts, sometimes there is literally nowhere to fit her clients. When she is successful, her department also provides extensive follow-up services, and often times she finds herself mediating disputes between her clients and their landlords (Phillips). This leads to extensive responsibilities with preventing eviction. Sometimes conflicts arise because of cultural differences, but most

often the issue is non-payment, forcing her to negotiate and barter with landlords so that the refugee family will not go homeless.¹⁰³ She laments that her efforts are not always successful, and that her clients get evicted “all the time,” (Phillips).¹⁰⁴ This likely reflects the disturbing rise of secondary migrant refugees, her very own clients, in Portland’s family shelter.

Beyond aiding in this process of securing and insuring housing, Refugee Services offers employment placement.¹⁰⁵ Like with housing, this process often requires constant correspondence, a difficult task for an office of six full-time and part time employees that served 1,459 unduplicated clients in 2009 (City of Portland, “Refugee Services Program Year End Report FY 2009”). Refugee Services also provides language development courses and cross-cultural life skills to train advise and direct refugee families on how to acquire General Assistance benefits that they are entitled to (Phillips).¹⁰⁶ The Department of Refugee Services also has the benefit of being able to operate across the greater Portland area, working continuously with clients that have moved to working class neighborhoods in suburban Westbrook and South Portland in search of affordable housing.¹⁰⁷ Their department has established a favorable rapport with the greater Portland

¹⁰³ Landlords often complain that “they have to fight every single month to get their rent,” (Phillips). However, Phillips cited incidents where the landlord’s unwillingness to negotiate was exacerbated by what they perceived to be mistreatment of their property by their refugee tenants. These issues were factors of cultural differences surrounding concepts of cleanliness, waste disposal and noise (Phillips).

¹⁰⁴ This problem often happens with PHA subsidized units, requiring Phillips to work in closely with Mark Adelson. If eviction is inevitable, Phillips negotiates with Adelson to ensure that her clients do not go to court, in which case the violation would go on their permanent records and put them on a “tenant net blacklist,” effectively preventing them from acquiring rental housing in the future (Phillips).

¹⁰⁵ In 2009 the department placed 83 clients in jobs, and plans in the next year to apply for employment-related grants from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (Phillips).

¹⁰⁶ Phillips states that “families move to Maine in general because we have a great social services network... they come to the Department of Health and Human Services building and within a week they have TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, vouchers for food... this is no different for refugee families, many of whom qualify” (Phillips).

¹⁰⁷ According to Phillips, her department relocated substantial numbers of their clients to Lewiston during the early 2000s as available housing and shelters were at capacity, which had led to a temporary crisis.

refugee community, a not-so-trivial phenomenon considering that many came from nations where they had considerable reason to fear or mistrust the government. While there is something mildly perverse about a burdened central city delivering social services to its own suburbs, this metropolitan relationship embodies the pragmatism with which refugee-specific social services need to operate in the face of scarce funding and a lack of governmental infrastructure for refugee-specific needs.

Despite Adelson's assertion that "city services are to stabilize [the refugee community] now as opposed to worrying as much about their future," and Valenzuela's claims that welfare-oriented programs do not provide adequate avenues for self-empowerment, Refugee Services work to ensure that they are stabilized in a manner that will ensure socioeconomic integration (Adelson, Valenzuela). Despite the intricacies of acquiring funding, Phillips is satisfied with the accomplishments of her department, and the 1000-plus clients that her organization serves every year are likely as well. However, Phillips' experiences highlight that providing these services requires her to constantly navigate a spatial and socioeconomic landscape littered with legacies of prior policy decisions, precariously tight housing markets and fiscal debt. In essence, she is forced to find a room for her clients in a pre-existing urban framework that affords little space to accommodate them, despite any cosmopolitan and egalitarian convictions on the City's part. As she admits herself, she is not successful one hundred percent of the time. Invoking Foucault's earlier assertion, the majority's experience should not be construed as indicative of the system's overall measure of success. Every refugee client that the city, social services or the housing market ultimately fails contributes to the dissonance

These populations are now provided for by CCMRIS, but for two years Phillips and her co-workers had to make the forty-five minute commute to Lewiston to provide follow up services for their clients. For reference and more information, refer to Phillips (2010).

between Portland's re-imagined self of post-industrial success, and a harsh reality of daily struggle, poverty and unfulfilled American dreams for the New Mainers.

Housing and services are the most apparent ways in which Portland is trying to provide for the refugee community, but the shortcomings of these efforts illuminate that working against the neoliberal economy's flow is a difficult task for an overextended city government. Returning to the metaphor of Portland as a sinking ship, the city's approach has been to furiously pump out the water instead of patching the leaks, which would require addressing the problem at its source. By investing in a consumer driven, service-sector economy during its urban renaissance Portland fashioned itself a framework that would invariably be prone to these leaks. In the neoliberal era, state and municipal governments were reduced to a fragile shell of their former self, their role having changed to facilitate the market. In overextending itself with services, Portland's weakness is beginning to show, exposing the dissonance between its perceived, re-imagined self and its lived experience. However, if the theoretical neoliberal city supposedly mitigates these weaknesses with a strong coalition of non-profit organizations, then perhaps Portland has an ideal patch at its disposal for its leaky frame.

The State of Maine multicultural resources website lists over forty organizations that serve multicultural families in the Portland area including religious and ethnically-specific organizations, consulting firms for multicultural enterprises, mental health services, legal advocacy groups ("The Multicultural Resource Guide"). These organizations are the refugee community's unsung heroes, primarily handling the difficult task of facilitating socio-cultural transitions for their clients. These responsibilities would likely fall outside of the city's "stabilizing" framework of services

but are nonetheless invaluable. Their community-based nature is in some manners more palatable to refugee demographics, many of whom come from societies with significantly different societal and familial structures than those in America. The same Root Cellar employee elaborates:

“A very limited number of people move outside the community. They rely on each other to help them watch each other’s children, for example if one has a job... It’s very difficult to translate into American language how valuable community is to these people, whether they are from Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Iraq... For example, one Ethiopian woman broke her ankle and during her recovery there was not one hour that someone from the Ethiopian community was not there sitting beside her...” (Anonymous Root Cellar Employee).

As this employee directly implies, there are many values and practices that may be essential to certain refugee communities that are outside of an American—and slightly ethnocentric—concept and framework of “necessities.” For example, Grace Ming firmly believes that the greatest challenge that the refugee community faces is figuring out how to integrate their children into American society without having to compromise their native society’s values and morality, a position echoed by Regina Phillips, Grace Valenzuela and Abdullah “Pious” Ali (Ming, Phillips, Valenzuela, Ali). Phillips cites that younger generations increasingly eschew rigid traditional customs such as wearing Hijabs or Burqas,¹⁰⁸ celebrating religious holidays or conforming to strict standards of relations with the opposite sex (Phillips). As Valenzuela notes, standards of legal adulthood are not universal, and upon reaching age eighteen, refugee young adults are privy to freedoms that exacerbate these intergenerational tensions.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Hijab and Burqa refer to extremely important and sacred articles of clothing in Muslim tradition (Phillips).

¹⁰⁹ Valenzuela has worked extensively with the Khmer (Cambodian) community in Portland. One Khmer mother expressed her frustrations in raising her adolescent with a traditional proverb: “The trick is how to hold a bird in your hand... you hold it loosely the bird flies away, too tight and you kill it. How do you hold

City Hall, operating from a more systematic perspective would view such socio-cultural conflicts as less of an exigent need and a lower priority than housing, general assistance, or employment training. However, neglecting these issues is highly problematic. Abdullah “Pious” Ali maintains that the absence of a functioning family unit propels young refugees towards the streets leading to elevated levels of gang activity (Ali). The subsequent increase in crime would invariably destabilize the refugee community, but would also be highly contradictory to Portland’s re-imagined self of urban renaissance, providing the city with ample incentive to address these issues. Ming often works with mothers and families who come to her organization out of desperation, having begun to lose their children to street life and gangs. Choul Ngoal relates a similar anecdote:

“My Mother is active in the Sudanese community and used to always invite other African mothers over for dinner... She would ask them ‘how is your son doing?’ and they would break down crying...they would say ‘my son is dealing drugs,’ or ‘he’s in trouble with the law’... this would happen with nine out of every ten families that would come visit,” (Ngoal).

Ngoal has seen several childhood friends end up in prison, and firmly believes that his close-knit family helped him stay on a path towards success. These issues are as alien to the Sudanese community as to Portland itself, which had experienced a between one and three murders per year until the mid 2000s, a comparatively low rate (“Portland Maine: City Profile”). The combination of elevated levels of violence and gang activity, a growing influx of predominantly minority refugees and a overwhelmingly white police force not used to either of these proved to be highly volatile.

it right?” Valenzuela asserts that “not a lot of parents are successful at doing that... that to me is the biggest challenge...” (Valenzuela).

Brewing tension between the Portland Police Department and the refugee community came to a head during 2008 and 2009, specifically following two tragic shootings in which young Sudanese men lost their lives. In 2008 James Angelo, an aspiring police officer, was gunned down in the West End as he was working as a security guard at Mercy Hospital (Bell & Kim). Police failed to identify and arrest the shooters. This brought outrage to the Sudanese community who wrote a formal letter to city officials saying that “they no longer viewed Portland as a safe city,” (Bell & Kim). This incident was preceded by seven separate unsolved cases involving shootings of Sudanese Portlanders. The 2009 shooting of David Okot highlighted in the introduction instantly became a highly politicized and controversial event as well, further polarizing the deteriorating relationship between refugee populations and the Police Department. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that prevalence of gang activity is a relatively new and growing problem for the New Mainers.¹¹⁰ Grace Ming cited a story in which an eight-year-old boy came in with a scar on his face, signifying that he had been initiated into a local gang. She claims that “I grew up in Africa and Trinidad, and there you live in an open neighborhood where people know each other and there’s a lot more trust. Here, those values are meeting an inner city environment and sometimes lose out,” (Ming). Portland received new police chief James Craig in 2009 from the Los Angeles Police Department, and he has made cracking down on gang activity and bridging the void between members of law enforcement and the refugee community a high priority (Hench). Regina Phillips knows and approves of Chief Craig, but believes “there are officers in the police force who carry around negative opinions of people who are

¹¹⁰ According to Grace Ming, director of the Root Cellar, “gang activity is a huge problem in the refugee community, even from when they’re very young... Muslims to Christians and everyone in between,” (Ming).

different,” (Phillips). Jackson Okot, one of David Okot’s brothers, commented that several years earlier he was wrongfully beaten and detained by a police officer that threatened him with racial epithets while saying “welcome to America,” an incident for which Okot successfully sued police (MacQuerrie).

Despite this recent history of troubled relations, Ming believes that the volatile dynamic between the refugee community and the Portland police department will likely improve. At a funeral for Serge Mulongo, a Congolese man murdered in a potentially gang related shooting in Parkside in February of 2010, community leaders publicly advocated cooperation with law enforcement stating that “we didn’t come here to sacrifice our kids and have them get shot... we need to support the police in every way we can,” (Ming). Since the Okot shooting, the Police department has established several new community-based programs to improve their relations with the refugee populations, including a cultural training course to familiarize officers with Muslim customs (Hench).

In light of any silver linings, these events represent the largest rupture in Portland’s re-imagined self. These incidents indicate that cosmopolitan and cultured Portland inadvertently marginalized its diversity instead of celebrating it. The location of David Okot’s shooting—at the border between the West End and Parkside—highlights that issues with crime literally threatened to spill over into the idyllic Portland of urban renaissance. Social scientist and geographer David Harvey asserts that the emergence of gangs and extremist factions are a result of the state’s failure to provide for its citizens, and is a common byproduct of global neoliberalism.

This failure indicates an ideal role for community-based organizations, whose non-affiliation with the city, but knowledge of its systems provide for a vital link for

refugee populations. Grace Ming believes that without local and community organizations such as hers, the refugee community “would be in a lot more trouble,” (Ming). Similarly, Pious Ali avows that the more grassroots the organization, the more attuned it is to its constituents needs and will likewise be successful in providing for them. Undoubtedly, the city’s objective with regards to the refugee community is to see that it is provided for adequately, regardless of what organization ultimately delivers the services. The aforementioned Brookings Institution study expounded on the fact that nonprofit and community-based organizations play leading roles in the process of successfully incorporating refugees into American communities (Singer, 18). Until Portland allows its own variety of similar organizations to become leading agents in providing for the city’s refugee population—instead of forcing them to be the proverbial clean-up crew—the dissonance between its re-imagined self and lived experience will only grow stronger.

Chapter IV: Drawing Conclusions

The sixteen gunshots fired at David Okot echoed in the evening air for a matter of seconds, but the dissonance they represented reverberates to this day. This dissonance is between the city of Portland's re-imagined self of urban renaissance, cosmopolitanism embedded liberalism, and its lived experience, the latter of which came to an untimely end for Okot. Measuring the level of this dissonance serves an index for how truly "livable" the nation's supposedly most livable city is.¹¹¹ Despite this accolade, a city that seems to envision itself as a figurative superman, providing for both a neoliberal, service-sector economy, and the welfare of its predominantly middle- and lower-income residents and a rapidly growing refugee community, will invariably experience a discord, as perfection is a difficult standard to measure up with.

From City Hall's perspective, it seems that any impediments to socioeconomic integration and political inclusion for the refugee community stem not from lack of will or interest on their own part. Instead, a truly complex socioeconomic infrastructure forces the network of city agencies and non-profits alike to rely on flows of federal funding through grants. Most importantly, Portland is undergoing a monumental effort to facilitate the construction of affordable housing, an attempt to provide for the future vitality of Portland, especially its low-income and refugee populations.

Clearly, the refugee experience indicates a different reality. The voices of refugees themselves, want to be included in determining their own future. City Hall sees itself as too fiscally overextended to provide any more services, but the refugees themselves have relatively simple demands to which extra funding is not necessary.

¹¹¹ Referring again to Portland being awarded the nation's most livable city in 2009 by Forbes Magazine (O'Malley & Greenberg).

Valenzuela wants to see the city establish services that foster self-empowerment, asserting that “if you don’t give [refugees] the tools [to succeed] in the first six months, how do you expect them to stand on their own two feet?” (Valenzuela). Dominic Suru and Abdullah “Pious” Ali emphasize the need for mutual understanding between the refugee and native born populations. If given the opportunity to do any one thing to improve the quality of life for the refugee community, Abdullah “Pious” Ali would simply ask to hold a citywide forum where people could speak free of judgment and learn about each other’s perspectives, experiences and cultures (Ali). Similarly, Choul Ngoal wishes that Portland’s public schools would explore multiculturalism in the classroom (Ngoal). Ironically, it is the refugee community that expresses the desire to celebrate Portland’s diversity, instead of the city itself. The outliers are not asking for anything more than to be included in the determining of their own future.

Examining the experience of the Refugee community provides an index for the way in which Portland is re-imagining itself. In this case, Portland appears to have re-imagined itself as a city that provides for both a successful postindustrial economy and the welfare of citizens. It seems, however, that one of these parties is receiving the lion’s share of these promises. The notion of “re-imagined” is ironically appropriate, as there is a tangible dissonance between these selves. Investing in the high-end service economy, while throwing as many social services as possible at the demographics left in the shadow of its success, is not a stable solution. That is not to undermine the efforts of organizations that work doggedly at bridging this gap, but they face the challenge of orchestrating miracles with limited and shrinking resources. Scholar Hassan Ali Mohamed (2001) extensively studied the socioeconomic and political integration of

Somali refugee populations in Toronto, Ontario, and his results have significant implications for Portland. Canada provides its citizens with an array of generous social welfare services that would be impossible to find in even the most progressive American cities. Under the precept that stabilization via social services is the key to effective integration, Mohamed's case study demographic should have flourished. His findings, however, indicated the opposite, that Somali refugees did not achieve "significant structural integration, into the social, economic and political structures of Canadian society," and were afflicted by many of the same problems facing Portland's refugee community (Mohamed).¹¹² This reflects the opinions of Portland's refugees, whose main desire is simply to have a stake in their future. Likewise, Valenzuela attests that social services that don't emphasize and engender self-empowerment will invariably fail to move beyond the stage of "stabilizing" its clients. However, refugees themselves unanimously agree that stabilizing services are initially necessary.

Perhaps the city's paradigm of "integration," as an "ends" is problematic in and of itself; it implies incorporating a disparate entity into a preexisting—and supposedly functioning—framework. Portland has managed to carve out a niche in its already crowded cityscape for the refugee community, but one that has proved to be unequivocally restrictive. Furthermore, "integration" connotes a systemic solution but this is problematic if an increasingly fragmented governmental structure is an inevitable aspect of Portland's future. Some incompatibilities may prove irreconcilable. One example is the issue of homeownership, a highly coveted goal for many refugee families

¹¹² Mohamed's study found that "as recent migrants, Somali refugees have not achieved significant structural integration into the social, economic, and political structures of Canadian society. Dependence on social welfare assistance, a high rate of unemployment, limited educational pursuits, and social and residential segregation are features common among Somali refugees in Toronto... factors that hinder their effective integration..." (Mohamed).

as an integral part of the American dream.¹¹³ Portland, on the other hand, is making a concerted effort to develop in a manner that instead favors rental units in order to ensure that the broadest range of demographics have access to housing within the city's borders. While not an overwhelmingly problematic issue, this example highlights that these two entities may not always fit perfectly together, but will ultimately have to accommodate each other.

The service sector economy in which Portland is continually investing has its own set of hazards and is already beginning to falter. The globalized, postindustrial economy has created what renowned scholar and theorist Manuel Castells delineates as the rise of economic “non-places,” (Francke & Ham, 2006). These are essentially economically productive spaces that have virtually no physical or geographical tie to their actual locations—such as producer services, which often are more dependent on the flows of information than specific location—and therefore are easily subject to mobility.¹¹⁴ As a small, regional center located on the periphery of the American economic engine, Portland has little margin for error. Portland recognized and adapted to the demands of a postindustrial economy by aggressively investing in the assets that would foster success and prosperity. This forward-thinking mentality certainly served the city well, but once again, it needs to recognize that a new Portland is emerging—not in its high rise office towers, medical centers and biotechnology clusters, but on its own streets and neighborhoods—and adapt its political and economic framework accordingly. This time, however, the city should take advice from Grace Valenzuela:

¹¹³ For reference and further elaboration, refer to Portland Press Herald article “There’s No Place Like Home,” (2006).

¹¹⁴ For further elaboration, refer to Francke & Ham (2006).

“These people have real life experiences that we could never have experienced or imagined ourselves, and we have a lot to learn from them... There needs to be more listening. We need to ask the refugee community, what can we do for you?” (Valenzuela).

Perhaps Portland can learn how to weather the current economic hardships from the refugee’s survival skills. Portland can draw lessons on how to better provide for its refugee community from other cities experiencing similar trends.

Portland’s immigrant population is “one of the most diverse in the nation,” (Bouchard). However, the city is far from unique in having to confront the complex issues of facilitating the successful integration of its refugee demographics. Larger cities that are also centers of refugee relocation are dealing with similar problems on a far greater scale. Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, has a Somali refugee community of 50,000 people, nearly the size of Portland’s total population.¹¹⁵ Embryonic refugee communities are also taking shape in smaller New England cities such as Concord, New Hampshire and Burlington, Vermont.¹¹⁶ Concord and Burlington exhibit many of the same qualities that made Portland an ideal location for refugee resettlement—small, safe and comparatively affordable. There are many parallels between Portland’s relationship with its refugee community and those in other cities, large and small. Minneapolis, Minnesota and Columbus, Ohio similarly experienced high-profile incidents of police officers shooting and killing mentally handicapped Somali young men. Eerily mirroring the David Okot slaying, in both cases police reports claimed that the victims had been armed and had threatened the officers with their respective weapons, a detail disputed by

¹¹⁵ For comparison, Portland’s Somali population—the largest within the refugee community—numbers approximately 5,500. For reference and further information on the Somali diaspora in the United States, refer to Abbe (2009).

¹¹⁶ For more information concerning the refugee communities in Concord, NH and Burlington, VT, refer to Conaboy (2007) and Rathke (2006).

eyewitness accounts.¹¹⁷ Minneapolis, like Portland, is also struggling with a series of gang-related murders and crimes involving refugee youths.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, cultural differences have also led to further conflicts between refugees and law enforcement, gaps which both parties have been actively working together to bridge.¹¹⁹ Larger cities provide cautionary tales as well. Housing shortages in Boston, Massachusetts have had a devastating impact on newly arrived refugees. The International Institute of Boston—New England’s largest (and most overburdened) multi-service refugee agency—was forced to place numerous clients in homeless shelters or far-flung motels. Many of these refugees ultimately migrated to more affordable metropolitan areas.¹²⁰ This specific example highlights the consequences of what could potentially happen in Portland if issues surrounding affordable housing are not properly addressed.

While highly urbane environments come replete with a variety of social ills that acutely affect vulnerable refugee communities, they are also fascinating laboratories from which Portland can garner valuable lessons. In spite of the aforementioned conflicts with law enforcement, Somali refugee communities in Minneapolis and Columbus have found considerable success in establishing ethnic indoor “malls,” which spatially imitate their native bazaars and marketplaces. Entrepreneurs lease booth space from which they sell their products, and rent is thus made affordable by the high density of vendors. In Minneapolis, Southeast Asian and Latino refugee communities have carved thriving

¹¹⁷ For reference and more information surrounding the tragic deaths of Abu Kassim Jeilani of Minneapolis, Minnesota and Nasir Abdi of Columbus, Ohio, refer to Collins (2002) and Williams (2006) respectively.

¹¹⁸ 2009 saw seven murders of Somali youth in a ten-month period in Minneapolis, all of which were gang related. For more information on Somali gangs in Minneapolis and the murder of Ahmednur Ali, refer to Condon (2009).

¹¹⁹ One specific example cites that in many foreign cultures, when stopped by police, it is customary to directly approach the officer, behavior that American law enforcement perceives as potentially threatening. Refer to Williams (2008).

¹²⁰ For reference see Rodriguez (2001).

economic niches through similar practices.¹²¹ In gritty Worcester, Massachusetts, Clark University launched a progressive academic program in which students work with local refugee establishments implementing microfinance loans. This community-university partnership was made possible by \$100,000 grant from Lutheran Social Services, the city's preeminent refugee resettlement program.¹²² Even in the smaller case studies such as Burlington and Concord, microfinance loans that facilitate entrepreneurship have been the most successful methods for facilitating socioeconomic self-sufficiency, a key to integration.

While other cities' experiences can illuminate successful (and unsuccessful) patterns and practices with regards to refugee services, they may not always be able to translate directly to Portland. In the context of its refugee community, Portland both benefits and suffers in this context from its size. Having the amenities of a larger urban area with the feel and character of a more modest city were qualities that initially drew both gentrifying professional classes and refugees alike to Portland. Portland's size certainly contributes to a communal ethos, a factor that rendered the refugee community highly visible, preventing them from proverbially slipping through the cracks. They are the conspicuous New Mainers in a city with a legacy of social services and new emphasis on celebrating cultural diversity. Despite their relative absence from the high-end boutiques and coffee shops of the Old Port, it would be impossible for this community, which comprises nearly one-sixth of the city, to go unnoticed. Conversely, Portland's size can prove highly limiting, especially with regards to socio-spatial dynamics. Portland's built environment legacies of the past have to be navigated by its contemporary populace.

¹²¹ For reference and further information concerning successful ethnic malls in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Columbus, Ohio, refer to Taylor (2000) and Ali & Arman (2008).

¹²² For reference and more information concerning the Clark University program, refer to Dayal (2010).

Columbus and Minneapolis are not only significantly larger than Portland, but also have a distinctly different and less compact urban morphology. In these expansive Midwestern cities where homeownership is comparatively affordable, refugee communities have carved out entire ethnic enclaves the size of Portland itself, able to establish their own institutions and support an array of ethnic businesses. These refugee populations still suffer from many of the same socioeconomic issues that afflict similar demographics in Portland, but the networks afforded by a population of, for example, 50,000 Somalis as opposed to 5,500 renders a considerably different dynamic.

Despite the egalitarian values of Portland's social service-friendly governmental framework, indications from these other cities experiencing extensive refugee resettlement point to smaller-scale initiatives being successful, or ones that derive from outside the pre-existing coalition of service providers. In Portland, one of the most successful and empowering programs for refugees stems directly from the private sector. Barber Foods, a large food processing plant on the West End's periphery, employs refugees as 44% of its 750-member workforce, a philosophy instilled and maintained by the company's founder, the son of Armenian immigrants. Furthermore, the company privately finances an English as a Second Language program for refugee employees along with courses in math and computer science and in 2001 established a college scholarship program named Pathways to Higher Education. This level of commitment to its foreign-born employees is seen as an investment, hoping that the recipients will make their career with the company and become empowered, contributing members to Portland society.¹²³

¹²³ For more information on Barber Foods and its employee programs, refer to Murphy (2007).

A similar emerging trend is the prevalence of grassroots refugee organizations forming to fill in the gaps between city-affiliated and faith-based services. Many initiatives are actually founded and managed by members of the refugee community themselves, the most ideal avenue for both community and self-empowerment. One example is the recently established Somali Community Center in East Bayside, the opening of which required \$500,000 in fundraising and personal investment.¹²⁴ Bayside's African Culture and Learning Center was founded for the purpose of community organization and coordination between African refugees and social services.¹²⁵ Other grassroots organizations such as the West End's LearningWorks has grown to a \$2,000,000 per year social service provider that even receives city funding on occasion. It operates language education and job training programs for refugees of all ages, and maintains 56 units of subsidized housing in 11 buildings in the West End, which it specifically provisions for its clients.¹²⁶

While these types of community-based organizations are well attuned to the needs of their refugee constituents, their success is indicative of trends that extend beyond Portland, and have significant implications for how the city must re-imagine and refashion itself. Returning to the key argument, there exists a dissonance between Portland's re-imagined self as the ideal, progressive city that simultaneously provides for a successful economy and its constituents' welfare, and Portland's reality, which attempts both, but is trapped in its pre-existing framework that has committed to a certain pattern of development. Perhaps the root of this contemporary dissonance comes from the fact

¹²⁴ For reference and more information concerning Portland's Somali Community Center, refer to Ross (2007).

¹²⁵ For reference and more information concerning the African Cultural Learning Center, refer to Maxwell (2006).

¹²⁶ For reference and more information on LearningWorks, see Hench (2009).

that Portland has not properly re-imagined itself in reference to its political-economic ethos. By re-packaging itself during its urban renaissance to capitalize on its service industries and commodified spaces, the city committed itself to a neoliberal economy, the principles of which would seem inherently antithetical to Portland's touted civic-mindedness. Portland has, in essence, become a distinct—and partially in denial—brand of the neoliberal city. Intriguingly, Portland exhibits some of the most positive qualities of the theoretical ideal of the neoliberal city, such as one of the nation's friendliest environment for small businesses.¹²⁷ Perhaps Portland can become a small city that bridges the gap between tapping into the neoliberal service economy, while maintaining a distinct local flavor by providing literal and figurative space for small-scale entrepreneurs to thrive. However, entrepreneurial success is dependant upon a site of production to generate disposable income. If the Economic Crisis of 2008 effectively halts conspicuous consumption in its tracks, then Portland may be in trouble, as it specializes in producing "culture," which requires a very specific consumer base. However, According to Nathan Smith, past recessions in Portland merely ratcheted development back as opposed to changing its trajectory altogether. If fabricated versions of urban vitality were sold wholesale to young professionals during the process of urban renaissance, perhaps Portland can capitalize on the opportunity to create an authentic version, this time replete with diversity. However, the capital to provide for these entrepreneurial opportunities must come from a real economic base that unlike tourism or "culture," is both consistent and tangible.

In further neoliberal form, the refugee community's experience in Portland has highlighted that a centrally based (city-affiliated) model of social service delivery is not

¹²⁷ For reference and more information, refer to Thomas (2002).

optimal, despite the stabilizing services it does provision. That's not to say that the city should take any more of a diminished role, but should recognize that community-based initiatives are equally vital and often provide more direct avenues to self-empowerment. Recalling Singer's (2005) research, cities that allowed these organizations to play a leading role in delivering social services were the most "successful" in providing for their refugee communities (18). Given adequate funding, there's no doubt that figures like Abdullah "Pious" Ali, a self-ascribed "foot-solder for the refugee youth," could work small miracles. Funding should be routed through the forty-plus nonprofit, community and faith based organizations in Portland dedicated to refugee services. They would certainly listen to their clients. Perhaps the presence of the refugee community in Portland has provided Portland in turn with a vital service—a proverbial wake up call and the opportunity to continually re-imagine and reinvent itself as a city more perfectly in tune with all of its constituents. Portland's ship does not have to sink. Perhaps if the city works with the refugee community to create a framework that floats, the future will be smooth sailing.

Part V: Epilogue

While the future of Portland's refugee community at times seems precarious, an extremely current and promising opportunity has emerged. The city acquired a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) grant from the American Institute of Architects to provide a number of infrastructural and aesthetic improvements to the East Bayside neighborhood in order to promote sustainability, foster human scale development and, ultimately, to re-integrate this somewhat isolated community into Portland's urban fabric ("AIA Sending Design Team to East Bayside"). Such an endeavor will undoubtedly make this vibrant but oft-troubled neighborhood a more livable environment, and it brings a host of expert planners, architects and consultants from around the nation to Portland.¹²⁸ Alan Holt, an Associate Professor at the Muskie School of Public Policy at the University of Southern Maine and former Urban Designer for the city of Portland has been instrumental in acquiring and implementing this grant.

While the SDAT grant nonetheless typifies the preexisting pattern of providing for the refugee community through federal or external initiatives, it has had one extremely important unintended impact. The subsequent planning process has brought together in conversation virtually every refugee service organization—faith-based, city-affiliated, non-profit or otherwise—with City Hall and the East Bayside community itself. According to Holt, SDAT planning meetings fostered “a cross-fertilization of non-profit groups, city officials, county officials, faith-based organizations, regional planners, business owners, residents, leaders from the various immigrant communities... they were all talking to each other and discovering that each of them had a piece to this puzzle and

¹²⁸ The Portland Press Herald stated that “any one of [these experts] would be too expensive for the city to bring in on their own during this budget cycle, but nine of them are coming together for free,” (“Our View: Portland's Gateway to Get a Fresh Look From Planners”).

that there were many overlapping interests,” (Holt). As examined, there are a variety of organizations that provide services for and contribute to the well-being of Portland’s refugee community, but coordinating efforts can be difficult. Holt posited that “one of the big opportunities is that these people are finding each other and new alliances and new conversations are coming out of it... people are excited about how to keep these conversations going,” (Holt). Holt is optimistic about Portland’s political future and its implications for including the refugee community and its interests. The current city council includes a former community organizer for Bayside and East Bayside, as well as the former district councilor for the East End and East Bayside. This implies that some of the highest offices in the city are sensitive and keenly attuned to issues surrounding neighborhoods with high refugee populations. In retrospect, Holt said that “it was heartening to find that there are a lot of people doing good work,” and he has high hopes for this neighborhood and Portland’s refugee community, a sentiment that, having thoroughly examined this issue, I echo as well.

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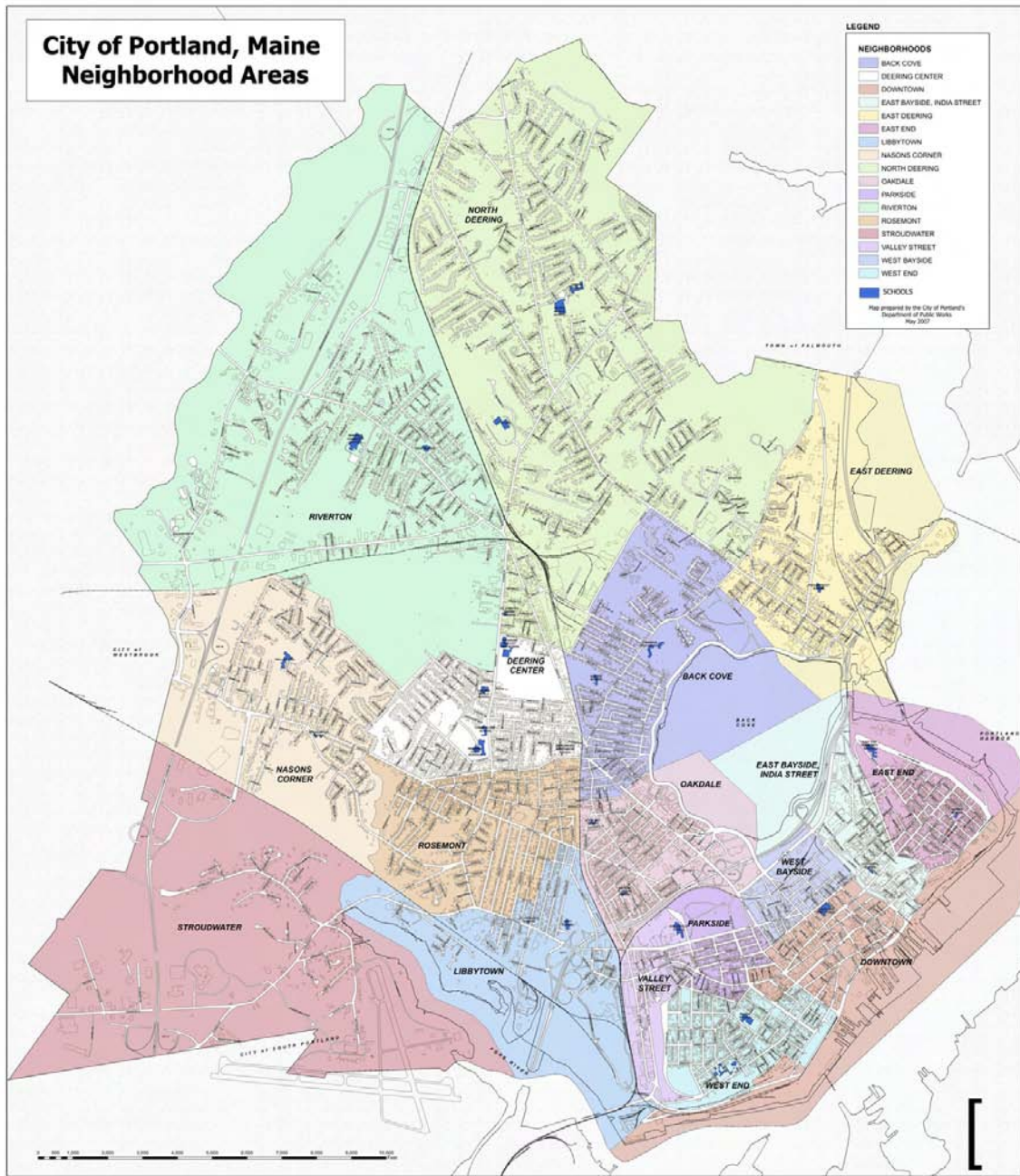
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Appendix I



Map courtesy of the City of Portland. Available from <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/neighborhoods3.pdf>

Appendix II



Figure 1—One City Center, Downtown Portland.



Figure 2—Portland's Arts District.



Figure 3—Exchange Street, Old Port.



Figure 4—Wharf Street in Portland's Old Port.



Figure 5—Shingle-style single-family homes, West End.



Figure 6—Brick town homes, Pine Street, West End.



Figure 7—Beckett Street, East End/Munjoy Hill.



Figure 8—Weymouth Street, Parkside—the setting of the Okot shooting.



Figure 9—Triple-decker tenements on Grant Street, Parkside.



Figure 10—Multi-family housing stock, Bayside.



Figure 11—Fox Street, East Bayside. The Kennedy Park housing projects are visible through the fence.

Appendix III



Franklin Arterial: before and after. Photo courtesy of Franklin Street Reclamation Authority. Available from www.franklinstreet.us.



Portland's former Little Italy. These buildings were destroyed by Franklin Arterial. Photo courtesy of Maine Memory Network. Available from <http://www.mainememory.net>.



More housing in Portland's former Little Italy that was destroyed by Franklin Arterial. Photo Courtesy of Maine Memory Network. Available from <http://www.maine-memory.net>.