PARKS IN CONTEXT

A Community History of Peninsula Park
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Page 1: Introduction by Dr. Catherine McNeur

Page 2: Circus For All by Brayton Price


Page 4-5: Gangs in Peninsula Park: Protection for NE Portland by Felix Bracy

Page 6-7: The Black United Front and Community Unity Day by Ana Bane

Page 8: Remembering the Vanport Survivors and African Cultural Heritage Festivals by Tanaka Axberg

Graphic Design by Andi Johnson
Introduction:

Inspired by the 2020 Black Lives Matter vigils and marches that began in Peninsula Park honoring George Floyd, the Friends of Peninsula Park Rose Garden reached out to Portland State University’s History Department hoping that our students could help tell a richer history of how the park has been a home to so many communities over the twentieth century. This zine is our attempt to tell the park’s story.

Professor Catherine McNeur
Tanaka Axberg
Ana Bane
Felix Bracy
Andi Johnson
Brayton Price
Vicky White

Images Courtesy of: City of Portland (OR) Archives, Oregon Historical Society, and Street Roots
From the 1940s to 60s, Portland Parks and Recreation staged the annual Barr Bros. Circus in Peninsula Park. Portland youngsters ranging from kindergarten to high school performed in parades and shows, representing their local playground sites and recreation centers from all around the city.

They performed flawlessly and showed elements of daring!

The Oregonian, 1960

Act included: boxing, chariot racing, acrobatics, baton twirling, and more!
In August 1979, the Inner-Northeast Neighborhoods Against Crime program invited children and park-goers to “Crime-Prevention Community Field Day” in Peninsula Park, in which participants enjoyed activities such as bicycle-marking, puppet shows, a disco dance, and a variety of sports competitions.

Throughout the 1970's and 80's, Peninsula Park hosted a number of events aimed at youth crime-prevention as concerns over juvenile delinquency and crime came to the forefront of the nation’s mind.

The Piedmont Neighborhood Association and residents lodged numerous complaints of rowdy behavior, alcohol consumption, and vandalism taking place at night in Portland city parks—Peninsula Park included.
Guardian Angels at Peninsula Park

In 1982, New York's "Guardian Angels," a volunteer street organization started by Curtis Sliwa, became popular in Portland. Peninsula Park fitness group "Crisp" headed by Penny Kelly and Roy Pittman even trained the "Rose City's Angels." Sliwa even noted that the program was more successful in Portland than in his home city of New York.

Roy Pittman's positive impact on the Peninsula Park community cannot be overstated. Pittman, a collegiate wrestling champion, founded the wrestling program at Peninsula Park in 1970. In an interview with The Oregonian, Pittman described one purpose of wrestling as a way to get kids off the streets, and said that he treats his wrestlers as if they were his own kids.

PARKS AND RECREATION
Portland is called the City of Roses.
Inspired by the 2020 Black Lives Matter vigils and marches that began in Peninsula Park honoring George Floyd, the Friends of Peninsula Park Rose Garden reached out to Portland State University's History Department hoping that our students could help tell a richer history of how the park has been a home to so many communities over the twentieth century. This zine is our attempt to tell the park's story.

Professor Catherine McNeur Tanaka Axberg
Ana Bane
Felix Bracy
Andi Johnson Brayton Price
Vicky White

Gangs at Peninsula Park: Protection for NE Portland

Peninsula Park's reputation has long been complicated, and many debate the existence of gang activity there and generally in Portland.

In the late 1970s, as youth unemployment soared and public disinvestment increased, Portland's first street gang since the 50s, the Dragons (later the Portland Crips), established their home turf in Peninsula Park. In an interview, the group's leader, Eddie Ray Crain, explained that one of the gang's purposes was to protect marginalized communities of NE Portland. In 1980, Portland Police estimated loosely 100 members in the Dragons alone.

Above: An interview with Eddie Ray Crain in The Oregonian from January 10, 1982

Jobs scarce for youths in Northeast
A branch of the National Black United Front, the Portland BUF organized for racial justice in the 1980s, most notably desegregating schools and fighting police brutality. From 1981-1985, the Portland BUF held its annual Community Unity Day at Peninsula Park, an event featuring free food, live music, swimming, and games and competitions for all ages.

Community unity day is the day the N.E. Community comes together to share its victories, realize its dreams and share the spirit of Black love.

In 1987, the Portland BUF hosted an MLK Day Celebration in Peninsula Park.

Ron Herndon
The Portland BUF’s boycotts in protest of the Portland school board’s racist busing practices were so effective, they were adopted by the National BUF as the “PORTLAND MODEL.”

A member of the BUF security team protesting a school board meeting, April 12, 1982.
African Arts are still being celebrated at Peninsula Park as recently as 2018 when the Community Center offered a Kakatonon African Dance Workshop.

July 1997, Peninsula Park hosted the eighth annual Homowo African Arts Cultural Festival. The festival, held every summer in Portland, is named for a traditional harvest celebration that takes place in Ghana.

Since 2014 the survivors of the 1948 Vanport flood, and their descendants, are honored by Vanport Mosaic at their annual Peninsula Park celebration. After the flood, the demographic makeup of the Albina and Piedmont neighborhoods underwent a massive shift as thousands of recently displaced families sought out new places to live.