

IDHH Episode Three: Building Community Defense



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Pioneer Square protest, date unknown (photo: Coyote Amrich)



Board and staff members of the Coalition for Human Dignity, funded by MRG to continue their research on right-wing groups and train grassroots organizations in opposition research skills.

Publicity photo of CHD, Abby Layton in foreground, Jonathan Mozzochi center back, Steve Wasserstrom with glasses, back right (date unknown)

Episode Summary: In this episode we learn about the initial formation of the Coalition for Human Dignity and its subsequent development into an effective organizing tool for self defense. Featured in the episode are community organizer and racial justice scholar Scot Nakagawa, community activist Abby Layton, Jewish studies professor Steve Wasserstrom, activist and protestor M. Treloar, community activist and researcher Steven Gardiner, community organizer and right wing watchdog Leonard Zeskind, writer and right wing watchdog Jonathan Mozzochi and community activist Gillian.

Homeless LGBTQ Youth According to research by the University of Chicago, LGBTQ youth are at more than double the risk of homelessness compared to non-LGBTQ peers and experience over twice the rate of early deaths, with statistical increase in both categories for Black or multiracial LGBTQ youth and higher overall reported discrimination and trauma. Transgender youth face unique and often more severe types of trauma. For more information on this report, see [Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America](#). Resources can be found nationally at [Trevor Lifeline](#) 866-488-7386 and in Portland at [Outside In](#) and [P:ear](#)

Firebombing Murders of Hattie Cohens and Brian Mock On September 26, 1992, four skinheads firebombed the basement apartment of an old house with Molotov cocktails in nearby Salem, Ore. while eight people slept inside. Everyone got out but 29 year-old Black lesbian Hattie Mae Cohens and 45-year-old white gay Brian Mock. The Seattle Times reported May 15, 1993 that the skinheads were said to be retaliating against an incident earlier in the day, when four of Ms. Cohen's friends, all of whom were Black, kicked in the door to an apartment where two of the murderers were present in response to hearing a racial slur shouted throughout the building. Many believed Ms. Cohens and Mr. Mock were targeted for their sexuality; at the trial District Attorney Dale Penn denied it was a hate crime though he did allow that "race or sexual orientation....played a role." According to Timothy Egan of the New York Times writing on November 1, 1992, there were an estimated 400 skinheads in Oregon at the time; the local Salem population had recently almost tripled, from 23 to 70. There were articles in the [New York Times](#) and in the [Seattle Times](#).

Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA), Lon Mabon, Measure 9 The atmosphere of the late September, 1992 bombing of Hattie Mae Cohens and Brian Mock was polarized along a clear binary of intolerance versus civil rights. The OCA was a political activist organization in Oregon, founded in 1986 by fervent antigay crusader Lon Mabon. In 1988, the OCA mounted a successful signature drive to overturn



Steven Wasserstrom, a professor of Judaic studies and the humanities at Reed College, holds a piece of documentation collected by the Coalition for Human Dignity in Portland.

Photo for PRI's *The World*, feature on Portland's racist history, 2017 (photo: Rupa Shenor, PRI)



COALITION FOR HUMAN DIGNITY PORTLAND, OREGON

CHD logo (with nods to old Civil Defense logo)

an executive order by Gov. Neil Goldschmidt banning discrimination against gays. The OCA's most infamous unsuccessful action was Measure 9, a ballot measure to create an exclusionary clause to the state constitution basically removing civil rights from LGBTQ people.

The proposed clause: "All governments in Oregon may not use their monies or properties to promote, encourage or facilitate homosexuality, pedophilia, sadism, or masochism. All levels of government, including public education systems, must assist in setting a standard for Oregon's youth which recognizes that these behaviors are abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse and they are to be discouraged and avoided."

The measure was defeated in Portland; Mabon then focused on bringing similar measures to 28 small communities throughout the state where they passed in all but two of the 28 counties. The threat of Measure 9 galvanized the state in defense of LGBTQ rights; by 1993 the state legislature passed HB3500 which overturned the measures as unconstitutional, which was upheld in the Supreme Court. The murders of Hattie Mae Cohens and Brian Mock took place just 37 days before the November 3 vote, a time marked by increasing violence and tension. Anna Quindlen wrote an [opinion piece](#) from the day before the vote.

Decline of the Timber Industry The 1979 Iranian Revolution kicked off a global oil shortage that led to an energy crisis across the U.S. The economy went into the worst recession since World War II; bankruptcies erupted across the nation, including timber industries of Oregon. Measures to protect the endangered Northern Spotted Owl led to logging reductions smaller timber companies could not manage without. Timber company ownership shifted to a now familiar model of oligarchic capitalism, with Wall Street private ownership of vast tracts of forest land paying minuscule taxes in parasitic relationship to struggling communities in Western Oregon. (in 1992 [timber taxes](#) brought in over \$100 million to the counties; due to changes in the federal tax codes in the 80s, in 2020 that number was less than \$5 million.) These taxes funded libraries, schools, county health services, transportation; without it, the rural areas of Oregon have been economically hobbled for years. A September 2020 [podcast](#) from Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) lays out the history.

Fred Meyer is a chain of supermarkets and department stores founded in 1931 by German immigrant and Yukon gold prospector turned grocer Fritz Grubmeyer a.k.a. Fred G. Meyer. The stores merged with Kroger in 1998 and have locations in Washington, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California and Alaska.

The Hollywood Neighborhood: In 1926 when Walter



CHD's ubiquitous 1990 FIGHT RACISM poster- based off a 1931 poster by German communist graphic designer John Heartfield- (designed and updated by Steven Birch and CHD's Patricia McGuire)



Cover photo from *Loud Hawk: The United States Versus the American Indian* by Kenneth Stern (1994)

Tebbets built the magnificent [Hollywood Theater](#); the neighborhood promptly named itself after the gorgeous theater, which is now a 'nonprofit modern-historic movie house.' Tebbets, originally of Nebraska, built, operated or managed 11 other theaters in town and is the reason for the many beautiful cinemas in Portland.

Susan Wheeler was a lifelong activist on the left, starting at age 15 when, with the help of the Communist Party, she organized a Pete Seeger concert. You can read some current writing by Ms. Wheeler's first husband, Communist Party organizer Don Hamerquist [here](#).

Ronnie Williams, Ms. Wheeler's second husband, was a founding member of the Alabama Black Liberation Front; the ABLF modeled themselves after the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. In addition to starting a breakfast program they monitored police radio. Black Alabamans in the early 70s were vulnerable to police violence, brutality and, all too often, murder. ABLF members would often arrive at police scenes in advance of the squad cars, to politely observe the interactions, while bearing armed witness. On September 15, 1970, an informant told the sheriff that the ABLF planned an ambush to prevent an eviction of a woman from her home; the sheriff showed up with 17 other cops, armed with teargas gas, rifles, shotguns and regular side arms. A deputy sheriff kicked the door in to find ABLF core members with shotguns. Miraculously, no one was murdered though Ronnie Williams was injured. No shots were fired from inside the house, all members were arrested and the Alabama Black Liberation Fund met its end, like so many groups, in legal defense fees and prison support. Williams served 8 months in jail during which time he met Susan Wheeler while she supported his campaign; he was given a 5 year sentence and was bailed out, upon which time he fled with Susan Wheeler to Oregon for asylum, where he and Ms. Wheeler married and successfully [fought his extradition](#) to Alabama.

In listing off Susan Wheeler's activism lineage and credentials, Scot Nakagawa rattled off a number of important cases, organizations, movements and historical moments. Here are brief notes with links for further exploration into the background of the American Left of the last 40 years.

Loud Hawk/Redner Offense/Defense Committee, Justice for Dennis Banks, American Indian Movement (AIM): The American Indian Movement (AIM) is a grass roots organization founded 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota by Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, Vernon Bellecourt and Russell Means, urban Indigenous men advocating for protection against police brutality. In February of 1973, AIM members and Oglala Sioux occupied the town of Wounded Knee on South Dakota's Pine Ridge reservation initially after locals called on AIM to support a protest of local corrupt tribal government; the protest became a 71-day siege as



Scot Nakagawa



Leonard Zeskind

police quickly surrounded the town, preventing comings and goings. Following the siege, AIM activists suffered high death rates in the next 2-3 years, described by Ka-Mook Banks as up to 200 deaths in [Loud Hawk: The United States Versus the American Indian Movement](#). As detailed in Stern's account in mid-November, 1975, a caravan of AIM activists was pulled over after local cops in the tiny town of Ontario on the eastern border of Oregon received a tip asking to watch for vehicles fitting their description. The activists, who included Anna Mae Aquash, Russell Redner, Leonard Peltier, Dennis Banks, Ka-Mook Banks and Kenny Loud Hawk, were escaping Pine Ridge, which had become deadly after the death of AIM member Joe Stuntz and 2 FBI agents during a confrontation where U.S. forces had entered the reservation in an action described as a military style invasion. The activists who survived (Anna Mae Aquash was murdered just months later in February 1976,) were tied up in a court case which lasted until 1988. Author Kenneth Stern was a Portland law student volunteering on the case who eventually argued as lead counsel when the case went to the Supreme Court. Like the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, AIM suffered deep betrayals as government antagonists planted informants and actively encouraged divisiveness as an effective strategy to destroy the movement. Few comprehensive books detailing the movement exist, though early years are covered by Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) and Robert Warrior (Osage) in [Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee](#); several memoirs exist, including [Ojibwe Warrior by Dennis Banks](#) and [Where White Men Fear To Tread by Russell Means and Martin Wolf](#), both available at Powell's Books. Recommended but hard to find and out of print is [Voices From Wounded Knee, 1973: In the Words of the Participants](#).

Black Panther Party for Self Defense, often called the Black Panthers was originally formed in Oakland in the fall of 1966 after Huey Newton and Bobby Seale met at Merritt Community College and began working together in a local poverty program. They formulated the now-famous [10 Point Program And Platform: What We Want, What We Believe](#) and began copwatching in support of #7 "We want an immediate end to Police Brutality and Murder of Black People." A Portland chapter was founded in June of 1969 by local living legend Kent Ford, who continues to regularly march with Black Lives Matter as of the summer of 2020.

By October of 1969, Huey Newton was in jail after a late-night encounter with police where Mr. Newton, unarmed, was shot. Within 4 years, according to a timeline based on BPP newsletters and other source documents created in [Still Black, Still Strong](#) at least 29 members across various chapters would die in violent confrontations, often with police or FBI agents. Chapters endured over 42 raids, disruptions, and occasional firebombings of Black Panther Party offices



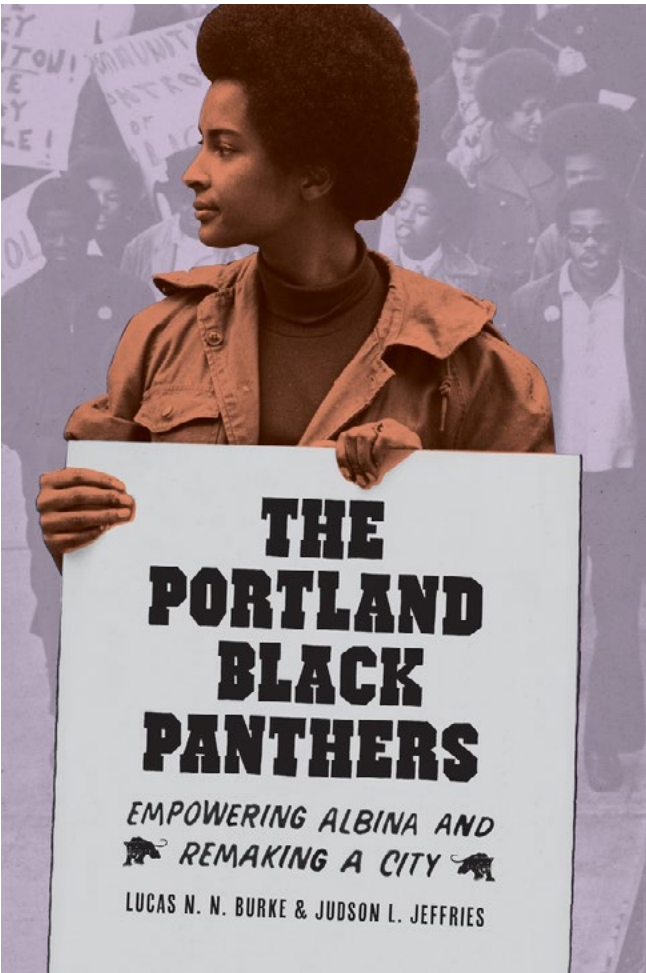
Steven Gardiner

as well as health clinics and in one case in L.A., a child care center (where police held children at gunpoint while beating up an adult.)

Party membership was heavily infiltrated by police and agents, which incurred a vicious split that resulted in members mistrusting and attacking each other. Panthers were harassed, stalked, followed, undermined, murdered and largely vilified in the mainstream, white-centered media. They were [openly and secretly targeted](#) in well-documented efforts by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI working in collusion with local police departments.

Throughout what amounted to a secret war on American citizens similar to the slightly later war on AIM activists, BPP members continued to open and run breakfast programs to feed food-insecure children, open and run health clinics and child care centers, participate in outreach and solidarity with oppressed peoples in South Africa, Palestine, Viet Nam and beyond.

For first-person accounts from the time, check out [The Black Panthers Speak](#) with source documents from Huey P. Newton, Kathleen Cleaver, Fred Hampton, Bobby Seale and others. For a woman's perspective on participating in Black Panther Party leadership, check out [Elain Brown's A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story](#) available at Powell's Books To learn about the Portland chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, check out the [Oregon Historical Society website](#) or see [The Portland Black Panthers: Empowering Albina and Remaking A City by Lucas N. Burke and Judson L. Jeffries](#).



The Iran-Contra Affair was a secret U.S. arms deal that traded missiles and other arms to free some Americans held hostage by terrorists in Lebanon, but also used funds from the arms deal to support armed conflict in Nicaragua. The controversial deal—and the ensuing political scandal—threatened to, but ultimately did not bring down the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

Lesbian Community Project: From 1985 through 2008, the lesbian community project promoted the “well-being of the lesbian community through a grassroots organization with an evolving multi-issue, multi-cultural perspective.” [They have a public archive.](#)

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) was founded in 1917 during World War I by the spiritual group known as the Quakers, formally called the Religious Society of Friends, to give young conscientious objectors ways to serve without joining the military or taking lives. During World War I the AFSC drove ambulances, ministered to the wounded, and stayed on in Europe after the armistice to rebuild war-ravaged communities.

[Quakers](#) have been around since around the 1600s, rising from the aftermath of the vicious English Civil War; they founded a non-hierarchical worship practice based on



Gateway to NE Martin Luther King Jr Blvd



Mural on MLK Blvd by Isaka Shamsud-Din

a belief that all humans can connect with the divine. Their practice is grounded in silence and tenets include nonviolent service and stewardship of the earth. Early Quakers traveled to protest Puritan strongholds in Massachusetts where they were [publicly tortured, maimed, and occasionally hanged.](#)

The AFSC is active on Facebook, where they continue to regularly call for defunding the police, releasing children from cages and generally advocate for humane treatment of all beings of earth.

Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard Renaming/Union Ave: [In 1987 Bernie Foster, publisher of Portland's Black newspaper The Skanner, led the push to dedicate a major thoroughfare to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr](#) reportedly after visitors to town asked why the city had no street commemorating the great man; by 1989 the City Council approved an ordinance to change the name. Pushback was immediate and—many argued—racist.