

April is National Fair Housing Month – Part 2

The Way It Was: Fair Housing Month Retrospective

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Fair Housing Month, which falls in April, commemorates the anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act . This year it also marks our 20th anniversary of serving Oregon and SW Washington as the Fair Housing Council. April is a good time to reflect on what life was like before these rights were passed and to think about why civil rights activists and policy leaders pushed for their passage.

There was a time in Oregon's history that it was actually illegal for African Americans and mixed-race individuals to be present in this state. Let's be clear, slavery wasn't legal here, but "those people" were not welcome to be here either. There was a time when African-Americans and Asians knew "sundown laws" were common and rushed through jurisdictions to assure they weren't caught in certain towns after dark and risk being exposed to the threat of whippings by a county official.

There was also a time when Oregon was declared the most discriminatory state north of the Mason-Dixon Line; we boasted thousands of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members targeting minorities, immigrants and Catholics.

Is housing discrimination still a problem today? Unfortunately, yes! The KKK has largely disappeared. However, other white supremacist groups have not. Cross burnings in our area are rare, yet there have been two reports of cross burnings in just the last couple of years. We have also seen

an alarming number of hate crimes and harassment based on religion, national origin, disability and sexual orientation. And, who hasn't heard about the white supremacist group that recently visited John Day and was looking to purchase real estate there in order to make the town its new training and headquarters location?

Our Fair Housing Hotline also receives more than 3,000 calls annually. We have had instances of housing providers giving false information in order to keep out "certain people." We've recently seen cases where landlords have required applicants to attend church and provide verification of such from their pastors. Not too many years ago there was also a home on the market in Gresham with a sign in the window that read, "Whites Only." Historically (and reaffirmed by recent, local testing), equally qualified testers are sometimes quoted different prices or offered different levels of service when the only distinction between them is a protected class status such as race, national origin, familial status, or sexual orientation. All of these instances prove that housing discrimination exists.

Please use this April as an excuse to get educated about Oregon and Washington's troubled past, and also about civil rights and fair housing movements on the national level. Please learn the reality of the situation today—how far we've come and how far we have yet to go. Furthermore, get involved, speak out and make a difference!

Visit <http://fhco.org> to learn more about fair housing and the FHCO. You can also take a quick Quiz to test your fair housing knowledge and find Easy Ways to Get Involved—each linked to our entry page.

This article brought to you by the Fair Housing Council; a nonprofit serving the state of Oregon and SW Washington. Learn more and/or sign up for our free, periodic newsletter at <http://fhco.org>.

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Visit <http://fhco.org> or call 1-800-424-3247 Ext. 2.

Qs about this article? Do you want to schedule an in-office fair housing training program or speaker for corporate or association functions?

Contact Jo Becker at jbecker@FHCO.org or 503-453-4016.

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