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**Leisure's Race, Power and Place: The Recreation and Remembrance of African  
Americans in the California Dream**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in History

by

Alison Rose Jefferson

Committee in charge:

Professor Randy Bergstrom, Chair

Professor Emeritus Douglas Daniels

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December 2015

The dissertation of Alison Rose Jefferson is approved.

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December 2015

**Leisure's Race, Power and Place: The Recreation and Remembrance of African  
Americans in the California Dream**

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by

Alison Rose Jefferson

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## ABSTRACT

### **Leisure's Race, Power and Place: The Recreation and Remembrance of African Americans in the California Dream**

by  
Alison Rose Jefferson

In “Leisure’s Race, Power and Place...,” I examine how African Americans pioneered leisure in America’s “frontier of leisure” through their attempts to create communities and business projects, as southern California’s black population grew during the nation’s Jim Crow era. With leisure’s reimagining into the center of the American Dream, black Californians worked to make leisure an open, inclusive, reality for all. My study reconsiders how they made California and American history by challenging racial hierarchies when they occupied recreational sites and public spaces at the core of the state’s formative, mid-twentieth century identity. Black communal practices and economic development around leisure created these sites, marking a space of black identity on the regional landscape and social space. Through struggle over these sites, African Americans helped define the practice and meaning of leisure for the region and the nation, confronted the emergent power politics of leisure space, and set the stage for them as places for remembrance of invention and public contest.

Through archival, personal collections, oral history and site visit research this dissertation presents case studies of southern California, leading African American leisure destinations (Bruce’s Beach/Manhattan Beach, Bay Street/Santa Monica, Lake Elsinore, the Parkridge Country Club/Corona, Eureka Villa/Val Verde and a few others) flourishing from the 1900s to 1960s. Oceanfront and inland places illustrate a range of kinds of leisure production, purposes and societal encounters, and the diversity of black social life in this

historical era. As these histories recover the social relations and community formation of leisure, they bring the voices of more prosperous black Californians, whose actions have been understudied in much of the research on southern California and black urban history, generally.

At leisure/recreational spaces, systematized white racism in ethnically diverse Los Angeles was most consistently targeted at African Americans. Yet they proved this regional style of racism more readily challengeable than elsewhere in the country. Their actions are the local stories of the national narrative of mass movement to open recreational accommodations to all Americans. In reconsidering the formation of California's leisure frontier, my research joins and complicates analysis of the long civil rights movement by demonstrating how the struggle for leisure and public space also reshaped it. In extending the story beyond dispossession through public memory and reclamation of history a generation later, this dissertation reveals a persistent struggle tied to and actively reappropriating these leisure destinations for contemporary place making and justice aims.

This dissertation presents the historic context of black Angeleno community formation and the development of each southern California leisure destinations from their beginnings early in the twentieth century. Two stories will be told: first, the creative assertion of full social and civic membership, and social and economic invention by African American leisure community agents in making leisure; and second, the subsequent story of memory of that leisure. Because the Jim Crow era's enterprise and constriction have largely been erased, I examine the story of the sites' evolution and heritage of how they are remembered to show how their recovery to public memory and historic preservation/heritage



conservation is today restoring the understanding of them as places of commerce, social networks, community, identity, contestation and civil rights struggles.

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## INTRODUCTION

Our arrival at this juncture of western African American history has come after a long, controversial intellectual journey. Until the 1960s the images of the West centered on Fredrick Jackson Turner's ideal of rugged Euro-American pioneers constantly challenging a westward-moving frontier, bring civilization, taming the wilderness, and, in the process, reinventing themselves as 'Americans' and creating an egalitarian society that nurtured the fundamental democratic values that shaped contemporary American society. This interpretation was reinforced by western paintings, by novels, and, most important, by movies and television programs, which cemented into our national consciousness, as no historical work could, the image of white settlers as 'conquerors' who superimposed their will on a vast, virtually uninhabited virgin land. African Americans, according to this interpretation, were not an indigenous conquered group, and certainly they were not among the conquerors. Thus black westerners had no place in the region's historical saga.

-- Quintard Taylor<sup>1</sup>

None of the bibliographies in the standard textbooks published before 1960 cite[d] any of the [articles and books that documented the presence and major activities of blacks on the frontier], and no information on blacks in the West as a group or as individuals, was incorporated into the narrative of the standard works.

-- Lawrence B. DeGraaf<sup>2</sup>

The American West and California have been investigated and mythologized as places of opportunity, hope and leisure lifestyle by varied scholars and writers, as well as by civic and business boosters of all sorts. From the late eighteenth century to the dawning years of the twenty-first century, throughout its Native American, Spanish, Mexican and American history, diverse groups of people from around the world have embraced this imagery, particularly those attracted as tourists and new residents to southern California. Over the last few centuries people moved to southern California for the mild climate and the landscape, accompanying various industrial employment opportunities in cattle ranching, mining, agriculture, petroleum, tourism, movies and high technology. In the last few decades

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<sup>1</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier, African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence B. DeGraaf, "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on the Writing of Western Black History," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Feb. 1975), 27.

of the nineteenth century, train travel allowed the American West to become the tourist destination of choice, as the railroads were marketed to affluent Euro-Americans with leisure time. Railroads transported these leisure consumers to swanky beach and inland resorts in California, as well as to luxurious rustic resorts built in national parks and similar resorts at other locations. More water sources were being engineered, agriculture flourished, Los Angeles developed a deep-water harbor in San Pedro and the Panama Canal opened by 1915, transporting more people and goods to California. Since this time period a romantic ideal of leisure as a lifestyle or “as a permanent way of life” in southern California has been a recurring regional promotion, and additional attraction for tourists and migrants. Leisure became a distinctive defining feature of place and of American citizenship and culture, as an integral part of the “modern” life that was a measurement of fulfillment, self-determination and uplift.<sup>3</sup>

As historians Rawls and Bean have observed the advertising campaigns of the railroads and the contributions of independent writers promoting “California’s charms and embellished...romantic heritage...” propelled southern California as a major tourist attraction and contributed to several real estate booms, making the land as a commodity of place very profitable, and subject to contest over resource control. Very influential in the development of the region was the idea that “California offered leisure as a way of life.” Charles Lummis, a writer and southern California booster, popularized this notion in books and articles in the magazines *Land of Sunshine* and *Out West*. Lummis envisioned and

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure, Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-4, 6-7; James J. Rawls & Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1973; reprint 2003), xiii, 15, 206-207; Kevin Starr, *California, A History* (New York, NY: Modern Library/Random House, Inc., 2005/2007), ix-xiv; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California, An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher/peregrine Smith Books, 1946/1973), 143-150; Lynn Bowman, *Los Angeles: Epic of a City* (Berkeley, CA: Howell-North Books, 1974), 216-218, 224, 227, 247-250.

promoted leisure as a defining ideal, central to social life, as work, eating and sleeping. He and other boosters, including the new (Hollywood) entertainment industry of the early twentieth century showcasing the regional landscape in weekly film and newsreels, extolled “Southern California as the playground of the world, a place where Americans would finally learn to embrace leisure.” Residents through their work and social routines could improve themselves and community in the process. Others could gain its benefits by visiting.<sup>4</sup>

But as Californians creatively undertook leisure, many found it restricted, and themselves excluded from the “way of life.” Racial and ethnic groups (of African Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Native American and Jews) encountered restrictions by the Anglo majority population that prevented them from fully taking advantage of the state’s opportunities and amenities. From Lummis’s time to well into the twentieth century, race, power, privilege and wealth often inflected leisure opportunities just as it determined who was able to take advantage of economic and social opportunities in southern California. Leisure became a site to separate and segregate, to control and regulate, people, places and opportunities. White boosters broadcasted this rhetoric and imagery about leisure lifestyle pleasures as messages in mass media, speaking to white consumers to create a sense of place in the California social and physical landscape that excluded African American leisure practices development from this discourse. In the white boosters’ messages communities of color were situated as laborers if at all, rather than neighbors or social equals.<sup>5</sup>

African Americans made leisure integral to culture, community and struggle in Los Angeles, California, the American West and the United States across the twentieth century.

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<sup>4</sup> Rawls & Bean, (quotation) 206; McWilliams, 143-150; Culver, 6, 16-17, 35-36, 50-51, (quotation) 83.

<sup>5</sup> Culver, 8, 26-27, 41-42, 52-53, 66-68, 83.

This vitally intertwined part of the history is layered, with stories about group and individual circumstances, and chronicles about migration patterns, socio-economic status, cultural practices, and educational and employment opportunities. These multi-faceted stories took place in private and public spaces. The narratives of these experiences and histories intersect and overlap. They are inseparable from one another in their composition and reflection of the structural racial exclusion and class exploitation imposed on African Americans along with other peoples of color. Examination of these layers and multi-faceted components offers scholars alternative research strategies to expand on prior approaches in studying groups previously excluded from the American national and Far West narratives.

Historical remembrance and analysis of leisure generally has focused on white owned and patronized sites, while African American leisure spaces have been mostly unrecognized. This traditional focus has missed a comparable, yet distinctive aspect of leisure, and its part in building difference in production of social space through opportunity of various groups' accesses to the cultural landscape of sites. Blacks, like other Americans who moved to California, embraced the booster dream of a leisure lifestyle and contested attempts of what the *California Eagle* newspaper identified as "confinement to...sordid forms of recreation and play" to assert self-determination in leisure. Astute African American entrepreneurs and civic builders recognized how this leisure embrace produced real estate and other business opportunities. As was the case with leisure and residential resort spaces near eastern, mid-western and southern cities with relatively large African American populations that sprouted up in the early twentieth century, the race-specific leisure spaces of southern California grew because there were black entrepreneurs and residents in particular areas offering services and accommodations to African American

visitors. Black social networking and community building as well as cultural traditions and economic development around leisure pursuits occurred at these sites, marking a space of black identity on the regional landscape and social space. From this, as historian Andrew Kahrl asserts “the development of attractive and accessible Black beaches and leisure sites free from white harassment emerged as a major political issue in the long civil rights movement.”<sup>6</sup>

In the pages of this dissertation I examine the leisure spaces enjoyed by African Americans, and their attempts to create communities and business projects, in conjunction with the growing African American community of southern California during the Jim Crow era. Black Angelenos asserted self-determination to participate in popular leisure and resort, cultural, social and economic trends that were considered modern in the 1920s, including healthful, invigorating activities at communities they built so they could control the property for their enjoyment of these activities and contest white racism. Particularly, they were contesting the laboring that white racism characterized as the lot of African Americans in racist hierarchy. Historically leisure spaces and resorts have been “products” that depended on a market, which starts off mostly outside the community. Public space and amenities are lures to attract visitors. Research sources on resort life and their production have typically

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<sup>6</sup> “Club House Movement Endorsed/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 24 April 1924, 22; Andrew William Kahrl, *On The Beach: Race and Leisure in the Jim Crow South* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2008), (quotation) ix; Henri LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 30-53; I gained some good insights into development of my research methodology from reading several resort community and residential recreational leisure histories, especially Theodore Corbett’s *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001). Others which were useful include: Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure, Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010); Stefan Kanfer, *A Summer World: The Attempt to Build a Jewish Eden in the Catskills, From the Days of the Ghetto to the Rise and Decline of the Borscht Belt* (Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1989); Jill Nelson, *Finding Martha’s Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island* (Doubleday: New York, 2005); Marsha Dean Phelts, *An American Beach for African Americans* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997); Lewis Walker and Ben C. Wilson, *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will, Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University, 1983).



been geographically diverse and fragmentary. This situation held true for my research in writing this project.<sup>7</sup>

Attention to the memory of African American leisure sites in southern California in the communities where these sites were located, remains a political issue for some that complicates defining a public past for citizens and their civic identity. The social meaning of these places and their histories are a powerful tool in developing a more enduring and broader meaning for a more inclusive definition of the collective past and civic identity that includes the actual presence of African Americans in these locales over the twentieth century. My study broadens and reconsiders how African Americans made California history by challenging racial hierarchies when they occupied recreational sites and public spaces at the core of the state's mid-twentieth century identity. I present case studies of southern California's larger and popular, although not broadly remembered, African American leisure destinations, that were sites of pleasure, civil rights struggles and contestation, flourishing for different time durations between the 1900s to the 1960s. In contrast to the city where black Angelenos lived, these California waterfront and pastoral places they went to relax included: Bruce's Beach in Manhattan Beach; Santa Monica's Bay Street beach near Pico Boulevard (sometimes controversially known as "The Inkwell"); Lake Elsinore in Riverside County; the Parkridge Country Club in Corona/Riverside County; Val Verde in Santa Clarita Valley/Los Angeles County; and a few others.

Established white racism in Los Angeles, when manifested in recreation space was most consistently targeted at African Americans, although the racial and ethnic mix of the Los Angeles region included whites of various European ethnicities, Americans of Mexican,

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<sup>7</sup> Theodore Corbett, *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 3.

Latino, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and other Asian descent, along with California American Indians and Native Americans from other regions, as well as African Americans. While the institutionalized discrimination of Los Angeles was constant, tough and resourceful due in part to inconsistent ignoring and locally defining of California's 1893 anti-discrimination statute, African Americans proved it more readily contestable than elsewhere in the country (like the South) through everyday assertions of presence and facilities use, as well as other forms of challenge such as civil disobedience and legal cases. Scholars are just beginning to investigate and comprehend the distinctive history of the varied ways that discrimination experiences impacted different communities of color and marginalized groups, and how the narrative about the Los Angeles region, and the greater American West in general, in the Jim Crow era has important differences than those in states in the nation's eastern region.<sup>8</sup>

The making of the Los Angeles metropolis leisure sites I illuminate are some of the local stories historian Victoria Wolcott identifies as documenting the national mass movement to open recreational facilities to all Americans. These are the stories of African Americans of all socio-economic classes – the “New Negroes,” who migrated out of the U.S. South to northern, mid-western and far western cities in the post-World War I decades, to escape racial injustice as well as migrants who were soldiers arriving home from Europe after the Great War – who were more self-confident, and sometimes militant, in demanding their rights as citizens and consumers. In its recovery of early twentieth century leisure and its subsequent memory, my research continues the expansion of analysis by historians who

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence B. DeGraaf & Quintard Taylor, “Introduction,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence B. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy & Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 20; Lonnie G. Bunch, III, “‘The Greatest State for the Negro,’ Jefferson L. Edmonds, Black Propagandist of the California Dream,” in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 138; Culver, 66-74; Eleanor M. Ramsey & Janice S. Lewis, “Black Americans in California,” *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey of California*, California Department of Park & Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, December 1988. From the Internet: [http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/5views/5views2.htm](http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/5views/5views2.htm), 25 September 2015.

have moved beyond the “master narrative” of civil rights to find struggles in cultural and economic contestation as well as the overtly political campaigns, to rethink the struggle for public accommodations in the extended context of the long civil rights movement. There is some urgency to this research: many stories about this struggle at these places are being lost, along with the structures that housed various leisure experiences, because our society has neglected to recognize, and document them. This lack of documentation, preservation/conservation and interpretation is especially true for the African American resort experience. As critical as it is to understanding the larger struggle for freedom and equality made in this history, the documentation of these cultural landscapes is valuable in its own right, since it offers important information to historians and the general public to give a fuller truth about the ethnic diversity of California, and people and events less familiar to many.<sup>9</sup>

I examine influences, and their effect over time from the early twentieth century to the dawning decades of the twenty-first century to understand the disappearance of memory of the African American history at these leisure sites and their agents of development, and the recent reclamation of this memory. The ever-evolving structures of discrimination influenced African American migration patterns to southern California, the geographic patterns of their residential settlement and their leisure place location developments, combined with the public and private lands accessible to them for use and ownership. The African American building of California began in the exodus from southern states in the 1890s, in what historian Douglas Flamming identified as a “quiet, persistent procession” due

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<sup>9</sup> Victoria C. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 3, 6; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91, 4 (March 2005): 1-28.

to the racial inequality, political violence, disenfranchisement of black voters, lack of economic opportunities and Jim Crow segregation perpetrated and condoned by white southerners. California presented a complex web of laws regulating housing, land ownership, labor and marriage targeted at peoples of color, but when compared to the prospects in the Jim Crow South, these barriers did not dissuade African Americans from coming, or from launching leisure consumption and business development pursuits. As historians DeGraaf, Kevin Starr and other scholars have observed, many of these black residents were drawn to California for the same dreams and reasons as whites -- hope, opportunity, freedom, economics, better schools, better quality of life in a temperate climate and a sublime landscape. Many in the African American population by the 1920s, and those who continued to migrate to the region until 1940, had resources to enjoy life and leisure pursuits in southern California.<sup>10</sup>

This time and place presents a distinctive historical moment to consider African Americans' dynamic reconstruction of social and political life in the rapidly changing twentieth century U.S. milieu. Leisure culture, like all aspects of African American history prior to mid-twentieth century needs further investigating, as historians Lawrence B. DeGraaf and Quintard Taylor have argued. Since Asian Americans and Mexican Americans had a much larger numerical presence in the Far West, DeGraaf and Taylor assert, this has led observers to largely ignore African Americans' presence until World War II, a pivotal period in their history in the state. This time of extraordinary, faster growth of the black

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Flammig, *African Americans in the West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, LLC, 2009), 12; Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom, Black Los Angeles in the Jim Crow Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), (quotation) 36; Lawrence B. DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 39 (1970): 343; Albert S. Broussard, "African Americans in The West Introduction," *Journal of the West*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 2005), 5; Kevin Starr, *Materials Dreams, Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 148-150.

Angeleno population than in the state and city overall, suggests that African Americans' experience offers an especially important window into the transformation of California in this era. From 1920 to 1940 the Los Angeles' population grew explosively from 576,700 to 1,504,277, while the African American community grew even more rapidly from 15,579 to 63,774. By 1950 as the population of Los Angeles grew 30% to reach 1,970,358, African American numbers grew by almost 300% to 171,209. This larger population of black Californians' lead by civic luminaries who captured regional and nationwide recognition, built on the African American community's earlier contestation history to push their rights issues to become a major visible subject of civic discourse and action.<sup>11</sup>

Progressive era political, economic, and social reforms that were supposed to directly benefit every American's life had not been equally realized by all citizen, and were losing steam in the shadow of World War I. American women obtained the right to vote with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, while African Americans continued to face limitations in their ability to exercise their citizenship rights and political agency. As well generally across the nation, African Americans ability to gain greater social and economic mobility continued to be restricted, if not obstructed.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-1920s Los Angeles became the most important urban center for African American life, politics and business in the West. Since 1900 Los Angeles had maintained the largest black population in the state, and it was one of the two substantial African American centers in the western United States. These initiatives contributed to defining the

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<sup>11</sup> From 1920 to 1940, California citizens grow from 3,833,661 to 12,206,849, and African American residents grew from 38,763 to 124,306. By 1950 the state's population grew by 30 % to reach 44,183,643, with African American citizenship increasing to 462,172. DeGraaf & Taylor, "Introduction," in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 22, 27, 33; U.S. Census; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 232-324.

<sup>12</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is A Country, Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48-49.

place for African Americans, and promoted the southern California metropolis as a place of opportunity for African Americans in that earlier era. This progress was symbolized by the 1918 election of Republican Frederick Madison Roberts (1879–1952) as the first African American assemblyman (1918–1934) in California, representing the 62<sup>nd</sup> District in Los Angeles. This California Assembly District, which included the Central Avenue district of Los Angeles, was where most African Americans in the region lived until the post-World War II years. While whites continued to make up the majority, and ethnic Mexicans and Japanese were equal to African Americans in numbers, Flamming observes, “culturally and politically, black Angelenos [prominently] placed their stamp on the district” by the mid-1920s. The characteristics of the people and social dynamics within the black Angeleno community were different in many ways from eastern and northern cities to which African Americans migrated in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

The Los Angeles region did not have an industrial base like American Northeast in the years leading up to the Great Depression and World War II. Flamming asserts African Americans migrating to the Los Angeles region in the early decades of the twentieth century “were less interested in factory wages available in the North than in the general good conditions in southern California.” The region’s industries in agriculture and oil extraction obtained cheap labor from China, the Philippines, Japan and Mexico, rather than recruiting black labor from the South or large numbers of new European immigrants. With all Americans, but especially with African Americans, who chose to journey to southern

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<sup>13</sup> DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...1890-1930,” 330-332; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier, African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 19, 22; DeGraaf & Taylor, “Introduction,” in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 21-22; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 92-93, 308.

California during this time, it took a certain amount of savings and vision to execute a move so far west and start over.<sup>14</sup>

As the modern African American community in Los Angeles emerged through migration beginning in the late nineteenth century during the land boom, those African Americans moving west met an economy largely limiting their hiring to more blue-collar employment. This created a constant tension with their values of respectability and ambition in their view of themselves as “the better class of Negroes,” as Flamming has argued. No matter what their educational and professional accomplishments before arriving in Los Angeles, most could only gain service jobs available to African Americans in urban settings. The early twentieth century migrants joined earlier black Angeleno émigrés in employed positions as janitors, porters, waiters, cooks, chauffeurs, draymen or house and hotel servants. Often these lower status jobs, may have been taken out of necessity due to discrimination compounded by competition from European and Mexican immigrants, and may not have precisely reflected their educational background or previous employment as teachers or skilled laborers in other states. Yet even menial job wages in Los Angeles were high when compared to southern standards. A janitor’s position could pay three to four times what an African American might have earned from farming in the South.<sup>15</sup>

Some were able to establish black owned service businesses, and some established professional practice in education, medicine, dentistry, law, and a few in architecture. There were a few photographers, some musicians, and a few working in the field of chemistry. Black Angelenos generally did not obtain positions in higher levels of transportation such as

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 8, 45-47, (quotation) 49, 367; Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns, The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 233.

<sup>15</sup> DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 332, 341-343; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, (quotation) 8, 70-78; Sides, 23-26.

conductors and motormen, or in the retail trade and non-professional white-collar jobs, of which the latter were the most plentiful employment in Los Angeles. They did secure some lower level public services jobs in Los Angeles before many cities in the U.S. Police and Fire Departments employment for black Angelenos began before 1900. This constricted pattern of work produced a rough income equality across the community; generally there was not much distance between the earnings of the steadily employed black service worker and the professional.<sup>16</sup>

Some change in the economic status of the black working class in the Los Angeles area occurred in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, as slowly some began to enter the new types of industries emerging. Angelenos contributed to a national trend in using government employment toward fuller workplace freedom, inclusion, opportunity and economic advancement. According to a 1936 Work Progress Administration report, “Story of the Negro in Los Angeles County,” by this time the federal, state, county and city work projects employed the greatest number of African Americans. This report noted there were twenty-five independently owned, black grocers, and 375 in the professional class, such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, etc. actively and profitably engaged in business. The largest businesses included the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Liberty Building and Loan Company, the Angelus Funeral Home, and the Dunbar Hospital. These black Angeleno migrants had been Southern city dwellers that came with some savings to invest in real estate, and DeGraaf asserts they “were optimistic about their ability to make a better life for themselves in the West.” These early twentieth century African American émigrés paved the way for all their black

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<sup>16</sup> DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 332, 341-343; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 70-78; Sides, 23-26.



comrades who moved to the southern California region during World War II and in its aftermath.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of their working class wages this was a “black bourgeoisie” with middle class aspirations, an enterprising spirit, and a determination to succeed. Despite facing social discrimination and barriers that stopped just short of what occurred where there was legalized Jim Crow before 1920 as DeGraaf and other scholars have observed, some had experiences that seemed to justify a faith in the promise of upward mobility and the California Dream. With investment in real estate, some developed considerable wealth. Some black Angelenos were able to participate as capitalists in the boom of urban expansion during the different eras of southern California growth. In the late nineteenth century, Biddy Mason and Robert C. Owens acquired substantial real estate holdings and became early leaders of the modern African American and greater Los Angeles community. A higher proportion of African Americans in Los Angeles owned their homes than in other urban centers with substantial black populations, like Detroit, Chicago and New York. This sepia toned group of migrants placed a premium on self-discipline and education. Additionally, more of the children of black Angelenos than in other cities were in school.<sup>18</sup>

Before 1915 the black Angeleno community was dispersed in several sections of the city of Los Angeles, where they were able to purchase land in less desirable areas. They resided in the northwest section of the city along West Temple Street, the northeast section

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<sup>17</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 8, 45-47, 49, 367; Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns, The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 233; DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 330, (quotation) 331, 332; Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 3-58; Octavia B. Vivian, *The Story of the Negro in Los Angeles County 1936*, Compiled by Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, Under the Supervision of Hugh Harlan, 1956, 33, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 8; Sides, 34; DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 332-333, 341.

in Boyle Heights, and the Furlong Tract in the southeast corner of the city. They also took up residence in an area west of the University of Southern California along Jefferson Boulevard between Normandie and Western Avenues, as well as on quite a few streets in the area south of First Street and Central Avenue. The early commercial districts servicing African Americans were in the area of First and Second Streets, near Los Angeles and San Pedro Streets in the central core of the city. A few miles south of the city's southern border there was also a black community in the incorporated city of Watts (which would be annexed to the city of Los Angeles in 1926).<sup>19</sup>

From as early as the 1910s thru the 1940s, Jews and other whites began to sell their homes, but not necessarily their businesses and moved to outlying areas from the old Central Avenue district south of downtown Los Angeles. As whites moved out, blacks along with Japanese and Mexican settlements moved southward into these mostly affordable, blue-collar white residential neighborhoods. By 1925 the Central Avenue corridor and what eventually became known as the "South Central Corridor" included a mixture of blacks, other people of color and whites as far south as Slauson Avenue. By the 1920s there was no place else in the United States with such a diverse ethnic and racial mixture of people living amongst each another.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> J. Max Bond's sociology dissertation is the earliest scholarly work on the beginnings of the modern African American community in Los Angeles, J. Max Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles," (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1936), 48, 67-69; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 323-324, 326 fn 13, 328, 331, 333; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 66-67.

<sup>20</sup> DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 326, 335; James P. Allen & Eugene Turner, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California*, (Northridge, CA: The Center for Geographic Studies, California State University, Northridge, 1997), 67, 79; Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 83; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 99-100; Sides, 17.

With a revived Ku Klux Klan, as the numbers of white southern migrants increased and the African American population grew visibly larger, whites paid more attention to the color line during the booming decade of the 1920s. The black Angeleno population grew to 15,579 in 1920 from 2,131 in 1900. White residents beginning as early as the 1900s in the neighborhoods south of downtown Los Angeles, started trying more often to restrict blacks from moving in through mostly occasional, unorganized intimidation and violence. Racially restrictive covenants prohibiting sale, lease, or rental to any person other than a white person, had been placed on some lots in the late nineteenth century and were extensively used in the early 1900s as the urbanization of Los Angeles expanded. These exclusionary provisions were supported by the legal system, until various mechanisms for maintaining discrimination and segregation, were weakened by United States Supreme Court and California Court decisions between 1948 and 1967.<sup>21</sup>

By the mid-1920s racially restrictive covenants and intimidation prevented any substantial expansion of blacks into white neighborhoods adjacent to the Los Angeles core, except in the Eastside section of the city, south of downtown spreading out on either side of Central Avenue to the east of San Pedro Street and to the west of the Los Angeles River and the City of Vernon. The covenants were never completely effective because some white Angelenos sold to blacks as the restrictions expired, especially during the Great Depression if they were out of work. As well blacks real estate agents would hire white intermediaries and blacks who could pass for white to buy property and scare white neighbors into selling

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<sup>21</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 90; Allen & Turner, 77; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 336-337, 345; Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures, California Enters the 1940s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 177, 179; 1900 & 1920 U.S. Federal Census; For a full discussion of the persistence of the national problem of discrimination, segregation and the struggle for racial equality into the 2000s, see Thomas J. Sugrue's book *Sweet Land of Liberty, The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008).

homes to blacks because of their unfounded fears about people of color and decreases in property values. In smaller concentrations the black community's expansion occurred in Watts and the middle class, West Jefferson Boulevard area northward into the West Adams district when many whites allowed their deed restrictions to expire. Slauson Avenue would be maintained as the "racial boundary" of the white only, Florence district, which extended to Watts until post-World War II. Watts would remain the only enclave with an African American community in southeast Los Angeles until World War II.<sup>22</sup>

Black Angelenos of all classes and backgrounds were forced to live in South Central during this *de facto* period of segregation. The center of the black population, politics and business in California was expanding as it concentrated in one district—Central Avenue, first at Twelfth Street in the 1920s and down to Vernon Avenue by the 1940s. The Central Avenue corridor became the geographic and spiritual heart of the African American community in a similar manner as Harlem's Lenox and Seventh Avenues, and 125<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, and Ashley Street in Jacksonville (Florida). In addition to home ownership and residency, blacks established a communal life of businesses, entertainment venues, newspapers, a hospital, various social institutions and churches. Facing racial snubs and discrimination at white department stores, restaurants, theaters and other public places of accommodation and recreation around the city due in large part to lax enforcement of civil rights laws passed by the California State Legislature from the 1890s to 1920s, some black Angelenos moved to this area from other parts of the city for social contact and other forms of community life due to this culture of open contravention of these laws by whites. Although there was a growing African American community presence (culturally, politically, economically and in population), the south Los

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<sup>22</sup> DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 338, 346-347; Allen & Turner, 77, 79.

Angeles district would remain diverse and include large numbers of whites, Asians and Mexicans throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

As the city population and the African American population grew dramatically from 1920 to 1940, whites were moving out to the new suburban developments, like the San Fernando Valley, the Westside, Santa Monica, Manhattan Beach and other districts in Los Angeles County and neighboring counties, where racial and some religious minorities were excluded. During this time, in the 1930s, 39% percent of black migrants relocating to Los Angeles moved to south Los Angeles neighborhoods. The majority of blacks in Los Angeles then resided in the neighborhoods south of downtown.<sup>24</sup>

During part of this period of this western migration, the country and Los Angeles were in the throes of the Great Depression, and the emergency relief efforts of the New Deal programs in the 1930s. These new Angelenos were able to easily spatially assimilate into the south Los Angeles community, though this was a period of high unemployment even with the New Deal jobs. It was a period of great structural changes in American public policy, economics, employment and society. The south Los Angeles district became larger and included more African Americans than it had in the past with people residing in older housing stock, much of it built before World War I. Pervasive racial animosity met the expanding ranks of the black newcomers of the less affluent side of middle class from the southern part of the United States. They were from more diverse origins than previous

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Allen & Turner, 80; The California civil rights legislation passed from the 1890s to 1920s era prohibited discrimination in public accommodations (i.e., inns, restaurants, hotels, eating houses, barber shops, bath houses, theaters, skating rinks and amusements), James Adolphus Fisher, "A History of the Political and Social Development of the Black Community in California, 1850-1950" (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1971), 165-168, 209-211; Charlotta A. Bass, *Forty Years, Memoirs From the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles, CA: Unpublished manuscript, 1960), 13, 29; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels...", 335, 346; Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 92-93, 104, 124; Sides, 34; DeGraaf & Taylor, "Introduction...", in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. DeGraaf & Taylor, 308; Bond, 30; U.S. Census.

generations of migrants and their values were a little different, but Los Angeles continued to maintain many opportunities for them, especially in the promise of home ownership. Even during this era, African Americans in the city of Los Angeles continued to have one of the highest home ownership rates of U.S. cities with large black populations.<sup>25</sup>

New employment opportunities eventually becoming available during the World War II years, and the following decade encouraged an accelerated increased migration of all groups to California. In particular the African American community's and other groups' contestation of discrimination and demand for equal opportunities, helped facilitate President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 opening up defense employment opportunities for African Americans. With Los Angeles continuing as the largest black population center, African Americans continued to migrate to California in greater numbers than the general population, a trend continued from 1900. In the 1940s and 1950s there was an acceleration of the trend, which began in the 1930s of working class whites moving out of inner city neighborhoods closer to Los Angeles downtown. This did mean more accessible housing for African Americans in their restricted neighborhoods, but the community could hardly manage the wartime migrant influx. Even with white exodus from the inner city opening up some housing, during the war years there was a citywide housing shortage that developed, impacting everyone, but especially African Americans. In addition, the 'redlining' policies of the federal government mortgage-assistance initiatives and bank loan underwriting programs began in the 1930s discouraged investment in inner city neighborhoods where communities of color resided.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 308; Sides, 38, 44-45; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels...", 350-351.

<sup>26</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 352-353; Sides, 3, 46.

The federal government moreover promoted racially restrictive covenants in the new outlying developments located in places, such as Manhattan Beach and the San Fernando Valley. Contractors who wanted to build new housing for African Americans could not get Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insured loans. Black Angelenos were turned down for loans outside, as well as inside of the “Negro District.” In addition the FHA would not fund renovation projects for older housing stock; the program would only fund new construction for over thirty years. The federal government effectively doomed inner city areas with escalating African American populations to decline, in promoting all-white suburban neighborhoods. A 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, overturned the judicial enforcement of restrictive covenants. This was the first of several legal victories towards abolition of racial restrictions and discrimination in housing and employment that would occur through the 1960s. The civil rights victories did not immediately vanquish racist exclusion (through redlining, loan preferences and steering, among other practices), but they did open Los Angeles to change — obscuring for some in subsequent generations of Angelenos the immediate experience and memory of racism practices.<sup>27</sup>

Despite continuing discrimination, blacks across the nation and in Los Angeles were able to profit economically, and in terms of the cause of racial justice from the greater social change created by the Great Depression, the New Deal era, and World War II. Historians of the long civic rights movement perspective assert these circumstances, combined with African American migration to urban Southern cities, the North, and the West, put in place

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<sup>27</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 351, 367; Lawrence DeGraaf, “African American Suburbanization in California, 1960 through 1990,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy & Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 441.

the conditions for the revolution that forced civil rights in the forthcoming decades. With migration out of the rural South, blacks gained the ability to be more full consumer citizens and to vote. Further these new African American voters buttressed a race specific political bloc emergence affecting the political actors' attention to potential votes and the humanitarian cause. In the post-World War II decades, the African American leadership of California and Los Angeles, headed in part by State Assembly Member Augustus Freeman Hawkins (1907–2007) from 1934 until 1962 when he became the first black United States Congressman from California (1963–1991), pushed forward African American full civic participation and racial justice with confidence their goals now would be addressed more promptly.<sup>28</sup>

The integration of African Americans into the national industrial economy during the World War II years was one catalyst that helped some black Angelenos to move from Central Avenue and adjacent neighborhoods. Over the ensuing post-World War II decades African Americans gained tremendous new economic advances as they steadily increased their presence in the industrial workforce of the region, even with many industrial employers still participating in racially discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. Employment opportunities in clerical occupations in the public sector also expanded for blacks, especially for black women. In spite of expanded employment opportunities and the U.S. Supreme Court decisions that restrictive racially covenants were unenforceable, black Angelenos continued to be excluded from living in most of the new outlying areas around Los Angeles

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<sup>28</sup> Foster, 230-232, 276; David M. Herszenhorn, "A.F. Hawkins, Civil Rights Lawmaker, Dies at 100," New York Times, 14 November 2007, From the Internet: [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/us/14hawkins.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/us/14hawkins.html?_r=0), 21 January 2014.



where the new industrial locations for aerospace and electronics were to be found into the 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1950s whites, as well as Mexicans and Asians continued to move to outlying areas. Black Angelenos from the post-World War II period into the late 1960s were able to move largely into neighborhoods contiguous with the Central Avenue district. At the same time a continuing influx of new black migrants needed to be absorbed into the already overcrowded and poorly municipally serviced south Los Angeles neighborhoods. With housing restrictions lifted over the next five decades middle class blacks continued to move west out of the old neighborhoods and into areas like Compton, one of Los Angeles County's oldest industrial and residential suburbs.<sup>30</sup>

Left behind was a more uniformly less affluent and less educated segment of the African American population in the Central Avenue corridor and adjacent south Los Angeles neighborhoods. Many African American institutions and businesses moved west to the West Adams, Crenshaw Boulevard and Leimert Park districts. The exodus of the black middle class to new areas from the eastside continued for several decades to new areas. By 1960 the Central Avenue district and adjacent neighborhoods were 95% African American.<sup>31</sup>

The Watts Civil Unrest of 1965 encouraged those whites still remaining in the south Los Angeles and Watts communities to move out. As early as 1963 blue-collar manufacturing jobs began relocating from south Los Angeles to outlying suburban areas and other southern California counties. These varied manufacturing concerns sought lower taxes,

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<sup>29</sup> Sides, 57, 59, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Allen & Turner, 80-82; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 377-379; Sides, 97-98, 112-113, 125.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Sides, 97-98, 112-113, 125; Allen & Turner, 80-82; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 377-379.

more land to expand their operations and new markets for their goods. By the 1970s many of these companies closed due to international competition and the employment opportunities they provided went overseas or disappeared. The narrowing of industrial employment impacted all American workers, but especially African Americans. Employment at these manufacturing firms was important to working class, black Angelenos' improved economic accomplishment, which pushed them into the ranks of the middle class financially, if not educationally. New industrial jobs were developing but because of the continued discrimination in outlying suburban housing, inadequate training and education, as well as poor transportation, many working class blacks economic opportunities were truncated. Their segregation became more entrenched in the neighborhoods of south Los Angeles.<sup>32</sup>

As employment opportunities were declining, the last large exodus from the south surged to northern and western U.S. cities in the late 1960s. As historian Josh Sides notes, the African American migrant population grew by more than 50% in Los Angeles during the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> This happened while there was increasing competition from new immigrants from Latin America and Asia for the manufacturing work that did not move out of the city. The economic structural changes to this community made it even harder to absorb the new African American migrants and taxed the south Los Angeles infrastructure even more. Opportunities did exist for working class blacks in the service sector, but the salaries and benefits were not as good as what the manufacturing jobs had offered in the recent past.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s there was an acceleration of out-migration by black Angelenos who could afford to move out of the older south Los Angeles neighborhoods.

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<sup>32</sup> Sides, 170-171, 176, 179-180.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Sides, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Sides, 181-182, 185.

Those exiting were now for the most part employed in white-collar occupations, were generally much better educated and had higher incomes than those who remained. In Los Angeles with this exodus from the old neighborhoods to new ones, the Leimert Park and Baldwin Hills area became the new heart of a more affluent African American Angeleno community. Inglewood, Carson, Gardena, the San Fernando Valley, even other more distant outlying areas and other counties became residential destinations for middle class blacks that gained more occupational choices and income in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s the hindrances to the pursuit of the California Dream of suburban residency and employment for African Americans substantially dissipated due to a successions of events occurring from the 1940s to 1960s, starting with the legal victories outlawing housing and employment discrimination and the growth of fair housing groups throughout the country.<sup>35</sup>

With the geographic opening and mobility, came fading memory of exclusion and struggle that had preceded it. That memory loss included the vitality of African American resort and leisure ventures that had countered exclusion. Additionally, scholar Priscilla A. Dowden-White observes, the marginalizing effects of racial segregation, along with the basic life challenges inherent in the Jim Crow era itself, white supremacy and all manner of discrimination have served to obscure more than reveal African American local community, neighborhood, professional and entrepreneurial organizing activities. The same can be said for the part played in the struggle by those African American impresarios of social and cultural expression and their clientele who managed to flourish, and the memory of what they contributed to the long struggle, and to the growth and character of the local community, California, and the nation in their era. My investigation contributes to the

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<sup>35</sup> Sides, 189-193, 201; DeGraaf, "African American Suburbanization...1960 through 1990," in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 415-416, 426.

scholarship on African American urban life in the twentieth century that has been slowly expanding over the last three decades to include what scholars Luther Adams and Davarian Baldwin identify as more diverse sites of cultural expression created through business, sports, music and film, where discourse and debate occurred that gave life meaning.<sup>36</sup>

Historically free time has been one of the most treasured parts of life. This has been especially true for African Americans, who have been determined to overcome the legacy of enslavement, and its aftermath, the life challenges intrinsic in the Jim Crow era, in order to enjoy consumption of leisure and experiences at varied places in their own country. The ability to choose how and where we spend our free time in many ways lies at the heart of what we understand these words ‘freedom’ and opportunity to mean. Along side the oppression and resistance that are central to understanding African American history, understanding the fullness, complexity and multiple perspectives of black life in the twentieth century is just as important as in the life of other groups of Americans. As many scholars have argued African American history is more than how black people got along with white people in the larger, white society. African Americans and their institutions exist beyond their connection to whites and their response to white oppression. African American people and their history are obscured if there is no understanding of their embrace of life in

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<sup>36</sup> Flammig, *Bound for Freedom...*, 35, 44; Kevin Mulroy, “Preface,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence B. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy & Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), xi; Stephen Gregory, *Black Corona, Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1998), 5-6, 9-10; Mark Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945,” *Journal of Negro History*, V., No. 2 (Spring, 1999), 130; Priscilla A. Dowden-White, *Groping toward Democracy, African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis, 1910-1945* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 4, 19; Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity for Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5, 13, 19; Luther Adams, “My Old Kentucky Home: Black History in the Bluegrass State,” *Register of Kentucky Historical Society*, V. 113, No. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2015): 389, 402.

all its complexity, including how they enjoyed their free time at resort and leisure destinations of their creation.<sup>37</sup>

A truncated view of the past at the southern California leisure sites discussed in this dissertation that excludes the experiences of African American and social diversity inhibits a sense of civic identity that shared history at shared territory can convey through acknowledgement of broader narratives. Like the layers of social and historical experiences that Delores Hayden discusses in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1995), the marking and remembrance of a place in a public past for any city or town is a political, as well as historical and cultural process, regardless of citizens' intention. Neglecting a larger historical topic as in the case of African American resort and leisure sites administers a double dose of erasure or loss. Erasure of the past public life as well as past struggle against exclusion has diminished current political standing and action. Recovery of memory has proven an important public tactic in fuller political inclusion and reclaiming of public presence in recent times. Decisions about what is to be remembered and protected situate the narratives of cultural identity in the collective memory of and history about a place. I concur with historian John Hope Franklin that expanding our knowledge of various places and exploring historical experiences from multiple viewpoints associated with them makes history more interesting, and tells a truer and more inclusive story of about the United States and its citizens.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131, 135; Deborah Slaton, Chad Randl & Lauren Van Demme, ed., *Preserve and Play: Preserving Historic Recreation and Entertainment Sites, Conference Proceedings*, (Washington D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2006), xiii; Lang, (discussion of African American history and understanding cultural life), 389-391.

<sup>38</sup> Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 7-9, 12-13; David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 3-22; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and*

In this dissertation I extend scholarly and general public knowledge of the African American experience in leisure culture production. Reconsideration in public memory can begin with inclusion of these unrecognized voices not only for a better understanding of the past, but to challenge current reproduction of constraints on the cultural-social meaning of a place and the politics of space that inhibit a sense of cultural belonging and common membership in an American identity when African American history is excluded. Full inclusion in the national discourse of the diversity of the African American story in the U.S. and recasting of the significance, meaning and place of leisure by recognizing African American agency and action will give a more complex understanding of the American experience in the post-enslavement, modern capitalist era. Although in the later decades of the twentieth century a broader wave of socially critical scholarship opened a path for more diverse and politically critical interpretations of history, there are still stories in the dawning years of the twenty-first century to be recorded not only for the understanding of the historical West, but that will continue an impact on Americans' identity association with western places, and historical consciousness. This project contributes to the accumulating body of knowledge examining African American agency and the consideration of memory as a mechanism of power in race and resistance, while acknowledging the importance of the historical writings documenting the racial victimization, terror, violence, discrimination and inequalities perpetrated against black Americans.<sup>39</sup>

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*the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 1-30; John Hope Franklin in "The National Park Service and Civic Engagement," National Park Service, 2001, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Hayden, 9, 43, 78; Francis Couvares, Saxon, Gerald N. Grob & George Athan Billias, ed., *Interpretations of American History, Volume Two, From Reconstruction* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 17-18; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 415-419, 595-597, 603-604.

In presenting the historic context of black Angeleno community formation and the development of southern California leisure destinations from their beginnings early in the twentieth century, two stories unfold. I elucidate the creative assertion of full social and civic membership, and social and economic invention by African American leisure community agents. As the era's enterprise and constriction have largely been erased, I examine the story of the sites' evolution and heritage of how they are remembered. Common patterns of many African American leisure retreats in California and across America are important to preserve for the memory and heritage of these sites, and proper understanding of them as places of commerce, social networks, community, identity, contestation and civil rights struggles.

In each of the case studies I investigate the ties of the African American leisure site promoters to the Los Angeles civic, social and business development infrastructure in their community, and in the white community, where applicable. When possible I present the view of black users about their experiences at these sites examined in my study. I examine the regional social context in which the leisure sites arose and negotiated through during the twentieth century. I survey the local history of the leisure site districts and their place in the region. In doing this, not only will relevant southern California leisure space development and social history inform my examination of these African American sites, but also those sites-specific histories will help recompose the historic geography of the African American community in Los Angeles. I consider the racialized issues and prejudices that arose at the sites enjoyed by black Angelenos in the local communities where these leisure destinations were situated. I also consider the contested history of some of these leisure site districts. The racialization and contestation pose another question for this study: what kind of boosterism

and other rhetoric did the entrepreneurs embrace in promotion of themselves as proprietors, and of their ventures, and how did black users define or embraced these discourses?

Black Angelenos' leisure centers, particularly in beach areas, were also places African Americans attempted to join the urbanization of outlying areas for long range opportunities for new housing, residential expansion and commerce development. As well as leisure, DeGraaf has proposed that these recreation centers "generally had the dual aim of providing a 'more cultured and sophisticated recreation' and of being nuclei for black residential colonies." These sites were part of an assertive strategy in the collective use of places as a community development tool. The historical nexus of leisure and residence means this study is integral to understanding the racial geography of contemporary Los Angeles and the U.S. black citizens' endeavors to join the 1920s-housing boom and beyond in suburban areas where they were rejected. I look at how the remembrance of these leisure sites has evolved (or not evolved) in the public memory of layered social and geographic, local and southern California communities.<sup>40</sup>

I consider other black leisure space developments that may or may not have included formal residential projects in the southern California area. With their varying degrees of success and failure due to an assortment of reasons, the memory of these other sites in the historical discourse of the southern California region is also mixed. The effects of racism towards African Americans, the location and amenities offered by these sites, changing tastes in leisure consumption, economics and the location of African American populations that might support these places, impacted the fortunes of all of the race-specific leisure sites and outlying residential development efforts. The places I examine illustrate a range of kinds of leisure production purposes and societal encounters.

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<sup>40</sup> DeGraaf, "The City of Angels...", (quotation) 348-349; Sugrue, 3-58.



The leisure sites I examine are worthy of remembering and commemorating in their own right because of the vision and agency of those who tried to provide an opportunity for African Americans to transcend race-based limits and control their own destiny, as well as the similar vision and the agency of those African Americans who used these sites. Historian Paul A. Shackel observes many minority group histories are about struggle, racism, and tragedy. As many Americans continue to struggle with the commemoration of these histories, each non-ethnic white groups' commemoration is important as it allows them to claim a part of the public memory and cultural belonging. African Americans and other peoples of color battle to have their histories remembered. Historian Edward T. Linenthal asserts, "conscientious remembrance is more than a necessary expansion of the nation's narrative. It is an act of moral engagement, a declaration that there are other American lives too long forgotten that count." In the American history uncovered in this dissertation, its forgetting was constructed, resisted and has mattered politically. The southern California leisure sites, like the black town venture of Allensworth, were symbols of hope, and they had great significance in the context of the political, racial and economic currents during the era of their existence. Although these southern California places may not exist today in the form of their initial use, they are sites of African American history possessing value for local, regional and national collective memory and identity. They show the depths of character and agency of the men and women who attempted economic development and racial self-determination for the enjoyment of California's offerings at these sites for themselves and future generations of all Americans.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Paul A. Shackel, *Memory In Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 198-199, 209; Edward T. Linenthal, "Epilogue: Reflections," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton & Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 224; Allensworth, Tulare County, California. "In

Situated at the intersection of the history of African Americans, the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the state of California, the American West and America generally, this dissertation scholarship joins a new stage of western and American historical writing and memory of the last forty years. This period has offered new perspectives on the African American and other peoples of color's experiences in the West. My study expands the cultural history scholarship of the African American experience into the themes of leisure, commerce, boosterism, urbanization, suburbanization, the "California Dream" attainment, civil rights struggles and their contested history. My research places black Californians as agents and active producers in their own self-fulfillment, cultural production, social and economic organization, and community development. In their efforts to live their version of the "California Dream" the African Americans active in these case studies are historical figures that coped with varied forms of racial prejudice, discrimination and marginalization perpetrated by racial hierarchies imposed upon them by white privilege and white supremacy.<sup>42</sup> This dissertation broadens the intellectual traditions of the African American experience in the West and California historiography, and expands the scholarship exploring

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August 1908 Colonel Allen Allensworth and four other settlers established a town founded, financed and governed by African Americans. Their dream of developing an abundant and thriving community stemmed directly from a strong belief in programs that allowed blacks to help themselves create better lives. By 1910 Allensworth's success was the focus of many national newspaper articles praising the town and its inhabitants," Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, From the Internet: [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=583](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=583), 16 February 2015; B. Gordon Wheeler, *Black California, The History of African-Americans in the Golden State* (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1993),171, 183-184.

<sup>42</sup> In a "multi-racial" society white privilege and white supremacy are part of system of social practices and policies that maintain and strength white social dominance, which order membership in a civil community, that creates social differences along race, color and class lines as a qualification for full citizenship rights. For more on white privilege see Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, V-90 (3) (2000): 12-40 and Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas with forward by Cornel West (New York: The New Press, 1995); and on white supremacy see George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy, A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981).

salient themes, interpretations and text revolving around western mythology, and group representations, cultural production and actors that influenced historical writings on the western African American experience since the 1890s.

In this dissertation I hope to answer several questions ranging from informational to interpretative. Is the African American experience at the leisure sites I examine included in local, state and national histories? If so, what information is recorded in these historical narratives? How is the history being disseminated? Is it through grade school curricula, regional history books or online and physical space exhibits? Through landmark designations or public art programming? What is the cumulative legacy and, or heritage of these African American leisure sites that can be and, or have been identified? Are any of these sites and the African American experience a feature of the local, regional and, or national public memory/consciousness? If so, what is the information disseminated about a site or sites?

Professional historians' intellectual traditions, major organizing themes and core narrative structures in historical writing on the American West over the last century have focused on Euro-Americans, mostly on heroic males in the region's history until the last decades of the twentieth century. These perspectives deemphasized, or excluded altogether, the multiethnic, multicultural nature of western American history, the influence of the federal government on western development, and neglected the urbanized West and twentieth century western history. Additionally peoples of color were viewed as victims rather than as agents of historical change. Later historians interpreted the history of the American West in terms of it being a global story of many diverse peoples, most of who have been overlooked, in the historical narrative of who conquered and inhabited the region.

Studies of the African American West among professional historians were scarce until the 1970s. With the victories of the modern civil rights movement and its failures, emerged a heighten interest in and demand for more knowledge about the historical experiences of African Americans generally, and opened employment opportunities for professional historians to pursue research to fulfill that demand.

The long shadow of the frontier thesis advanced by historian Fredrick Jackson Turner in an 1893 essay entitled, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, informed how scholars examined “the West” for much of the twentieth century. Turner imagined the West populated by rugged, heroic Euro-American pioneers pursuing successive waves of conquest, and settlement of the wilderness and virtually uninhabited virgin land. In their crossing of the continental United States from the East to the Pacific Ocean, in this moving frontier zone where “civilization” conquered “savagery,” Americans formed their national character and an egalitarian society composed of democracy and freedom lovers. African Americans were not included in this interpretation, as they were perceived as neither among the indigenous conquered group or the conquerors.<sup>43</sup>

In early scholarship on the American West, as well as on African Americans or other peoples of color’s experiences generally, most historians overlooked or neglected the study of their group experiences. Before the 1960s, historian William Loren Katz argues those professional as well as amateur historians, many of whom where African Americans who

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<sup>43</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier, African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 19; Sucheng Chan, Douglas Henry Daniels, Mario T. García & Terry P. Wilson, *Peoples of Color in the American West* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 1-2.

did write about how the black West had “to overcome the tendency of white journalists and historians to ignore or marginalize the black presence.”<sup>44</sup>

These earliest black authors of historical experience of African Americans in the West wrote compilations of autobiographies, and colorful stories of their western adventures to sell to the reading public. Extensively researched, the 1919 book by Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* is a sweeping compilation highlighting accomplishments and contributions of African Americans throughout communities in California from Mexican exploration of California in the sixteenth century to American California in the early twentieth century. An Oakland journalist and club woman, Beasley presented information important to her and the African American reading public of her day through biographical sketches, court cases and legal victories, poetry and important regional and national events sited at specific locations. Today Beasley’s book provides documentation and memorialization of some African Americans in California history which might not be available to us, had she not had the insight to preserve this earlier history. Her contribution is an example of this early twentieth century, compilation approach.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the first modern histories of African Americans in the West were published. Into the 1970s, the tradition of what historian Lawrence DeGraaf called the recognition school and other scholars called the contributionist school had long been a major focus of African American historical writings. The era’s social revolution dislodged hegemonic perspectives, opening up a path for more diverse and politically

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas Flammig, *African Americans in the West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 4-5, 305; William Loren Katz, *The Black West, A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc./Touchstone, 1987), 1996), xii.

<sup>45</sup> Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles, CA: The California Eagle Publishing Company, 1919, reprint Fairfield, CA: James Stevenson Publisher, 2004), Book Title page.

critical interpretations of history. This acknowledgment approach “aim[ed] [at] dispelling unfavorable racial images, developing self-respect, and assuring blacks their deserved place in American history.”<sup>46</sup>

DeGraaf noted in a 1975 assessment of western black history, before the 1960s, most texts and scholarly monographs on African American history rarely ventured west of the Mississippi River. He found in this period, the exception was a mention of African Americans in standard text on the moving western frontier and how distinctive the West might have been in connection with the issue of enslavement. With regards to African American history in the United States, until about twenty-five to thirty years ago the majority of the texts focused on the history of enslavement and on the rise of black populations in northern cities. These topics were quite in need and worthy of scholarly attention. DeGraaf noted even though contributionist scholars such as W. Sherman Savage and Kenneth W. Porter who wrote numerous articles offering information on black American activities, they were absent from western history prior to the 1970s. Simultaneously, the North American West was unattended in African American history, until introduced with the Great Migration to the West during World War II. In the 1970s authors moved to correct the previous exclusions, first by using the traditional “contributionist” model to restore African Americans to the nineteenth and early twentieth century West, and that West into African American history. Two comprehensive texts with differing styles, debuted in the 1970s in the tradition of the recognition or contributionist

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<sup>46</sup> Couvares, Saxon, Grob & Billias, ed., 17-18; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 415-419, 595-597, 603-604; DeGraaf, “Recognition...,” 35; Taylor, 21.

school of African American history. These were works by William L. Katz and W. Sherman Savage.<sup>47</sup>

William L. Katz's 1971/2005 *The Black West* volume is an engaging narrative about many black western pioneers from the Spanish exploration to the end of the early twentieth century. Katz reminds the reader the American national identity is very much intertwined with the frontier story. In the pages of his text and extensive images, he brings to life the African Americans who helped to shape the many American frontiers that had previously been excluded from fiction, textbooks, films and television programs, and from an important component of the American national identity. As he inserted blacks into the western American narrative, Katz did not forget to mention, these migrants moved to free themselves of southern and eastern oppression for the "American Dream" of better all-around life opportunities.<sup>48</sup>

Savage's, 1976 *Blacks in the West* is thought by some scholars to be the first survey of the black experience in the West. The book chapters are organized topically with a chronological thread on migration, slavery, military service, occupations and professions, civil rights, politics, education and social life. In the classic tradition of the study of the West as influenced by historian Fredrick Jackson Turner, the periodization of this survey began around 1830 with the Anglo-French fur-trade era and accompanying general population movement into western territory. It ends in 1890 with the closing of the frontier, when whites effectively settled the arable land of the West. Although, neither Katz nor Savage goes deeply into assessing issues and events in their work, or discussing the twentieth

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<sup>47</sup> DeGraaf, "Recognition..." *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Feb. 1975), 23-27; Flaming, *African Americans in the West*, 305.

<sup>48</sup> William L. Katz, *The Black West* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster/Touchstone Book, 1996), xii, 309.

century—both volumes offer an understanding and summary of accomplishments of African Americans in the region. While neither Katz nor Savage offered a new analytical framework, both observed that restrictions on African Americans were not as strictly enforced in California as elsewhere in the U.S., that black codes differed from locale to locale in the western region, and African Americans fought to overturn these restrictions via legal means.<sup>49</sup>

A historiographical change from the traditional “contributionist” model of the 1970s occurred when historians began to voice recognition of the urbanization occurring more or less simultaneously with the settlement of the West, and that the western African American experience needed to be viewed in this context before the 1940s. This recognition connected to the multi-ethnic and racial heritage of the West to reveal the interaction of black westerners with other peoples of color. The growing recognition of the African American past in the West joined historical analyses of race, class, gender, the environment and cultural expression to become part of the study of what would eventually be called the New Western History in the latter decades of the twentieth century.<sup>50</sup>

Scholars Rudolph M. Lapp, Lawrence B. DeGraaf and Douglas Henry Daniels importantly contributed to situating African Americans in the new history of the American West with a focus on California. In his book, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (1977) Lapp crafted a historical narrative from thinly scattered references in journals and diaries, and scantily availability primary sources, when not many recorders of events of the pervious century paid much attention to African Americans. His study helped illuminate the distinctiveness of thousands of African Americans who came to the American West, and

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<sup>49</sup> W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>50</sup> DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 323; DeGraaf, “Recognition...,” 42, 47, 50-51.



were part of the early California population in the 1850s-1860s who were overlooked in earlier historical writings about the region. He documented the nineteenth century's first time, unique migration of free African Americans voluntarily visiting and moving to the western region who were not being forced to leave from whence they came. Lapp argues these new black migrants, many from northeastern U.S. states, were similar to the whites migrating to California in that "they were not leaving a condition of unbearable economic depression," but also sought "quick prosperity." He contends their ambitions in the gold rush "dramatize the essential Americanism of black aspirations" in that these African Americans subscribed to the same "nineteenth century notions of progress and martial wealth...as the most upward-striving white Americans." Further, Lapp showed, African Americans were also connected to mainstream American values of the period in "the demands and the rhetoric of the civic rights movement they led in California." His book gives an instructive view of the values and ideologies supported by early, black Californians, which later generations of this community stood firmly upon as they constructed lives for themselves in the Far West.<sup>51</sup>

DeGraaf in his 1970 *Pacific Historical Review* article, "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930" concluded the characteristics of the people and social dynamics with the black Angeleno community were different in many ways from other non-Southern cities to which African Americans migrated in the early twentieth century. Like Lapp, DeGraaf asserts, the migrants populating his study were similarly lured like whites to Los Angeles for reasons of economics, with the addition of the attraction of the climate and healthy living. Closer to proletarian than elite in their

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<sup>51</sup> Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks In Gold Rush California* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), x-xi, 307.

occupations, many of this aspirational group of black Angeleno migrants and California Dreamers came with money for investing in a real estate, and optimism about their ability to build a better life for themselves in the West.<sup>52</sup>

DeGraaf noted the high degree of homeownership and superior housing of some blacks and other minorities, and the early openness to African American opportunity during the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. As the African American population increased, this openness, particularly in the residential choices available in several areas of the city, became constricted over time. Whites became more hostile and imposed real estate restrictions on black Angelenos. DeGraaf's work articulated the western distinctiveness during the emergence of the urban West, as well as the convergence with national patterns as Los Angeles became a national and world center during the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup>

Historian Douglas Henry Daniels intensified the reinterpretation of the urban black West with his study of African Americans in San Francisco in *Pioneer Urbanites, A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (1980/reprinted in 1990). In this first book-length, social and cultural history of African American life in a western city, he examined the San Francisco black community from the mid-nineteenth century to World War II, and its mostly working class aspirants' rich social and cultural life, focusing on their quality of life and their urban identity. For Daniels the city is part of the frontier experience of the U.S. West settlement, and African Americans were a component of new community formation. Like DeGraaf, he contends the western black citizens were different pioneering African American migrants who faced different conditions than those migrating to northern urban centers during the Great Migration of World War I, or who remained in the South. The early

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<sup>52</sup> DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels...", 323-324, 330-332.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels...", 333, 336-337.

African American populations in both Los Angeles and San Francisco compared to eastern cities in the U.S. were small in number until World War II. There was more freedom, opportunity and mobility available, and they encountered less discrimination and everyday racism because whites did not perceived them as a threat. Daniels explored the experience of the black people dispersed in neighborhoods around San Francisco as pioneering and successful American urbanites, as well as African American city dwellers.<sup>54</sup>

In examination of the San Francisco African American community experience, Daniels's use of oral history interviews and photographs was an especially effective method to capture individual views of their proud and industrious community's development and transitions. These individual interpretations helped to inform a portrait of the experience of the black community along with other types of documentation. In a historiographical turn, his work departed from the black urban community formation pathology literature approach, which had been the outcome in studies of northern cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia and New York. These studies made, and continue to make, all black people seem poverty stricken, without agency or motivation to help themselves, and as people who have no pleasure in their lives. In his study, the considerable discrimination this community faced in the West is not overlooked. While not diminishing the hostility and challenges of discrimination these black Americans faced, Daniels recaptured the agency, motivation and capacity to derive pleasures from the opportunities they appropriated to carve out and enrich their lives and community space in San Francisco. Like Daniels, my research focuses on the

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<sup>54</sup> Flammig, *African Americans in the West*, 306; Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites, A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco*, with forward by Nathan Irvin Huggins (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1980. Reprint, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), xii-xiv, xvii, 5-7, 9, 22.

examination of the variety and complexity of the African experience in California and the American West.<sup>55</sup>

The refocusing of the 1970s wrought new topical directions such as earlier histories of black communities, Garveyism, culture production, and civic uprising by scholars Emory J. Tolbert, Albert S. Broussard, Quintard Taylor, Dolores McBroome, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, Gerald Horne, Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, Lawrence G. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy, Robert O. Self, Josh Sides and Douglas Flamming. Research themes included Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association's western region influence, black San Francisco from 1900-1954, the Seattle black experiences post-1870, East Bay/Oakland area black communities, women and worker experiences, West Coast jazz, R&B and gospel music, as well as the Watts Uprising (1965) and other black Los Angeles twentieth century community and particular group studies. Important studies were done examining such cities as San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond and Los Angeles in California, Seattle, Washington and Wichita, Kansas. Since the 1980s, scholars have explored multiple directions as they have attempted to illuminate, reconstruct and interpret the hidden African American experience in the West. These study efforts set the stage for even more diverse and interdisciplinary research explorations into rethinking the community formation, transformation and issues of the multi-ethnic U.S. West by succeeding generations of scholars.<sup>56</sup>

In 1998, Quintard Taylor published what is the reigning reinterpretation of the African American experience in the West. The book entitled, *In Search of the Racial Frontier, African Americans in the American West 1528-1990* goes much beyond Savage's

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Daniels, 22-24.

<sup>56</sup> Broussard, 5; Flamming, *African Americans in the West*, 305-309.

1976 survey to include the black urban, western experience in the years from the later nineteenth century to 1990. Taylor stated the major purpose of the book “[was] to reconstruct the history of African American women and men in the nineteen western states on and beyond the ninety-eighth meridian—North Dakota to Texas westward to Alaska and Hawaii.”<sup>57</sup>

Taylor goes beyond the contributionist school to present “a new interpretative historical survey.” Taylor articulated his goals: to make visible the diverse complex tradition of black western history in both its regional distinctiveness and its continuity with the legacy of African American history in the nation as a whole; and to conclusively establish the existence of multiple African American historical traditions. Although he discussed many individuals, his work is distinct from the contributionist school as he is primarily concerned with African Americans quest for community in the West, and the consequences of this quest in the context of the West as a place rather than a process. Taylor affirmed the majority of African Americans in the West resided in cities, where they made a living and lives while developing community institutions. At the same time, these black westerners moved to integrate themselves into “both the larger social and political lives of their cities and the cultural and political life of the national African American community.”<sup>58</sup>

Taylor considers several distinctive qualities of the African American experience in the West that similarly have been observed by other New Western History scholars, some whose work was discussed earlier in this chapter. Black people have been members of multi-racial and -ethnic western communities for a few centuries. This multiracial population of

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<sup>57</sup> Taylor, 18, 21, the nineteen states west of the ninety eight meridian included in this survey are: North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska and Hawaii.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Taylor 19, 21, 23.

African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and Native Americans, moved civil rights demands beyond the “black and white” paradigm. These groups have interacted with whites in varied ways, and both competitively and cooperatively among themselves, which caused the South, North and the nation in general to reinterpret and redefine the concept of “race.” As the different minority groups suffered different levels of discrimination and prejudice, they had different philosophies for solutions. Some scholars argue the varied minority peoples are an important part of the historical claims for Western distinctiveness.<sup>59</sup>

He observed African American migrants’ self-transformative process and agency had a modifying effect on the new western region in their adaptation to new physical environments, customs and neighbors. Well into the twentieth century, their energies to create community and to fight discrimination and prejudice in the western region modified life conditions in their new home and the nation. Urbanizing much faster than other major regional and racial groups starting in the 1870s, African Americans defined and responded to the political, economic and social milieu and challenges encountered by the large post-World War II, black migrant population. In the mid-1960s the California communities of Oakland and the Watts section of Los Angeles produced the organizations, the Black Panthers (originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense) and US (United Slaves). These groups articulated the demands and aspirations of the two major streams of black power consciousness that swept the entire nation, due to black rage and frustration over the fact that the modern civil rights movement and legislative initiatives did not improve their lives sufficiently.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Taylor, 18, 292.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Taylor, 163, 193-196, 250.

One theme, Taylor contemplated in his work, one which many other scholars also have considered in the years after his 1998 tome, was whether the region has lived up to the “Western Ideal” as the place for the best chance for racial equality and equality of opportunity. These themes of hope, opportunity and freedom are central in both African American and other Western histories. He concluded African American westerners learned the region was not the panacea of opportunity and racial justice they had hoped for, but they stayed and chose to pursue political and cultural struggle because there was no better place to go. Another theme he pondered was that California, and more specifically the city of Los Angeles emerged as the center of African American life and politics on the Pacific slope; its influence has grown through the twentieth century. With this understanding scholars contend to comprehend the black West, one must understand the history of California and the city of Los Angeles. Our knowledge of these themes will expand with further research offerings on the lifestyles, memory and place making in the experience of the African Americans and others in the West.<sup>61</sup>

Taylor, DeGraaf, and Kevin Mulroy prodded this New Western history further in the 2001 anthology of new and previously unpublished essays in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* illustrating how many African Americans regarded the Golden State as tantamount to the greater freedom and economic opportunities they sought in the West, even after some experienced discrimination and disappointment. This anthology was part of the Autry Museum of American Heritage initiative to engage in new discourse and extend their interpretation of the American West by giving more coverage to issues of race, ethnicity and gender. It’s title represents the dominant theme of the essays, the search for the American Dream in real and mythologized opportunities offered by the California Dream

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Taylor, 309-310, 313-315; Flammig, *African Americans in the West*, 10-11; Broussard, 5.

that transcend time from the colonial period to the twentieth century. When the American and Western ideals and mythologies are combined with the romanticized, California Spanish and Mexican heritage, the region's beautiful landscape and its warm climate, a reputation for tolerance and inclusiveness, and the pioneering spirit – the fully developed “California Dream” emerges. For many of whatever ethnic or racial group, California was and still is, as the volume's editors and essayists assert, the land of opportunity and the good life that historian Kevin Starr so eloquently described in his American and California Dream multi-volume series. Their anthology introduction offers a comprehensive historical background that contextualizes events in California within broader national trends. The thirteen essays were important steps in the direction of reconstructing aspects of the African American experience that add to our understanding of the historical roles of African Americans in California and the American West. The anthology also revealed the great deal of this history that has been ignored, and the research that still needs to be conducted to round out the view of African American westerners.<sup>62</sup>

The volume's chronology begins with the multi-racial Spanish/Mexican colonial period. It moves on to examine American nineteenth century migration and settlement, and the Great Migration and communities of the twentieth century, as well as the multi-racial environment of cooperation and challenges. The essays contemplate the California black experiences of negotiations for rights and community construction, culture, politics and political representation, community organizing and conflicts, civil disobedience, business activities, employment and housing issues, and suburbanization. With only two essays on

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<sup>62</sup> Kevin Mulroy, “Preface,” in *Seeking El Dorado, African Americans in California*, ed. Lawrence B. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy, & Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles, CA: Autry Museum of Western Heritage/Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001), ix, xi; Bunch in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 130; Broussard, 5.



San Francisco and Oakland, the volume largely focuses on the black experience in Los Angeles and southern California.

One essay by historian Lonnie G. Bunch, III examines the black boosterism of Jefferson L. Edmonds (1845–1914), the publisher of the early twentieth century, monthly news magazine, the *Liberator*. An early leading proponent and propagandist of the “California Dream” for African Americans, Edmonds and other black boosters also painted an unvarnished and frank portrayal revealing both the challenges and opportunities blacks would find in Los Angeles. As Douglas Flamming noted in his 2005 book, *Bound for Freedom, Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, throughout the early twentieth century black newspaper and other publication editors in Los Angeles, with their booster rhetoric, masterfully “contrasted the idealized West and the racist West...[to create] a distinctly African American vision of the urban West, somewhere between an endorsement and an indictment.” Edmonds’s vision of the California Dream, as Bunch and other scholars asserts, enticed African Americans’ migration to the state during much of the twentieth century. Some of those persuaded by this vision became new African American residents of Los Angeles and leisure makers at the southern California sites studied in this dissertation.<sup>63</sup>

Douglas Flamming brought the new interpretive framework to bear on Los Angeles as a place of distinctive importance in *Bound for Freedom, Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*. He examined how the pioneering, early twentieth century African Americans developed political and social institutions and its leadership laid the foundation for the civil rights activism of the late twentieth century that continues to influence twenty-first century Los Angeles and the nation. Flamming’s engaging text gives extensive details about African

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Bunch in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 130-131, 143-144; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom...*, 128.

American community life and political activism from the Jim Crow era through the first Great Migration, to the booming 1920s, the Great Depression and the build-up to World War II.

In his 2003 book, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, Josh Sides joined Flamming in tracking the history of the African American West by focusing upon its leading metropolis, Los Angeles. In contrast to Flamming, Sides' interest is the impact of federal legislative initiatives, the Great Migration, newly open industrial employment beginning as a result of World War II, deindustrialization, and post-war opportunities and challenges to dramatically reduced racial inequality for blue-collar black Americans in Los Angeles in a multi-racial environment. The everyday choices and decision about their lives, work, education, housing, recreational activities, political representation and explicit challenges to discrimination, put African Americans into public spaces and the consciousness of the city of Los Angeles in ways which forced civic leaders to react. Even as some African Americans have been able to attain the "California Dream" and the "Western Ideal," *de facto* racial inequality still afflicts many Americans of this group.<sup>64</sup>

Both Flamming (2005) and Sides (2003) offer specific points of view and details of the African American migrant experiences of middle and blue-collar, socio-economic classes, before and after World War II within the context of African American history, Western history, Urban Studies and American history. These volumes with the edited collection by Taylor, DeGraaf, and Mulroy (2001) offer a good foundation to understand the black experience in the American West, California and Los Angeles in the past, present and

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<sup>64</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 3, 6, 8-9.

future. Although none of these volumes cover much about the social and cultural history and traditions of Los Angeles black community, their class-based and institutional analysis offers a necessary preview and foundation for further examination of this rich social-cultural landscape. Informed by the foundation laid in works of Taylor et al, Flamming and Sides, my study of African American leisure production and economic advancement pursuits in southern California builds on their work and adds needed illumination and interpretation to the social-cultural landscape.

Moving beyond the structural analysis, still further new directions have pointed out essential elements of understanding the African American experience in the West lie in the particular areas of innovation and culture. Works have been published in the last twenty years on the music scene such as, *California Soul: Music of African Americans in the West* (1998) edited by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows, *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (1998) by Clora Bryant, Buddy Collette, et al., and *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (2006) by R.J. Smith. Donald Bogle's *Bright Boulevards, The Story of Black Hollywood* (2005) and Daniel Widener's *Black Arts West, Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (2010) publications broaden our understanding of movie industry history and black agency in the mid-twentieth century arts scene, respectively. In the book, *Imagining the African American West* (2005), Blake Allmendinger offers a noteworthy analysis of how African Americans have pictured their role in the West in various literature types, cinema and rap music during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Joining the new directions of scholarship, my dissertation study of African American leisure production, economic development agency and civil rights struggles is another new area of inquiry adding new information and

understanding about how black Americans sought to seize their California Dream to appropriate and shape the offerings of their new environment in the Far West.

The study of the western states' black experience has advanced significantly in the last few decades. All of the works suggest directions to local studies of the African American experience in the West. There continue to be large areas of the African American past in the West that have not been fully documented or studied, especially in the area of social and cultural history. More about the diversity of individual lives and institutions needs to be studied and presented by the scholarly community to scholars and the public. Even with this caveat, the representative scholarly works I have discussed are repopulating U.S. history with previously excluded experiences, and in the process, reframing the very understanding of the subjects or agents of historical change, who are central to the history of the United States.

Other scholars have refocused study on the making and perpetuation of this exclusion from public memory. Historical narratives provide the foundation for incorporation into the U.S. historical public memory, or what Pierre Nora calls *lieu de memoire* or sites of memory. These are the material or non-material, memory heritage of sites, people, ideals and events that resonate historically, intellectually, emotionally and unconsciously, and that are linked in the landscape of national consciousness. The history of memory is one aspect of the African American history of the West that promises in analyzing “the landscape of national consciousness,” to reveal distinctive elements of community, place, self-understanding and politics in asserting public remembrance.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pierre Nora, “From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory,” From the Internet: [http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan\\_of\\_Arc/OLR/03\\_PierreNora\\_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan_of_Arc/OLR/03_PierreNora_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf), 16 February 2015, xv, xvi, xvii.

Responding to the demand to restore African Americans to the history of the American West, scholars and community advocates have also focused on public programs, such as museum exhibitions, conferences, local, state and national landmark designations, and other public programs. Public history research has increasingly recognized that scholarship does not automatically affect public awareness, and the construction of public memory has itself been a topic for close scholarly analysis and argument. These historiographical turns are important elements for the continued development of programming to infuse the black experience of the West and its diversity into the history of western states, the history of African Americans, and U.S. history generally -- as well as into the national consciousness.

As historian David Thelen asserts, historical public memory is constructed, and it “is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the context of community, broader politics, and social dynamics... The struggle for possession and interpretation of memory is rooted in the conflict and interplay among social, political, and cultural interests and values in the present.” Still with us today, is the gap scholar Michael Frisch identified in 1990 (and others have recognized since then) “between the content that amateur audiences associate with ‘American History’ and the content... presently taught in most graduate departments of history.” As historians have since the 1970s rediscovered African American history in the West, they have also been attending to the renewed struggle to recognize that history in public, and especially in public places. In the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century resistance from some white Americans to a broader national narrative continues. Due to the fact much of this history is about struggle, racism and tragedy, some of these whites who are in institutional capacities with tremendous

influence on the dissemination of information, resist incorporating and commemorating the histories of African Americans and other peoples of color into the regional and national American narrative.<sup>66</sup>

The development of a more inclusive national consciousness and identity are a slow struggle that is occurring. My contribution with this historical writing has a public dimension and one to the professional practice of history. In this dissertation I attempt to more broadly locate African American representation on the landscape to further integrate African Americans into the historical consciousness of California, the North American West and the nation. Further, my study of the history and memory of African American leisure, pushes the historic preservation/heritage conservation field to reconceive itself, beyond architecture, and to reevaluate whose experience gets featured, in determining what social activity is significant and how. The field has begun to do this in many ways, but needs to go much further in recognizing and affirming more sites and landmarks important to the celebration of a more inclusive American experience and identity.

Chapter 2 offers a brief historical context of the origins and values of vacation experiences, and the evolution of leisure choices in the United States. A few favorite early American vacation experiences that evolved out of European leisure choices are examined, and I present examples of African American leisure and vacation sites formed outside of California during the Jim Crow era from the late 1800s to the early 1960s. Chapters 3 through 7, unearth and analyze formation of the historical context of the development of specific southern California geographic environments in which leisure and resorts grew that

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<sup>66</sup> David Thelen, ed., *Memory and American History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), ix, xix; Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 198-199, 209; Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 11-12.

included African American actors and consumers from the late 1800s, into the twentieth century and the new millennium of the twenty-first century. At each of the sites discussed in these chapters, I illuminate the history of the development of leisure of a specific sort in the social, political and economic particulars of the time and place.

Chapter 3 exhumes Bruce's Beach in Manhattan Beach, a coastal community in southwestern Los Angeles County. This was the earliest (1912-1920s) successful residential resort and leisure destination. Eventual racial exclusionary measures aided by destructive use of state power (1925) eliminated residential and economic development, with attempts to erase the site's memory from history. Only through political assertion has a limited revival of the history of Bruce's Beach and its incorporation into the public record emerged in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 4 elucidates Santa Monica's Bay Street beach near Pico Boulevard, sometimes controversially known as "The Inkwell." Santa Monica formed as a suburban community in the late 1880s for a leisure lifestyle residential community and recreation space for regional citizens, and for some from other parts of the U.S. A small African American community staked a place in Santa Monica. African American local residents and Los Angeles entrepreneurs attempting leisure space service and expansion for blacks were challenged by various racial exclusionary measures inhibiting residential expansion and economic development, although African American citizens' public beach usage and a small local residential community persisted. The local community's persistence has mattered in the reclamation of place and memory in twenty-first century heritage conservation efforts and public history programming that have been initiated by public officials and citizen groups.

Chapter 5 explores Lake Elsinore in Riverside County, a somewhat successful residential and leisure destination for the general population and African Americans even in its marginality through the middle decades of the twentieth century. This was one of the farthest inland of the African American leisure spaces (1910s–1960s) that developed. The vagaries of the lake conditions and changing leisure taste over the years impacted African American entrepreneurs’ resort business opportunities and success. The African American presence has been left out of local history narratives and landmark designation programming. This omission of the African American experiences from the heritage conservation programming obstructs our understanding of the full, shared history of the agents and their impact and contributions to the development of the Lake Elsinore community and the southern California region.

Chapter 6 unearths the history of the Parkridge Country Club in Corona/Riverside County. This was a private club and leisure space development built by for a “white” only constituency. A group of very ambitious African American businessmen purchased the site to operate as an interracial space of recreation, and an attempt at black community suburbanization (1927–1929). The local white citizens’ strongly contested this new venture in the Corona community. The African American businessmen’s efforts to make the venture a success have been left out of local history narrative, and there have been no local attempts of revival of the history or incorporation of it into the public record of the local community, thereby limited our understanding of the community’s historical actors and development.

Chapter 7 excavates the history of Val Verde in Santa Clarita Valley area of Los Angeles County, initially an African American and Anglo resort community development project begun in the mid-1920s. Public money contributed to the development of a park and



swimming pool, and multiple marketing efforts by Val Verde boosters helped sustain interest of African American consumers' leisure usage of the hidden canyon area until the crumbling of the Jim Crow era in the 1960s. In 2015 the Val Verde community has been recast as one of the last rural areas remaining with affordable housing in the Santa Clarita Valley area, with limited public memory of the African American heritage.

Finally, Chapter 8 considers where memory of these southern California leisure sites discussed stands in 2015. I reflect on what it means and the effect of reclaiming and reinserting these African American communities can mean to the regional community understanding of its history, and how memory work demonstrates continuities with (and departures from) the assertion of leisure early in the twentieth century. I offer programming ideas to engage the broader community with the African American heritage, which could be part of larger efforts that memorialize the collective history of cities where these leisure sites are located and the region.

The group name used to describe African Americans has evolved over the years. In this dissertation I use the words "Negro" and "Colored" to identify people of African descent in the United States during the Jim Crow era, as these are the names they and others would have used. I also use "black" and "African American" throughout the dissertation. These are more contemporary group identifiers for people of African descent in the U.S., and serve as universal group identifiers, which cross historical time periods.

My research efforts add the historic African American cultural landscape to the narrative and collective memory of the heritage of the region, by giving voice to places where this group of people was present, prospered in the past, and contributed to the growth and character of the local community, California and the nation. This dissertation recasts our

understanding of leisure in the struggle against racial oppression in a still longer and broader civil rights movement, and of the African American's community intellectual and spatial composition in southern California and the West. The stories of the people in the pages that follow, recast our understanding of leisure as being synonymous with a unique mix of strategies of activism assertion and resistance, mobilizing practices, black spatial imaginary, and struggle for equal access to publicly owned space and private land ownership, for pleasure and amusement, community life formation, sometimes accompanied by entrepreneurial ventures and commerce. Long overdue are the accounts of the lives of these African Americans, who claimed space in the California Dream, and were able to defy the odds of racial discrimination to become successful citizens with the ability to enjoy leisure and invest in real estate for their personal or business use during the Jim Crow era in the West. In this study I join other scholars of New Western History to give a voice to pioneering African Americans who deserve attention and commemoration, not in order to de-emphasize the stories of those who achieved less, and had distressingly narrower opportunities. Rather my extraction and analysis of their stories in the pages of this dissertation elucidates the diversity of the African American experience in their participation in the larger, complex world of the American West, and expansion of the nation's democratic tradition through their struggle and contestation for freedom, equality and rights as citizens and consumers, and as agents in the making of their own history, along with western and national American history.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Foster, 130; Chan, v; George Lipstiz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 51-70.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF RESORTS, LEISURE SPACE AND VACATIONING

The African American making of leisure and resorts in southern California built upon a long history of human pursuit of these types of recreational experiences, as well as upon the struggle for freedom and equality. Since the time of the Greeks and Romans in antiquity, people have traveled to places away from their homes for pleasure, health cures, culture, self-improvement and spiritual rejuvenation, recreation, relaxation and distraction. Not until after the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, however, did leisure travel and vacations become a pursuit that Americans beyond the wealthy or elite, could imagine undertaking. Vacations became a critical marker and entitlement of middle class status. As soon as African Americans could afford extended leisure after the end of American enslavement, they joined Euro-Americans resorts, first on the Eastern seaboard, and later in travel to other places domestically and overseas. Ideas, practices and expectations of leisure in the United States, especially African American leisure, developed attributes, tendencies and effects that would inform and challenge the vision and practice that African Americans pursued in southern California region early in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

As historians have analyzed and interpreted leisure as cultural production of social practice and consumption they have recognized African Americans' leisure as a product of distinctive initiative and resourcefulness, cultural self-expression, self-determination and

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<sup>1</sup> Maxine Feifer, *Tourism In History: From Imperial Rome to the Present* (Stein and Day Publishers: New York, 1985), 167; Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

political activism amid systematic exclusion and dispossession of public rights. In this chapter I briefly explain how leisure consumption has evolved from a European and American elite practice to forms involving more strata of society. I examine some of the original types of leisure in their early American locations, and discuss how African Americans intersected with these sites as employees and leisure consumers. I present the history and memory of African American leisure communities at these more known, earlier United States sites and other locations, for they share many characteristics with the black Angeleno developed leisure sites in southern California that will be discussed in the following chapters of this dissertation.

Elite and aristocratic European travelers were the first to develop vacation travel. Resorts developed to attract leisure travelers to their natural resources, and the hosts provided further amenities as new transportation made it easier to travel. At the same time elites countered cultural values of industry and frugality with values of cultivation, “civilization,” and invigoration through leisure, as by products of the increased wealth of the Industrial Revolution spread. As the United States was growing more prosperous, from across the socioeconomic spectrum, individuals, social reformers and some physicians argued rest could be curative in restoring vigor to a nation that had been worn out by Victorian manners and devitalized by the closing of the western frontier of new opportunities. As vacation communities evolved in the nineteenth century, the hosts were concerned with providing “a restful, healthful and entertaining experience that would appeal to the broadest respectable public.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Aron, 3-7; Theodore Corbett, *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1, 8, (quotation) 11, 15; Horace Sutton, *Travellers: The American Tourist from Stagecoach to Space Shuttle* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 28; ; Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure, Southern California and the Shaping of*

This was also a time of transition in the U.S. economy from self-employment in small scale, competitive capitalism to bureaucratic, corporate employment of middle class men. Working class and immigrant men, as well as middle class women were challenging middle class men over who should control public power and authority, and in turn the nation's destiny. Simultaneously changing conditions and erosion were occurring in ideologies of manliness entangled with self-restraint, self-control, postponed gratification of Victorian culture and traditional sources of male power and status. The growth of consumer culture and commercial leisure that was also occurring, promoted many middle class men to find identity in the pleasure of leisure pursuits and consumption rather than work to become economically independent, as delayed gratification became less profitable. As historians Cindy S. Aron, Gail Bederman and Kay Davis note American men and women used leisure in the performance of various sorts religious, intellectual, and therapeutic social practices as leisure became away of defining class identity. Middle class men in particular, with wives who were not wage earners for the family's economic survival, used leisure and vacations to participate in strenuous, active and competitive physical endeavors, and as a badge of their economic success, reinforcing their newly evolved sense of manliness and patriarchal power. With leisure and vacations, middle class women exercised new forms of personal autonomy in experiencing a wider range of amusements and pleasures, along with new forms of social intercourse than were normally unavailable to them at home.<sup>3</sup>

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*Modern America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35. For a discussion of the changes occurring in popular leisure in society and industrial communities of the United States from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will, Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization, A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 12-15, 83-85; Aron, 3-4, 8-9, 46-47, 70, 72-73, 79; Kay Davis, *Class and Leisure at America's First Resort: Newport, Rhode Island, 1870-1914*, From the

Spas were the first form of vacation life for the American colonists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. They learned about the mineral springs from the Native Americans. The Puritan ethic did not allow for “aimless pleasure,” however. At spas, they could allow for the enjoyment of socializing, relaxation and recreational activities as side products of an excursion primarily in the pursuit of health and escape from disease. It was difficult to get to the early spring sites. The colonists traveled by stagecoach on primitive roads, or by boat when this was a more convenient transportation mode. Even for the more affluent colonial, these early American spas were not necessarily comfortable places as the amenities were very basic.<sup>4</sup>

Spa bathing and drinking took place at springs throughout all the eastern United States, and later in other parts of the nation, with a few continuing to be fashionable resorts even today. Lynn Springs, near Boston, was a popular early mineral water spring. Later, John Adams went to Stafford Springs in Connecticut “to take the cure.” There were other well-liked springs in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey. George Washington visited many springs throughout the colonies, including Berkeley Springs in Virginia, to cure his rheumatic fever in 1761. Spas flourished in Pennsylvania, such as Yellow Springs, and Bristol, outside of Philadelphia, with visitors arriving from various parts of the country and from the West Indies. Historian Horace Sutton colorfully describes these early American resorts in the following passage. Their popularity highlighted the conflict and change of values that the emergence of leisure prodded:

Yellow Springs and Bristol Springs had become so popular and so fashionable that some Quakers succumbed to the allure and visited the springs on the Sabbath.

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Internet: [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/davis/newport/newport%20history/newport\\_overview.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/davis/newport/newport%20history/newport_overview.html), 23 January 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Sutton, 11-13; Aron, 17-18.

Protestant ministers decried the people's 'immoderate and growing fondness for pleasure, luxury, gaming, dissipation, and their concomitant vices.' When some entrepreneurs tried to organize a lottery to build yet another spa, the clergy stomped off in a body to urge the governor to prohibit the scheme 'for erecting public gardens with Bath and Bagnios among us.' The clergymen had the last and the compelling word. If hot and cold baths were so necessary to good health, they said, then proper facilities could be added to the hospitals.<sup>5</sup>

In New York, mineral water resort life emerged in Ballston Spa, Caldwell, at Lake George and Saratoga Springs, from the end of the American Revolution to the end of the nineteenth century. Historian Theodore Corbett observes, Saratoga Springs was the first town in the U.S. "to base its continuous prosperity and growth on its ability to become a center of entertainment." With accommodations and offerings for elites and the burgeoning middle class, Saratoga Springs was the first resort to market to attract the middle class by promoting the possibilities of social interactions with the wealthy and famous. As the nineteenth century marched forward, the crowds visiting the resort became increasing diverse in class, age, gender and health.<sup>6</sup>

The upper classes visited the Saratoga Springs resort typically for the amenities. The public space amenities served as an elegant background for leisure activities. They carried on their social activities at the springs, the hotels and on their porch areas, in the public gardens, squares, parks, promenades and cemeteries, and at the entertainment venues, including the theatre, the racetrack, and various types of gambling and nightlife establishments. The middle classes, on the other hand, went in search of health and spiritual revival. They and the working class visitors to Saratoga Springs stayed a shorter period of time than upper class visitors. The early entrepreneurial and civic-minded landowners played a key role in the development of the original settlement, with sections of land plotted

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<sup>5</sup> Aron, 17; Sutton, 11-12, 13, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Corbett, 1, (quotation) 59, 223, 226-227.

for more modest middle and laboring classes' lodging, as well as more affluent housing budgets. The housing options included large and small hotels, boarding houses, cure institutes and private homes. Almost every dwelling in the town had the potential of being rented to visitors.<sup>7</sup>

Women had many more employment and business opportunities not open to them in industrial cities at a resort like Saratoga Springs with its boarding houses and hotels. In general, women made up the majority of the workforce at the resort, largely in household and hotel domestic service jobs. Owning or running a boarding house or a hotel was an acceptable and respectable role for a middle class, single or married woman, using her domestic skills to support her family. In 1873, Corbett asserts, "women ran more than half the quality boarding houses advertised in guides and several of them were hotel proprietors."<sup>8</sup>

Late eighteenth century to middle nineteenth century Americans also sought health and amusement at seaside watering places such as Newport, Rhode Island, Cape May, New Jersey and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. At these and other coastal resorts it was believed cold sea baths had therapeutic potential, and "an aesthetic appreciation of the sublimity of sea and shoreline" developed.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1760s, Newport, Rhode Island had emerged as a holiday destination for the American colonial elites. Sutton notes even in that period, Newport came to be known as "the most elegant social center of the colonies." The ship captains who managed the trading

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Corbett, 18, 60, 65, 74, 79-80, 83, 98, 136-137, 226; Myra B. Young Armstead, "Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August": *African Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 39.

<sup>8</sup> Corbett, (quotation) 98, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Aron, 20-21.



routes between Newport, the southern U.S. and West Indian ports advertised the pleasures of the Rhode Island coast. Southern planters and prosperous Philadelphia merchants, families from Baltimore and New York, and some vacationers from the West Indies, spent as much as four to five months there. Sutton observed expatriates from Europe thought the Rhode Island summer climate to be like that of Italy. Yet getting to Newport was a long, expensive and challenging trip. In the eighteenth century sea routes were the only ways to get to the Rhode Island coastal city, since as late as 1767 there were no roads from the eastern cities into New England.<sup>10</sup>

The roots of vacation leisure in the wealth made from trade and industry are evident in Newport's history. Newport was a principal North American colonial trading post before it was transformed into a summer resort in the eighteenth century. The merchants of the city engaged in the triangle trade of the enslaved between America, Africa and the West Indies. Merchants on the West African coast traded rum made in Newport, along with flour and iron for individuals that would become enslaved. Transported back across the Atlantic to the West Indies, the enslaved were then sold to sugar cane and rice planters. The enslaved in the Caribbean made molasses, which was shipped, back to Newport for distilling into rum. Enslaved African people were also shipped to Newport and sold in New England until the enslavement system there was abolished in 1807.<sup>11</sup>

The early seasonal visitors to Newport stayed in boarding houses or rented local farmhouses. As the nineteenth century progressed and vacation became an industry in Newport, visitors could stay in hotels. By mid-century, cottages were being built for

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Aron, 16-17, 21; Armstead, 14; Sutton, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Armstead, 14; Richard C. Youngken, *African Americans in Newport: An Introduction to the Heritage of African Americans In Newport, Rhode Island, 1700-1945* (Newport, RI: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and the Newport Historical Society, 1998), 3-7.

exclusive summer residence. Famous artists, writers and intellectuals, like Bostonians Oliver Wendell Holmes, Julia Ward Howe and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, sought inspiration from the environs of Newport. In the 1870s “fashionable society” discovered Newport, and from the last quarter of the nineteenth century in what has become known as “the Gilded Age” forward, Newport became “the summer home of America’s wealthiest families,” where they built palatial estates in historical revival architectural styles.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century the summer colony popularity of Cape May and Long Branch on the New Jersey shore overshadowed Newport. Like other resorts in America, the New Jersey seaside vacation spots emerged in conjunction with rapidly developing cities. Initially accessible only by the Atlantic Ocean or the Delaware Bay, Cape May was particularly popular with residents from Philadelphia and the southern states. With several hotels by 1850, it was the most famous seaside resort in the United States, and it retained that status for the remainder of the nineteenth century. The combination of sea and land transportation infrastructure improvements, such as railroads, better road access and steamships, along with new facilities for day-trippers, and residential cottage development — made Cape May more accessible to a broader range of visitors and influenced the city’s growth.<sup>13</sup>

After being overlooked as a vacation destination during the early part of the twentieth century, due to changes in public taste and the effect of being off the beaten path, a new post-1950s auto thoroughfare was a catalyst for renewed tourism and year-round

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<sup>12</sup> Armstead, 14; Davis, *Class and Leisure at America’s First Resort: Newport, Rhode Island, 1870-1914*, From the Internet: [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/davis/newport/newport%20history/newport\\_overview.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/davis/newport/newport%20history/newport_overview.html), 23 January 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Cleveland Amory, *The Last Resorts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1952), 19; Emil R. Salvini, *The Summer City by the Sea: Cape May, New Jersey, An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press), 17, 20, 32, 40.

population growth. The reemphasis on the historic architecture of Cape May helped to revive the economic fortune of the town by expanding the shore summer season from early April to late October. With the most complete *in situ* grouping of mid-nineteenth century Victorian style buildings east of the Mississippi River, Cape May gained designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1976.<sup>14</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, tourism replaced the whaling industry on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard as the area's most profitable business enterprise. Inspired by religious practice from annual Methodist revival meetings held at an area they named Wesleyan Grove, vacation leisure on the island grew out of a different origin than that in Newport or Cape May. In 1835, worshippers began to stay in tent camps in an open field area leased by the religious organization. The Methodists pioneered and dominated religious resort development throughout the nineteenth century. People who went to these summer camp meetings sought educational and spiritual goals, as well as leisure activities. They could renew their faith, gain self-improvement, and get away from home to a new setting to socialize with friends and strangers. Wesleyan Grove grew dramatically in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, "acquiring a national reputation as one of the most successful and institutionally stable of the Methodist camp meetings," according to Dona Brown.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1850s, the growth of secular pastimes among those who attended the camp meetings became a concern of the more pious sort, who wanted to maintain a spiritual setting as their community grew. In the 1860s, the newly formed Martha's Vineyard Camp-

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<sup>14</sup> Salvini, 112-113, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism In The Nineteenth Century* (Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington, DC, 1995), 77; Aron, 102-106; Jill Nelson, *Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans At Home On An Island* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2005), 22.

Meeting Association purchased Wesleyan Grove and some adjacent land. This organization included church leaders and elected officers who managed the camp, and leased and sold the tents, and later, cottage spaces. During this era the communal tents set up by local church groups on the earlier camp meeting grounds began to be replaced by private family tents, and the first permanent residences were built on the grounds. Ellen Weiss, an architectural historian and a summer resident in the area, suggests the tents were replaced by tiny, ornate gingerbread cottages whose architecture combined design elements of the early tents, church architecture and cottages.<sup>16</sup>

By the late 1860s, land speculators and astute entrepreneurs also saw potential profit in settings like Martha's Vineyard. Early developers realized those who came to the island for religious reasons also enjoyed the "clean ocean, pristine beaches, rolling hills and bluffs, ponds, and cool breezes — and that there was money to be made." These land speculators purchased land, offered cottage lots for sale, built hotels and wharves, and invested in rail lines near the Methodists and other religious denomination enclaves. The Christian influence of nearby places like Wesleyan Grove on Martha's Vineyard was not seen as a liability, because increasing numbers of the middle class were seeking resorts where this type of influence prevailed. An area like Wesleyan Grove was not unique. By 1870, many other camp meeting locations, such as Ocean Grove, New Jersey, and Rehoboth, Delaware, were being turned into permanent vacation communities.<sup>17</sup>

Those frequenting Wesleyan Grove and the cottages built there in the 1860s and 1870s were not genteel, wealthy or particularly well educated people accustomed to summer leisure and travel. At the time, only a few who vacationed there had white-collar

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<sup>16</sup> Nelson, 24; Brown, 77-78; Aron, 104-105; Lofguen, 143.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Lofguen, 105-108; Brown, 79-82, 102; Nelson, 22.

professional status, which allowed taking time off for extensive summer leisure. Instead, the majority of the visitors to Wesleyan Grove were artisans and shopkeepers of varying degrees of wealth and status: coopers, blacksmiths, tanners, watchmakers, grocers, teamsters, milliners and merchant tailors. Some were also employed in office occupations as agents for factories, bookkeepers and clerks. These industrious citizens treated their visits as extensions and counterparts to their urban lives and communities they lived in during the rest of the year. Unlike the formality and conventionality of the great resort hotels and mansions of places like Saratoga and Newport, the cottage experience of visitors at Wesleyan Grove environs was characterized by a comfort, rural simplicity, privacy and domestic informality.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in the late 1860s, new residential developments around Wesleyan Grove copied the circular design of the campgrounds and added parks and other amenities that would attract more affluent vacationers. This late nineteenth century settlement area around and including the grounds of the camp meeting were renamed Oak Bluffs in 1907. After losing some of its temporary features with their the establishment by the 1890s, religious resorts like Oak Bluffs and Ocean Grove were attracting a more “genteel” clientele with more permanent infrastructure and institutions. As those attracted to these summer communities became more affluent, they brought more secular expectations of leisure and enjoyment. Along with camp meetings, a range of activities, such as billiards, dancing, roller skating, croquet, concerts and readings, became acceptable forms of diversion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Brown, 82-85, 90, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Brown, 94-95, 98, 100; Nelson, 26, 28; Aron, 110.

## **African American Leisure Sites and Resorts Around the United States**

As resort towns developed in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century U.S. African Americans were part of them as year-round residents, service workers and entrepreneurs. By the late nineteenth century a small but growing African American middle class could afford to travel for vacations at spas, seaside and mountain resorts, and occasionally in Europe. This group of African Americans throughout the United States more or less mirrored the resort-based leisure consumption of white middle and upper class Americans at the time. Between the 1910s and 1930s, a greater variety of people beyond the white middle and upper classes — working class whites, immigrants, middle class and working class African Americans — gained the means to vacation. By the end of 1940, paid vacations began the journey towards being institutionalized as part of employment compensation and as part of “the American Dream” for numerous working people.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, resorts at Saratoga Springs, Newport, Cape May, Martha’s Vineyard, and several other locations throughout America, attracted an African American clientele for summer vacations, along with white patrons. In an era of heightening segregation, when African Americans tourists began to experience restrictions at mainstream resorts, as early as 1894 historian Myra B. Young Armstead notes, “distinctly black resorts emerged as the most trouble free vacation option.” Those resort towns the African American middle class visited had sizable African American populations with establishments catering to their accommodation needs. There were several leisure and vacation sites throughout the United States catering to an African American clientele during this period, with varying degrees of success and longevity. Hillside Inn in the Pocono

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<sup>20</sup> Armstead, 18-22; Gatewood, 7, 200-201, 248; Aron, 10, 184, 207, 238, 248; Lofguen, 109-110; Rosenzweig, 68-69.

Mountains of Pennsylvania, and Highland Beach, Maryland, were open for business in the Atlantic coastal states. Idlewild, Michigan, was one of several retreats in the Midwest. The South featured more than one beach area serving black leisure seekers and vacationers, including American Beach at Amelia Island, in Florida, and the black Methodist, Gulfside Assembly resort on the Gulf Coast, between New Orleans, Louisiana and Biloxi, Mississippi.<sup>21</sup>

Jews also faced exclusion and discrimination at many mainstream vacation places as early as the 1870s, and through the Depression years of the 1930s. The Jewish press published information about lodgings and other facilities where they were not welcome. Word of mouth also helped both Jewish and black travelers to know where they were welcome, and where they were not. Vacation places they built for themselves, and Jewish heritage sites, were also featured in the press and guidebooks. Jewish resorts flourished in the Catskill Mountains in New York, Atlantic City, New Jersey, South Haven, Michigan, the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, and Florida's Miami Beach.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Armstead, 18 (quotation), 19-22, 36; Aron, 213-216; Gatewood, 7, 45; Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, "The Black Resorts." *American Legacy* magazine, Summer 1996, 12, 14. Haizlip calls to our attention, of the popular Eastern seaboard vacation spots historically serving the African American upper classes, three continue to thrive in contemporary times: Highland Beach (MD), Sag Harbor on Long Island (NY) and Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard (MA); Stephen Birmingham, *Certain People: America's Black Elite* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 94; Jill Nelson, Nanine Alexander & Pamela Douglas, "A Summer Place: Black resorts are havens, communities of neighbors and real property," *Black Enterprise* magazine, August 1981, 57; Foster, 136-144; F.R. Washington, "Recreational Facilities for Negroes," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 140 (Nov. 1928), 279-280; Gulfside was a Negro Chautaugua (self-improvement) resort servicing many generations in the Gulf states and Deep South was begun in the 1920s by Rev. Robert E. Jones, one of the first African American bishops in the Methodist Episcopal denomination. Gulfside has struggled to survive, and has been eyed by coastal real estate developers and local officials to acquire for redevelopment. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused tremendous damage to Gulfside. Though the facility is being rebuilt, its future remains uncertain; Richard Bardolph, *The Negro Vanguard* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1959), 108; William L. Jenkins, "Methodist Churches and Landmarks in Mississippi," From the Internet: [http://www.millsaps.edu/library/library\\_cain\\_complete\\_list.php](http://www.millsaps.edu/library/library_cain_complete_list.php), 23 January 2015; Andrew Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours, African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 52-54, 59, 68-75, 82-85, 241-244, 247-248.

<sup>22</sup> Aron, 218; Lofguen, 106; *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1949), From the Internet: [http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Race/R\\_Casestudy/Negro\\_motorist\\_green\\_bk.htm](http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Race/R_Casestudy/Negro_motorist_green_bk.htm), 23

As black mobility and demand for leisure travel increased in spite of the racist restrictions and possible inconveniences, special travel guides were created by entrepreneurs and even the U.S. Federal government to inform African Americans about services and facilities available to them as travelers on the road. One such guide published from 1936 to 1963, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, promised “to give the Negro traveler information that would keep [her/]him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make [her/]his trips more enjoyable.” Many black resorts and other accommodations were regularly listed in *The Green Book*. During this era, the United States Department of the Interior even published “A Directory of Negro Hotels and Guest Houses.” In addition to guidebooks and word of mouth, African American newspapers, mass-circulation magazines and city directories advertised hotels and other services available to African American travelers in various regions of the country. Although there were some commercial accommodations throughout the United States where African American travelers could find lodging and meals, these establishments were not common among Anglo communities, generally. Until the end in the 1960s of the Jim Crow era’s legalized social barriers and segregation, as Price M. Cobbs, co-author of *Black Rage* (1968/1992) examining black life from a psychological viewpoint notes in his memoir, African Americans mostly traveled to places where they could “[stay] in private homes with friends, or friends of friends, relatives,

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January 2015, 1; Avi Y. Decter & Melissa Martens, eds., *The Other Promised Land: Vacationing, Identity, and the Jewish American Dream* (Baltimore: The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Inc., 2005), 5; Judith Endelman, “Vacation: Days: Jews in the American Landscape” in ed. Decter and Martens, 18, 20-21; Sutton, 42; Price M. Cobbs, *My American Life: From Rage to Entitlement* (New York: Atria Books/Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2005), 27; Lewis Walker & Ben C. Wilson, *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 119.



colleagues..., or church people [they] knew or who had been told of [them]. Sometimes they would be asked to pay, sometimes not.”<sup>23</sup>

### ***Saratoga Springs, New York and Newport, Rhode Island***

African Americans were enslaved on rural estates in Saratoga Springs from the time of the earliest American settlements. The 1790 census also listed a number of free African Americans. From 1785 to 1827, several laws were passed in the state of New York to end enslavement in the state. Yet African Americans were only allowed to work in the lower strata of resort employment, as domestic and unskilled labor, and had few opportunities beyond that. A few obtained work as entertainers. Until the 1840s, African American women made up the majority of the workforce at many U.S. resorts. Many males of African American descent worked as waiters. As resort work was seasonal, most workers held down a series of jobs to patch together their year-round income. Well into the twentieth century the African American community maintained a strong employment information and recruitment network, which was especially useful to students and teachers who could utilize their vacation time by working at the resorts.<sup>24</sup>

As the nineteenth century went on, African Americans were permanently pushed out of many of the better domestic service jobs and skilled trades they had previously held at

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<sup>23</sup> Armstead, 18; Endelman, in eds. Decker and Martens, 20-21; Foster 136-137; *1940 Negro Motorist Green Book*, 1; Prepared in conjunction with the United States Travel Bureau, the 1940 edition cost 25 cents and listed “Hotels, Taverns, Garages, Night Clubs, Restaurants, Service-Stations, Automobiles, Tourist-Homes, Road-Houses, Barber-Shops, Beauty-Parlors” from “America on the Move,” Exhibit, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, From the Internet: [http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/exhibition/exhibition\\_11\\_3.html](http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/exhibition/exhibition_11_3.html), 23 January 2015; Sarah Allaback, ed., *Resorts & Recreation: A Historic Theme Study of the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route*, 1995, From the Internet: [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/nj1/chap4.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/nj1/chap4.htm), 23 January 2015; Cobbs, (quotation) 27; Gatewood, 202. Accommodations in Santa Monica, Lake Elsinore, Val Verde and other California destinations were listed in *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* until the publication cease in 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Corbett, 146-148, 150-151, 154; Armstead, 21-22, 73-77, 93-94.

Saratoga Springs by white competition. This preference for hiring white European immigrant domestics increased across the country as the century advanced. By the late nineteenth century, many respectable African American women—like Euro-American women—used their housewifery skills to operate lodging facilities and other businesses catering to summer visitors. At Saratoga Springs and other early resorts, some of these facilities served African American seasonal workers and tourists, others served whites, and some served a mixed clientele. Some seasonal and year-round businesses included laundry services, nightclubs, restaurants, barbershops, dressmaking and tailoring, transportation, and spas or bathhouses.<sup>25</sup>

Although African Americans may have been part of the social mix in resort towns since their early days, they face discrimination and prejudice throughout the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. In the face of exclusion, African Americans built institutional spaces, such as churches and voluntary associations. After the Civil War and during America's Jim Crow era, black tourists were generally barred from staying in white-owned hotels for a white clientele. At Saratoga Springs they stayed with friends, or rented rooms or cottages from African American proprietors in the Quarter de Africaine. They also suffered other restrictions and barriers. At many resorts during this period, African Americans were only welcome if they were employed at a particular establishment.<sup>26</sup>

At Newport during the eighteenth century the majority of enslaved and free African descendants worked in domestic service, agricultural goods production, and services associated with rum production, shipbuilding, wharf warehousing and marine trades. Many

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<sup>25</sup> Corbett, 5, 144-145, 150; Armstead, 21-22, 73-75, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Armstead, 18, 28-29, 74; Gatewood, 200-202; Lofguen, 106; Gretchen Sullivan Sorin & Jane W. Rehl, *Honorable Work: African Americans in the Resort Community of Saratoga Springs, 1870-1970* (Saratoga Springs, NY: Historical Society of Saratoga Springs, 1992), 22-31.

enslaved people also labored in the trades of furniture and cabinet-makers, silver smiths and goldsmiths, local builders and stonemasons. In the mid-1700s, leading church figures and their associates began denouncing the practice of enslavement, and created religious and educational programs for African Americans. With encouragement from vocal anti-slavery activists, many African Americans gained or purchased their freedom in the years of ferment proceeding and during the Revolutionary War. The oldest African American mutual aid society in the United States, the African Union Society, was established by the African American community of Newport in the early 1780s.<sup>27</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, many free African Americans continued to be employed in domestic service and the marine trades. Some continued their pre-manumission living arrangement with their former owners. Others settled into neighborhoods where they continued as domestic employees or were independent service-related entrepreneurs such as teamsters, laborers, coopers, cordwainers, caterers, blacksmiths, house painters and gardeners. Both classes of these workers participated in and supported the development of the resort-based economy of Newport.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to the decade of the Civil War, and through at least 1900, there were African American who established a few flourishing businesses in Newport as they did in Saratoga Springs, some of which serviced European American seasonal visitors. George Crum was a successful chef and later independent restaurateur in Saratoga Springs, who is purported to have (with his sister) invented the potato chip. Restaurant owner, caterer and real estate developer, George T. Downing, first opened establishments catering to white summer visitors at Newport in 1846. Already a successful restaurateur in New York City,

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<sup>27</sup> Armstead, 30; Youngken, 11-12, 18-20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Youngken, 23.

Washington, D.C. and Providence, Rhode Island, with a clientele made up of many of the social elites, Downing's Newport establishments were patronized by his high society associates who began to summer on the Rhode Island coast. In 1854 he built the Sea Girt Hotel, which was described as "sumptuously furnished for a resort for the wealthy." After the hotel was destroyed suspiciously by fire in 1860, the entrepreneur constructed the Downing Block on the site, the first commercial retail project in Newport. Downing was also involved in the abolitionist movement, and used his associations in the nation's capital towards ending the enslavement era.<sup>29</sup>

After accumulating substantial capital out West during the California Gold Rush, Benjamin J. Burton returned to Newport to launch a transportation business, which included baggage transfer services for the summer resort crowd. Towards the end of the nineteenth century his business also included taxi and bus services. Burton's bus service provided Newport with its first mass transit.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1890s, brothers David B. and John T. Allen began a restaurant and catering business. Their Hygeia Spa was a well-known cafe at the turn of the twentieth century at Newport's Easton's Beach. The widowed mother of Stanley Beaumont Braithwaite established a "tourist home" on the city's DeBlois Street in the 1890s. In the early to mid-twentieth century, historic preservation consultant Richard C. Youngken notes, Braithwaite, a nationally-known African American poet and literary critic "...was a distinguished college professor for [ten] years at Atlanta University and a personal and literary friend of major

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Youngken, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Youngken, 31, 33, 51; Armstead, 22-23, 77; Sorin, 22-27.

American poets Robert Frost, Edgar Arlington Robinson, Amy Lowell, James Weldon Johnson, Counter Cullen, and black nationalist / scholar W.E.B. DuBois, among others.”<sup>31</sup>

At Saratoga Springs in the twentieth century there were successful clubs and restaurants in the heart of the African American neighborhood, serving an interracial clientele of both tourists and workers. Patrons went to places like Jack’s Cabaret (ca. 1916–1962) to see a show, or to Hattie’s Chicken Shack (1939-present) for fried chicken. As in the white community, during the Prohibition era of the 1920s there were speakeasies and illegal gambling establishments situated in the African American business community. While most African Americans found their employment limited and opportunities constricting in the resort industry as the twentieth century progressed, a few managed to launch and sustain successful ventures in resort services.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Cape May, New Jersey***

African American experience in the early resort industry’s development was similar in Cape May as other places. Although their movements were very restricted, some free African Americans began settling in Cape May in the first half of the 1800s for employment in the fishing and resort industries. In 1846, African American Stephen Smith, a lumber and coal merchant as well as real estate entrepreneur, built a family vacation home at Cape May out of materials from his lumber yard. This was the same year the enslavement system was permanently abolished in New Jersey, although it persisted in practice in the state until the Civil War. A resident of Philadelphia who was born enslaved in Columbia, Pennsylvania in

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<sup>31</sup> Youngken, 42, 51-52 (quotation); Armstead, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Armstead, 73, 86, 132-133; Sorin, 23-24; Hattie’s Chicken Shack, From the Internet: <http://www.hattieschickenshacks.com>, 12 February 2015.

1795, Smith purchased his freedom and was set up in business by his former owner, Revolutionary War General Thomas Boude. Smith was said to have been the wealthiest African American of his era.<sup>33</sup>

In oral histories from the last half of the nineteenth century passed down by African American families living in Cape May, it is said abolitionist Harriet Tubman worked in the local hotels under an assumed name, while hiding from bounty hunters, to earn money to assist in the funding of the Underground Railroad. As early as the late 1870s, the Banneker Hotel at Cape May catered to upper class black vacationers. Many from Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia spent a portion of each summer at this resort. By 1911, the Hotel Dale, a Cape May African American establishment, was providing hospitality and fine amenities to such distinguished guests as W.E.B. DuBois and Tuskegee educator Booker T. Washington.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts***

Like other places in the United States, African Americans came to Martha's Vineyard as part of the enslaved people trade with the earliest European settlers or shortly thereafter. The enslavement system was legal in Massachusetts until 1783, but there is documentation reporting black indentured servitude well into the nineteenth century. During the first half of the 1800s, blacks were skilled workers, laborers, and at least one was a

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<sup>33</sup> *Stephen Smith House*, brochure published by the Center for Community Arts, Cape May, New Jersey, 1996; Kim Mulford, "A Proud Past at the Shore," *Courier Post*, August 7, 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.courierpostonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060807/LIVING/608070316/-1/ARCHIVES>, 24 January 2015; Douglas Harper, "Slavery In the North," From the Internet: <http://www.slavenorth.com/newjersey.htm>, 24 January 2015; Birmingham, 116.

<sup>34</sup> *Stephen Smith House*, brochure; Gatewood, 45; *Hotel Dale*, brochure, published by the Center for Community Arts, Cape May, New Jersey, 1993; Avon, 213; Salvini, 16; Mulford, *Courier Post*, 7 August 2006.

whaling captain. People of color (African and Native American) were allowed to participate in the Methodist camp meetings from their beginnings in the nineteenth century. Some participated as occasional preachers, but few were permanent residents of Wesleyan Grove. The African American community of Martha's Vineyard was small throughout the nineteenth century. Those African Americans arriving at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century sought work and residential opportunities in the more hospitable northern environment.<sup>35</sup>

During those years an increasing number of African Americans came to Martha's Vineyard to work as servants in the summer homes of Euro-American families from Boston and other eastern cities. By the early 1900s some African Americans became year-round homeowners and small business owners. These entrepreneurs operated guesthouses for African Americans, such as Thayer Cottage and the Promenade Hotel. Its doors still open today, Shearer Cottage was opened around 1917, the longest-lived and best-known of these establishments catering to an African American clientele. Other early businesses run by African Americans included a guesthouse that serviced only white European descendants, a dining hall, a gas station, a barbershop, a laundry, and a shoe shine and cobbler establishment.<sup>36</sup>

At a time when accommodations were segregated, the guest houses — run for the most part by African American women entrepreneurs — introduced Martha's Vineyard to a class of African Americans who were government workers, teachers, doctors, lawyers,

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<sup>35</sup> Nelson, 17, 19, 23; Jacqueline L. Holland, "The African-American Presence On Martha's Vineyard in Arthur Railton, ed., *African Americans on Martha's Vineyard: A Special Edition of The Dukes Count Intelligencer*, (Published by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, October 1997), 1-5; Adelaide M. Cromwell, "The History of Oak Bluffs As a Popular Resort for Blacks," in Railton, 48-52.

<sup>36</sup> Cromwell, 52, 56; Nelson, 28-29.

artists and small business owners with disposable income to spend on summer vacations. Many of these early guests bought summer homes, with some continuing even in the second decade of the twenty-first century to be passed down through the generations of those early African American families. Some of the homeowners also quietly took in paying guests for extra income.<sup>37</sup>

Starting in the late nineteenth century more affluent African Americans in the eastern half of the United States built summer communities to rest, socialize, and expose their children to a positive vision of black life at Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard. In the post-World War II era, an increasing number of African Americans began to go for a summer respite on Martha's Vineyard from cities such as Boston, New York and Washington, D.C. Many cottages were available to rent or buy at prices within the budgets of the burgeoning class of African American strivers who wanted to spend time at this type of rustic, seaside retreat. The 1950s and 1960s saw a period of declining popularity on the island where, in Oak Bluffs and other towns, more than a few houses were empty and boarded up for many years. As late as the early 1970s, journalist Jill Nelson asserts, one could "...purchase a large cottage for four or five figures." In recent times, Oak Bluffs continues to serve a substantial African American community of summer and year-round residents and visitors.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nelson, 31-33; Cromwell, "The History of Oak Bluffs As a Popular Resort for Blacks," in Railton, 56, 58-60.

<sup>38</sup> Award-winning filmmaker and MacArthur Fellow Stanley Nelson describes in his 2004 documentary film, "A Place of Our Own," his family's experiences on the island of Martha's Vineyard at Oak Bluffs. Stanley Nelson, "A Place of Our Own" film, produced by Firelight Media, Inc. and PBS (2004). Nowadays, class and financial ability for the most part supersede race in property transactions on the island of Martha's Vineyard, and vacationers—black as well as white—come from all over the United States to partake in the region's leisure offerings. African Americans purchase and build more expensive homes all around the island in the early twenty-first century. The cottage lots that were purchased for prices in the low five figures a few decades ago are worth hundreds of thousands, and in some cases millions of dollars. Prominent African Americans who have spent part of their summer there, or purchased a vacation home, from the time of segregation to the present, include: activist singer and actor Paul Robeson and his wife, Eslanda; singer Ethel Waters; composer Henry T. Burleigh; Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and his son, Adam, Jr., who eventually



### ***Highland Beach, Maryland***

With freedom, the new wealth of the emerging urban, African American middle and elite classes, and the rigid enforcement of racial separation by Jim Crow laws and custom, some African American vacationers chose during this era to patronize resort destinations specifically developed for them, usually in the vicinity of white resorts. Some of these properties were in less desirable areas not coveted by whites, but they allowed African Americans to feel safe and welcome, and they would not be exposed to racist incidents and inferior segregated facilities. Civil War veteran of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Colored Infantry and longtime U.S. Treasury Department clerk, retired Major Charles R. Douglass (1844–1920) and his wife, Laura A. Douglass, in the 1890s formed Highland Beach, on the Chesapeake Bay near Annapolis, Maryland. As the first to consciously plan an African American resort development, the Douglasses bought the forty-acre tract on the Chesapeake Bay to create a summer resort enclave, after they had been turned away from accommodations at a nearby Bay Ridge area resort and amusement park because they were African Americans. The land the Douglasses purchased was near the Bay Ridge facilities. Free African Americans had owned it since 1858, an unusual situation in a state where the enslavement system persisted to 1865. About forty miles north of Washington D.C. in the Annapolis Neck region of Anne Arundel County, this Chesapeake Bay beach front community consisted of private residences, although some owners built their cottages with the idea of taking in paying guests.<sup>39</sup>

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became a powerful Congressman from New York City; Massachusetts U.S. Senator Edward W. Brooke; singer Lionel Richie and the Commodores; film auteur Spike Lee; writer B.B. Moore Campbell; and 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. President Barak Obama. Nelson, 31-32, (quotation) 33, 34, 80-84, 238-243; Cromwell, “The History of Oak Bluffs As a Popular Resort for Blacks,” in Railton, 59-60, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Armstead, 18; S. Foster, 136, 140; Gatewood, 45; Haizlip, 12, 14, 16; Carroll Greene, “Summertime—In the Highland Beach Tradition,” *American Visions* V. 1, No. 10 (May/June 1986): 46-48; Birmingham, 57;

Though he died before its construction was finished and he could fully enjoy it, Charles's father—abolitionist, orator, writer and publisher Fredrick Douglass (1818–1895)—planned to reside at the vacation home he named “Twin Oaks” at Highland Beach. Here he could have—as a free man—looked out over the Chesapeake Bay to the Eastern Shore where he had been born enslaved. Other well known residents and guests of the area included: entrepreneur, Judge and U.S. Diplomat Mifflin W. Gibbs, Tuskegee educator Booker T. Washington, thespian and activist Paul Robeson, poets Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Langston Hughes, educator Dr. Mary Church Terrell and her husband, Washington, D.C. Municipal Court Judge Robert Terrell, author Alex Haley, comedian Bill Cosby and tennis player Arthur Ashe. The streets were named after African American political and clerical figures of the Reconstruction era, including Douglass and Blanche K. Bruce, U.S. Senator from Mississippi. By World War I, Highland Beach was the most popular vacation destination in the Washington-Baltimore area for the African American educated and professional classes. Others came from Virginia and Pennsylvania to partake of the social and outdoor recreational offerings. In 1922, when the town was incorporated, it became the first African American governed municipality in the state of Maryland, and the first independent African American vacation resort town in the nation. Even with Highland Beach residents' differences of view about the purpose and implications of incorporation, these firsts provided a model and inspiration for many African Americans around the nation

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Jack E. Nelson, Raymond L. Langston & Margo Dean Pinson, *Highland Beach on the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's First African American Incorporated Town* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company, Publishers, 2008), 9-10.

as strategies for self-determination, economic self-reliance, civil rights and black nationalist goals.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1920s, as the automobile made the Maryland shore more accessible to the growing classes of African American business people and professional population migrating to Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, other black Chesapeake Bay vacation communities—Arundel-on-the-Bay, Venice Beach and Oyster Harbor—were eventually built around Highland Beach. Today, Douglass’s Twin Oaks is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is maintained as a private house museum featuring exhibits related to the history of the Douglass family and the Highland Beach area. The town is now part of the Annapolis metropolitan area. It has remained a small community of mostly single-family homes with no hotels or stores as the town zoning excludes commercial enterprises. No longer all African American, Highland Beach is now made up of year-round residents, many of whom are descendants of the original settlers and their friends who would visit the enclave. The Highland Beach community survives due to resident’s desire to preserve and perpetuate its history, and has served as a model for African American beach communities threatened by growth and expanding development.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Birmingham, 46, 50; Gatewood, 77; Nelson, Langston & Pinson, 20, 29; Haizlip, 14, 16; Andrew Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours, African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 92, 96-97.

<sup>41</sup> Highland Beach, Maryland website, From the Internet: <http://www.highlandbeachmd.org>, 24 January 2015; Nelson, *Black Enterprise Magazine*, August 1981, 57; the *African American Heritage* brochure, published by the Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Conference & Visitors Bureau and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority; Kahrl, 92, 110-112; Eugene L. Meyer, “A Welcoming Enclave With Roots in a Snub,” *New York Times*, 3 September 2009.

### *Idlewild, Michigan*

African American development of vacation resorts spread from the Northeast as the Great Migration of southern, rural African Americans to U.S. industrial cities in the Northeast, Midwest and West spread leisure demand across the first half of the twentieth century. Shrewd entrepreneurs saw an emerging opportunity to provide places where more affluent African Americans could spend their disposable income to escape the pressures of the urban environment and the summer heat at health retreats and other black resorts. These resort promoters generally found real estate to develop in more remote locations, or in areas less contested and coveted by whites. One of the most successful black resorts, at least for a time, was founded at Idlewild, Michigan.<sup>42</sup>

Located about seventy miles north of Grand Rapids in “the heart of the Great Resort Section of [northwest] Michigan,” this Lake County site became one of the most popular African American resorts in the Midwest. This rustic retreat was advertised by Idlewild promoters in marketing pamphlets, promotional films in black movie houses, and featured in stories and print ads in the black press all over the country. Although African Americans from all over the United States did visit, the majority of the vacationers to this Arcadian playground traveled from the leading cities of the region, such as Grand Rapids, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Fort Wayne and Gary.<sup>43</sup>

Initially white promoters purchased 2,700 acres of cutover timberland with Lake Idlewild to subdivide around 1913. The land was acquired from lumber companies and from the Michigan Railroad, which was in receivership for back taxes. Through African American salespersons, the developers sold lots for the explicit purpose of creating an

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<sup>42</sup> Foster, 138-140; Walker & Wilson, xi, 1, 4, 6, 21-22; Armstead, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Armstead, 19; Walker & Wilson, 1, 21-22, 48; Foster, 136-137; Washington, 280.

African American vacation community. Historians Lewis Walker and Ben C. Wilson note, the district's growth accelerated, especially after improvements were made, including the building of “a Club House, a hotel with modern laundry facilities, some twenty guest cottages, ice houses, an electric plant, a dancing pavilion, a barbershop, a billiard hall, a superintendent’s cottage, improved roads, an athletic field, tennis courts, baseball fields, an athletic track, a railroad station, a post office, telephone service, a school, and a tabernacle.”<sup>44</sup>

Promotional materials and newspapers enticing the African American professional and business classes to purchase lots in the 1920s described Idlewild as “an Eden-like playground for blacks [with] sandy beaches, new hotel accommodations, unpolluted water, boating, swimming, golf and tennis, horseback riding and nightclubbing.” In addition to extolling it as a place of beauty and relaxation, the purchase of land at Idlewild also appealed to African American interest in progress and achievement, just as it did in other parts of the country. At the end of the 1920s, the white promoters sold their interests in the resort to the Idlewild Lot Owners Association (ILOA). Lot ownership brought automatic membership in the ILOA, and a board of managers was created to govern the resort. As a result, African Americans would control the later development of the location.<sup>45</sup>

Daniel Hale Williams, MD (1856–1931), the first doctor to successfully perform open-heart surgery in the United States, and founder of Provident Hospital in Chicago, was a draw for other African Americans to purchase lots at the Idlewild resort. Early on he purchased a large portion of land, subdivided and sold much of it to friends and other African American professionals who resided in midwestern cities. These friends included:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Walker & Wilson, 6-7, (quotation) 21, 23-25.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Walker & Wilson, 6-8, (quotation) 21, 27-28, 64-65.

Madam C.J. Walker, cosmetology millionaire and philanthropist, Charles W. Chesnutt, lawyer and author of several books including the *Conjure Woman* (1899), and Chicago elected officials. W.E.B. DuBois purchased lots and wrote about Idlewild in the *Crisis* magazine, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) official publication. In the early days of the resort, the presence of and endorsement by people like these attested to the resort's meaning as a place of self-determination and assisted in attracting a broader audience of African American professionals, small business people, blue-collar workers and outdoor sporting persons. Some lot buyers would make Idlewild their year round residence, especially once they retired. The heyday of the Idlewild resort was in the years between 1940 and 1965.<sup>46</sup>

Hotels, motels, cottages, nightclubs and restaurants were built to service the growing crowds of African Americans looking for "an attractive weekend getaway" and summer retreat. The resort's night spots became an important stop on "the chitlin circuit," where many up-and-coming African American entertainers honed their acts before they became locally, regionally and, or nationally famous. Entertainment venues at Idlewild functioned much as the "Borscht Belt" of the Catskill Mountains in New York functioned for up-and-coming Jewish performers between the 1930s and 1960s. During the summer months, many black entertainers who were denied access to white audiences had a place to showcase their talent. Some called Idlewild the "Summer Apollo of Michigan." Many established entertainers also came to perform at Idlewild.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Walker & Wilson, 27, 39-40, 51; Benjamin C. Wilson, "Idlewild: a Black Eden in Michigan," *Michigan History* 65:5 (September/October, 1981): 36. DuBois regularly wrote in the *Crisis* publication about vacation and other destination places to inform his readership of the conditions of and opportunities for African Americans throughout the United States.

<sup>47</sup> Walker & Wilson, 48-50, 70-71, 69-119; Armstead, 19; Ronald J. Stephens, *Idlewild, The Rise, Decline, and Rebirth of a Unique African American Resort Town* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press,

Idlewild began to decline with the end of Jim Crow era in the 1960s, as African Americans chose to go to new places, some of which had excluded them in the past. Simultaneously, the entertainers stopped wanting to perform, because they were now able to obtain employment in many venues across the country, where more of both blacks and whites could see them perform. Facing declining attendance, critics claimed, as Walker and Wilson observed, that the leaders of the resort were “[unprepared or unwilling] to build the infrastructure needed to position the community to compete successfully with any challenges that might come from the outside world, race notwithstanding.” Whether due to unwillingness to invest further, the inability to pull together financial resources from lending institutions and private investors or changing tastes in leisure and the impact of changing regional employment patterns as a result of deindustrialization, in the post-1960s decades the Idlewild entrepreneurs and leisure community builders were unable to keep the crowds coming to maintain the vitality of the resort. Today the community, once described as the “Black Eden,” is made up of mostly African American retirees who are year-round residents, and some seasonal vacationers. There are less than a dozen businesses including a bar and a small hotel, down from three hundred African American-owned businesses Idlewild boasted of in the 1950s–1960s during the district’s height of popularity.<sup>48</sup>

By the second decade of the twenty-first century community efforts to revitalize the rustic village began gaining a bit of momentum by promoting memory and heritage tourism. In 2012 Idlewild celebrated its centennial with the installation of several markers

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2013), 2, 11, 128-137, 150-157. Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Brook Benton, Della Reese, The Four Tops, Sammy Davis, Jr., Bill Cosby, Aretha Franklin and B.B. King are a few of the entertainers who were featured at Idlewild nightclubs.

<sup>48</sup> Walker & Wilson, 65-66, 139 (quotation), 140; Stephens, 7, 12-13, 225-259.

recognizing historic structures such as the homes of Dr. Daniel Hale Williams and boxer Joe Louis. Since the 1990s, state of Michigan and federal government sources have invested several million dollars to support the resort in its infrastructure improvements including affordable housing development, education and cultural programs, tourism marketing programs, creation of a ten-year strategic plan for the community's revitalization, and other community development ideas. The Idlewild Historic and Cultural Center opened and visitors can view exhibits, a film and artifacts from the district's heyday. The cultural center, small revitalization projects, and summer music and arts programming have aimed to attract a new type of visitor, as have publications intended to help preserve the history and cultural memory of the Idlewild resort district. Books and articles have been written about the place, and the Michigan State University Museum created a traveling exhibit entitled, "Welcome to Idlewild: The Black Eden of Michigan."<sup>49</sup>

### ***American Beach, Amelia Island, Florida***

American Beach, on Florida's Amelia Island, demonstrates that resourceful African American leisure development prospected the South, as well as Midwest and West. American Beach was established in 1935, during the Great Depression, as "a black oceanside heaven." Founded in 1901, the Afro-American Insurance Company (known as

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<sup>49</sup> Stephens, 14, 246, 261-275, 279-286-301, 324; David Robert Weible, "Preservation Vacation: What's Next for Idlewild, Michigan's 'Black Eden'?" *PreservationNation Blog*, 20 December 2012, From the Internet: <http://blog.preservationnation.org/2012/12/20/preservation-vacation-whats-next-for-idlewild-michigans-black-eden/#.VMrrBd5cfww>, 29 January 2015; Nancy Derringer, "Once a gem of West Michigan, African-American resort community Idlewild seeks new identity," *Bridge Magazine*, 18 July 2013; "Welcome to Lake County, Michigan—Idlewild," From the Internet: <http://www.lakecountymichigan.com/idlewild.html>, 29 January 2015; John Carlisle, "Once a paradise, Idlewild hopes to rise again," *Detroit Free Press*, 30 November 2014; "Welcome to Idlewild: The Black Eden of Michigan," Traveling Exhibit, Michigan state University Museum, From the Internet: <http://museum.msu.edu/museum/tes/welcomeidlewild.htm>, 29 January 2015; Continuing to tour in 2015, the Idlewild history exhibit has traveled to locations all over Michigan, and is supported by grants from various Michigan state funding agencies and in-kind support sources, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Research Council for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



‘the Afro’) purchased 216 contiguous acres with one half mile of ocean front through its Pension Bureau, to develop as a black beach resort. Although at the time it was purchased this Amelia Island location was considered remote, it featured the finest beaches and tallest dunes on the island. The Afro offered lots for sale to friends, relatives, employees, and customers in its planned resort community. While many of the beaches in Florida were publicly owned during this era, most of them either forbade or limited African Americans’ usage. When the Afro first proposed the idea to develop the site for African Americans, the Ku Klux Klan demonstrated against it in Jacksonville.<sup>50</sup>

Abraham Lincoln Lewis (1865–1947), the visionary leader of the Afro for almost thirty years and one of Florida’s first African American millionaires, began investing in Florida’s Nassau County real estate where Amelia Island is located as early as 1919. Lewis and the company were headquartered in the city of Jacksonville, about forty miles south of Amelia Island. American Beach was located at the site of Franklin Town, where a community of African Americans had resided since 1862. Earlier settlers made a living through farming, ranching and fishing, and some owned “huge acreages.” Town members were originally the ex-enslaved from a nearby plantation, and some descendants of those families continued to live in Franklin Town at the end of the twentieth century. Lewis had some familiarity with this area before the company’s real estate investment, as his wife’s family had roots on the island.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Armstead, 19; Alan Huffman, “An American Beach,” *Preservation* magazine, July/August 2005, 34-36; Marsha Dean Phelts, *An American Beach for African Americans* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), 1, 12, 28, 38.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Phelts, 12-16, 18, 25-30, 34, 38, 64, 74. The enslavement trade existed on the island from 1781 until Union soldiers occupied the port city of Fernandina on the north side of the island during the Civil War. The U.S. legally banned the importation of enslaved people in 1808. As Florida was not acquired by the United States until 1821, Amelia Island became an illegal trade site, where those forced into enslavement’s bondage from Africa and the Caribbean could be smuggled to the mainland, and illegally sold across the border of

Lewis and company were involved in several historic building projects before the American Beach development, including the construction of the thirty-six acre, Jacksonville Lincoln Golf and Country Club, in 1929. This was the first African American country club in northeast Florida. It featured a stream containing catfish and bream with a fishing spot open to the public. The club amenities the members and their guests could choose from included, “a nine-hole golf course, dining room, club house, swimming pool, shooting range, two clay tennis courts, picnic facilities, and a recreational playground for children.”<sup>52</sup>

During the early years of the American Beach resort, beach front and near-beach front lots were marketed to African American professionals and business owners. Many of these more affluent families would spend the entire summer at the vacation homes they built at the beach. By the 1940s, in order to sell more lots, the American Beach developers decided to sell smaller parcels so the cost of purchasing land would be more affordable to a broader audience of potential buyers. Blue-collar workers then had access to building a cottage at the beach. During the 1940s and 1950s, many affordable inns and motels sprang up to accommodate visitors during summer days. When the crowds overflowed at these establishments, lodging proprietors asked homeowners to take in people as paying guests. By the 1950s, business was flourishing for the entrepreneurs at American Beach, especially for the owners of lodging and restaurant establishments. For many African Americans during the earlier years of the resort, historian Marsha Dean Phelts observed “American Beach was the equivalent of going to Disney World today, in terms of its popularity and

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Florida to Georgia and onto other southern states. One of the barrier islands, Amelia Island is the only location in the U.S. where eight different countries have raised their flags in claim to the area: the French, Spanish, English and Patriots flags, the Green Cross of Florida, and the flags of Mexico, the Confederacy, and the United States.

<sup>52</sup> Phelts, 35; Huffman, 36.

prestige.” During the height of American Beach’s popularity from the 1930s to the 1970s, busloads of African American excursion groups came to visit from all over the southeast U.S.<sup>53</sup>

With the abolition of Jim Crow’s social barriers and legal segregation, and the advent of integration in the 1960s, American Beach—like the resort town of Idlewild and black business districts across the U.S.—fell into decline. The services black entrepreneurs provided could not compete with white service providers and facilities, as their previously, captive African American consumers now explored the broader array of choices than had previously been unavailable to them. Nor did whites choose to patronize these sites. American Beach’s decline was also hastened by the natural disaster of Hurricane Dora in 1964, when some residential and commercial structures were destroyed and never rebuilt. Since the 1960s the year-round community at American Beach became smaller, the buildings grew weather-beaten, many of the stores and businesses were abandoned, and many lots have remained empty.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1970s, new developers, who had a different idea about what a beach community should look like, came knocking on the doors of older African American homeowners, and some of these homeowners sold their properties. As upscale, manicured and gated communities typical of new southern Atlantic coastal residential developments surrounded American Beach, some landholders in American Beach sold out and their lots became part of these new developments. Lobbying efforts have helped to preserve the beach’s dunes and remnant forests, protect the remaining buildings, keep properties together, and establish an American Beach Museum. As in Idlewild, community memory

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Phelts, 63, 65, 74.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Phelts, 120-121; Armstead, 19; Huffman, 35-36.

and leisure heritage became an important strategy. In American Beach, however, the strategy has mobilized to resist redevelopment rather than invite it.<sup>55</sup>

Descendants of longtime stakeholders and others newly acquainted with the area, have renewed interest in American Beach, as they have purchased multiple unwanted properties for their own use and to develop for others in this quaint community with a “hodgepodge of unconstrained architectural styles.” In 1992, American Beach became the first site named to the *Florida Black Heritage Trail*. In the 1990s books on the retreat by historian Marsha Dean Phelts and journalist Russ Rymer came out. In 2002, filmmaker John Sayles made the community a subject of the film, “Sunshine State,” and the American Beach Historic District recognizing the beach enclave for its African American cultural significance, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2004 the National Park Service created Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve from donated land, which came in part from land previously sold to the nouveau, gated community of the Omni Amelia Island Plantation. The eight-acre sand dune system of American Beach was dubbed the name, “NaNa,” an African name of a female ancestor, in honor of the activist MaVynee Betsch, a descendant of Abraham Lincoln Lewis, who fought to preserve it for posterity. The American Beach Museum, housed inside the American Beach Community Center opened with a grand celebration on September 6, 2014, presenting an exhibit titled “The Sands of Time: An American Beach Story.” The exhibit not only featured the history of the beach community and “NaNa,” its natural centerpiece, but also honored its own purpose by

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<sup>55</sup> Phelts, 120-121; Armstead, 19; Huffman, 35-36.

celebrating the activism and legacy of MaVynee Betsch (1935–2005), the most vocal advocate for the area’s preservation.<sup>56</sup>

The defensive preservation strategy of the community enlisted national allies. The Northeast Florida office of the conservation group, the Trust for Public Land, ten years ago acquired American Beach’s abandoned Evans’ Rendezvous club (where popular musicians such as Louis Armstrong, James Brown, Ray Charles and Billie Daniels had performed) and adjacent property to create a future cultural center and historic park. The community launched a “Rendezvous Festival” to spotlight American Beach’s music and entertainment legacy that thrived during the 1930s to 1950s as part of the new annual Amelia Island “International Music and Gaming Festival.” A ten day long program featuring events around Amelia Island at American Beach, the Ritz-Carlton, Fernandina’s Main Beach and historic downtown Fernandina, the Festival is intended to raise additional funds to develop the historic park and rehabilitate the old nightclub, while broadcasting awareness of the historical African American beach enclave at American Beach and the African American experience on Amelia Island.<sup>57</sup>

Just as the leisure and resort spaces described in this chapter in New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Michigan, Florida and other places were developed by African Americans during the Jim Crow era, in southern California African American leisure spaces developed to promote the interests of the race, advance a complex

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<sup>56</sup> Huffman, 35-36; Phelts, 12, 121-125; “American Beach Museum Opening on Amelia Island,” *Amelia Island Living*, 4 September 2014, From the Internet: <http://ameliaislandliving.com/fernandinabeach/2014/09/american-beach-museum-opening-on-amelia-island/>, 12 February 2015; History of American Beach – Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve, U.S. National Park Service, From the Internet: [http://www.nps.gov/timu/historyculture/ambch\\_history.htm](http://www.nps.gov/timu/historyculture/ambch_history.htm), 12 February 2015. Russ Rymer, *American Beach, How ‘Progress’ Robbed a Black Town—and Nation—of History, Wealth, and Power* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 2000), 98.

<sup>57</sup> Huffman, 35-37; “American Beach Museum Opening on Amelia Island,” *Amelia Island Living*, 4 September 2014.

mix of political perspectives supporting freedom, racial uplift and progress, economic development, and emotional and physical rejuvenation. Unwilling to accept exclusion from leisure, the African American leisure sites discussed in this chapter advanced assertion and contestation of discrimination and institutionalized racism through self-determination in the establishment of voluntary separate institutional space against oppressive racial oppression of the era. Black Angelenos in their southern California leisure projects, like their counterparts in those places developed separate leisure spaces to promote a renewed sense of racial pride, cultural self-expression, economic independence, and progressive politics that were the embodiment of the “New Negro,” determined to achieve a fuller participation in American society. The experiences and memories of these leisure resorts and spaces, and the attention they gained in public memory and newspapers of the era, offered African Americans new and broader visions of themselves, a new identity, and a new collective sense of freedom, contributing to cultural and intellectual efforts that defined the “New Negro.” In southern California, African Americans’ ambitions and initiatives for leisure space also claimed, challenged and promoted the region’s identity in the consumption of leisure as “a lifestyle” that would spread across the country to develop a new suburban, middle class culture.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Stephens, 3-4, 26, 29-36; “The New Negro Movement – NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom, 1909-2009” Exhibition, From the Internet: [http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naACP/the-new-negro-movement.html#skip\\_menu](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naACP/the-new-negro-movement.html#skip_menu), 14 February 2015; Culver, 2, 6.

## CHAPTER 3

### **BEFORE BEACH BLANKET BINGO: THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING AFRICAN AMERICAN LEISURE AND REMOVAL IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY AT BRUCE’S BEACH**

Bruce’s Beach is in the limelight. On last Sunday a good day was reported and quite a few enjoyed a day at this pleasure place.

-- *California Eagle*, 18 July 1914<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, Bruce’s Beach in the southern California community of Manhattan Beach was formally commemorated with a park named in its honor and a plaque. The commemoration was significant: the site had not been known as “Bruce’s Beach” since the Bruce’s black resort business and surrounding settlement had been forced out more than eighty years before. With dispossession, the site’s African American heritage disappeared from public discourse and retreated to private memory for decades. Although officially recognized, the Bruce’s Beach heritage reemergence into public discourse continues to hold a contentious place in the social memory and collective consciousness of the Manhattan Beach community.

In the early part of the twentieth century this place was a leisure and resort site where African Americans mostly from Los Angeles went to enjoy a magnificent view of the Pacific Ocean and the California coastline. But in 1924, Manhattan Beach officials uprooted the African American community through eminent domain condemnation and eviction proceedings, ostensibly to establish a public park. The process was clearly an excuse to move

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks in column by J. Allen Reese entitled “Venice, Ocean Park and Santa Monica,” *California Eagle*, 18 July 1914.

the African American families away from the beach. The city did not create a park on the site for almost forty years. In the decades to follow, the city effectively erased the Bruce's Beach memory from public discourse. This chapter examines the history and commemoration of the site, Bruce's Beach, and the social context that was the backdrop to the unfolding events impacting it.

African American entrepreneurs Willa and Charles Bruce established a successful resort service business, and a small community of black vacation homeowners emerged in the vicinity by the 1920s. The place flourished as indicated by all accounts. It did so against white property owner resistance to the small resort from its beginning in 1912, and against local government in the 1920s when black actors stood up in peaceful civil disobedience that forced the city government to discontinue discriminatory policies inhibiting African Americans from Manhattan Beach public shoreline usage. This peaceful, but militant protest would be the first organized action of civil disobedience by the Los Angeles Branch of National Association of Colored People (NAACP).

The understanding of the significance, meaning and remembrance of this place has evolved. From vibrancy in the 1910s and 1920s to silence by 1930, Bruce's Beach remained relegated to private memory for three quarters of a century. Recollection resurfaced momentarily, and then resubmerged. Then in the subtext to a public discussion, private whispers of the demise of Bruce's Beach led to public debate about the necessity to reclaim its history and public remembrance for the current community of Manhattan Beach and beyond in the 1990s to 2000s. As new groups of citizens learned something of the place's history discussion about memorialization grew louder and commemoration ideas for the site by community members and elected officials surfaced. Multiple Bruce's Beach memories



and the city's racist removal of the site came to contend with other messages leaders wanted inscribed on the site. The Bruce's Beach commemoration that resulted became a decorous sort of reclamation of history, designed to absolve contemporary white residents of the uncomfortable truths from the past that they found appalling and embarrassing. Their image of themselves was blemished and their respectability tarnished by the injustice of the black community's dispossession. As the agency of the black pioneers in their social and business practices and fight for their civil rights at Bruce's Beach was recalled, recounting of their struggle to keep their property and access to the beach, eviction and victimization was eliminated. This absolution of contemporary white residents and the narrow portrayal of black actors' contributions to the city of Manhattan Beach, shown vividly in the text of the commemorative plaque placed on the signage of the newly named park, suggest how resistance by white residents and their elected proxies' to recognition of the full purview, effect, and continuance of racism.<sup>2</sup>

The Bruce's Beach plaque demonstrates the complexity of the layers of the African American experience and history in Los Angeles, California, and the United States. Among these layers are stories about group and individual migration patterns, socio-economic status, cultural practices, educational and employment opportunities, and social power. Leisure struggles for private and public spaces is another. These layers present narratives of place, time and people, and personal and public memory struggles, which intersect and overlap. They are inseparable from the defining factors of systematic racial exclusion and class exploitation imposed on black and other peoples of color and minority groups.

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<sup>2</sup> My discussion of contemporary white absolution, identity and the inability to recognize moral, white people can be racist is informed by scholarship from Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, V-3 (3) (2011): 54-74; Russ Rymer, *American Beach, How 'Progress' Robbed a Black Town—and Nation—of History, Wealth, and Power* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 2009), 70-72.

African Americans similarly to other Americans moving to California embraced the booster dream of a leisure lifestyle in the outdoors, health and rejuvenation, and economic development opportunities. Their development of beach leisure space in southern California grew as it did elsewhere in the U.S. at the time near eastern, mid-western and southern cities with relatively large African American populations. African American entrepreneurs and residents in the area created services and accommodations for the emerging leisure community visitors. Their claim to public space and practices of leisure met with opposition by white citizens who made counter public claims with force, assertions of property rights, deployment of local state power and restrictions on public beach access to exclude African American beach front resorts. Bruce's Beach became contested ground in the development of attractive beaches and resorts free from white citizens harassment. In Los Angeles, leisure presented a distinctive political concern in the nation's long civil rights movement.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have argued that leisure and resorts, though produced by the social economy of industrial capitalism, created a novel cultural political form. The resort was a long way from a standard production of the Industrial Revolution. Resorts and leisure spaces, sites of transitory recreational consumption, depended on a market that started off mostly outside the community and captured attractive public space and amenities in order to attract visitors. Sources of resort life and their production have therefore typically been geographically diverse, fragmentary, and reflecting distinctive aspects of the place of their making, conditions that may complicate many scholars' execution of research plans in analyzing African American leisure making and contention against it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew William Kahrl, *On The Beach: Race and Leisure in the Jim Crow South* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2008), ix.

<sup>4</sup> Theodore, Corbett, *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George*, (New

Scholarly recognition of memory as a site of political power alerts us that the memory of leisure in southern California has also been the product of politics, requiring critical examination. Like the layers of historical experience, as Delores Hayden discusses in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1995), the marking and remembrance of the experience in saving a public past for any city or town is a political, as well as historical and cultural process. Decisions about what is to be remembered and protected situate the narratives of cultural identity in the collective memory of and history about a place, and remake the place in the process. That is evident in the case of Bruce's Beach and the century of its making, unmaking, erasure and recovered memory. How that has been achieved and to what effect in Manhattan Beach bears inquiry. Recovery alone does not restore public presence and power in a place, but participants in the memory battle there have believed it has effect. Landmark designation of significant social history sites associated with the cultural landscapes of multiple communities face struggle to recognize various marginalized groups. In Manhattan Beach, the recovery and struggle to present the fuller story of Bruce's Beach for the public shows the difficult steps towards a more complex, accurate, and multiply meaningful public memory.<sup>5</sup>

This research effort re-charts the heritage of the region, by viewing the historic, African American cultural landscape as a place where the region's whole culture and 'collective memory' was constructed. By giving voice to places where this group of people was present, prospered in the past, and contributed to the growth and character of the local community and California this research challenges existing collective memory and demands

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Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 7-9, 12-13, 52 & 61.

its reframing. Scholarly inscription of a fuller understanding of the past benefits everyone, not only in resetting the frame of the landscape, but in providing additional narrative details for the development or extension of collective or popular memory that is the informally told, collective knowledge or history transmitted between citizens to hopefully encourage the formation of a more inclusive sense of a shared identity. While Asian Americans and Mexican Americans have had a larger numerical presence in the Far West than African Americans until World War II, the larger black population nevertheless begot action and cultural and political figures that gained golden state and national notoriety, making their rights issues a major subject of civic discourse and action.<sup>6</sup>

Just as participants have had to reclaim their place in the making of the American West's history, so has the social quest for leisure. The ability to choose leisure and how it would be spend, formally understood as an isolated cultural phenomenon, has become understood as inextricably a matter of social and political meaning. This was especially true of African Americans, who were determined to overcome the legacy of the forced labor of enslavement and Jim Crow laws, to assert control to define themselves and claim community as more than laboring. Leisure was a fundamental field of self-determination. As scholar Mark Fosters asserts, the lives of those African Americans, who were able to defy the odds of relentless oppression to become successful citizens with the ability to take vacations and

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<sup>6</sup> My discussion of collective memory in this paragraph is informed by scholars Paul Connerton and Martita Sturken. Connerton, his ideas about the importance of the practice of historical reconstruction as a guide and shaper of the memory of social groups, about communal memory production being formed through more or less informally told narrative histories and that individual interconnecting sets of narratives are the story of groups from which individuals derive their identity, *How societies remember* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14, 17, 21, and Sturken, her ideas about memory as a provider of individual and cultural identity that gives a sense of importance to the past, and its important to understanding of a culture because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definitions, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 1-2; Lawrence B. DeGraaf and Quintard Taylor, "Introductions," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence B. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 27.

possibly buy second homes during the Jim Crow era deserve historical attention for their part in making leisure and commemoration against concerted opposition, amid distressingly narrowed opportunities. Their aims and achievements exemplify the diversity of the African American story in social class and patterns that needs to be more fully included in the collective public discourse to give a more complex understanding of the American experience.<sup>7</sup>

### **Historic Context: Manhattan Beach and Los Angeles**

When Manhattan Beach was founded and the Bruces were purchasing their resort property, thousands of people, white and black from a variety of backgrounds, migrated to “the mythical land” of promise. They came to California and the Los Angeles region in the early decades of the twentieth century for economic opportunities, the climate, health, the beauty of the locale and freedom. Over a generation from 1900 to 1920 the population of the city of Los Angeles grew 82.2% from 102,479 to 576,673 people. Most were optimistic about the prospects to create a better life for themselves in the West. Carey McWilliams observed that the rapidly increasing population facilitated the expansion of the construction industry and its payrolls, new industries emerged, more stores opened, and employment opportunities in the professions and service trades proliferated. While many came with money to invest in homes and maybe other real estate or small entrepreneurial business ventures, most came with only their hands to work and a determination to succeed as their

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<sup>7</sup> Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131, 135; and Deborah Slaton, Chad Randl and Lauren Van Demme, ed., *Preserve and Play: Preserving Historic Recreation and Entertainment Sites, Conference Proceedings*, (Washington D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2006), xiii; Mark Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945,” *The Journal of Negro History*, V. 84, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), 130.

assets. With employment earnings and savings, even Los Angeles emigrants of modest means could purchase a house to live in with their families. A few purchased houses they then rented out to newer migrants pouring into the Los Angeles area. Some became wealthy from real estate transactions.<sup>8</sup>

Of the towns in the southern section of the Santa Monica Bay coastline, Manhattan Beach was one of the latest to begin development in 1902. It did not receive its name until the city was chartered in 1912. Redondo Beach and Hermosa Beach to the south of Manhattan Beach were already settled communities. The first Santa Fe Railroad train ran into Redondo Beach in 1888. Sand dunes along the coast melded into the inland hills. The Santa Fe Railroad added a small sub-station, and in 1904, the Los Angeles Railway, later called the Pacific Electric Car put in the electric transit line from Marina del Rey to Redondo. Not until these two public transportation systems were constructed did development of Manhattan Beach begin.<sup>9</sup>

The south section of the city was developed by Steward Merrill, the central area by Frank Daugherty with his associates in the Highland Land Company, and the northern track by wealthy Los Angeles area developer George H. Peck. The land Peck developed ran along the coast inland to the crest of the dune, where one had a “grand view.” The Bruce property was located in the Peck Tract. The original Manhattan Beach homes were wooden structures referred to as cottages, but many of them were little more than sheds. Water was available

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<sup>8</sup> 1900 & 1920 United States Census; Jules Tygiel, “Introduction,” in *Metropolis in the Making, Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. by Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 7; Lawrence DeGraff, “City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review*, no. 39 (1970): 333; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California, An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher/Peregrine Smith Books, 1946/1973), xii, 134; J. Max Bond, “The Negro in Los Angeles” (PhD diss, University of Southern California, 1936), 129.

<sup>9</sup> Judson Grenier, *Manhattan Beach: Yesterdays, Manhattan Beach Historical Series Publication Number 3*, (Manhattan Beach, CA: City of Manhattan Beach Historical Committee, 1976), 1-3; “The History of Manhattan Beach: Earliest History,” Manhattan Beach Public Library, Historical Document Files, 3-4.

from two central wells and it had to be delivered in buckets. Each of these developers did the typical promotions of the day to attract buyers to purchase sites in Manhattan Beach, including free train rides, auto tours and free lunches.<sup>10</sup>

In the early years of the city's development people from Los Angeles and Pasadena could take the Pacific Electric car and arrive in little more than an hour at this summer retreat, where only twelve families lived year round. The first pier with concrete pilings and decking was built in 1923. A dance pavilion and bathhouse were built at the shore end of the pier. Sand was a symbol and a problem for early Manhattan Beach residents. As the wind would spread the sand in drifts, dunes shifted, boardwalks and streets were inundated, and homes destabilized. Remaining largely intact, the northern dunes in the Peck Tract were more stable. This area saw desert scenes filmed for Hollywood movies in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>11</sup>

To promote civic improvement in 1909 two organizations formed: The Manhattan Beach Improvement Association, and the Neptunian Women's Club. The city's first government was formed at incorporation in 1912. The City Marshall directed volunteer law enforcement officers and firefighters. After World War I, Manhattan Beach had flappers, moonshine and fast drivers passing through town, but it was still a small family-oriented, mostly white town. In the 1930s, during the Depression years fishing and swimming were very popular. In 1928 the pier was extended to improve fishing and encourage more visitors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Grenier, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Grenier, 5, 8; "The History of Manhattan Beach: Earliest History," Manhattan Beach Public Library, Historical Document Files, 8; Cecilia Rasmussen, "City Smart." *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Grenier, 4; Jan Dennis, *Manhattan Beach, California*, (Great Britain: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 55, 77.

The community began as a residential community with little industry and commercial development. Even though it was subdivided early, Manhattan Beach developed more slowly than other areas in the region as the developers were not required to furnish all of the improvements, which became standard features of later developed tracts. Residents were required to pay for such improvements as water, sewers, drainage, streets, curbs and sidewalks, street lighting and parks by special assessment improvement districts. A large percentage of the city's sanitary sewers were slow to be constructed, and more than 50% of the city's streets did not have gutters, curbs and paving until the 1950s. The city's drainage system was not fully constructed until after 1958.<sup>13</sup>

Until 1949, Manhattan Beach had a winter population of less than one half of the summer population. In 1920, Manhattan Beach had a population of 859. By 1931 it was 1,891; and by 1940 there were 6,398 people. Most of the area's growth occurred after World War II, with the aircraft industry springing up on Aviation Boulevard and population growth in the Los Angeles metropolitan area and freeway improvements making the area desirable and accessible for commuters. In 2013 the population of Manhattan Beach slightly exceeded 35,700. Its barren sand dunes of yester-year have evolved into "a prosperous, [overwhelmingly white] enclave of the South Bay with a prestigious address, a town that has become home to aging baby boomers building wood and mortar castles by the sand."<sup>14</sup>

African Americans visiting Manhattan Beach in the 1910s and 1920s, rode out from Los Angeles on the Pacific Electric Car, came by automobile or by bus. They congregated at

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<sup>13</sup> "The Growth and Progress of the City of Manhattan Beach," Manhattan Beach Public Library, no date.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "The Growth and Progress of the City of Manhattan Beach," Manhattan Beach Public Library, no date; "The History of Manhattan Beach: Earliest History," 9; Rasmussen, November 29, 1996 (quotation); 2013 U.S. Census, Manhattan Beach (city) QuickFacts, From the Internet: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0645400.html>, 11 August 2014.



the shoreline area that became known as Bruce's Beach. Patronizing the Bruce's establishment were mostly black Angeleno beachgoers of all professional and economic statuses employed in the public and private sectors, self-employed and owners of small businesses. There was not much distance between the earnings of the steadily employed black service worker and the professional. In spite of their mostly working class wages the professionals constituted a "black bourgeoisie" with middle class aspirations. That was demonstrated in a February 12, 1909 *Los Angeles Times* newspaper published series of articles about African Americans in the city (to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, "The Great Emancipator.") The publication illustrated African American Angelenos' successful striving for upward mobility and pride in their accomplishments during this era. In their own words, black Angelenos and southern Californians reflected on their "religious, social, professional and business life," and "render[ed] an account of [their] stewardship of freedom" in a generation and a half.<sup>15</sup>

In one article about the educational progress of African Americans in the nation and the southern California region, Professor E.L. Chew reported their education levels in the local region were varied, ranging from those who had finished what would be considered grammar school, others who finished high school to normal schools (approximately two years of colleges). Still others attended or finished at colleges or universities. None were illiterate, even if they had only manual labor training. He observed, all African Americans who

drift[ed] westward from the land of their nativity...[sought] better conditions in a new locality...The majority of arrivals were seeking a better market for their labor; the

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<sup>15</sup> John S. M'Goarty, "The Emancipated," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III-1; DeGraff, 341-342; Douglas Flaming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles In Jim Crow America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 8, 70-78; Josh Sides, *L. A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, (Ewing, NJ, USA: University of California Press, 2004), 23-26.

minority either came to profit by the wonderful climate or to seek a new environment in which to rear their children. A great many have brought money, but the large majority have started with their strong capable, willing hands and a determination to succeed as their only capital.

Chew continued with descriptions of some representative individuals' levels of educational attainment and their businesses or employment. He finished up the article by noting these individuals had utilized their varied levels of educational attainment to develop material advancement through "sober habits and close attention to business, and [that] their possessions...range from \$500 to \$40,000 or \$50,000." Chew also asserted these African Americans had developed as good citizens. Photographs of the interiors of the homes with their addresses of Mrs. Mannie Reynolds Holt and Robert Owens (the wealthiest African American in Los Angeles at the time) were featured in the article with the caption, "Interiors of two luxurious homes of negroes," illustrating these homeowners' tastes and consumption patterns.<sup>16</sup>

Another article in this *Times* series, entitled "Negroes Who Have Won Place or Fortune in Los Angeles and Pasadena" showcased the new migrants' business development and land acquisition in the "Land of Sunshine." Some black Angelenos and their businesses, individual employment, and residential and business real estate holdings were discussed. The real estate owned by all individuals discussed in the series of articles was mentioned. Early twentieth century African American businesses described in the article included: real estate investment, storage and transportation, plumbing, cleaning and dyeing, rubbish collection, metal dealer, construction, and a hotel. Occupations described included positions with Los Angeles county as deputy county auditor, tax collector and assessor and Los Angeles city as

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<sup>16</sup> In 1909 in Los Angeles a home the average home building would have been valued at less than \$2,000. More information about African American capitalist Robert Owens is featured in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Prof. E.L. Chew, "Educational Progress of Negro in College and School of Land is Remarkable," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III-5.

a police officer. Other jobs included head porter, expressman, tailor, ironworker, cooks and caterers, landscape gardeners, undertakers, store merchants and ministers. Featured in the article were photographs of the homes with addresses of the Holts, L.M. Blodgett, R.E. Banks, Rev. C.C. Halford, the Qualls, Mrs. Julia Chamberlain, J.M. Scott and Harry Mitchell. The overall caption describing the images read, “Prosperous Negroes’ homes in Los Angeles, showing good taste and refinement.” The article series spoke about the African Americans’ social practices through their businesses and occupations, and the club and religious institutions they had developed by the end of the first decade of twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

African Americans’ appreciation for books, music and art were mentioned in the articles. In addition the series highlighted the accomplishments of a few African American professionals such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, newspaper entrepreneurs, a veterinarian, teachers and musicians. As articulated in the *Los Angeles Times*, the small but growing African American community demonstrated faith in the promise of upward mobility. They saved their money to acquire real estate as soon as they could, as they sought to enjoy various opportunities available to contemporary, southern California consumers of era, including material possessions and such experiences as riding out to delight in the shoreline offerings of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>18</sup>

This was the social milieu of Manhattan Beach and black Angelenos that was the backdrop to the unfolding events at the site of Bruce’s Beach from its early days of 1912 to its formal commemoration in 2007.

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<sup>17</sup> “Negroes Who Have Won Place or Fortune in Los Angeles and Pasadena,” 12 February 1909, *Los Angeles Times*, III-6; M’Goarty, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III-1.

<sup>18</sup> Chew, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III-5.

## **Bruce's Beach, African American Leisure and Los Angeles County Boosterism**

In 1912, Mrs. Willa A. Bruce (also known as “Willie”) purchased the first of two contiguous Manhattan Beach lots near the Pacific Ocean shoreline between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets (west of Highland Avenue) for \$1,225 from Henry Willard, a white real estate broker from Los Angeles. In comparison to the cost of nearby lots Mrs. Bruce paid a high price for her 32 x 100 ft. lot. The land Mrs. Bruce purchased from Willard and that the other African American families later purchased in the area was undeveloped, as was the majority of the land in this section of Manhattan Beach at the time. Evidence indicates that the land purchased by Mrs. Bruce contained no racial restrictive covenants in the deeds, and that this type of agreement was not a practice in Manhattan Beach until later in twentieth century. At the time, the more common practice appears to have been the less legalistic, but just as socially exclusionary, custom of real estate agents refusing to sell land to African Americans in the more developed sections of the beach town. About 600 people lived in the small, half resort, half-year residential and rural Manhattan Beach district which became a city a few months after the June 1912 Bruce enterprise opened.<sup>19</sup>

The U.S. Census indicates Mrs. Bruce (b. 1862), her husband Charles (b. 1860) and their son Harvey (b. 1889) moved to Los Angeles sometime between 1900 and 1910. Mrs. Bruce was born in Missouri, her husband in the District of Columbia and their son in New

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<sup>19</sup> In 1916, depending on the proximity to the ocean front, lots were ranging for sale between \$200 (farthest from the ocean) to \$450 (nearest the ocean), *Manhattan Beach: 80 Year Anniversary Magazine*, 1993, 9; We owe a debt to Robert Brigham, who might be called a “memory activist.” As a curious youngster, he was always interested in the story of what happened at Bruce’s Beach. Native Angeleno, Brigham moved with his family to Manhattan Beach at age 12. His family had lived in Los Angeles in one of the multi-ethnic Central Avenue neighborhoods, and then in a neighborhood around Western Avenue and Exposition Blvd. before moving to Manhattan Beach, Robert L. Brigham, author of *Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach* (1956), interview by author, 7 November 2004, Los Angeles, via telephone; Robert L. Brigham, “Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach,” (Masters Thesis, Fresno State University, 1956), 15, 17, 21, 24; “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15; “Manhattan Beach Dons New Municipal Togs,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1912, II10.

Mexico. The family lived and owned their homes free and clear in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1900, and in Los Angeles at 1021 Santa Fe Avenue by 1910. Charles Bruce's profession in 1900 and later was identified as a cook or a chef with a railroad company. At the time Mrs. Bruce purchased the Manhattan Beach property in 1912, her husband was said to be a dining car chef on the train running between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles. Mrs. Bruce was listed in the 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930 U.S. Census as having no profession. As the Bruces owned their home and her husband worked in the transient world of railroad workers, there were opportunities for her to earn income while at home through providing services to her husband's co-workers and others. Like many upwardly mobile and middle class women of the era, Mrs. Bruce's housewifery skills such as cooking, ironing and sewing for others, or managing the rental of rooms for a boarder or two at her home could have provided her with personal income and savings as well contributed some to the family's overall finances. Although there is no concrete evidence to substantiate this, patterns of history support that it is possible her professional skills (and earnings) might have gone unreported to the U.S. Census enumerator at the time.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence does support that Mrs. Bruce's skills were the prominent ones engaging the black Angeleno beach pleasure seekers at the new summer resort. At its opening in June 1912 amenities were a bare bones but functional affair. The *Los Angeles Times* reported Bruce's establishment featuring "a small portable cottage with a stand in front where soda pop and lunches [where] sold, and two dressing tents with shower baths and a supply of fifty bathing suits." In 1913 the earliest building structure was constructed at the resort establishment that was first known as "Bruce's Lodge." By 1920, Mrs. Bruce purchased the

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<sup>20</sup> 1900, 1910, 1920 & 1930 U.S. Census; "Colored People's Resort Meets With Opposition," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15.

adjacent land parcel south of her original acquisition from Charles and Anna Kraus and Jessie Carson Drake, residents of New York City at the time. Her husband Charles A. Bruce was not recorded as an owner of either of the two properties, but his name does at times come up as associated with the business. It can only be speculated that his name was not on the property deeds because Mrs. Bruce was the manager of the resort operation, and hence the responsible party for this particular investment on all levels. By 1923, on the original lot purchased in 1912 there were two structures, one of which was a two-story building with room for dancing upstairs and a café downstairs. On the second lot purchased in 1920, another structure was built. The resort accommodated the needs of African American day-trippers and overnight guests who wanted to enjoy themselves at the seaside.<sup>21</sup>

The reaction of the white Manhattan Beach community to the African American presence was mixed. Within a week of the opening of the small summer resort enterprise in 1912, white property owners of adjacent land expressed agitation and took action with the invocation of public power to harass and contest the leisure of the Bruces' guests and patrons. As described in a *Los Angeles Times* headline of a June 27, 1912 article, the "Colored People's Resort Meets With Opposition." Written on the Monday after a Sunday full of visitors at the Bruce resort, the article noted landowner George H. Peck staked off and installed "no trespassing" signs on the strip of land in front of Mrs. Bruce's property. This caused a situation whereby a good size crowd of sepia-toned bathers could not reach the shoreline to frolic in the ocean and enjoy the sea breezes *in front* of the Bruces' property without walking a half-mile around Peck's supposed ocean front, land parcel. Simultaneously confronting Mrs. Bruce and her African American guests' beach usage were two deputy

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<sup>21</sup> Brigham, *Master's Thesis*, 17-18.

Constables patrolling the “prohibited strip” warning them not to cross Peck’s land in front of Mrs. Bruce’s place to reach the ocean. Clearly intended to drive out African American users, the barricade and show of force had little effect on the beachgoers. The *Times* reported, “This small inconvenience, however, did not deter the bathers, . . . pleasure bent, from walking the half mile around Peck’s land and spending the day swimming and jumping the breakers.”<sup>22</sup>

Also announced in 1912 was the opening of another venture complementing the Bruce resort. African American real estate dealer Milton T. Lewis leased from Willard the entire next block between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets, east of Manhattan Avenue with plans to rent space for tents in this area for black Angelenos and other sepia-tone visitors who desired an outing on beach. While there is no further evidence of how the Lewis venture worked out or its duration, it would certainly have further contributed to any concerns of white property owners agitated about the arrival of African American pleasure seekers to the Manhattan Beach shores.<sup>23</sup>

The property owner and lead business proprietor, Mrs. Bruce became the face of the new resort business and its spokesperson. She became somewhat of a cause célèbre and source of irritation to the white supremacists in Manhattan Beach. The same June 27, 1912 *Times* article reporting on white opposition to her venture described Mrs. Bruce, noting her resolve as it characterized her as a “dusky proprietor” and “stout negress.” A photograph/line drawing of “Mrs. W.A. Bruce” featured the caption, “Colored woman, who has created a storm at Manhattan Beach by establishing a seaside resort for the members of her race.” Despite the Sunday harassment, when interviewed by the *Times* correspondent, Mrs. Bruce asserted “most emphatically[,] . . . she [was] there to stay,” and her business catering to an

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<sup>22</sup> “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15.

<sup>23</sup> “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15.

African American clientele would continue. Mrs. Bruce's comments made it clear she was aware that prior to her arrival, African Americans had been unable to buy land for a beach resort. Her comments appear to have solicited a little sympathy from the correspondent who described this situation as having "a pathetic side." The reporter noted,

[Mrs. Bruce] avers negroes cannot have bathing privileges at any of the bath-houses along the [Pacific] coast, and all they desire is a little resort of their own to which they might go and enjoy the ocean. 'Wherever we have tried to buy land for a beach resort we have been refused, but I own this land and I am going to keep it.'<sup>24</sup>

Willa Bruce's position was clearly informed about the market for her new enterprise and trends in local real estate development. Newspaper articles showed that George H. Peck (1856–1940), a founding developer of Manhattan Beach, was a vocal advocate for what he thought appropriate to facilitate his business of real estate sales and Manhattan Beach's growth. As described in a Manhattan Beach history written in 1976 by Frances Dow and Jud Grenier, some old time residents said Peck intended "the area between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets and from Highland to the beach to be set-aside for minority people." Local lore has it that Peck was a businessman with a generous streak, and this may be true. But it was real estate agent Henry Willard, not Peck who sold at least the first lot owned by Clement L. Shinn to Mrs. Bruce. Decades later in 1976, local citizen Wilmer Drake recalled Peck tossing out fistfuls of coins to him and other children along the boardwalk after he became blind in his later life. Drake who arrived in Manhattan Beach in the early 1920s, also asserted Peck helped his African American neighbors and clients build a fishing pier.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Colored People's Resort Meets With Opposition," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15.

<sup>25</sup> Information about these particular events in the city's history has not been verified by supporting primary or other sources. *Manhattan Beach: Yesterdays, Manhattan Beach Historical Series Publication Number 4*, Compiled by Frances Dow & Jud Grenier, Manhattan Beach, CA: City of Manhattan Beach Historical Committee, 1976, 26-27; *Manhattan Beach: 80 Year Anniversary Magazine*, 1993, 9.



Individuals' inaccurate portrayals of Peck's actions regarding his African American neighbors have been passed down through generations as "facts" when they were not true. Peck owned large tracts of land in southern California and made substantial sums on their sale. As an owner of land in the South Bay region as early as 1897, the newly-platted Manhattan Beach subdivision was supposedly his "pet project." Although he may have come around later, evidence reveals that Peck was "bitterly opposed" to the area's 1912 incorporation as a city because he did not want to pay higher taxes at a time when the services of that a Manhattan Beach city could provide would be very limited. Peck may have been generous to his white neighbors, but evidence supports the contrary as it relates to his African American neighbors. Peck staked off and installed "no trespassing" signs and guards on the strip of land at the shoreline to discourage African Americans at the Bruce resort from usage of the beach. He was one of those white property owners who early on expressed agitation about the African Americans' new resort and their presence. If he stopped his discriminatory practice of trying to restrict public beach access, it was because he and his fellow white property owners got the message it was illegal, and realized they had more pressing issues to manage with the new municipality, and their own personal and business affairs.<sup>26</sup>

Her business actions and response as reported in the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper in 1912 are evidence of Mrs. Bruce's awareness of the challenges she could expect to continue to face in efforts to provide beach front pleasures to her African American clientele. She was aware of her pioneering status in the area, and was prepared, if need be to fight to keep her

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<sup>26</sup> "Colored People's Resort Meets With Opposition," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, I15; "Standard Oil Refinery Plan..." *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1911; "Manhattan Faces Crisis: Beach Will Vote Today on Matter of Incorporation," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 November 1912; "Manhattan Beach Dons New Municipal Togs," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1912, II10.

property and business. Unidentified white Manhattan Beach property owners publicly stated to the *Times* correspondent they “deplored the state of affairs” of the new resort, and its African American clientele, and vowed “to find a remedy, if the negroes tr[ied] to stay.” Although public actions were dormant for a few years after this first exchange, the stage was set for several rounds of private and public contestation between the African American protagonists and white property owners with white supremacist views in Manhattan Beach.<sup>27</sup>

From its opening in 1912 to its forced closure in the mid-1920s, the Bruce resort became a popular seaside-gathering place for weekend outings and summer time breaks. Accounts indicate the Bruce’s Beach was popular and a financially successful enterprise for its owner. Ivan J. Houston, a California native, a long time Los Angeles resident and retired head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, remembers hearing his mother fondly speak about “Bruce’s Beach” as the establishment became known. It drew Los Angeles African American residents who took the Pacific Electric train and drove to one of the only places locally where they could enjoy the offerings of the Pacific coastline with minimal harassment.<sup>28</sup>

By 1926 the Bruce enterprise attracted six-identifiable African American families who settled in the general vicinity of Bruce’s Beach. All of the African American families buying in the area lived in Los Angeles in the various neighborhoods open to them. With the exception of the Bruce enterprise and one other small lodging I will discuss later, the

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<sup>27</sup> “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1912, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Dennis, *A Walk Beside the Sea: A History of Manhattan Beach*, (Manhattan Beach, California: Janstan Studio, 1987) 105,108; Brigham, 17, 18; Ivan J. Houston, Los Angeles resident and retired head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co., interview by author, October 27, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

properties developed contained beach cottages used as vacation homes by their owners with their families and friends. It is most likely these families had been introduced and attracted to the pleasures of southern California seaside living due to previous visits to the Bruce resort. Otherwise, this area of Manhattan Beach was almost uninhabited at the time. It was the most remote shoreline section of this beach town. North of Bruce's Beach and the small African American residential resort community there was nothing but sand dunes for about four to five miles until just south of the Los Angeles Airport.<sup>29</sup>

The Bruce venture appears to have been the anchor of a growing community related to the Bruces claiming the place through purchase and residency. In addition to the Bruces, the Prioleaus with Elizabeth Patterson, the Johnson family (Milton B. and Anna with their daughter Emma K. Barnett), and Mary R. Sanders Washington were the African American families who owned property in the Peck Tract. Retired Major George Prioleau (1856-1927) and his wife Ethel purchased a lot with their long-time friend Elizabeth Patterson who they knew from Kansas in 1919. They built a duplex. By 1919 when he bought and developed his lot in Manhattan Beach, George Prioleau had already blazed many trails. He was a former slave who after the Civil War went to Wilberforce University in Ohio to earn his college degree. He taught religion at Wilberforce before he was one of the five black ministers who served as a Buffalo Soldier Chaplain from 1884 to 1901. He and Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth, the founder of the black Central California town named after Allensworth, served together as chaplains. As an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) chaplain, Prioleau was a major supporter of providing education, in addition to spiritual guidance to the to the Ninth Cavalry unit also known as the Buffalo Soldiers. The *California Eagle* newspaper

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Brigham, 21, 25, 35.

featured a front-page article about Prioleau when he died in 1927 at his West Adams District home in Los Angeles. Full military honors were performed at his funeral service held at First AME Church in downtown Los Angeles.<sup>30</sup>

Down the block from the Prioleau-Patterson duplex, Mary R. Sanders Washington bought her beach cottage in 1923 from Frank Heron, one of the owners of the Hollywood Cemetery. A very successful caterer, Sanders's family had moved to Los Angeles in the late 1800s from Windsor, Canada. She lived at Twelfth Street and Kingsley Avenue in the Temple area. In an interview, her grandson, Eddie Atkinson recalled the family lore that Sanders married several times and was quite a good businesswoman. In addition to her catering business, during her lifetime she purchased several pieces of property that were passed down to her descendants. She instilled in her children, her entrepreneurial flair. Sanders's descendants continue to live in Los Angeles.<sup>31</sup>

John and Bessie McCaskill, along with the Slaughter family purchased property outside of the blocks of the Peck Tract of the early settlement and the Bruce establishment, but adjacent to the general location of the other African American families' property in the Tract. McCaskill and his family lived on Forty-eighth Street, near South Park in the Central Avenue district of Los Angeles. He was a presser who moved to California from Pensacola, Florida with his parents when he was a teen. Mrs. McCaskill was a native of California, who worked in catering. The McCaskills enjoyed entertaining. Harold Peace, their grandson, remembers the great breakfasts at the beach house with his grandparents and the entertaining

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Brigham, 24-26, 63; Bruce E. Clasrud & Michael N. Searles, *Buffalo Soldiers in the West, A Black Soldiers Anthology*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 74-78, 81; "Chaplain Prioleau Crosses Great Divide," *California Eagle*, July 22, 1927.

<sup>31</sup> Brigham, 25; Edward C. Atkinson, II, grandson of Mary Sanders, interview by author, 21 November 2009, Los Angeles, California.

they enjoyed doing with family and friends. In his sixties, Peace recalled his visit to the beach vividly, and how the Manhattan Beach neighbors greeted his grandfather respectfully as “Mr. McCaskill.” The family owned their Manhattan Beach property from 1923 until 1973.<sup>32</sup>

In 1927, the Slaughters built a small apartment building on a lot next door to the McCaskills, which for a time was known as the Slaughter Hotel. There were other black families who purchased property outside of the area that became known as Bruce’s Beach, but adjacent to the general location of the early African American settlement. The Leggett and Bradford families also made purchases of property nearby in the early decades of the twentieth century. Descendants of these families continue to own property in Manhattan Beach in 2015. Evidence supports all the property purchased by the African Americans in Manhattan Beach in the 1900s–1920s was located in various adjacent sections to Bruce’s Beach in or outside of the Peck Manhattan Beach Tract. Not only were these African American families purchasing real estate in southwest Los Angeles County for their leisure enjoyment, but they were also betting on the path of growth in the urban expansion of the Los Angeles metropolis towards the South Bay and the Pacific Ocean shoreline, an investment for their future financial security.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Harold Peace, grandson of John McCaskill, interview by author, 21 November 2009, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>33</sup> Brigham, 78; Anne Bradford Luke, Manhattan Beach & Los Angeles property owner, interview by author, 30 October 2009, Los Angeles, California.

## **African American Property Owners and Visitors Contestation to Manhattan Beach's White Racism**

By the early 1920s some “concerned” and increasingly vocal white citizens believed a “Negro invasion” was in progress that would have a less than favorable effect on property values. At this time California did have civil rights laws that made it illegal to discriminate against all citizens in public places, which would have included the oceanfront. Nevertheless, local legal sanctions and private actions from new city ordinances to roping off the shoreline again at the Bruce’s establishment were implemented to discourage African Americans from visiting and settling in Manhattan Beach.<sup>34</sup>

Even though illegal, in an effort to impose segregation white owners of the beachfront property adjacent to the Bruces roped off the beach so that African American visitors would be confined to the shoreline directly in front of the establishment. African Americans visitors, especially if they ventured off this beach, were harassed and insulted. White harassment spread to the streets, as well as to other African American owned properties away from the shoreline. Some African Americans returned to their automobiles to find the air had been let out of the tires or they were slashed. “Mysterious” fires occurred at the African American owned properties. These incidents included a fire purportedly set to a mattress under the Bruce’s main building by a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) member, which produced much smoke, causing the local fire department to come out to the site. Before it could cause any

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<sup>34</sup> Brigham, 43-44; Dennis, 108; From 1893 to 1923 California statutes and legislation were instituted extending to “. . . all citizens within the jurisdiction of this State . . . the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, restaurants, hotels, eating-houses, barber-shops, bath-houses, theaters, skating-rinks, and all other places of public accommodation or amusement, subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to all citizens.” Milnor E. Gleaves, “Civil Rights: Extent of California Statute and Remedies Available for Its Enforcement,” *California Law Review*, V. 30, No. 5 (July, 1942), 563-564; Ronald P. Klein, “The California Equal Rights Statutes in Practice,” *Stanford Law Review*, V. 10, No. 2 (March, 1958), 253-273.

physical damage to the Bruce's structure, the fire was promptly extinguished. Another African American family's home was destroyed by fire.<sup>35</sup>

Harassment included schemes under the guise of the law. A white Manhattan Beach resident and member of the Board of Trustees interviewed by Robert Brigham in 1955 asserted consideration was given to planting liquor at the Bruce's establishment, but the idea was dropped due to lack of support. As Prohibition laws were in effect in the early 1920s, the idea was to report the violation, hence provoking an arrest of the people on the Bruce's premises. This particular harassment scheme was never implemented.<sup>36</sup>

In another use of public power as a harassment tactic, Manhattan Beach authorities placed a "10 Minutes Only" parking sign in front of the property of Mrs. Sanders to inconvenience her and her guests when they parked their automobiles. On June 19, 1924 the city of Manhattan Beach enacted new laws with fines or penalties for any violation of these ordinances, to prevent new or additional development of bathhouses and commercialized amusements near The Strand. Some observers saw these laws directly aimed at African Americans, to discourage any new individuals of this group from establishing themselves in the area. Ordinance 273 prohibited "public bath houses east of the Pacific Electric right of way," located west of The Strand. As an existing facility, Bruce's Lodge was situated east of the right away, and was not immediately impacted by the new law. But in the future Mrs. Bruce would have been unable to expand her bathhouse facility. Another ordinance (274) stated managers who wanted to operate any new bathhouses and other places of amusement would have to make written application to the city Board of Trustees. Additionally the new

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<sup>35</sup> Brigham, 40-41; Dennis, 108; "Colored Family's Home Twice Visited by Fire," Unidentified newspaper, 3 December 1926, Manhattan Beach Historical Society Collection, (copy in author's possession).

<sup>36</sup> Brigham, 41-42.

law gave the Board the power to regulate these businesses, as they ““deemed proper and necessary for the maintenance of public order, and the promotion of public morals.””<sup>37</sup>

To discourage visitors to Manhattan Beach who might be “undesirable,” or not have a host with property and a formal structure at the shoreline, Ordinance 275 was passed. It prohibited dressing or undressing in any automobile or other vehicle of convenience on any street or public place or in a tent or temporary structure on the beach. Additionally various subterfuge measures revolving around city land leased to white citizens and posting of “No Trespassing” signs were used to make “private” the beach areas near the location African Americans frequented. One observer even recalled a fence or a rope being installed to inhibit the African American beachgoers use of the beach outside of the space in front of Bruce’s Lodge. Herb Culler, the son-in-law and business associate of Manhattan Beach subdivider George Peck, disturbed by what appeared to him as “the growing crisis among the Negroes and whites over the use of the beach,” installed the rope to fence off the area between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets. The private action of a cross burning—a symbolic use of terror and warning traditionally implemented by the Ku Klux Klan to claim place—also occurred near the property of one of the African American owners. Additionally to terrorize the Bruces, an anonymous telephone intimidation campaign may have been organized by the KKK, or their sympathizers.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Brigham, 36, 38-39, 82; Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Trustees, City of Manhattan Beach, June 19, 1924; “Important Ordinances at Trustees Meeting,” *Manhattan Beach News*, 6 June, 1924, Manhattan Beach Historical Society, (copy in author’s possession).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., “Important Ordinances at Trustees Meeting,” *Manhattan Beach News*, 6 June, 1924; Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 19, 1924; Brigham, 39, fn10/39, 41, 82, 85; “Oustings in Terrorizing Plot Loom,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1928, A-14; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1967), 189.



When the white supremacist harassment tactics did not succeed in driving African Americans from Manhattan Beach, a proposal to condemn the North End neighborhood of the black residents through eminent domain emerged. A campaign to create a public park was launched by private citizens including real estate agents among them, and submitted to the city council. George Lindsey, a local resident and real estate agent, first approached the Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees in 1921 requesting action to discourage African Americans from establishing residency in Manhattan Beach. Although city officials were sympathetic to this line of thought, they were reluctant to act, as they did not want the identification of being bigots in the public record. After no action by city officials for a time, Lindsey then circulated a petition requesting condemnation of the African American neighborhood for a public park and presented it to city officials on November 15, 1923. By the next Manhattan Beach City Council meeting another petition was submitted by “property owners” of “Block 5 and 12 of Peck’s Tract protesting the one filed by Lindsey. The signers of this petition against Lindsey’s petition were not identified, but it can be assumed they included most or all of the African American property owners.<sup>39</sup>

During this same time period the *California Eagle* reported in a page one article that the “Ku Klux Klan [was] operating unrestrictedly along the water front...of California.” The correspondent issued a call of alarm that transplanted white supremacists from Texas were attempting to restrict “Colored Americans” from California’s ocean front, a location understood to be free for all. Cited was an incident occurring in May or June 1924 at a Redondo Beach pier where three African American men were fishing. They were approached by a white man who handed them a pamphlet entitled, “The Ideals of the Ku Klux Klan.”

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<sup>39</sup> Brigham, 44-50, 58-59.

Scrolled across the top of it was “Colored Folks beach three miles North.” The African American men moved on without any other harassment occurring before their exit from fishing at the Redondo Beach pier. Also citing the Bruce’s Beach condemnation case, the *Eagle* called on its California “colored” readers to fight this sort of KKK propaganda and the legal actions to divest African Americans of their ocean front property working its way into the courts of the golden state.<sup>40</sup>

The *Eagle*’s call to action against these discriminatory events seemed to be grounded in the belief the KKK’s objection to the presence of African Americans in the South Bay area was having undo influence on the Manhattan Beach city council, and that this was the cause of the condemnation of Bruce’s Beach as a pleasure resort for African Americans. As the Bruces had been some of the first settlers to this section of Manhattan Beach, the *Eagle* admonished their fight was also “the fight of the [black] people [, and that] the NAACP and all organizations should look into this matter.” The correspondent further chided readers that the African American community must be vigilant in insuring all the African American resort property owners would be given a fair opportunity to continue ownership of their pleasure resort sites. Based on current available evidence, we can only speculate whether the KKK’s activities may have influenced the Manhattan Beach city council in the condemnation proceedings of the Bruce’s Beach establishment and surrounding African American resort community. What is clearly supported by evidence was that the rhetoric of southern exceptionalism, where only the South excluded African Americans from public accommodations, did not match the reality of the situation unraveling at California’s ocean front and other places in the 1920s. Further the history of Manhattan Beach white agitation at

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<sup>40</sup> Cady, 194-199, 226-228; “Klans Operations,” *California Eagle*, 4 July 1924, 1.

the Bruce's resort arrival in 1912 appeared not to have reemerged, at least not in the public discourse, until the 1920s eviction and condemnation actions.<sup>41</sup>

Eventually Manhattan Beach city officials overcame their concerns of being perceived bigots and about the property rights of the Bruces and other African American landholders. Available evidence does not provide information on whether the city officials were concerned or considered that public record of their racist rationale might be interpreted as contrary to the laws of California. Eventually on October 16, 1924, the city officials passed ordinances to condemn the land and create a public park. The proceeding was applied under the "Park and Playground Act of 1909." This action was not popular with the entire community of Manhattan Beach, and it was sharply contested. The African Americans and some other community residents recognized the ploy to dispossess them. The black Angeleno landowners straightforwardly said in filed court papers to fight condemnation of their property for a public park that the situation was motivated by racial prejudice against African Americans.

[T]he proceeding...is to divest...members of the Negro Race of their ownership of said land, and their residence in said City, and to banish them...from the portion of the said City which is nearly contiguous to the Pacific Ocean...[T]his in order to entirely free the said City from their present because of the fact they are Negroes...[The property owners] allege that the said proceedings are arbitrary, oppressive, and inspired by Racial Prejudice.

They also pointed out the illogical nature of creating a public park out of this area between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh at Highland, due to the fact there was already a 144,000 square foot tract of land about a half mile south near Thirteenth Street and Highland Avenue, which had been given to the city for park usage. That park site was not only larger, but more

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<sup>41</sup> "Klans Operations," *California Eagle*, 4 July 1924, 1.

centrally located to the population of the town, and required no condemnation. Further, they pointed out, if there was need for a park in the North End of the city, there was other property containing fewer buildings that could be condemned with less trouble and expense.<sup>42</sup>

Bruce's Beach and its visitors were not alone in facing extraordinary harassment and public policy efforts to exclude African Americans from public beach usage across the region. In addition to Bruce's Beach, there were other sites of contestation and even violent assaults, aimed at discouraging African Americans from public beach usage during the 1920s (more on this in Chapters 4 and 7). An effort to dispossess African Americans of their Manhattan Beach and of their Santa Monica real estate was moving forward simultaneously. Just as in Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica used municipal action to stop African American real estate development ventures. In Santa Monica's Ocean Park, African Americans were forced to give up a beachfront resort development project in 1922, while retaining public beach usage on the ocean front. Although this area was enjoyed by African Americans, those Euro-Americans homeowners and business people of the Ocean Park neighborhood were unsuccessfully at totally purging them from their enjoyment of this stretch of the beach (more on this in Chapter 4).

Legal sanctions and private harassment actions discouraged African Americans from visiting and settling in particular beach locales as the region's population increased during the 1920s. A second strategy for exclusion was also emerging from civic leaders, ironically involving claims of "opening" to exclude. Adversaries urged that the beaches should be preserved for the public, at least when African American land development projects were

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<sup>42</sup> Brigham, 44-50, 58-59; Answer of Milton B. Johnson and Anna E. Johnson, *City of Manhattan Beach v. B.H. Dyer, B.L. Rice et al*, 1924, Los Angeles County Archives.

concerned. During the 1920s several “save the beaches” for the public campaigns were implemented to keep African Americans from creating or maintaining beachfront resorts.

In 1925, a few miles north of Bruce’s Beach and south of Santa Monica, another African American beach resort plan had strong opposition. White citizens’ groups blocked black businessman, lawyer and aspiring politician Titus Alexander from building a “beach park for the amusement of the Los Angeles African American community.” The proposed site near what is now the Hyperion Water Treatment Plant in El Segundo was on land that had been used for sewer purposes since its purchase by the city in 1892. The Playground Commission of the city of Los Angeles in conjunction with the Title Guarantee and Trust Company obtained an injunction to prevent the City Council of Los Angeles from leasing this 200-foot stretch of beach to Alexander for fifteen years at a low rental rate that they characterized as an ill advised handout to a private concern. As ingeniously as it was hidden in an ostensibly anti-special privilege and public openness argument, in fact it was race that motivated Alexander’s opponents.<sup>43</sup>

The Los Angeles Realty Board, the Municipal League, the Chamber of Commerce and the Advertising Club along with numerous other groups of the Santa Monica Bay supported the Commission’s action. An initiative petition was also supported by these groups calling on the City Council of Los Angeles to pass an ordinance to prohibit the leasing of any recreational beach property to any private parties. This ordinance effort was by Mississippi born Arthur W. Eckman under the auspices of the newly formed Beach Playground Protective Association based in Los Angeles. The Association argued Alexander’s recreation

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<sup>43</sup> See Footnote 11 of this chapter for information on California statutes and legislation regarding civil rights and public space in the 1920s; Dan Cady, “‘Southern California’: White Southern Migrants in Greater Los Angeles, 1920-1930,” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 2005), 194-199; Brigham, 44-47, 86; Jan Dennis, 108, Brigham, 31-34; “Beach Suit Depending on Voters: Continuance Granted Until After Election, as Changes May Settle Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1925.

facility not only opened the door to the full privatization of the county beaches, but also promoted segregation because whites would not have access to a 200-foot section of the close to 400,000 feet (65 miles) of shoreline. The supporters of this movement argued to the *Los Angeles Times* on January 30, 1925, they were “not...against the colored or any other race, but...simply [wanted] to keep the municipally owned beaches open, free to all the public, white, and colored, and prevent them from being leased to private parties for gain and from being shut off by private parties from the public at large.” White boosters, civic leaders and politicians viewing the beach as one of the region’s most important recreational and tourist asset, feared non-white private ownership of beach front property would make the beach-area property unattractive to white Americans.<sup>44</sup>

The Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles, estimated in the 1920s on summer weekends and holidays a quarter or more of the total population of the county of Los Angeles (500,000 plus people) would go to local beaches. The image of the beach was a central component of promotions by boosters of the southern California good life, and it has continued to serve that function into the twenty-first century. Realizing they were also a primary tourist destination, white city officials assiduously policed, and maintained sanitation across the various municipalities in southern California. In the 1920s, the local public authorities began purchasing and managing ocean front properties to assure public access, and urged voters to support more beachfront property acquisitions. Racial restriction actions on African Americans at the beach were being imposed, as they were

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<sup>44</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1925 (quotation); Cady, 195-196; Brigham, 31-34; Lawrence Culver, *Frontier of Leisure, Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70.

forced to pay taxes to buy up coastal land they might be discouraged or prohibited from using through explicit ordinance or by custom.<sup>45</sup>

Historian Lawrence Culver observed that the fact that African American taxpayers “...could stake a claim to the...recreational space that stood at the core of the [region’s] civic life and identity made them seem more of a threat to white dominance than poorer migrants or immigrants.” Ethnic exoticism at tourist attractions was encouraged by boosters, at Chinatown and the Spanish Revival market at Olvera Street in central Los Angeles as reminders of the romantic past or quaint relics of regional history and culture. Spanish Revival architecture and Mexican performers were used by tourist promoters as theme elements at many area resorts. African Americans did not fit into this booster agenda, as they were a reminder of the national racial tensions of the 1920s. Los Angeles was supposed to have transcended these types of tensions. Systematized white racism in the Los Angeles region when manifested in recreation space was most consistently targeted at African Americans, although the racial and ethnic mix included whites of various European ethnicities, African Americans, Mexicans, Latinos, Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos, along with California American Indians and Native Americans from other regions.<sup>46</sup>

Although the white group’s removal efforts overcame the opposition to take the land from its African American owners in Manhattan Beach, this did not stop black Angelenos usage of the shoreline’s public space. After the Bruce’s privately owned bathhouse at the shoreline had been taken by eminent domain for a park, city authorities turned around in 1927 to lease city beach frontage and the pier in a subterfuge measure to a crony, Oscar C. Bassonette for a payment of one dollar for a period of twelve months. He placed a “No

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<sup>45</sup> Brigham, 33; Lawrence Culver, 70.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Culver, 66-68.

Trespassing” sign at the beach between Twenty-fifth and Twenty-seventh Streets as a way to deter people he later called “undesirables,” meaning African Americans from using this section of the beach. He asked the local police to act as enforcers. These measures set in motion a series of harassment actions towards African Americans in Manhattan Beach that eventually bolstered some members of the NAACP’s resolve to militantly press the issue of public beach access and African Americans usage.<sup>47</sup>

On Memorial Day the Manhattan Beach Police took down the names and addresses of twenty-five swimmers out in front of Bruce’s Beach in a harassment action to dissuade them from continuing to swim that day or in the future. Refusing to leave the water or the beach, the holiday crowd of African American swimmers was told this police action occurred because they were trespassing on privately, leased ocean front shoreline. With the headline of the *California Eagle* article recounting this incident reading, “Attempt to Bulldoze Negro Bathers,” the correspondent articulated emphatic support of the ordinary African American citizens’ firm commitment to demand their civil rights “with both feet” in usage of this public beach. The *Eagle* correspondent encouraged readers if they demanded their rights, “[they would] find that some of the present obstacles will evaporate over night.” With a firm posture of confident entitlement, the newspaper encouraged the African American community and others who might encounter their message—this question of bathing (swimming) rights could be settled sooner than later.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>“Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927; “Dr. Hudson, Three Companions Receive Fines in Trail at Manhattan Beach,” *Pacific Defender*, 4 August 1927, 1, in NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939, University of California, Los Angeles, Library Special Collections; Brigham, 85.

<sup>48</sup> “Attempt to Bulldoze Negro Bathers,” *California Eagle*, 10 June 1927; “Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927.



A California native, and University of California, Los Angeles African American student Elizabeth Catley, seemed to have internalized the *Eagle's* entitlement message. A member of a family that migrated from Texas, Mississippi and Tennessee to Los Angeles in the early 1890s, on July 4, 1927, she was “hauled[,]...jerked around...and pushed into an automobile” by Manhattan Beach Police officers who arrested her for swimming in the ocean at the same shoreline spot of the Memorial Day harassment of African American pleasure seekers. The *California Eagle* report on the incident asserted Catley was swimming in the ocean alongside Japanese, Mexicans and whites. She was held in her wet bathing suit at the police station until Mr. Slaughter, the father of some of the girls she was with on the beach, posted her bail of \$10.00. Her hostesses, sisters Willine and Estella Slaughter along with Roberta Lee and two other unnamed young women had not entered in the water.<sup>49</sup>

At nineteen years old, Catley was the oldest young person in her private beach party. Upon reflection she said to the *Eagle* correspondent about going into the ocean, “I dared to do what I thought was my right [and]...was thrown in jail...The real importance of the whole affair is just beginning to dawn upon me.” Catley’s comments appear to indicate shock at her first time being arrested for entering the ocean at a public beach. She may have realized a person sense of bravery and power. Like many other young people of her age and other ordinary African American consumers around the county were beginning to do, Catley was demanding equal access to participate in all available urban public recreational spaces.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Brigham, 84; “Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927.

<sup>50</sup> Brigham, 84; “Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927; 1920 and 1940 U.S. Census; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3-5.

On this same July 4 day in 1927 at a different time than Elizabeth Catley, Mr. Roy Hilbert was also arrested for swimming in the contested area, and released on a \$10.00 bail charge. Catley recounted to the *Eagle* correspondent that Mr. Hilbert was swimming in the ocean around Bruce's Beach as he did most every Sunday, and this was the first time he had been arrested for it. She also asserted that police chief Henry of Redondo (where Catley was most likely taken to jail) objected to the Manhattan Beach officers "putting [her] in jail in such a manner, but they insisted." The Redondo Police chief's purported reaction to the events gives some evidence that not all local citizens were of the same mind about using intimidation and harassment tactic towards African Americans to keep them off the shoreline at Manhattan Beach. By allowing his jail to be used for the arrests of Hilbert and Catley, regardless of the chief's words on that day, his acquiescence supported Manhattan Beach Police officers' use of aggressive intimidation through legal tactics and physical actions as a stand-in for more violent displays of force, in their attempts to restrict African Americans use of the public beach.<sup>51</sup>

On July 17, 1927 lead by the Los Angeles Branch president and dentist Dr. H. Claude Hudson (1887–1989; see his profile in Chapter 5), the NAACP entered the beach struggles with a dozen or so people willing to press the issue who were not afraid of the possibility being arrested and put in jail. Even sixty-year-old Mrs. Sadie Chandler-Cole, an educated, cultured, militant and stalwart member of the local NAACP was one of the protesters, in what would be the branch's first organized action of civil disobedience. The daughter of a conductor of the "Underground Railroad," a Fisk University graduate who became a social worker, music teacher, active clubwoman and social activist, she would not tolerate racial

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<sup>51</sup> "Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach," *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927.

restrictions. She moved to Los Angeles from Detroit, Michigan in 1902 with her husband Thomas A. Cole and their children. The Coles joined Sadie's sister, Mrs. Wildred Chandler-Williams and other family members in Los Angeles. Mrs. Wildred Chandler-Williams was a very successful dressmaker and milliner who had resided in Los Angeles since 1889. Chandler-Cole's civic leadership accomplishments were numerous, including serving a four year terms in each capacity, as the first woman to be elected vice president and as a member of the Executive Board of the NAACP. Her husband, Thomas A. Cole was in real estate, her daughter was the famed soprano vocalist Florence Cole-Talbert and her son, Arthur Chandler Cole served in the U.S. Army in France, and became a Los Angeles police officer. The Chandler sisters and their extended relatives were pioneer African American families who made history in Los Angeles. Chandler-Cole once told writer Delilah Beasley that she was determined to break up discrimination if she had to die in the process.<sup>52</sup>

Before the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP was formed in 1913, Chandler-Cole was the first to have an objectionable sign with the words, "Negro Trade Not Wanted" removed from a soda shop on Broadway. Enraged at the discriminatory sign, she proceed to ask for service and was told by the proprietor a drink for her would be fifty cents when he charged his other clients five cents. She proceeded to throw glasses and plates and trash the place while she demanded the proprietor serve her without extra cost and remove the objectionable sign. After the police arrived and sided with Chandler-Cole, the proprietor changed his policies, removed the sign and served all patrons alike. She next influenced

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<sup>52</sup> "Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach," *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927; H. Claude Hudson Oral History, interviewed by Lawrence B. deGraaf, January 10 & April 18, 1967, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton Collection; Brigham, 84-99; Flammig, 271-272; Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles, CA: 1918/James Stevenson, Publisher, Reprint 2004), 212, 241-242; "Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who, 1930-1931," Published by The California Eagle Publishing Co., Los Angeles, CA, no page number; 1910 U.S. Census; 1915 Los Angeles City Directory.

Mayor Arthur C. Harper's (1906–1909, mayor of Los Angeles) order for all such signs to be removed. As Sadie Chandler-Cole was a respected, determined and committed activist in defense of racial justice, having her participate in the beach protest was an important statement.<sup>53</sup>

Bassonette with ‘belligerent’ police officers as enforcers, proceeded to have African Americans ejected off the beach or arrested if they would not leave. Hudson, John McCaskill (an African American Manhattan Beach property owner and tax payer referenced earlier in this Chapter), James Conley and Romulus Johnson challenged the transparent expropriation of public land, and were the only ones arrested for trespassing on what was alleged to be private beach property. They were officially charged with resisting a police officer and disturbing the peace. The others involved in the swim-in escaped arrest including Sadie Chandler-Cole. Hudson and the three others incarcerated, posted bond of \$10.00 each and were told to appear in court Tuesday, August 2, 1927. In the trial the four were represented by Attorney Hugh MacBeth who in his trial maneuvers called to the judge’s attention that the city’s beach lease with Bassonette failed to acknowledge the actual sum of money paid, and that the only purported “undesirables” being arrested on the beach were African Americans. He further argued the whole situation “reek[ed] with fraud, and deception, and [was] a blot on Americanism.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927; Brigham, 84-99; Beasley, 212, 241-242; Flamming, 275.

<sup>54</sup> “Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach,” *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927, 1, 6; “Dr. Hudson, Three Companions Receive Fines in Trail at Manhattan Beach,” *Pacific Defender*, 4 August 1927, 1, NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; “Manhattan Beach Throws Open Beach Frontage to the Public,” *Pacific Defender*, 18 August 1927, 1, NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; “NAACP Wins Beach Victory,” *California Eagle*, 19 August 1927, 1; Hudson to Pickens letter, 4 August 1927, NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; Flamming, 274; Brigham, 84-99.

Even after MacBeth's trial maneuvers, the four were still found guilty and were sentenced to fines of \$100 each or twenty days in jail. Upon appeal MacBeth got the judge to grant an arrest of judgment motion suspending the fines and releasing the men on a \$500 bond. More importantly, the Manhattan Beach trustees revoked the private lease of the public beach and pier, and secured a perpetual lease of its entire beach frontage, making it free for all the public's enjoyment. Without direct reference to the recent beach scandal, the *Los Angeles Times* on August 16, 1927, reported this development "reflect[ed]...[the Manhattan Beach trustees] financial foresight...and set an example in public spirit for the older beach cities of southern California... [Their] secur[ing] for the recreation and enjoyment of all the people two miles of foreshore, free from private exploitation or the erection of barriers, assure[s] residents and visitors an ocean playground in keeping with the spirit of democracy." The Los Angeles Branch of the NAACP won the fight to prevent circumvention of civil rights laws and the exclusion of African Americans from swimming at the ocean front in Manhattan Beach. Racial restrictions attempts at public beaches would fade away in the coming decades. The black Angeleno community was energized by the Manhattan Beach victory. The national office of the NAACP proclaimed in a press release that this militant stand for civil rights in southern California set a good example for the setting of the 19<sup>th</sup> NAACP Convention that would be held in Los Angeles in 1928.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Negro Bathers Outraged At Manhattan Beach," *California Eagle*, 5 August 1927, 1; "Dr. Hudson, Three Companions Receive Fines in Trail at Manhattan Beach," *Pacific Defender*, 4 August 1927, 1, in NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; "Manhattan Beach Throws Open Beach Frontage to the Public," *Pacific Defender*, 18 August 1927, 1, in NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; "Manhattan's Fine Example," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 1927, A4; "NAACP Wins Beach Victory," *California Eagle*, 19 August 1927, 1; "Los Angeles NAACP Wins Against Bathing Beach Segregation," NAACP Press Release, 20 August 1927 in NAACP Branch Files, Los Angeles, California, 1913-1939; Brigham, 84-99; Flamming, 274-274.

Around the United States, accessibility to beaches and resorts and demand for decent recreation space free from white harassment and intimidation escalated in the coming decades as a political issue in African Americans' struggles against environmental racism and economic exploitation in the long civil rights movement. Blacks continued to open businesses and other establishments for their social and physical welfare, as well as for amusement, entertainment and lodging. As the twentieth century wore on, individual actors, and local, state and nationally organized groups, such as the NAACP, would increasingly utilize legal actions and public protests to dismantle legally sanctioned as well as informally enforced segregation and discrimination in public accommodations.<sup>56</sup>

### **NAACP Swim-In Wins Public Beach Access for African American Bathers, But Not Sustainability of the Bruce's Beach Resort Community**

In this climate of mixed success and contestation for African American beach access, a lawsuit by the African American families challenging the condemnation of their property in Manhattan Beach was unsuccessful. The property owners alleged the proceedings were arbitrary, oppressive and inspired by racial prejudice in order to free the city of their presence because they were African Americans. Their cottages and the Bruce resort were razed in 1927; the city moved quickly and preemptively before the legal challenge had been completed. Litigation lasted until 1929. The African American families eventually settled for the most favorable sale prices they could obtain. Whether they were "favorably," let alone adequately, compensated for their land has remained open to debate into the twenty-first century. At the time these families were allowed to relocate to other places in Manhattan

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<sup>56</sup> Kahrl, ix-x; Wolcott, 4-8; "Civil Rights in America Theme Study: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations," National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, From the Internet: <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/themes/themes.htm>, 10 May 2010.

Beach, but not on The Strand. The Bruces chose not to relocate in Manhattan Beach, but did continue on in Los Angeles.<sup>57</sup>

In 1928, Mrs. Sanders purchased another vacation house “a stone’s thrown” from her old place. She moved from Twenty-seventh and Bay Streets to Twenty-sixth Street and Highland Avenue. She died in 1937, and left the property to her daughter, Ethel Atkinson. Mrs. Atkinson and her husband continued to use the property as her mother had, for both rental and personal use. She sold the property in 1953, because her husband tired of driving to Manhattan Beach to care for this property that was so far from their home and activities in Los Angeles in the Country Club Park neighborhood. Activist lawyer and journalist Loren Miller had assisted them to purchase this westside Los Angeles house in 1948, as the *Shelley v. Kraemer* case made restrictive real estate covenants unenforceable by states went before the US Supreme Court. Mrs. Atkinson and her husband took over the catering business of her mother and engaged in other business activities.<sup>58</sup>

Mrs. Barnett-Holt, part of the Johnson family who were original African American landowners, purchased another home on Twenty-third Street and Highland Avenue in 1927. She did not hold on to the property very long because the neighbors were aggressively unpleasant, and often were grossly insolent. Mrs. Prioleau with Leslie King, who replaced Ms. Patterson as a partner in the duplex, moved the entire structure to the corner of Twenty-fifth Street and Bayview Drive. This was two blocks south, and only one block from the beach, whereas their first property was further from the shore. Mrs. Prioleau enjoyed the new place for several years after her husband died in 1927. After she had been there awhile, she

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<sup>57</sup> Brigham, 58-59; Dennis, 109; Paul Silva, “The secret of Parque Culiacan: History of north end park reveals troubled race relations,” *The Beach Reporter*, 16 April 1987.

<sup>58</sup> Brigham, 77; Eddie C. Atkinson, II, great, great grandson of Mary Sanders, interview by author, 21 November 2009, Los Angeles, California.

learned the new property had a restrictive covenant on the lot. She decided rather than risk the indignity of another eviction to trade the Manhattan Beach property for a place in Los Angeles.<sup>59</sup>

The Slaughters, who built a small apartment building next door to the McCaskills, and across from the condemned property on Twenty-sixth Street and Bayview Drive were foreclosed on in 1930. The Slaughters purchased their property and constructed their small apartment building and advertised it as a hotel after the eminent domain process began. Robert Brigham speculated that the Slaughters possibly “hoped that their facilities would replace those [which] the Bruces had been forced to abandon.” He asserted the Slaughters left the area due to animosity they felt from their white neighbors. They were “Negroes” and owners of a commercial establishment, which attracted larger numbers of blacks to the area who were non-property owners. Like the Bruces, the Slaughters may have been the recipients of more directed animosity from white Manhattan Beach citizens because their establishment, although smaller and able to accommodate fewer black visitors, was symbolic of the causes as well as an intentional promoter of the “Negro Invasion.”<sup>60</sup>

The whites who owned property in this North End section of Manhattan Beach had no improvements on the land. It is presumed they did not fight the condemnation because they thought their investment was in jeopardy due to the African American presence or they had no great interest in the property anyway that compensation would not resolve.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Brigham, 77-78; As it relates to the restrictive covenant on the new lot, it is not clear from currently available research sources why Mrs. Prioleau and Leslie King were not aware of the racial sales restrictions when they purchased the lot to house their moved duplex or how they learned of it.

<sup>60</sup> Brigham, 60, 78; “Ousting In Terrorizing Plot Loom, Keyes May Act Against Beach City Officials in Attacks on Negroes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1928, A14.

<sup>61</sup> Brigham, 53, 56.



After the black families who had their private property taken relocated to other parts of Manhattan Beach and the city acquired the two blocks, the relocated owners continued to be harassed in the same manner as before the eminent domain proceedings. The “anti-Negro activity” carried out included house burnings, intimidation, and the same quasi-legal maneuvers of posting “10 Minutes Only” parking signs in front of Mrs. Sanders’ home to inconvenience her and her guests’ in parking their automobiles. When a KKK burning cross appeared one night on the hill above Mrs. Sanders’s house the Police did quickly respond to extinguish the fire. Other African American families had no problems with these types of hostile acts or vandalism.<sup>62</sup>

In an ironic twist, there were other African American families who owned property in Manhattan Beach during this time of their nearby neighbors’ dispossession in the 1920s, who did not suffer the same fate. The homes or lots they owned were outside of the two-block area where the effected families lived. My research has uncovered one family, the Leggett family and descendants who continue to own property today that was purchased in 1916. They were originally from Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>63</sup>

They came to Los Angeles by way of Washington DC. James Leggett attended Howard University Medical School for pharmacy training. He and his wife Anna Janet came to California in 1898. James Leggett and his partner owned Smith and Leggett’s Drug Store in downtown Los Angeles at Fifth and Spring Streets. The family lived on Ceres Street near the African American hub at Eighth and Towne in downtown Los Angeles in what today is

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<sup>62</sup> Brigham, 82; “Ousting In Terrorizing Plot Loom, Keyes May Act Against Beach City Officials in Attacks on Negroes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1928, A14.

<sup>63</sup> Anne Bradford Luke, Manhattan Beach & Los Angeles property owner, interview by author, 30 October 2009, Los Angeles, California.

the Flower District. The early sites of First African Methodist Episcopal and Second Baptist Churches were located nearby.<sup>64</sup>

Camelia Leggett Bradford, a teacher by profession, inherited the Manhattan Beach property from her mother, Anna Janet Leggett. She was fully aware of what had taken place a few doors south of her family's vacation property. She could walk out of her front door, look south or left, and see the vacated condemned property. Her daughter, Ann Bradford Luke remembers when she was a little girl there was a small wood cottage situated on the family property. At some point when she was very young, this house was torn down. Even with the house gone, the family continued their trips to their property to visit the beach. Her parents would park the car at their lot, and they walked one block to the oceanfront. Ann's father, Neil Bradford, who was a Los Angeles city police officer, had also inherited a lot in the area from his mother.

One of the Bradford family rituals when going to visit Manhattan Beach was cleaning off the weeds from the lots. Anne Bradford Luke never remembers on their visits people saying much to her or her parents, except there was a regular inquiry as to whether her parents wanted to sell their Manhattan Beach properties. Luke remembers more than a few times over the years when she was in grade school, men showed up unannounced at their home near Fiftieth Street and Western Avenue in Los Angeles to inquire about buying her mother's Manhattan Beach property. She recalls her mother was always a bit uncomfortable and agitated when this situation happened.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Anne Bradford Luke, interview, 30 October 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Anne Bradford Luke, interview, 30 October 2009.

Starting when she was a child, Luke's mother discussed with her the events of the Bruce's Beach community removal, and related that she always thought the whole situation a social injustice. In an interview with the author, Luke indicated her mother Camelia Bradford never really had a good feeling about the Manhattan Beach community because of it. Mrs. Bradford's parents paid \$1,600 in 1916 for the lot. She would always tell her daughter Ann that the property would be real valuable one day.<sup>66</sup>

When Anne Bradford Luke inherited the family's Manhattan Beach property it was still a vacant lot. She developed it in 1974 with a four-unit apartment building. In 1995, she renovated the property again, remodeling the original structure to meet the desires of the contemporary renter interested in living in Manhattan Beach. Luke's mother always encouraged her daughter that this property and the other real estate she invested in around Los Angeles were good investments. The Manhattan Beach property is layered with emotions of pride for the accomplishments of her family, and sadness due to all of the unfortunate events of the 1920s. These sentiments have been carried forth into contemporary generations of the family living in the twenty-first century.<sup>67</sup>

### **Beyond the Era of the Bruce Resort Community, Memory Erasure and Reclamation, and Park Creation**

In the 1950s, memory of the site of Bruce's Beach pushed park building as erasure of the city's previous inaction and the ignoble history of their 1920s deeds. A 1950s park building act would challenge and eventually perpetuate memory by overlaying new purposes of international "friendship" on the historical site of Bruce's Beach in the 1970s. Since the

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<sup>66</sup> Anne Bradford Luke, interview, 30 October 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Bradford Luke, interview, 30 October 2009.

1970s local knowledge about the city's racist legacy had given some members of the civic polity a piquant discomfort and a feeling of shame or embarrassment. Some in the civic polity wanted to erase this legacy from public discourse. For them this legacy became a painful remembrance of guilt about the 1920s events that took place at the Bruce resort site. Over a period of four decades (1970s–2000s), city of Manhattan Beach public histories and local newspaper accounts discussing the site used guilt ridden, evocative terms such as “blot on the city's generally progressive record,” “a smoldering history,” “the secret” of the site, “dark past,” and “park has an embarrassing history.” Events of the first decade of the twenty-first century reasserted, literally “contested” and partially reclaimed memory in naming and messaging debates that unfolded in the eventual commemoration of the Bruce's Beach site.<sup>68</sup>

Thirty years of city inaction on the appropriated land glaringly disproved that any public purpose was served by the actions of the 1920s other than to forcibly evict and attempt to exclude African American entrepreneurs and makers of a leisure community. With the land seized and its occupants removed, the next thirty years of idleness and vacancy worked as an erasure of the history of vitality of the place once called Bruce's Beach. A fear of history, of remembrance of past acts in a new day leading to reclaiming the land, prompted city officials in Manhattan Beach to remake the unused space into a park around 1956. From nominal intention, through new attention, the Bruce's land got transformed into a park of appearances—to comply with and reify “park-making” as the reason for removal—with choice of decorative appearance as landscaped site rather than public leisure use of the land.

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<sup>68</sup> Linda Chilton McCallister, *The Waterfront of Manhattan Beach, Manhattan Beach Historical Series Number 6*, Manhattan Beach, CA: City of Manhattan Beach Historical Committee, no date (author estimates publication ca. 1978-1979), 30; Mary Lynn Swenson, “Parque Culiacan: a smoldering history,” *The Easy Reader*, 17 February 1977; Silva, *The Beach Reporter*, 16 April 1987; Cara Murphy, “Dark Past: Parque Culiacan...,” *The Beach Reporter*, 18 May 1995; Stephanie Walton, “Park has embarrassing history,” *Daily Breeze*, 4 November 2001, Jan Dennis Archives, January 2010.

In the 1950s the Manhattan Beach Recreation Commission had begun to worry that the descendants of the former Bruce's Beach community property owners might sue to regain their land due to the fact it had not been developed for the purpose it was originally taken—to create a “public park.” The reasons why the city's mid-1950s interest to develop the park emerged at this time are unclear from the currently research resources available to the author. I can only speculate about the cause of their heightened interest. Periodically in the intervening decades before the 1950s Manhattan Beach city authorities received investor inquiries about purchasing this unimproved land for private development. Manhattan Beach City Council correspondence and meeting minute items regarding this property indicated these investors were informed the land was to be used as a public park, and was not for sale.<sup>69</sup>

This was the time period Robert Brigham was developing his formal research sources, and conducting interviews with local residents, to write his Fresno State College 1956 Master's thesis, “Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach.” His work may have triggered the city officials to independently act on the park project. In reviewing Manhattan Beach City Council Meeting Minutes there was an item indicating Brigham, in his role as a local Manhattan Beach resident was “the Secretary of the Recreation Commission” on January 11, 1955. It is feasible while in the midst of his research and serving on the Recreation Commission, Brigham's research implied or may have expressly pointed out to city officials that they needed to take action to fulfill their

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<sup>69</sup> Correspondence between Frank L. Perry and the City of Manhattan Beach, May 10, 1937 & August 18, 1937, Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files; City of Manhattan Beach Council Meeting Minutes, March 4, 1948, Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files; Correspondence between Richard G. Thompson, Hermosa Realty Company and City Clerk, City of Manhattan Beach, March 5, 1948.

obligations to create a park from the expropriated private property at the Bruce's Beach resort settlement.<sup>70</sup>

A November 9, 1954 *South Bay Breeze* newspaper article entitled, "Manhattan Beach Scans 27<sup>th</sup> St. Site for Fourth City Park," reported on a joint session between the City Council and the Recreation Commission discussing developing a preliminary plan for a park. The article indicated the city officials pointed out there were no available funds for this project. In a December 14, 1955 *South Bay Breeze* article Recreation Commissioner John W. Campbell was quoted as saying the land was not appropriate for any use in developing a park or recreation space. Nonetheless, eventually in 1956, the vacant sloping land of sandy terrain was graded and transformed into five stepped terraces. Topsoil and fill dirt were brought in from nearby Pollywod Pond, and grass, shrubs and trees were planted. Bayview Drive was vacated through and subsumed into the park. There sat the plot, relandscaped and ready for use by then contemporary and future generations. Lacking an identity as much as a purpose, over the years the park has been renamed several times. A naming contest sponsored by the Kiwanis Club and supported by the Manhattan Beach City Council in 1962, established the site as Bayview Terrace Park. Prior to this time the site was referred to as City Park and Beach Front Park.<sup>71</sup>

In the last three decades of the twentieth century new interest blossomed in the city park site. Public recognition of the dispossessed African American resort community history began in 1974 with a restrained public dialogue occasioned incidentally by a new

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<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, 18 January 1955, in Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files.

<sup>71</sup> "Park Development of Manhattan's 27<sup>th</sup> St. Property 'Too Expensive,'" *South Bay Daily Breeze*, 12 January 1955; "Manhattan Park to Blossom On Weedy Land Near Ocean," *South Bay Daily Breeze*, 14 December 1956; City Council Resolution Number 2353, City of Manhattan Beach, 1962.

cosmopolitan initiative. For the next generation some Manhattan Beach citizens grappled with their municipality's heritage, past and contemporary civic identities, and collective consciousness to translate whisper to stone, word of mouth to public declaration. As they should be, the victimized African American resort property owners have been remembered. Forgotten in this public dialogue more often have been the 1920s African American actors who stood up in peaceful, but militant civil disobedience that forced the city government to discontinue discriminatory land leasing policies inhibiting African Americans from Manhattan Beach public shoreline usage. Most citizens learned what they know of the site's history from word of mouth, which is subject to distortion and omissions.

While general knowledge to some, all the citizenry still did not know the park's origins history. That would begin when in 1974 the Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee requested the city rename the park as a tribute to their sister city in Mexico when a delegation of visitors from Culiacan would be in Manhattan Beach. The City Council agreed, and the park was named after the city of Culiacan to honor Manhattan Beach's first sister cities relationship. "Parque Culiacan" became the latest name of the park developed from the African American dispossession. In a 1977 *Easy Reader* newspaper article entitled, "Parque Culiacan: a smoldering history," Robert Brigham recalled in an interview about the rededication ceremony that city officials did not overtly refer to the park's history in their speeches. Brigham recalled that Manhattan Beach City Council member Steve Blumberg "made some 'ambiguous remarks' about good human relations," and he "hoped the park's renaming would foster better understanding between people of diverse backgrounds and

cultures.” This was the extent of public comment, although one journalist’s story recalled the Bruces.<sup>72</sup>

A nominal purpose transcending the park’s local history prevailed. The beach city’s involvement with the sister cities program began in 1966. Started during the U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s term in 1956 as an outgrowth of a White House Conference on Citizen Diplomacy, thousands of Americans pledged their support to create a free and peaceful world through a people-to-people program—ordinary people visiting one another across national borderlines and oceans. Launched in the shadow of post-World War II, the program was an attempt initially to repair American relations with European, Asian and Pacific island countries. Eventually the Sister Cities International association evolved out of this citizen diplomacy initiative with a mission “to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation—one individual, one community at a time.” Early interactions between cities of U.S. and war torn countries revolved around trade relationships. Through the years the program now includes many more international communities, and enduring “friendship” relationships between these and U.S. communities are centered on cultural and educational exchange partnerships.<sup>73</sup>

Friendship, just like the decades of silence preceding it would not last for all time. Thirty years after the Parque Culiacan renaming a new chapter opened at the former African American resort community site. The Leadership Manhattan Beach Class—an educational

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<sup>72</sup> “Minutes of the City Council,” City of Manhattan Beach, February 19, 1974; Swenson, *The Easy Reader*, 17 February 1977.

<sup>73</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the 34<sup>th</sup> president of the United States (1953-1961). “The Name Stays...,” *The Manhattan Beach Observer* newsletter, May 2003; “About Sister Cities – Highlights,” From the Internet: <http://www.sister-cities.org/mission-and-history>, 1 September 2014; *Peace Through People, 50 Years of Global Citizenship* (Louisville, KY: Sister City International/Butler Books, 2006), 1 (quotation), 5, 11-12, 84.



forum to develop and unite existing and aspiring youth and adult community leaders to encourage more community involvement—proposed in 2003 a contest to rename Parque Culiacan as their class project. By 2003 Culiacan was no longer the sister city, and the Leadership Class believed the name, “Parque Culiacan,” was therefore passe to Manhattan Beach. A new sister city association was established with Santa Rosalia of Baja California, Mexico in 1989. The group thought the park renaming project would be a fun way to get residents involved in civic activities and support of community pride. The city of Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation Commission, and the City Council unanimously approved the contest idea in January and February 2003 respectively. The move to rename the site again opened the door to a longer view of memory and meaning.<sup>74</sup>

This new boosterism and local promotion could have set the stage to rebury the site’s past and city’s public chicanery. In the “Renaming of Parque Culiacan Position Paper” written by the classmates of Leadership Manhattan Beach 2003, the introduction stated:

This paper sets forth the history of the park and details the reasons the class proposes that a contest be held to rename the park. The proposal is designed to make the park’s name more relevant to our community, and is not intended to change whatsoever the nature or ambience of this quiet park in any fashion.

The *Background of Culiacan Park* section of this document stated “the park began its life in the 1920s” due to “the City Council initiation of eminent domain proceedings to take the property located from the Strand to Highland Avenue, between 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Streets.” The position paper presented no other details about the events of the 1920s property confiscation.

*Easy Reader* newspaper reporter Jerry Roberts called this out in his February 27, 2003 article

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<sup>74</sup> “Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest,” Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files, the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003 Project, November 2009; “Presentation of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003,” Staff Report, City of Manhattan Beach, April 15, 2003; Leadership Manhattan Beach, From the Internet: [www.leadershipmb.org](http://www.leadershipmb.org), November 2009; Cindy Yoshiyama, “City to find out what’s in a name,” *The Beach Reporter*, 3 April 2003; *City of Manhattan Beach, Sister City Program*, From the Internet: <http://www.mbsistercity.org/>, 29 April 2015.

entitled “Contest set to rename Parque Culiacan.” He cited this opening text was “perhaps [a] politically correct preamble” to the various reasons the park did not become a park until decades later, but was an understatement compared to actual events of the park’s birth out of the ashes of misfortune recorded in Robert Brigham’s 1956 Master’s thesis, and a passage in a book by local citizen Jan Dennis on Manhattan Beach history.<sup>75</sup>

The theme of the park renaming contest was:

To demonstrate the best of Manhattan Beach by celebrating the best of our past while encouraging the best for our future.

Contest rules stated the park could not be named after an individual, and all new name submissions had to be accompanied by a 500 word or less explanation of how the name reflected the contest theme, and would be appropriate for the park.<sup>76</sup>

A panel of six judges was selected from local civic organizations (the Parks and Recreation Commission, Manhattan Beach Historical Society, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club and the Chamber of Commerce). They were asked to select the top five names, and five alternate names to recommend to the City Council for review and to make the final selection of names, if they liked any of them. The one-page, “Rename Parque Culiacan Contest” form did not feature a description of the “history” of the park. The form did offer a few words about the park’s geographical features and landscape design in the narrative about

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<sup>75</sup> “Renaming of Parque Culiacan Position Paper,” Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files, the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003 Project, November 2009; Jerry Roberts, “Contest set to rename Parque Culiacan,” *Easy Reader*, 27 February 2003; Jan Dennis, *Manhattan Beach, California*, (Great Britain: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 55, 77.

<sup>76</sup> “Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest,” Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files.

the contest particulars. A prize of \$100 was offered to the person who submitted the winning name.<sup>77</sup>

The publicity efforts to promote the contest included press releases sent to local media, advertisements in local newspapers and on the local cable television station, and circulation of the contest form throughout the community. The contest forms were made available, especially to local schools, in *The Beach Reporter* newspaper, on the city of Manhattan Beach website, and at physical locations throughout the town. The local newspapers, the Manhattan Beach Historical Society newsletter, and the Manhattan Beach Residents Association newsletter, *The Observer*, all carried multiple stories about the contest, and its results.

Downplayed, but present in all the news coverage was the story of the 1920s African American resort community land dispossession via eminent domain proceedings undertaken by white Manhattan Beach city fathers. The civil rights protests for shoreline usage, however remained overlooked. The majority of the news and community outlets covering the park renaming contest offered the site history in their text as transmitted orally over fifty years from members of the community, and from interviews with Robert Brigham. Much of the news coverage mentioned Brigham's 1956 Master's thesis on the site's historical events, but it was not apparent in these stories whether the journalists actually read the document when one views the limited details featured. Many writers of these stories offered their own additions to the folklore of the Bruce's Beach site in the words chosen to frame or texture their social commentary around the facts of the site history.

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<sup>77</sup> "Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest," Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files; Staff Report, City of Manhattan Beach, April 15, 2003; Yoshiyama, *The Beach Reporter*, 3 April 2003.

In 2003, no new research was solicited or conducted to develop the retelling of the Bruce’s Beach site historical narrative by Manhattan Beach local journalists. Having done my own research on this site history and actors, the primary and secondary research sources are not robust, and in some instances not easily accessible. The 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class did undertake research in the city’s archives and other local resources to learn about the “park” history after the 1920s eminent domain proceedings. If Brigham’s Master’s thesis had been read at all or more thoroughly read, there might have been more nuanced and detailed discussions of the actors and actions involved in the social injustice and justice events of the contestation between white bigots maneuverings and African American protest in Manhattan Beach. For the more general public, the difficulty of research material access is a contributing factor as to why the Bruce’s Beach story continues to be narrowly cast.

Over 120 entries were submitted from fifth graders to long-time residents of the area, with most of the submissions coming from students. A few entries to name the park after an individual or a family were received, even though the contest rules stated these were not eligible. The judges recommended six top and four alternate names to the Manhattan Beach City Council for review, accompanied by essays.<sup>78</sup>

The top six name recommendations included:

- |                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Freedom Park              | 4) Ocean View Park           |
| 2) Friendship Park           | 5) Shore Acres Park          |
| 3) Ocean View Community Park | 6) Sunset Park <sup>79</sup> |

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<sup>78</sup> “Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan

Contest,” Sandra Seville-Jones Personal Files; Staff Report, City of Manhattan Beach, April 15, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., “Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest.”

The four alternate name recommendations included:

- |                      |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Beachside Park    | 3) Harmony Park                |
| 2) Golden Waves Park | 4) Surfside Park <sup>80</sup> |

In recommendations for new park names a restoration of Bruce's Beach was not considered, though oblique references to the 1920s eminent domain property evictions of the black families did enter in the essays for Friendship Park, Ocean View Community Park and Harmony Park. The essay for Friendship Park suggested the name reflected the history of "[the] minorities who lived in the area and the former Spanish name." The essay author supporting the name Ocean View Community Park offered, "I've been told that this park area used to be a ghetto for [b]lack families, then they were kicked out, and to make sure they didn't come back the land owners built a park... We have done wrong, but now we want to become a community of everyone and every race." The supporter of the name Harmony Park said the name represented "racial harmony, in a way to acknowledge the less than desirable way that the park was first set aside... The best of our past was in rejecting such racial actions and... that only through racial and regional cooperation will we encourage the best for our future." The other essays referred primarily to the beauty of the ocean views, and the experiences of spiritual rejuvenation and nature one could have while visiting the park, disregarding the historical origins of the place becoming "public."<sup>81</sup>

Despite the Council's previous direction that the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class pursue the renaming project, after the elaborate contest proceedings on April 15, 2003, the Manhattan Beach City Council voted to keep "Parque Culiacan" as the name of the park.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., "Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest."

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., "Final Report of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003, on the Rename Parque Culiacan Contest."

Council members indicated they could not support the reasoning behind renaming the park. During the public comment period before the Council’s vote, several residents of the city including long time active members of the Sister City Committee had voiced their displeasure and objection towards the renaming idea. Some of these citizens made their sentiments known in various newspaper interviews published before and after the April 15 City Council meeting. In a bit of an ironic twist, some leaders cited absence of history in the proposed new names as reason for not changing the name of the park. Two City Council members commented before the vote against the name change that “the history of the park goes back further than [the sister city relationship],” and it has “many histories.” That “while the intent was good,” they concluded, “none of the names proposed [were of] interest.”<sup>82</sup>

The City Council accepted the Leadership Manhattan Beach 2003 Class gift of \$3,600 raised for a new park plaque. The Council directed city staff to work with the Class to develop text for a new plaque, while retaining the ‘Parque Culiacan’ name, and explaining the history of the park site. Sandra Seville-Jones, 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class co-project manager suggested the plaque text writer should attempt to thematically combine the history of the park with the sister city ideals that enabled the Bruces to gain reentry to the public memory, though only partial memory. Referred to as the “tragic” circumstances, the leading historical fact on the new park plaque identified Bruce’s Beach as a resort that had been utilized by “African American Angelenos.” Next noted was that “minority families” were “housed” in the two-block resort neighborhood, and evicted by condemnation through eminent domain proceedings. The other “tragic” circumstances not illuminated in the 2003

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<sup>82</sup> “Minutes of the City Council,” City of Manhattan Beach, April 15, 2003; City of Manhattan Beach City Council Members in 2003 included Jim Aldinger, Joyce Fahey, Mayor Steven Napolitano, Mitch Ward and Linda Wilson; Roberts, *Easy Reader*, 27 February 2003; Dennis Johnson, “Context may plant new name on park,” *Daily Breeze*, 18 March 2003; Yoshiyama, *The Beach Reporter*, 3 April 2003; Yoshiyama, *The Beach Reporter*, 17 April 2003.

plaque text were that there was no sense of the 1920s era African American initiative or designation of responsibility for Manhattan Beach's public racism and injustice. No mention was made of the African American property owners' legal fight opposing the city's land grab, or of the black Angelenos' civil rights agency of the 1920s that forced the Manhattan Beach's city government to cease discriminatory land leasing policies illegally inhibiting African Americans from local public shoreline usage.<sup>83</sup>

The 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class carried the city's public memory from no specific identification of their community's dispossessed African American pioneers in the "Renaming of Parque Culiacan Position Paper" to an affirmative step toward a more open and inclusive recognition of the history of the site. Though still a partial story, for many of the Manhattan Beach polity the words on the new Parque Culiacan plaque discussing Bruce's Beach would be their first awareness of their town's African American resort pioneers. The new park signage and plaque were rededicated in July 2003.<sup>84</sup> (See Figure 1)

The efforts of the 1920s era public park campaign to halt the "Negro invasion" appear to have been successful. From 2003 to 2014 African Americans remained less than one percent of the population in Manhattan Beach. In a nod towards diversity from a more inclusive thinking local electorate, businessman and actor Mitch Ward served his first term as a member of the City Council in 2003, the first African American to serve on the Manhattan Beach City Council. He also identified himself publically as a gay man, who had been married to his partner for more than twenty years. Ward continued as an elected city official until 2011. Before finishing his service he would be mayor twice of the city of Manhattan

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<sup>83</sup> "Minutes of the City Council," City of Manhattan Beach, April 15, 2003; Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

**Figure 1.** Bruce's Beach 2003 Plaque Text

## **Parque Culiacan**

(actual arrangement of 2003 text on the new park plaque)

Named in honor of Culiacan, Mexico  
Our First Sister City 1974

Formerly the site of Bruce's Beach, a resort for  
African American Angelenos. This  
two-block neighborhood also housed several minority  
families and was condemned  
through eminent domain proceedings commenced in 1924.  
Those tragic circumstances  
reflected the views of a different time.

The land was referred to as City Park and Beach  
Front Park, and later named Bayview  
Terrace Park through a community contest in 1962.

Designated Parque Culiacan on March 16, 1974 at the  
time of a visit from  
representatives of our first Sister City.

Parque Culiacan commemorates our community's  
understanding that friendship,  
goodwill and respect for all begins within our own  
boundaries and extends to the world  
community.

Signed and donated by Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003.



Beach. Ward's presence as a city elected official, and his input would be pivotal in the next chapter in the park renaming and the public recollection of the once popular black beach resort site.<sup>85</sup>

### **Park Name Revisited and Public Memory Reconsidered, Again**

Arrival of new elected city leaders, and inspiration by a prominent national event that led to a nationwide memory moment reopened the matter of the park's identification in 2005. Thinking about marking a national achievement inadvertently enabled recalling the local past. Far from inevitable, the reconsideration of the place's identity was stridently contested by proponents of alternative naming, for purposes of promoting current ventures, civic unity and marketing. Contemporary rhetoric reflecting a common conservative, neo-racist argument of "white injury" was injected into the discussion. New ideas emerged for public uses for the funding resources that renaming would require. Those who had labored in the process just years before to fix the identity through public consultation only to be rebuffed, contested a new park renaming effort.

The 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach's Rename Parque Culiacan contest resulted in new consciousness and a new park name plaque. It also opened another chapter in the park naming saga and public remembrance of the site of Manhattan Beach's dispossessed black resort community in December 2005. During a City Council meeting a local resident and

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<sup>85</sup> Manhattan Beach, California data, From the Internet: [www.city-data.com/city/Manhattan-Beach-California.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/Manhattan-Beach-California.html), 2003 & 24 March 2015. The Manhattan Beach City Council is comprised of five (5) members, each serving a nine (9) month mayoral position during their four (4) year term, From the Internet: <http://www.citymb.info/city-officials/city-council>, 23 March 2015; In 2010 Ward was also a candidate in an election to represent the California State 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District, *Mitch Ward, A Mayor for the Assembly*, From the Internet: [http://digital.library.ucla.edu/websites/2010\\_997\\_217/about.html](http://digital.library.ucla.edu/websites/2010_997_217/about.html), 23 March 2015; Nick Green, "Candidate Profile: MB mayor Mitch Ward stresses local interests in 53<sup>rd</sup> Assembly bid," *Daily Breeze*, 22 May 2010.

activist Patrick McBride requested consideration of “the renaming of Parque Culiacan in honor of civil rights leader Rosa Parks” who had died in October 2005 at the age of 92. The City Council directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to “discuss and consider” the request to rename Parque Culiacan because of Mrs. Parks’ historical civil rights achievements. At the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting a lively public discussion among Commission members and the general public unfolded in February 2006. The advocates for a park name change, and those opposed to one presented their cases once again. At the Commission meeting Patrick McBride argued with the knowledge of history of Parque Culiacan and the removed African American resort settlement, the park had “a huge civil rights significance and deserve[d] the name of a great civil rights leader [like Rosa Parks].”<sup>86</sup>

Bob Bohner, President of the Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee argued at the Commission meeting, as he did in 2003, that Parque Culiacan was named to honor Manhattan Beach’s former sister city, and he opposed the a name change to “Rosa Parks.” He strongly supported the current name of the park site and argued that Manhattan Beach parks should reflect a local history connection. The theme of local history as a valued basis for naming a place or this park was consistent with what some community members publicly voiced as acceptable, and for others this theme was gathering momentum towards acceptability. Referring to the park plaque addition to the signage worked out in 2003 as “the compromise,” he suggested the text already featured the history of the park and that retaining

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<sup>86</sup> Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006; Rosa Louise Parks [1913-2010] was nationally recognized as the "mother of the modern day civil rights movement" in America. Her refusal to surrender her seat to a white male passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, December 1, 1955, triggered a wave of protest December 5, 1955 that reverberated throughout the United States. Her quiet courageous act changed America, its view of black people and redirected the course of history, “Rosa Parks,” From the Internet: <http://www.rosaparks.org/biography/>, 25 March 2015.

the park name honored Rosa Parks and the civic rights movement in the context of Manhattan Beach history. Long time Sister City Committee member and local resident Marge Crutchfield argued the message of the Parque Culiacan plaque represented “understanding diversity, appreciating your fellow man no matter what his color is or where he comes from”—all things the sister cities program stands for.<sup>87</sup>

A resident who lived near the park, Bill Roos, suggested “the [city] should not get so political.” Whether he recognized it or not, as a citizen offering his comments at the February 27, 2006 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, Roos was participating in the “political” discourse of government in his community. How could the city *not get so political*? The word “political” refers to the “conduct [or discourse of] government, the organization or actions of individuals, parties or interests that seek to control the appointment or action of those who manage the affairs of a state.” Often when people do not obtain what they think they should from their government, they characterize the situation as being politicized or political. His opinion was the park name should remain the same for the reasons given by the Sister City Committee members. His and the Committee’s insistence to preserve the Parque Culiacan name, its symbolism and the physical signage was a political act of power in selective remembrance and organized forgetting. Maintenance of this moniker strategically silenced the conflicting historical political facts and events of the park site in the public sphere, and in the identity and self-definition of these town citizens. Roos’ further argued that the \$8,000–10,000 the city would spend on a new park sign with a new

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<sup>87</sup> The mission of the Sister Cities program is “to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time.” From the Internet: <http://sistercities.org/mission-and-history>, 24 March 2015. Cynthia Dizikes, “Culiacan keeps name, MB’s past racism revised,” *Easy Reader*, 2 March 2006; Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

name for the site should be utilized for a new shower and drinking fountain at the park's shoreline edge that he had advocated for over the last three years.<sup>88</sup>

The 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class co-project manager, Sandra Seville-Jones conveyed to the Commission that she believed the plaque gift to the city inscribed with the site history on the new Parque Culaican signage should remain in the park longer than two years. After all the work the Leadership Manhattan Beach group did two years earlier in their ill fated attempt to rename the site, her preference was for the park name to remain the same. If the city resolved to change the name, she favored the park name to be more in the theme of brotherhood and friendship.<sup>89</sup>

In the February 2006 Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes the commissioners unanimously indicated tremendous respect for Rosa Parks and her accomplishments. Commissioner Lear asked McBride “whether the text on the plaque, i.e....understanding, friendship, goodwill respect for all begins within our boundaries...is something Rosa Parks believed in and, therefore, what you are trying to accomplish is done by this text.” McBride did not agree, noting the plaque text did not really speak to what he hoped to accomplish by honoring Rosa Parks.<sup>90</sup>

There was a discussion in the meeting minutes of whether to seek the opinion of regional African American leaders from outside of Manhattan Beach (such as Dr. Cecil

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006; *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1959), 237, 654. My discussion here of collective memory, representation, selective remembrance, forgetting and silences is informed by examination of these themes by Marita Sturken's in *Tangled Memories, The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) & Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

“Chip” L. Murray or Dr. H. Claude Hudson’s associates) on their reaction to renaming the park after Rosa Parks, and how a gesture of this sort would be viewed. Parks and Recreation director Richard Gill was against consulting leaders in the African American community in Los Angeles, contending that the park naming was a local community issue. As an African American staff member, Gill thought Bruce’s Beach would be a more appropriate name for the park as he saw no connection for the city with Rosa Parks.<sup>91</sup>

No evident suggestion appeared in the meeting minutes to contact a Los Angeles historian or other professionals with expertise in these matters. A recurring theme in all the commissioners’ comments was a concern if the park name was changed the new moniker needed a local connection related to Manhattan Beach. Commissioner Paralusz favored a name more inclusive in recognizing “our commitment to diversity.” Commissioner Lear’s comments spoke for his colleague’s sentiments, “Culiacan might not be the best name, but the connection of Rosa Parks is not compelling enough to rename the park.”<sup>92</sup>

Commissioners in a chorus voiced that if a name change was to occur they supported renaming the park Bruce’s Beach, to reflect the local history and a significant theme.

Commissioner Lear noted,

The Commission has an interest in sending the message that Manhattan Beach stands for, amongst other things, diversity and recognizes that the greatest blemish in our history is what happened in the 1920s at Bruce’s Beach.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Dr. Cecil “Chip” L. Murray (b. 1929) served as the pastor of First African American Methodist Episcopal Church (FAME) from 1972-2004 in Los Angeles before joining academia at the University of Southern California (USC) and the Claremont School of Theology. Founded in 1872, FAME is the oldest African American church congregation in Los Angeles. As quoted from his USC biography, he “has many years of experiences as a senior statesman in the African American community and in the city of Los Angeles as a whole.” From the Internet: <http://crcc.usc.edu/about/personnel/cecil-l-murray.html>, 25 March 2015; Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

Mr. McBride indicated if the commissioners liked the name “Bruce’s Beach,” he and others would respond favorable to this moniker for the park. The meeting minutes denoted Commissioner Lear’s caution “that the Commission would need direction from the City Council to look more broadly at other names.” A motion was unanimously passed recommending to the Manhattan Beach City Council that the name, Parque Culiacan, not be changed to Rosa Parks Park. Another motion was passed requesting the City Council to indicate to the Commission whether Parque Culiacan should be renamed, and if so in what direction should they explore for new names.<sup>94</sup>

The Commission’s acts and the consideration of a possible renaming the park moved the City Council in the direction of a reconsideration of this idea. At their March 21, 2006 meeting, the Manhattan Beach City Council discussed the February Parks and Recreation Commission meeting vote not to recommend the renaming of Parque Culiacan to Rosa Parks Park. The Council, similar to the Commission, determined it was not appropriate to change the name as had been most recently requested by Patrick McBride. The next event of the park renaming saga opened at the April 18, 2006 City Council meeting, when Mayor Mitch Ward requested and the Council directed staff to refer the renaming of Parque Culiacan back to the Parks and Recreation Commission for the exploration of a new name with historical significance to the city.<sup>95</sup>

In the midst of city officials’ public meeting discourses examining the park renaming, a descendant of the Bruces publically spoke up about a possible park name. A grandson of Willa and Charles Bruce, Bernard Bruce, in conjunction with the Center for Law in the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, March 21, 2006; Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, April 18, 2006.

Public Interest (CLIP/renamed The City Project in Fall 2006) in a letter dated March 21, 2006 to Mayor Mitch Ward urged the renaming of Parque Culiacan to Bruce's Beach to commemorate and honor the civil rights legacy of the Bruce family. Robert Garcia of The City Project also lobbied Manhattan Beach city officials to include the installation of interpretive panels and public art to accurately tell the story of the site, once the park was renamed Bruce's Beach. The Center for Law in the Public Interest, known for its work on equal access to public places, especially beaches and green spaces for underserved and underrepresented urban populations, recognized the power of history not only for reclaiming a place, but promoting the contemporary cause of equal access through celebrating the history of its assertion. These letters supporting the park renaming to Bruce's Beach most likely exerted some influence with Mayor Ward and the other city officials who may have reviewed them.<sup>96</sup>

The Commission took up the matter of identifying a new name for Parque Culiacan again at their May 22, 2006 meeting. Prior to this meeting, a May 15 *Daily Breeze* newspaper headline about the upcoming meeting read, "Name change to fit park's past weighed." The very occasion of the meeting did memory work for the community by alerting journalists who proceeded with the retelling of the story of Bruce's Beach. The article described the history of the dispossessed African American resort community, the park name, and the recent meetings' discourses and results to rename the site. Reporter Deepa Bharath

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Garcia, Esq., Director, The City Project, interview by author, 22 March 2014, Los Angeles, California; Correspondence Robert Garcia (Center for Law in the Public Interest was renamed to The City Project in Fall 2006) to Mitch Ward (Mayor, City of Manhattan Beach), 21 March 2006, (In author's possession); Correspondence Robert Garcia (Center for Law in the Public Interest/The City Project) to Mitch Ward (Mayor, City of Manhattan Beach), 5 September 2006, (In author's possession); Bruce's Beach, The City Project, From the Internet: <http://www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/brucesbeach.html>, 25 March 2015.

articulated that in the history of the serene and scenic park “lies a controversial past and an uneasiness and embarrassment that continues to this day.”<sup>97</sup>

This reporter viewed the park renaming matter in 2003 and 2006 as “caus[ing] a stir in the community.” He proposed the “stir” was that the Manhattan polity had opposing viewpoints in the park naming discourse. Bharath opined the upcoming Parks and Recreation Commission consideration of whether to rename Parque Culiacan would be so that its history, however unpleasant, would not be forgotten. He suggested “Bruce’s Beach” would likely be one of the name options before the Commission.<sup>98</sup>

The May 15 *Daily Breeze* article also featured comments from an interview with Mayor Ward. He asserted,

Personally, I think Bruce’s Beach is a historically appropriate and correct name for a park in this area...it is pointless to change the name [of the park] to reflect a theme such as friendship or peace, however honorable they might seem. Rosa Parks, too, was a great leader. But there’s little there in terms of relevance to local history.<sup>99</sup>

Ward’s support of a park name change in 2006 was an adjustment in his stance on the renaming of the site from his 2003 position of maintaining the status quo. In this same May 15, 2006 article, Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation director Gill also indicated Bruce’s Beach could be a strong option for the new name of the park. Other voices registered opposition. Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee representative Marge Crutchfield continued opposition to another name change of the park site.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Deepa Bharath, “Name change to fit park’s past weighed,” *Daily Breeze*, 15 May 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 15 May 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 15 May 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 15 May 2006; Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, February 27, 2006.



“Consideration of Renaming Parque Culiacan” was the first item of general business on the agenda at the May 22, 2006 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. Following audience comments on whether to change the moniker of the historic park site, the commissioners reviewed the following names for consideration:

- Bruce’s Beach
- Ocean View Park
- Keep Parque Culiacan
- Surf View Park
- Forgiving Park
- Bayview Terrace

Those for and against a name change lined up to speak at the Commission meeting. Deepa Bharath reported in the *Daily Breeze* on May 24, 2006, the assembly was “an emotional meeting.”<sup>101</sup>

Not just words but imagery permeated the meeting. Bharath wrote “several residents in favor of the name change [to Bruce’s Beach] wore t-shirts bearing the likeness of Rosa Parks with a pink paper heart bearing the letters ‘BB’ pinned on their shirts.” The majority of the supporters for the name change recognized in the May 22, 2006 Commission meeting minutes advocated for the site of “the once haven and resort popular with black people” to be called Bruce’s Beach to honor the historic struggle that took place on the land. Resident Michele Murphy asserted plaques could disappear overtime, but naming gave power to remembrance of the historic site with or without a plaque.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The order of the names for consideration are represented as listed in the City of Manhattan Beach Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, May 22, 2006; Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Deepa Bharath, “Parque Culiacan renaming endorsed,” *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006; Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 16, 2006.

Naming a site offers public commemorative recognition and acknowledgement of actors, actions or other features. Historian David Glassberg observes “places loom large not only in our personal recollections but also in the collective memory of our communities.” A name on a public site gives it an identity and meaning; it is the beginning of telling its stories and history to the public. In a few words, a name on a public site infuses history into the collective memory of the local and national culture. An oral heritage is transmitted with a name for people who never have the opportunity to visit site and read a plaque text or other about a location.<sup>103</sup>

Local activist Viet Ngo reiterated a position he had advocated at the May 16 Manhattan Beach City Council Meeting at the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. Though he urged that all would have to accept the fact the former African American residents were victims of racism, and that the city in addition to renaming the site, should issue an apology to them in the spirit of equal justice for all, he proposed another park name for consideration, “Forgiving Park.” He suggested the park should be a place where anyone could go to meditate, ask for forgiveness, look at the ocean and be with nature. “Forgiving Park,” he argued would be a healing name and helped to remedy past wrongs. Seeking fuller acknowledgement of history by formal action, Ngo regarded nominal marking as a less critical incorporation in a principal practice of forgiving.<sup>104</sup>

New community opposition to the park renaming joined continuing opposition to different arguments to those previously heard in 2003. The Sister City Committee representatives at the May 22 Commission meeting continued their opposition to renaming

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<sup>103</sup> David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the past in American Life*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), (quotation) 19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Glassberg, 19; Cynthia Dizikes, “Commission recommends changing Parque Culiacan to Bruce’s Beach,” *Easy Reader*, 25 May 2006.

Parque Culiacan, despite the groups acknowledgement that the sister city program with Culiacan was terminated, and their existing relationship with Santa Rosalia, Mexico since 1989. They reiterated their program reflected and promoted diversity, and that the plague put up by the 2003 committee explained the history of the site. The new voices of opposition argued that renaming the park “Bruce’s Beach” would bring up bad feelings, and tell a negative story. John Bushman, a life long resident of Manhattan Beach and member of the city’s Metlox, Police and Fire Facility Committee, who lived near the park argued if the name were to change it should be something he called “non-descript” like Ocean View, Surf View or Sunset View. The historically accurate Bruce’s Beach as a name for the park was “too descriptive,” as some citizens were increasingly recognizing the power of remembering on this place. The marking of a place for history was too powerful for some, sustaining the shame of past wrong rather than repairing it by remembering.<sup>105</sup>

Historian Paul A. Shackel has observed that while many minority histories are about struggle, racism and tragedy, and that many Americans see it as important that these stories be commemorated, others continue to struggle with the inclusion of these stories in local and national American heritage. In this way we can understand that changing the park name to a “non-descript” or innocuous name would be a symbolic act of a deliberate effort of re-erasure of the site history, and continuing the process of normalization of white hegemony in the community.<sup>106</sup>

Similarly to his fellow citizen John Bushman, Manhattan Beach resident Jim Wagner had a problem with the remembrance of challenging city history. Instead of covering over the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Dizikes, *Easy Reader*, 25 May 2006; Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Paul A. Shackel, *Memory In Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post Bellum Landscape*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 198.

recognition of the site history, Wagner was explicitly against remembering the site's history at all. Wagner in registering his opposition to the renaming sarcastically suggested to the Commission the park should be named "Mea Culpa." As every city has dark secrets, he suggested he did not understand why this beautiful park should make amends for an errant past. He commented this was not Mississippi, and that he did not comprehend naming a park after something, which has not contributed to the growth of Manhattan Beach.<sup>107</sup>

Some would argue with Wagner that the making of a community devoid of African Americans and other people of color groups had indeed been a deliberate strategy for the growth of Manhattan Beach. As Robert Brigham's 1956 thesis recounted, the unofficial, underlying reason for the 1920s Bruce's Beach resort community property dispossession was due to what some whites hyperbolically decried as a "Negro invasion." They had declared the African American presence as a threat to Manhattan Beach property values, and its continuing ability to attract Euro-Americans to the shoreline community. Of course a mass influx of African American residents in the twentieth century was entirely unlikely due to varied socio-economic and geographic conditions, but that did not stop the city from using its policy and powers to disrupt and dispossess the African American citizenry. Although Manhattan Beach was not Mississippi, it still had used some of the same white supremacy attitudes and exclusion policies in its history that had been used in Mississippi to disenfranchise African Americans of their civil rights and their rights as consumer citizens. That Manhattan Beach's growth has exclusively been among aspirational and a higher

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<sup>107</sup> Mea Culpa is a Latin phrase for acknowledgement of a personal error or fault. Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006; Cynthia Dizikes, "Commission recommends changing Parque Culiacan to Bruce's Beach," *Easy Reader*, 25 May 2006.

income white group was a product of city harassment and removal of African Americans, and the park's renaming advocates recognized that.<sup>108</sup>

The May 22, 2006 discussion among the Commissioners about the name change yielded two different camps. A predominance of commissioners were proponents of the side for renaming the park Bruce's Beach. They were not deterred by fears of acknowledging a bad part of the city's history would incite new negative feelings. Commissioner Cohen noted it was significant that some in the community viewed the current plaque text with the history of Bruce's Beach as effective, and others found it lacking. Education and creating a moral lesson about the misfortunes of the African American pioneers seemed to be a consensus theme amongst the officials. Commissioner Lamb agreed the condemnation of the African American resort community had been an unfortunate era for the city. He argued what happened there should be recognized to remind the community, but renaming the park was not atonement for an entire history. Commissioner (Ned) Gill noted his fifth grade son had never heard the story of Bruce's Beach in his school class on the history of Manhattan Beach. Commissioner Paralusz argued while renaming the park, Bruce's Beach recognized a blemish on the city's history sometimes doing the right thing is not easy.<sup>109</sup>

Those Commissioners unafraid of a more inclusive city history and commemoration of moral tragedy, were challenged by others wanting to maintain the status quo, and keep the park name the same. Commissioners Harris and Lear believed the plaque adequately explained the history of the site and the park name did not need changing. In a 4-2 vote, the

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<sup>108</sup> Brigham, 44, 73, 96-98; Culver, 67-68, 70.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Culver, 67-68, 70; Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Bharath, *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006; "What's in the name?," *Beach Reporter*, 25 May 2006; Dizikes, *Easy Reader*, 25 May 2006.

Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation Commission recommended to the City Council the renaming of Parque Culiacan to Bruce's Beach to reflect the historical events that took place in the city at this site.<sup>110</sup>

A May 25, 2006 *Beach Reporter* newspaper article entitled, "What's in the name?" described the action by this Commission as a "controversial decision" that would go before the Manhattan Beach City Council for "the final say about the park's name." Another episode in the public remembrance saga of the Manhattan Beach African American pioneers unfolded at the July 5, 2006 City Council meeting. In 2006 the Manhattan Beach City Council included some members of the 2003 Council, when the park renaming was considered as a result of the Leadership Manhattan Beach Class project, and they unanimously voted against renaming Parque Culiacan as they did not find any of the names proposed of interest. After Recreation Services manager Idris Al-Oboudi outlined the Commission's exchange of the May 22 meeting from a Staff Report, City Council deliberations and an extensive public comment period ensued with an emotive coloring.<sup>111</sup>

The staff, City Council and public maneuvered through political avoidance, gamesmanship and expediency toward renaming the park. In response to the staff report presented by Recreation Services manager Al-Oboudi, Council members Tell and Aldinger asked him if additional research was done to learn more about the Bruce family that would be helpful for the Council in their consideration of whether to rename the park after them.

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<sup>110</sup> Minutes of Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, May 22, 2006; Deepa Bharath, "Parque Culiacan renaming endorsed," *Daily Breeze*, 24 May 2006; "What's in the name?," *Beach Reporter*, 25 May 2006; Dizikes, *Easy Reader*, 25 May 2006.

<sup>111</sup> "What's in the name?," *Beach Reporter*, 25 May 2006; 2003 City Council Members: Linda Wilson, Joyce Fahey, Mitch Ward, Jim Aldinger and Mayor Steven Napolitano, Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 15 April 2003, and 2006 City Council Members: Joyce Fahey, Nick Tell, Mayor Mitch Ward, Jim Aldinger and Richard Montgomery, Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006; The author spoke in favor of the park name change to Bruce's Beach at the Manhattan Beach City Council meeting on 5 July 2006.

Council members were concerned about the possibility of adding more detailed information about the Bruce family to the plaque.<sup>112</sup>

The gamesmanship of the Council began with a few members remarking the public might be interested in considering a broader array of park names than Bruce's Beach.

Council Members Aldinger and Fahey were concerned the history of the good works of the Manhattan Beach Sister City program not be lost. Council Member Aldinger indicated he was not interested in naming the park after a person. Mayor Ward firmly urged his fellow Council members the evening's discussion ought to be centered on whether or not the park should be renamed Bruce's Beach.<sup>113</sup>

In his remarks before opening the public comment period, Mayor Ward shifted the focus of the night's discussion to the origin of the land itself in Manhattan Beach's history, away from the Bruce family. To frame this point he cited a passage in what he noted as something he recently had come across in "a local paper," *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, a (newsletter) publication of the all-volunteer Manhattan Beach Residents Association:

When Manhattan Beach was incorporated in 1912 George Peck, bucking the then current practice of racial exclusion, opened up two blocks of land on the beach for African Americans to purchase. George Peck is remembered as a generous businessman who helped his black neighbors build a fishing pier (Peck's Pier) near the resort, which was the only pier open to African Americans in the area.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Al-Oboudi evaded answering this question about whether additional research was done to learn more about the Bruce family by indicating staff reviewed the documents obtained from various sources. Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006; Michelle Murphy, "Park and Recreation Commission Recommends Changing Park Name," *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, June 2006, 6; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010.

Mayor Ward reiterated the evening's discussion should not be about the Bruce family, rather "it is about the movement...the Bruce family generated as a result of the generosity of George Peck." Ward's words introduced a new dynamic to the site's interpretation narrative dialog about renaming the park that until now had been about commemorating the Manhattan Beach African American resort community's dispossession and pioneering local entrepreneurs, not the white developer Peck who purportedly sold them the land.<sup>115</sup>

Mayor Ward also mentioned receiving constituent email questioning changing the park name. He asserted the park name had been changed several times before, and it was Council's prerogative (informed by citizen's wishes of course) if it wanted to change the name of the park again. Twenty-three people eventually came to the microphone to offer their comments for and against the park name change. As they had at an early 2006 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, many in the audience favoring the name change wore light pink and yellow hearts with the letters "BB" pinned on their clothing. The demographics of the public in attendance at the meeting reflected the ethnic make up of the city of Manhattan. Most everyone in the audience was a white person.<sup>116</sup>

As with recent past park name change efforts in 2003 and earlier in 2006, of the opposition voices the Manhattan Beach Sister City program boosters were the most prevalent at the July 5 City Council meeting. They reiterated their previous stance on retaining the

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<sup>115</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010.

<sup>116</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Kristin S. Agostoni, "Council votes to change Manhattan Beach park name to reflect community's history," *Daily Breeze*, 7 July 2006; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006.



Parque Culiacan name for the site as the program embraced the City's history and exchange, and represented cultural diversity. Other program enthusiasts thought the name Parque Culiacan was a more recent, and a more positive reference than Bruce's Beach. Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee founding member and long time local beauty shop owner Carmen Daugherty spoke for many of her program allies when she expressed concern the group's years of service would be forgotten if the park name were changed. During the public comment period, Daugherty said,

It is really a slap in the face as far as I'm concerned. I gave my heart to this city and to that program. I left a mark here and I don't want it to be destroyed.<sup>117</sup>

The Sister City program's claim for the park name raised issues of selection and compound meanings of place and memory. Historian David Glassberg reminds us "that the various senses of place in a community reflect not only its residents' emotional attachments to the local environment but also their position in a larger economic and political system." In Manhattan Beach, "marking" one's presence of the more contemporary white residents was pitted against the historic African American property ownership and dispossession, and civil rights actions as claims to preeminence and remembrance.

Resident Larry Grik, who lived across from the park, offered another perspective to this site-renaming chapter. He came to the City Council meeting with a petition of fifty-five residents' signatures he collected with fellow neighbor Bill Roos on July 4 that proposed the park name revert back to "Bayview Terrace," its name from 1962 to 1974 before it was

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<sup>117</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Kristin S. Agostoni, "Council votes to change Manhattan Beach park name to reflect community's history," *Daily Breeze*, 7 July 2006; Michelle Murphy, "City Council Renames Park Bruce's Beach," *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006, 8; Dawnya Pring, "Parque Culiacan to be renamed Bruce's Beach," *The Beach Reporter*, 7 July 2006; Lisa McDivitt, "A park by any other name, Manhattan Beach contemplates a new name for Culiacan Park, triggering a debate on how best to recognize the city's black history," *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006.

renamed “Parque Culiacan.” Their thought was the park should have a descriptive, but innocuous name, like other parks in Manhattan Beach. He asserted the name, Bayview Terrace, reflected to the site’s location, topography, Bayview Drive that once bisected the park, and the view of the Santa Monica Bay.<sup>118</sup>

Representative of a few others who spoke that night, Grik argued there was no need to dig up a tragic historic event for people using the park now; these few people saw the African American resort events remembrance as negative and a step backward. He indicated some who earlier spoke made him feel he was being characterized as a racist because of his lack of support for the park renaming to “Bruce’s Beach.” Mayor Ward chimed in with an even tone of disbelief and compassion at a pause in Grik’s remarks, that people were not saying he was a racist. Grik went on to say he felt intimidated by his fellow citizens supporting the name change because he did not endorse it, and he thought the situation was being turned into a civil rights discussion.<sup>119</sup>

Whether or not Grik was a racist, his rhetoric presented a common conservative, neo-racist argument of “white injury” of the day. Grik’s argument was that in recalling a past recognizing the dispossessed African American settlement history and their city forefathers’ eminent domain land dispossession, current citizens were “intimidated” and wrongly made to suffer. Did living near a site publicly recognized as having a difficult history but a more inclusive cultural heritage make Grik feel guilty? His resentment at joining this Manhattan

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Pring, *The Beach Reporter* 7 July 2006; Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Pring, *The Beach Reporter*, 7 July 2006; Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006; McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006; Agostoni, *Daily Breeze*, 7 July 2006.

Beach site to a civil rights narrative suggests he accorded power to place. He said he felt he was a victim of intimidation. Grik and his faction looked to pick a fight, any fight because their status and privilege—dependent on what W.E.B. DuBois called a “public and psychological wage” involving “public deference” and their preferential “personal treatment” by key social and political institutions—was being challenged. Others joined Grik in objecting to the name change of a public park to acknowledge the wrongs of former officials.<sup>120</sup>

The majority of the individuals who spoke up at the meeting favored the renaming. The citizen supporters spoke to the ideal of remembering a more inclusive history, public education and a moral lesson about the misfortunes of the black Manhattan Beach pioneers. Some of their thoughts echoed those heard from City Council. Donna Warren, a native black Californian and Hawthorne resident recalled that until she was twelve years old she could not go past Crenshaw Boulevard due to the existing racism and occasional racial harassment tactic in the area to keep African Americans out. A 2006 Green Party candidate for lieutenant governor of California, Warren insisted that we as a society have to admit what the historic truth is to move forward in friendship and as comrades. Local resident Bob Willett noted he did not think property values were at risk when the African American families lived in Manhattan Beach, and it was a tragic and cruel mistake that the families were pressured to leave. In my role then as University of Southern California graduate student who had done scholarly research on the site and who had been consulted by some of the citizens in favor of the renaming, I joined the debate contending the renaming of the public park would tell an

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Agostoni, *Daily Breeze*, 7 July 2006; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color, European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 18; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006.

American pioneer story about successful African American entrepreneurs who serviced their community, and recognize a more inclusive rich history that had been overlooked. Although I did not say this at the time, recognition of the Manhattan Beach black pioneer property and business ownership also illustrates the lost prospects of their investments' future potential value, and African Americans' visions as local capitalists with uninhibited freedom to exercise their rights as fully entitled consumer citizens.<sup>121</sup>

In response to earlier comments that the name Parque Culiacan was a more recent and more positive reference than Bruce's Beach, long time Manhattan Beach resident Gail Runk reminded those at the July 5 meeting the past was not that far away, as there was a cross burning on the lawn of African American residents in the 1970s. She noted that in the 1960s she was instrumental in the creation of the Manhattan Hermosa Fair Housing Council after discovering landlords would tell minority apartment seekers none were available, but later lease to white renters. Runk asserted the renaming of the park was a positive action of acknowledgement. Local resident and writer for the residents' association publication, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, Michelle Murphy suggested history is written by the victors, and the city had the opportunity to hide it or a chance to shed light on the history of the town.<sup>122</sup>

Thirty year resident Grace Walters said it frightened her that the Bruce's Beach history was not widely acknowledged and was kept undercover. She declared the Bruces built some of the earliest structures in the area, and the new park name was a unique

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<sup>121</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Pring, *The Beach Reporter*, 7 July 2006. At the time of the 2006 Manhattan Beach, park renaming action, the author was a graduate student working towards earning a Master of Historic Preservation degree at the University of Southern California.

<sup>122</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006.

opportunity to honor them along with the integrity of town founder George Peck's humanism. In addition to Peck, members of the public suggested recognizing other pioneering heroes in whose agency they found a source of pride, such as the members of the NAACP who were arrested after a swim at the beach, and Robert Brigham (the retired local teacher and historian who wrote his 1956 Master's thesis on the history of Bruce's Beach). The local polity comments showed a variety of interpretations regarding the knowledge of the historical truths of the site and what they thought might have relevance for commemoration. This community dialog and process about the broader history of Manhattan Beach and its significance, was important in itself as a moment of public remembrance acknowledging the issues on record, formally and publicly.<sup>123</sup>

Many white citizens, and a few African American ones, were uncomfortable with discussion of and recognition of racial discriminatory events and the cruel inequity complexities that are vestiges of the dismantled economic, social and political system of enslavement and Jim Crow in the modern capitalist era. But as scholar Robert Weyeneth has noted, these conversations are part of the education process to help societies think about the relevance of the past, and particularly about events, which remain controversial. These discursive acts acknowledge that history matters, and its legacy continues to shape the present. Public hearings, apologies, memorials and plaques, site name changes, financial compensation and days of contemplating the past are symbolic acts of recognition that offer moral reparations, provide a means for present generations to respond to the past and draw

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006; Myron Puller offered, as a resident of Manhattan Beach since 1965 he knew nothing about the history being discussed until recently. Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006; Robert Weyeneth, "History, Memory and Apology, The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation," *The Public Historian*, V. 23, No. 3 (Summer 2001), 32.

lessons for the future, and present as a path towards healing and unity.<sup>124</sup>

After the lengthy public comment period, before more City Council members' discussion and their vote, Mayor Ward said, "When you talk about race and history things get a little tough inside...glad we got through that without too much difficulty." Perhaps due to internal parochialism, the Council at first indicated the majority were in favor of retaining the site's name as "Parque Culiacan," citing respect for the Sister City program, the recent plaque, alternative acts or recognition like a formal apology without changing the park name, and compliance with the longstanding policy of not naming City parks or buildings after individuals. But Mayor Ward favored the name change, and used a bit of drama, theatrics, political gamesmanship and his personal story to obtain his colleagues' vote.<sup>125</sup>

He offered heartfelt commentary about his personal pride in purchasing his home in Manhattan Beach seventeen years before. He spoke about running the first time for public office when he went door to door to meet town citizens, and everyone was friendly. As the city's first African American elected official who was also a gay man, he noted he was a minority on the Council in more ways than one. Ward remarked on how good the Bruces must have felt when they bought their property and built their resort. Once again he invoked the legend of George H. Peck, noting he wanted to honor this visionary man who aided the Bruce's entrepreneurial endeavors. More political maneuvering and posturing ensued. Mayor Ward asserted, "I feel badly that this Council does not have the foresight of George Peck."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Weyeneth, 14-15, 24, 31, 35-36.

<sup>125</sup> Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Pring, *The Beach Reporter*, 7 July 2006; Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006, 15; McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006.

He firmly objected to the idea floated that a city issued formal apology for its past actions against the Bruces and the other resort community property owners be presented to their descendents. At one point the Mayor asked his Council colleagues who favored keeping the Parque Culiacan name what was their fear of the original inhabitants who owned the property? He questioned them about why they valued the people from Mexico over the original American inhabitants of that property. “Give us the name Bruce’s Beach or give us nothing,” Mayor Ward said forcefully.<sup>127</sup>

Ward turned the Council’s vote to 3-2, passing in favor of the name change. Loud applause arose from the audience. As Michelle Murphy noted in *the Manhattan Beach Observer*, Mitch Ward’s words had special weight. Many participants were convinced the park name change to Bruce’s Beach might not have happened were it not for Mitch Ward, as the first African American Manhattan Beach City Council member. Ward’s words sufficiently soothed the anxieties of the polity or at least of the Council — about the commemoration of the 1920s African American Manhattan Beach pioneers and justified its priority over rationales for opposing the change. As had the arguments of Warren, Runk and Walters, Ward’s presence as a contemporary African American Manhattan Beach pioneer, reminded his constituents the park renamed Bruce’s Beach not only commemorates the past, but also the memory of the present and the future.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., McDivitt, *Easy Reader*, 13 July 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Pring, *The Beach Reporter*, 7 July 2006; Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006, 15.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., Murphy, *The Manhattan Beach Observer*, July 2006, 15; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 1 May 2010; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 July 2006.

Poignant support for the renaming of Parque Culiacan to Bruce's Beach continued to flow to newspapers. Community commentary in the "Letters to the Editor" section, and a front page article featuring Council proceedings about the Bruce's Beach site filled the local *Easy Reader* newspaper. (See Figure 2) Local polity members pointedly discussed the more challenging, less spoken about issues of the lost economic opportunities by the African American resort property owners due to the city fathers' 1920s land dispossession. For example, one letter to the editor expressed outrage at what he viewed as the attempt to erase the history and collective memory of the "hard working [African American] pioneers" of Manhattan Beach.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "Letters," *Easy Reader*, Thursday, 20 July 2006.



Manhattan bruises beach

Dear ER:

So, the city of Manhattan Beach wants to do the politically correct thing and rename Culiacan Park "Bruce's Beach" (Cover story "A park by any other name," ER July 13, 2006). Well let's see if the city fathers have the huevos to do the morally correct thing and sell the real estate back to Bernard Bruce for the price the city so generously paid his grandparents decades ago. Only that will genuinely right a grievous wrong.

Joe Hellerman  
Hermosa Beach

Man-Hate-Tan Beach

Dear ER:

I couldn't have been more saddened, angered, and frustrated by the indifference of the officials at the City of Manhattan Beach toward the injustice that was done and continues to be done to the black people of our area and in turn to all foreign descendants of the non-white race ("A park by any other name, ER July 13, 2006). Surely, there is a plaque on the stone monument that stands on the park which depicts its history, but it is mounted on a monument that negates it. Parque Culiacan is an insult to the hard-working pioneers of the Manhattan Beach area since it does not bear its rightful name of "Bruce's Beach." What's the fuzz, anyway? Is it "politically correct" to lie about the city's past, which was filled with KKK members and bigots of every kind? Are we in the business of living in denial by consciously withholding knowledge from the young because it is convenient? Talk about hypocrisy. I am ashamed to have ever walked the streets of such a place. Finally, I would like to commend Lisa McDivitt for the expository way in which she reported this story and opened the eyes of this and many other readers of your publication. Her uncompromising views have elevated her to a high place in the heart and mind of this reader and I shall avidly look forward to her next report.

Humberto C. Maldonado  
Via Internet

Park's place in Manhattan

Dear ER:

Interesting cover story on Bruce's Beach (Cover, ER July 13, 2006). Interesting too, that some folks on the east side of Highland now have beachfront property.

Bill Switzer  
Manhattan Beach

**Figure 2.** "Letters," *Easy Reader newspaper*, Thursday, July 20, 2006.

One important change wrought by the public hearing was to feature recognition that the Bruce's Beach resort settlers were Manhattan Beach pioneers, who encouraged economic development through real estate transactions, property improvements, and leisure

consumption. The discourse of the race relations paradigm, the dominant site narrative incorporating the Bruces had focused on was important, but it left out the discussion of the significance of the African American Manhattan Beach pioneers as historical, economic, cultural actors with agency. That discourse had narrowly depicted the African Americans solely as victims in relationship to the white Manhattan Beach pioneers who evicted them, and subject to the goodwill of the white people who helped them.

### **Parque Culiacan Site Recovers the Bruce's Beach Moniker, What About its Public Remembrance Narrative?**

Moving the new multifaceted discourse to the memorial plaque would not be automatic. The new language proposed for the 2006 plaque included some new words that changed the meaning of the site's public memory conveyed by the original 2003 plaque text. On November 8, 2006, city staff presented a report to the Manhattan Beach City Council with updated language for the new plaque for the renamed park Bruce's Beach. A new episode in the public remembrance of the site of the Manhattan Beach dispossessed African American resort community and political gamesmanship commenced.<sup>130</sup>

This report noted "in developing the new language...[they] tried to keep as much of the original text as possible to keep the integrity of the message developed by the Leadership [Manhattan Beach] Class of 2003." It was noted that city staff had reviewed the new text with the authors of the original plaque text from the Leadership Class of 2003 and received their approval. The staff apparently did not seek out new research to develop the retelling of the Bruce's Beach site historical narrative. Although no new research was done, a new

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<sup>130</sup> Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, November 8, 2006.

perspective about whom and what should be commemorated for the Bruce's Beach site emerged, changing the 2003 effort.<sup>131</sup> (See Figure 3)

The City Council was scheduled to vote per staff's recommendation "[to] approve the text for the plaque on the Bruce's Beach monument sign." Local resident Patrick McBride requested this item be pulled from the Consent Calendar for Council discussion. In the public commentary period, McBride voiced his dissatisfaction with the text, as it did not mention the non-violent civil rights actors or actions of the 1920s that forced the city government to discontinue discriminatory land leasing policies that prevented African Americans from Manhattan Beach public shoreline usage. He was concerned the appropriate professionals and other citizens of Manhattan Beach, who worked to rename the park as Bruce's Beach, did not review the language. Local citizen Viet Ngo stated he wanted the city to recognize the past and honor the people who founded Bruce's Beach—the people who sought the American dream that was denied to them due to racism.<sup>132</sup>

City Council members and staff had varied comments that did not necessarily respond to the concerns of McBride and Ngo, but to others of their own. In the videotape of the November 8, 2006 meeting, Council member Ward reminded all that the language for the plaque was modified from what had previously been developed with the 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach signage gift. He reaffirmed the group's effects should continue to be recognized, and stated that he did not think it necessary to include all the 1920s history of the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, November 8, 2006.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, November 8, 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 8 November 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010.

### **Bruce's Beach**

In 1912, Mr. George Peck, developer, made it possible for the beach area below this site to be developed as Bruce's Beach, a resort for African American Angelenos. This two-block neighborhood also housed several minority families and was condemned through eminent domain proceedings commenced in 1924. Those tragic circumstances reflected the views of a different time.

The land was referred to as City Park and Beach Front Park, and later named Bayview Terrace Park through a community contest in 1962.

The park was designated Parque Culiacan on March 16, 1974 at the time of a visit from representatives of our first Sister City.

The Manhattan Beach City Council renamed the park as Bruce's Beach in July 2006, commemorating our community's understanding that friendship, goodwill and respect for all begins within our own boundaries and extends to the world community.

A project of Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003.

**Figure 3.** City of Manhattan Beach, Staff Report: Proposed Plaque Language – November 8, 2006 <sup>133</sup>

Bruce's Beach site on the plaque. Ward cited viewing a plaque at the National Landmark site, Wounded Knee Massacre as an example of language he thought did a good job of explaining a site that contained minimal text. His comments assumed his audience's knowledge of the actors and events at the Wounded Knee site, as he gave no further description. This "memory of memory" might have carried a different lesson to the Council meeting. The minimal presentation the mayor was impressed with had been the subject of great national controversy and contestation for years. Ward argued the new revised plaque language was a wonderful start to educate people about the Bruce's Beach site.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council, City of Manhattan Beach, November 8, 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 8 November 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010.

Council member Fahey was concerned the proposed plaque language did not mention why the area was named Bruce's Beach, and she wanted clarification about whether Bruce's Beach was the "only" beach in the state of California at the time open to African Americans. She particularly liked the last paragraph of the language, which gave attribution to the current Manhattan Beach City Council for the renaming of the park as Bruce's Beach. This new attribution was attached to the Sister City program ideals for community values and identity originally presented in the 2003 plaque text. Council member Tell wanted staff to make sure the plaque language was factual, as he observed there was misinformation about the Bruce's Beach site and events circulating. City manager Geoff Dolan, who presented the Staff Report, informed Council the plaque language was approved by Jan Dennis (a former Manhattan Beach City Council member and author of books on the history of the city of Manhattan Beach) and a Leadership Manhattan Beach representative.<sup>135</sup>

These well-intentioned community representatives may have approved the modified language for the new plaque, but what does the confirmation of their approval of this text indicate? With the new name "Bruce's Beach" on the park, new opportunities to recognize additional significance for the site were possible. Were these people given a chance to suggest other relevant "idea or word content" for the plaque's commemorative language? Political expediency or lack of understanding and knowledge, interest or time for reflection, may have played into their approval. Were they fully cognizant of the meaning and memorialization the new proposed text language presented to the community's current and future remembrance of the site's history? Were these community representatives sensitive to the hegemonic perspective of the "generous" Euro-American George H. Peck who was

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 8 November 2006.

purported to have originally not included racial restrictions on the sale of two-blocks of his 100 plus-block subdivision? And to the relegation of African Americans to a victim narrative rather than recalling them as the central actors in the memorial? In their rush for political expediency to rename the park and rewrite the plaque text because the will of the town polity was now loudly supportive of the process, how cognizant of the meaning of the proposed new plaque language were City Council members? Were Manhattan Beach City Council members using the park renaming and plaque text as rhetorical resources to propel their own political agendas for the upcoming election in early 2007?

At the November 8, 2006 meeting, city staff was directed by the Manhattan Beach City Council “to modify the proposed language on the plaque of the Bruce’s Beach monument sign...to include additional historical information, such as why it’s named ‘Bruce’s Beach,’ who George Peck was and his significance, and that Bruce’s Beach was the only beach in the State open to African Americans at the time.” The new language proposed for the 2006 plaque at the December 5 City Council meeting included some new words that changed the meaning conveyed by the originally 2003 plaque text, and the site’s public memory. Although some of the words in the 2003 plaque language were semantically problematic, and the legacy of the non-violent civil rights agency occurring at the site was not included, the overall text in the new plaque conveyed a public history memory of the site that offered primacy to the African American pioneers of Manhattan Beach.<sup>136</sup>

At the December 5, 2006 City Council meetings, Manhattan Beach polity members were still not satisfied with the newly edited language of the plaque text presented by city staff for the Bruce’s Beach monument signage. While some saw the language as not going

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<sup>136</sup> Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006.

far enough to tell the history and its meaning, others continued to contest its recognition of the historical wrong. In the public comment period local citizens Patrick McBride and Bev Morse suggested more effort should be put into deciding the suitable wording of the plaque, and the decision on the final language should be deferred. McBride mentioned that the Center for Law in the Public Interest sent suggestions for wording on the plaque that the Council should review. In addition to support of the park name change, they advocated for developing a public art project commemorating Bruce's Beach as a site of history and justice "which reflects the values that bring people together, remembers history, and nurtures a vision of what can be."<sup>137</sup>

Sandra Seville Jones, 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class co-project manager who was involved with the original text creation, indicated the additional wording to the plaque "raise[d] questions." She also asserted if the CLIPI had comments on the text, they should be considered as many people respected their work. The proposed 2006 new plaque language with the new semantic, fact and word choices convoluted the meaning of the site's public history remembrance. Shaped by the local elected political actors to suit their political and ideological agendas, whether intended or not, the new language of the Bruce's Beach

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<sup>137</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006; Letter from Robert Garcia, Executive Director and Andrea Luquetta, Law Fellow, Center for Law in the Public Interest (CLIPI) to the Honorable Mitch Ward, Manhattan Beach City Council Member, dated September 5, 2006 (in Jefferson's possession); Los Angeles based, CLIPI engages in advocacy and litigation on a broad range of issues including parks and recreation access for under represented communities. Center for Law in the Public Interest, From the Internet: [www.clipi.org](http://www.clipi.org), 10 May 2010.

plaque text changed the meaning of the sites public memory, and commemoration of the black Manhattan Beach and Angeleno pioneers.<sup>138</sup>

Council member Ward and mayor pro tem Aldinger made up the City Council Committee agreeing to review the modified plaque language presented at the December 5 meeting. After listening to citizen's comments, Council members offered their opinions and responses to polity members in the Chamber on the reworked plaque language. Council Member Ward argued the plaque text was not the final say of what happened, but a relatively brief starting point for people to discuss what went on at the site. He indicated he had received suggestions for additional information for inclusion in the new plaque language via citizens' emails. Without giving an airing to the email suggestions received, he claimed many were inflammatory. Ward asserted the proposed text was positive and simple. He also argued the darker elements of the site's history were intimated in the sentence "those tragic circumstances reflected the views of a different time," and "that those words said enough about the negative events."<sup>139</sup>

Council member Fahey contended "the experts" on the subject of the plaque language were the residents of Manhattan Beach. She noted the city was simply trying to commemorate a park and reflect an experience. Fahey was not opposed to continuing the matter for a few weeks if there was important information that should be included. Mayor Tell wanted the text to focus on the "positive elements." In the text, he wanted the historic

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<sup>138</sup> Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 8 November 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 13 May 2010; Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 8 November 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010.



facts recognized and remembered with a mention of the sad element, but not an emphasis on what a few horrible people did. Council decided on a few additional word changes to the language of the plaque as proposed by City manager Dolan. During the December 5, 2006 meeting, the City Council unanimous voted to approve of the new wording.<sup>140</sup> (See Figure 4)

With the approval, the opportunity to recognize additional significance of the Bruce's Beach site in the new plaque language was passed over for a narrative of political expediency that created new problems. The revised history text now glorified a white capitalist, a city father who in fact had been disturbed at the establishment of the Bruce resort in 1912. George H. Peck had tried to keep African Americans from using the beach with the installation of "no trespassing" signs and police deputies patrolling the area warning them not to cross his land in front of Mrs. Bruce's property to enjoy the ocean. Later in 1924, his business associate and son-in-law Herb Culler roped off the shoreline area at Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets to discourage African Americans usage outside the front of the Bruce's resort. It can be inferred from the available evidence, Peck's silence exerted authority and that he supported the eminent domain eviction proceedings to remove the historic 1910s–1920s African American resort community. Yet, he was now being honored as the new plaque language now also misrepresented other historical facts, events and significance.

### **The Next Chapter in the Public History Saga of Bruce's Beach Remembrance**

For many Americans the stories of places like Bruce's Beach are what historian Edward T. Linenthal calls "indigestible" narratives, stories that "stick[sic] like a fishbone in

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<sup>140</sup> Minutes of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006; Video of the City Council Meeting, City of Manhattan Beach, 5 December 2006, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.manhattan-beach.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=1804>, 9 May 2010.

[a] city's throat." The terms used to characterize engagement with these sites and stories speak of processes of erasure: marginalizing, suppressing, concealing, masking. He asserts "the enduring hunger for redemptive narratives smoothes any rough edges in these indigestible stories, insisting that other, more positive stories about [an uncomfortable historic event] be told in the service of 'balance.'"<sup>141</sup>

In the controversy over the 2006–2007 final Bruce's Beach signage text the historical understanding of the site evolved into a political contest to absolve contemporary white citizens' guilt about the 1920s land dispossession and racial discrimination which took place at the black pioneer resort settlement. Intended or unintended consequences of the new plaque text language placed primacy on a competing interpretive voice. The new text featured the white Manhattan Beach developer George H. Peck in the first line as the hegemonic subject of the narrative. Peck was an important man in Manhattan Beach city history. There is a city street named after him to help validate this fact. Although he may not have placed racially restrictive covenants on two-blocks of his new land development, Peck was agitated by the African American presence in 1912 and was one of the white property owners who tried to aggressively discourage their presence. He did not convey property to the Bruces. Contrary to what some local Manhattan Beach residents have passed down through oral history without a full examination of the available historical records, evidence does not support that Peck set aside any property to specifically be sold to the African American families at the place that has come to be identified as the Bruce's Beach resort community. Unfortunately popular memory of historical events and actors in this situation

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<sup>141</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, "Epilogue: Reflections," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton & Lois E. Horton, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 213-215.

have proven difficult to extricate or add new information to, even with further new scholarship, advocacy and more enlightened historical and cultural civic leadership.

Other white property owners, Clement L. Shinn, Charles and Anna Krouse, Jessie Carson and white real estate agent Henry Willard were the intermediaries in at least one of the two transactions involving the selling of lots to Willa Bruce. Where was George H. Peck when the black Manhattan Beach pioneers' property was taken in a subterfuge land grab by the city of Manhattan Beach through condemnation and eminent domain proceedings in the 1920s? There is no record of him standing up to the bigotry of his fellow citizens in this 1920s white supremacist act of economic and social injustice done to a group of hardworking, tax paying African American Manhattan Beach pioneers. By his silence he at least condoned, if not supported their actions. The prioritization of Peck in the new language diminished the symbolic life of the destroyed African American resort community narrative and erased by omission their civil rights activism and agency.<sup>142</sup>

The plaque text made no mention of the 1920s non-violent civil rights actors or struggle that forced the city government to discontinue discriminatory land leasing policies inhibiting African Americans from Manhattan Beach public shoreline usage. Stating that Bruce's Beach was "the only beach in Los Angeles County for all people" and identifying the other resort pioneers as "minority families" erases by substitution, and misrepresents the African American history and public memory at the site. This site marks the place where a group of African Americans demanded justice and equality. The plaque text re-inscribed the historic meaning and commemoration of the past to subvert the apparent public intent of memorialization of the heritage of the Bruce's Beach site as a place where pioneering black

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<sup>142</sup> The author reviewed records in the County of Los Angeles Assessor's Map Books and Registrar-Recorder, and U.S. Census to determine the ownership and ethnicity of the property owners who sold their lots to Willa Bruce.

Californians took agency to participate in the fruits of the state's recreational and real estate offerings.

As many Americans continue to grapple with the commemoration of these histories that include struggle, racism, and even sometimes tragedy, each marginalized minority group's commemoration is important as it allows them to claim a part of the public memory and American identity. African Americans and other marginalized groups battle to have their histories remembered. Historian Edward T. Linenthal asserts, "Conscientious remembrance is more than a necessary expansion of the nation's narrative. It is an act of moral engagement, a declaration that there are other American lives too long forgotten that count." Bruce's Beach was a site not only of African American presence but struggle. Its remembrance counts by forging production of a more inclusive and diverse American story in the local, regional and national historical narratives of American history and cultural memory.<sup>143</sup>

On Saturday, March 31, 2007 a dedication ceremony was held to officially rename the park between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets, and Highland Avenue and The Strand, Bruce's Beach. Mayor Nick Tell and Council member Mitch Ward officiated at the program. (See Figure 4) The political contest and agenda of the local politicians developed the inadequate language that appeared on the signage plaque. But renaming the park Bruce's Beach began to recognize a more inclusive and diverse cultural heritage, and some of the rich history that has been overlooked. An American pioneer story about successful African American entrepreneurs has begun to be told, as well as the story of the disenfranchisement of the small resort community they inspired from this part of their California Dream. People

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<sup>143</sup> Shackel, 198-199, 209; Linenthal, "Epilogue: Reflections," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. Horton & Horton (2006), 224.

have gained a small bit of education about black pioneers in California. Naming the site does gain public commemorative recognition and acknowledgement. What is missing from the

**2007 Plaque Text<sup>144</sup>**

**Bruce's Beach**

In 1912, Mr. George Peck, one of our community's co-founders, made it possible for the beach area below this site to be developed as Bruce's Beach, the only beach resort in Los Angeles County for all people. Charles and Willa Bruce were the African American entrepreneurs who settled here, thus the name Bruce's Beach. This two-block neighborhood was home to several minority families and was condemned through eminent domain proceedings commenced in 1924. Those tragic circumstances reflected the views of a different time.

The land was referred to as City Park and Beach Front Park and later named Bayview Terrace Park through a community contest in 1962.

The park was designated Parque Culiacan on March 16, 1974, at the time of a visit from representatives of our first Sister City.

The Manhattan Beach City Council renamed the park as Bruce's Beach in July 2006, commemorating our community's understanding that friendship, goodwill and respect for all begins within our own boundaries and extends to the world community. All are welcome.

A project of Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003.

**Figure 4.** The Manhattan Beach City Council approved a large plaque to honor the African American family that once operated a resort at what is now a city park known as Bruce's Beach.

Bruce's Beach site recognition and acknowledgment is the story of the peaceful, but militant black actors of the NAACP who stood up in nonviolent, civil disobedience. These black agents of change forced the city government to discontinue discriminatory policies inhibiting African Americans from Manhattan Beach public shoreline usage, which set the stage for the fading away of racial restriction attempts at public beaches, and for the opening of these spaces for all in the coming decades.

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<sup>144</sup> Plaque text as featured in "Bruce's Beach Re-Naming Ceremony" Program, Saturday, March 31, 2007, and Deborah Schoch, "Erasing a line drawn in the sand," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 2007.

The Bruce's Beach park name can now touch many people's lives as they come to enjoy the beach at this beautiful site. The partial story on the park signage does offer an introduction to the African American pioneers of the city of Manhattan Beach, who in spite of challenges took agency in developing the leisure culture that would define southern California. The story of Bruce's Beach has begun the journey of infusion into the collective memory of local and national public culture, even with the signage plaque text that dilutes, misrepresents and partially omits the site's historical truths and understanding.

## CHAPTER 4

### RACE, REAL ESTATE AND REMEMBRANCE IN SANTA MONICA'S OCEAN PARK NEIGHBORHOOD, 1900s–1960s

There is a lure and charm about California that grows with knowing. It is a land that sweeps from pine to palm, from ocean to snow-capped peak, from shrewd cold to breathless heat... The boulevards of Los Angeles grip me with nameless ecstasy... To sing with the sun of a golden morning and dip, soar and roll over Wilshire or out to Pasadena where one of the Seven Streets of the World blooms; or out Washington to the sight of the sound of the sea—this is Glory and Triumph and Life.

-- *W.E.B. DuBois*<sup>1</sup>

“It was a summer weekend gathering place. You would see everybody... all your friends, there,” octogenarian and Los Angeles native Ivan J. Houston (b. 1925) recalled of the beach in the Ocean Park area of Santa Monica where African Americans could enjoy sand, surf, and sociability during the Jim Crow era of restrictive racism—an era that reigned into the early 1960s in southern California. “It could be a very noteworthy, social event to go to the beach,” especially as a young adult, Houston remembered. He liked to stay in the water a long time, swimming and body surfing on those hot summer day visits to “the Inkwel,” the derogatory name whites gave to this beach a few blocks south of Pico Boulevard frequented by African Americans. This pleasure was not unbounded, however. Making the place a site for African American leisure required assertion against racist opposition. Houston, a third generation Californian and retired head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, vividly recalled a memory from his youth when the nearby Club Casa del Mar Club rebuilt a

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<sup>1</sup> “Postscript by W.E.B. DuBois, The California Conference,” *The Crisis*, September 1928, 311.

1920s era fence out into the water (in late 1930s to 1940s) so that “people” would not “trespass” on the public beach in front of the exclusive clubhouse.<sup>2</sup>

As Houston’s recollections suggest, the history of the Jim Crow era beach site frequented by African Americans in Santa Monica’s Ocean Park neighborhood is one of challenge, contestation and continued assertion of authority to make the place for leisure. Derogatorily termed by whites and sardonically referred to by blacks as “the Inkwell.” This popular beach area was established, defended and persisted as an African Americans place in the spatial imaginaries in California’s “frontier of leisure,” contrary to the experience of Bruce’s Beach. Though public remembrance of African Americans’ leisure activities at this site have dissipated since the end of the Jim Crow era, personal remembrances continued. Interviews with black Angelenos whose families have been in the region for the majority of the twentieth century reveal that the beach area near the end of Pico Boulevard had been a gathering place for African Americans more or less alongside whites since the 1900s. They indicate this beach usage developed because there was a sepia “anchor” community living nearby in Santa Monica that drew African Americans from around the region to this beach section. A number of African American families had settled in Santa Monica by the early years of the twentieth century. The continuous presence of Phillips Chapel, a church of the African American Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) faith, in Ocean Park near the beach since 1908 indicates this beach was not merely a recreational outpost, but the site of

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<sup>2</sup> Ivan J. Houston is one of the son’s of Norman O. Houston, a founder of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company who will be discussed later in this chapter. Ivan J. Houston, from childhood also remembered his mother fondly speaking about “Bruce’s Beach.” Ivan J. Houston, Los Angeles resident and former head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co., interview by author, November 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.



community life. This local community existence helped African Americans' beach usage to persist through all challenges.

Ocean Park's history shows that at a time when racially restrictive real estate covenants and laxly enforced civil rights laws prevented them from buying property in certain areas or using various public or private facilities, when distinct social barriers and overt discrimination persisted, African Americans nevertheless succeeded in claiming relaxation, recreation and vacation sites in southern California. Ocean Park's "Inkwell" beach site, remained an important recreational area for African Americans from the turn of the twentieth century through the racial conflicts of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, into the post-war period when the sustained activism of the modern civil rights movement began to crumble social and legal barriers.<sup>3</sup>

Whites had begun complaining about African American beach usage as soon as their gatherings became organized efforts to occupy public space, evidence suggests. Along many stretches of the California coastline, refusal to allow African Americans access to places of leisure constituted an "informal" policy that was sometimes forcefully asserted and physically enforced by white citizens and public authorities when they thought they could get away with this type of behavior. As early as 1912 in Manhattan Beach and 1914 in Play Del Rey, whites complained about African American beach usage in the local newspapers. At the time, these complaints did not result in distinctively newsworthy white antagonistic acts against African Americans. These news items even acknowledged that under California laws,

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<sup>3</sup> I first became aware of an African American historical relationship with the Santa Monica Bay area while doing research for a class paper on segregated resorts and recreation areas in southern California as part of my Master's degree graduate school course work with historian Kevin Starr in 2004 at the University of Southern California. Cathy Naro, "A Page From History, How Green Was My Valley: Southland African Americans Remember Hayrides and Golf Games in Val Verde," *Westways* magazine, February 1995, 71.

African Americans could not be prevented from using the public beach. Yet the law did not prevent systematic discrimination and exclusion at other recreation sites.<sup>4</sup>

In 1925, black taxpayers in the city of Los Angeles were refused the full use of public swimming pools by only being allowed access to the pools one day a week, on the day before they were cleaned, when they had previously had full access. Children's summer camps were also segregated by the city of Los Angeles during the 1920s. Of the five city camps open, only one admitted African American children. These discriminatory public pool and camp policies would not be legally remedied until the early 1930s. While African Americans did win clarification on their right to unrestricted public access to beach frontage in a Manhattan Beach court case, that did not reverse the city's dispossession of the supporting leisure community there. In spite of legal victories, asserted custom, hostility and devious local public authorities continued to keep some facilities white-only for several decades more.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Colored People's Resort Meets With Opposition," *Los Angeles Times*, 27, June 1912, I-15; "Don't Want Picnics," *The Daily Outlook*, Wednesday, 24 June 1914, 1; Douglas Flammig, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 274; Dan Cady, *Southern California: White Southern Migrants in Greater Los Angeles, 1920-1930*, (PhD diss., Claremont University, 2005), 198-199.

<sup>5</sup> "Swimming Pool Suit Dismissed, Negroes Advised to Seek Injunction Against Rule for Colored Bathers," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1922, A5; Lawrence Culver, *Frontier of Leisure, Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54-55, 66-74; Such exclusionary customs of maintaining racial restrictions were weakened by United States Supreme and California Court decisions between 1948 and 1968. It would not be until the U.S. Supreme Court decisions, *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) and *Barrows v. Jackson* (1953) that the judicial enforcement of racially restrictive real estate covenants would be overturned and effectively abolished. These were the first of several legal victories towards the total abolition of all legal and vigilante racial restrictions and discrimination in housing, education, employment and even recreation facilities. By the 1960s, at least on paper, the combined effect of *Kraemer* and *Barrows*, along with additional Federal enforcement efforts—the U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968—prohibited most forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin. Flammig, 351, 367, 369, 373; Lawrence DeGraaf, "African American Suburbanization in California, 1960 through 1990," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor (Seattle, WA: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press, 2001), 336-337, 415, 441; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 100, 415.

For the several decades when racial discrimination and restrictions reigned, African Americans made a place of sociability, special significance, warm memories and some self-determination in the Ocean Park neighborhood of the city of Santa Monica. Their formation and defense of leisure practices tells a fuller story that exposes their foundational and creative “pioneering” role in patterns of settlement and sense of community. This story gives further authority and justification to African Americans, other marginalized groups and their allies in the present, pursuing public initiatives to overcome continuing legacies of adverse public action and suppositions about who is authorized to claim and reclaim space, determine its use and lead leisure planning. Against threats and exclusionary conditions, this place remained a site where African Americans composed a community of leisure to enjoy the sun at the surf.

African American families of all economic classes, professional and occupational levels, and social persuasions demanded and built Santa Monica beach as their leisure places by regularly visiting on day-trips, and through cottage rentals or, in some cases, home buying for weekend outings and summer vacations. Some of the African Americans who came for recreation at the beach became permanent residents of the area. In Santa Monica, little sign remains today of the Jim Crow era leisure site made by African American Angelenos and southern Californians from the 1920s to 1960s. As is true of African American leisure sites across the region, documentation of these places has been neglected and only one building in the Santa Monica beach area has been designated as a historic landmark. Historic sites of African American leisure activities have faded from memory as white-determined leisure

culture so dominated the region's narrative that it naturalized their absence, and proclaimed the white-directed leisure presence that emerged as "original" to the place.<sup>6</sup>

### **Development History: City of Santa Monica and the Ocean Park Neighborhood**

The Santa Monica Bay shoreline seems to have always been a popular location throughout the history of California. Before the Spanish colonial era, the Mexican ranchos and later the American undertakings, the Tongva people (later renamed the Gabrielenos by the Spaniards) lived in villages scattered throughout the Santa Monica Bay cities area adjacent to the rivers and marshes, and near the Pacific Ocean. When the Portuguese explorer Juan Cabrillo first investigated the coast of California for Spain in 1542, he stopped in Santa Monica Bay. He claimed the land for the King of Spain, but it was not until over 200 years later in 1769 that missionaries were sent to colonize California. Gaspar de Portola explored the Santa Monica area then, in search of a northern route along the coast and an overland route through the mountains. Not finding any acceptable coastal route and noting the cliffs rising from the ocean, the Portola expedition party, which included Father Junipero Serra, established El Camino Real (The King's Highway) inland. Spanish settlement was limited in the Santa Monica area until 1821 when California became part of the Republic of Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

Under the Spanish and Mexican systems, large land tracts were distributed to soldiers and individuals as payment for their services. The Santa Monica Bay land grants included Ranchos San Vicente y Santa Monica, Boca de Santa Monica and La Ballona. These three

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<sup>6</sup> Naro, *Westways* magazine, February 1995, 71.

<sup>7</sup> "Historic District Application For Third Street Neighborhood in Ocean Park, Santa Monica, California," Prepared by The Third Street Neighbors, 1990, V2, 11; Luther A. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History: Santa Monica Bay Cities: 1542 to 1908* (Los Angeles, California, 1908), 8-93.

tracts comprised land that included the present day communities of Santa Monica, Westwood, Culver City, Palms, Mar Vista, Playa del Rey, Marina del Rey, Venice and Ocean Park. The area came under American control in 1848 at the conclusion of the Mexican American War. Agrarian enterprises in the area revolving around cattle and sheep, and some row crop agriculture dominated the economy of this period.<sup>8</sup>

North of Ocean Park, starting in the 1850s the canyon and beaches of Rancho Boca de Santa Monica became popular with Los Angeles and other southern California residents for picnics, sunbathing and camping. Even Biddy Mason (1818–1891), an African American woman who became a successful midwife and capitalist, and an important pioneering member of the Los Angeles community camped in the rustic canyon in 1854. She and her children moved to California from Mississippi in 1851 as enslaved persons accompanying their master, Robert Smith. Los Angeles County Sheriff Frank Dewitt heard Smith was camping in the canyon with his family and slaves en route to Texas, and issued a writ preventing him from removing his slaves from California on January 19, 1854. On this day in the canyons of Santa Monica, Mason and her children gained their freedom. Dewitt and many other whites in the early years of California, who were opposed to slavery, assisted through the courts and otherwise with the emancipation of African American slaves who came to the state. The issue of slavery ensnarled the Santa Monica locale, like other parts of the nation, in the years leading up to the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marvin J. Wolf and Katherine Mader, *Santa Monica: Jewel of the Sunset Bay* (Chatsworth, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989), 14; Paula Scott, *Santa Monica: A History on the Edge* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 24-27.

<sup>9</sup> Delilah Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers of California*, (Fairfield, CA: John Stevenson Publisher, reprint 2004), 90; Scott, 32-33.

South of the canyon, Santa Monica's Ocean Park neighborhood and the north side developed somewhat independently of each other. Travel was difficult between the two communities as they were separated by an arroyo or gully through which the Santa Monica Freeway now runs to join the Pacific Coast Highway, and a mile-wide unimproved tract which belonged to the Southern Pacific Railroad.<sup>10</sup>

Sheep rancher, Colonel Robert S. Baker, and Nevada Senator and mining entrepreneur John Percival Jones in 1874 began to build a railroad and a port in northern Santa Monica, along with a town site by the ocean. Although their railroad was eventually sold to the Southern Pacific and the port idea never came to fruition, in 1886 Santa Monica was officially incorporated and the city evolved to be a resort community. Vacation leisure became a defining industry of the place, as numerous hotels and bathhouses including the Santa Monica (1875), the Arcadia (1887) and the North Beach Bathhouse (1894) were built on the north side for wealthy tourists and health-seekers. Pleasure piers were built including today's municipal pier at Colorado Avenue. Wealthy easterners and Santa Monica founders built homes in architectural styles of Queen Anne, Eastlake, Shingle Style and Colonial Revival that exemplified Victorian seaside living in California.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning in the 1880s through the early part of the twentieth century, north Santa Monica played host to many wealthy and influential business and civic leaders, and, with the turn of the century, movie stars of Los Angeles who sought recreation in the "freshness of the ocean air." Some like Frederick and May Rindge built fine houses in Santa Monica. During

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<sup>10</sup> "Historic District Application," V2, 22; Ingersoll, 252; Scott 32-34.

<sup>11</sup> City of Santa Monica, "Historic Preservation Element, Final Draft," Prepared by PCR Services Corp. & Historic Resources Group, December 2001, 11-12; Wolf & Mader, 42-43; Scott, 35-46; Ingersoll, 142-145, 157-159.

this time period the Rindges owned the Rancho that is today Malibu and Pepperdine University. Fredrick Rindge was an investor in many successful business enterprises including Union Oil Company. He was the president of the Conservative Life Insurance Company, a leading California business during this era, which later became Pacific Mutual. In the twentieth century the Rindge family founded the Malibu Tile Company that produced beautiful tiles and ceramics, which today can still be found in many homes and commercial buildings throughout the southland. Broken Malibu tiles are one of the featured elements of the Los Angeles Landmark, the Watts Towers by Simon Rodia, who worked at the company. Products produced by (the Rindge Adamson) family's Adohr Dairy, although under another company name can still be found today on supermarket shelves.<sup>12</sup>

Until Ocean Park became part of Santa Monica in 1907, these two areas were separate cities. Already known regionally and across the United States for amusement facilities, entertainment and beach resorts, the two small independent municipalities developed to accommodate the regional day-trip tourist along with the vacation and year-round residential patronage of the wealthy and those of more modest means. The little city by the bay's initial growth as the playground of the Los Angeles region was multiplied by its connection with the electric streetcar to Los Angeles, and later the railroad and automobile. The electric trolley railway line from Los Angeles to Santa Monica and Ocean Park, the Pasadena & Pacific (P&P) began service in 1896. The P&P route followed what are known today as Sunset and Santa Monica Boulevards. By 1898 the transportation line was renamed

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<sup>12</sup> Ingersoll, 128-130; Fred E. Basten, with an introduction by Carolyn See, *Paradise by the Sea, Santa Monica Bay: A Pictorial History of Santa Monica Venice, Marina del Rey, Ocean Park, Pacific Palisades, Topanga & Malibu*, (Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey + Ingalls), 24.

the Los Angeles Pacific (LAP). By 1903 it extended through Santa Monica and Ocean Park along Main Street and Neilson Way through Venice and Playa del Rey to Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach. Although these transportation conveniences were available, there were still dirt roads in Santa Monica and Ocean Park into the dawning twentieth century decades. Ocean Park developed its own unique identity as it evolved as an independent municipality with permanent residents.<sup>13</sup>

The Machado family owned the Rancho La Ballona land grant, comprising the localities known today as Ocean Park, Venice, Palms, Culver City and the Ballona Wetlands. In 1874, the family sold 861 acres encompassing most of the Ocean Park section of the Rancho to Anglo American Nancy A. Lucas and her family. They grew barley and other grains, and eventually subdivided the land into 47 lots. In 1875, the first lots sold were beach front property south of Pico Boulevard on the northwest side of the Lucas Tract. Upscale beach houses were built with extensive gardens by many Los Angeles notables, including Major Henry Hancock. A number of 10- and 20-acre farms were sold in the 1880s that produced vegetables for sale.<sup>14</sup>

The Ocean Park district's first general store and the first Presbyterian church in Santa Monica were constructed by the Vawter family in the 1870s. Originally from Indiana, the Vawter family members were major business and civic figures in Santa Monica during their life times. Williamson Dunn Vawter, the senior patriarch of the clan was one of the original

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<sup>13</sup> "Historic District Application," V2, 21-22; Wolf & Mader, 33; Ingersoll, 185-209, 211-243, 244-263, 317-325.

<sup>14</sup> "Historic District Application," V2, 21; Ingersoll, 244-263; Major Henry Hancock owned the land now the Park LaBrea Apartments and the LaBrea Tar Pits at Hancock Park in Los Angeles, where "a multitude of remains of prehistoric life forms [were] found in the thick, black, bubbling pools of sticky bitumen." "Thing to do in LA: LaBrea Tar Pits," From the Internet: <http://www.laokay.com/halac/RanchoLaBrea.htm>, 23 July 2014.



five Santa Monica town trustees in 1886. He developed the town's first public transportation system of horse-drawn streetcars and the small gauge tracks they followed, which first made semi-regular travel between the north side and south side of Santa Monica possible in 1887. His son, Edwin organized the first National Bank of Santa Monica and was an entrepreneur in the establishment of the fresh flower industry with flower fields located in the seaside district. He eventually sold subdivided tracts of the family's Ocean Park land, which were developed for residential use, and organized the City Water Company.<sup>15</sup>

Visionary and entrepreneur Abbott Kinney (1850–1920) and his partner Francis Ryan (d. 1898) bought large sections of waterfront property from the Vawter family in 1892, which they subdivided for sale as modest residential parcels (25 by 100 feet). They developed a pleasure pier, race track, auditorium and casino. By 1901 the small community they named Ocean Park (in 1895) had two hundred cottages, a post office and a few stores. In 1904 Kinney split from his partners and began construction on Venice-of-America, a rival amusement park and residence community to the south of Ocean Park, which opened in 1905. The entire coastline from Ocean Park to Venice became known as “the Coney Island of the West” and featured “plenty of opportunities for people watching.”<sup>16</sup>

The attractions and amusements situated in Ocean Park at the turn of the twentieth century made the district one of the most popular destinations in southern California and

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<sup>15</sup> “Historic District Application,” V2, 21-24; Ingersoll, 244-263, 265-287, 288-303, 317-325; Wolf & Mader, 20-21; Scott, 64-66.

<sup>16</sup> Patterned after the Venetian canals and buildings of its Italian namesake, the Venice community was originally part of Ocean Park. After the population grew and surrounding housing tracts were annexed, the community changed its name to Venice from Ocean Park in 1911, and then became part of the city of Los Angeles in 1925. “Historic District Application,” V2, 27-30; Ingersoll, 211-243, 245-263; Fred E. Basten, *Paradise by the Sea, Santa Monica Bay: A Pictorial History of Santa Monica Venice, Marina del Rey, Ocean Park, Pacific Palisades, Topanga & Malibu*, with an Introduction by Carolyn See, (Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey + Ingalls, 1997), 52, 59; Scott, 64-65.

provided work and tourist income to the community. As the community was oriented towards the beach, the residential development was clustered on the streets closest to the ocean. In the beginning of Ocean Park's development, the Fourth Street hill was the inland boundary of the residential area. The housing consisted of boarding houses, beach cottages, bungalow courts and hotels built in a variety of styles, including Craftsman, Spanish Colonial Revival and Mission Revival. Servicing permanent residents and visitors, Main and Pier became the commercial streets of the district. Banks, churches, libraries, schools, civic groups and local businesses emerged.<sup>17</sup>

### **African American Pioneers in the Santa Monica Bay Cities**

The first African Americans moved to Santa Monica in the late nineteenth century to join communities of Chinese, Japanese, old Californios and new Mexican immigrants, Anglo Americans and Jews, as well as immigrants of various other national backgrounds. The city of Santa Monica became one of the few seaside communities in the region with a historic African American community that continues today and still includes descendants of these early settlers. Drawn by opportunity as much as they were seduced by the lure of the sand and surf resort town, the early black Santa Monica pioneers came from beyond California to seek their dreams of "El Dorado," just like the other migrants to the area. Just as others trekked westward to widely advertised southern California, African Americans moved west on the railroads to the region and Santa Monica for employment opportunities, the climate, health, beauty, and a more liberated life style. The majority of these black newcomers from

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<sup>17</sup> "Historic District Application," V1, 3; Scott, 50-53.

the 1880s to post-World War II came to the Santa Monica area from southern U.S. states.

Like African Americans who moved to the northeastern part of the United States, those who moved to Santa Monica also acted to escape the worst of Jim Crow era racial restrictions.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the new African American émigrés who moved to Santa Monica in the first few decades of the twentieth century settled within walking distance of Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, the first African American church established in Santa Monica's Ocean Park district. The CME congregation was established in 1905, the first spiritual outpost established by the CME denomination in California. Hull House on Third Street in the north section of Santa Monica was the group's first meeting place. In 1908 an old school building that had been damaged by fire was purchased from the Santa Monica School Board to become the first CME church-owned building in California. The Washington School, built in the 1890s at Ashland Avenue and Fourth Street was moved to its location at 2001 Fourth Street (at Bay Street) on October 4, 1908, to serve as the new church. Phillips Chapel was remodeled in 1910 and the 1940s. The building has retained its historic Colonial Revival architectural style appearance.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Paula Scott, 7, 47, 50-51; Walter Nugent, *Into The West: The Story of Its People* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 212; James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1973; reprint 2003), xiii. The Jim Crow laws and customs relegating African Americans to the status of second class citizens operated primarily, but not exclusively in southern and border states, between 1877 to the mid-1960s. Segregation of the races was mandated, leading to treatment and accommodations that were usually inferior for black Americans to those provided to white Americans, and institutionalizing of many economic, educational and social disadvantages. In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court declared state sponsored school segregation unconstitutional. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 for the most part overruled the last remaining Jim Crow laws.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, 7, 47, 50-51; Othal Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the C.M.E. Church*, (Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House, 1985), 349; "Historic District Application For Third Street Neighborhood in Ocean Park, Santa Monica, California," Prepared by The Third Street Neighbors, 1990, V1, 3; City of Santa Monica, "Historic Resources Inventory Sheet for Phillips Chapel," Prepared by Leslie Heumann, 1992; and James W. Lungsford, *Looking at Santa Monica: The Ocean, The Sunset, the Hills and the Clouds* (Santa Monica, CA: 1993), 391890, 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930 U.S. Federal Census [database on-line], From the Internet: www.ancestry.com, 6 June 2008. As a result of this author's research and making city officials aware of the

At this time racial discrimination in the cities by the bay and in California generally was not as rigid as it would become by the 1920s and 1930s. Most African Americans lived in neighborhood clusters side by side with non-blacks within a few blocks of Phillips Chapel in Ocean Park, as well as in the sections that are now the sites of the Santa Monica Civic Center and part of Santa Monica High School campus. Farther north in Santa Monica, around Second to Sixth Streets, near Broadway, there was another neighborhood that included African Americans. This is where Calvary Baptist Church bought its first public meeting space from the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1920s. As early as the 1920s, African American families began to settle in the Pico neighborhood of Santa Monica, between about Fourteenth and Twenty-fourth Streets, between Pico and Santa Monica Boulevards. The First African Methodist Episcopal Church (of Santa Monica) also established its first meeting place in this neighborhood in 1921. To the south of Ocean Park, the community of Venice also had a cluster neighborhood of African American families.<sup>20</sup>

As in other parts of the United States in the early twentieth century most African Americans living in the Santa Monica area met limited occupational opportunities. Most were employed in service positions in domestic work, transportation, and the restaurant and hotel trades as maids, janitors, draymen and chauffeurs (with the rise in the use of the automobile, and the decline of the horse and wagon) due to America's discriminatory practices of the time period. Some were entrepreneurs running small enterprises such as

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site, Phillips Chapel CME Church was made a City of Santa Monica landmark on October 10, 2005 by the Landmarks Commission and the City Council. A small plaque noting this fact was placed near the main entry to the Church. The criterion for designation was based on the cultural significance of the site, rather than the building's architectural aesthetic.

<sup>20</sup> *1910, 1920 and 1930 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census* [database on-line], From the Internet: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), 6 June 2008; Robert L. Leake, "The History of Calvary Baptist Church," Prepared for Calvary Baptist Church Men & Women's Day Program, Santa Monica, California, 28 October 2001.

boarding houses, barber shops, beauty salons, hauling and trucking, and other service related businesses. A few established early businesses that serviced blacks as well as whites. Aside from a minister or two serving the African American congregations, professionals with formal education had few options for employment. Others with professional training and formal education like teachers would not gain employment opportunities in their trained professions in Santa Monica until the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

Santa Monica's African American pioneers developed social life and churches, and a sense of place as good standing members of the Santa Monica community generally, as well as in the African American community. They developed a sense of community, and were agents in community leadership and assertion against racist challenges they faced. For example when barber George W. Hunt died on August 18, 1916, a *Santa Monica Bay Outlook* newspaper article noted about his death and funeral services, he was "one of the oldest colored residents" and "a pioneer of the bay district [who had lived] in Santa Monica for a quarter of a century." The 1910 U.S. Census noted Hunt (age 49) worked in his own shop, and was a homeowner living with his wife Clare (48) and their children (Camelia [29], Tourseall [15] and George, Jr. [14]) and a boarder named LaVerne Floyd (age 7), at 1548 Seventh Street in the north Santa Monica neighborhood between Colorado Avenue and Broadway. The timely mention of his death and funeral services in the regional local

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Smith, "SM Blacks Develop Own Culture," *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B, 10B; Russell Snyder, "Centenarian generous slice of Americana Revisited," *Daily Breeze*, 6 November 1983, B1, B3; Scott, 55.

newspaper seems to acknowledge Hunt as a respected citizen among his white and black contemporaries of the Santa Monica community.<sup>22</sup>

Gilbert B. McCarroll was another early African American entrepreneur in Santa Monica. He owned a short-lived shoeshine parlor that serviced men and women on Pier Avenue in the Ocean Park district around 1907. The 1910 U.S. Census identifies McCarroll (age 38) as having been born in Tennessee, having the occupation of a bootblack and renting his place of business operation at 121 Pier Avenue. His wife, Martha (age 34, born in Ohio) was identified as being employed as a domestic. He and Martha rented their residence at 230 Pacific Street. When the shop closed he went to work as a doorman for the California Bank, and as a janitor. Later in 1928, he opened Gilbert's Grocery and Soda Fountain, a very popular spot located at Eighteenth and Broadway Streets. It, too, was short lived, lasting only a few years, but his shop was the center of many fond memories for African American residents of Santa Monica.<sup>23</sup>

Walter L. Gordon established Gordon Day Work Company in Ocean Park in 1902 specializing in house and window cleaning, and janitorial service. The business lasted at least eight years and at one time had a workforce of seventeen employees. A 1906 photograph taken in front of the Gordon office features some of the employees of differing ethnic groups with bicycles that have Gordon Day Work Company advertising signs situated in the open space of the bike frame. After moving to Los Angeles, Gordon worked for a time at the U.S.

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<sup>22</sup> "Pioneer Barber Passed Away," *Santa Monica Bay Outlook*, 19 August 1916, 1; George W. Hunt was originally from Virginia, and his wife Clare was from West Virginia. The three younger members of the Hunt household were identified as being born in California in the U.S. Census. *1910 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census* [database on-line], From the Internet: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), 6 June 2015; *Santa Monica City Directory 1912*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975; *1910 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census* [database on-line], From the Internet: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), 6 June 2015; *Santa Monica, Venice, Ocean Park Directory 1911*, 65; *Bay Cities Directory 1928*, 333.

Post Office as a letter carrier, and successfully tried his hand at other business ventures. After leaving the post office in 1923 he organized the Walter L. Gordon Company, a very successful real estate firm headquartered on Central Avenue in Los Angeles. His son, Walter L. Gordon, Jr. would grow up to be a very successful attorney with his office on Central Avenue for a time in the same building as the offices of *California Eagle*, the oldest African American newspaper in Los Angeles. Early Santa Monica residents asserted full citizenship and contested derogatory treatment.<sup>24</sup>

When Charles E.A. Brunson arrived in Santa Monica in 1905 from Americus, Georgia he had little formal education. Yet as an entrepreneur he worked to achieve upward mobility for himself and his family, and became an advocate for racial social justice. In her 1919 book, *Negro Trail Blazers of California*, historian Delilah Beasley noted Brunson took successful action to have an objectionable, derogatory sign referencing African Americans removed from the Santa Monica Pier. Early on he earned a living with a horse and wagon hauling construction material for builders and carrying tourists' luggage from the train stations in Los Angeles to the luxury hotels along the Santa Monica shoreline. The trips to and from the downtown Los Angeles train stations took a half a day each way, as Pico and Olympic Boulevards, the only thoroughfares to connect Santa Monica with Los Angeles were mostly unpaved. He would later in his life work in maintenance and janitorial services.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Walter L. Gordon, Esq. Collection/William Beverly Collection, University of California, Los Angeles Special Collections; *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who 1930-1931*, Published by The California Eagle Publishing Company, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Santa Monica Historic Society, Oral History Program: Interview with Donald Augusta Brunson, interviewed by Barbara Wurf, February 23, 1991, 1-5; Beasley, 303; *1920 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census* [database on-line], From the Internet: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), 6 June 2015.

Charles lived with his wife Selena McDonald Brunson and their fifty chickens and two horses on Fifth Street, then a small dirt road five blocks from the beach. At the time, this was a neighborhood of shotgun houses and other small vertical wood board cottages. Some of these houses had been moved by horse power to this area by residents. The majority of these structures had been makeshift ocean front vacation cottages with no plumbing or electricity. This is also where the Brunson's two sons, Donald (1907) and Vernon (1909) were born.<sup>26</sup>

The Brunsons divorced by the time Donald began school. The elder Brunson moved to Venice, and married a woman named Theresa and began another family (according to the 1920 U.S. Census). Selena and the boys stayed on at the Fifth Street residence. They initially used kerosene lamps for light. The bathroom arrangement was in a room in the back of the house, seats over two holes emptied into a cesspool. At the time there was no water meter, but service was delivered for a fee of one dollar per month. Eventually Selena saved enough money to bring electricity to the house. There was a wood-burning stove used for cooking and heating.<sup>27</sup>

Selena supplemented her child support payments with work as a piece ironer at Gallow's, a domestic hand laundry on Ocean Park Boulevard. Being a minister's daughter, she saw to it her sons attended the only African American church in town at Phillips Chapel. The family later attended other churches in Santa Monica, including the Anglo Methodist

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<sup>26</sup> Santa Monica Historic Society, Interview with Donald Augusta Brunson, interviewed by Barbara Wurf, February 23, 1991, 1-5; Ernest Marquez, *Santa Monica Beach: A Collector's Pictorial History*, (Santa Monica, CA: Angel City Press, 2004), 104, 108. Located in this area of the Brunson's homesite today are Santa Monica High School and the Civic Center complex.

<sup>27</sup> Brunson Interview by Wurf, 1-5.



Sunday School near Arizona Avenue and Lincoln Boulevard. In the 1920s after the First African American Episcopal Church of Santa Monica was established inland at Michigan Avenue and Eighteenth Street, they remained active members there for the duration of their life times.<sup>28</sup>

Several other pioneering Santa Monica African American families resided in the neighborhood where the Brunson family lived, establishing a community sense of place that they would assert against challenges arising before them as individuals and as a group. One of the patriarchs of the Boyd family, Emmitt, came to Santa Monica after his military discharge in San Francisco following World War I. He had a team of horses and mules he used to grade streets and haul luggage to and from the downtown Los Angeles train depots. Other members of the family followed his lead and joined him out west. His brother-in-law, James Maxwell, came soon after with his family. Maxwell worked with another brother-in-law as a plasterer. A graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and a former school teacher and principal, he could not get hired as such in Santa Monica. Maxwell helped to start the Santa Monica-Venice Chapter of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) around 1920. He served as president of the local chapter for seven years. By 1920 the total population of Santa Monica had grown almost 50 percent since 1910 to 15,252 people, as had the African American community, growing from 191 to 282 members.<sup>29</sup>

In Venice, Arthur L. Reese (1883–1963) and his family were pioneering African American settlers. Originally from Louisiana, Reese came to Los Angeles as a Pullman

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<sup>28</sup> Brunson Interview by Wurf, 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B; Snyder, *Daily Breeze*, 6 November 1983, B1-3; U.S. Census.

porter in 1902. The place was appealing to him, and he decided to stay. Reese heard about Abbot Kinney and the building of Venice of America, just south of Ocean Park. In 1904 he rode the streetcar out to Venice to see what kind of economic opportunities might be available for him with the Kinney operation. He started a shoeshine business, then a maintenance service that thrived. Reese then became the maintenance supervisor for the Kinney properties. He would eventually have charge of decorations for the Kinney facilities. He later was involved with other business ventures in Venice, as well. Under his supervision was a work force of a few dozen people, many of them family members that he recruited to move to California to work with him. Members of the Reese, Tabor and other families who worked for Arthur Reese's or Abbott Kinney's enterprises were some of the other first African Americans to live in Venice.<sup>30</sup>

Reese had other notable achievements in his business career and civic life. He was appointed to the election board and became a member of the Venice Chamber of Commerce in 1920. During this time period it was not a common occurrence in the United States for an African American businessman to be a member of an Anglo organization of this type. Another of his civic accomplishments was being a founding member of the Crescent Bay Lodge Number 19, a Masons Lodge in the city of Santa Monica formed in 1910. He also served as the charitable and benevolent activities organization leader, the Lodge Worshipful Master, in the 1940s. The Lodge today continues to exist at a site on Eighteenth Street and Broadway that was purchased in the 1910s.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Carolyn Elayne Alexander, *Abbott Kinney's Venice-of-America, The Golden Years: 1905-1920*, Volume 1, (Los Angeles: Westside Genealogical Society, 1991), 1-5, 215; John Tabor, Las Vegas resident/retired Venice, CA business, interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander, 1-5, 215.

Rev. James A. Stout (1875-1932) began his tenure as the first minister of Phillips Chapel CME Church in the Ocean Park District of Santa Monica in 1909. He eventually became the presiding elder of the region. He was involved with the formation of several CME churches in the West. Rev. Stout moved to southern California from Texas accompanied by his wife, Mary, their daughter Bernice, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Ary McReynolds in 1908. Rev. and Mrs. Stout were both graduates of African American colleges in Texas, where they both trained as teachers. During his lifetime it was said of Rev. Stout that: "His...insight [is] keen, his spirit fearless, his heart generous and his personality [is] engaging." In addition to these admirable qualities, Rev. Stout was a handsome, physically imposing presence at over six feet tall. It was said he possessed a deep, musical bass voice. As the first minister of the first CME church on the Pacific Slope, all these attributes ascribed to Rev. Stout would have been assets in building church memberships and community.<sup>32</sup>

Phillips Chapel's congregation had formed in 1905 when Santa Monica African American residents and a CME church emissary facilitated this development. In its expansion, the church denomination was endeavoring to keep up with emigration of African Americans from the South. The new church became an early anchor of the already established and emerging community of African Americans in Santa Monica with its Ocean Park building purchase in 1908. It created a formalized institutional space where African Americans could shape community to address their social, spiritual, political, cultural and leisure needs. The Stout family and several extended family members made Ocean Park their

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<sup>32</sup> Phillips Chapel CME Church File Papers, 2005; James A. Stout, *Pills and Pearls: A Collection of Sermons, Lectures and Addresses*, 1919, "The Author" section, no page number, Cristyne Lawson Collection (copy in the author's possession); Cristyne Lawson, Santa Monica, California resident, interviews by author, 17 February 2006, June 2009 & 6 November 2010.

permanent home. The members of the Stout family and their extended clan are among the people memorialized in the lovely stained glass windows of Phillips Chapel CME Church. The families and extended clans of the Stouts, the Lawsons, the McCarrolls, the Brunsons, the Reeses, the Tabors, the Gordons, the Jacksons, the Spauldings, the Boyds, the Maxwells, the Carters, the Quinns, and others, formed the community that played an important role in drawing African Americans from across the southern California region and beyond for leisure at the Bay Street beach in the city of Santa Monica.<sup>33</sup>

Paralleling other places around the U.S., in Santa Monica African American social life was centered on family, the church, evolving social and civic organizations, civil rights groups, and the limited number of public places and private enterprises allowing them patronage. In these early decades new Santa Monica residents developed a beach culture in Ocean Park, this meant for recreation activities African Americans could only comfortably visit certain beach areas, swim at municipal pools on the day before the water was changed, or attend movies, concerts and thespian presentations at selective theaters without being relegated to segregated seats.<sup>34</sup>

Following World War I the population in the region accelerated. In Los Angeles the population grew from 102,479 in 1900 to 576,673 in 1920, and in Santa Monica from 3,057 to 15,252 during the same period. In 1920, although the African American population in Santa Monica was only roughly 300, their population in Los Angeles was 15,579, up from

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<sup>33</sup> Lakey, 349.

<sup>34</sup> Lonnie Bunch, "The Great State for the Negro," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 142-143; Flammig, 4; Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B.

2,131 in 1900. Santa Monica's unique relationship as a playground to Los Angeles brought many new tourists, day-trippers and residence to Santa Monica from all walks of life.<sup>35</sup>

As Euro-Americans from southern states became more entrenched in California and the African American population increased in visibility, affluence and assertiveness in their pursuit of leisure activities, so too did the institutionalized restrictions and racism that whites foisted upon them. In the first few decades of the twentieth century racism in Los Angeles and Santa Monica was much more subtle than it was in its blatant, state-enforced version in southern U.S. states. Many obvious barriers to equal opportunities were dismantled in California. It was unpredictable where African Americans would encounter discrimination. The state was more diverse than the black-white binary due to the presence of multiple racial and ethnic groups. As in Los Angeles, though not always stated explicitly in Santa Monica, African Americans learned from experience they were unwelcome at many hotels, restaurants, theaters, and other establishments. This unpredictability of discrimination and the presence of multiple racial and ethnic groups in the West experiencing racial restrictions in different ways, at different locals is something that scholars began exploring and to understand in the 1990s. Due to this unfamiliarity with the distinctiveness of the regional history of Los Angeles, California and the American West in general, many observers overlook that the Los Angeles regional experience of the Jim Crow era has a narrative that has similarities and at the same time important differences from what occurred in the U.S. South, Northeast and Great Lakes regions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census; Basten, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Bunch, "The Great State for the Negro," 138; Scott, 55-56; For examination of the various ethnic and racial groups and classes and their historical relationships over time in different locations of the North American West, see Richard White, *It's your misfortune and none of my own: a history of the American West* (Norman, 210

## **African Americans Beach Usage and Place Making at the Santa Monica Bay Site Derogatorily Called the “Inkwell”**

In the first decades of the twentieth century African Americans from Santa Monica and Los Angeles enjoyed congregating around the end of Pico Boulevard, north of the site of the Crystal Plunge, which was destroyed by a storm in 1905. They were relatively free to enjoy the shoreline south three quarters of a mile to Ocean Park Boulevard. At this time most of the tourism activity other than walking along Ocean Front Promenade from the Santa Monica to Venice Pier was about a half mile to the north and south of the Pico Boulevard area of central Santa Monica and Ocean Park. This area of Pico Boulevard near the shore was not so densely packed with development and people as it would become with the population growth that brought new waves of tourists and residents to all of Los Angeles County, and specifically Santa Monica. By the early 1920s when the exclusive white beach clubs began to rise near the foot of Pico Boulevard, the site remembered today as the principal gathering place for African American beachgoers during the Jim Crow era emerged at the area around Bay and Bicknell Streets as its hub in Ocean Park, less than a quarter of a mile south of Pico Boulevard.<sup>37</sup>

There is evidence of the African American community’s enjoyment at other Santa Monica Bay beach locations in North Beach and Play del Rey, in addition to the Ocean Park before the 1920s. Their usage of these sites appears to have stopped after a few years, at least

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OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) & Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines, The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994/2009).

<sup>37</sup> Basten, 99; Marquez, 169, 172, 174-180; Scott, 62; Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, California, 2005), 271-272; “Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House, Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach,” *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922; U.S. Census. There were few other recreational water sites around the nation that were called “the Inkwell.” (See page 36 of this dissertation for more explanation of these locations).

for large social gatherings. A 1908 *The Daily Outlook*, front page news feature headline read “Picnic of Colored People on July 27” to celebrate Emancipation at Santa Monica’s North Beach (north of the Santa Monica Pier), the most popular “beach center for tourists, holiday crowds and ‘hometown’ parties.” African American William Tecumseh Simpson, the Santa Monica pound master (for dogs) was the promoter of the Monday event, which appears to have been scheduled on an off-peak day when a smaller number of white beachgoers would likely have visited the beach. Several hundred African American guests were expected, and some of the activities planned included swimming, and games and races of several types on the sand during the daylight hours. Later in the evening at the North Beach Auditorium a variety of dancing style contests were to take place, with prizes offered to those who did the best cakewalk, waltz, two-step, and buck and wing routines. “Grand” entertainment for the night included “Leonard’s military band of Los Angeles, a colored organization numbering about twenty pieces and singing by the Glenwood Quartet, a negro quartet of some note in this section.” Advertised in the local Santa Monica community and bay cities’ general newspaper, this promotion invited an audience that would not have been exclusively the African American consumers engaging with leisure, beach public space and private accommodations in Santa Monica in 1908.<sup>38</sup>

Most of *The Daily Outlook*’s audience would have been white consumers. As its July 10 announcement and a July 25, 1908 event-promotion article headlined, “Darkies Are to Have Big Time” suggests, the venture intended to attract white as well as African American customers. The latter article’s text noted the North Beach Auditorium gallery would be

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<sup>38</sup> “Picnic of Colored People on July 27,” *The Daily Outlook*, 10 July 1908, 1; “Darkies Are To Have Big Time,” *The Daily Outlook*, 25 July 1908, 1; Basten, 26; Marquez, 25.

reserved “for the white folk to witness the cake walk and dancing.” The use of this demeaning and disrespectful name, “darkies” referencing African Americans’ skin color, and to white folks being welcome in the auditorium gallery for the evening activities are curious, confusing and exploitive, all at the same time. The evening activities of this Emancipation “celebration” appear to have been aimed at divergent promoter goals and audience expectations. These divergent goals accepted African American presence and cultural initiative, as it eroticized, demeaned, and de-politicized it. Where was the rest of the community’s commitment to national remembrance of emancipation? These other celebrations were not visually apparent in the newspaper’s advertising of the North Beach African American event.<sup>39</sup>

During this time period, the term, “darkies,” was acceptable among whites as a patronizing and racist term for African Americans. It was not considered offensive, at least not by most white people. This term commonly used in minstrel representations was far from benign, as it promoted public perceptions of African Americans as uneducated, ever-cheerful subordinates and buffoons, which conformed to the dominant ideology of white supremacy in the U.S. Culture observer Paul Von Blum asserts that these type of derogatory names and imagery appealed to whites who thought of them as “humorous depictions of obvious racial truths,” and who “rarely encountered contrary images of African American dignity.” The Auditorium gallery seats reserved for white people would have allowed them separation from

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<sup>39</sup> “Picnic of Colored People on July 27,” *The Daily Outlook*, 10 July 1908, 1; “Colored Picnic Will Be A Big One,” *The Daily Outlook*, 24 July 1908, 1; “Darkies Are To Have Big Time,” *The Daily Outlook*, 25 July 1908, 1.



the music, dancing and socializing on the floor below to view ordinary African Americans enjoying themselves as an entertainment spectacle like a minstrel show viewed in a theatre.<sup>40</sup>

If pitched to whites as a consumable spectacle, Simpson's Santa Monica North Beach event promoted as an Emancipation celebration would also have been a stage on the sand and in the Auditorium for African American social practices and spatial imaginary, and for developing their agency in creation of new opportunities and life chances, including leisure. Black urban musical forms and dancing were featured in the evening for *all* North Beach Auditorium customers' enjoyment, even if the space was racialized and spatialized. No sources are currently available showing that Simpson promoted the event in Los Angeles, which he would probably have needed to do to attract a "large" African American audience. The available sources provide evidence sufficient only to speculate about the African American promoter Simpson's (maybe with partners not mentioned in the newspaper articles) rationale for his event promotion tactics. If Simpson was motivated by money to provide a good time for as many people as possible who could afford to purchase tickets he was hedging his bets by diversifying the audience outreach to African Americans, whites and anybody else that read the bay cities newspaper or heard by word of month about the event. He and any associates would have wanted to sell tickets to as many patrons as the venue could manage, to cover the event production costs, hopefully make a profit, and develop an audience following for future events.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Picnic of Colored People on July 27," *The Daily Outlook*, 10 July 1908, 1; "Colored Picnic Will Be A Big One," *The Daily Outlook*, 24 July 1908, 1; "Darkies Are To Have Big Time," *The Daily Outlook*, 25 July 1908, 1; Paul Von Blum, J.D., "African American Visual Representation: From Repression to Resistance," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, no. 8 (December 2012): 41-42, 45.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to working as Santa Monica's pound master and being a promoter, William Tecumseh Simpson may also have been an entertainer of some sort. He was obviously entrepreneurial; making the most of

On the south side of Santa Monica Bay at the Playa del Rey ocean front community, south of Venice and Bellona Creek, African Americans' leisure outings held in June 1914 were advertised in the *California Eagle*. "Railroad Day! Universal Conclave" was set for the resort area's New Germania Park on Thursday, June 4, 1914. Advertised on a newspaper page dedicated to news specifically for black railroad and affiliate workers (porters, waiters, chefs, maids, red caps, hotel men, etc.), the event was similar to those that the employees of the Southern Pacific held for several years at the same location. The difference was the African American workers who promoted their Railroad Day did not have a corporate sponsor covering the event costs, and it was advertised for African American industry workers and the general public to attend. This sepia group's beach frolic was advertised in the newspaper, hence open to all who wanted to pay the twenty-cent admission fee and the twenty-cent special round trip Pacific Electric Railway transportation fare. The event offered ocean swimming and various games on the sand, barbecue, fish dinners and assorted refreshments, and dancing and entertainment in the Pavilion into the evening. In the same newspaper on May 30, 1914 in the "Local Happenings" column, the promoters extended "a complimentary invitation" to the delegates of the Masonic Grand Lodge and the Eastern Star fraternal groups meeting in Pasadena to attend the outing on June 4 at Playa del Rey.<sup>42</sup>

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his skills and the opportunities that came before him. *The Daily Outlook* featured articles about two minstrel shows Simpson was a part of after the July 27, 1908 Emancipation celebration. These event promotion articles appear to be geared towards attracting white consumers. A Thursday, August 6, 1908 article headline and sub-headline read, "Minstrel Show Monday, Genuine Colored People Will Appear at North Beach Auditorium in Old Time Minstrelsy—Wm. T. Simpson One of 'Em.'" This article referenced the show date as Monday, August 10, 1908. Another article in *The Daily Outlook* on Thursday, August 13, 1908 about an event being held that evening with Simpson involvement featured the headline and sub-headline, "Minstrel Show By Real Darkies, Simpson and His Colored Friends Will Give a Performance Tonight at the North Beach Auditorium—Big Time for the Colored People."

<sup>42</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century for several years, in addition to being appreciated for its the ocean front access, Playa Del Rey was known for its wooden track auto racing at the Motordrome which burned

The event was a success in every way, from the numbers drawn to the demonstration of orderly leisure it exemplified to all, to the cooperation of public authorities in suppressing harassment. J. Allen Reese reported in the *California Eagle* on June 13, 1914, "Railroad Day was celebrated at the Beach by way of a picnic at Playa Del Rey. Quite a crowd was in attendance, the majority from Los Angeles." In the same *California Eagle* issue in the "Local Happenings" column, Matthew T. Laws, the president of the Pacific Amusement Club promoting the event declared it a success and publicly thanked the Venice Police Chief Sebastian and officers, along with the Pacific Electric Railway for their excellent service. Laws also added extra praise for Chief Sebastian's assistance with removing a few undesirables. He further noted the emerging battle against nationally surging typecasting of criminality to malign African Americans, suggesting that as they claimed beach space it was a deliberate demonstration of civic respectability and right to the place.

On this occasion we proved to the public that we were not law breakers and through the assistance of Chief Sebast[i]an the few [rowdies] who followed us up were soon notified that they were not wanted.

Everything was harmonious and every participant spent a most enjoyable day, for which we most heartily thank the forces already mentioned.<sup>43</sup>

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down on August 11, 1913, and was not rebuilt. Additionally some of the first airplane flying exhibits were held nearby due to the location of the emerging airplane industry, including Hughes Aircraft and Miner Field (the site of Los Angeles International Airport). The Railroad Day event promoters Bernard F. Spivey (porter/Red Cap), Nicolas W. Gordon (clerk) and Matthew T. Laws (porter) all worked at railroad or affiliated companies. "Famous Race Course Burns," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 1913, II4; "From Motordrome to Sugar," *California Outlook*, 29 August 1914, 16; *Los Angeles City Directory 1914; 1920 U.S. Census*; "Local Happenings" column/Pacific Coast Amusement Club ad and Pacific Coast Amusement Club leaders invitation to fraternal groups to Railroad Day, *California Eagle*, 23 May 1914; "Railroad Men's Picnic: Southern Pacific Employees Will Frolic at Playa Del Rey and Context for Hundred Prizes," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1907, II7; "Pier Repairs Finished, All Damage Wrought by Recent High Tides at Playa Del Rey Has Been Overcome," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1908, II8.

<sup>43</sup> "Railroad Day! Universal Conclave"/Pacific Coast Amusement Club ad, *California Eagle*, 23 May 1914; J. Allen Reese, "Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News" column/Railroad Day mention and "Local

The available sources provide evidence sufficient only to speculate on the actions and identity of the rowdy people. Laws' seemed to have felt obligated to make a public explanation to the African American community via the article in the *California Eagle*. Whether black celebrants who challenged Laws' intentions of "respectable" proceedings in joining the event or rowdy whites tried to limit African Americans access to the beach through intimidation or violence, Laws' comments reported that the event planners and guests at the public beach accommodations kept the use of the beach "harmonious" and had local authorities' support. Whether his reference was to rowdy blacks or racist (rowdy) whites, Laws was reassessing his potential customers for future events and African American consumers generally, that they were safe from being harassed when visiting the public Playa del Rey park and ocean front spaces—both from rowdy acts, and as an important subtext, from adversarial policing. In this same June 13, 1914 newspaper issue discussing the success and challenges of their Railroad Day Conclave on June 4, Laws and his associates also had an advertisement for their next event. The promoters' Emancipation Day Carnival was scheduled for the following Wednesday to Thursday, June 18 and 19, 1914.<sup>44</sup>

Although articles in the *California Eagle* spoke of the successful Railroad Day Conclave, the popular media outlet *The Daily Outlook* covering activities in the Santa Monica bay cities was not laudatory. A June 24, 1914 front page headline and sub-headline read, "Don't Want Picnics, Citizens Protest to Venice Trustees Against Negro Gatherings at Del Rey." This article from the "citizens" asserted "a protest [would] be lodged with the

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Happenings" column/Pacific Coast Amusement Club leaders discuss successful Railroad Day event, *California Eagle*, 13 June 2014.

<sup>44</sup> "Emancipation Day...Carnival, June 18 and 19," *California Eagle*, 13 June 1914.

Venice trustees against the negroes holding picnics at Playa Del Rey.” *The Outlook* correspondent noted, “During the past year large numbers of colored folks picnicked at Playa Del Rey and caused, according to the Venice police, a great deal of trouble.” In closing the article asserted, “It is exceedingly doubtful under the state law if the negroes can be prevented from picnicking at the beach.” This statement appears to be a begrudging recognition of African Americans rightful presence on the beach, even as it implied that their presence attracted “trouble.” The writer also implies “trouble” came from the law enforcing their rightful presence. After reading both media outlets’ narratives about African American usage of Playa Del Rey, *The Daily Outlook’s* acknowledgement of the state of California laws about beach access for all citizens and patterns of history associated with the Jim Crow era, the available sources provide evidence only to conclude that the rowdy people may have been racist whites using harassment and subterfuge schemes to inhibit African American usage of the public recreation spaces in the Playa del Rey community, hence causing the problems the Police assisted in stopping.<sup>45</sup>

Development pressures (including some simultaneous residential building and oil drilling at the water’s edge, and the emerging aviation industry) as well as attempts at racial harassment and exclusion elsewhere were probably the major factors driving African American gatherings to Santa Monica’s Ocean Park shoreline from other sites in the region from the 1910s—late 1920s. Additionally natural disasters such as flooding, and other disasters such as fire destroyed or damaged the Playa del Rey’s tourist facilities in the 1910s—early 1920s. As the regional population increased, in Ocean Park racial exclusion and development pressure appear to have pushed the African American residential community

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<sup>45</sup> “Don’t Want Picnics,” *The Daily Outlook*, 24 June 1914, 1.

further inland, and their ocean front gathering place south from its earliest incarnation centered at Pico Boulevard. But the African American community's leisure space at Ocean Park persisted. Black social networking, community building, cultural traditions and economic development around leisure created this and other sites, marking a space of black identity on the regional landscape and social space.

There were more confrontations and assaults across decades, some of which turned violent, aimed to bar African Americans from public beaches. Activists mounted legal challenges to these discriminatory practices endeavored by whites. One such incident involved Arthur Valentine, a chauffeur from Los Angeles out with his family and friends, who was beaten and shot by three Sheriff deputies on Memorial Day, May 20, 1920. It was alleged Valentine and his extended family trespassed on private ranch land adjacent to Topanga Canyon at the ocean front. Other accounts suggest the African American group crossed into an area frequented by white beachgoers, at the said site several miles north of the city limits of Santa Monica. A Grand Jury indicted the Sheriff's deputies involved for assault with a deadly weapon with intent to do bodily harm. After several trial delays, the case was ultimately settled in January 1923, with the case against all three deputies being dismissed due to insufficient evidence. This case suggests the inconsistency among authorities in enforcing the rights and privileges of all citizens of the state of African American descent. Further it indicates a complicated class- as well as race-based response toward both African American assertion and rights, and the ignoring of white "rowdy" disorder and perpetration of violence towards African Americans.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Flaming, 183-184; 202-204, 272, 275; From 1893 to 1923 California statutes and legislation were instituted extending to ". . . all citizens within the jurisdiction of this State . . . the full and equal

Even with such white violence and attempts to evict African Americans from public beach recreational space outside the Santa Monica city limits, social mentions in the *California Eagle* featured descriptions of beach excursions some African Americans continued to enjoy in these places. A June 1924 party celebrating the fifth birthday of little Hugh Macbeth, Jr. and twenty of his small friends held at Venice Beach was discussed. “Lunch on the Beach” was the 1925 heading topping a social mention description of a “delightful lunch on the sands of Palisades Beach.” Dr. G.K. Offut and a party of seven women and girls entertained themselves “with an auto drive over the Mulholland Drive and through Topanga Canyon” before reaching the beach for their lunch. From the description it appears the Offut’s party enjoyed themselves without any problems at the area where Arthur Valentine and his family endured white violence and intimidation in an attempt to evict them from the beach near Topanga Canyon.<sup>47</sup>

African American vacation leisure did occur unabated at Orange County’s Huntington Beach as different social items in the *California Eagle* from the Scott family and friends, and the Brooks family in 1925 mentions. More social news “At Huntington Beach” appeared in the same July 10 issue. Charlotta Bass, managing editor of the *Eagle* was

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accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, restaurants, hotels, eating-houses, barber-shops, bath-houses, theaters, skating-rinks, and all other places of public accommodation or amusement, subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to all citizens." Milnor E. Gleaves, "Civil Rights: Extent of California Statute and Remedies Available for Its Enforcement," *California Law Review*, V. 30, No. 5 (July, 1942), 563-564; Ronald P. Klein, "The California Equal Rights Statutes in Practice," *Stanford Law Review*, V. 10, No. 2 (March, 1958), 253-273; "The Valentine Case On Trail," *California Eagle*, 11 March 1922; "Law Delays the Valentine Case," *California Eagle*, 22 April 1922; "The Valentine Case," *California Eagle*, Editorial Section, 13 May 1922; "Special Policemen and Colored Deputy Sheriff Lock Horns Up in Topanga Canyon Over Bagatelle," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 1 June 1920; and "Suspension of Deputy Sheriff Cooper Comes As Aftermath of Recent Fight in Topanga Canyon," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 11 June 1920.

<sup>47</sup> Social Intelligence, Heard or Seen in Passing column, *California Eagle*, 27 June 1924, 6; "Lunch on Beach," Social Intelligence, Heard or Seen in Passing column, *California Eagle*, 11 September 1925, 5.

described as “the weekend guest of Mrs. Ella Cassells...at beautiful Huntington Beach,” where the two took a Sunday afternoon sightseeing trip to Newport and Balboa Beaches hosted by Mrs. Lois Best. It was noted Mrs. Cassells had made her “permanent home” in the community since its founding in 1909. The item went on to say she was the owner of “some of the most valuable property there, and [was] one of the most highly respected citizens in that city.” The 1910 U.S. Census lists Mrs. Ella L. Cassells and her two brothers (William and Henry) as the only “Mulattoes” living on Alhambra Avenue in the Orange County beach city. Before the 1920s oil boom and after the dream of Huntington Beach being developed as the Pacific Coast version of Atlantic City passed, Cassells and her relatives would have been some of the few recognized African American property owners living in this south coast Orange County area in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup>

Members of the African American community in their planning of group activities that included ocean front visits were discreetly publicly mindful, but undeterred by attempts to harass, molest, intimidate or restrict them from southern California public beaches by self-appointed guardians of white supremacy as the decade progressed. On the front page of the *California Eagle*, a 1927 announcement inviting needy mothers and children to participate in the sixth annual summer camp of the Urban League to be held at Pacific Palisades carefully stated that guests would be on a private camp ground. Noted also was the short trek from the camp to “a portion of the beach owned and controlled by the Pacific Palisades” camp group which could be used by camp visitors for beach parties and swimming. The camp organizers

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<sup>48</sup> “At Huntington Beach,” Social Intelligence, Heard or Seen In Passing Column, *California Eagle*, 10 July 1925, 5. 1910 & 1920 U.S. Census Enumeration Sheet each the Cassells family member’s race was listed as “Mulatto.” In the 1930 U.S. Census Enumeration Sheet, Cassells’s race is listed as a “Negro.” “City of Huntington Beach History,” From the Internet: <http://www.huntingtonbeachca.gov/about/history/>, 30 June 2014. In 2010, the demographic state of affairs had not changed. African Americans were less than one percent of the Huntington Beach population.



were informing their supporters and potential guests, camper consumers would not face the humiliation of racial discrimination, racial epithets or have to protect their children from possible white violence in using this recreation space outside the city limits.<sup>49</sup>

Another incident demonstrates both effective resistance to harassment and the deterrence that authority-claiming harassment could have. The 1937 story under the headline, “Attempt To Bluff Race Bathers From California Beach” in *The Pittsburgh Courier* told of an African American family beach party being threateningly approached by the local Standard Trailer Park’s white owner R.A. Stephens. He attempted to evict them from the Pacific Palisades beach frontage where they planned to hold a nighttime wiener bake. The group selected the Palisades site because it was the only place at that time allowing campers to build fires at night. Stephens approached the group displaying a Deputy Sheriff’s badge, and commanding, “Don’t stop here, you’ll have to move on.” A former Los Angeles Police detective Shannon S. Wylie among the group led the party’s defiance by informing Stephens that the law said their group was within their rights to use the beach. Stephens threatened the group with allusions to violence to make them leave if they did not move on peacefully of their own volition. To Stephens’s threat “the colored citizens fearlessly answered, ‘Use any means you see fit,’” noted the article. Once Stephens realized this group’s position would not be changing in his favor, he was described as hurrying off to harass another Negro party pulling up in a truck some distance away. The conversation between the parties was far enough away that Wylie and his party could not hear it. Harry Levette of the Associated

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<sup>49</sup> This campground described would have been owned by whites who were opening it to African American guests. “Pacific Palisades Sight For 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Camp Of Urban League,” *California Eagle*, 12 August 1927, 1.

Negro Press (APN) reported the Wylie party saw the other African American group drive away after their interaction with Stephens.<sup>50</sup>

As tenuous as Stephens' harassment proved upon resistance, the second group's departure demonstrated the deterrent effect racist assertions of authority could have. The article described "Los Angeles Negro citizens" as calling on both city and county officials to investigate this attempt at establishing racial restrictions on a Los Angeles County public beach. They asked officials "to take definite steps in the matter and warn the guilty parties that they, as citizens, must not be molested." Associate Negro Press articles were distributed to several African American newspapers around the United States including those in Los Angeles, illustrating the desire of African American citizens to know about what was happening in the broader struggle for racial equality and access to public accommodations in various cities and towns in which they lived and might visit as part of the long civil rights movement.<sup>51</sup>

These publicly reported vignettes of white intimidation and ordinary African American consumers' contestation of racial restrictions at southern California beaches represent the spectrum of experiences that defined the possibilities and limits of action in the local struggle to dismantle racial discrimination. From the initial leisure claims to the places, ordinary citizen consumers fought through the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s against predominant practices of racists for the right to use the spaces. Some elements of both new assertions of racism and contestation occurred. The level of demand for power over, possession and use of

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<sup>50</sup> Harry Levette, "Attempt To Bluff Race Bathers From California Beach," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 August 1937, 2. The story, "Jim Crow Reported on Los Angeles Beach" was also carried on the front page of Los Angeles' *New Age Dispatch*, 23 July 1927. Most African American, Los Angeles Police Department officers worked out of Newton Station during this era.

<sup>51</sup> Levette, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 August 1937, 2; Wolcott, 3.

recreation space varied with individuals and their particular psychological make up, along with the particulars of the laws, and the dynamics of each leisure location and social situation. But generally, the unpredictable nature of white reception to African Americans at beaches in southern California's outlying exurban coastal areas probably influenced black Angelenos greater use of Santa Monica's Ocean Park beach front as a congregation place as the decade of the 1920s and the twentieth century edged forward.<sup>52</sup>

White reference to the Ocean Park beach as "the Inkwell" did not deter African American claim and development of the site. History suggests white Americans probably first used the term, "the Inkwell," to describe more than one leisure site around the United States that African Americans were associated with during the Jim Crow era. The name, the Inkwell was as a derogatory term referencing the "blackness" of skin color. *Some* African Americans and later their allies, took agency and repurposed the offensive term to describe these places they frequented and enjoyed, transforming the hateful moniker into a badge of pride or belonging. The name, Inkwell, has not universally been used or recognized by African Americans and their allies for any of these leisure locations, with some refusing to use the name at all.<sup>53</sup>

Keeping in mind patterns of history associated with the Jim Crow era and the rise in visibility of African Americans living in the region and visiting this beach, it can be surmised

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<sup>52</sup> My analysis is informed by Victoria Wolcott's assessment of African Americans' demand for the right to use recreation and public space was about power and possession, Wolcott, 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Jill Nelson, *Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans At Home on an Island*, (New York, New York: Doubleday, 2005), 131. As discussed in Chapter 2 there is another beach area historically utilized by African Americans on the U.S. eastern coast on the island of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts called "the Inkwell." There were also a few other recreational water sites around the nation that were lesser known nationally that were called "the Inkwell" for the same reasons as the two locations which are more well known that are discussed in this dissertation. These same locations were also called other derogatory terms referring to "blackness" of skin color of visitor users.

the Santa Monica site began to be referred to by *some* whites and *some* African Americans as the Inkwell by the 1920s. In interviews the author conducted with African Americans who enjoyed this Santa Monica leisure space during the Jim Crow era, the term, “the Inkwell,” was not universally used to describe this Ocean Park beach area. Many of these African Americans with lived experience at this site pre-1960 called it the Bay Street beach. Further, no articles in the local newspapers (African American or general population media) of the day the author has reviewed about the Santa Monica leisure site refer to this place as “the Inkwell.”

The Bay Street/Inkwell beach site continued to serve as a recreational site enjoyed by African Americans into the middle decades of the twentieth century. Many a sepia-toned visitor may have stopped by Phillips Chapel for religious fellowship in the morning before heading for the sand, sun and surf in the afternoon. Others may have headed to La Bonita, a black-owned bathhouse and lodge at 1811-1825 Belmar Place (a street that ran north and south, and does not exist today) between Pico Boulevard and Main Street where the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is today, or at Thurman’s Rest-A-While Apartments at Fifth Street and Broadway to the north in the heart of Santa Monica. At these establishments out-of-towners could rent a bathing suit as well as a guest room, have a meal and change clothes before proceeding by foot or other transportation conveyances to the designated place at the beach. These early establishments and amenities offered, probably helped to further broaden the appeal and leisure practice of African American consumers to visit the beach in Santa

Monica because of the convenience of services available for those who wanted or needed to utilize them.<sup>54</sup>

As early as 1914, the Los Angeles-based, African American-owned *California Eagle* and *New Age* newspapers featured news about the happenings at the La Bonita establishment. The newspaper items about this enterprise included social and business notes, as well as paid advertisements about the offerings of this hospitality. In the Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News section of the *California Eagle* on May 23, 1914 it was reported La Bonita was already caring for a capacity house. In June the newspaper mentioned the beach area establishment was erecting an annex to take care of its usual summer rush, and that the proprietors thought they would have an excellent summer. Later that same year in September the newspaper noted as testament of the establishment's success, proprietor Mr. Warren purchased a new "Oakland roadster" (an open-top automobile with two seats).<sup>55</sup>

The establishment appears to have been a business venture between parents (Frances and Moses Warner) and their daughter (Helen Warren). Ellis Warren (Helen's husband) seems to have maintained the family residence in Los Angeles, while working as a foreman and a manager in a private company. On August 1, 1914 the *Eagle* reported La Bonita proprietor Mr. Warner erected a tennis court to accommodate his guests. In a few issues during 1914, *The New Age* featured an ad with a photograph of a street view of the La Bonita enterprise topped by a large American flag waving in the wind and happy guests in period

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<sup>54</sup> La Bonita served African Americans visiting the beach front from around 1914 through the early 1950s. Flammig, 272; Lloyd Allen, Retired Santa Monica businessman and civic activist, interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles, California, Via telephone; Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B; "La Bonita" ad, *The New Age*, 28 August 1914.

<sup>55</sup> "Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News," *California Eagle*, 23 May 1914, 1; "Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News," *California Eagle*, 1 August 1914; "Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News," *California Eagle*, 26 September 1914.

street clothing posed near motorcycles, with one showing a sidecar attached. In *The New Age*, the names of Mrs. F.C. [Frances “Fannie” C.] Warner and Mrs. E.N. [Ellis N.] Warren headed the ad as manager and proprietor, respectively. This ad highlighted La Bonita’s “two short blocks from the ocean” location, room, meal, line of bathing suites and other accommodation amenities for individuals and club parties. As different names associated with the business were mentioned in the advertisements, no doubt the proprietors probably were very proud of their accomplishment of opening this facility serving African American consumers.<sup>56</sup>

An ad in the *California Eagle* announced the opening of La Bonita Café in connection with La Bonita Apartments on Saturday, May 28, 1921. This advertisement also emphasized the enterprise catered to “Auto Parties” and could arrange for “any SPECIAL occasion.” The site is visible in Ernest Marquez’s 2004 book on Santa Monica Beach, *A Collector’s Pictorial History*, in an aerial photograph taken during the construction of the Casa Del Mar Club in 1924. Looking east from over the Pacific Ocean around Pico Boulevard, in the background can be seen two streets back from the beach the La Bonita enterprise to the north (on the right). Phillips Chapel can be seen about four streets in to the south (on the left) of the ocean front construction. One can see on either side of the construction site there are vacant lots, and behind it there is still quite a bit of open space amongst the low-density residential buildings and trees.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News,” *California Eagle*, 1 August 1914; “La Bonita” accommodations ad, *The New Age*, 28 August 1914; 1910 & 1920 U.S. Census; 1914, 1915, 1917 & 1918 Santa Monica City Directories.

<sup>57</sup> “La Bonita” ad, *California Eagle*, 28 May 1921; Marquez, 174.

Thurman's was located in the early African American neighborhood in Santa Monica near the first location of Calvary Baptist at Sixth Street and Broadway. The Dewdrop Inn and Café was at Second Street and Broadway. The Paxtons owned this restaurant and a small apartment building. The late Donald Brunson, an African American born in Santa Monica in 1907, who eventually grew up to be a leader in the Boy Scouts and other civic activities as well as a mail carrier, said in an interview he remembered as a boy walking by the store and admiring the best looking pastries in town.<sup>58</sup>

Visitors at one time could stop to pick up something to eat at the Arkansas Traveler Inn run by the Dumas and Griswold families at Belmar Place at Main Street. Their 1930 advertisements in the *California Eagle* stated the eatery specialized in southern style barbecue with genuine barbecue sauce, and southern style fried chicken. The "New" La Bonita's paid advertisements in the *California Eagle* in the same year boasted of thoroughly renovated and sanitary facilities convenient for bathers, with private lockers, a café and bathing suit rentals two blocks from the beach. The ads also noted the new management of Frank N. Miller with supervision assistance from Mrs. M.L. Pitre and Mrs. C. Sims, and that all patrons at La Bonita facilities would be given the most courteous treatment and best attention. The ad went on to assure patrons they could enjoy La Bonita's big picnic ground with a large pit for wiener bakes for private parties. The development of leisure at the Bay Street beach supported the rise of African American ventures, a deepened community life, and more complex relations to the Ocean Park beach as an African American-made place.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B. Today the Calvary Baptist Church is located at Twentieth Street and Broadway in a building constructed in 1950 when Rev. Wilford P. Carter served as the congregation's spiritual leader.

<sup>59</sup> "La Bonita" ad, *California Eagle*, 27 June 1930, 2.

## Racist Challenges in the 1920s

As the ocean front around Pico Boulevard drew increasing numbers of African Americans and businesses catering to them, the Santa Monica Bay Protective League, an Ocean Park neighborhood group of white homeowners, unsuccessfully “sought to purge” them from the beach in 1922 by prohibiting leisure business enterprises. Within walking distance of the black residential community and shoreline recreation space, at Third Street and Pico Boulevard—a few block east of La Bonita, on the southern edge of the today’s Santa Monica Civic Center property—George Caldwell’s dance club hosted parties on Sunday nights, bring large numbers of African Americans to the bay city. The evening socials got out of hand a few times, and complaints by neighbors and the Santa Monica Protective League influenced the municipal authorities to pass an ordinance prohibiting dancing on Sundays. Caldwell, an African American, responded by moving his dances to week nights. The authorities then responded by “[adopting] a blanket ban on dance halls in residential districts.”<sup>60</sup>

In a *Los Angeles Times* article on July 27, 1922, entitled “Fight Against Beach Dance Halls Success,” a staff correspondent reported:

An ordinance prohibiting dancing at any public hall in the residential districts of Santa Monica and Ocean Park was adopted by the City Council today [July 26, 1922]. The ordinance was aimed at Caldwell’s negro dance hall on Third Street, which has caused many complaints from near-by residents during the past year...A delegation of negroes, headed by George W. Caldwell, voiced their protest to the passage of the ordinance, but it was adopted by a unanimous vote. About seventy-five members of

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<sup>60</sup> Flamming, 272; “Caucasians Organize Protective League,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1922, 14; “Fight Against Beach Dance Halls Success,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1922, II-11.



the Santa Monica Bay Protective League which is opposed to negroes encroaching upon the city, were present to support the passage of the ordinance.<sup>61</sup>

At the time many African Americans thought this was a discriminatory action that ought to be protested. They saw it as a case of southern prejudice encroaching on life in California. Los Angeles attorney and civil rights activist Hugh MacBeth noted of the crowds at Caldwell's Dance Hall that the actions of a few individuals did not merit "wholesale discrimination and limitation" of all African Americans. He encouraged protest to prevent and eradicate this type of southern style discrimination.<sup>62</sup>

It is unlikely that patrons at Caldwell's evening events were any more unruly than white patrons at similar establishments. Instead, such description was more likely an exaggeration to justify shutting down the dancehall after police harassment had aggravated patrons who were only trying to have a good time. Similar white characterization and tactics elsewhere around the U.S. suggested that the closing of this festive atmosphere was an overzealous way of policing and containing African Americans' leisure activities and freedom of expression because of broader white anxieties over this urban and upwardly mobile labor force and how they chose to use their free time. As historian Andrew Kahrl has pointed out in examining African American leisure activities on the Potomac River from the 1890s to the 1920s, white Washingtonians needed to image African American gatherings as noisy rather than quiet and sedate at a period when racial cues were increasingly uncertain. This view helped to perpetuate white belief in a defined racial order predicated on distinct and immutable racial characteristics and an ideology of segregation, which depended on the

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<sup>61</sup> "Fight Against Beach Dance Halls Success," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1922, II-11.

<sup>62</sup> Flanning, 272; Hugh MacBeth, "An Open Letter to the Los Angeles Forum," *California Eagle*, 5 August 1922, 8.

racial other that was both dangerous and amusing. While the characterization of African American dance gatherings as disorderly enabled white use of local ordinances to harass and suppress leisure, Kahrl also noted “few images were more threatening to the emerging Jim Crow order than that of a black family relaxing on a beach, books in hand, in silence.”<sup>63</sup>

At the same time the Santa Monica Bay Protective League was closing down Caldwell’s Dance Hall in 1922, this same group also sought to block the efforts of a black capitalist group from carrying out plans to build a “first-class resort with beach access” near Pico Boulevard and the ocean front. Charles S. Darden, Esq. (1879-1954) and Norman O. Houston (1893-1997), two civically active and enterprising black Angelenos were president and secretary respectively of the Ocean Frontage Syndicate. The outfit had plans for their facilities to include a bathhouse, dance hall and other attractions. To attract patrons, the business plan included advertising from Los Angeles to El Paso seeking to draw 60,000 African Americans to the Santa Monica pleasure site.<sup>64</sup>

As in other parts of the United States, because they were barred in southern California from employment with better wages and in higher-level managerial positions in corporate America, “ambitious African Americans gravitated toward entrepreneurial ventures, especially those that catered to the group population of [black] Angelenos.” The “nationalist

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew W. Kahrl, “The Slightest Semblance of Unruliness: Steamboat Excursions, Pleasure Resorts, and the Emergence of Segregation Culture on the Potomac River,” *The Journal of American History* V. 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 26, From the Internet: [www.historycooperative.org.libproxy.usc.edu/journals/jah/94.4/kahrl.html](http://www.historycooperative.org.libproxy.usc.edu/journals/jah/94.4/kahrl.html), 9 April 2008.

<sup>64</sup> The Ocean Frontage Syndicate is also referred to as the Ocean Front Investment Group in some sources. “Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922; “The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice,” *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; “Amusement Center for Negro Visitors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April 1922; “Reopen Hearing: Project of Negro Amusement Center Urged at Santa Monica,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1922; “Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House, Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach,” *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922, 1.

surge” of the early 1920s, when Pan Africanist Marcus Garvey would speak at organized meetings in Los Angeles about promoting black pride and political and economic self-reliance strengthened this entrepreneurial trend. It was a theme carried over from earlier decades, with black journalists, entrepreneurs, clubwomen, ministers and Booker T. Washington preaching race progress through enterprise.<sup>65</sup>

Most likely members of the Ocean Frontage investment group were part of the African American population that had prospered after the end of slavery, despite the obstacles and prejudice they faced. During the Jim Crow era, successful blacks developed resorts and amusement facilities in other parts of the U.S. similar to the one the group was attempting to build in Ocean Park, so they could relax away from whites, and insulate themselves and their children from humiliating or unpleasant confrontations with whites. In providing this service to their community, African American capitalists hoped to make a profit from their resort development endeavors.<sup>66</sup>

Attorney Charles S. Darden was a land use specialist. Darden was from a prominent family in Wilson, North Carolina, where his father was the first undertaker of the city. He graduated from Howard University Law School in 1904. Before settling in Los Angeles, he made a grand tour of the mainland United States, the Hawaiian Islands and Asia. One of the early Negro lawyers admitted to the California bar, and the first of his race to take a case before the Supreme Court of California, Darden was the first African American lawyer to

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<sup>65</sup> Flamming, 227, 231-232; and Delores Nason McBroom, “Harvest of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment In Allensworth and Little Liberia” in Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor, ed. *Seeking El Dorado: African American Experiences in California*. Seattle and London: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945,” *The Journal of Negro History*, V. 84, No. 2 (Spring, 1999): 131, 135.

successfully challenge the legality of racially restrictive real estate covenants that appeared on deeds of sale. This 1915 court decision (*Benjamin Jones and Fannie Gautier v. Berlin Realty Company*) established a precedent, as it was the first decision obtained upon this question in a Court of Justice in the United States.<sup>67</sup>

Another important precedent-establishing decision Darden won in California was that a married woman could sell community property without the consent of her husband, especially when the title to the property was vested solely in her name (*M. Randall v. Jane Washington and Samuel Washington*). Practicing law in California for many years, Darden, like other black lawyers, worked on civil and criminal appeals before the California Superior and Supreme Courts. It was said Darden was a reserved man, but socially popular. He was active with the Knights of Pythias, the Masons and the Elks. In addition to leading the effort to develop a resort and amusement facility in Santa Monica, Darden was also involved in a resort and expansion development plans for African Americans at Lake Elsinore in Riverside County (see Chapter 5).<sup>68</sup>

Norman O. Houston (1893–1981), the other syndicate leader, was a second generation Californian born in San Jose, and raised in Oakland. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and was commissioned as a lieutenant in World War I. In 1925 he co-founded the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, which sold life and health insurance policies to African Americans throughout California, and, later, mortgage loans for homes and businesses of varying sizes. At its height, the Golden State became one

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<sup>67</sup> Beasley, 197-200; DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 337-338.

<sup>68</sup> Beasley, 197-200; J. Clay Smith, Jr. *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 485-486.

of the largest African American-owned businesses in the U.S. Although Houston's professional life has been most associated with the Golden State and his numerous civic activities, he was involved in other successful business ventures. Among them, he was a co-founder of black-owned Liberty Building and Loan Association in 1924, and later in his career he was chairman of the Board of Directors of Broadway Federal Savings and Loan (a company founded in 1947 that is still in business in 2015).<sup>69</sup>

Houston and colleagues faced organized racist opposition to their project that moved beyond harassment and menace to determined public policy. An article about the formation of the Santa Monica Bay Protective League in a *Los Angeles Times* on June 9, 1922 entitled "Caucasians Organize Protective League, Segregation of Races at Beaches Object of Santa Monica Body" reported the slogan of the organization as: "A membership of 1000 Caucasians." The article reported the League was created to "eliminat[e] all objectionable features or anything that now is or will provide a menace to the bay district." The *Times* account also included a statement that was issued at the time of the group's election of officers:

Inasmuch as a certain negro syndicate has announced through the Los Angeles press their intention of making this bay district their beach and bringing thousands of negroes to the beach cities, which we believe would be very detrimental to our property values and our bay district as a whole, this organization will immediately take up this problem which in its opinion is of vital interest to all citizens. We believe that they should procure a beach of their own at a point separate and apart from all white beaches—which would eliminate all possible friction for all time to come. We

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<sup>69</sup> Flamming, 255-258; *Who's Who In California: California Negro Directory, 1942-1943*, Published by the California Eagle Publishing Company, 215; *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who, 1930-1931*, Published by the California Eagle Publishing Company, 93; *The Negro Who's Who In California*, Published by the Negro Who's Who In California, 1949, 54, 59.

invite any and all citizens to notify the secretary of any menace which needs the attention of this league.<sup>70</sup>

On May 1, 1922, the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* reported the Santa Monica City Council refused to amend zoning ordinance 211, passed in February 1922, setting aside the ocean frontage for residence property, to permit the construction of the resort. On the morning of May 1, more than 400 citizens appeared at City Council chambers to protest the change in the ordinance wanted by the Ocean Frontage group. In an earlier *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* article on April 19, 1922 covering the Ocean Frontage group's petition request for the amendment of the ordinance so they could move forward with their development, the petitioner included an appeal to the City Council's sense of fairness for all taxpaying citizens, even if they were black and used their own facilities separately from other citizens of the United States:

...that the colored citizens for whose benefit said improvements are to be primarily erected and constructed are without ocean frontage facilities and advantages such as bath houses, restaurants, dancing halls, and like amusements such as the abundantly owned, operated, maintained and controlled for the use and benefit of other citizens of the United States in the city of Santa Monica.

... the colored citizens for whose benefit said improvement are contemplated have been using the property purchased by your petitioner unmolested for the past ten or fifteen years and with absolute peace and freedom.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Caucasians Organize Protective League, Segregation of Races at Beaches Object of Santa Monica Body," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1922.

<sup>71</sup> "The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice," *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; "Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House: Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922; and "Council Denies Petition for Negro Bath House: S.M. Council Refuses Plea When 400 Citizen Appear to Protext Change In Law," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 1 May 1922.

The black venture group claimed African Americans' past usage and presence at this beach front site for their pleasure site development as a political claim for policy continuity, against the opponents' contention their project was a "disruptive" use of this location.

In a *California Eagle* editorial on May 6, 1922, titled "Southern Red Neck Is Pumping Hot Air at Santa Monica: Endeavors To Stir Up Strife," the writer described the text of a hand bill sheet distributed under the name of a newspaper called the *Interpreter* in Santa Monica as unfairly playing to white racial prejudice toward blacks to stop the development of the Ocean Frontage amusement facilities. The editor expressed hope that the Santa Monica citizenry might be above this kind of negative race baiting:

...Santa Monica in it mad zeal to keep afloat is desperately grasping at a straw and has grasped hold of the zoning proposition at the beach town and playing to the prejudice of the citizens thereof; for what? Only to bring upon itself the just indignation of all of the good people of Santa Monica regardless of race, for they are not that sort of cattle down there. The officials there are high class gentlemen and would not for one minute stand for the whims of the cracker from Texas who, by the foulest methods possible seeks to stir up strife. The blatant [*sic*] misrepresentations in the vile sheet mentioned, comes not from any paper of standing but as foretold from a notoriety sensational hand bill guided evidently by a red neck from the South.<sup>72</sup>

A *Los Angeles Times* newspaper article dated July 30, 1922 with the headline, "Settlement of Negroes is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Blocks Plans for Colony of Colored Folk," noted "[The Santa Monica Bay Protectively League] was instrumental in getting an ordinance passed by the...Santa Monica [authorities] denying permission for the construction of the negro bathhouse and amusement center." The same article also reported

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<sup>72</sup> "Southern Red Neck Is Pumping Hot Air at Santa Monica: Endeavors to Stir Up Strife," *California Eagle*, 6 May 1922.

the cancellation of the sale of the ocean front property by the owners, Messrs. Harry H. Culver and Robinson.<sup>73</sup>

Thus a move was apparent in the white segment of the Ocean Park beach community by 1922 to bar African Americans from beach use, land development and further home ownership. White owners of large land tracts in the district who had recently subdivided several lots of beach frontage “placed a Caucasian restriction on their properties, barring Negroes from ownership or occupation.” Major Santa Monica and West Los Angeles real estate developers Robert C. Gillis and Charles “Roy” Leroy Bundy, and associates urged other property owners throughout the area to employ the “Caucasian clause” to prevent the leasing, occupancy or sale of any property to persons not of the Caucasian origin.<sup>74</sup>

California’s civil rights laws affirmed it was illegal to discriminate against all citizens in public places, which included the ocean front. Unenforced laws, legal sanctions and private harassment actions dissuaded many African Americans from visiting or taking up residency at particular beach locales. Further at this time a philosophy was evolving from civic leaders that beaches should be maintained for the public, as least when African American land development plans were involved. The 1920s saw several “save the beaches

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<sup>73</sup> “Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922; “The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice,” *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; “Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House: Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach,” *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922; Assessor’s Parcel Map, County of Los Angeles; Sanborn Maps.

<sup>74</sup> Flammig, 272-273; and “Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922.



for the public” campaigns emerge to keep African Americans from creating or maintaining beach front resorts.<sup>75</sup>

Similar cases to exclude African Americans occurred at other southern California beach towns in the 1920s. In 1925, a few miles south of Santa Monica’s Ocean Park and north of Bruce’s Beach in the city of Manhattan Beach, African Americans were forced to give up on developing of a beach front resort. White citizens and business interests blocked black businessman, lawyer and aspiring politician Titus Alexander from developing a beach pleasure facility in a lease arrangement on city-owned, El Segundo beach (see Chapter 3). The Title Guarantee and Trust Company, the Los Angeles Realty Board, the Municipal League, the Chamber of Commerce and the Advertising Club along with numerous other groups of the Santa Monica Bay supported the newly formed city of Los Angeles’ Playground Commission’s action against Alexander’s proposed plan.<sup>76</sup>

Other beach resorts suffered similar fates. The most violent intimidation campaign to evict African Americans from enjoying the beach was the destruction of the nearly completed Pacific Beach Club in Huntington Beach. Arsonists burned the beautiful new facility to the ground shortly before it was to open in 1926 (see Chapter 7). As discussed in Chapter 3, the popular Bruce’s Beach in Manhattan Beach providing African Americans coastal recreation space in the South Bay for twelve years until 1924, was forced to close.

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<sup>75</sup> See footnote 45 for a brief discussion of California civil rights laws implementation. Gleaves, *California Law Review*, V. 30, No. 5 (July, 1942), 563-564; Klein, *Stanford Law Review*, V. 10, No. 2 (March, 1958), 253-273; Cady, 194-199. The site where Alexander wanted to build the beach facilities is today the location of Hyperion Water Treatment plant. By the 1920s the El Segundo beach area had been used as a sewage outflow area since 1890. Robert L. Brigham, “Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach,” (Masters Thesis, Fresno State University, 1956), 44-47, 86; Culver, 66-74; Jan Dennis, *A Walk Beside the Sea: A History of Manhattan Beach*, (Manhattan Beach, CA: Janstan Studio, 1987), 108.

<sup>76</sup> Cady, 196-198; Brigham, 31-34; and “Beach Suit Depending on Voters: Continuance Granted Until After Election, as Changes May Settle Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1925.

Some “concerned” and increasingly vocal Manhattan Beach white citizens in the early 1920s believed a “Negro Invasion” was in progress and this would have a less than favorable affect on property values. Harassment tactics by the Ku Klux Klan such as automobile vandalism, cross burnings and arson attacks failed to push the Bruces and their guests to leave the area. The Bruces, other African Americans (and some whites because of their proximity) with vacation homes in this Manhattan Beach section were evicted under the banner of a campaign that the land should be used for a public park by a Manhattan Beach property condemnation ordinance passed by the City Council in 1924.<sup>77</sup>

Continuing the effort to restrict African Americans from using the public beach after the Bruce’s Beach closure by 1927 the city turned around and leased their beach front to a private party for a dollar per year. This private party proceeded to exclude African Americans for the site. After the NAACP took legal action challenging the private lease situation, the Manhattan Beach trustees revoked the private lease. With this situation resolved, there was a reaffirmation the beach was theoretically free for all the public’s enjoyment. Though overt attempts at racial restrictions at public beaches began to fade away, the threat of white harassment and lack of accommodations deterred African Americans from enjoyment of Manhattan Beach’s shoreline until later in the century.<sup>78</sup>

The upwardly mobile African American population residing and migrating to the region from the 1920s to the 1940s had the resources for consumer pleasures in their lives and enjoyment of the leisure offerings of southern California. Even with a mishmash of laws

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<sup>77</sup> Brigham, 21, 25, 35, 44-46, 82-84; Dennis, 108; and Cecilia Rasmussen, “Los Angeles: L.A. Then and Now; Resort was an Oasis for Blacks Until Racism Drove them Out,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Cady, 194-199; 226-228, 273-275; “Ousting in Terrorizing Plot Loom,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1928; and Brigham, 84-99.

that might restrict some of their freedoms, economic racism and the structural or institutional inequities, the conditions for the African American population were much better than in southern and some eastern cities. As discussed in Chapter 3, white boosters and the civic authorities viewed the regional beaches as the area's most important recreational and tourist asset. Non-white private ownership of beach front property and African Americans' claim on beach public space and its regional identity was viewed as a threat to attracting white Americans and white dominance.<sup>79</sup>

Although ethnic exoticism at Chinatown and Olvera Street in central Los Angeles and some resorts was promoted as a theme element of quaint vestiges of regional history and culture, African Americans did not fit into this booster agenda, as they were a reminder of the national racial tensions. Los Angeles was thought to have risen above these types of strains by the 1920s. The racial and ethnic mix of the Los Angeles region was a diverse multicultural mix of whites of various European ethnicities, and peoples of color—but systematized white racism aimed at African Americans most consistently occurred at Los Angeles' recreation space.<sup>80</sup>

As the most popular summer weekends and holidays recreation space for residents, beaches also became an important image for promotion of tourism and the southern California good life even as early as the 1920s. As a primary tourist destination, beaches were patrolled and maintained by various municipalities in southern California. To assure public access, local public authorities began purchasing and managing ocean front properties, and strongly lobbying voters for support of more beach front property acquisitions. This was

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<sup>79</sup> Culver, 66-74; Flamming, 8-9, 12, 37, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Culver, 67-68.

at the same time that racial restrictions were imposed on African American taxpayers at the beach, forcing them to pay taxes to acquire coastal land they might be prohibited from using by law or custom.<sup>81</sup>

Ironically, amid the campaign to prevent the Ocean Frontage Syndicate beach resort construction by claiming to protect the citizenry from African American private appropriation of public beaches, it was white beach privatization that effectively bounded African American beach use to “the Inkwell.” In Ocean Park, racial exclusion and development pressure appears to have pushed the African American residential community further inland, and their ocean front gathering place south from its earliest incarnation centered at Pico Boulevard. A string of lavish, exclusive and highly advertised beach clubs (and some private residences) were constructed beginning in 1922; by the 1930s they stretched all the way from Pico Boulevard to Santa Monica Canyon. The former Ocean Park Crystal Plunge site became the lavish Casa del Mar Club (today the Casa del Mar Hotel). Opening in 1924, it was the first of three large private clubs, and the most successful opening in the vicinity from Pico Boulevard north to the Santa Monica Pier. North of the Casa del Mar at the end of Pico Boulevard, the Edgewater Club was built in 1925. Later, in the 1930s,

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<sup>81</sup> As the twentieth century progressed, southern California beach culture and sports emerged as a mass culture lifestyle with an even bigger global reach, influencing advertising, fashion, music, television shows and movies. Books, music, film and television shows such as the *Gidget* multi-media franchise (1950s–1960s), the Beach Boys band songs (1960s–), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965), *Baywatch* (1990s), *Malibu, CA* (1998-2000) and *The O.C.[Orange County]* (2003-2007) are a sampling of some of the more well known beach culture imagery promoting a vision of a romantic southern California lifestyle that has influenced cultural development, regionally, nationally and internationally. *Malibu, CA* television show, From the Internet: <http://www.tv.com/malibu-ca/show/1661/summary.html>, 4 July 2014; *The O.C.*, television show, From the Internet: <http://www.tv.com/o-c/show/16960/summary.html>, 4 July 2014; Brigham, 33; Culver, 70-71.

the Edgewater was known as the Waverly Beach Club and the Ambassador Club in the 1940s. In 1926, a short distance north of the Edgewater, the Breakers Club opened.<sup>82</sup>

By means of public policy the white racist “Protective League” had facilitated the denial of Darden, Houston and associates their resort outpost. Racists recast mutual leisure into raced, segregated practice, setting the stage for inevitable conflict and enabled privatization of the public realm supported by the reigning discourses of the day of privacy, anti-government association, and value of business style management of all social ventures. Whereas at the public areas on the beach, all classes more or less mingled together, at the beach clubs the members stayed within their own private fenced-in beach, reinforcing white notions of privilege, and shifting the focus away from race as a primary motivation of exclusion; this did not diminish the racist motivations. Restrictions and open discrimination against African Americans, Mexicans and Jews were imposed at these private clubs. The creation of private clubs for “Members Only” at recreational spaces was a policy used to circumvent civil rights laws outside of the South, and throughout the urban North and West. In Santa Monica, though pushed southward down the beach by the exclusive clubs, the African American beach site moved from the edge to the center of public activity. Down the hill from Phillips Chapel CME Church at Fourth and Bays Streets, near the arcade and park area known today as Crescent Park, and just south of the Casa del Mar Club beach area, fanning out from Bay to Bicknell Streets, African Americans from the Santa Monica and Los Angeles area continued to gather for parties and to socialize. Here in commune with one another, they enjoyed the ocean breeze, swam and play games, and physically asserted their

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<sup>82</sup> “Pier Repairs Finished, All Damage Wrought by Recent High Tides at Play Del Rey Has Been Overcome,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1908, II8; Marquez, 57-58; Basten, 99.

rightful presence with more success against racially motivated harassment than at other southland beaches.<sup>83</sup>

### **Fond and Other Remembrances of the Bay Street Beach AKA The “Inkwell”**

In spite of the unpleasant events in the 1920s the African American community’s growth, persistence and agency sustained their ocean front usage in Santa Monica as it evolved over the twentieth century. Although not necessarily welcoming African Americans with open arms, the lack of white violent resistance and resilient insistence by African Americans overcame the constrictive ordinances and harassment by white groups like the “Protective League” to maintain marginal racial coexistence in Santa Monica. African Americans maintained their right to occupy their stage and public space in their continued possession of this part of the beach front, alongside whites from varied economic classes. Simultaneously the unpredictability of racial discrimination by white groups at other beaches effectively limited where many African American groups seemed to feel they could comfortably, safely and freely use beach recreation space beyond Santa Monica. Different stories of memory—personal memory, public misrepresentation and recent resurgence of public remembrance—have emerged about this site due to the persistence of African American use over multiple decades through varied geographic, political and social conditions.

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<sup>83</sup> Marquez, 57; In the South, the universal symbol of Jim Crow, the “White Only” sign would have been used in the landscape of (primarily black and white) segregated recreation spaces. Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 19.

The presence of the Casa del Mar facility, its history and memory perpetuation have erased the broader history and memory of the early, African American beach site, while contemporary popular media and other accounts have perpetuated myths about explicit physical demarcation of the beach area in Santa Monica for African American usage. Some of these accounts have occurred due to the limited sources available for review, and incomplete understanding of the context and material facts of Santa Monica ocean front cultural landscape and geography, pre- and post- the beach clubs, as well as the region's history. Experiences and preferences of some black and white observers have also affected how the history of the site has been interpreted in commentary on the beach cultural landscape. The "imposed" mental geographic limitations of some interpreters have "imposed" mental geographic limitations that they transposed, making remembered practice into mythical, explicit demarcation at the Ocean Park beach landscape because African Americans were the most visibly recognizable at this shoreline "congregating place." Others have overlaid the history of the American South with its laws of systematic discrimination and segregation on to California, mistaking the actual local history of how discrimination occurred in the state. Awe with popular memory of many historical events of the Jim Crow era, including the African American beach leisure in Santa Monica has proven difficult to extricate or add new information to, even with new scholarship and public cultural administration. Regional history has narrated African Americans' successfully mounting legal challenges to physical demarcation efforts such as signs and other material culture racial discriminatory attempts. If there had been these types of racial discrimination attempts in Santa Monica, history suggests black Angelenos and Santa Monicans would have legally

challenged it because they were aware (as most whites were) this type of discriminatory demarcations were illegal in the state of California.<sup>84</sup>

African Americans from Santa Monica, Venice, and greater Los Angeles walked, travelled on the Pacific Electric trolley lines, or drove their cars to Santa Monica's Ocean Park to enjoy the pleasure of the ocean front and shoreline. When they occupied recreational sites and public spaces like the Inkwell at the Ocean Park beach, at the core of the state's formative, mid-twentieth century identity, they challenged racial and class hierarchies of the era. Though the community's entrepreneurs were curtailed from developing their leisure/pleasure facilities on the desirable beach frontage, African Americans refused any removal from the site of their recreational, leisure and social space due to the incursion of their affluent white neighbors at the beach clubs. In an interview, the late Novellette Tabor Bailey (1914–2010), a niece of Arthur L. Reese, the African American who worked with developer Abbott Kinney in his Venice amusement enterprise discussed earlier, expressed fond

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<sup>84</sup> Here are a few examples of contemporary interpreters giving audiences a false sense of the history and geography of this African American historical site in Santa Monica's Ocean Park beach area. In a 2005 *Los Angeles Times* article, Cecilia Rasmussen wrote there were ropes demarcating the African American beach site in Santa Monica's Ocean Park neighborhood in the 1920s. She does not appear to have a full understanding of the context of Santa Monica's beach culture and beach clubs during the era. The newly built beach clubs had at one time their own private, fenced-in beaches for their members. These fenced-in beaches were to "exclude" anyone who was not a member of these clubs, and to note the "exclusivity" of their establishments. As discussed earlier in this chapter, their "exclusion" of people would have included non-club members, who were white, as well as African Americans, Mexicans, Asians and Jews who were openly discriminated against. In this context, a roped off beach area would have identified an "exclusive" site for African Americans at a popular center of public activity. She also wrote the area "was marked 'for Negroes only,'" which again would be setting up a situation of "exclusivity" rather than "exclusion" at the beach in this context and era. Cecilia Rasmussen, "L.A. THEN AND NOW: In 'White Only' Era, an Oasis for L.A.'s Blacks, Inkwell in Santa Monica..." *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 2005. Another example, a donated 1925 photograph in the Los Angeles Public Library's Shades of L.A. Collection features several African Americans sitting on what appears to be ocean frontage, breakwater rocks under a portion of a sign with the word, "Prohibited." The photograph's donor said the image was at the "boundary between the black and white sections of Santa Monica and Venice beaches." As only a portion of the sign text is visible, it is impossible to know exactly what was "Prohibited." Most likely the sign read, "Walking," "Swimming" or "Fishing" "Prohibited." Several contemporary interpreters have used this image in public projects to validate their narrative about the Santa Monica Jim Crow era beach site to say there were signs up marking this as a black recreation space. See image 00001726 at: <http://photos.lapl.org/carlweb/jsp/FullRecord?databaseID=968&record=1&controlNumber=5001106>, 4 August 2014.



memories of going to Venice and Santa Monica beaches. Then in her 90s and living in her family's home built by her father in Venice, Mrs. Bailey recalled enjoying visiting the beach near her home, fun occasions at parties in Santa Monica and at visits to the Bay Street beach when she was a blossoming young woman. With a girlish grin and the voice of a woman who has enjoyed her life, she reminisced, "We would go up to the beach in Santa Monica so we could meet the L.A. boys." She never recalled anyone calling the Bay Street beach area, "the Inkwell" when she was frequently using it as a younger person. A retired Douglas Aircraft employee and nurse, Mrs. Bailey also remembered with great affection being in an Easter program at Phillips Chapel Church when she was four years old.<sup>85</sup>

As a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) student, Ralph Bunche (1904–1971), who would become a diplomat, civic rights advocate, and 1950 Nobel Peace Prize winner, would come to the African American section of the beach in Ocean Park in the 1920s. He and his friends would stop by to visit the Stout family, with a particular interest to visit young Bernice Stout Lawson (1908–2004), daughter of the earlier mentioned Rev. James A. Stout (the first minister of the Phillips Chapel at Fourth and Bay Streets).<sup>86</sup>

In an interview, the late Wallace Decuir (1922–2014), a long time Los Angeles resident and retired Los Angeles city firemen and businessman, recalled of the Bay Street beach, "We would say we had the best part of the beach." On a beautiful summer day in the 1930s when Decuir was a youth, he and his friends (including Ivan J. Houston) would sometimes ride their bicycles from central Los Angeles to the beach near the end of Pico

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<sup>85</sup> Novellette Tabor Bailey, retired Douglas Aircraft employee and nurse, interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>86</sup> Cristyne Lawson, retired dean of Dance Education, California College for the Arts. interview by author, February 2006, Santa Monica, California.

Boulevard to take pleasure in the summer day and meet other friends. While at this Ocean Park section of the city of Santa Monica, he remembered stopping for hot dogs at the “Blue Bird Hot Dog Stand.” He also has a keen memory of the itchy wool bathing suit he wore. Decuir and all the people I interviewed regarding the Bay Street beach area remember having great times there during the summer, especially at the Independence and Labor Day holidays. Even though African Americans in social gatherings were somewhat restrained to this one section of the beach, they enjoyed the outlet.<sup>87</sup>

The late Los Angeles native Prince Cobbs (1925–2010), a retired corrections officer who lived the later years of his life in Las Vegas, found the Bay Street beach a release of another kind. As a young adult, he would ride the streetcar to the beach when he needed to get away to think about things. At that time, in the 1940s, one could take either the bus or the red car trolley line for less than twenty cents to get to Venice or Santa Monica beaches.<sup>88</sup>

Various social clubs, church groups, and extended families would have picnics at the Bay Street beach area. After returning from World War II, Decuir, Ivan J. Houston and several of their childhood friends formed the Cosmos Club in 1946. The organization still exists today as a social group with a business networking and civic disposition. In the late 1940s the club threw big picnics at the Bay Street beach area and in Val Verde (an African American recreation and vacation area near Santa Clarita in northwest Los Angeles County, see Chapter 7), and dances at various venues around Los Angeles. They started the club to welcome home their friends who were getting discharged from the armed services. Decuir

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<sup>87</sup> Wallace Decuir, Los Angeles resident, retired fireman and businessman, interview by author, 1 November 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>88</sup> Prince Cobbs, Las Vegas resident and retired law enforcement officer, interview by author, 27 October 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; and Decuir, interview by author, 1 November 2004.

said, “the world and Los Angeles had changed so much for us during the war. When we returned home, we were strangers in our own home town.” Sixty-plus years later, the Cosmos Club’s surviving members now throw only one gala social event a year.<sup>89</sup>

Los Angeles native Marilyn Hudson (1927–2015), shared with me that she and friends in the 1940s started a group they called “The Beach Club” at Bay Street/the Inkwell. This group of established and financially secure, black Angelenos continued the tradition of gathering there into the late 1960s to early 1970s. During this time period Synanon (a substance-abuse rehabilitation center) occupied the nearby Casa del Mar facility, and Hudson said the atmosphere of the whole vicinity changed. Her Beach Club continued gathering into the early decades of the twenty-first century for fun at the shoreline, though they discontinued meeting at the Ocean Park beach during this time period. The buildings at Santa Monica beach in the area of Bay Street began to look frayed, as did the population inhabiting these shoreline properties, Hudson thought. These impacts, combined with the memory of the exclusivity of the defunct Casa del Mar and the development of beach leisure culture across southern California as a white space aided in erasure of the memory of history of African American self-determination through leisure at this ocean front section of Santa Monica on the Pacific Slope.<sup>90</sup>

Hudson’s Beach Club moved their activities south to Marina del Rey to take advantage of the new recreational and leisure amenities and commercial accommodations, that were more upscale than what was available at the Bay Street environs. South of Santa

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<sup>89</sup>Decuir, interview by author, 1 November 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Marilyn Hudson is the daughter of architect Paul R. Williams and the daughter-in-law of dentist and civic activist H. Claude Hudson. Marilyn Hudson, Los Angeles resident, interview by author, November 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

Monica and Venice to the north of Playa del Rey in a portion of the Bellona Wetlands, the newly developed area, Marina del Rey, opened in 1965. The public-private shoreline development included a pleasure craft harbor, public parks, fishing and beach areas, restaurants, shops and other businesses, hotels and residential housing. African American groups from the region, such as Hudson's Beach Club enjoyed new places open to them for congregation and consumption in Marina del Rey and elsewhere. Visibility along with public memory of African Americans community life also began to be removed as their social practices faded from the beach at the Bay Street/Inkwell site. The memory of the Inkwell's pleasurable times and sense of place area began to be mostly retained in the personal memories of groups like Hudson's club and other African Americans who experienced Santa Monica's Ocean Park district beach during its heyday, while fading from the public memory.

In 2000, after Synanon closed and other organizations who occupied the building moved out, the Casa del Mar Club was restored as an elegant beach front hotel. The club turned hotel site is now included in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historic Places. On the location where the African American capitalist attempted to construct a "first class resort with beach access" in 1922 for black community patrons, a new upscale, Shutters Hotel on the Beach was built in 1993. The Crescent Bay Park and the arcade south of the hotel have not changed much. The Bay Street beach area sometimes called the Inkwell was partially taken up by a parking lot, but in general, the location continues to have its charming character and defining vistas featuring the Santa Monica Pier, the Pacific coastline, the ocean, the Crescent Bay Park and arcade, the bluff and the Casa del Mar facility.

This section of Santa Monica beach is no longer referred to by anyone as the “Inkwell.” Few people visiting this stretch of Santa Monica Beach today had any idea, until a recent commemorative plaque was put in place, that this section was once where African Americans had built a beach leisure culture. The shoreline has been transformed to protect for beach erosion and the Casa del Mar fence dividing black and other non-club member beachgoers from affluent, white beach club members no longer exists. In the twenty-first century people from all walks of life can now enjoy “...the best part of the beach.”<sup>91</sup>

In southern California and throughout the country, African American agency forced changes in discriminatory laws and social customs, and enforcement of civil rights laws already existing. That combined with changes leisure culture and new transportation infrastructure over the course of the twentieth century created many more opportunities for all people, especially African Americans, to enjoy a greater variety of recreational and leisure spaces at beaches, near and far. At the same time in southern California and all over America, the painful reality of discriminatory practices imposed and, or reinforced by both government, institutions and white resistance (which sometimes included violence and intimidation) limiting African American consumers access to and economic development of the most coveted urban spaces—beaches and other recreational spaces—has largely been forgotten. The memory of African American presence and struggle was only resurrected by research, revaluing the personal remembrances of beachgoers, and the broader movement to

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<sup>91</sup> In 1947 the words “Colored Use” were used to identify this section of the beach on a map of a beach erosion and shoreline plan, City of Santa Monica, Los Angeles County Master Shoreline Plan map, 1947, Divisions of Beaches and Parks, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Engineering, State of California (University of Southern California, Special Collections).

reclaim the African American history, generally, and of leisure, specifically elsewhere around the southland.

Historians and the community have collaborated to reclaim the Ocean Park beach site through memorializing African American beachgoers at Bay Street/the Inkwell. The historic African American beach and Nicolas “Nick” Gabaldón (1927–1951), a Santa Monica resident who is one of the earliest documented, California surfers of African and Mexican American descent, were honored on February 7, 2008 with the installation of a commemorative monument at Bay Street and Ocean Front Walk. In 2004 and 2005 books, historians Paula Scott and Douglas Flamming began the contemporary scholarly reclamation of Santa Monica’s African American history. My research has extended their efforts in community, with my public presentations on the Phillips Chapel CME Church and southern California African American beach culture laying the foundation for the historic church to be landmarked in 2005. This work enhanced public officials’ and local citizens’ formal awareness of the Santa Monica’s diverse heritage, hence facilitating the ease of commemorating the Jim Crow era, historical African American beach at the Bay Street/Inkwell site in 2008.<sup>92</sup>

Folklore has it that Nick Gabaldón, took his first swim in the Pacific Ocean at the Bay Street beach. One of the few African American students matriculating at and graduating from Santa Monica High in 1945, he is said to have loved the beach and the waves. A handsome, athletic and well-liked young man, Gabaldón and his friend Wayne King, taught themselves to surf using a thirteen-foot rescue surfboard of a white lifeguard he befriended in the World

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<sup>92</sup> Alison Rose Jefferson, “Nick Gabaldón (1927-1951): A Southern California Surfing Pioneer,” The Ultimate History Project, From the Internet: <http://www.ultimatehistoryproject.com/nick-gabaldoacuten-southern-california-surfing-pioneer.html>, 21 May 2015.

War II years. A skilled recreational waterman rather than a professional competitive surfer, Gabaldón's legacy is an empowering story about overcoming bigotry, the pursuit of freedom and the attainment of self-fulfillment that has inspired many to consider him as a role model, especially surfers of color. In the bloom of his manhood at age 24, Gabaldón died in a surfing accident at Malibu Pier in 1951. Though only traces of his life story are known, his passion, athleticism, discipline, love and respect for the ocean live on as the consummate qualities of the California surfer.<sup>93</sup>

A local citizen supported by members of the Black Surfing Association, suggested to the Santa Monica City Council this beach site and Gabaldón be recognized in some way and the Council approved. I had the honor of creating the text on the plaque monument and of serving as a guest speaker at the unveiling ceremony. As public memory work, this monument touches many people's lives and recasts for them the African American making of beach culture at the place as they come to enjoy the beach. The plaque's text tells an American pioneer story about African Americans who, in spite of challenges, took agency to participate in the fruits of California. The American stories told about the Bay Street beach and surfer Nick Gabaldón on this monument are being infused into the collective memory of local and national public culture.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Jefferson, "Nick Gabaldón (1927-1951)..."

<sup>94</sup> At the City of Santa Monica Council Meeting on February 14, 2006, "Ms. Rhonda Harper..[with] inquiries and support from several members of the Black Surfing Association" are identified as making the request to recognize in some way the historical African American beach area at Bay Street and Nick Gabaldón. Members of the Black Surfing Association who lead the recognition effort include Donald Stein, III, Mary Mills, William Lamar, Rick Blocker, Andrea Kabwasa, Suyen Mosley, Max McMullin, Rosemarie "Rose" Garza Corley and Tony Corley. Santa Monica Council directed staff to research options to create a plaque for the site. Suggested language for the plaque was submitted by the various interested parties and several drafts were circulated for review by citizens and history field professionals. The final plaque text was developed by this author. At that time in 2007, the author was employed as a Historian at Historic Resources Group in Los Angeles, California. In 2005 the author's research was used as the basis for the City of Santa Monica

**Figure 5.** Bay Street/Inkwell Plaque Text

## **"THE INKWELL"**

### A Place of Celebration and Pain

The beach near this site between Bay and Bicknell Streets, known by some as "the Inkwell," was an important gathering place for African Americans long after racial restrictions on public beaches were abandoned in 1927.

African-American groups from Santa Monica, Venice and Los Angeles, as early as the 1920s to the end of the Jim Crow era in the 1950s, preferred to enjoy the sun and surf here because they encountered less racial harassment than at other Southland beaches.

In the 1940s, Nick Gabaldón, a Santa Monica High School student and the first documented black surfer, taught himself how to surf here.

More interest has developed in the reclamation and recognition of African Americans participation in the California Dream and Santa Monica beach culture space. The "How We Roll: Cultural Influences in Skateboarding, Surfing and Rollerskating" exhibit appeared at

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Landmarks Commission and Council to designate the Santa Monica's historic, African American Phillips Chapel Church a city landmark. This research on Phillips Chapel included information on the Bay Street beach/Inkwell site. Barbara Stinchfield, Director of Community & Cultural Services, "Information Item" to Mayor and City Council, City of Santa Monica, 7 September 2007, (copy in author's possession); Gary Walker, "Santa Monica: Plaque is dedicated at historic Inkwell Beach, once the only local beach for African Americans," *The Argonaut*, 14, February 2008, 3; Tony Corley, Founder of Black Surfing Association, interview by author, May 2015, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.



the California African American Museum in Los Angeles' Exposition Park in 2010 featuring information on Jim Crow era, African American beach culture, Gabaldón and more contemporary black surfers. Two documentary films, "White Wash" (2011) by Ted Woods and "12 Miles North: The Nick Gabaldón Story" (2012) by Richard Yelland and Nike (sporting goods company) debuted. Both films examine black surfers, but through different lens and distinctive directions, and discuss the historical Bay Street beach/Inkwell site.

Rick Blocker is the third generation of his family who grew up enjoying the beach at Santa Monica's Bay Street/Inkwell site and other locations. When Blocker first started surfing in the 1960s, he was looking for role models of African Americans who surfed because he never saw any of his African American peers surfing. He eventually learned about Nick Gabaldón. Blocker, founded BlackSurfing.com (an information portal on African American surfers) in further recognition of African American beach culture heritage and Gabaldón's influence on him and many people. In 2013 he commissioned a portrait painting of Gabaldón by well known, artist Richard Wyatt. Best known for his contemporary murals and installations, his works are featured in public and corporate spaces in and around Los Angeles. Many of Wyatt's usually, large scale works showcase scenes of people in the region's history. Wyatt positioned Gabaldón in a classical center of canvas pose to illustrate his importance, with a complex, green color for the background behind him to make the viewer think of the Pacific Ocean when gazing at this composition. The portrait Wyatt created is an interpretative vision of Gabaldón's appearance from the few photographs that are known to exist of him. In the portrait, Wyatt represented Gabaldón smiling and with a sense of serenity, dressed in casual clothing he might have worn as young adult. Gabaldón

looks directly out at the viewer from the canvas. Blocker has made, and will continue to make, the painting available for public viewing and media use in varied public programming efforts.<sup>95</sup>

My research, public presentations and a scholarly article, a few book text mentions by professional historians, some popular media reports and innovative educational programming are other contemporary efforts connecting the public to these more inclusive and diverse heritage stories of southern California. The Santa Monica Conservancy, Heal the Bay, the Black Surfers Collective, Surf Bus Foundation, the Black Surfing Association and the Malibu Surfing Association and other groups, along with Los Angeles County Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas, Zev Yaroslavsky and Sheila Kuehl have implemented public programs, separately and jointly in community outreach efforts to inform and connect a broader citizenry to the African American heritage in the California Dream, the joys of surfing and ocean stewardship. Since 2012 Santa Monica's Bay Street, historical African American beach site has been a Coastal Cleanup Day location for this global program. Other events are developing to honor the legacy of African American beach culture of this historic site, and also may be on their way to becoming annual events.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The Nick Gabaldón portrait by Richard Wyatt is composed of acrylic paint on canvas work, 30 inches wide by 24 inches high; Jefferson, "Nick Gabaldón (1927-1951)..."; Mike Sonksen, "Richard Wyatt: Artist for Los Angeles," KCET, LA Letters, Departure Columns, 7 February 2014, From the Internet: <http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/columns/la-letters/richard-wyatt-artist-for-los-angeles.html>, 21 May 2015; Rick Blocker, Founder of BlackSurfing.com ([www.legacy.blacksurfing.com](http://www.legacy.blacksurfing.com)), interview by author, May 2013, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Richard Wyatt, Los Angeles Artist, interview by author, May 2015, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Richard Wyatt, Jr. Studio. From the Internet: <http://www.richardwyattjr.com>, 21 May 2015.

<sup>96</sup> At the Bay Street beach/Inkwell site, Nick Gabaldón Day has been held in late May/early June since 2010, led in planning by the Black Surfers Collective, with support by Heal the Bay, Surf Bus Foundation and the Santa Monica Conservancy; and the first, Nick Gabaldón Charitable Paddlethon was held in February 2015, sponsored by the Black Surfing Association and the Malibu Surfing Association, with support from Heal the

The celebration of American, California and Santa Monica heritage has yet to fully illuminate and embrace the complicated layers of our national, regional, and local heritage, at work in the history of African American leisure culture at the Ocean Park beach. As the case of this place illustrates, the lack of tangible material culture in the form of buildings to landmark in recognition of a group's legacy make more difficult, but not impossible, the recovery of a rich history that was made at a place. Through research, innovative ideas and programs to memorialize marginalized groups, citizens and scholars in the city of Santa Monica and beyond have begun to recover and recast a fuller history of African American invention, struggle, and persistence in the making of southern California's beach leisure culture.

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Bay and other groups; The Black Surfing Association was founded in 1976, and the Black Surfers Collective was founded in 2010. Both groups are based in California.

## CHAPTER 5

### LAKE ELSINORE: A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA RESORT TOWN MEECA FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN PLEASURE SEEKERS

To the Colored citizen, Lake Elsinore, is comparable [as]...Palm Springs [is] to the wealthy white vacationist.

– *California Eagle*, 23 May 1940<sup>1</sup>

As African American leisure seekers were making leisure sites on the Pacific Slope at Bruce's Beach and Santa Monica's Ocean Park, they were also developing a vacation community of a different sort inland from the ocean, ninety miles away from Los Angeles. Remote from the city, in a scenic valley with a large fresh water lake and mineral hot springs, African Americans invested their labor, money and recreation time in the founding decades of a health resort and garden agrarian community, Lake Elsinore, in an attractive but unruly environment. Their pioneering residency and investment established the development of the African American community's persistence through inheriting generations, who well into the middle decades of the twentieth century built a place of work, leisure, family and communal life and memory centered on recreation and health. Lake Elsinore's distance from the metropolis made it more of a retreat or "escape" destination leisure space. The development efforts of its founders and first residents drew black Angeleno professionals as holiday visitors and vacation residents, as well as established African American real estate investors and business owners providing services to African American consumers. Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon and Charles S. Darden, Esq. whose leisure and residential development visions at

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<sup>1</sup> "Lake Elsinore Opening Offers News Features," *California Eagle*, 23 May 1940, 7.

other locations around the southland had experienced the destructive use of state power to block their plans, proved undeterred in pioneering community-building efforts at Lake Elsinore. There, black social, communal and business practices built a place of leisure and living relatively insulated from the unchecked regular aggravated racial harassment and discrimination of whites.

African Americans joined a long line of travelers, settlers, fortune seekers, homesteaders and recreation seekers into the Valley where the Elsinore Colony would be formed in the late 1880s. The longer history of the area shows the range of places imagined by those encountering it, with the organization and promotion of health and agrarian community attractions patterned on the successful promotion of other southern California places prevailing at the end of the nineteenth century. Lake Elsinore was one of the many California and American West sites promoting health tourism and progressive agrarian smallholdings in the late 1800s to the early decades of the twentieth century that had varying life cycles of transformation, longevity and decline. At Lake Elsinore, as aspiring settlers and developers purchased land for agriculture, leisure pursuits and real estate speculation, cyclically inconsistent lake water levels overlaid with real estate platting that supposed a more fixed water topography than ever existed in the Valley, ultimately shaped the community's history.

The Lake Elsinore Valley in California's Riverside County had long been known for its natural attractions. Many of those who have entered the valley have used it for social as well as subsistence endeavors. At different times Native peoples, Spaniards, Mexicans and Anglos along with African Americans and other groups took in the Valley's offerings to create a variety of transient, seasonal and permanent communities. Situated in the Santa Ana

Ortega Mountain range along the interior route between the current cities of Riverside and San Diego, ninety miles from Los Angeles and inland from the Pacific coastal town of Laguna Beach, the valley has been appreciated for its beautiful vistas, climate, water, mineral deposits, adaptable soil and natural hot springs. The Pai-an-che Indians, the earliest settlers, named the valley “Etengova Wumona,” which means “Hot Springs by the Little Sea.” The lake and the hot springs were very important to the spiritual traditions and subsistence of the tribe.<sup>2</sup>

In 1797, Franciscan Padre Juan Santiago was the first Spaniard to see Lake Elsinore. Assigned to Mission San Juan Capistrano, he entered the Valley from the long-established trail used by the Indians to traverse the Santa Ana Ortega Mountains from the Pacific Ocean side. In the early part of the nineteenth century few non-Pai-an-che used this trail, but as the century progressed the trail became more frequented by colonialists and other venturers. It became a favorite camping location for American trappers, due to the shade trees along the shores of the “Laguna Grande,” as Lake Elsinore was known at that time. A Mexican land grant was issued to Julian Manriquez in 1844 for Rancho La Laguna, which included “Laguna Grande” and 20,000-acres surrounding it.<sup>3</sup>

When California became part of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, many a new group of couriers, adventurers and other travelers rode through the Elsinore Valley along the old trail and stopped to refresh at the lake. On one of his scouting

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<sup>2</sup> In 1972 the town of ‘Elsinore’ was officially named ‘Lake Elsinore.’ Tom Hudson, *Lake Elsinore Valley: Its Story, 1776 – 1977*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Printing, (Lake Elsinore, California: Mayhall Print Shop, 2001), 3-5, 142; Dorothy Georgia Zimmerman, *The History of the Elsinore Region, Riverside, County, California* (Master’s Thesis, University of Southern California, 1934), 1-2; “Elsinore: A New Colony in Southern California,” (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Book & Job Printing Office, 1884), from the Riverside File, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California, 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., “Elsinore: A New Colony...,” 6-7.

expeditions, the “pathfinder” John C. Fremont and his men are said to have traveled along the south lake trail. Kit Carson, along with other scouts, and stagecoaches like the Butterfield Stage mail and passenger line, used the valley passage as part of the overland trail connecting California to the rest of the U.S. After a succession of ownership including Mexican Augustin Machado and American Abel Stearns (who both also owned rancho land in the Santa Monica Bay region of Los Angeles County), Rancho Laguna was purchased by Franklin Heald, William Collier and Donald Graham in 1883. They established a town on the north side of the lake, called Elsinore, and began to sell lots. By 1885, Lake Elsinore was on the Santa Fe transcontinental railroad line arriving through San Diego.<sup>4</sup>

Heald recognized the potential of the hot springs, along with the Elsinore Valley’s beauty, to attract “seekers of health, recreation and rest.” By the 1900s various entrepreneurs had developed numerous hotels, apartments and cottages, as well as several sanatoriums, to attract visitors from around the world to what became a popular vacation site for health and pleasure, combined. The Valley contained a number of different types of hot and cold mineral water wells said to cure various ills, such as rheumatism, gallstones, indigestion, kidney and liver trouble, eruptions and constipation. Varied social and recreation activities were promoted on land and in Lake Elsinore, including hunting, hiking, fishing, picnicking, swimming, boating, and dancing on summer nights.<sup>5</sup>

Real estate speculators like Heald were aware tourists were prospective residents, and when possible capitalized on their enjoyment of the valley to sell them and their associates

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. “Elsinore: A New Colony...,” 7-9, 23.

<sup>5</sup> As summed up a century later, “The hot springs and mineral waters brought visitors from all over, the Southern California land boom lured eager buyers to Elsinore and the arrival of the railroad added to the prosperity. “See “Lakes of California: Lake Elsinore,” *PG&E Progress*, February 1972, Elsinore File, San Diego Historical Society.

lots. Originally from Iowa, Heald was the developer of the Elsinore town site and region who had the most to do with its growth. He arrived in Pasadena in the 1870s with some familiarity with California and its development, as his uncle was a founder of Healdsburg in Sonoma County, near San Francisco. Heald was one of the regions' late-nineteenth century pioneers who California historian Carey McWilliams saw as coming to build a new land, one who was a part of the progressive, enterprising, venturesome spirit so impressing visitors to the region at that time.<sup>6</sup>

Heald was a descendent of Thomas Macy through his mother Sarah Macy Heald. Macy was one of the English Quakers who came to America escaping persecution in England. As a member of the Society of Friends, Heald's Quaker background was probably a strong influence on the way he and his partners chose to develop their "Elsinore Colony." From the start, the Elsinore community was viewed as progressive. The founding pioneers were interested in "families of limited means" being able to afford a "...place that promised to equal Pasadena and Riverside at about one-fifth of the prices obtain[ed] at those places." The town founders created small lots for settlers in the town site, around the valuable hot springs, as they wanted to "form a dense community, where a mutual and neighborly interest [would] act as a stimulant and encouragement." Early buyers of land to farm bought an average of about thirty-five acres.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Zimmerman, 59; "Lakes of California: Lake Elsinore," San Diego Historical Society; *An Illustrated History of Southern California* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1890), 132; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Publisher/ Peregrine Smith Books, 1946, 1973), 156; Culver, 127.

<sup>7</sup> "Elsinore: A New Colony..." from the Riverside File, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California, 3-4; *An Illustrated History of Southern California* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1890) 61, 132-133.



The examples of Pasadena and Riverside were fresh in the Lake Elsinore developers' minds. A bit more upscale than Heald's colony vision for Lake Elsinore, Pasadena had started a decade before his colony as a cooperative agricultural outpost and grew into a charming town that sought the emblematically genteel as residents. Located northeast of the city of Los Angeles, in the San Gabriel Valley between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Arroyo Seco, a deep ravine allowing water to pass from those mountains westward to the sea, it began forming in 1875 and was incorporated as a city in 1896. Initially the area was an agricultural cooperative owned by the San Gabriel Orange Grove Association. The balmy climate, and the wilderness of the lower lying areas of the Arroyo Seco, with its sycamores and other trees, wild grape vines, flowering plants and other vegetation, cultivated its growth as a health resort and retirement community.<sup>8</sup>

In 1886, the Hotel Raymond was the first of a number of the lavish, large resort hotels to open in Pasadena for wealthy Easterners looking for a place to escape the cold and snow of the Atlantic coast winter. Many of the visitors to these hotels returned to Pasadena as permanent residents. These new Pasadena residents built large homes in the various fashionable architectural styles of the day, including the elegant craftsman designs by the architects Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene, and Mediterranean Revival styles. In addition to building stately homes, some bought large estates at the outskirts of the city, where orchards continued to be extant, and developed various types of gardens around their newly built homes. In addition to wealthy whites, by the earlier decades of the twentieth century the population of Pasadena drew Chinese and Mexicans, who had been brought in to

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford Press, 1985), 99, 102.

work on the railroad, and African Americans, who moved to the area to start small businesses and obtain service work in the big homes and hotels.<sup>9</sup>

Wealthy investors of the California Silk Center Association originally founded Riverside as a colony in 1870. Those efforts to develop a silk industry collapsed when the organizer of the Association died. At the time, the old rancho land was being sold off to land speculators. Other, more successful Riverside settlements were started during this era, such as the southern California Colony Association, the New England Colony, and the English Colony, made up of English and Canadian migrants. The city was incorporated in 1883, and the county of the same name, Riverside, was created in 1893. The original settlement included a town site and land for farming. After Mathew Gage brought irrigation from the eastern part of San Bernardino Valley to Riverside through what became known as the “Gage Canal,” and many agricultural experiments were tried, the area eventually became the center of the orange industry in California.<sup>10</sup>

By the time the new county was formed in 1893, Ruth Austin notes Riverside was becoming known for “its gracious lifestyle and outstanding fruit production.” The well-to-do Riverside English and Canadian investors built the first golf course and polo field in southern California. By 1895, Riverside was the wealthiest city per capita in the nation, due to the development of refrigerated railroad cars (transporting the orange crops throughout the U.S.), and innovative irrigation systems that created the water supply for the area. The first African

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Starr, *Inventing...*, 100-101; “Heritage: A Short History of Pasadena - Pasadena Becomes a City: 1886-1920,” Pasadena History website, From the Internet: <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us/History/1886-1920.asp>, 1 December 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Austen, *Riverside: The Heritage, The People, The Vision* (Montgomery, AL: Community Communications, 1996), 12-17; William Wilcox Robinson, *The Story of Riverside County* (Los Angeles: Title Insurance Co. & Trust, 1957), 25, 33-35.

American families came to the city with transplanted white families between 1870 and 1900, working as farm laborers, particularly in the citrus industry and as road builders. They competed with Japanese and Mexicans for the jobs available to people from communities of color. A few African American entrepreneurs developed impressive grocery store and trash collection businesses. Some of the early Riverside African American families would become leisure visitors to Lake Elsinore, and patrons of the pioneering black businesses catering to the forming leisure community there.<sup>11</sup>

Lake Elsinore capitalized on the bucolic, healthful, agrarian image that was successfully launching Pasadena and Riverside. At Lake Elsinore,

Beyond the town site, citrus, walnut, apricot and olive groves alternated with groves of eucalyptus trees and open spaces where rabbits and coveys of quail made their homes. Beyond the fringe of development, coyotes barked and yapped when the moon rose. The mountains and hills brooded unchanged as if the white man had never come.

In the center of it all Lake Elsinore sparkled in the sun, or reflected the silver path of the moon, or flung its waters about in fury when strong winds blew from the ocean or desert.<sup>12</sup>

That image describing the valley of the early 1920s, by Tom Hudson in his book *Lake Elsinore Valley: Its Story, 1776 – 1977*, would continue to be the predominant view of the place to the 1970s. At a later date, *Los Angeles Times* writer Dave Smith called the valley a “California Shangri-La.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Austen, 17 (quotation); Lake Elsinore was originally part of San Diego County. “History of Riverside,” City of Riverside, California, From the Internet: <http://www.riversideca.gov/visiting-aboutriv.asp>, 16 September 2015; Richard R. Esparza and H. Vincent Moses, “Westward To Canaan: African American Heritage in Riverside, 1890 to 1950,” Prepared for the Riverside Municipal Museum by Riverside Museum Associates, 1996, 1-2, 7-8; “Our Families, Our Stories: From the African American Community, Riverside, California, 1870-1960,” Prepared by the Riverside Municipal Museum, 1997, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Hudson, 59.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Tom Hudson, 59-60.

Although by the early decades of the twentieth century Lake Elsinore Valley was popular for its beauty and health-giving attributes and for the adaptability of its soil for agricultural production, the lake was “once described as ‘one of the most perverse, unruly and unpredictable bodies of water in California.’” Before manmade interventions, by nature the lake was really a flood plain holding the run off from the areas of hills and mountains surrounding it, and an overflow site for the San Jacinto River. When full it was the largest freshwater lake in southern California, at about seven miles long, two miles wide, and forty feet at its deepest point. When it was dry, it could be a dust bowl. The Colorado River aqueduct began delivering water to southern California in 1941. But Lake Elsinore’s water level would not be stabilized until 1964, with water flowing from the Colorado River and Lakeview aqueducts, the San Jacinto River through Canyon Lake, and local watershed runoff. Prior to this time the lake had regular cycles of wet and dry years. Through the years the effect of natural incidence of low rainfall—and, hence, no run off from the mountains—reduced the amount of water flow into the lake. Later, manmade factors, such as various dams installed on the San Jacinto River, and huge amounts of water pumped from underground to develop the region’s farms and cities, further adversely affected the lake’s water level.<sup>14</sup>

Even with the capriciousness of the water level, during its wet years Lake Elsinore remained an attraction for Californians through the twentieth century, particularly to fashionable Angelenos who arrived by train and then by automobile. The community’s economic development over the twentieth century waxed and waned with the level of the

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<sup>14</sup> “Lakes of California: Lake Elsinore,” San Diego Historical Society (quotation); Zimmerman, 62-63; “Celebrating 50 Years of Water History,” Prepared by Mary Brown for the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, 2000; James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1968; reprint 2003), 319; Tom Hudson 24, 55, 154-158.

lake. In spite of this, the town survived and the residents stayed, sustained by faith in the future despite the realities of the vagaries of their natural environment.<sup>15</sup>

The 1920s were a prime era for new real estate development in Lake Elsinore Valley. New buildings were constructed for local businesses, social organizations and country clubs, tourist lodging and other facilities, including a golf course and campgrounds. Residential structures, including palatial homes, were built in different places around the lake. Improved transportation lines were built, making it possible to drive on paved roads north to Corona, and south to San Diego. The many attractions of the Valley and California were extensively promoted in a variety of publications. People came from all over to visit the area, buy property and spend their money. An assortment of boosters and promoters were lured, just as the town's founders had been, by visions of an opportunity they viewed as reserved especially for them. They continued their attempts to develop Lake Elsinore into a health and recreation center with the extra benefit of ideal home and business districts.<sup>16</sup>

Successful businessman Ernest Pickering, one of the developers of the Ocean Park section of the city of Santa Monica, bought the entire block of Lake Elsinore where the Lake View Inn and the Crescent Bath House stood around Spring and Limited Streets, along with a substantial parcel of lakefront land nearby. Pickering had worked with the Abbot Kinney Company developing the residential community and amusements of Venice, California. Clevelin Realty became Elsinore's biggest real estate promoter, selling lots on the lake's north and south shores, including at Country Club Heights (also known as Clevelin Heights) on the north shore. The company also constructed on the north shore what became known as

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Hudson, 78, 116-117; "Lakes of California: Lake Elsinore," San Diego Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Hudson, 61, 65, 68, 71, 73; "Lake Elsinore Healthy Place," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1928, A12.

the Aloha (Pleasure) Pier in 1926, and Clevelin Country Club, near the edge of the town site.<sup>17</sup>

In 1924, the *Los Angeles Times* noted one of the largest real estate syndicate operations in the state of California was being undertaken by the Elsinore Land Trusts. The owners of this 9,000-acre parcel of land, the Southern California Athletic and Country Club, planned to build a clubhouse, golf links, polo grounds and water sports facilities on their property on the south shore of Lake Elsinore. Their development plans included making available tracts for independent subdivisions of country club estates, mountain cabin sites, and farms of three, five and ten-acres. By 1925 construction of the clubhouse was completed, but it was never used as intended, as the developers ran into financial difficulties.<sup>18</sup>

## **African American Heritage**

### ***Early Decades of the Twentieth Century***

By the 1920s there were also establishments catering to African Americans seeking recreational and leisure opportunities in Lake Elsinore Valley. In 1887 when the town of Lake Elsinore was first settled, African Americans William Charles Burgess (1842-1913) and his wife, Hannah (1852-1947), both from Missouri, came to the Valley, and began work as domestic servants for the household of Franklin Heald, the founder of Lake Elsinore. The Burgesses bought property in Lake Elsinore off Pottery and Main Streets, a location then at the outskirts of the town center. They purchased additional property a little further out,

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<sup>17</sup> Hotels and Apartments, Elsinore, 5 November 1920, *Southwest Builders and Contractor*, 19; "Lake Elsinore Healthy Place," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1928; Tom Hudson, 55-56, 71, 72, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Tom Hudson, 61-62, 68; "Subdivisions and Subdividers," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1924, D1.

including near Pottery and Kellogg Streets, where they raised oranges and olives. Eventually, Pottery Street became the main thoroughfare of the African American vacation and year-round community at Lake Elsinore.<sup>19</sup>

Burgess and other early residents parlayed their labor in agriculture and service occupations into community stability, enterprise and land purchases. By the 1910s and 1920s, their ventures had established a resort destination that would attract leading African American professionals, successful capitalists and good life aspirationalists. William Charles Burgess was noted for his civic activities and employment history. Accounts described the senior Burgess as having worked as a cook for various individuals and on work details such as crews constructing roads. Born in enslavement and a Civil War veteran who served in the Union Army, Burgess was at one time a color-bearer and treasurer of the Elsinore Grand Army of the Republic Post with other Civil War veterans. Other early African American families with permanent residences at this time in the Lake Elsinore environs made livings in the local economy in agriculture, construction and other manual labor jobs. A few worked in support jobs for the (Euro- and African American) resort infrastructure as masseurs, cooks, housekeepers, property caretakers and small lodging proprietors serving both African and Anglo Americans.<sup>20</sup>

From the 1910s to 1927, evidence supports that Mrs. Burgess and her son, William Lafayette Burgess (1875-1948), ran a small hotel known as Rieves Inn, built at the family

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<sup>19</sup> Sandy Stokes, "Elsinore lacked the look of hatred: Black family going north paused, then settled down," *The Press Enterprise*, February 13, 1996, B-2; Lake Elsinore Cemetery Records.

<sup>20</sup> Sandy Stokes, "Elsinore lacked the look of hatred: Black family going north paused, then settled down," *The Press Enterprise*, 13 February 1996, B-2; History of Lake Elsinore compiled from newspaper stories by Altha Merrifield Cauch, 1956, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 307.

farm near Pottery and Kellogg. Catering to African American leisure and health seekers, their lodging facilities began in a private residence, and expanded to a larger hotel structure when they were sold to Mr. and Mrs. Kruse from San Diego. The Kruses had previously worked as managers of the café at the Douglas Hotel, a hugely successful African American establishment located in downtown San Diego founded in 1924.<sup>21</sup>

A 1921 article in the *California Eagle* entitled “Elsinore Notes,” speaks of the Rieves Inn as a “popular resort for health and recreation.” The article described a scene of a successful party with guests dressed in their finery. Hotel guests from Oakland, California are noted as being participants in the merriment that went on past midnight on a Wednesday evening, no less. Robert C. Owens (1859–1932), the prosperous black Angeleno real estate mogul and descendant of Los Angeles pioneer Bidly Mason, was noted as a guest at the party. The description of the soiree and socially prominent African American vacationers shows that Lake Elsinore not only attracted the well-to-do, but presented a public discourse of respectable social interaction like that appearing city newspaper of the day. The *Los Angeles Times* often featured articles discussing similar experiences of well-to-do and socially prominent whites enjoying parties, and their vacations at popular resort hotels.<sup>22</sup>

A letter dated May 20, 1924, written on Rieves Inn stationery, from Ms. A’Lelia Walker (1885-1931) to a Mr. [Freeman Briley] Ransom [, Esq.] (1884–1947)—along with the *California Eagle* article, noting visitors from Oakland—gives evidence the Burgess’s Lake Elsinore hotel was known to African Americans outside of southern California. Ms.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Cauch, 309-310; Richard L. Carrico & Stacey Jordan, PhD, *Centre City Development Corporation Downtown San Diego African-American Heritage Study*, Prepared by Mooney & Associates, San Diego, California, June 2004, V/40-V/46.

<sup>22</sup> “Elsinore Notes,” *California Eagle*, 21 September 1921.



Walker's letter to Mr. Ransom, the attorney/general manager of the Madame C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, informed him she was feeling much better, and had been following the doctor's orders of her physician in California, Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon, a respected black Angeleno medical professional, civic leader, businessman and Lake Elsinore property owner. Walker may have come for recuperation at the Rieves Inn, but she may have also known the Burgess family as Ms. Walker and her mother had lived in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1880s, and it is possible they may have been acquainted from that time period. Even if Ms. Walker before becoming a cosmetic mogul had not crossed paths with the Burgesses in St. Louis, this would have made for some mutual interests and memories while she was their paying guest. A statuesque six-foot tall woman with a stylish appearance and regal African beauty, Ms. Walker suffered from hypertension and other health problems. From 1915, she had a West Coast base of operation in Los Angeles at 1449 West Thirty-fifth Place, a few blocks west of the University of Southern California.<sup>23</sup>

Ms. Walker was a prominent national figure, the only daughter and heir to the cosmetics empire and fortune created by her mother, Madame C.J. Walker (1867–1919), the first self-made African American woman millionaire. Like her mother, A'Lelia Walker in addition to being a businesswoman, was a philanthropist who supported many causes. Internationally visible with celebrity status and a very independent woman, she traveled abroad, alone, during an era when few women did so, to Africa, Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Central and South America. Ms. Walker owned property in Los Angeles, New York, Indiana and a few other places. She inherited the lavish family estate, Villa Lewaro,

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<sup>23</sup> A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground, the Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books, 2001), 16, 106-107, 165; A'Lelia Bundles, biographer and descendent of A'Lelia Walker, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, via email, 20 August 2014.

her mother had built in Irvington-on-the-Hudson, New York, near the home of John D. Rockefeller. She entertained and supported Harlem Renaissance literati and musicians such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Jame Reese Europe and Alberta Hunter in her tastefully decorated, renovated Manhattan townhouse she called the “Dark Tower.” Vertner Tandy, a Tuskegee Institute and Cornell University trained architect and founder of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, designed both of the Walker’s New York residences. Her legendary parties and salons hosted guests from the worlds of African Americans and Anglos, Harlem to Greenwich Village, and assorted international royalty in an era when this kind of social mixing infrequently occurred. She was a muse who inspired many singers, poets and sculptors, such as literary critic Carl Van Vechten, author George Schuyler and artist Richard Bruce Nugent. Langston Hughes called her, the “joy goddess of Harlem’s 1920s” because of his admiration for her character and gift for staging extravagant and memorable social gatherings for the era’s intellectuals, artists, businessmen and civil rights leaders.<sup>24</sup>

The letterhead of the Rieves Inn stationery provided much information about the establishment, and was reminiscent of an advertisement one might see in a magazine or newspaper. Along with the name and location of the hotel, there was a small line drawing of what the resort hotel and its setting might have looked like at one time, a list of ailments the Lake Elsinore Hot Springs water was “unsurpassed” in treating, transportation options to

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<sup>24</sup> Bundles, *On Her Own Ground, the Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (2001), 16, 106-107, 165, 169, 172; A’Lelia Walker Essay, BlackPast.org, From the Internet: <http://www.aleliabundles.com/2014/02/05/blackpast-org-features-alelia-walker-essay/>, 24 September 2014; A’Lelia Bundles, biographer and descendent of A’Lelia Walker, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, via telephone, April 8, 2007; 1880 U.S. Federal Census; Vertner Woodson Tandy (1885-1949), From the Internet: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/tandy-vertner-woodson-1885-1949>, 26 September 2014; Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (founded 1906) was the first national, black Greek-letter organization and it was founded on the Cornell University campus, From the Internet: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/alpha-phi-alpha-fraternity-inc>, 26 September 2014.

reach the resort, and the proprietor's contact information. Hotel rates were mentioned as being "Popular Prices," with food service described as available on an "a la Carte" basis.

Some of the guests at the Burgess establishment may have also perceived entrepreneurial opportunities to provide accommodations for African Americans who sought a rustic, health respite from the southern California metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, San Diego and Riverside and other locations. By the mid-1920s several prominent black Angelenos purchased their own vacation homes. A few entrepreneurs from the city of the Angels also invested in resort and recreation spaces for their own and their African American compatriots' use at Lake Elsinore. (See Figure 6)

As in other parts of the U.S., because they were barred in southern California from employment with better wages and in managerial positions in corporate America, "ambitious African Americans gravitated toward entrepreneurial ventures, especially those that catered to the group population of [black] Angelenos." The "nationalist surge" of the early 1920s, when Pan Africanist Marcus Garvey and others spoke at organized meetings in Los Angeles and around the U.S. promoting black pride and political and economic self-reliance, strengthened this entrepreneurial trend. Carried forward from earlier decades, these same themes of self-development and self-determination had been promoted in one form by Booker T. Washington, as well as by other African American journalists, entrepreneurs, club women and ministers preaching race progress through enterprise.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See generally Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race, Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 227, 231-232; Delores Nason McBroom, "Harvest of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment In Allensworth and Little Liberia" in Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor, ed. *Seeking El Dorado: African American Experiences in California* (Seattle and London: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press, 2001).

**Figure 6.** Selective sites in the Lake Elsinore African American Resort Community, 1920s-1960s. Locations were identified from interviews, census records, African American newspaper ads, and travel and business directories.

	<b>Property</b>	<b>Address</b>
1	Rieves Inn, 1920 By 1930 the Rieves Inn would be called L.C. Malanda's Burgess Hotel and Health Resort	Pottery & Kellogg
2	Lake Shore Beach 1921-1940s	On Lakeshore Drive going towards the northeastern corner of the lake about 1.6 miles from Main Street in historic downtown Lake Elsinore.
3	Mrs. Mildred Sterling cottage rentals business, 1920s-1970s	311 N. Kellogg
4	Love Nest Inn Strider & Sons, 1925 (faded sign may still be there at private home)	N. Kellogg Across from Lake Elsinore Hotel/Inn
5	Lake Elsinore Hotel/Inn, 1930s-1960s	416 N. Kellogg
6	George Moore Motel & Café (Chicken Inn) In Los Angeles, he also owned a service station & tire shop @ 46 <sup>th</sup> Street & Central Avenue	Pottery & Spring
7	Martinez Bathhouse	Riley & Sumner, across from Hensley Court
8	Mundy's Court, 1940s	NE corner of Pottery & Langstaff
9	Hotel Coleman DeLuxe, 1926-1930s	Pottery & Lowell
10	LaBonita Motel, 1930 First owner: Jim and Inez Anderson Later owner: Wyman & Rita Burney, also had a lamp shop in the Hermitz Bldg. on Graham. Extant as apartments, but modified.	Pottery & Riley
11	Brooks Health Baths and Spa and Café, 1930s, Al Brooks, proprietor	Pottery & Poe
12	Hensley Court Horace C. Hensley, owner, 1940s Tom Yarborough owned property before Hensley. Extant as apartment.	Riley & Sumner
13	Pottery Lunchett, 1930	415 Pottery
14	Smith's Grocery Store, 1930 A. Smith, proprietor	419 Langstaff
15	Mr. Daniels' Court cottages	Riley
16	Hendrix's Court, 1930s William & Gussie Hendrix, proprietors Served family style meals. She was the mother of the Independence Church.	309 Lowell
17	Clarence Muse Muse-O-Lot Ranch	Perris, CA
18	Henry's, 1940s	Pottery, b/t Langstaff & Poe
19	Miller's Café, 1945-1980s	SE corner Pottery & Langstaff

<b>Property</b>	<b>Address</b>
Andrew J. and Elizabeth Miller, proprietors Rubin "Buddy" Brown's family lived next door on Pottery.	
20 Thomas and Kathryn Yarborough Residence, 1920s-1960s	
21 Judge David Williams Residence	Silver, south of Sumner
22 Paul R Williams Residence	16908 Grand Ave. @ Buena Vista Street -across the lake from the historic town center
23 Douglas and Mary Henderson Residence In Los Angeles, he was a pharmacist @ Washington Blvd. & Central Central Ave. His wife Mary Broyles worked at the soda foundation in the Clark Hotel.	Poe b/t Pottery & Sumner
24 The (Leon & Ruth) Washington Family ranch – 30 acres LA Sentinel Newspaper, owners	
25 Dr. Curtis King's Ranch	Flint, off Chaney
26 H. Claude Hudson Family Residence Also rented a house on Lowell before they built on Lewis. Barbara Anderson owns the house today.	304 N. Lewis Street Lewis & Sumner
27 Dr. Elvin and Olive Neal Residence	Scrivener & Pottery
28 Thomas and Portia Griffith, II Residence	214 Lewis Street
29 Thomas & Judy Rutherford Residence	On Lewis Street
30 Paul Payne Family Residence	On Lewis Street
31 The Oggs Residence	Near M. Sterling on Kellogg
32 Rev. Hampton and Gertrude Hawes, Sr. Family Residence, 1930s	Lowell & Scrivener
33 2 <sup>nd</sup> Baptist Church of Los Angeles Retreat	1548 Lakeshore @ Elsinore City limits
34 Charlotta A. Bass Residence, 1950s-1960s	709 West Heald Ave. b/t Kellogg & Lowell
35 Hill Top Club, 1950s-60s	
36 Barbershop, 1940s One owner: Sterling Jackson	Pottery
37 Beauty Salon, started in 1953 Miriam Hutchinson, owner - came to LE in 1920s	Pottery & Lowell
38 Jones Fish & Tackle Repair Shop Dollene Jones	Langstaff
39 Rev. and Mrs. Jones	Lewis, b/t Pottery & Sumner
40 Dr. Wilbur and Desdemona Gordon	Pottery, east of Main include parcels across the highway
41 Independent Church (African American congregation, begun 1920s-present)	Kellogg b/t Pottery & Sumner

The Rieves Inn served as a point of encounter and inspiration to further enterprise and community building. The resort venture known as Lake Shore Beach, located on the north shore of Lake Elsinore may have been an idea launched after one of its founders had been a guest at the Burgesses' Rieves Inn. In 1921, the Lake Shore Beach Company purchased a little less than fifty acres of land in order to build a black resort at the northeastern corner of Lake Elsinore, edging the town site just below the Clevelin Heights area. The real estate investment was valued at \$35,000, with each of the five directors' shares valued equally. This real estate investment group included several leading black Angelenos who wanted to ensure African Americans had "a footing on the lake" so they would not be shut out by racial discrimination and white harassment. The original officers and members of the company's Board of Directors included Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon as president, Charles Darden, Esq. as vice president and attorney, Arthur L. Reese as secretary, Alexander C. Richardson as treasurer and business manager (his wife, Sallie T. Richardson, replaced him as a board member after his death in 1922), and Mrs. Anna Josephine Jones.<sup>26</sup>

The members of the Lake Shore Beach investment group were all people civically active and highly regarded in the black Angeleno community, likely knowing one another through their business, social and church affiliations. These associates were part of the segment of the black population who prospered after the end of slavery, despite the obstacles and prejudice they faced. As in the Eastern U.S., successful, more affluent African Americans developed resorts like Lake Shore Beach at Lake Elsinore to promote rightful

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<sup>26</sup> Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting notes, Arthur L. Reese Family Archives, Los Angeles, California, Sept. 30, Nov. 1 and Dec. 13, 1921, July 2 and Oct. 16, 1922; Milton Anderson, Los Angeles and Lake Elsinore, California resident, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, via telephone, November 15, 2004; "Where Will You Spend Your Vacation," *California Eagle*, 27 June 1924, 11; Florence Keeney Robinson, *Problems In Training Adult Negroes In Los Angeles* (Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1929), 71-72; 1920 U.S. Federal Census.

leisure and health, insulated from racist confrontations, such as enforced public proscriptions and violence of word or deed. It is noteworthy that several of the Lake Elsinore developers were viewed as distinguished citizens of their day in the state of California, evidenced by their inclusion in Delilah Beasley's ground-breaking 1918 book, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*.<sup>27</sup>

As land owners and resort developers, these trail blazing southern California pioneers and capitalists sought to use their money and civic connections to promote their vision of African American business ownership, wealth growth and community life at place where they and their paying guests could enjoy themselves without fear of the insidious white torment. The head of the group, Dr. Wilbur Clarence Gordon (1880–1945) hailed from Ohio. He graduated from Howard University Medical School in 1904, and had a successful practice in his home state of Ohio until 1912, when he moved to California. From the beginning of his tenure in southern California, Gordon was a leader on matters of racial social progress, medical and dental professional associations, and black business development. He was instrumental in organizing the Doctors, Dentists and Pharmacists Association for Southern California, and the Ohio State Social Society. He was the chorister of Second Baptist Church, one of the oldest African American churches in the city of Los Angeles. He was already familiar with Lake Elsinore at the time the Lake Shore Beach Company was forming, as he and his wife, Desdemona, had purchased a 130-acre ranch there in the latter part of the second decade of the 1910s. After he moved to California from Ohio, his father and mother,

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Foster, 131, 135.

Calvin and Arabelle Gordon, moved out and operated the ranch for him. His mother was a Spanish scholar and his father had been a mechanic.<sup>28</sup> (See Figure 6)

Later, in 1949, after Dr. Gordon's death in 1945, his church home, Second Baptist, purchased a house on Lake Elsinore's Lake Shore Drive, not far from the Lake Shore Beach establishment. Just at the Lake Elsinore city limits, the lakefront house was available for church members, their friends and the general public for vacation at a nominal fee. The house could accommodate twenty people, at a price of one dollar a person per night. An article in the *California Eagle* announcing Second Baptist's new resort venture noted:

Buses stop in front of the door. If motoring, a sign saying "Elsinore City Limit" is in front of the property. Second Baptist is not selfish...the beach house... is open to the public at large.<sup>29</sup>

Concerned about creation of power, wealth, and more businesses owned and controlled by African Americans, Dr. Gordon was involved in numerous business and real estate development ventures, in addition to his medical practice and the Lake Shore Beach Company. Businesses ventures were one way Dr. Gordon used his personal agency to push for African American civil rights, wealth development and equal access to the consumer culture of the era. He persevered even while he and other black Angeleno entrepreneurs experienced state action and white bigotry that impeded some development projects. His base of operations in Los Angeles was located at 1021 East Washington Boulevard at Griffith Avenue, a block west of Central Avenue. Delilah Beasley waxed that his property was "a centrally-located double corner lot, upon which he erected a handsome residence and suite of

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<sup>28</sup> Delilah Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Fairfield, CA: John Stevenson Publisher, reprint 2004), 246-247; Files on Wilbur C. Gordon, MD, California State Archives; 1920 U.S. Federal Census.

<sup>29</sup> "Second Baptist Operates Own Beach House on Lake Elsinore," *The California Eagle*, August 11, 1949; *A Treasury of Tradition, Innovation and Hope: History of Second Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California*, 1975, publication created for the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration for the institution, 16.



modern offices.” For many years the Lake Shore Beach Company was also headquartered at Gordon’s offices, where they also held their board meetings.<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Gordon was a founder of the black-owned Liberty Savings and Loan Association (the Liberty), and its first president in 1924. This was the first, black-owned financial institution of this kind founded in Los Angeles.

The Association was organized...to promise thrift among [African Americans] by providing a safe and convenient method for people to save and invest money; and...to provide for the sound and economical financing of homes.<sup>31</sup>

The following year in 1925, Dr. Gordon was among the initial investors in the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company (the Golden State), which sold life and health insurance policies to African Americans throughout California. Later the company also sold mortgage loans for homes and businesses of varying sizes. At its height, the Golden State became one of the largest African American-owned businesses in the U.S.<sup>32</sup>

Also, in 1925, with backing from the Liberty and the white-owned Commercial National Bank, Dr. Gordon, his personal realtor Journee W. White (who will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6) and several other African American realtors worked to create a high class residential subdivision for African Americans called Gordon Manor, near the city of Torrance, three miles east of Manhattan Beach in the southwestern section of Los Angeles County. It can be assumed customers would have been further reassured about the soundness of the venture’s investment return possibilities with the well regarded Eastside Realty led by

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<sup>30</sup> Flamming, 239-242, 256; Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting notes, Sept. 30, 1921-1930s.

<sup>31</sup> *Negroes Who’s Who In California*, 1948 Edition, 59; *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who’s Who, 1930-1931*, The California Eagle Publishing Company, 90-91; Emory Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles: Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement* (Los Angeles, CA: CAAS, 1980), 72; Flamming, 240.

<sup>32</sup> Flamming, 253-258.

O.L. Banks and the Walter L. Gordon Company as lead real estate agents selling lots for the new subdivision. From his research and investment expertise articulated in the Gordon Manor advertisements, Dr. Gordon saw this area becoming “the choicest residential section of Greater Los Angeles.” The *California Eagle* viewed purchasing in “the Gordon Manor Subdivision...[as] a forward step in the march of progress.” The newspaper urged its readers and potential lot purchasers at Gordon Manor to consider acquisition of land at this location, adjacent to major boulevards leading to the beaches, and bus and street car service, which created the circumstances for exceptional development opportunities and increased property value as the regional population, Los Angeles and the surrounding towns grew. Plans for this 213-acre farm and undeveloped land were intended to be “posh,” and included luxury homes and more modest dwellings.<sup>33</sup>

Gordon engaged respected august and youthful professional expertise for what he called “the subdivision beautiful.” Charles R. Sumner, a pioneering Los Angeles land surveyor, civil engineer and sometimes realtor, was contracted to handle the Gordon Manor site planning needs. Available information suggests that Sumner emigrated from England in the late 1800s and was living in Los Angeles as early as 1893. A young African American architect, designer and engineer beginning his long career, James “Jimmy” H. Garrott (1897–1991), was retained to design the subdivision plan. His other responsibilities were to

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<sup>33</sup> “Gordon Manor” ad, *California Eagle*, 11/18 December 1925 & 7 May 1926, 2; It can be inferred from newspaper accounts and advertisements O.L. Banks and associates at Eastside Realty Co. were well known for their successful business dealings in the African American community. They were identified with several of the era’s leisure development projects discussed in this dissertation. The company’s agents were noted for successfully handling of investors in the sale of land in the 1920s transactions for the popular Central Avenue Gardens Tract and the Central Avenue Subdivision. “Eastside Realty Co. Opens New Sub-Division,” *California Eagle*, 11 December 1925, 1; Walter L. Gordon of the Walter L. Gordon Company was no relations to Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon; “Rare Opportunity” Editorial, *California Eagle*, 11 December 1925, 8; “Gordon Manor Tract Centrally Located,” *California Eagle*, 8 January 1926, 9; *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who’s Who, 1930-1931*, The *California Eagle* Publishing Company, no page number; Flammig, 239-242; 1920 U.S. Federal Census.

supervise and approve the building design of all the subdivision's houses before they could be constructed so they would conform to the tract's general scheme of a "Moorish or Spanish" Revival architectural style. Garrott also designed a "beautiful clubhouse" to be erected in the center of the tract for the benefit of the community that Dr. Gordon as the tract developer agreed to pay for.<sup>34</sup>

Born in Montgomery, Alabama, Garrott came to Los Angeles as a small boy with his family in 1903. Garrott's inspiration to become an architect may have been due to viewing the masterful work of his father, James H. Garrott, Sr., who was a successful builder and contractor before and after arriving in Los Angeles. Garrott the younger went on to be a successful professional who designed and built the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance headquarters (with contractor Louis M. Blogett, 1928) on Central Avenue, many single family and apartment dwellings, churches, office buildings, cocktail lounges, publicly and privately funded civic structures, residential subdivisions and other structures in revival and modern architectural styles for a clientele of Anglo and African Americans in various parts of the Los Angeles metropolitan environs.<sup>35</sup>

James H. Garrott's family included other black Angeleno pathfinders and pioneers in addition to his father, and others who could have influenced and helped his career development and life pursuits. His uncle, Dr. Alva C. Garrott, after graduation from Washington D.C.'s Howard University Pharmacy and Dentistry Departments, moved to Los Angeles in 1901 where he became the first African American to practice dentistry in the city.

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<sup>34</sup> "Gordon Manor" ad, *California Eagle*, 12 March 1926, 2.

<sup>35</sup> 1910 & 1920 U.S. Federal Census; 1893 Los Angeles City Directory, 743; Wesley Howard Henderson, "Two Case Studies of African American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 376, 388, 452-545.

Dr. Garrott had many civic and business accomplishments in addition to his dentistry practice. To name a few, he served as vice president and president of the Los Angeles Urban League founded in 1921, and he was a founder of the Unity Finance Company, another African American bank formed in 1924, the same year as the Liberty Savings & Loan Association. Another uncle, Homer L. Garrott, rose from the position of patrolman to detective with the Los Angeles Police Department. Early in their tenure in Los Angeles, both uncles, through individual action, fought the imposition of the color line in residential accommodations, discrimination, and for equal access.<sup>36</sup>

In housing, regular white resistance to African American neighbors began in southern California early in the twentieth century, and Garrott family members came up against some of this opposition. In pursuit of his California dream, Dr. Alva C. Garrott purchased a lot to build a new home in Glendale in 1907. The selection of this community was for the drier climate to help his first wife, Lillie D. Garrott (1871–1916), who suffered from tuberculosis. While the family slept in a tent on their property during construction of their new home, they received a series of threatening notes stating they would be harmed or killed if they did not leave Glendale. Garrott would not be intimidated and slept with two loaded shotguns nearby his bed until the community stopped their harassment and intimidation tactics. Once their

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<sup>36</sup> Howard University had been founded in 1867 for the purpose of providing higher education training to people of African descent, especially from the American South and Africa. From the Internet: <http://www.howard.edu/explore/history.htm> and <http://healthsciences.howard.edu/education/schools-and-academics/medicine/about/mission/short-history>, 9 October 2014; *Negroes Who's Who In California*, 1948 Edition, 84; Beasley, 246; Homer Livingstone Garrott, U.S. World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917-1918; Charlotta Bass, *Forty Years, Memoirs From the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles, CA, 1960), 9; An affiliate of the National Urban League founded in 1910, the Los Angeles Urban League was formed in 1921 to advocated for employment advancement and equal opportunities of African Americans and other people of color in the work place, From the Internet: [www.laul.org/2012-01-13-20-59/overview](http://www.laul.org/2012-01-13-20-59/overview), 6 September 2014; Lonnie G. Bunch III, "Black Angelenos, The Afro-Americans in Los Angeles, 1850-1950" (Los Angeles, CA: California African American Museum, 1988), 23; *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who, 1930-1931*, 93; Unity Finance Company ad, *California Eagle*, 14 February 1924, no page number; Flammig, 67, 245.

new home was completed, the Garrot family moved in without further incident. With Charles S. Darden, Esq. as his attorney, Homer L. Garrott successfully fought racially restrictive real estate covenants in a California court case, *Garrott v. Title Guarantee Company* (1915–1919). Although the courts ruled in Garrott’s case restrictive covenants violated California law, for others in the varied communities of color the fight over this legal tactic of housing discrimination would not be resolved until the U.S. Supreme Court cases of *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948) and *Barlow v. Jackson* (1953).<sup>37</sup>

Available evidence suggests James H. Garrott, the younger may have absorbed and benefited from these experiences of his uncles and others in the community, to become as he phrased it in 1947 “an ardent worker in the constant fight for the rights of minorities” as well as a bold designer and entrepreneur during his lifetime. Later in his life in 1955, he reflected that articulating “community welfare” and “improved residential planning” ideas in housing development projects were some of his most gratifying experiences. The Gordon Manor subdivision would be an early project in Garrott’s career where he could have actualized his architectural design philosophy and building skills to promote the rights of African Americans to enjoy quality housing and well being. Modern architecture, rather than revival style buildings became the specialty he is most remembered for. Garrott collaborated on several projects with Gregory Ain, a southern California architect most remembered for

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<sup>37</sup> 1910 U.S. Federal Census; E.H. Rydall, “California for Colored Folks,” *The Colored American* magazine, (May 1907), 387; Bunch, “Black Angelenos...,” 23; Lawrence B. DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review*, V. 39, No. 3 (August 1970): 337-338; Charlotta Bass, 96; Flamming, 67, 245.

bringing refined, modern architecture design and imaginative planning to lower and middle cost housing in such subdivisions as the Mar Vista Housing Tract in western Los Angeles.<sup>38</sup>

The Gordon Manor project, including the land, proposed erection of 1,000 houses, street improvements, landscaping, lights, civic infrastructure and financing, was estimated to cost a little over \$7,000,000. Gordon Manor lot prices began at \$700 and up, with a three percent down payment being acceptable. The seller granted liberal discounts if buyers paid cash for their lots. Gordon stated in a newspaper advertisement (that was more like an article) that lot sales went very well from the beginning, even though the sales offering was presented in December 1925 just before the Christmas holidays. By early March 1926, Gordon announced more than \$200,000 worth of property had been sold in the Gordon Manor subdivision. Lot sales continued to go well into 1926. To erect a house the average price would have been between \$3,500 to \$5,000. A few among the more affluent African Americans investing in Gordon Manor developed plans for houses priced from \$22,000 to \$36,000 each to erect. Some of the era's familiar business savy and respected people of the black Angeleno community were identified in a *California Eagle*, Gordon Manor advertisement as lot buyers and investors, including Chester and Bessie B. Burke, Leroy A. and Lillian Beavers, Dr. Emily Childress (see Chapter 7 for more on her), police lieutenant detective Charles Brody, and others.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Negroes Who's Who In California*, 1948 Edition, 84; Marguerite Cartwright, "James Garrott, California Architect," *Negro History Bulletin* (April 1955) in Henderson, Appendix GB, 544; Gregory Ain biography, From the Internet: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/shulman/architects/ain/>, 13 October 2014; Esther McCoy, "Retrospective: Gregory Ain's Social Housing," *Arts and Architecture*, (Winter 1981), 66-70.

<sup>39</sup> Bessie Brunington Burke (1891-1968) was born in Los Angeles and she became Los Angeles's first African American school teacher in 1911, and principal in 1918, From the Internet: <http://www.westadamsheritage.org/read/474>, 9 October 2014; *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 37; Leroy A. Beavers (b/abt. 1901) was an insurance salesman and a relative of George Beavers, Jr. one of the founders of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co.; "Gordon Manor" ad, 11/18 December 1925 & 12 March/9

As racist antagonists had done to the Bruces in Manhattan Beach, a group of very wealthy white Angelenos, who owned mansions and sizeable ranchettes (or estates) in the hillsides of Palos Verdes several miles south of the Gordon Manor development, convinced the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 1926 to condemn the subdivision's land to build a park. Among those who fought to keep out the "invading" African Americans were powerful Los Angeles lawyer Henry W. O'Melveny, banker, investor and former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Frank A. Vanderlip and prominent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.<sup>40</sup>

After protracted proceedings, the Gordon Manor interests are said to have received in the range of \$700,000 as payment under the condemnation proceedings. Funds from a \$1,014,691.20 bond issue by the county of Los Angeles secured the land purchase for the public park. Bought at a premium of \$32,581.50, the bonds paid seven percent interest and were oversubscribed by the investing public. The payment to Gordon and associates barely covered the group's expenses for the land and the infrastructure improvements put into the development. As had been the case in Manhattan Beach, there was no hurry to create a park on the land. For many years after the proceedings the land was used by Japanese truck gardeners and for dairy cattle grazing by Sullivan's Dairy. As part of the settlement, the wealthy whites that had undermined the Gordon Manor project were legally bound to a 10,000-acre assessment (improvement) district and its tax liability to pay for the bonds to

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April 1926, *California Eagle*, 2; Charles Brody, "Why I Bought in Gordon Manor Tract," 26 February 1926, *California Eagle*, 2; George P. Johnson, "Collector of Negro Film History," Transcript of oral history conducted in 1976 & 1968 by Elizabeth Dixon & Adelaide Tusler, Department of Special Collections Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, From the Internet: <https://archive.org/details/collectorofnegro00john>, 29 September 2014, 87-89; Flammig, 238-242.

<sup>40</sup> The law firm of Henry W. O'Melveny continues to exist to day as a major firm in contemporary times as O'Melveny and Meyers; Frank A. Vanderlip, From the Internet: <http://frankvanderlip.com/home.html>, 13 October 2014; George P. Johnson, Transcript of oral history 1976/1968, 87-89; Flammig, 238-242.

fund the condemnation land acquisition for the public park. In 1932, during the Depression because they could not pay the yearly ad valorem tax, these mostly rich, white landowners in the improvement district asked the county supervisors for help. Gordon Manor eventually became Alondra Park, El Camino College, and a public golf course. As one African American observer noted at the time, the creation of the park was “the most costly segregation measure ever passed in the West.”<sup>41</sup>

In printed rhetoric as part of their sales pitch, Dr. Wilbur Gordon, Journee W. White and their associates in the Gordon Manor plan offered this real estate project as a way for African Americans through group ownership to participate in wealth generation and consumer culture. White asserted in the *California Eagle* this use of eminent domain proceedings with the assessment district feature was a way for whites “to wipe...out...groups [in any area] whenever and as often as they [could] prove a public necessity, by condemning your entire holdings for park purposes.” As a spokesperson for his business associates speaking to the African American community via the media, he regarded this tactic as more damaging than “the Black restrictions” aimed at African Americans as individuals. To his way of thinking the ability of African Americans’ wealth building and community-making

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<sup>41</sup> The Los Angeles County Supervisors and the Southwest Organization to finance the purchase of Gordon Manor land for a public park used the Acquisition and Improvement Act of 1925. Also called the Mattoon Act after its author, Los Angeles County Counselor Everett Mattoon, the legislation was passed by the California state legislature (which included condemnation of property) to streamline and provide funding for desired public works (roads, sewers, parks, etc.) The legislation was revised in the 1930s due to issues, which are beyond the scope of this examination. For more on the Mattoon Act, see Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven, Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 144-146; “Gordon Manor” ad, *California Eagle*, 10 September 1926, 2; “Park Bond Issue Held to be Legal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 November 1927, A5; “City and County to Join Forces in Alondra Park Improvement,” *Torrance Herald*, 14 February 1929; Alondra Park Timeline, County of Los Angeles, Parks and Recreation Department Archives; George P. Johnson, Transcript of oral history 1976/1968, 87, 88, (quotation) 89; Flammig, 242-243.



efforts throughout Los Angeles could be thoroughly blunted if the continued use of public condemnation power against African American property persisted.<sup>42</sup>

While these blatant efforts to dispossess African American citizens were taking place in southwestern Los Angeles County, Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon pressed on with his associates at Lake Elsinore in their resort business endeavors. Another significant investor in the Lake Elsinore enterprise was Attorney Charles S. Darden (1879–1954), a noted land litigation specialist. After graduating from Howard University, and settling in Los Angeles, Darden undertook purposeful leisure travel in the prevailing mode of the day. (See Darden’s biographical information in Chapter 4.) As noted earlier (Chapter 4), another important participant in the Lake Elsinore venture, Arthur L. Reese (1883–1963) was originally from Louisiana, and like many early African American men he came to Los Angeles as a Pullman porter in 1902. He settled in Venice, California where he developed several small business ventures mostly in the Santa Monica Bay region, and worked with developer Abbot Kinney in several capacities. Reese brought his workforce of a few dozen people and civic connections, plus his professional network from his work with Abbot Kinney’s resort enterprise in Venice to the Lake Shore Beach project.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Gordon Manor” ad, *California Eagle*, 10 September 1926, 2; Flammig, 272-273; Robert Brigham, “Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach” (Master’s Thesis, Fresno State University, 1956), 58-59; Jan Dennis, *A Walk Beside the Sea: A History of Manhattan Beach* (Manhattan Beach, California: Janstan Studio, 1987), 109; Lawrence B. DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...,” 348. As the story of Bruce’s Beach details in Chapter 3 reveal, whites had also used the tactics of condemnation and eminent domain in the 1920s to close a very successful African American beach leisure space in the South Bay, which had its beginnings in 1912 a few miles west of Gordon Manor development. The African American resort community was also evicted in 1924 under the banner campaign that their land was required for a city of Manhattan Beach public park—which did not get constructed for decades.

<sup>43</sup> Beasley, 197-200; Charles Sylvester Darden, U.S. World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917-1918; Charles Sylvester Darden, California Death Index, 1940-1997; It is possible Darden and Gordon became acquainted with one another while matriculating in their respective professional education departments at Howard University as they were on campus during the same time period; Carolyn Elayne Alexander, *Abbot Kinney’s Venice-of-America, The Golden Years: 1905-1920*, Volume 1, (Los Angeles: Westside Genealogical

Ernest Pickering, a successful white real estate developer, who had worked with Abbot Kinney at the same time as Reese, also invested in Lake Elsinore property as Reese and his partners began developing the Lake Shore Beach recreation area for African American patronage. While the Lake Shore Beach venture could have been encouraged by the similar investment of Pickering with whom Reese almost certainly had contact, it is unlikely Pickering's Lake Elsinore project had any direct influence on the Lake Shore Beach black investment group initiative as there was already an established tradition of African Americans owning property in the Valley by the 1920s. This earlier African American land ownership is likely to have been more of an inspiration for the Lake Shore Beach investors to buy real estate in Lake Elsinore than Pickering's interests in the area.<sup>44</sup>

One more Lake Shore Beach Company board member Sallie Taylor Richardson (1878–1943) was a businesswoman active in the civic life of black Los Angeles. Born into an old Kentucky family of racial justice activists, she was the granddaughter of two conductors in the Underground Railroad who helped many African Americans escape enslavement. Raised and educated in Kentucky and Illinois, she moved to Los Angeles with her husband Alexander C. Richardson after living for a while in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her husband was a merchant and did some real estate investing with his wife. In Los Angeles, she studied to become a certified chiropodist (person who treats diseases of the feet and hands), and appears to have had a very successful practice. Delilah Beasley noted in *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* that Richardson “practiced [chiropody]...until she earned sufficient money to buy

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Society, 1991), 215; Flaming, 74; Sonya Reese Davis, with Jewll Lupoma, *Arthur L. Reese, “The Wizard of Venice”* (Marina del Rey, CA: JTI DEMC Publishers, 2006), 1-10; Sonya Reese Davis, Arthur L. Reese Family Archives, interview by author, August 2006, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>44</sup> Tom Hudson, 55-56; “Luncheon Honor As A Farewell,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1914, II8.

a large and valuable piece of property at Wilmington, near Los Angeles... [Said] property, since the shipbuilding industry of the great World War [developed], has greatly increased in value.”<sup>45</sup>

Richardson was a club woman and an active worker for the Sojourner Truth Club in Los Angeles. One of the early black Angeleno women’s clubs, the Sojourner Truth Club was an early affiliate of the California Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (CWC). A branch of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the CWC was the most important organization for African American women in the state. CWC clubs provided social services to their local communities and encouraged women to achieve economic independence. Completed in 1914, the Sojourner Truth Industrial Home was the first major “institutional” project undertaken by local club women. Later known as the Eastside Settlement House, the site provided living quarters, job training, lectures and other services to self-supporting women and girls. Delilah Beasley observed the colored women’s groups “wove together cultural conservatism and women’s rights activism in ways that [were]...slightly disarming, but which made perfect sense given their precarious position in society.” The Sojourner Truth Club continues to provide service to the black Angeleno community in the early decades of the twentieth-first century in a different location in the West Adams District of Los Angeles.<sup>46</sup>

The CWC/NACW structure offered women a source of power and an arena for service unrivaled by mixed-gender organizations. They supported the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), and some club women became leaders in that body. A local

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<sup>45</sup> Beasley, 243; Sallie T. Richardson [aka Sally Richardson], California Death Index, 1940-1997.

<sup>46</sup> Beasley, 243; Flammig, 135, 138-139, 141.

NAACP stalwart, Richardson was a speaker at the 1928 convention hosted by the Los Angeles branch. Her convention session was on membership development and retention. By many accounts, including one from the national organization's co-founder W.E.B. DuBois, the Los Angeles NAACP convention of 1928 was one of the finest the organization had held up to that time.<sup>47</sup>

Although Lake Shore Beach was open for business in the 1920s, some resistance and hostility from Lake Elsinore's white community to the company's plan for an African American resort continued as mentioned in the Board of Directors' meeting minutes dated August 24, 1922. The minutes indicated some local citizens influenced the Southern Sierra Light and Power Company to refuse the furnishing of electricity to their site. The resort group was in the planning stages for a big Labor Day picnic that September when they obtained this unfortunate news. The minutes from a board meeting a few months before the Labor Day event indicated the group had earlier considered canceling the event, due to concerns about the greater community's lack of hospitality. However, the event was held, and after successfully organizing this Labor Day affair, Lake Shore Beach eventually obtained their power and light connection in December 1922.<sup>48</sup>

Minutes from the Lake Shore Beach Company Board of Directors' meetings during the 1920s indicated the group had serious intentions early on to create a fine resort catering to the leisure needs of African Americans, and particularly those from Los Angeles. Various meeting minutes, beginning with an entry on January 20, 1922, and continuing into 1924, 1925, 1926 and 1928, noted the board hired the architect Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980)

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Flammig, 141, 281, 288-289.

<sup>48</sup> Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting minutes, Jan.- Dec. 1922.

to design plans for Lake Shore Beach that included landscaping, dining and dancing pavilions, a bath house, cottages and a fifty-room hotel. This was early in Williams' career, but by the late 1920s he became the most prominent African American architect in the U.S., a status he retained throughout his lifetime and in the years after his death. Williams became especially known for the luxury houses he designed for several Hollywood film industry and wealthy patrons, and his office building designs. Architectural historian David Gebhard asserted Williams became "an eminent society architect in southern California" due to his luxury house designs by the early 1930s.<sup>49</sup>

Williams most likely obtained the Lake Shore Beach commission because the African American resort investors personally knew him and his early success as an architect. He socialized with, or was involved with, civic and religious groups and activities in Los Angeles that included the company board members. At the time of writing of this manuscript, Williams' drawings for this Lake Elsinore development have not been found. Although the design style of the Lake Shore Beach resort is not known, some assumptions can be made about how it might have looked if it had been built. It can be inferred from the known buildings designed by Williams during the 1920s that the Lake Shore Beach resort would have been in one of the popular Spanish Colonial, Moorish or English Tudor revival styles of the period. In the Lake Shore Beach Company meeting minutes dated April 13, 1926, it is noted Williams' hotel building design was discussed. The Board of Directors appeared to be telling Williams they wanted additional space added to the hotel design in the form of a porch placed on three sides, at least twelve feet wide, and partially covered on its front sides

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<sup>49</sup> Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting minutes, Sept. 30, 1921-1930s; Bardolph, 191; Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*, with forward by David Gebhard (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1993), 22-23.

so it could be used to extend the entry lobby and as additional lounging area for hotel guests.<sup>50</sup>

Just as Lake Elsinore had a building boom in the 1920s, so too did Los Angeles. It was during this time Williams was establishing his reputation by often managing the prejudices of potential white clients with his talents, charm and business acumen. Before and after opening his own office in 1922, Williams acquired experience in residential, planning, landscape and commercial architecture, working for and collaborating with prominent southern California architects Irving J. Gill, Reginald D. Johnson, Gordon B. Kaufmann, John C. Austin, Welton Beckett and others. Throughout his career, Williams built houses for mostly upper class and wealthy clients—and a few middle class patrons—across the country, and in Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin America. Lon Chaney, William “Bojangles” Robinson, Tyrone Power, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball, Frank Sinatra and Zsa Zsa Gabor were a few of the entertainers he designed houses for in southern California. Williams’ architectural style is most remembered for its careful abstraction of Anglo Colonial or Georgian and regency styles that appeared simultaneously traditional and modern.<sup>51</sup>

He applied the details of these styles in an elegant manner that was streamlined, horizontal and modern. The usually dramatically curved staircase is an element recognized as an admired feature in many of Williams’ designs. Never abandoning traditional concepts, many of the houses he designed in the later part of his career, including his own house, featured a modernist interpretation. The design style of these Williams buildings referenced

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<sup>50</sup> Karen E. Hudson, 21, 31-51, 104-105.

<sup>51</sup> Karen E. Hudson, 19-25.

the influence of the machine, with rectilinear forms and extensive use of glass to connect the interior open floor plans to gardens.<sup>52</sup>

The commercial buildings Williams designed were in both modernized traditional or modernist styles. Some of his more recognized non-residential projects in the Los Angeles environs include: the Music Corporation of America (1937) and Saks Fifth Avenue Department Store interiors (1939; 1945-50) both in Beverly Hills; Los Angeles County Hall of Administration and Courthouse, a collaboration (1955); Franz Hall (1956) and Botany (1961) Buildings, University of California, Los Angeles; and the Theme Building, Los Angeles International Airport, a collaboration (1960s). In the 1930s and 1940s, he was involved in the design of several public housing projects, including Pueblo del Rio Defense Housing (1940), an important federally funded project in Los Angeles.

Throughout his sixty-year career as an architect, Williams designed only a small number of mostly non-residential buildings in the African American community. In Los Angeles, the Hostsetter Street Elementary School (1924) and the Twenty-eighth Street Young Men's Christian Association/YMCA (1925) were buildings he designed that were used by African Americans. The Second Baptist Church (1924), the Angelus Funeral Home, on West Jefferson Blvd. (1932), Golden State Mutual Life Insurance at Western Avenue and Adams Boulevard (1948), First African American Episcopal/FAME Church in the West Adams District (1963), and the second Angelus Funeral Home, on Crenshaw Blvd. (1966), are better-known buildings designed by Williams commissioned and used by black Angelenos.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Karen E. Hudson, 22, 24, 26-27, 230-235.

<sup>53</sup> Karen E. Hudson, 22, 43-44, 98-99, 122-123, 201.

Williams' broad and significant contribution to the mid-century modern southern California style might be exemplified by a remembrance of Los Angeles native Price Cobbs, a psychiatrist, management consultant, author and longtime San Francisco resident. As a youth, Cobbs remembers Williams driving a Cord automobile around Lake Elsinore one summer in the mid-1930s. A Cord was the successor to the Duesenberg automobile, and was considered very stylish at the time. In 1932, Williams built a house in Beverly Hills for E.L. Cord, the head of the automobile manufacturing company that bore his name. The Cord residence design was an important project in Williams' career, giving him a much higher profile status as an architect in southern California leading to even bigger commissions. For many summer vacations, the Williams family rented a house at Lake Elsinore, and eventually bought a vacation home there.<sup>54</sup>

According to the Lake Shore Beach Company meeting minutes, while the resort group worked on raising the money to build Williams' plan for the site, a series of interim structures were constructed from materials salvaged from other structures and from Army surplus. The first structures at Lake Shore Beach included small wood-framed tent cabins, a dining pavilion, a dance platform, and temporary toilets. Additional clapboard-sided and simple stucco-sided housing was also built during the 1920s.

As Lake Shore Beach struggled to raise funds for construction of its grander building plan by Williams, another Riverside County African American resort, the Parkridge Country Club, opened in nearby Corona in 1928 (See Chapter 6) to racial harassment and traffic ticketing from local Corona citizens and its police department indicating what what the Lake

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<sup>54</sup> Karen E. Hudson, 17, 23, 58-67; Price M. Cobbs, MD, (the younger) San Francisco resident, psychiatrist management consultant, and author, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Los Angeles, California.



Shore Beach Company might have experienced if they had completed the grand facilities the owners envisioned.<sup>55</sup>

Through never fully built, Lake Shore Beach did create a memorable leisure community. The late Milton Anderson, whose father, Charles C. Anderson, signed the lease to operate the concession for the Lake Shore Beach Company during the summer season in 1925, fondly remembered the area owned by the Lake Shore Beach group. Anderson recalled with affection his childhood experiences there, which came through in his tone and word choice during our discussion. The whole Anderson family helped with the management of the property in the mid-1920s. It cost ten cents per person each day to come through the gate to the beach. If you lodged or camped there, the price was of course higher. Sodas were sold from tin tubs with ice keeping them cool for ten cents each. The concession sold sandwiches, and guests could make reservations for dinner.<sup>56</sup>

“Everyone would hang out at the lake for picnics, swimming and some boating. It was like a paradise to go out to [the lake],” he recalled about his visits to Lake Elsinore during the middle decades of the twentieth century. As a child, Anderson learned to swim at Lake Elsinore, and he has nice memories of the evening bands that played and dancing that went on. He remembered Arthur Reese out on his boat at the lake. He also recalled some

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<sup>55</sup> Verna Williams interview, “Shades of L.A.” Oral History Project, Photo Friends of the Los Angeles Public Library, 1996; DeGraaf, “The City of Black Angels...” 348; Washington, “Recreational Facilities for Negroes,” 280; Robinson, 71-72; “Negroes Buy Country Club,” News of Southern Counties Section, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1928, A10.

<sup>56</sup> Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting minutes, April 28, 1925; Milton Anderson, Los Angeles and Lake Elsinore, California resident, interview by author, November 15, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

times the lake had three to four feet waves that could be a bit treacherous, whereby one needed to be careful if out in a rowboat.<sup>57</sup>

To encourage visitors who did not want to drive or did not have a car to make the journey, the various groups sponsoring affairs at Lake Shore Beach offered Hupmobile (a minivan of the 1920s) transportation to bring visitors from Los Angeles to the Lake Elsinore recreation area. The periods around the Independence Day and September Labor Day holidays were especially busy for the city of Lake Elsinore, as well as the Lake Shore Beach resort, with overnight rental visitors and day trippers. In the Board's meeting minutes, the Lake Shore Beach owners from the 1920s into the 1940s continued to renew and upgrade improvements to the site to accommodate the crowds that came out and regularly repair floodwater damage from the lake to the property. Due to the inability of the Lake Shore Beach Company to raise sufficient funds for its execution, the resort plan design by architect Paul Williams was never fully implemented.<sup>58</sup>

Pleasure seekers from San Diego were also regular visitors to Lake Elsinore during the Jim Crow era. Barbara Anderson, a retired librarian of African American lineage reminisced in a 2004 interview that as a girl growing up in San Diego she thought it quite an adventure to go to Lake Elsinore with her family, because it was a four-hour drive through winding roads around the mountains. In the late 1930s to early 1940s, her family camped in a tent and a camper at Lake Shore Beach, or at the free public beach, for several weeks each summer for many years. She and her two siblings, William and Jacqueline, helped their mother, Louise, pick and can apricots as one of their summer activities. Like most fathers of

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<sup>57</sup> Milton Anderson, interview by author, November 15, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>58</sup> Lake Shore Beach and various club event advertisements, *California Eagle*, May thru June 1922-1925.

the era who could afford a vacation for their family, Anderson's father, Lorenzo, stayed home in San Diego to work during the week, and joined the family on the weekends at their vacation location. Initially not welcome by whites in San Diego's Chula Vista district where they purchased a Victorian style house and a small farm, the Andersons soon became an integral part of the civic life of the community. The Andersons grew corn, beans, peanuts, peppers, lettuce, celery, cabbage and other crops, which were often sold at local markets. Lorenzo Anderson also worked for the city road crew, and later entered the landscaping business, working with contractors on new housing subdivision developments in the greater San Diego-Escondido area. While at the lake, for their enjoyment and probably for a bit of useful extra income, Anderson's father and uncle would catch significant quantities of fish and take them back to San Diego to sell.<sup>59</sup>

“There was a group of people who came to the lake just after school let out for the summer,” said Anderson. She remembers how friendly the (black) people were at Lake Shore Beach. “You would walk by people on the sand and they would say hello.” Anderson now has a retirement home at Lake Elsinore, formally owned by civically prominent, black Angeleno H. Claude Hudson (1887-1989). Originally from Louisiana, Hudson was a dentist, lawyer, civil rights activist, longtime president of the NAACP Los Angeles Branch, and a founder of Broadway Federal Savings and Loan (1947).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Barbara Anderson, Lake Elsinore resident and retired librarian, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone. The Anderson family home in San Diego/City of Chula Vista was designated as a local historic landmark in 2005. The Lorenzo Anderson House information sheet, Barbara Anderson Collection (in author's possession); Historic Sites List, Chula Vista Historic Homes (The Lorenzo Anderson House, No. 68-3487), From the Internet: <http://www.historichomesofchulavista.com/historic-sites.html>, 20 October 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Anderson, Lake Elsinore resident and retired librarian, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone. *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who, 1930-1931*, The

At the same time African Americans were enjoying their segregated recreational and social activities at Lake Elsinore, white community celebrities and notables such as Carole Lombard, Clark Gable, Andy Devine, Bela Lugosi, Will Rodgers, Harold Lloyd, Sir Guy Standing, Eddie Foy, James Jeffries and even former United States President Grover Cleveland also gathered there. The Catalina Island Wrigleys, along with their baseball teams, the Los Angeles Angels and Chicago Cubs, came for the winter to the Elsinore Valley. Aimee Semple McPherson, one of the most popular evangelists of the period, conducted services at Lake Elsinore, and built a palatial house she called “Aimee’s Castle” in Clevelin Heights, which still stands today overlooking the Valley. At the same time, the lake became a destination for record-setting boat races and Olympic swim team training.<sup>61</sup>

Further leisure ventures illustrated what a thriving community Lake Elsinore was for African Americans for another decade. Beyond Lake Shore Beach and the Rieves Inn, elsewhere in Lake Elsinore other black entrepreneurs offered visitor accommodations, and individual families bought vacation homes with some renting rooms to paying guests. The *California Eagle* newspaper featured advertisements in 1925 and 1926 for newly established accommodations. Opened mid-year in 1925 the Love Nest Inn owned by Mrs. J. Strider and Sons, could accommodate fifty or more guests with rented rooms, meal service at all hours, and the management furnished entertainment on the weekends with space for dancing. Mrs.

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*California Eagle* Publishing Company, 91; See Chapter 3 for illumination of some of H. Claude Hudson’s civil rights activities in the 1920s; Flammig, 213-214, 273-275, 277-284, 281, 303, 373; “H. Claude Hudson, A Los Angeles Icon!,” The African American Registry, From the Internet: [http://www.aaregistry.com/african\\_american\\_history/2622/H\\_Claude\\_Hudson\\_A\\_Los\\_Angeles\\_Icon](http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/2622/H_Claude_Hudson_A_Los_Angeles_Icon), 24 May 2015 “Historical Notes on the Los Angeles NAACP,” From the Internet: <http://www.naacp-losangeles.org/history.htm>, 24 May 2015; “The History of Broadway Federal Bank,” From the Internet: <http://www.broadwayfederalbank.com/history.htm>, 24 May 2015; Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1920s-1940s.

<sup>61</sup> Tom Hudson, 73-74; Jeanie Corral, “Old Elsinore boasted the gracious days of hostelry and cultured elite,” *Lake Elsinore News*, June 10, 1992, 4.

Mamie Young opened the Nightingale Lunch Room and Delicatessen serving refreshments and meals at Pottery Street, near Poe Street. Also advertised was the new Hotel Coleman De Luxe established by the pioneering black Angeleno resident, entrepreneur and social activist James Wesley Coleman (1865–1940), and his wife. Billy Tucker provided accommodations for visitors, and the Taylors and R.C. Anderson at their Silvia Lax Springs offered treatments from the springs at Lake Elsinore. Others like the Sterlings who first visited Lake Elsinore in 1919, began their accommodations venture sometimes in the early 1920s.<sup>62</sup> (See Figure 6)

In an early *California Eagle* ad for its April 1926 opening on Easter Sunday, the Hotel Coleman De Luxe at the corner of Pottery and Lowell called itself the “best equipped (colored) hostelry and summer resort on the Pacific Coast.” The ad quoted rooms for \$2.00 per day or \$12.50 per week. Rooms with kitchenettes were \$8.00 per week. Facility amenities included hot and cold sulfur showers or baths, a dining room with booths, buffet, soda fountain, lunch counter, barber shop, bootblack stand, cigars and tobacco and a hairdressing parlor. Other services might be obtained upon request. Reservations and special party arrangements could be made by contacting Mrs. J.W. Coleman, listed as the “proprietress” in the ad. It can be assumed potential guests were encouraged that good behavior and moral conduct was expected as the ad offered special considerations for weekend accommodations to all church pastors and their wives. Early reviews were very complimentary with Joe Bass, editor of the *California Eagle*, writing the facility was “a most

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<sup>62</sup> “Love Nest Inn, Elsinore Mecca For Pleasure Seekers and Tourists,” *California Eagle*, 10 September 1926, 4; Lake Elsinore advertisement, *California Eagle*, July-August 1925; Coleman De Luxe Hotel ad, *California Eagle*, 12 March 1926, 8; “Hotel Coleman De Lux, Elsinore, *California Eagle*, 7 May 1926, 6; “Elsinore Alive with Visitors” and “Silvia Lax Springs, Elsinore, California,” *California Eagle*, 10 September 1926, 4; Exhaust section, *California Eagle*, 10 September 1926, 8; Coleman De Luxe Hotel ad, *Pacific Defender*, 8 March 1928,; 1900 U.S. Federal Census; California Death Index, 1905-1939; Halvor Miller, Esq., Los Angeles, California resident, interview by author, March 12, 2007, Los Angeles, California.

modern and up to date hostelry...[and]...would do credit to the most metropolitan city...[I]t [was] a genuine pleasure to stop there.” Bass’s review may have also been a little self-serving to grease the wheels of commerce as the Coleman hotel and other enterprises ran regular, frequent advertisements in his newspaper. Coleman ads were regularly visible in the *Eagle* before the new Lake Elsinore project opened.<sup>63</sup>

Early black California pioneers, John Wesley and Lydia (b. 1866) Coleman, their four children, his mother, Mrs. Harriett Owens-Bynum (b. 1850) and her husband, Green Bynum (b. 1850) moved from Austin, Texas to Los Angeles in 1887 during the land boom of 1887-1888, when Lake Elsinore was in its founding years. The clan arrived just before the black Angeleno population reached 1,285 in 1890, and they were founding members of the modern African American community. At about two and half percent of the total city population in 1890, African American residents had grown at a rate of 12.60 times from their population of 102 (or less than one percent of the total city population) in 1880. As African American newcomers, the Bynum Coleman family represented the important and growing portion of articulate professional and business class residents who joined the larger group of mostly unskilled southern laborers migrating to Los Angeles throughout the 1890s. Before coming to Los Angeles, the family owned a 160-acre ranch in the Austin environs. Upon settlement in California, Mrs. Bynum led the family in their first regional land purchase of a twenty-five foot lot in the Boyle Heights District, a then newly available Los Angeles neighborhood just east of the river. After the formerly enslaved Bidley Mason (1818–1891), the first African

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<sup>63</sup> In the 1910 and 1920 U.S. Federal Census John Wesley Coleman was identified as being married to Lydia in 1910, and remarried to a woman named Edith in 1920. The 1930 U.S. Federal Census identified John Wesley Coleman as divorced. This all being said, it is not clear from evidence currently available which Mrs. J.W. Coleman was the proprietress of the Lake Elsinore hostelry business opening in 1926. Hotel Coleman De Luxe, Easter Sunday ad, *California Eagle*, 12 March 1926, 8; J.B. Bass, “Hotel Coleman De Lux, Elsinore,” *California Eagle*, 7 May 1926, 6.

American woman to own land and to amass a fortune in Los Angeles real estate, of her period, Mrs. Bynum was the first woman of her racial group to enter into the real estate business on a comparable scale. Additionally she was one of the first women to hold a leadership office at Second Baptist Church founded in 1885, one of Los Angeles' first African American faith congregations. Several observers considered Harriett Bynum a lively personality, and one of the most dynamic and business savvy African American women of her era.<sup>64</sup>

Mrs. Bynum started out in Los Angeles working as a maid, walking a mile to and from central Los Angeles to their suburban home in east Los Angeles. As the electric streetcar was not yet installed in the area, so she would not have to walk so far, she opened a hand laundry and later a bakery. Lastly she established a dairy as her land holdings expanded. She also served as a nurse with some of the "leading white physicians" in the city. Seeing an opportunity for African Americans to purchase property in her neighborhood, she talked the real estate agent of the Boyle Heights District into letting her be his sales agent for potential African American buyers, whereby she made sales commissions on the houses and lots she sold. In the 1890s into the first decades of the twentieth century she sold over sixty-five houses and lots to African American families of mostly lower income, who were first time property buyers with middle class aspirations. Some of those families later sold their property for handsome profits, thus gaining an education in wealth generation from Mrs. Bynum in addition to shelter over their heads. She also assisted hundreds of renters to find

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<sup>64</sup> U.S. Federal Census; James Adolphus Fisher, "A History of the Political and Social Development of the Black Community in California, 1850-1950" (PhD diss., University of New York at Stony Brook, 1972), 163; DeGraaf, "The City of Black Angels..." 327; J. Max Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 1-39 Beasley, 109-110, 137, 244; Charlotta Bass, 17-18; "John Wesley Coleman and his Remarkable Career, Success and Contribution for a Better Citizenry," *California Eagle*, 21 December 1923, 8.

good homes to live in. Mr. Bynum worked in livery express (care of horses used in transportation) in the family's early years in Los Angeles. Mrs. Bynum also assisted her only child, John Wesley Coleman to learn the profession of the real estate business. The family continued adding to their Boyle Heights land holdings located around New Jersey and Savannah Avenues near Evergreen Cemetery until they owned a tract themselves. Mother and son jointly invested in other properties, and also built the Coleman Flats on Savannah Street that they rented out to African American families.<sup>65</sup>

On his way to establishing himself as a leading business and civic leader in Los Angeles's African American community, Coleman was in a few different lines of work before finding his most enduring and fruitful business career direction. A graduate of Tilleston Institute (today called Houston Tilleston College) of Austin, Texas in 1884, upon arrival to Los Angeles in 1887 with his family, Coleman visualized a business career for himself. He appears to have considered his skill set and resources, along with the era's economic conditions as he took advantage of varied employment and business development opportunities in his years as a Los Angeles newcomer and established citizen. He first was employed as a driver for the Black Diamond Coal Company. Next he opened a well-regarded and successful downtown café at First and Los Angeles Streets. He sold this establishment after a year to become a landscape gardening contractor for three years. Probably wanting to explore and learn more about the world in addition to an income, Coleman then obtained a job as a Pullman Company railroad porter, traveling all over the country and meeting all

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<sup>65</sup> Of the original African American community sites in Los Angeles, Boyle Heights was the most isolated that sprang up. The Bynum Coleman family were among the district's early African American pioneers who acquired several land parcels, and would probably have been the most active in selling area property to other African Americans during this period, Bond, 67-68; Beasley, 244; 1888-1890 California Voter Registration List (John Wesley Coleman listing).



kinds and classes of people for twelve years. In the first decade of the twentieth century Coleman and his wife Lydia, owned and operated an early African American owned hostelry in downtown Los Angeles called Hotel Coleman located at 145 South San Pedro Street for five years, in the area that evolved to be known as the Little Tokyo District. For two years during this time period, Coleman was also the first African American operating a furniture store business.<sup>66</sup>

Next, Coleman became a pioneering agent in the insurance business, selling to an African American clientele. While he travelled around the state selling insurance, he also worked as an advertising agent for Venice and Santa Monica Bay, as well as a superintendent for Dr. Burner's chain of sanitariums located around the state of California. In the public service arena, Coleman served as a deputy constable of Los Angeles County and township for fifteen years, simultaneously to his other employment endeavors. Around 1907, Coleman began his pioneering and enduring business effort, his own employment agency located at 211 East Second Street in downtown Los Angeles, where he helped many African American newcomers find jobs. Along the way he also worked as a real estate agent earning a commission on third party transactions. With his mother and on his own, Coleman also bought and sold real estate. Though he would accumulate substantial valuable real estate during his lifetime and be involved in other business ventures like his Lake Elsinore hotel project, the employment agency was often publicly acknowledged in the press as his most successful business accomplishment. Some observers in the African American media called Coleman the "Employment King of Los Angeles" due to his energetic and insightful service

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<sup>66</sup> Beasley, 137; 1900 U.S. Federal Census; 1902 Los Angeles City Directory.

to his clients of both employers and over 60,000 persons he placed in jobs on the Pacific Coast. It is likely that among these same clients Coleman also brokered a few profitable real estate sales, residential rental and hostelry reservation deals.<sup>67</sup>

Considered by his peers to be progressive and philanthropically generous, Coleman was a leader in a few civic and fraternal organizations and African American community betterment causes. He was instrumental in founding the People's Independent Church of Christ in Los Angeles (1915). Coleman served two terms as president of the Forum, an organization he helped established in 1903 with the mission to encourage a "united effort on the part of [N]egroes for their advancement, and to strengthen them along lines of moral, social, intellectual, financial and Christian ethics." Everyone from all positions, economic classes, and political and ideological affiliations in the African American community was welcomed to become Forum members as long as they were morally upright citizens, "striving to be useful members of society." No dues were collected for membership, but the organization did appeal to members for monetary donations to support varied local and national, causes and charities, and for deserving individuals for educational scholarships and such. The Forum strongly advocated for African Americans of all classes, including laborers, to purchase land. They promoted support of black businesses, and urged white-owned business enterprises and the government to hire African Americans in non-menial positions. Several observers argue the Forum was one of the most important organizations formed in the history of African Americans in Los Angeles and southern California as it helped black

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<sup>67</sup> "Negroes Who Have Won Place or Fortune in Los Angeles and Pasadena, In Business They Succeed," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III6; "John Wesley Coleman and his Remarkable Career, Success and Contribution for a Better Citizenry," *California Eagle*, 21 December 1923, 8; "Business Men"/Editorials, *California Eagle*, 30 May 1924, no page number; "J.W. Coleman—Vice-Pres. UNIA," *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 6; Beasley, 136-138, 244; Flammig, 80, 113.

Angelenos develop a sense of community through providing a place for public discourse, affable debate, political dialogue and helped newcomers network to assimilate into Los Angeles society.<sup>68</sup>

At the height of the Forum's power and influence in the 1920s, black and white, politicians and political operatives pursued their members' support and votes. As the U.S. was becoming more involved in world affairs and in direct and indirect colonialism of people of color in the Philippines, Haiti and other places, during the years following World War I, African Americans became more aware of the Third World's calls for self-determination, and their own history with Pan-Africanism. John Wesley Coleman led this discourse in Los Angeles by calling for the first and only "National Convention of Peoples of African American Descent" in 1920. The *California Eagle* noted in an article a few years later, the Convention opened with a spectacular parade. He merged this organization into the local Garvey movement chapter, Division 156 of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), of which he was among the founders and held the office of vice president. He continued on in the leadership of the Forum, a political and ideologically neutral organization, and the black nationalist organization, UNIA. This was not extraordinary as many black Americans and Angelenos supported both groups. He was also active in the Republican Party, where in the mid-1920s he served as the only member of color on the Republican Party County Central Committee for his Boyle Heights neighborhood which was

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<sup>68</sup> Theodore W. Troy, "The Forum," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1909, III2; Beasley, 137-138; "J.W. Coleman," *California Eagle*, 24 June 1916, 1; Ernest Frederick Anderson, "The Development of Leadership and Organization Building in the Black Community of Los Angeles from 1900 Through World War II" (PhD Diss, University of Southern California, 1976), 106-164; Charlotta Bass, 46-47; Bunch, "Black Angelenos..." 24-26; James Adolphus Foster, "A History of the Political and Social Development of the Black Community in California, 1850-1950" (PhD Diss, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1972), 187-188; Flammig 25-26.

then in the 66<sup>th</sup> California Assembly District. We can surmise Coleman's charisma, pioneer status, good reputation, and his civic and business leadership networks facilitated reservations at Hotel Coleman Deluxe at Lake Elsinore. Along with revenue, their establishment also provided Coleman and his family accommodations for their own pleasure at Lake Elsinore.<sup>69</sup>

Another couple, Mildred Jackson Sterling (1890-1989) and her husband Aaron Joseph "A.J." Sterling (d. 1935) started out by building a house in 1919, and tried their hand first at the restaurant business in the lake community. In Los Angeles the couple owned a pool hall near Twenty-first Street and Hooper Avenue, and other real estate. A musician who sang and played guitar, Mrs. Sterling worked as a soloist for the Angelus Funeral Home, which was founded in 1922. In Lake Elsinore, on Kellogg, near Pottery, and down the street from the Rieves Inn, they constructed a few cabins they rented to African American vacationers. Their extended family also stayed at the Sterling establishment on their trips, to visit and relax.<sup>70</sup>

The extended family of Mildred Jackson Sterling included some noteworthy African American citizens. One of her relatives, activist Loren Miller, Esq. (1904-1967), worked on the legal team from Los Angeles that won the case against race-based restrictive covenants in real estate in the United States Supreme Court case, *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948). Miller was

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<sup>69</sup> Bunch, "Black Angelenos..." 24-26; "John Wesley Coleman and his Remarkable Career, Success and Contribution for a Better Citizenry," *California Eagle*, 21 December 1923, 8; "J.W. Coleman—Vice-Pres. UNIA," *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 6; James A. Foster, 187-188; Emery J. Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles, Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement* (Los Angeles, CA: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1980), 49-51; Flammig, 233-234.

<sup>70</sup> Nancy Griffith, Los Angeles, California resident, interview by author, July 19, 2006, Los Angeles, California; Halvor Miller, Esq., interview by author, March 12, 2007; Jane Miller Cerina, Orlando, Florida resident, interview by author, August 21, 2006, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Still open in 2007, Angelus Funeral Home is one of the oldest operating African American owned businesses in Los Angeles and continues to be managed by a descendent of its founders.

also a journalist and editor for the *California Eagle*, first published in 1879 and the longest surviving African American newspaper in Los Angeles until the early 1960s, and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. Additionally he wrote for other publications, including the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, and the *Nation* magazine. Miller was a regional counsel and national vice president of the NAACP, and was active with numerous other civil rights organizations. Following in the footsteps of Charlotta Bass, "a crusading journalist and extraordinary activist," he became publisher of the *Eagle* in 1952. Miller sold this venerable newspaper when he was appointed as a Los Angeles Municipal Court judge in 1964 by Gov. Edmund G. Brown, Sr.<sup>71</sup>

Mrs. Sterling's other nephew who visited at Lake Elsinore was Leon "Wash" Washington, Jr., publisher of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. He and his wife, Ruth, eventually owned their own property and had a pleasure boat at Lake Elsinore. The *Sentinel*, founded in 1933, promised a 'Fearless—Independent—Free' newspaper and initially used the "Don't Spend Where You Can't Work" slogan as its rallying cry. In the *Sentinel's* early years it was heavy with real news. During this era, Flamming asserts it was "the most sophisticated Race paper ever offered to the community." In early decades of the twenty-first century, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* remains the oldest, best known and largest of the African American newspapers in the southern California region. The coterie of investors and kin made Lake

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<sup>71</sup> Jane Cerina interview, August 21, 2006; "L.A. Attorney Loren Miller Named Judge," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1964, 22; "Rights Pending for Municipal Judge Miller," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1967, *Los Angeles Times*, G6; Loren Miller, *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 46; Loren Miller (1903-1967), From the Internet: <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/miller-loren-1903-1967>, 14 October 2014; Charlotta Bass (1879-1969); Flamming 17-19, 32,44, 380-381, 302-303, 369; Smith, 487, 489; For more on Charlotta Bass, see *Forty Years, Memoirs From the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles, CA, 1960).

Elsinore a leisure place for Los Angeles' African American leading public activists, professionals and business people.<sup>72</sup>

Along with relaxation, many social patterns (organized and informal) taking place in Los Angeles also occurred at the lake, including family parties, picnics and barbeques, card games with the men or women's sewing circles, discussions about the issues of the day, musical performances and religious services. More personal social interactions, like developing new friendships, courting and marriage celebrations, and learning how to swim, hunt or cook also took place. Jane Miller Cerina, Mrs. Sterling's niece, remembers from her childhood visits in the late 1930s and 1940s the goats grazing across the street from her aunt's property. According to Cerina, Mrs. Sterling took great pride in her vegetable and fruit garden, which included a grape arbor and watermelons. She and her brother, Halvor Miller, Esq., both remembered there were always people from Los Angeles stopping by visiting the family during their summer stays at Lake Elsinore.

Cerina recalled the Wednesday night game of pinuchle her Uncle "Wash" and Uncle Loren had every week, whether in the city or at Lake Elsinore. When he lived in southern California, the poet Langston Hughes, a friend of Loren Miller's, regularly joined the pinuchle group. In 1932, Miller and Hughes were part of the much-publicized and criticized group of young radicals of the New Negro Renaissance, who went to the Soviet Union to view life there first-hand. At the time both men were active in the democratic socialist movement in Los Angeles. Though Miller eventually evolved into a "mainstream liberal democrat," his early radicalism probably prevented him from getting a federal judgeship.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Jane Cerina interview, August 21, 2006; Flammig, 302, (quotation) 303.

<sup>73</sup> Flammig, 302, 369; Jane Cerina interview, August 21, 2006.

The 1930 United States Federal Census count included fewer than 3,000 Lake Elsinore residents, and fewer than sixty full time residents (or two percent) were African Americans. At the same time, the city of Los Angeles had a population of 1,238,048, and the black Angeleno population was 38,894, or around three percent. In Riverside County there were almost 81,000 people, of which 1,303 (less than two percent) were African Americans.<sup>74</sup>

The seasonal visitor count is not calculated in the U.S. Federal Census, but it can be estimated from the literature that thousands of people—white people, black people and maybe people from other communities of color—visited the area, especially from the population centers of the region. From the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century, ads and stories about the beauty, resorts and natural (exploitable) resources of Lake Elsinore were regularly featured in the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers, including the black newspapers and their special publications. Booster and travel materials were distributed all over the U.S., from the Lake Elsinore and Riverside County Chambers of Commerce, the Automobile Club, the Santa Fe railroad and resort businesses, and other regional entities which had a stake in economic development.

Even during the Great Depression, beginning in 1929, holiday makers continued visiting Lake Elsinore Valley in record numbers from the regional metropolitan areas. Through the 1930s there was much more rain than dryness. Mining and agriculture flourished, the lake was stocked with fish, speedboats set racing records that regularly garnered national attention, and the mineral baths remained popular. As it was hardwon by the American industrial labor force, the cultural practice of vacationing increasingly became

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<sup>74</sup> 1930 U.S. Federal Census.

institutionalized by the World War II years, and in the post-World War II decades. In the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the African American community of year-round and vacation residents grew in Lake Elsinore along Pottery, west of downtown at the edge of town near the Rieves Inn (which became known as the Burgess Hotel in the early 1930s after the Burgess family sold their interests in the property). During this time, some small hotels and court cottages sprang up that African Americans mostly from Los Angeles and San Diego would rent for weekend trips and longer vacations. Lake Elsinore African American residents also rented space in their homes to visitors.<sup>75</sup> (See Figure 6)

In the 1930 U.S. Federal Census Enumeration Sheets, the live-in manager of the Burgess Hotel was listed as Cuban-born Fredrick E. Malandro, age, twenty-seven years old. Other African Americans were listed in the 1930 Census as Lake Elsinore business owners. Because of the nature of their establishments it can be assumed their clients were predominantly African American. Leon Daniels was listed in the same 1930 Census as a restaurant keeper and the owner of a multiple-unit dwelling on Riley. Gussie Hendrix was listed as the manager of a bungalow court on Scrivener. Gussie and husband William opened Hendrix's Motel and Auto Courts, with a dining room serving family-style meals, on Lowell. Also in the 1930s, Hotel Coleman Deluxe continued as an establishment offering room and

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<sup>75</sup> Tom Hudson, 78, 85, 91, 96; "Lakes of California: Lake Elsinore," San Diego Historical Society; George Brown, Lake Elsinore Valley and Alberhill resident and retired City of Riverside employee, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Alberhill, California; William Beverly, Eighth and Wall, interview by author, October 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Milton Anderson interview, November 15, 2004; Thomas Rutherford, Marina del Rey resident and retired mechanical/electrical engineer, interview by author, August 18, 2006, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 238; There were a few larger scale agricultural businesses owned by African Americans in the Lake Elsinore environs. In the 1940s the Wilson brothers from Los Angeles purchased from retiring rancher Jay D. Jenkins, an industrial chicken ranch in Corona and his poultry market on East Vernon Avenue (at Ascot Street) in Los Angeles. At the present time the author has not found evidence of how long Jenkins ran his chicken ranch before he sold it to the Wilson brothers in the 1940s. "Chicken Farm: A GI Dream Come True, Three Coast brothers and friend parlay \$5,000 into \$250,000 poultry business," *Ebony* magazine, February 1949, 62-65.



board at \$12 per week. Al Brooks owned a health bath and spa with a café at the intersection of Poe and Pottery.<sup>76</sup> (See Figure 6)

During this time the health resort's sulphur water also attracted a large, mostly working class, Jewish and other European immigrant population. This community created several synagogues and temples, along with the Jewish Culture Club of Lake Elsinore, for their religious and social needs. Jews also enjoyed other health resorts in Riverside County. Highland Springs in Beaumont was popular among the more affluent Jewish community. Gilman Hot Springs in San Jacinto, and a few places in Hemet and Murrieta, also accepted the patronage of Jews.<sup>77</sup>

Prior to the building of the national freeway system, starting in the 1950s, for motorists or those riding the bus looking for a resort within easy driving distance of Los Angeles or San Diego, Lake Elsinore was considered to be delightful, but a bit far and somewhat off the beaten path due to its location at the extreme western and southern part of Riverside County. One had to drive the streets to get there, and it could take four to five hours, to drive to the lake from various population centers around the southland. Most people who visited the Valley—whites, Jews or African Americans—planned to stay overnight. The distance of Lake Elsinore and the overnight “vacation” leisure experience gave the place an air of exclusivity, especially among black Angelenos. (See Figure 6)

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<sup>76</sup> “Highlights of Black History of Lake Elsinore, 1982,” Prepared by Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 8; 1930 U.S. Federal Census; Lake Elsinore advertisement, *California Eagle*, April-June 1930.

<sup>77</sup> Sandy Stokes, “Elsinore Lacked that look of hatred: Black family going north, paused, then settled down,” *The Press Enterprise*, February 18, 1996, B1-B2; Steve Lech, *Resorts of Riverside County*, (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 9005), 52-57,74-83; August Muymudes, Los Angeles resident and retired pharmacist, interview by author, July 26, 2006, Los Angeles, California; Jewish Cultural Club File, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. Los Angeles, California.

African American doctors, lawyers, government workers, ministers, teachers, newspaper editors, business owners and others from Los Angeles prosperous enough regularly visited Lake Elsinore, and some bought vacation homes in the Valley. Some of these people were leaders in their respective white and blue-collar professions and in their community in Los Angeles. Many were middle class in values, lifestyle and aspirations, more than in wealth. Although economic racism stymied their financial ambitions, black Angelenos held continued faith in the promise of upward mobility, and they embraced the Anglo booster rhetoric of American West freedom and egalitarianism and of the California Dream's leisure and health lifestyle. Taking a road trip, an extended vacation, and buying property like a second home were certainly big components of American West idealism and the California Dream that middle class, black Angeleno boosters also promoted.<sup>78</sup> (See Figure 6)

Wallace Decuir's fond memories of experiencing Lake Elsinore in the 1930s illustrate black Angelenos' engagement with the era's popular leisure and health practices, and as aspirational consumers and capitalists. He recounted happy memories of excursions riding out to Lake Elsinore in the Model T Ford of his friend Ballinger Kemp's grandmother, who had a vacation home at Lake Elsinore. "She called her car 'Henry.' Ballinger and I would have to get out of the car just before it got to a hill [to take some of the weight out of the car] and walk up so the car could make it up the hill," said Decuir. He recalled when he and Ballinger were playing by the lakeshore, sometimes they would collect mud at the request of old ladies sitting on the beach, for them to spread on their bodies for health treatments. "We didn't mind them interrupting our play because they would give up five to ten cents for the

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<sup>78</sup> Flamming, 5, 8, 58.

chore. We would have a little extra money to spend for cokes and candy,” he laughingly shared.<sup>79</sup>

***From ‘Best Negro Vacation Spot in the Nation’ to No Lake at All: The Post-World War II Flourish and Fade of Lake Elsinore***

For many 1940s African American leisure seekers, Lake Elsinore continued to provide a sense of community, a retreat for accomplished professionals, and persistence of families’ traditions, even as environmental changes and mismanagement, along with sunbelt booms, set up the vacation spot’s decline and transformation. *Ebony* magazine’s May 1948 issue touted Lake Elsinore as the “best Negro vacation spot in the state...and...the nation, according to many Californians.” The Lake Elsinore Hotel, the biggest of the African American hotels in Lake Elsinore, exemplified the vibrant fulfillment of *Ebony*’s “best” proclamation. Mrs. Mary E. Baker (ca. 1881–1962) and her daughter, Eula M. Reeves (ca. 1898–1971), operated this African American establishment on Kellogg between Pottery and Flint, which they acquired in 1931. In addition to its main building featuring fifteen rooms, the Lake Elsinore Hotel had four cottages and camping spaces available for summer rental, an area to play croquet, and a tennis court. In 1948, *Ebony* magazine cited the hostelry as “the oldest Negro venture in town, built fifty-six years ago by a couple who came to the valley for their health.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Wallace Decuir, Los Angeles resident, retired fireman and businessman, interview by author, November 1, 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>80</sup> In some sources the Lake Elsinore Hotel is referred to as the Lake Elsinore Inn. Evidence suggests the Lake Elsinore Hotel was located on the earlier discussed Rieves Inn site that had been owned by the Burgesses. *The Negro Traveler’s Green Book, 1959*, 8; Edith Hawes Howard, Talare, California resident and retired chief, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007, via telephone, Los Angeles, California; and George Brown, Lake Elsinore Valley and Alberhill resident and retired City of Riverside employee, interview by author, October 30,

The Lake Elsinore Hotel had a clientele of whites who patronized the dining room, along with African Americans who were overnight guests at the establishment, and otherwise visiting Lake Elsinore. One of the white patrons was the local Sheriff, who regularly came by for lunch (that he paid for), and to visit with the owners and others he might know who were dining there at the time. Two full meals a day were served family-style, and snacks were set out on a sideboard table all day. When required, Ms. Reeves' brother, Ted, would pick up holiday makers needing a ride to the hotel from the nearby bus or train stations. In the winter months, Reeves closed the hotel and went to Palm Springs to work during the desert resort's high season. One year, while she was working in the Coachella Valley, she met her long-time boyfriend, Connell Butler, whose specialty was preparing pastry.<sup>81</sup>

Betty Lucas Howard remembers on her family's trips from Los Angeles to Lake Elsinore they would rent space behind Mrs. Baker's establishment for their trailer for the month of August during the 1930s and 1940s. Her father worked for the U.S. Post Office as a letter carrier, and her mother was a homemaker. Rupert and Beatrice Lucas bought land in Lake Elsinore in 1928, eventually building a house on it and retiring there in 1958. When it came time for their daughter, Betty and her husband, Nathan Howard, to retire from their jobs as a hospital administrator and with Los Angeles County Facilities Security Department, respectively, they too decided to move to Lake Elsinore.<sup>82</sup> (See Figure 6)

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2004, Alberhill, California; 1920, 1930 & 1940 U.S. Federal Census; California Death Index, 1940-1997; U.S. Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014; "California Vacation, Golden State offers new resorts to record 1948 army of Negro tourists," *Ebony* magazine, 1 May 1948, 20-21.

<sup>81</sup> Edith Hawes Howard, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007; George Brown, interview, October 30, 2004; 1920, 1930 & 1940 U.S. Federal Census.

<sup>82</sup> Betty Lucas Howard, Lake Elsinore resident, interview by author, March 16, 2006, Lake Elsinore, California (no relations to Edith Hawes Howard).

Lucas Howard has affectionate memories of childhood summers at Lake Elsinore. She relished the greater freedom and independence her parents allowed her, over limits they imposed in the city. Her father came on the weekends and Betty would sometimes go swimming, fishing and hunting for doves and rabbits with him. She recalled the Lake Elsinore Hotel as being a big brick house, with both proprietresses being good cooks and hostesses. On Sundays the lady innkeepers of the 1930s–1940s would make homemade ice cream and peach cobbler for all. For the adults there was evening dancing in the parlor or on the dance platform, with music provided by a jukebox, especially on Sundays.<sup>83</sup>

Some famous people in the African American community are remembered as visitors to the lake. Actress Hattie McDaniels (1895-1952), who won an Academy Award for her performance in the movie *Gone with the Wind*, vacationed at the Lake Elsinore Hotel at least one summer in the 1940s. As a teenager, Edith Hawes Howard (no relation to Betty Lucas Howard) worked for the hotel establishment that summer, and for Ms. McDaniels. At the Lake Elsinore Hotel, Hawes Howard learned about working in the hospitality business, where she would later be employed most of her adult life. A retired chef, Hawes Howard worked several summers at the Lake Elsinore Hotel during her teenage years so she could have extra money for items she needed for school.<sup>84</sup>

Edith Hawes Howard's father, and the patriarch of the Hawes family was Rev. Hampton Hawes, Sr., the first minister installed at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, founded in 1904. The church, then located near Jefferson Boulevard and Vermont Avenue, was the first African American church of the Presbyterian denomination in the city

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Betty Lucas Howard interview, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Edith Hawes Howard, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007, via telephone, Los Angeles, California.

of Los Angeles. Hawes Howard's younger brother was jazz pianist Hampton Hawes (1928-1977), who was an important artist in the emerging "West Coast" school of jazz, and recorded with Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Dexter Gordon, Art Pepper, Charlie Mingus and others. His own band recordings in the mid-1950s established him as a major figure in jazz. He was famous for his prodigious right hand, his deep groove, his very personal playing, his profound blues conceptions, and his versatility within a mainstream context. He remained anchored in chord-change based jazz his whole career.<sup>85</sup>

The Hawes family enjoyed many pleasurable summer visits to Lake Elsinore. In the early years, they camped on the dike at Lake Shore Beach in carport and under umbrella tents. Hawes Howard recalled big barbeques where people lined up to purchase their food at the concession area, and the adults joyously dancing at the pavilion. She has memories of lots of love and fun, going out on boat rides and watching the speedboat races on the lake. Later in the 1930s, the family built their own house on Scrivener, a few blocks from the Lake Elsinore Hotel. Hawes Howard described the house as being log cabin-like, with a spacious screened-in porch. She especially remembers the house had a beautiful wood dining table, with benches instead of chairs, with the dining furniture ensemble being held together by wood joinery instead of nails. The backyard of the Hawes residence faced that of Hendrix's Court on Lowell.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Edith Hawes Howard, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007; "Hampton Hawes, Jazz Pianist Icon of the 1950's!," The African American Registry, From the Internet: [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/hampton-hawes-jazz-pianist-1950s](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/hampton-hawes-jazz-pianist-1950s), 5 November 2014; "Hampton Hawes, Jazz Pianist Icon of the 1950's!," The African American Registry, From the Internet: [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/hampton-hawes-jazz-pianist-1950s](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/hampton-hawes-jazz-pianist-1950s), 5 November 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Edith Hawes Howard, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007.

During her summer vacations Hawes Howard enjoyed going hunting with her father for jack and cottontail rabbits. She would sell part of their catch from her wagon to various neighbors: jack rabbits sold for fifty cents apiece and cottontail rabbits for thirty-five cents apiece. With adult neighbors looking in on him, her brother, Wesley—who got relief from his asthma during his stays in the Lake Elsinore Valley—went to the local high school. The congenial weather conditions allowed him to thrive as a good academic student and a high school track athlete.<sup>87</sup>

Long time residents and visitors also remember interacting with musician, composer and record company impresario Leon René (1902–1982) and his relatives spending time at Lake Elsinore. The René clan moved from Covington, Louisiana to the Los Angeles environs in 1922. In the 1920s Leon led his jazz group the Southern Syncopators Orchestra as songwriter, pianist and singer. His older brother Otis J. René, Jr. (1898-1970) was a pharmacist at Thirteenth Street and Central Avenue, and also a member of the band. For several decades the two brothers wrote songs individually and together, and produced them for musical theater, Hollywood films, and jazz, rhythm & blues and rock ‘n’ roll artists. Some of the songs become very popular. Louis Armstrong made their “When It’s Sleepy Time Down South” (also written with Clarence Muse) his anthem when he recorded it several times during his career. Leon René wrote “When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano” which became a standard with recordings by The Inkspots, The Glenn Miller Orchestra, Bing Crosby, Pat Boone and other artists. The song’s popularity catapulted the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Edith Hawes Howard, interview by author, March 2 & 5, 2007.

little southern California town and its old Spanish mission into a much higher profile in popular culture, and more significance in public memory.<sup>88</sup>

One of Leon René's best selling songs was "Rockin' Robin," first recorded by Bobby Day in 1958, then later by Michael Jackson of the Jackson Five in 1972, and more than fifty other artists. On the West Coast, the René brothers were also pioneering, record company owners, opening a few of the first independent record companies, Exclusive Records and Excelsior Records in the 1940s, and Class Records in the 1950s. They recorded early rhythm & blues, and rock 'n' roll hits with innovators such as the Nat "King" Cole Trio, Ivie Anderson, Herb Jefferies, The Johnny Otis Orchestra, Preston Love, Joe Turner, Johnny Moore's Three Blazers, Joe Liggins, Richard Berry, Charles Mingus' Band, Richard Berry, Bobby Day and numerous other artists. Evidence suggests both Leon and his wife Irma (1905–1998) had deep affections for the Lake Elsinore community, as they along with their two children (Rafael "Googie" L. René [1927–2007] and Cecilia N. René Masserschmidt [1931–1968]), were interred at the Lake Elsinore Valley Cemetery. During their lifetime, word of mouth and media reports of the Leon René family's and other entertainers' stays at Lake Elsinore would have contributed to informal promotion of it an African American

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<sup>88</sup> "Highlights of Black History of Lake Elsinore, 1982," Prepared by Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 11; "Composer, Arranger Leon Rene Succumbs," 10 June 1982, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, A1; Leslie Berkman, "Song Ensures Home for Birds, Composer," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1982, B22; Cleo Joffrion, "Sleepytime Down South,' Author Leon Rene Revisits SU Campus," Afro-Louisiana Historical and Genealogical Society Inc., From the Internet: <http://www.alhgs.com/pub-sleepytimedownsouth.html>, 15 November 2014; "Leon Rene" in Nick Talesky, *Rock Obituaries – Knocking On Heaven's Door* (London, UK: Onnibus Press, 2010), 544-545; Bette Yarbrough Cox, *Central Avenue-Its Rise and Fall (1890-c. 1955), Including the Musical Renaissance of Black Los Angeles* ( Los Angeles, CA: BEEM Publications, 1993/1996), 67.



resort where one could potentially see and mingle with the who's who of black Los Angeles.<sup>89</sup>

For the African American year-round and vacation communities, a happening place to go eat and hang out was Miller's Café and Pool Hall, which opened in 1945 at Langstaff and Pottery. The fact that Miller's had a big street light in front helped to entice night-time visitors for inside activities and street-front gossip gatherings. Other businesses catering to African Americans in the late 1940s included a motel and steam bath owned by the Hensleys, on Riley near Sumner. The LaBonita Motel was a fixture on Pottery near Riley for many years, and Mr. Leon Daniels also had court cottages he rented to vacationers, and provided meal service. Mrs. T.J. Mundy had an Auto Courts facility charging \$5.00 per person daily with meals near Pottery and Langstaff.<sup>90</sup> (See Figure 6)

The 1949 and 1956 edition of the *Negro Traveler's Green Book* suggested George Moore's hotel on Scrivener for accommodations. Before this establishment, Moore had a motel and café, George Moore's Chicken Inn, on Pottery and Spring. The legendary entertainer Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong (1901-1971) was a visitor at this earlier establishment. Before Moore bought the Pottery and Spring location, it was owned by the

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<sup>89</sup> Berkman, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1982, B22; Clora Bryant and Buddy Collette, editors, *Central Avenue Sounds, Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 335; George Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse, The Johnny Otis Story* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 26-27; Tom Reed, *The Black Music History of Los Angeles – It's Roots* (Los Angeles, CA: Black Accent LA Press, 1987/2000), 52, 73; Talesky, 544-545; "Composer, Arranger Leon Rene Succumbs," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 June 1982, A1; Leon G. Rene, Find A Grave Memorial, From the Internet: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=16594921>, 16 November 2014.

<sup>90</sup> George Brown, interview by author, October 30, 2004; Rubin "Buddy" Brown, Lake Elsinore Valley and Perris resident, interview by author, March 3, 2006, Perris, California; Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 9; 1930 U.S. Federal Census; and Prince P. Cobbs, Las Vegas resident and retired law enforcement officer, interview by author, October 27, 2004, via telephone; "California Vacation, Golden State offers new resorts to record 1948 army of Negro tourists," *Ebony* magazine, 1 May 1948, 21.

Carrier and McLucas families. Prior to this, with his mother, Mrs. Eliza Mason, entertainment entrepreneur and *California Eagle* movie columnist Earl Dancer, who was at one time married to Oscar-nominated blues singer and actress Ethel Waters (1896-1977), first leased the site and created the Chicken Inn that Moore eventually took over. Quite the ambitious entrepreneur, Moore also had a service station and tire shop in Los Angeles at Forty-sixth Street and Central Avenue.<sup>91</sup>

As a boy in 1928, long time Lake Elsinore and Perris resident Rubin “Buddy” Brown remembers that boxer Archie Moore (1913-1998) visited Lake Elsinore. According to Brown, Moore was acting as chauffeur of a Lincoln Zephyr for his passenger, an African American lady from San Diego. When he was not working, Moore sometimes played ball out in the streets with the kids. During his career, the purses for professional championship fights were not as generous as they became later in the twentieth century. Before he became more established as a professional boxer, Moore probably picked up employment where he could that did not interfere with his boxing training regimen and bouts. His career as a professional fighter spanned from 1936 to 1963, in which time Moore boxed many of his more than 200 bouts in his adopted home of San Diego. Setting a record for knockouts during his career, Moore became the light-heavyweight world-boxing champion when he defeated Joey Maxim in 1952, and held on to the title until 1962. He trained many fighters including George

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<sup>91</sup> Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong was the orchestra leader at Frank Sebastian’s Cotton Club on Washington Boulevard in Culver City from June 1930-March 1931. Visiting Los Angeles often in his long career, from 1932 through 1945 he work in sixteen Hollywood films as an actor or a musicians. Cary D. Wintz & Bruce A. Glasrud, ed., *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West, The New Negro’s Western Experience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 9-10; Douglas Flamming, “The New Negro Renaissance in Los Angeles, 1920-1940” in *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West...*, ed. Wintz & Glasrud, 73; George Brown, interview by author, October 30, 2004; Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams, The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York, NY: One World Books/The Random House Publishing Group, 2005), 175-176; Rubin “Buddy” Brown, Lake Elsinore Valley and Perris resident, interview by author, March 3, 2006, Perris, California; Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 9, 11; *1949 Negro Traveler’s Green Book* 12; *1956 Negro Traveler’s Green Book* 12.

Foreman, James Tillis, and for a short time even the young Cassius Clay (who later became known as Muhammad Ali). He was elected to the Boxing Hall of Fame in 1966. It is said by some, Moore's colorful personality and his advanced age as a career boxer were part of the inspiration for the 2006 movie, "Rocky Balboa."<sup>92</sup>

The thespian, stage producer, songwriter, screenwriter and activist Clarence Muse, Esq. (1889-1979) owned a 160-acre ranch in the hills of Perris, a short distance away from Lake Elsinore, he called "Muse-A-While." His ranch (offered six cabins for rent including meals for \$6.50 daily per person in 1948), and the Lake Elsinore Inn were also both listed as leisure destinations in the 1959 edition of the *Negro Traveler's Green Book*. Mildred Sterling was a friend of Muse and his wife, Ena. Sterling's nephew, Halvor Miller, recalled his great aunt and Muse would help each other out when big parties visited their establishments. Some people who had lodgings in Lake Elsinore went to Muse's place to see him, or to go horseback riding, hiking and hunting.<sup>93</sup> (See Figure 6)

Muse was the first African American to star in a Hollywood film. He appeared in more than 200 films, including *Huckleberry Finn* (1931), *Porgy and Bess* (1959), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Car Wash* (1976). He was an advocate for better and more equitable treatment for African American performers. Muse was a steadfast supporter of the

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<sup>92</sup> Rubin "Buddy" Brown, interview by author, March 3, 2006; "Archie Moore Dies at 84," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1998, 1; Archie Moore biography, From the Internet: [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Archie\\_Moore.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Archie_Moore.aspx), 6 November 2014; "Archie Moore's 1998 Death," From the Internet: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0771452.html>; "Archie Moore was a colorful boxer," The African American Registry, From the Internet: [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/archie-moore-was-colorful-boxing-great](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/archie-moore-was-colorful-boxing-great), 14 November 2014; Archie Moore, From the Internet: [http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Archie\\_Moore](http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Archie_Moore), 14 November 2014; "Archie Moore 1913-1998," *The Cyber Boxing Sone Newswire*, From the Internet: <http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/archie1209.htm>, 6 November 2014.

<sup>93</sup> "California Vacation, Golden State offers..." *Ebony* magazine, 1 May 1948, 21; Halvor Miller, Esq., interview by author, March 12, 2007; *1956 Negro Traveler's Green Book* 12; *1959 Negro Traveler's Green Book*, 8.

controversial television series *Amos N' Andy*, because he thought, even with the caricatured leading characters, the show permitted African American actors to play doctors, bankers, judges, professors and other parts that they could not in general get to play in Anglo series.<sup>94</sup>

At the south Riverside County resort Thomas R. Yarborough (1895-1969) saw business and civic engagement opportunities. He also found relief from his asthma. He and his wife, Kathryn, became year-round residents at Lake Elsinore in 1929, after living in Los Angeles for ten years. Yarborough was born in Arkansas, but he grew up in Greenville, Mississippi. He went to Strait University, an African American college in New Orleans, from 1911 to 1912. His wife was a graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio. Yarborough became a successful “real estate operator” in the Lake Elsinore Valley. Before creating his own property management enterprise in Riverside County, Yarborough worked as a chauffeur, with building contractors, and in furniture making. He was a caretaker for the Lake Elsinore estate of the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson when he arrived to take up residency in the Valley. His successful real estate strategy included buying property at tax sales in Riverside County for inexpensive prices, to sell later at better prices, or to develop for year-round and vacation rentals.<sup>95</sup> (See Figure 6)

As a civic leader Yarborough served as a member of the Elsinore Planning Commission, on the Board of Directors of the Elsinore Chamber of Commerce, and as a

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<sup>94</sup> “Biography for Clarence Muse, Versatile Performer, Producer and Songwriter, Dies at 90,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1979, C3; “Clarence Muse, a pioneer film actor,” The African American Registry, From the Internet: [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/clarence-muse-pioneer-film-actor](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/clarence-muse-pioneer-film-actor), 8 November 2014; “Clarence Muse,” Biography, From the Internet: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0615617/bio>, 8 November 2014; “Clarence Muse,” Filmography as an Actor, From the Internet: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0615617/>, 8 November 2014.

<sup>95</sup> *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 66; Ken Overaker, “Elsinore Negro Mayor Retiring: Hopes to Work on Racial Peace,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1968, G1; Elbert Hudson, Esq., Los Angeles resident, interview by author, July 26, 2006, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

member of the Executive Board of the Property Owners Association. Yarborough's path in civic leadership had a few hiccups that he had to overcome in the late 1940s. When he was appointed by then Elsinore Mayor James Tarpley to the Planning Board, a 1948 *Ebony* magazine article reported, he "was promptly the target of a recall campaign by lily-white old-timers," but he retained his seat with a vote of 378 to 286. He was also a founder of the Elsinore Progressive League's Hilltop Community Center, which was a hub for social gatherings and charity work. As African Americans and Jews became more visible at Lake Elsinore in the 1940s, and more confident to stand up for their civil rights, there were a few situations of discrimination against individuals of both groups that occurred where establishments along Main Street refused serve to these patrons. At that time Yarborough rallied Jewish leaders in a common cause to fight these Jim Crow discrimination tactics, "[so that any] person [could] go anywhere for a drink or a meal" in the business district without fear of discrimination. As a pioneer in local leadership at Lake Elsinore, African American Yarborough also helped to form a Lake Elsinore businessmen's association that included all community groups in its membership. Traveling to Los Angeles for their meetings, he was an active supporter of the NAACP.<sup>96</sup>

When the voters of Lake Elsinore elected Yarborough to the City Council in 1948, he was the first African American to be elected to that office in California. He served his first term until 1952, but was defeated when he ran again in 1956. Yarborough was then appointed to fill a vacancy on the Council in 1959, and was reelected in 1960 and 1964. In both of the later contests he received the highest vote count of all the candidates. His fellow

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas R. Yarborough was most likely a founder of the Elsnore Chamber of Commerce; *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 66; Stokes, *The Press Enterprise*, February 18, 1996; Lake Elsinore did not get a chapter of the NAACP until 1977; Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, Lake Elsinore Historical Society Collection, 14; *Ebony* magazine, May 1948, 21.

City Council members selected him as mayor in 1966, making him one of the three African American mayors of California cities at the time. When he retired from public service in 1968, the citizens of Lake Elsinore named a city park in his honor, to recognize his contributions to their community. Today, the Thomas R. Yarborough Park remains at its original site, off Poe between Pottery and Flint, on the property where the Elsinore Progressive League's Hilltop Community Center used to stand. The park is one of the only visible landmarks to the African American community's historical presence, if one knows Yarborough's biography.<sup>97</sup> (See Figure 6)

The park signage reads:

In Memory of  
Thomas R. Yarborough  
1895–1969

First African American Mayor  
of Elsinore  
1966–1968

Donated by  
Hilltop Community Center

The Yarborough home, like his former employer's, evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, was situated on top of a hill, though not as high as the one where the house of

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<sup>97</sup> Overaker, *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1968; and Stokes, *The Press Enterprise*, February 18, 1996.

McPherson sat in Clevelin Heights. From the Yarboroughs' hill property on Pottery and Lewis, at the then edge of town and approaching Clevelin Heights, is a beautiful and inspiring panoramic view of Lake Elsinore to the west, and Quail Valley to the east. Despite the capriciousness of the lake level, the agency and hospitality of the various African American proprietors at Lake Elsinore—entrepreneurs like the Burgesses, the Lake Shore Beach group, the Colemans, Ms. Reeves and Mrs. Baker, Yarborough and others—were in all likelihood the biggest factors in the ongoing inspiration to black Angelenos, others throughout the southern California region and from outside the locale, to visit the Valley.<sup>98</sup>

Dr. N. Curtis King also developed King Ranch in Lake Elsinore, just down the hill from the Yarboroughs place at Davis and Chaney Streets, going toward Quail Valley. King Ranch included a large guesthouse that could sleep fifty people, along with two main houses. A 1949 *Ebony* magazine article waxed about Dr. King's throwing of frequent, lavish parties where he treated his guests in style at his country place. He also provided paying guest accommodations, and is said to have opened his place on occasion to the local community for public meetings. Sometimes, parties in his large barn would have several hundred guests with dance music being provided by a jukebox. Horseback riding was a main activity at the ranch where seven prize Palominos were boarded. A self-sustaining operation, the ranch raised its own food, and had a laundry. The *Ebony* article noted that during this period in 1949 most of the employees were white, because out of the 150 applicants, only two African Americans applied for the King Ranch jobs. As mentioned earlier there were some African Americans involved in agricultural activities in the area. From current available information, most were

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<sup>98</sup> Site visit by author, accompanied by George Brown, Lake Elsinore Valley and Alberhill resident (as tour guide), Spring 2006.

growing food for their own businesses or as recreational farmers, rather than working as ranch employees on property owned by others.

As well as a Lake Elsinore area proprietor, King, a 1924 Meharry Medical School, was a distinguished medical professional with a specialization in the prevention and cure of venereal diseases. Before coming to Los Angeles in 1929, Dr. King did his internship at Tuskegee Institute Hospital in Alabama, and practiced medicine in Georgia. He founded Rose Netta Hospital in Los Angeles at Vernon and Hooper Avenues. In 1942, King's Rose Netta was the first hospital where the Red Cross set up an interracial blood bank. When not assisting his patients, Dr. King pursued his hobbies of photography in addition to raising palomino horses at his ranch.<sup>99</sup> (See Figure 6)

Up the hill from King's Ranch to the south, Dr. Elvin Neal, a dentist and his wife Olive built their Lake Elsinore vacation home, and it continues to stand on Scrivener near Pottery. The Neals moved to Los Angeles in 1924, just after Dr. Neal finished dental school at Meharry. Raised and educated in Texas, Dr. Neal's extended family also bought property in Lake Elsinore. Some of the descendants of the elder Neals have retired to the Valley, and

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<sup>99</sup> *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 32; and *Los Angeles Classified Buyers' Guide, 1942-1943*, 11; Meharry Medical School is located in Nashville, Tennessee. Founded in 1876, it has remained the largest private historically African American institution in the United States dedicated to educating healthcare professionals and scientists. Before obtaining its independent charter in 1915, Meharry was originally part of Central Tennessee College/Walden University, which was initially established by the Methodist Episcopal Church North, From the Internet: <http://www.mmc.edu/about/index.html>, and <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/meharry-medical-college-1876>, 23 May 2014; John Neal, Moreno Valley resident, interview by author, February 10, 2006, via telephone and in Lake Elsinore; George Brown, interview by author, February 10, 2006, Lake Elsinore; "Ranches, Many celebrities flock to King Ranch, best of dozen run by Negroes," *Ebony* magazine, 1 September 1949, 67-70.



many summers other relatives return for a huge family reunion. In 2006, the reunion event was held under the shade trees at Yarborough Park.<sup>100</sup>

Jurist David W. Williams (1910–2000), the first African American federal judge west of the Mississippi, also had a vacation home in Lake Elsinore, on Silver Street, a short distance down the hill from the Yarborough home. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Judge Williams grew up on 109<sup>th</sup> Street near Central Avenue in the Watts community of Los Angeles. He worked his way through Los Angeles Junior (now Community) College, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the law school at University of Southern California. Being a founding member of the John M. Langston Bar Association—a black lawyer’s group established because African American lawyers were not allowed to join the Los Angeles County Bar Association—was one of his many professional and civic activities and accomplishments.<sup>101</sup>

In the 1940s, Williams was one of the African American lawyers from Los Angeles who, along with Loren Miller and Willis O. Tyler, worked on the legal cases with Thurgood Marshall, Esq., then the head of NAACP Legal Defense Funds efforts, to fight racially restrictive real estate covenants barring people of color from living in many neighborhoods in the City of Angels, and around the nation. In the mid-1950s, pretending to live out of town, then Municipal Court Judge Williams outwitted those who might discriminate against him when he brokered the sale of a vacant lot next door to the exclusive Bel-Air Country Club for

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<sup>100</sup> *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 48; John Neal, interview by author, February 10, 2006; George Brown, interview by author, February 10, 2006; Charles Neal, Lake Elsinore resident, interview by author, June 15, 2005 & Fall 2005, via telephone and in Lake Elsinore.

<sup>101</sup> *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 50; Williams, a lifelong Republican, was appointed to the Federal Bench by President Richard Nixon in 1969. Elaine Woo, “David Williams Dies; Was First Black Federal Judge in West,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 2000, B-1; Hilltop Community Center Program Bulletin, 11; Eric V. Copage, “David Williams, 90, Pioneering black Judge;” [Obituary (Obit)], *New York Times*, May 12, 2000, B-15; Thomas Rutherford, interview by author, August 18, 2006, via telephone.

\$20,000, through telephone calls. He ignored the neighbors who were outraged that an African American had purchased the land, and built a house for his family. Jurist David Williams continued to live in the house in the exclusive Bel-Air neighborhood until he died in 2000.<sup>102</sup>

In May 1948, *Ebony* magazine featured an article titled, “California Vacation, Golden State offers new resorts to record 1948 army of Negro tourists.” The article noted California’s fifty-year history “as a favorite U.S. playground, [where] some five million sun-hungry tourists trek to southern California to enjoy its well-bally-hooed 300 days of Ol’ Sol annually.” The reporter estimated 300,000 of those visitors were expected to be African Americans with pockets filled with wages of post-World War II employment boom to spend on “a host of new facilities and resorts—many opened to colored vacationists for the first time by wartime exigencies.” Lake Elsinore was extolled for its size as the biggest natural lake in southern California, and as “the brightest spot on the California vacation map for Negro tourists.” Speaking to a national audience, the *Ebony* magazine reporter under an article subheading titled “Elsinore Offers” described the beauty of the Lake Elsinore environs and expressed the place was “one California resort where a Negro can drive in, rent a motel or park a trailer and relax in warm sunshine without worrying about discrimination.” Also mentioned in the article were “many other exciting stops for visitors,” such as Los Angeles’

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<sup>102</sup> Williams was appointed to the Los Angeles County Municipal Court in 1956 by Gov. Goodwin J. Knight. He gained an appointment to the Superior Court in 1962 from Gov. Edmund G. Brown, Sr. Williams was a life long Republican and was elevated by President Richard Nixon to the federal bench in 1969. After the Watts Revolt of 1965, he volunteered to handle the 4,000 criminal cases that resulted from the uprising. Woo, *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 2000, B-1; Copage, *New York Times*, May 12, 2000, B-15; Betty Pleasant, “Legal Community Gathers to Mourn Judge David Williams,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 24, 2000, A-1.

“Fabulous” Hollywood, Val Verde (see Chapter 7), Murray’s Dude Ranch, the National parks of Yosemite and Sequoia, and Mexico.<sup>103</sup>

All this enthusiasm in the Pan African American community about visiting Lake Elsinore, a safe place where they would not have to face embarrassment and humiliation due to discrimination while relaxing, was happening during a period of many changes for the area. Beginning in the mid-1930s during the Great Depression discontinuation of railroad service to the city, drought, low/dry and high lake cycles, an earthquake, a disastrous storm that caused significant property damage, foul odors from dying fish when the lake was low, and delinquent taxes on lots depleting local revenue adversely affected visitation rates and local services. In additions, there was vacillation between federal and local officials about making Lake Elsinore a county park or whether the federal government should maintain it for a role in national defense. Many people from southern California metropolitan areas continued to visit in record numbers, but during the years of World War II the crowds, particularly the white crowds began a pattern of decline that would continue into future decades. The people that did come to the lake spent less money, and were not interested to buy property or build improvements. There were many vacant houses in the community, which became home to the families of the men serving at Camp Haan, a few miles away in Perris, across the highway from March Army Air Field. During the war years the lake and the surrounding area were used for army maneuvers, and new equipment was tested before it was sent overseas to be used by American soldiers. Douglas Aircraft opened a small machine

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<sup>103</sup> “California Vacation, Golden State offers...,” *Ebony* magazine, 1 May 1948, 19-22.

shop employing five hundred women and men working in crews that rotated over three shifts who manufactured wings of B-17 bombers.<sup>104</sup>

Even with the changing fortunes of Lake Elsinore, pivotal moments of life and social practices took place alongside relaxation for African Americans during this era. Ivan J. Houston in addition to remembering the hot weather and joy of swimming in his formative years also recalled his mother and father telling him that they had spent their 1920s honeymoon at Lake Elsinore. Jan Miller Cerina recalled that in the mid-1940s, when she was an early adolescent, African American soldiers came to the north shore of Lake Elsinore one summer day on a big transport truck to watch singer Lena Horne perform. Cerina remembered the soldiers and others who came to hear the free show sitting on the beach at the lakeshore and standing around, while Ms. Horne entertained from a makeshift stage provided by a truck transport bed. “She [Horne] was a very pretty, unassuming woman who also brought her children for vacation with her at the lake,” recalled Cerina.<sup>105</sup>

Los Angeles native Price M. Cobbs remembered when he was about ten years old on one of his family’s summer visits to the lake in the late 1930s, seeing Dexter Gordon (1923-1990), who was about seventeen years old at the time, driving his 1935 Ford Convertible around the lake. Gordon later became a renowned jazz musician who played tenor saxophone. “I remember thinking how cool Dexter must be,” said Cobbs. Young Cobbs with his parents, Dr. Peter Price and Rosa Cobbs, and his siblings Prince and Marcelyn would go

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<sup>104</sup> Tom Hudson, 86, 89, 91-93, 97, 103; “Historic California Posts – Camp Haan,” The California State Military Museum, (copy in author’s possession); “Cultural Resources Survey, Test, and Evaluation Report for the Meridian Specific Plan Amendment, Riverside, California,” Submitted by Kimley-Horn & Associates, and Tierra Environmental Services, December 2009, From the Internet: [http://www.marchjpa.com/docs\\_forms/meridianappendixj.pdf](http://www.marchjpa.com/docs_forms/meridianappendixj.pdf), 9 November 2014, 12-14, 17-18.

<sup>105</sup> Jane Cerina interview, August 21, 2006.

for summer stays at Lake Shore Beach and at Mrs. Sterling's place. The elder Dr. Cobbs graduated in 1919 from Howard University Medical School, and his wife was a graduate of Miles College in Alabama.<sup>106</sup>

In 1925, Peter and Rosa Cobbs drove a new Dodge to Los Angeles from Montgomery, Alabama, where Dr. Cobbs had a successful medical practice. Like so many others before and after them, the young couple moved to Los Angeles to escape the discrimination of the South, to make a better place for themselves, their forthcoming children, and for the California Dream of freedom and opportunity. The medical office of Dr. Cobbs was on Central Avenue in Los Angeles, above Harris Pharmacy, and around the corner from the Twenty-eighth Street Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) facility designed by architect Paul R. Williams. The elder Cobbs also opened a sanitarium on North Hazard Street in the Boyle Heights section of Los Angeles and was involved in other business ventures. Mrs. Cobbs was active with civic and church work, and spent many years on the executive boards of the Parent Teachers Association and the Young Women's Christian Association. Several people I interviewed fondly remembered Dr. Cobbs providing someone in their family with emergency care when they had situations requiring a physician's assistance while at Lake Elsinore. The recollection of lively day-to-day social relations in the leisure community show that the Lake Elsinore's self-

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<sup>106</sup> Price M. Cobbs, MD, San Francisco resident, psychiatrist management consultant, and author, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Los Angeles, California; *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 35; The Official Dexter Gordon website, From the Internet: <http://www.dextergordon.com/main.htm>, 8 May 2014. Miles College is a historically African American liberal arts college founded in 1905, near Birmingham, Alabama, Mile College website, From the Internet: <https://www.miles.edu/about>, 18 September 2015.

determined vacation leisure extended the bonds of community across lines of class and status.<sup>107</sup>

The 1940s began the slow death of the Lake Elsinore resort, due to the economy, and the impact of nature and humans on the source of its water. As cycles of little rainfall for several years at a time diminished the lake's level, two dams were put into service upstream on the San Jacinto River further depriving it of the steady source of its water. There was escalating drainage of the underground water supply that fed into the river and eventually supplied the lake for use in the communities of San Jacinto, Perris and Lake Elsinore. In 1948, the combination of low water and over-population of fish caused there to be insufficient oxygen in the lake. A fish dying cycle began abruptly. Large numbers of fish washed up on the north shore due to the winds, creating a situation where they had to be hauled away because there were so many. Despite these events, the town population continued to grow. In 1950, Lake Elsinore's population grew to just over 2,000 people, with probably as many people living outside the city limits. At this time serious discussion began regarding bringing the lake under public ownership and creating a public entity, which could have the power to deal with the lake's problems. It would not be until the first half of the 1960s that the major management issues of Lake Elsinore would be resolved.<sup>108</sup>

The problems and concern for future development of the community of Lake Elsinore in the 1940s continued into the 1950s. By 1955 the lakebed was dry and dust storms were a regular occurrence. Except for 1958, the lake's condition stayed parched like this for the next ten years, when in 1964 Colorado River water was pumped in to partially fill the lake.

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<sup>107</sup> Price M. Cobbs, MD, San Francisco resident, author and management consultant, interview by author, October 30, 2004, Los Angeles, California; *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 35; Cobbs, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Tom Hudson, 102-103, 157; 1950 U.S. Federal Census.

Although many people left or did not visit the area because of these conditions, some stayed, a few visitors still came, and some even continued to buy property in the Valley. A few, like the Paynes and Rutherfords who were related by marriage owned houses on Lewis Street down the hill from the Yarboroughs, and built swimming pools when the lake no longer provided its rehabilitating waters in the 1950s. Judge Thomas L. and Mrs. Portia Broyles Griffith, Jr., began building a weekend/vacation home for their family at Lake Elsinore in 1953, the same year he was appointed by Gov. Earl Warren to the Los Angeles Municipal Court.<sup>109</sup>

Griffith was the first African American attorney admitted to the Los Angeles Bar Association, and the first to be named to the California Bar's Legislation Committee. Mrs. Griffith was an elementary school teacher. He served as president of the NAACP Los Angeles Branch for fifteen years. In 1925, during the ministry of his parents, Rev. Thomas L. Griffith, Sr., and Mrs. Carrie L. Griffith, architect Paul R. Williams was hired to design the elegant Second Baptist Church, at Twenty-fourth Street and Griffith Avenue in Los Angeles, a block west of Central Avenue. Today, Judge Griffith's grandson and his family reside year-round in the house he built for his family's leisure. The judge's daughter, Liza Griffith Scruggs, said in an interview, "I have many wonderful childhood memories of swimming in

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<sup>109</sup> Tom Hudson, 123, 157; Thomas Rutherford, interview by author, August 18, 2006; Liza Griffith Scruggs, Los Angeles resident and Assistant Superintendent-Secondary Instruction, Los Angeles Unified School District, interview by author, August 8 & October 7, 2006, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Nancy Scruggs Griffith, Los Angeles, California resident, interview by author, July 19, 2006, Los Angeles, California; Halvor Miller, Esq., interview by author, March 12, 2007; and Griffith was California's second Negro judge. "A New Judge in the Largest court in the World: Griffith Becomes 8<sup>th</sup> Negro Judge in U.S.," *Sepia USA* magazine, August 1953, Liza Griffith Scruggs Collection.

the Rutherfords' pool whose house was next door to ours, lots of barbeques and of the many people who stopped by to visit when we were at Lake Elsinore for the weekend.”<sup>110</sup>

The historic Lake Elsinore black resort community had much in common with other sites around southern California and the nation where prosperous American Africans successfully built a place of leisure to insulate them and their children from rude treatment and repeated affronts to their dignity from whites. These particularly determined African Americans with disposable income eagerly pursued the respectable culture of vacation leisure and real estate purchase opportunities for wealth generation, in a similar manner to their Anglo counterparts. Vacationing together at selected resorts provided African American families with the opportunity to reinforce their relationships, to make new acquaintances, and renew old ones. They were pioneering African Americans, carving out spatial imaginaries for themselves, and public spaces in recreation, in leadership and public policy, and in the identity of the region during the middle twentieth century decades.<sup>111</sup>

As was the case with black resort areas near eastern, mid-western and southern cities with relatively large African American populations that sprouted up in the early twentieth century, the Lake Elsinore Valley race-specific leisure space grew because there were African American entrepreneurs and residents in the Valley who offered services, accommodations and also leadership to black visitors. Relatively remote from the larger southern California metropolitan areas, the city of Lake Elsinore included African Americans as part of the early American settlement in the late 1880s. Evidence suggests the presence of

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<sup>110</sup> “...Griffith Becomes 8<sup>th</sup> Negro Judge in U.S.,” *Sepia USA* magazine, August 1953, Liza Griffith Scruggs Collection; Liza Griffith Scruggs, interview by author, August 8, 2006; *Negroes Who's Who In California* 1948 Edition, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Mark Foster, 131, 136, 143; Gatewood, 202.



a black family was a decisive factor as to why an African American leisure community emerged in this area, as it was a factor in the development of many others around the United States. Although the Lake Elsinore resort was popular, it was never as coveted by whites as other southern California resort areas. This is particularly true when it is compared to those near the beach and in Coachella Valley as their promotion and popularity heighten as the twentieth century progressed. The African American (and Jewish American) leisure retreats co-existed around the margins of the white resort community, with few documented unpleasant confrontations between the different communities.<sup>112</sup>

As previous chapters point out, other southern California resorts developments were not so fortunate in their start up and persistence over time making the success of the Lake Elsinore community all the more noteworthy. In 1922, the Santa Monica City Council refused to allow construction of a proposed African American bathhouse and amusement center, and the same year forced the closure of Caldwell's, a very successful African American-owned dancehall in the Ocean Park section of the city. Bruce's Beach (also known as Bruce's Lodge) provided oceanside recreation space for black Angelenos in the South Bay region of Los Angeles County beginning in 1912, until it was forced to close. In 1924, the Bruces, other African Americans and whites with vacation homes and unimproved land in this north Manhattan Beach section, were evicted under the banner of a campaign their land should be used for a public park. One of the uglier incidents intended to keep African Americans from enjoying the beach was the 1926 destruction of the nearly completed Pacific

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<sup>112</sup> Mark Foster, 136-137; Coachella Valley is where Palm Springs and other southern California, inland desert area resorts, including Palm Springs are located. During this period Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans lived in the area. It can be speculated these residents, also used the Lake Elsinore around the margins of the Anglo resort community *Ebony* magazine, 1 May 1948, 21.

Beach Club, in Huntington Beach. Arsonists burned the beautiful new facility to the ground shortly before it was to open.<sup>113</sup>

With the onset of the Great Depression, World War II, federal legislation making discrimination and segregation illegal, and its stronger legal enforcement beginning the opening up of public places more or less to all, many African American resorts and leisure spaces began to suffer waning attendance and economic hardship. The Lake Elsinore African American retreat was no different in this regard, and the situation was multiplied by the unfavorable environmental factors. As southern California African Americans were presented with a broader array of vacation and leisure options, they began to go to newly accessible places, and stopped going to Lake Elsinore. African American vacation retreats that have faded, and those continuing to survive today, drew and still draw people because of their legacy of enduring ownership, achievement, strong sense of place, vital social life and memory.<sup>114</sup>

Changing historical, sociological and cultural significance does not diminish the importance of Lake Elsinore and other African American vacation retreats. On the contrary, the societal changes only make these sites more intriguing, because of the “brave pioneers who persisted in pursuing the finer things in life in public, despite repeated rejection, hostile environments and even physical danger.” African American leadership has been associated with martyrdom, toil and sacrifice, and also with advancing obvious racial causes and civil

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<sup>113</sup> “Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1922; “The Color Line At Santa Monica,” *California Eagle*, April 1, 1922, 1; DeGraaf, “City of Angels...,” 348; Brigham, 31-34, 47, 84; Dan Cady, “Southern? California: White Southern Migrants in Greater Los Angeles, 1920-1930,” (PhD diss., Claremont University, Claremont, California 2005), 194-198, 226-227.

<sup>114</sup> Haizlip, 21.

rights more associated with political and economic opportunities. This recognition is appropriate. But determined African Americans with disposable income, demonstrated by their own example that part of the right to freedom and self-determination was the right not only to work, but to leisure, to enjoy the fruits of their labor when and where they choose. These citizens' determination also advanced the universal search for human dignity, civil rights and consumer equal access for all in America.<sup>115</sup>

By the 1960s, healing water resorts became less popular, and in Lake Elsinore the sulfur water baths became a relatively minor part of the local economy. Such spa resort and leisure areas showed certain lifespan, determined by changing ideas of leisure, and public fancy as much as by transportation change and weather. Further the change in consumer leisure tastes has been very much a product of its promotion and deliberate commodification as novelty and fashion, as promoters have cultivated “new leisure” over “old leisure” in capitalists' exploits. For Lake Elsinore, changing environmental factors accelerated the change in promoted tastes and decline in the area's leisure lifespan. At this lake, dry spells were a reoccurring event before the 1960s. If not for the Great Depression of the 1930s and the unpredictability of the lake that enticed successive visionaries and boosters, Lake Elsinore would probably have grown into a sizable city surrounding the big lagoon. As it was, the Elsinore Valley lost some of its “retreat” attraction as it began to feel less rural due to new residential community developments bringing population centers nearer, and the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Haizlip, 21; Mark Foster, 146; Victoria C. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 3, 6; Andrew William Kahrl, *On The Beach: Race and Leisure in the Jim Crow South* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2008), ix.

expansion of the influence of three nearby metropolitan areas encouraged by the enlarged regional freeway system that came to envelop it.<sup>116</sup>

The community of Lake Elsinore has gone through many transitions since the middle decades of the twentieth century. Final public acquisition of the lakebed lands in the Lake Elsinore Valley came in 1957. The area is no longer the vacation site it once was. It is now a small, suburban, family community, a mix of the old town site, rural areas, and new master-planned communities of houses built on parcels of land once part of the lake, used for farming, or open land. Residents are for the most part retired, or commute to work locations around the southland in Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, San Diego and Los Angeles counties. Today, the websites of the city of Lake Elsinore and its Chamber of Commerce promote the natural scenic and recreational attributes of the area, social practices and memory of action/extreme sports venues and world famous thermal winds for aerial sports, and the small, historic downtown district for boutique shopping and dining. They advertise the city's over 1,100-acres of freeway frontage available for new commercial and industrial park development, lower housing and land costs, relatively close proximity to skilled labor and universities, and a strategic location within the southern California market.

People can camp at the lake, but not currently at Lake Shore Beach. The area is promoted as the "Action Sports Capital of the World" by the city of Lake Elsinore, which maintains some public parks along the shoreline and throughout the city. The Lake Elsinore and San Jacinto Watersheds Authority manage Lake Elsinore water quality, wildlife habitats and improvements. Lake Elsinore itself is maintained at 3,300 acres, or 2.5 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, with ten miles of shoreline. This is less than half its size in the years of

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<sup>116</sup> Tom Hudson, 61, 136, 141; Sutton, 293.

abundant water flow early in the twentieth century. A private company is contracted to manage the lake area campgrounds, boat launch and marina, day use areas, concessions, and other services.<sup>117</sup>

None of the Lake Elsinore hotels serving white or African American visitors during the first half of the twentieth century are open now, nor is their remembrance much apart of the local public memory. Many of the vacation homes, court cottages and small hotels built during this period have been torn down, or dramatically altered for year-round use by residents rather than visitors. Descendants of some of the African American families who came to live in Lake Elsinore in the early part of the twentieth century continue to live in the Valley environs. A few black Angeleno descendants who vacationed at the lake when the place was popular as a healing water resort have taken over the second homes their ancestors occupied for their year-round residences. While memory remains in their presence and in the recollections of participants in the past, an active, collective public characterization of the place's past as a product of African American leisure development success is absent from the landscape.

In the early part of the twenty-first century, many recreational visitors to the Valley come for skydiving, hang-gliding and other aerial sports, as well as water sports of wakeboarding and windsurfing—not for the therapeutic waters. Pottery Street is no longer the hub for African Americans at Lake Elsinore, nor is any other street. The city of Lake

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<sup>117</sup> Tom Hudson, 120-121, 128, 154; “*Lake Elsinore 2003 State of the City Report*”; Lake Elsinore Valley Chamber of Commerce, From the Internet: <http://www.lakeelsinorechamber.com/>, 11 November 2014; City of Lake Elsinore, From the Internet: <http://www.lake-elsinore.org/index.aspx?page=1>, 11 November 2014; Lake Elsinore Campground, From the Internet: <http://www.rockymountainrec.com/camp/elsinore.htm>, 11 November 2014; Lake Elsinore Valley Chamber of Commerce Community Map. San Diego, CA: Map Masters, 2003; Lake Elsinore & San Jacinto Watershed Authority, From the Internet: <http://www.mywatersheds.com>, 11 November 2014.

Elsinore has grown in landmass, and from a majority white population of about 3,000 in 1930, to a more diverse population of 53,024 in 2012. People of Spanish speaking descent make up the largest percentage (48.4 percent) of the residents, while African Americans make up only about 5.6 percent and Asian Americans make up 5.8 percent of residents. Following many cultural and environmental changes, the Lake Elsinore Valley continues to be a charming and beautiful place to visit and live, but with very different cultural nuances.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Tom Hudson, 77; Lake Elsinore, California data, 2014, From the internet: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Lake-Elsinore-California.html#b>, 11 November 2014; Lake Elsinore Valley Chamber of Commerce Community Map. San Diego, CA: Map Masters, 2003; Lake Elsinore Visitors Bureau, From the Internet: <http://www.visitlakeelsinore.com/>, 11 November 2014; *Lake Elsinore General Plan 2011*, 1/1-1/2, From the Internet: <http://www.lake-elsinore.org/index.aspx?page=909>, 11 November 2014.

## CHAPTER 6

### WELCOME TO THE PARKRIDGE? ADVENTURES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EXURBAN COUNTY CLUB AND SUBDIVISION DEVELOPMENT DURING THE 1920s

FOLKS: This is just another way of spelling Parkridge, and our strong bond of district restrictions compel us to create new fields, new districts, and build a community that we might expand for the sake of prosperity—therefore, PARKRIDGE...

Land, by group ownership, means wealth collectively, and power politically, and with these two requisites you will help materially in solving a most critical economic situation which is fast gaining a strangling hold on Black America. It is your most sacred duty, people, to acquire land, not only residential lots, but beach frontage and farm land as well.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY HAS GROWN IN VALUE FROM TWO MILLION TO SEVERAL BILLIONS IN WEALTH, AND THAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN APPROXIMATELY TEN YEARS. Do the Black Americans of Southern California own or control their share of this in proportion to population? We say, “NO!” The same Los Angeles County has more than 50,000 colored families living therein. Every race man or woman at the head of a family should have enough family pride, love for that said family, and foresight enough for his or her children to own at least \$3,000 worth of real estate in this fast-growing county. That would give us a gross valuation of \$150,000,000 in community wealth. Folks, when this shall have been done we will be well on our way toward SUCCESS—PARKRIDGE WILL HELP YOU TO ARRIVE.

– *California Eagle*, 31 August 1928<sup>1</sup>

“Land, by group ownership, means wealth collectively, and power politically, and with these two requisites you will help materially in solving a most critical economic situation which is fast gaining a strangling hold on Black America,” declared the advertisement in the *California Eagle* in late summer 1928. “It is your most sacred duty, people,” it proclaimed, “to acquire land, not only residential lots, but beach frontage and farm land as well.” With this analysis and charge to its readers, the principals of a new recreational and real estate ownership venture, the Parkridge, planted its purposes firmly in

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<sup>1</sup> “Parkridge, ‘Famous Because of its Beauty’ ...” ad, *California Eagle*, 31 August 1928, 2.

the ground of African American Angelenos quest for equality through leisure and economic self-determination.

In this chapter, I investigate the Parkridge Country Club, a 1920s era southern California leisure site and subdivision development. Parkridge promoters invoked racial uplift rhetoric to engage African American consumers in large scale, organized efforts for leisure pursuits, wealth development through land ownership, and social and economic self-sufficiency. The Parkridge project was unique because its black principals re-imagined the previously unsuccessful white-owned elite leisure landscape for a new group, African Americans as well as whites who might like to participate. This material landscape presented participatory inclusion as assertive rejection of regional Jim Crow practices, as it aimed to realize for African American Californians modern citizen consumerist values embodied in leisure, ownership and mastery of time. It presented to members and the world evidence of esteem attained by socioeconomic success. In participating in the Parkridge project, African Americans were simultaneously contesting their exclusion from the exclusive environment, creating their own images of a cultural island of economic power, social status, dignity and self-affirmation, as well as on some level maintaining the status quo of their individual and group conditions in the American cultural hierarchies.<sup>2</sup>

In more recent generations the Parkridge has been separately remembered by differing interpretations as a place of local civic pride, as an attempted location for African

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<sup>2</sup> In an editorial on April 24, 1924, the *California Eagle* had supported the idea of country club ownership as means for African American self-determination in leisure and economic development through property control and community determination. The Parkridge project was one of a series of formal and informal southern California African American attempts to fulfill these goals in the 1910s and 1920s (see Chapter 7). Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race, Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1-5; James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development* (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 2-3.



American suburban expansion, or not at all. Located in the Inland Empire, this site in the city of Corona is less remembered as being enjoyed by African Americans and more remembered for its association with white Americans. In 2006, historian Jose M. Alamillo added a broader picture on Corona's history with the publication of his rich narrative about the labor and leisure of Mexican American workers in the city's lemon industry, the dynamics and impact of the discrimination they faced, and their civil rights struggles from 1880–1960. Yet when the site is remembered at all in Corona local history and booster narratives it is as an architectural attraction and a failed Euro-American country club. On the website of the Corona Historic Preservation Society, the Parkridge is remembered as one of “Corona’s lost treasures,” and for the 1960s Cresta Verde Golf Course facilities and subdivision development which stands on the site in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

The remembrance of architectural grandeur of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the Parkridge clubhouse has obscured a more interesting and important historical meaning. For example, writer Diann Marsh's account in the 1998 book, *Corona, The Circle City*, and the publications by the Corona Historic Preservation Society declare that the country club only survived from 1925 to 1928, after which time it became a sanitarium for a short time. In Marsh's brief account she mentioned Dan Gilkey built the club and sold Golden Life Membership cards for \$500. These Corona local history accounts do not mention the African American purchase and ownership of the Parkridge site after Gilkey failed. On the Corona Public Library, “Brief History of Corona” webpage, the Parkridge is not mentioned at all

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<sup>3</sup> “Corona History,” Corona Historic Preservation Society, From the Internet: <http://www.corona-history.org/corona-lost-treasures.html>, 29 December 2014; For information on the Mexican American heritage of Corona, see Jose M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons, Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town 1880-1960* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

among the culturally significant markers of Corona's identity. This memory misses a visionary moment, a moment of enterprise and political struggle, and a community-defining moment in excluding the African American initiative at the Parkridge Club.<sup>4</sup>

There the leaders of the African American venture envisioned infusing new life into a once-failed project to build an exurban community of refined leisure pursuits in the setting of the grandly designed clubhouse and amenities that might grow in value, building wealth for the principals and their patrons who built homes while asserting full, unexcludable African American "membership" in the emerging consumerist citizenship of the early twentieth century. To understand the venture, I examine the regional social context this leisure site arose in and negotiated during the twentieth century. I illuminate the history of the district and its place in the region, in the context of relevant southern California leisure spaces, subdivision developments and social history as they relate to Los Angeles and ethnicity. And I analyze the booster rhetoric, racialized issues and discourse, and racist practices (and resistance) in the history of the Parkridge, the community of Corona in southern California.

### **Southern California and the Citrus Belt**

California's largest city by the second decade of the twentieth century was Los Angeles. The establishment of new communities throughout the region spread growth across Los Angeles County and nearby counties of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura as the twentieth century evolved. Subdivision opportunities opened up on large land tracts as

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<sup>4</sup> Diann Marsh, *Corona, The Circle City* (Corona, CA: Heritage Media Corporation, 1998), 102; "Corona History," Corona Historic Preservation Society, From the Internet: <http://www.corona-history.org/corona-lost-treasures.html>, 29 December 2014; "Brief History of Corona," webpage, Corona Public Library, From the Internet: [http://www.coronapubliclibrary.org/Heritage-Room-\(1\)/Heritage-Room/HeritageSubPage.aspx](http://www.coronapubliclibrary.org/Heritage-Room-(1)/Heritage-Room/HeritageSubPage.aspx), 29 December 2014.

ranching closed down, promoting early regional suburban growth as people from around the world began to look more closely at southern California as a land of opportunity. From within the region, African American capitalists envisioned opportunities beyond the city and the ocean's beaches, imagining a modern, leisured and civilized "country" living on the perimeter for self-determining African Americans. Interested to purchase land in conducive areas of southern California, they foresaw situating new communities in the path of exurban growth.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the southland region saw financial success from the oil and movie industries, as well as from the automobile revolution. The southern California aviation industry was beginning to construct more planes. The transcontinental train lines brought many new visitors and future residents lured by the weather, scenery and the chance for a new life. According to historian Carey McWilliams, the largest internal migration in American history occurred to the southern California region during this time period, and the population began to spread to new areas. As the California population increased from 3.4 million in 1920 to 5.7 million in 1930 with most of the growth occurring in the southland, new industries and residential districts began to take over orange groves and agricultural lands. New cities multiplied.<sup>6</sup>

Established in the 1880s, Corona was a young city seeking economic sustainability and expansion by the 1920s. The Parkridge Country Club was a new land use pattern of business and leisure site for this small city, and for the club's promoters and investors. Both

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<sup>5</sup> Lynn Bowman, *Los Angeles: Epic of a City* (Berkeley, CA: Howell-North Books, 1974), 216-218, 224, 227, 247-250.

<sup>6</sup> Bowman, 227-263, 285; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California, An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, Publisher/Peregrine Smith Books, 1946/1973), 135; 1920 & 1930 U.S. Census.

city officials and the businessmen had big ambitions for this venture in leisure-based home building in the Inland Empire district.

After careful inspection by the ‘bankers, business and the most conservative [analysts]’ and being ‘aware of the benefits that have accrued to our citrus belt through the world-wide reputation of [Riverside] Glenwood Mission Inn,’ Parkridge received the full endorsement of the Corona Chamber of Commerce because of ‘what this splendid enterprise means for the future of our Citrus Belt community.’<sup>7</sup>

Opened in fall 1925, the Parkridge County Club was a half-million dollar leisure development the local Chamber of Commerce endorsed as a “great asset to [the] citrus belt” due to its distinction of having what the city boosters regarded as the finest championship golf course in California, and possibly the entire country. In the local newspaper, *The Corona Independent*, city boosters boasted that great golf tournaments held at the Parkridge would accrue national and international recognition for their citrus belt community and publicity benefits that would attract tourists. Once in the district, the boosters ventured these visitors would gain an awareness of the beauty of the region, the excellent opportunities they believed it afforded, and some would become new residents.

Today when most people think of Riverside County history, they think of its agricultural and residential real estate development. But from the 1880s to the 1960s, numerous resorts were spread out over the landscape, “offering rest, relaxation, activities, and even recuperation to thousands of people both local and far away.” By the late 1920s, Inland Empire booster and Mayor Guy Bogart of Beaumont in *The Corona Daily Independent* newspaper proclaimed Riverside County as the “Empire of Recreation and of Health.” The hot springs resorts are the ones most remembered today. Situated along the numerous geographic faults that crisscross the county, these resorts offered their guests,

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<sup>7</sup> “Chamber of Commerce Endorses Parkridge,” *The Corona Independent*, 6 April 1925, 1; Alamillo, 24.

healing hot and cold mineral waters. Guests could take the natural waters by soaking in and drinking them while luxuriating in the southern California sunshine at resorts such as Glen Ivy, Murrieta, Eden Gilman, Soboba, and Desert Hot Springs. There were also medical resorts, or sanitariums. Varied sized hotels offered visitors relaxation and vacation in the congenial southland climate at the Mission Inn in Riverside, the Robertine in Perris, the San Gorgonio Inn in Banning, the Vosburg Hotel in San Jacinto and others.<sup>8</sup>

The Corona Valley was part of this. Historically located in the proximity of the Old Temescal Canyon Road (which today parallels the Temecula Valley/I-15 Freeway route), near the Santa Ana Mountains pass (today the Riverside/91 Freeway route) in western Riverside County, about sixty miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles on the inland route to San Diego, Corona Valley's geological attractions distinguished the place from first settlements. Native American use of nearby hot springs in Temescal Canyon and Lake Elsinore set the stage for the establishments of the area's Glen Ivy and Lake Elsinore resorts in the 1880s. These establishments were part of California's emerging health tourism industry that became one of the defining service industries of the region. Native Americans, Spanish and Mexican explorers and settlers, and early California American explorers had traveled routes through the valley on foot and horseback, in wagons and stagecoaches on expeditions and journeys through the region, anticipating the automobile traffic which would follow later in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

The Parkridge Country Club topped "scenic slopes" with "awe-inspiring" views of the Corona Valley just outside the city limits at the intersection of the inland, main

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Lech, *Resorts of Riverside County* (Charleston, SC/San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 7; "Riverside County, 'Empire of Recreation and of Health,'" *The Corona Daily Independent*, 31 May 1928, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lech, 7; Marsh, 10.

transportation arteries in the southern foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains and the Cleveland National Forest on a delta basin near the Temescal Wash and Santa Ana River. With the development of the citrus industry in western Riverside County, Corona had become known for the “quality and quantity of lemons” the district produced. According to a 1926 *Los Angeles Times* article, the city with a population of 6,000 shipped more lemons than any other city in the United States. By the 1920s, Corona passengers and freight were served by the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific and Pacific Electric railways and three motor-buses with almost hourly service to any regional Pacific Coast location. In addition, from the district, drivers could motor along thirty miles of paved highways to reach the closest beach.<sup>10</sup>

Several already successful Iowans had organized the city in 1886 during the period of increased migration to California in the 1880s after the Southern Pacific Railway had reached Los Angeles. Robert B. Taylor, Adolph Rimpau, George L. Joy, A.S. Garretson, and Samuel Merrill created a land development company known as South Riverside to build an agriculture colony from 15,000 acres of the Spanish Rancho La Sierra and Rancho El Temescal purchased from various owners. “Colonies” were cooperative enterprises where wealthy (or sometimes not so wealthy) investors jointly purchased large land tracts. They would subdivide the land among themselves, and build an agricultural economy to subsidize township civic infrastructures of schools, churches, government buildings, water supply and other necessary amenities.<sup>11</sup>

During the booming 1880s while many towns were founded in California, some survived and others did not. Corona flourished because there was an artesian basin and a

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<sup>10</sup> Charles R. Miller, “Corona Crops Find Good Mart,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 January 1926; “Large Pool Finished in Parkridge,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1925; Marsh, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Marsh, 29, 54-55; Alamillo, 13-15.

climate conducive to growing citrus crops and producing other agricultural products. Taking the lead of the city of Riverside in the eastern part of the county, many new southern California towns planted citrus crops. In Corona, clay mining and manufacturing sewage pipes, bricks and other products, along with rock quarry operations, also provided some additional economic opportunities. In 1896, residents voted to become an incorporated city and named their city, “Corona,” a Spanish word for crown or garland. Alamillo observes “the Spanish name evoked not only the region’s romanticized Spanish past but also the shape of a citrus fruit and the town’s unique circular design.”<sup>12</sup>

Proclaiming a “white” racial identity, early settlers sought to create a community reflecting their Protestant mores and temperance beliefs. Yet as a single industry town, dependent on an agricultural labor force of different background and beliefs, Corona’s citrus industry relied on mostly Mexican and Sicilian immigrant workers, who were integrated into a labor system stratified by class, division of labor, ethnicity and race until the 1940s.

Alamillo contends,

In Corona’s citrus industry, native Anglo [Americans] made up the majority of owners and managers, Italians were incorporated in the packinghouse labor force, and Mexicans were relegated to field orchard work. Although Italian immigrants encountered prejudice and discrimination, they were structurally positioned as ‘white’ in the U.S. racialized social system. By the 1930s, Corona’s Italian Americans had gained greater economic and residential mobility, whereas Mexican Americans still faced economic and political road-blocks and were relegated to the nonwhite racial status of ‘Mexican.’<sup>13</sup>

A small but powerful group of Euro-American citrus growers exercised substantial influence on the lives, housing, health, recreation and education of their work force, on the politics of multiple government levels, on civic affairs and on the layout and use of public

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Alamillo, 15; Marsh, 29, 54-55, 80-81.

<sup>13</sup> Alamillo, 6, 15, 32.

space. The growers worked to keep competition and unions out of Corona, and they kept labor wages low. Those Mexican American and immigrant workers who lived at the citrus ranches were subject to a system resembling ‘industrial plantations’ or feudal relationships, where their work and leisure activities were controlled by their Anglo American supervisor and/or employer. Those Mexican workers who chose to live in the residential area of Corona, were pushed into a barrio in the northern part of the city within the circular platted town bounded by Grand Boulevard about Sixth Street. Italians lived nearby in neighborhoods on the north side of town.<sup>14</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century, racial restrictive real estate covenants were attached to property deeds on land south of Sixth Street. Home listings included explicit instructions of “Do Not Show to Mexicans” for fear of depreciating property values. Also in the 1920s, children of Mexicans who lived at the citrus ranches and in the northern section of Corona were all sent to the same elementary school. The children of Italians, along with the children of the two African American families who lived on the north side were also sent to this same school. When the municipal pool opened in 1925, Mexicans, Italians and other ‘foreigners’ could only swim on Mondays, the day before the ‘dirty’ pool water was changed on Tuesdays, so it would be ‘clean’ for whites to swim in.<sup>15</sup>

Although there was cultural discrimination and segregation in Corona limiting employment opportunities and constraining public space for community organizing and leisure, Mexicans and Italians, like descendants of African Americans, Chinese, Japanese and

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<sup>14</sup> Alamillo asserts in Corona racial mixing was discouraged and Jim Crow style conditions were imposed. In Corona, the racial restrictive real estate covenants were probably added to property deeds in the late 1920s. Before that time, property racial restrictions were more likely implemented in Corona by local custom. *Ibid.*, Alamillo, 6, 12, 20, 23, 25, 28, 34, 48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Alamillo, 47.



other ethno-racial groups in other parts of southern California, relied on family, kinship, and neighborhood ties to create a vibrant community life. Many of these marginalized groups turned segregation into forms of congregation, and developed their own separate institutions, organizations and leisure activities. The contributions of these groups to the development of Corona and other local communities and the nation are gradually being more fully documented and recognized, alongside the narratives of white American elites.<sup>16</sup>

Until the shift of large sections of agricultural land in the 1950s to residential real estate development, production of lemons and the manufacturing of a variety of lemon by-products was the largest industrial employer in Corona. By the 1920s era with prosperity from agriculture, Corona citizens had established a civic and commercial center with a variety of buildings, businesses and civic institutions. The town contained a city hall, schools, a library, hotels, a municipal swimming pool, churches, a few movie theatres, a hospital, civic, charitable and fraternal organizations, two English language newspapers, business blocks and houses. The building stock was constructed in a variety of architectural styles including English Tudor cottages and castles, Spanish Colonial Revival homes, Norman cottages, Byzantine churches and other exotic styles. Improved telephone service also made communication much easier.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Almarillo, 34-35; My discussion of forms of congregation marginalized groups created when faced with structural limitations of segregation is informed by the work of Earl Lewis. Whites missed that segregation also vested African Americans' and other people in communities of color with the power to redefine their own existence in the battle for empowerment. Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> Marsh, 49, 70-72, 99, 102-103, 109.

## **The Parkridge Country Club Makes Its Debut**

The Corona growers were very active in founding and developing Euro-American male lodges, fraternal organizations and country clubs during the 1920s. The Corona Rotary Club and Lions Club raised funds for many community services and civic projects including scholarships, help for children with disabilities, a city park and recreational facilities. In 1925, the Parkridge Country Club opened to cater to an elite, exclusive Euro-American male membership and their families. The recreational and resort facilities combined with the stately, Spanish Colonial Revival, Mediterranean style clubhouse accented by a front colonnade framed in arched openings and a prominent tower, from the start was a popular gathering place for Corona growers and other native white southland elites. The Parkridge project created by its promoter and owner, Dan Gilkey of Long Beach, California was a private business endeavor set up for the purpose of making a profit through the proposed sale of country club estate sites on the nearby hills and memberships for the sports and social center. The local boosters supported this country club model of recreation as both a community amenity and a mechanism for promoting residential development.<sup>18</sup>

In the United States the 1920s were “the golden age of country clubs,” a social and architectural form that emerged in the 1880s. These private recreational and social centers paralleled the rise of suburbanization and mass transportation. They had historical roots in the exclusive city clubs, spas, summer resorts and elite sports clubs of the wealthy in the nineteenth century. Those who patronized country clubs sought a place of permanent organized space to spend their leisure time. Venues of elite status with a sense of community identity and traditions, these spaces enabled a way for elite, white families to separate their

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Marsh, 102; Alamillo, 24.

collective leisure life from everyday life in the city, combined with physical security and social superiority. Country clubs of the late nineteenth century evolved from origins as makeshift landscapes around country farmhouses and barns into carefully planned landscapes with professional architects designing the facilities run by professional management in the twentieth century. In the 1920s, memberships were restricted to white, American elites by selective administration procedures, and high initiation fees and dues. Admission was denied to Jews, African Americans and members of other marginalized groups regardless of wealth or background. African Americans were not admitted but occasionally were hired as caddies and waiters. In California the service staff at country clubs also included people of Mexican and Asian descent. Real estate developers like Gilkey, in some places linked country clubs with real estate ventures such as planned subdivisions to attract upper and upper middle class homebuyers. These integrated planned developments of clubs and homes are now recognized as the prototypes to the gated community of the later twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

In the years following World War II, many whites moved to these new suburban, housing development communities and eventually to gated communities, spreading out from urban cores all around the nation. Segregated along class lines, and excluding African Americans and other communities of color until the civil rights laws of the 1940s-1960s opened up housing and other markets, many of these new upper class white suburban subdivisions organized private swim and other recreation clubs rather than fund public facilities so they could control the class and racial composition of the visitors. Residency requirements and membership fees achieved class and racial exclusion, hence limiting the

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<sup>19</sup> My discussion of country clubs origins is informed by James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development* (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 1998), and Roger D. Simon, "Country Clubs," in *The Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, ed. David R. Goldfield (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006).

social makeup of the membership to that of the community in a similar manner to the more elite country club projects. In these new communities with privatized recreation facilities, private behavior, market practices, and public policies constructed and supported class and racial separation and discrimination. These exclusive and exclusionary communities reinforced notions of white privilege and white supremacy, and solidified social differences along class lines against other less affluent whites as well as racial lines against African Americans. These exurban white communities treated African Americans moving in as “a criminal transgression” and residential segregation was enacted as part of their ideas flowing from a white spatial imaginary. African American desires for adequate housing, leisure, community amenities as well as upward mobility were not viewed as part of the California Dream or American Dream in these exurban communities in the era of the 1920s when Gilkey hatched the Parkridge Country Club and lot sale project.<sup>20</sup>

A January 3, 1925 article in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled “Golfers Flock To Join Parkridge Club” reported, the newly built country club “...caused the Corona Club, an organization of some twenty years of existence and a closed membership of more than fifty-members to join Parkridge County Club in a body...Never in the history of the Corona Club have the directors recommended any other similar affiliation.” The article also noted the Corona Club was not disfranchising its organization by joining the Parkridge, rather the older club was taking advantage of the “outstanding additional benefits” offered by the new

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<sup>20</sup> My discussion here of white suburban housing communities and privatized recreational facilities, white privilege and white spatial imaginary is informed by work of: Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters, A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty, The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008); & George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011).

facilities. The older and also exclusively white, Corona Country Club featured tennis courts, a large hall for parties, a billiard table, piano and a phonograph player.<sup>21</sup>

The marketing strategy of the Parkridge management appears to have targeted potential members throughout the southern California region, not only in Riverside County. The Inland Empire city of Corona's new luxurious resort style club venture received extensive coverage and rave reviews in the local and regional newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*. Newspaper articles especially described and promoted the club's sports programming and gave accounts by the southern California boosters from various cities that visited the site. In the descriptions of the programming and visitor activities, a vision of the social life of the Parkridge was presented to the reader of the newspaper article.

The well-known golf course's architect and the Parkridge course's design were highlighted in many of these articles. In a *Los Angeles Times* article on March 8, 1925 was entitled "Parkridge Club Is Hailed As The Best." *The Corona Independent* on March 2, 1925, listed the names and titles of various regional civic and business elites who visited the site for a "Community Frolic." Offering praise for the event and facility, these men were identified as hailing from Corona, Riverside, Fullerton (Orange County), Los Angeles and Long Beach (Los Angeles County). Their approval helped publicize the facility and bolster its credibility for a white, regional elite constituency, from whom the Parkridge Club management sought membership purchases and patronage. Although not explicitly stated in these booster-style newspaper articles, the inference was these influential, southland men listed in their text were

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<sup>21</sup> "Golfers Flock To Join Parkridge Club," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 January 1925; Marsh, 87.

“white Americans,” and the sought after audience for patronage was an affluent, “white” constituency.<sup>22</sup>

An October 4, 1925 article in the *Los Angeles Times* touted the transformation by an elaborate irrigation system of a “wasteland” of “uninviting hills...to lovely, rolling greens” and “beautiful scenic slopes.” The same article portrayed the project costs as almost \$400,000 at the date of the publication. The few available 1920s-era photographs of the place highlight tastefully appointed architecture, décor and a variety of recreational amenities on its 700 acres. The clubhouse building was constructed in the 1920s California style inspired Spanish Colonial Revival. The Mediterranean architectural design evoked the region’s romanticized past. This leisure palace overlooked a “championship” golf course designed by J. Duncan Dunn, a large swimming pool, a rifle range “declared to be one of the most complete in the West,” cricket grounds, tennis courts, and a landing field and a hanger for airplanes. Overnight visiting guests could be accommodated in fifty bungalows. An August 18, 1927 *Los Angeles Times* article noted the Parkridge dining experience as being “conducted with an elaborateness and finish hardly equaled in the West.”<sup>23</sup>

Although the newspaper portrayed the Parkridge Country Club as being well received in its efforts of catering to the recreational and leisure needs of the “Southland’s elite,” after two years the resort’s finances were in poor health. In 1927, Gilkey found himself in

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<sup>22</sup> “Parkridge Club Is Hailed As The Best,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1925; “Commends Parkridge,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1925; “Parkridge Will Open This Fall, Rushing Work on New Club That Offers Diversified Sports for Members,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1925; “Large Pool Finished In Parkridge, Converted Wasteland is Now Beautiful Country Club Site,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1925.

<sup>23</sup> “Parkridge Will Open This Fall,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Sept. 1925; “Large Pool Finished in Parkridge, Converted Wasteland is Now Beautiful Country Club Site,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 Oct. 1925; “Country Club Can’t Pay Debts, Fashionable Resort Near Corona May Be Sold To Negro Corporation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 1927; “Parkridge Country Club, ‘The Million Dollar Playground,’” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928.

financial difficulties with outstanding personal and corporate debts of around \$250,000 to a few principal creditors. The outstanding debts included a \$122,000 mortgage against the club. In a *Los Angeles Times* article dated August 18, 1927, the clubhouse and improvements had an appraised value of \$600,000. To resolve his debt burden, the promoter contemplated bankruptcy proceedings as one of his options. An August 19, 1927 article, in the *Corona Courier* described Gilkey's efforts to make a deal with the creditors and the members of the club to relieve his financial obligations. The article stated Gilkey informed the members of the club if they "would relieve him of his obligations and would make a mutually satisfactory deal with the creditors he would turn over all of his holdings to the club, receiving nothing for himself."<sup>24</sup>

Apparently, Gilkey could not come to a satisfactory agreement with his creditors and the club members, so he pursued another course of action to relieve his debt obligations. In August 1927, he chose to sell the fashionable club and valuable property to an African American syndicate, the Nelson-White Holding Company, based in Los Angeles. From the African American capitalists' perspective, the difficulties of the late 1920s over development offered a new kind of favorable circumstances to establish and expand their own opportunities. The sale meant the new owners would not only own the property, but also manage the club's services for its existing and future membership. Gilkey's attorney, Welburn Mayock informed *The Corona Daily Independent*, that the new property ownership

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<sup>24</sup> "Country Club Can't Pay Debts, Fashionable Resort Near Corona May be Sold To Negro Corporation," *Los Angeles Times* 18 August 1927; "Parkridge Sale to Negro Syndicate Confirmed," *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; "L.A. Negroes Buy Club Site, Dan Gilkey Confirms Sale of Parkridge Count[r]y Club to Large Negro Syndicate," *California Eagle*, 26 August 1927; "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale at Meeting Tonight Interesting Disclosures Likely," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; "Gilkey Spends Two Sleepless Nights In The Riverside County Jail; Was Arrested at Compton," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 22 August 1927.

by the colored financiers would not interfere with the privileges of the current holders of memberships.<sup>25</sup>

The white club members' bitter contestation of this transaction began within days of confirmation of the Parkridge sale to the African American businessmen. It took on numerous intellectual, legal and physical forms. They would engage in a campaign to devalue and demonize this venture's credibility and legitimacy in the maintenance of their ideas of white spatial imaginary. *The Corona Daily Independent* and the *Corona Courier* newspapers carried news stories, editorials and other types of coverage about the events surrounding the Parkridge's ownership transition. The *Corona Courier* stated, "it is understood every possible legal recourse will be used by the Corona and Riverside members of the club to prevent the sale from going through."<sup>26</sup>

The publishers of the general interest daily newspapers in Corona and other southern California cities geared their new coverage to an audience assumed to be the native white American reading public. The tone of the newspaper coverage and the actions taken by the Parkridge club members and Corona citizens to stop the "negro invasion" were inflammatory, alarmist, reactionary and resentful, as well as racist. The rhetoric about the club events making its way to the local newspaper pages was relatively indirect in word choice, but not meaning. They used the tactics of associating blackness with the fear or phobia of being overrun by "some monstrous collectivity," which George Lipsitz and other observers identify as persisting as a master sign of "a fearful relationship to the specter of

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<sup>25</sup> "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale...", *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; "Parkridge Sale...Confirmed," *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club...", *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; Lipsitz, 36-37.



Blackness” constructed in U.S. culture to aid in maintaining white privilege and spatial imaginary, that unfortunately continues in usage into the twenty-first century. The news reporting and editorial pieces used veiled and obvious racist attacks against American African citizens denoting white privilege and entitlement betrayal by anyone who allowed this sale to take place. The Euro-American attacks were couched in community protectionist notions and verbiage against the rights of the African American syndicate and population in general.<sup>27</sup>

An editorial entitled “Keeping Our Record Clean” in *The Corona Daily Independent*, opined that Corona citizens did not object to African American families who might move to the city with heads of household who engaged in local work. Asserting that he/she spoke for the sentiments of the majority of Corona citizens, the writer argued these “industrious, honest and law-abiding” African Americans would have a place when work called them to the city. The implication was since there was no work they could be hired to do, there was no place for African Americans in Corona. The writer contended Corona, and every other city in the southland would object to and fight against, “the coming of arrogant and uppish Northern negroes, who would make a playground in our midst... We want no Central Avenue in this city.” The author’s “Central Avenue” reference indicated his/her fear about the possibility of a vibrant cultural and economic hub like the one situated in the African American community of Los Angeles from the 1920s to middle years of the twentieth century. Such African American vitality would be an unwelcome circumstance for Corona.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lipsitz, 37.

<sup>28</sup> “Keeping Our Record Clean,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 22 August 1927.

The writer of the August 22, 1927 editorial paradoxically warned her/his white readers that African Americans were creating a settlement that would decrease property values, though they were wealthy enough to have summer and winter homes with club privileges in the Corona community. Whites and blacks could not mix in the privileges of club membership, especially in a facility owned and controlled by African Americans, the editorial opined. The objection of whites to African Americans' ownership of the Parkridge was about whites' inability to control and define African American social, residential and economic mobility, and their recreation. Just as the native white elites of Corona defined Mexicans as undeserving of upward mobility, these same white elites and the newspaper discourse appears to have included African Americans in this same category.<sup>29</sup>

Newspaper headlines appearing in the local papers included "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale at Meeting Tonight, Interesting Disclosures Likely," "Corona's Crisis," "Quiet Sunday Is Reported In War Sector Near Club," "Negro Menace is As Great As Ever," "Fiery Cross Burns Near Parkridge" and "'Mixed Club' Will Never Be Possible, Says Corona Citizen." The *Corona Courier* wrote in an article on August 19, 1927, "Many citizens regard the sale of the Parkridge Country Club to the colored population as a decided blow to the future growth and prosperity of both Corona and Norco (a nearby city north of Corona). They regard it as the first inroad of a negro population in this community."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., *The Corona Daily Independent*, 22 August 1927; Alamillo, 67.

<sup>30</sup> "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club...", *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; "Corona's Crisis," *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; "Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale..." *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; "Quiet Sunday Is Reported In war Sector Near Club," *Corona Courier*, 26 August 1927; "Negro Menace Is Great As Ever," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 3 Sept. 1927; "Fiery Cross Burns Near Parkridge," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; "'Mixed Club' Will Never be Possible, Says Corona Citizen," *Corona Courier*, 4 November 1927.

Announcements were printed in the local newspapers about public meetings to be held at the clubhouse, open to all interested citizens, whether they were Parkridge members or not. At these meetings, the committee representing the members, who became known as the Parkridge Protective Association, discussed the actions to be taken in “their attempt to keep the...club from falling in to the hands of a colored syndicate.” *The Corona Daily Independent* in the August 19, 1927 editorial entitled “Corona’s Crisis” opined,

Tonight’s meeting at the Parkridge Country Club may offer some sensible and sane way out of the dilemma. As we view the situation it is more than the mere saving of the city’s playground; it is more than keeping Parkridge a white club. Ask any citizen of Elsinore what he thinks of the situation there and you have in the answer what Corona may be expecting in the future if these things shall come to pass.

During the past two years Corona has enjoyed a splendid growth. New citizens...have sought a home in the Southland where they might enjoy life amid pleasant surroundings amidst their own people—a happy and contented community.

Will Corona be able to extend such [an] inviting environment to the newcomer seeking a home, a year from now?...One dark spot on the horizon will keep these people away and Corona cannot keep apace with her prosperous and growing neighbors.<sup>31</sup>

This reference and others suggest white elites’ awareness of African American leisure sites, elsewhere in the region, in addition to the conclusions they ironically drew from the success of these ventures. The Lake Elsinore reference above in the *Corona Courier* and *The Corona Daily Independent* articles and editorials was to African American use and enjoyment of a section of lakeshore property owned by an African American syndicate in the nearby town (see Chapter 5). In an article, highlighting the comments of a Parkridge committee member from one of the meetings, Vern Tyler (head of Riverside Petroleum

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<sup>31</sup> “Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale...,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; “Corona’s Crisis,” *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; “Negroes Claim Club, Secretary of Colored Syndicate Pens Letter to Parkridge Members Expressing Much Hope,” *Corona Courier*, 20 April 1928.

Company) is noted as saying, “eight thousand negroes took possession of Lake Elsinore on July 4.” Tyler’s inflammatory rant declared that a similar gather could happen at the Parkridge if the African Americans obtained possession of the site—with the implication their usage of the site would be an undesirable event, rather than a successful one.<sup>32</sup>

The white membership of the Parkridge Club, “Organized For Protection” stated a sub-headline of an article in *The Corona Daily Independent* on August 20, 1927. This ‘organization’ included a variety of actions. During this period of change and contestation of ownership, the Parkridge remained open for white members’ enjoyment. The members committee and the creditors took legal actions to protect their interests through filing for bankruptcy proceedings to throw the club into receivership for the amount owed to creditors. (The white life membership holders viewed themselves as among the creditors.) Another legal action filed in the Riverside Superior Court by club “Golden Life Membership” holders charged Gilkey and the club creditors with violating the state securities act in the selling of life memberships, with the intention to defraud them. Attorneys volunteered their services, and money was raised from the community “to carry on the fight to a finish” to keep “the white spot white.” The white protectionists charged theft, and had Gilkey arrested.<sup>33</sup>

After receipt of instructions via a letter from Gilkey to do so upon the sale of the property, the white club caretaker refused to turnover the keys and possession of the site to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; “High Lights of Tyler’s Talk,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; “Parkridge Sale...Confirmed,” *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; “Move Likely to Protect Property of Our Citizens,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; Gilkey, Bound Over To Superior Court By Corona Justice,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 27 August 1927.

<sup>33</sup> “Throw Parkridge Into Bankruptcy Is Plan,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; “Parkridge Members Planning Fight on Club Sale...,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; “Dance at Club House Tonight for Members,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; “Parkridge Dance Saturday Night Enjoyable Affair,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 22 August 1927; Parkridge Club Placed In Hands of Receiver,” *Corona Courier*, 26 August 1927.

the new African American property owner representatives (Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon and Journee W. White). In an unlawful, obstructionist vigilante maneuver, Corona's white male citizens carrying their guns were recruited to serve as guards around the clock to prohibit lawful entry to the new proprietors of the Parkridge Club property. Signs were placed on the private road, leading from Corona to the club, on the property owned by the firm of Kuster & Waterbury, stating its use was "limited to...members of the Caucasian race only and their servants. All others subject to trespass law..."<sup>34</sup>

Gilkey took some actions of his own to protect his interests in the sale of the Parkridge to the African American syndicate, by making a few bylaws changes and sending official notifications to the members. Between them, Dan Gilkey and his wife, Eva, owned almost all of the Parkridge capital stock. At meetings of the stockholders in August 1927 shortly after the sale and before Gilkey was arrested, the bylaws were amended to define a Parkridge member as a person who was a holder of a membership privilege. The official notification of the removed restriction clause stating only whites could obtain club membership was the overt act that the white, Parkridge members needed to obtain the court ordered appointment of a receiver. Clarification was also made in the bylaws stating members had no voting rights, and no interest in the property or assets of the club. Those members in the arrears on their club dues were also notified they were dropped from the membership rolls.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Negroes Attempt To Take Club," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; "Club House Is Under Guard," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; "Signs and Men Placed on Road Leading to Club," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 22 August 1927.

<sup>35</sup> "Parkridge Members Are Dropped; Several Changes Made In By-Laws," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 23 August 1927; "Coronans Filed Action Against Gilkey, One Big Black Cloud Appears On The Horizon

In Gilkey's testimony at his trial for grand theft, he stated he warned the African American investors "the Corona people would resent the purchase of the club,"...[It] might be blown up and...there might be bloodshed." Their reply to him was race prejudice was something they always had to contend with where they bought property. This group of investors indicated they were not deterred by the prospects of the ugliness, which might occur in their purchase of the Parkridge Country Club. Two white Los Angeles detectives were also reported to have been at the club mingling with patrons, watching out for the interests of Gilkey and the new owners before they were able to take possession of the property.<sup>36</sup>

A small article in *The Corona Daily Independent* on August 20, 1927, reported at the recent members' committee meeting that a Corona resident suggested a "Southern gentleman" should be placed at the head of the combined municipalities of Corona and Norco to get things under control in the area. One night a flaming cross appeared atop a hillside across from the Parkridge, visible to those leaving the club and to motorists on the road through town, and the residents of Corona Valley. A purported representative of the local Ku Klux Klan (KKK) delivered a statement denying the organization's responsibility to *The Corona Daily Independent*, as reported in the newspaper on August 22, 1927, a few days after the fiery cross occurrence. Whether they were members of the hate group or not, we can safely surmise the local white citizens of Corona who positioned the upright burning cross on the hillside were well aware this was a symbol of intimidation for the KKK organization in

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Yesterday," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 24 August 1927; "Negro Menace Is Great As Ever," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 3 Sept. 1927.

<sup>36</sup> "Gilkey's Case To Jury This Afternoon, Attorneys Present Arguments as Testimony Is Completed at Noon," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 9 November 1927; "Detectives at Parkridge Today," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927.

their nationwide revival of the 1920s. These types of public actions associated with the KKK had been periodically publicized in the press. In southern California, the KKK aimed its intimidation tactics at limiting the rights of people of color, religious minorities, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, and other new residents from purchasing homes and participating in employment in certain areas. In some southern California districts, the KKK aimed at keeping Mexican American citizens in manual labor employment and from participating in community politics.<sup>37</sup>

The newspaper reference to “gentlemen of the South” handling things along with the flaming cross were veiled threats of intimidation and possible violence directed towards the African American investors or anyone who might help them to gain possession and use of their new property. Local newspapers suggested it was time for consideration of Jim Crow measures to keep Corona an inviting city of the southland. It was reported that many around town thought it time for Corona people to ruminate on placing race restrictions on where non-whites could live and play, like some of their white neighbors in nearby towns had done. Corona’s whites may have hoped for a twofold benefit with this cross burning as a signal of their hostility towards the African Americans attempting to become apart of the community, and to intimidate Mexicans to stay in their place.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Fiery Cross Burns Near Parkridge,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 19 August 1927; “Suggest Norco-Corona United,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; Carlos M. Larralde and Richard Griswold del Castillo, “San Diego’s Ku Klux Klan 1920-1980,” *The Journal of San Diego History*, Vol. 46, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2000), From the Internet: <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/2000-2/klan.htm>, 1 January 2015; Michael E. Engh, S.J., “Practically Every Religion Being Represented” in *Metropolis in the Making, Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. Tom Sitton & William Deverell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 207.

<sup>38</sup> “Move Likely to Protect Property of Our Citizens,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 August 1927; “Corona’s Crisis,” *Corona Courier*, 19 August 1927; Alamillo, 24-25.

On November 9, 1927, Dan Gilkey was found not guilty by a jury of the charge of grand theft. Although Gilkey was acquitted, there continued to be a few other unresolved legal matters, such as the receivership proceedings. In an August 1927 article, *The Corona Daily Independent* reported on the superior court approval of the receivership orders and ruled the receiver was to be placed in charge of the operations of the Parkridge. The article read, “The...order stat[ed] that only members of the Caucasian race shall have access to the club during the time it is in the hands of the receiver.”<sup>39</sup>

Once the judge lifted the receivership order in April 1928, the stage was set for the African American investors to resume their negotiations for the Parkridge Country Club property. A *Los Angeles Times* article on April 21, 1928, stated the appointed receiver, attorney T.T. Portous had resigned several weeks before, declaring, “it was hopeless to attempt to make the club a going concern.” The white members committee and creditors continued in collaborated efforts to keep the African Americans from gaining complete control of the club, while they awaited the court’s decision against Gilkey regarding the changing of the club bylaws and the debt collection. The time finally arrived for the African American syndicate to take their turn to make a success of the “palatial” Parkridge Country Club. Financial tangles occurring during Gilkey’s ownership and white Corona’s citizens legal and extralegal contestation of the new club ownership and patrons would remain a

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<sup>39</sup> “Gulkey, Bound Over To Superior Court By Corona Justice,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 27 August 1927.



shadow over the eventual African American ownership, possession, management and their clientele's enjoyment of the Corona leisure site.<sup>40</sup>

**“Welcome to Parkridge... – The Largest Country Club in the World Owned and Controlled by Black Americans”<sup>41</sup>**

The Nelson-White Holding Company had signed the deal to purchase the Parkridge Country Club on August 13, 1927, from owner Dan Gilkey for \$575,000. Completion of the transaction and close of escrow on the sale occurred quietly on November 7, 1927. Until at least the receivership matter of the Parkridge Protective Association and creditors' legal maneuvers were worked out, the African American investors were hindered from taking actual possession of the property. On May 4, 1928, within days after the receiver's resignation was formally accepted by a Riverside court judge, the Nelson-White Holding Company took physical possession of the Parkridge and began to advertise their new club in Los Angeles African-owned press, such as the *California Eagle*, the oldest black newspaper in the southern California region and in other periodicals. The civil case pending against Gilkey over the changing of the by-laws was postponed to a future date.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Negroes Buy Country Club,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1928; “Parkridge Club Receiver Matter Comes Up Monday,” *Corona Courier*, 30 March 1928; “Parkridge Club Troubles Talked Over In Corona,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 7 April 1928; “Negroes Claim Club...,” *Corona Courier*, 20 April 1928.

<sup>41</sup> “Welcome to Parkridge any day!” was a closing tag line used at the end of a short column entitled “Doings at Parkridge!” discussing the happenings at the club and the people who visited featured in the *California Eagle* from September to November 1928; “The Largest Country Club in the World Owned and Controlled by Black Americans was the subtitle on the “Parkridge Country Club, Official Program, Opening Celebration,” May 30, 1928, Ann Cunningham Smith Collection (copy in author's possession).

<sup>42</sup> “L.A. Negroes Buy Club Site,” *California Eagle*, 26 August 1927, 1; “Club Can't Pay Debts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 1927; “Gilkey Freed in Club Trial,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 November 1927; “Negroes Claim Club...,” *Corona Courier*, 20 April 1928; “Parkridge Country Club To Have Gala Opening,” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “Parkridge” ad, *California Eagle*, 28 July 1928.

Now with physical possession of the Parkridge, the new owners were ready to show off the property. Dr. Eugene C. Nelson, Clarence R. Bailey and Journee W. White were the principals of Nelson-White Holding Company, and the new owners of the Parkridge. These men were recognized as respected members of the African American community. Like Gilkey had done, from the start the African American syndicate planned to sell not only Parkridge Country Club memberships but also estate sites. They ran simultaneous advertisements for both activities in the *California Eagle*. The syndicate's first big promotional event, billed as a grand gala opening was held on Decoration Day (or what we know today as Memorial Day), May 30. Who were these ambitious, African Americans investors in the 1920s buying a luxurious resort in Riverside County, sixty miles from downtown Los Angeles and the largest African American population in California? Their individual and cooperative economic efforts were part of the new forms of black social existence, imagination and spatial imaginary challenging the boundaries of racial progress before the Great Depression. Their efforts would carry into the New Deal era, World War II, Cold War nationalism, the classical civil rights era of the 1950s to 1960s, and into Black Power militancy.<sup>43</sup>

Born and reared in Charleston, South Carolina, Eugene Curry Nelson, MD (1888–1962) graduated from Prairie View State Normal College (today Prairie View A&M University) near Houston, Texas, and received his medical training at Meharry Medical School in Nashville, Tennessee. Like many other African Americans pursuing higher

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<sup>43</sup> “Parkridge Country Club To Have Gala Opening,” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “Parkridge Country Club, Official Program, Opening Celebration,” May 30, 1928, Ann Cunningham Smith Collection (copy in author’s possession); “Californians Purchase Fine County Club,” *The Chicago Public Defender*, 2 June 1928; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country, Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48-49, 68-69; Lipsitz, 51-55.

education in his generation, he worked his way through medical school by waiting tables on the Fall River and Providence steamboat and railroad lines between New York City and Boston, and on the dining cars running out of Columbus, Ohio. After graduating from Meharry in 1911, Nelson assiduously worked to earn money to purchase the equipment needed for his chosen profession as a physician and surgeon. He began his career in Virginia, before moving to and settling in Los Angeles in 1914 to build up his large medical practice that included people of African American, Anglo and other ethnicities as patients. During this time period and into the middle decades of the twentieth century before the end of the Jim Crow era, in Los Angeles it was not unusual for African American physicians to have a patient clientele made up of various ethnic communities. This state of affairs for these doctors occurred even while they and other African Americans were discriminated against in other employment, professional and social situations. Especially in the 1920s, Nelson and his medical services were particularly popular with the Hollywood crowd.<sup>44</sup>

Nelson appeared to be a very handsome and well-groomed man from his Christmas greetings advertisement in the *California Eagle* in 1923–1926, and in other photographs found from the 1920s. The 1926 text of his holiday greeting suggested he thought himself successful in his practice, and civic activities. Having a light colored complexion and hair texture more towards the straight than tightly curled side, it was said Nelson was never one to go about proclaiming he was one race or another, though he made no effort to conceal his racial connections to African Americans. Several written accounts waxed that Nelson was always “immaculately handsome,” “carefully groomed,” and “elegantly tailored.” In a 2011

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<sup>44</sup> Chandler Owen, “Dr. Eugene Curry Nelson, A Professional and Business Man of a New Type Among Negroes,” *The Messenger* 6 (6 October 1924): 320; “White Stage Star Sticks to Mate: Defies Race Prejudice for Love,” *The Chicago Public Defender*, 28 December 1929, 1; Eugene C. Nelson, California Death Index, 1940-1997.

interview, 102 year-old Walter L. Gordon, Jr. a retired Los Angeles lawyer recalled Nelson as a handsome man with a mustache who dressed well. Gordon remembered that Nelson at one time had been married to a [white] actress [Helen Lee Worthing], and drove a convertible Pierce-Arrow automobile, an expensive and stylish vehicle during this era. Gordon also recalled Nelson's medical practice as being successful and that at one time his office was on the westside of Los Angeles in the West Adams district, not in the Central Avenue district, the center of African American life at the time.<sup>45</sup>

Nelson was identified as "one of California's wealthiest Negroes" in a 1924 article by Noah D. Thompson in *The Messenger*, a nationally circulated African American monthly published by Chandler Owen and A. Phillip Randolph in New York. Before the Parkridge Country Club venture, in addition to practicing medicine, Nelson invested in several businesses in finance, real estate, manufacturing, oil and amusement. Around the time of the Thompson article, Nelson had recently founded the Commercial Council of Southern California, dedicated to fostering business enterprises and civic participation amongst African Americans for individual and group benefit. He also was a founding member of the Board of Directors of the African American-owned Liberty Building-Loan Association in 1924 (see Chapter 5), a banking association that encouraged African Americans to become homeowners. The same year, Nelson was the principal organizer and president of the Unity Finance Company, a banking outfit for the African American community. Nelson also

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<sup>45</sup> Chandler Owen, *The Messenger* 6 (6 October 1924): 320-321; "Former Doctor Freed in Illegal Practice Trial," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1943, A16; Dr. Eugene C. Nelson, MD, Christmas Greetings Paid Advertisement, *California Eagle*, 17 December 1926; Dr. Eugene C. Nelson and Mrs. Angelita Williams Nelson and friends are in a photograph taken with friends in Pasadena, California, ca. 1920s, Miriam Matthews Collection (1889), Box 20, Folder 16, Department of Special Collections, Young Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Walter L. Gordon, Jr., Esq. (retired), interview by author, 12 April 2011, Los Angeles, California. Nelson's office was at different addresses from the westside to the eastside to Hollywood while he practiced medicine in Los Angeles, before he moved to the San Diego area sometime in the years following World War II.

grabbed the opportunity to invest in oil, the world's new black gold. Some of the investment capital for the business ventures thus far mentioned may have come from Nelson's trade of his Pierce-Arrow auto with a man he knew when an opportunity arose to buy stock constituting one percent in a particular oil well. Sometime in the summer of 1923, oil started following out of the ground at this well, at a rate of nine thousand barrels per day.<sup>46</sup>

Other African American publications identified Nelson, as "one of Los Angeles' leading Negro citizens" and the "Merchant Prince" due to his success in business. Nelson enjoyed nightlife amusements during this era. Mingling his own interests in these activities with a business endeavor, he opened with the assistance of Mrs. Tessie Patterson as manager in 1924, the sumptuously decorated cabaret called The Humming Bird Café in the 1100 block of East Twelfth Street near his medical office (in this time period) and the Unity Finance Company. His "elaborate temple of pleasure," as Chandler Owen called it in a *Messenger* article about the good doctor with the subtitle "A Professional and Business Man of a New Type Among Negroes," featured live music and other entertainment for the amusement of local African Americans, tourists in the broadest since of the word and of course, himself. Owen's article included photographs of the exterior and interior of The Hummingbird Café and the offices of the Unity Finance Company. Owen's article also contained photographs of Nelson and his first wife, Angelita D. Williams Nelson and their two smiling, little girls, Wildred and Ramona holding hands in their bathing suits on the

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<sup>46</sup> In 1924 United States crude oil was \$1.68 per barrel. The average annual American income was between \$1,124-\$2,196, Historical US Crude Oil Prices, 1861-present, From the Internet: <http://chartsbin.com/view/oa>; Citizens' Voice, <http://citizensvoice.com/arts-living/2.223/wow-the-average-income-in-1924-was-just-2-196-1.819546>; 1924 Mile Posts, <http://local.aaca.org/junior/mileposts/1924.htm>, 16 December 2014; Noah D. Thompson, "These 'Colored' United States, No. 15—California: Horn of Plenty," *The Messenger* 6 (July 24, 1924): 215; Chandler Owen, *The Messenger* 6 (6 October 1924): 320; Editorials/"Long Time Subscriber," *California Eagle*, 21 December 1923, 12; "Eugene C. Nelson M.D.," *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 1; *Negro Who's Who in California*, Published by the Negro Who's Who in California, 1948 Edition, 59.

beach. Also presented was a photograph of the Nelson family home, a beautiful craftsmen style bungalow of the larger variety, located on the westside of Los Angeles at 108 So. Oxford Avenue, six miles northwest from Eugene C. Nelson's business endeavors near the Central Avenue hub of the 1920s African American community.<sup>47</sup>

In the midst of the Parkridge purchase, Nelson was also a trailblazer in his personal as well as his business affairs. Several months after they met, in summer of 1927 Nelson married again, in Tijuana, Mexico, in a secret wedding to Helen Lee Worthing (1905–1948), a white entertainer once called “the Golden Girl” of the American stage. A Ziegfeld Follies star in New York, she was once “the toast of Broadway.” As one of the “three world-famous artists” of the follies, and “considered one of the five most beautiful women in the world,” in the mid-1920s Worthing made her way to Los Angeles and to the Hollywood scene. She appeared in several silent movies including *Janice Meredith*, with Marion Davies, *The Swan*, with Adolphe Menjou, and *Don Juan*, with John Barrymore. After Worthing's marriage to Nelson, her movie offers dropped off. Some have observed the white star's career was over once her interracial relationship was out in the open for all of society to see, rather than a clandestine association. The Nelson-Worthing marriage continued for several years with much joy and sorrow, before it finally ended in 1933. In this union, they both had to battle intolerance, bigotry and race hatred. Nelson was accustomed to fighting this Dragon as he called it, but Worthing never comfortably figured out how to fight it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Eugene C. Nelson M.D.,” *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 1; Editorials/”Long Time Subscriber,” *California Eagle*, 21 December 1923, 12; “New Café Opens Doors to Los Angeles Public,” *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 1, 9; Chandler Owen, *The Messenger* 6 (6 October 1924): 316-317, 320-321.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Lee Worthing, “Hollywood's Most Tragic Marriage,” *Ebony* magazine, February 1952, 26-36; “Helen Lee Worthing, Internet Movie Database, From the Internet: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0941745/>,

Nelson's partner, Journee W. White was the public spokesperson for the Parkridge Country Club management. Born in 1890 in Louisiana, White was a proud, commissioned officer and World War I hero. He left his real estate business in 1917 to serve in France with the 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 92<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Army Division also known as the "Buffalo Soldiers." His bravery and heroism in a decisive battle at Metz, earned Lieutenant White, along with the First Battalion of his regiment, the Croix de Guerre (a French military cross decoration created to recognize French and allied soldiers who were cited for their exceptional gallantry). Upon returning home, the white-owned Los Angeles *Daily Express* newspaper honored White by publishing a photograph of him in uniform wearing his Croix de Guerre with an article titled "Officer Praises Colored Yanks' Courage in War." White asserted in the article, African Americans had done their part to protect the world's freedom, and American democracy. He stated, "The Negro has done his part in the war...He does not claim to have done any more than any one else, but he does want the world to know and give him credit for what he actually achieved. If he gets that it will be much."<sup>49</sup>

White hoped the world, and particularly the United States where he was a citizen, would recognize this African American achievement and their loyalty. Like leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois who called for the "Close Ranks" strategy in an editorial in the *Crisis*, the NAACP's official magazine, White argued that this demonstration of World War I patriotic service and sacrifice should translate to greater social and political gains for all African

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15 December 2014; Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams, The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World Books/The Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 56-59.

<sup>49</sup> The story of Journee W. White's military exploits and honors was featured in Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles, CA: California Eagle Publishing/Vacaville, CA: James Stevenson Publisher, 1919/Reprinted 2004), 286A, 308; R.J. Smith, *The Great Black Way, L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African American Renaissance* (New York, NY: Public Affairs/Perseus Books Group, 2006), 38-39.

Americans. As in other parts of the U.S., World War I service of African Americans did not halt open discrimination and racism against black Angelenos, so the local as well as the national fight for social equality continued. Riots occurred in several U.S. cities to roll back African American citizenship and economic gains of the World War I era. White and several other black Angelenos were intensely interested in development of locally controlled and carefully executed financial investments which led the economic renaissance of black Los Angeles in the 1920s.<sup>50</sup>

Journee W. White used his U.S. Army title, “Lieutenant,” along with his World War I hero and patriot status when it might be an advantage at various circumstances throughout his lifetime. In the 1920s he was active in Los Angeles’ Benjamin J. Bowie Post (black chapter) of the American Legion. The group’s Legion Club, with White sometimes acting as a representative of the management, took over the space of Dr. Eugene C. Nelson’s Hummingbird Café, near Twelfth and Central, after the local Police Commission finally revoked its dance license “because of [what they viewed as] ‘damnable conditions in which members of the white and black races misconducted themselves.’” In his *Chicago Defender* column entitled “Coast Dope,” Ragtime Billy Tucker asserted, The Hummingbird Café was the black Angeleno community’s “most beautiful café, [and] the most up-to-date place in town.” He speculated because Nelson’s place, “attracted the attention of all of the spending class of Ofays [whites] in Los Angeles and Hollywood...elites..., the Ofay café and road house owners” saw the Twelfth Street establishment as a threat to their business operations. He ventured these white owners upon investigation noted many of their former clientele were

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., R.J. Smith, 38-41; W.E.B. DuBois, “Close Ranks”/Editorial, *The Crisis* 16-3 (July 1918), 111; Emory J. Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles, Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1980) 71-72.



patronizing The Hummingbird Café. As a measure to get the lost clientele back, Tucker concluded the white owners started filing complaints with the authorities to get The Hummingbird Café's dancing license revoked so its business would evaporate. Tucker's speculation may be correct, as late-1920s era, Los Angeles exhibited substantial police corruption and brutality, especially as it related to African Americans. Further with the lax enforcement of statewide anti-discrimination laws, there were increased incidents of both subtle as well as more overt racism towards the growing African American population. The masked, less lucid racism allowed white supremacy to be executed without obviously contradicting the state's civil rights laws or replicating the South's explicit system of hate and armature of Jim Crow laws that gave formal structure to racism.<sup>51</sup>

Once the Legion Club was in situ by January 1926, the new management team retained the interior decoration of the previous Hummingbird Café. In fact they capitalized on the former café's reputation and success in newspaper ads and word of mouth to attract its patrons to their newly named establishment in the heart of the then, African American business district on Twelfth, between Central and Paloma Avenues. Promotion articles in the *California Eagle* claimed, "those who have visited The Hummingbird know of the beauty of the Legion Club. Those who are making their first visit will be greatly surprised." That is, until the Legion Club operated by the Benjamin J. Bowie Post of the American Legion, was also closed by the Police Commission a year later, in January 1927. The Bowie Post management operating the Legion Club was charged with "flagrant violations of the Wright

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<sup>51</sup> The Legion Club was also referred to as the Legion Café, "Café Charges Sensational," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1927, A1; "Ragtime" Billy Tucker, "Coast Dope" column, *The Chicago Defender*, 1 November 1924, 7; R.J. Smith, 41-42; Flaming, 275-290.

Act [1921–1922],” California’s ratification of the Volstead Act (1919) passed by the U.S. Congress establishing prohibition and a national ban on alcoholic beverages.<sup>52</sup>

In defense of the Bowie Post management of the Legion Club, Journee W. White testified at a Police Commission hearing regarding the suspension of the club’s permit in an effort to have it restored. He testified a certain policeman “had threatened to put the café out of business so a new club could get the patronage.” He asserted this policeman was “frequently intoxicated while in the café,” and that the charges against the management occurred as retaliation because the officer in question was criticized for his conduct. White further noted in his testimony highlighted in a *Los Angeles Times* article, the Legion Club management had assisted the police when they recently requested the arrest of an unidentified “police operator [who] definitely brought liquor into the café.” One can surmise based on the currently available evidence, the Legion Club was probably doing a visibly good business, and the most likely cause of the Legion Club’s closure was the Police Department’s racketeering network’s inability to line their pockets with enough protection money or bribes from the club’s management. In this situation and others, due to their various business activities and apparent civic network, White and the other Parkridge proprietors showed a sense of self-direction, justice and community.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the Parkridge and other business endeavors, White was involved in a few high profile African American real estate development ventures that were written about and advertised in the press during the 1920s. These deals included Gordon Manor (Torrance)

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<sup>52</sup> “Legion Club Management Already to Serve and Entertain Huge Dancing Crowd Saturday and Sunday,” *California Eagle*, 8 January 1926, 7; “Café Charges Sensational,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1927, A1.

<sup>53</sup> “Café Charges Sensational,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1927, A1; R.J. Smith, 41-42; Flamming, 275-290; Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 170-172.

and Eureka Villa also known later as Val Verde (Santa Clarita). Evidence suggests White was a businessman whose primary commercial activities were in real estate, but he also was involved in other commerce in addition to the Legion Club. In the mid-1920s it was announced in an article in the *California Eagle*, White began operation with the assistance of Mr. E.L. Dorsey of a Julian Station providing gas and auto serve 24-hours a day at Ninth Street and Central Avenue. In 1929 a story appeared in several general population and black newspapers about White and Clarence R. Bailey regarding a situation with three oil wells they owned and a labor payment dispute, which was eventually resolved. A *Chicago Defender* article in 1940 mentioned White saying he was “the president of a firm dealing in the production of strategic minerals.” Evidence of the various business projects White attempted and had successes with, indicates he was intelligent, personable and fearless. He was obviously ambitious. He appears to have been respected and well connected in the various Los Angeles and other communities of interests he travelled in based on the information available about his life and endeavors.<sup>54</sup>

White’s first marriage was to the socially popular, Mamie V. Cunningham White (1884–1941). Her father, David Cunningham, was the first African American bricklayer and later a building contractor who worked on significant buildings in Los Angeles. Her mother, Minnie Cunningham-Slaten, was a distinguished club woman, active with work at the Sojourner Truth Club, and other activities for the betterment of African Americans. Mamie and her several siblings were educated in the public schools of California. Earlier in her work

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<sup>54</sup>1920, 1930 & 1940 United States Census; “Julian Products in New Location at 9<sup>th</sup> & Central, Journee White To Supervise Operations,” *California Eagle*, 10 July 1925, 8; “J.W. White and Clarence Bailey in Jail Over Oil Leases,” *California Eagle*, 18 January 1929, 3; “White and Bailey Paroled,” *California Eagle*, 1 February 1929; “Uncovered Race Bias in Defense Industries,” *The Chicago Defender*, 30 November 1940, 7.

life, Mrs. White was a clerk at the main Los Angeles post office. Later, after her marriage she owned a successful employment agency located near Twelfth Street and Central Avenue. For a time, she also assisted in editing the African American-owned, *New Age* newspaper published by Frederick Madison Roberts. Mrs. White participated in the women's auxiliary of the branch of the Benjamin J. Bowie Post. In August 27, 1927, *The Chicago Defender's* "California News" column featuring happenings in Los Angeles noted, "Mrs. Journee White was among the fourteen women elected to attend the American Legion convention in Paris, and the only Race [meaning black] woman to be elected." In the private collection of the late Anne Cunningham Smith there is a photograph of her aunt, Mamie V. Cunningham White while she was on this American Legion convention trip to France. In the image, she is standing proudly, looking very cosmopolitan with her young daughter Emma White, and another woman in front of Paris' Eiffel Tower on what looks to be a sunny day.<sup>55</sup>

Later in his life, Journee W. White would be involved in a few civic leadership endeavors in a similar spirit to his efforts with Parkridge, advancing the cause of racial equality, employment and wealth development opportunities. In 1940, "Lieutenant" White was the head of the Committee on Labor and Industry of the Eastside Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles which exposed the prejudice against and the exclusion of Americans of color and religious minorities (including African Americans, Mexicans, Jews and Portuguese) in violation of the federal and state laws forbidding such discrimination in national defense programs, a several billion-dollar effort approved by Congress and signed into law by

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<sup>55</sup> Gordon, interview, 12 April 2011; Beasley, 135, 148; "California News," *The Chicago Public Defender*, 27 August 1927; Gordon, interview, 12 April 2011; "Automotive Section, Exhaust Column," *California Eagle*, 21 October 1927, 9; Mamie Cunningham White with her daughter, Emma and Unidentified woman in Paris during the American Legion convention, 1927, Anne Cunningham Smith Collection, Los Angeles, California.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The committee headed by White contended this discrimination was unpatriotic, and presented specific evidence that the National Youth Administration, the California State Relief Authority and various trade schools were systematically excluding Americans of color and religious minorities from the opportunities of enrollment for training in aircraft mechanical schools. This exclusion was to prevent them from gaining employment in the well paying occupations in the aircraft and other defense related industries and deny them access to other employers holding government contracts. In a report to California Governor Culbert Olson, White's committee called for a state probe into the "abuse of the rights and privileges of American citizens, a misuse of the taxpayers' monies and a conspiracy to cheat and defraud citizens of their constitutional rights." White and his committee members were in sync with labor leader A. Phillip Randolph's and other locally and nationally organizations fighting for defense industry opportunities for all Americans and against discrimination. Their collective pressure efforts finally forced President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, declaring discrimination based on race, creed, color or national origin in defense industries to be illegal. The order also created the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to oversee compliance through investigation and exposure of racial discrimination charges.<sup>56</sup>

The FEPC held hearings in Los Angeles in fall 1941 to see how well defense industry management and organized labor were doing in cooperating with the President's Executive

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<sup>56</sup> A democrat, Culbert Olson was the twenty-ninth governor of California from 1939-1943. "Eastside Chamber Confers With Aviation Officials," *California Eagle*, 25 July 1940, 9B; Lawrence F. LaMar, "Conspire to Bar Race From Defense Setup," *The Chicago Defender*, 3 August 1940, 1; Lawrence F. LaMar, "Secret Probe Data is Given to Gov. Olson," *The Chicago Defender*, 21 September 1940, 7; "Uncovered Race Bias in Defense Industries," *The Chicago Defender*, 30 November 1940, 7; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits, African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 3; Flamming, 361-364.

Order. “Lieutenant” White was the spokesman for the Allied Organizations Against Discrimination. Various groups testified before the Committee that the practice of race, religious and national origin discrimination in employment in key defense industries with government contracts and labor unions continued notwithstanding the Order. A November 1, 1941 article in *The Chicago Defender* mentioned Lieutenant White as the representative for the Allied Organizations Against Discrimination testifying about the continuing racial discrimination in defense industry employment. His name and the organizations he represented were listed with several influential Californians who also testified about the continuing racial prejudice in defense industry hiring, including California State Assemblyman Augustus F. Hawkins, George Beavers of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company and president of the National Negro Business League, C.L. Dellums, Northern California Pullman Porters Union representative, Floyd C. Covington, director of the Los Angeles Urban League, Thomas L. Griffith, Esq., president of the NAACP’s Los Angeles Branch, leaders from the Jewish, Mexican and Japanese communities, and others. The impact of Executive Order 8802 was mostly symbolic as there was no enforcement capability included. Nonetheless the order was a very important step towards dismantling Jim Crow discrimination in the workplace, as it legitimized a policy of racial equity in hiring, at least in principle, by the federal government due to activist pressure.<sup>57</sup>

Clarence R. Bailey (1889–1975) was the third identified principal in the Nelson-White Holding Company’s Parkridge venture. Bailey moved to Los Angeles with his parents and siblings from Birmingham, Alabama sometime between 1900 and 1910. His father,

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<sup>57</sup> R.J. Smith, 51; Flammig, 362-363; Sides, 4, 68, 131; Lawrence F. LaMar, “Big Business Trembles During FEP Hearing, Coast Probe Show Bias In Defense Hiring,” *The Chicago Defender*, 1 November 1941, 2; “racial Prejudice Charged in Plants,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1941, 18.

Samuel G. Bailey was identified as a builder in the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Federal Census Records. Clarence R. Bailey was listed as a self-employed painter and building contractor from 1910 to 1940, and he may have continuously engaged in other business activities unreported to the census taker. He was married to Pearl P. Bailey by 1920, and by 1930, Clarence and Pearl had five children (one girl and four boys). In census records he is identified as being either black, Negro or mulatto. His wife, Pearl and children were identified as white in the 1930 Census. Clarence R. Bailey's appearance may or may not have impacted some of the business opportunities he was able to engage with during his lifetime.<sup>58</sup>

By 1927 Bailey was involved with real estate transactions, in addition to his building trade activities. Further in the midst of the Nelson-White Holding Company's purchase of the Parkridge, it was reported in the *California Eagle* on September 23, 1927, oil was discovered in the vicinity of land owned by Clarence R. Bailey, located in the rapidly developing oil field in eastern Long Beach around Signal Hill, in southeastern Los Angeles County. Bailey had purchased this one and one half lot parcel in 1918, not knowing whether oil would ever be found in the area. His parcel moved into "the proven oil land" category when several oil wells within 300 feet of his property were producing 1,000 plus barrels per day. Looking for capital, Bailey secured some credit, and was willing to give up one half interest in the property to investors to raise money so he could begin drilling immediately. The newspaper reported he was soliciting acquaintances to raise additional capital needed to purchase oil drilling equipment and pay labor to begin drilling as soon as satisfactory arrangements could

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<sup>58</sup> 1900, 1910 & 1920 U.S. Federal Census; Clarence Bailey, Sr., U.S. Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014.

be made. Long time African American Angeleno, Attorney Afue McDowell was handling all the legal details and contracts. The *California Eagle* article noted that for his start up oil drilling operation, Bailey's headquarters would be at the Eastside Realty Company offices at 1136 East Twelfth Street until further notice. The Nelson-White Holding Company, Parkridge Club management was also conveniently headquartered at the same Eastside Realty Company offices.<sup>59</sup>

Available sources do not indicate who became Bailey's investment partners in this southeastern Los Angeles County oil well project, or how much oil his drilling efforts actually raised. It can only be speculated Bailey may have had some success with this project, because of the land parcel's location in an area that developed into "proven oil land," and became one of the world's richest oil deposits. What is known is in January 1929, Clarence R. Bailey and Journee W. White were partners in a three oil well drilling project described in the press as located in the Huntington Beach area of southwestern Orange County. This location would have been ten to twenty miles southeast of Bailey's oil land parcel in Los Angeles County's Long Beach vicinity described in the press in 1927. No sources have been uncovered to dispute whether these were in reality two different oil drilling projects in Long Beach and Huntington Beach as they were described in the press in 1927 and 1929 or whether this was the same project with different geographic descriptions ascribed mistakenly arising from the newspaper reporters' limited understanding of southern California geography and the location of the oil well sites.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "L.A. Colored Man Owns Oil Property in New Field at Long Beach, California," *California Eagle*, 23 September 1927, 6.

<sup>60</sup> "J.W. White and Clarence Bailey in Jail Over Oil Leases," *California Eagle*, 18 January 1929, 3; "White



What is known about their three oil wells with one under a drilling lease near Huntington Beach, California, is Bailey and White were accused in a court case of not paying their (I assume white) oilrig workers for wages owed them. The two partners were exonerated of any wrong doing as the judge in the case ruled based on the written Trust Agreement with the workers “a large part of the indebtedness involved in the labor claim...had not been incurred by either White or Bailey, but consisted of indebtedness incurred by a former employer.” Further the judge ruled “that White and Bailey, by entering the said Trust Agreement and guaranteeing labor claims not incurred by themselves, but by a former employer, were acting in an equitable and generous manner toward the employees concerned in the criminal prosecution,” and they had no wrongful intent. No sources currently available giving a clear indication of the degree of success of Bailey’s and White’s Huntington Beach oil well projects. The two partners must have had some success since the workers attempted collection on the previous employer’s wages owed to them. Most likely when Bailey and White signed the agreement with the oil workers to drill at their well, they had limited choices in worker and equipment selection due to possible financing and other constraints, and they made the best labor deal they could at the time, under the circumstances, and it appears with a sense of fairness to the workers if they found oil. In any case, both Bailey and White were pioneering, African American entrepreneurs directing

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and Bailey Paroled,” *California Eagle*, 1 February 1929, 1; “Journey White, Secretary of Colored Club Sentenced to Two Years in Jail,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 5 January 1929, 1; “Surrender at Jail for Sentences,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 1929, B7.

capital into a range of ventures, including oil extraction, not unlike other non-blacks in similar circumstance in their era.<sup>61</sup>

The Nelson-White Holding Company principals had been part of other large real estate projects and were associated with investors who most likely in some way were involved in the Parkridge project. Some of these people whose names appeared in newspaper articles and promotional text for the Parkridge acquisition who had been involved in substantial real estate development deals during the 1920s were Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon, Norman O. Houston and L.P. Grant. Journee W. White had been involved in some of their prior deals from which he seemed to have developed expertise in financing. The Parkridge acquisition financing was structured through loans from Euro-American banking and corporate entities, and a corporate bond offering. A Parkridge promotion text stated this type of equity and debt financing “mark[ed] a new era in the progress of our local Black Americans, being the first successful attempt of a deal of [this] nature by members of our group.”<sup>62</sup>

White had also been on the team with Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon to develop an African American residential subdivision called Gordon Manor on 213-acres in Torrance, part of the South Bay section of Los Angeles County (see Chapter 5). While that project was undermined by wealthy and connected whites mobilizing state power, Gordon had

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<sup>61</sup> “J.W. White and Clarence Bailey in Jail Over Oil Leases,” *California Eagle*, 18 January 1929, 3; “White and Bailey Paroled,” *California Eagle*, 1 February 1929, 1; “White and Bailey Paroled,” *California Eagle*, 1 February 1929, 1; James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1973; reprint 2003), 299-300; Bowman, 254-257.

<sup>62</sup> “Parkridge” promotional text, *California Eagle*, 13 July 1928.

simultaneously been involved in the resort development plan for African Americans at Lake Elsinore in Riverside County, not far from Corona.<sup>63</sup>

It was announced in the *California Eagle* that Houston and Grant through the Parkridge Country Club Corporation would sell the four thousand lots of Parkridge Estates subdivision. A second generation Californian, Norman O. Houston had been one of the leaders of a failed venture to develop a resort and amusement facility for African Americans in Santa Monica in 1922 (see Chapter 4), who continued to participate in development projects for African Americans and support pioneering ventures in his lifetime of business and civic pursuits. Today a city of Los Angeles park, the Norman O. Houston Park is named for him. As a colleague in other ventures, it is possible White may have been involved with the effort to build the Santa Monica leisure resort with Houston and the Ocean Front Syndicate though no evidence has been uncovered to identify the names of more of the investors in the Santa Monica beach project.<sup>64</sup>

The purchasers that White, Nelson and Bailey expected to join the country club at Parkridge reflected the African Americans who migrated to the Los Angeles region from the 1890s to 1930s, many of who were families of city people who were more educated, ambitious, and affluent with a middle class outlook. They were more likely to be professional people, like teachers, ministers, doctors, dentists, newspaper editors and business people, whether or not they found employment in these professions in their new homes. Some

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<sup>63</sup> Flamming, 239-242; “Gordon Manor” promotional text, *California Eagle*, 10 Sept. 1926; “Gordon vs. County Supervisors” promotional text, *California Eagle*, 8 October 1926; “Alondra Park Bonds Ordered,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Sept. 1927; “Park Bond Issue Held to be Legal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1927.

<sup>64</sup> Norman O. Houston Park, From the Internet: <http://www.laparks.org/dos/parks/facility/houstonNOPk.htm>, 25 December 2014; “Parkridge Announcement Extraordinary” ad, *California Eagle*, 24 August 1928, 13.

African Americans who worked in the usual urban service jobs open to them during this time period such as porters, domestics, custodians and labors also had upward mobility aims, often saving their money to invest in real estate. Others who might be able to pay for the club offerings and estate sites, were a few men and women engaged in the underground economy, whispered and known to be in the underworld vice business. Their business interests were in the numbers game and other gambling, speakeasies, illegal drugs and alcoholic beverage trafficking, prostitution, mixed with other business interests like barber shops, dining establishments, real estate ownership and other ventures that no one would have thought twice about. In many circles, some of these business people would have been considered respectable citizen of the 1920s era and the later black Angeleno community.<sup>65</sup>

Scholar, activist and writer W.E.B. DeBois and other observers, following his lead broadly saw this generation of more educated, ambitious and affluent African Americans that migrated out of the South between 1890 and 1915 as the Talented Tenth of the African American population, and as race leaders. The numbers of African Americans who migrated to Los Angeles and the West in this era in general were more modest than the numbers that went north, with the Los Angeles black-population growth rate staying the same in the 1920s as it had been since the 1880s. In the migration of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the black Angeleno population was not unlike those in other cities around the U.S. in their response to the process and formation of institutions such as churches, clubs, mutual benefit societies, fraternal organizations and other organizations. Tied to the formation of a new

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<sup>65</sup> Flammig, 5, 44-45, 47. See a discussion of gambling syndicates as an important source of capital for African American businesses in Maryland and Pittsburgh, PA at a time when banks denied loans to African Americans, respectively in Andrew Kahr, *This Land Was Ours, African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 178-209 and Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons, Sports in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

black elite, these new institutions articulated the philosophy of race pride and racial unity. Their complex collection of responses included self-determination, economic self-help, as well as “uplift.” In 1920s-era, black Angelenos added to this earlier ideology, an embrace of the “nationalist surge” of Pan Africanist Marcus Garvey’s promotion of black pride and political and economic self-reliance. Because they were barred in southern California from better wages and managerial positions in corporate America as in other parts of the country, “ambitious African Americans gravitated toward entrepreneurial ventures, especially those that catered to the group population of [black] Angelenos.” Garvey’s brand of social, political and an economic nationalism strengthen this entrepreneurial trend. Race progress through enterprise was a theme carried over from earlier decades through the writings, preaching and practices of journalists, entrepreneurs, clubwomen and ministers.<sup>66</sup>

When the black Angeleno syndicate purchased the Parkridge Country Club, Los Angeles was the center of the African American population, politics, culture and business in California, and the Far West (outside of Texas). This was symbolized by the 1918 election of Angeleno Frederick Madison Roberts as the first African American assemblyman in California, and the cultural and political imprint African Americans visually and literally stamped on the Central Avenue district of Los Angeles. High profile African American businesses joined Roberts to generate immense pride within the local black community, and

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<sup>66</sup> James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 32; Flamming 45-47, 227, 231-232; 157; Delores Nason McBroom, “Harvest of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment In Allensworth and Little Liberia” in Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor, ed. *Seeking El Dorado: African American Experiences in California*. Seattle and London: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press, 2001; Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns, The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 233; Rawls & Bean, 249.

attracted comments and contacts from outsiders in the white as well as Pan African American community nationwide.<sup>67</sup>

The ideas, vision and circumstances of Parkridge proprietors and their expected investors for this leisure palace emerged from and fed off the growth and dynamism of the burgeoning black Angeleno community's expansion during the early part of the twentieth century. The Central Avenue district featured African American-owned residences, churches, theaters and nightclubs, savings and loan associations, automobile dealerships, newspaper offices and retail businesses. The only black hospital, the Dunbar Hospital, opened in 1922. The largest African American-owned business in the West until well into the middle decades of the twentieth century founded in 1925, the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company made its home in the district. The Liberty Building and Loan, and Unity Finance Companies were established in 1924. The Angelus Funeral Home was founded in the district in 1925, and today it continues to exist at another location on Crenshaw Boulevard. The beautifully appointed Hotel Somerville (later known as the Dunbar Hotel) opened to host the 1928 NAACP National Convention in Los Angeles, within months of the Parkridge Country Club purchase by the African American investors.<sup>68</sup>

The images of the political, business, cultural and social happenings, and cultural expression of African American community in the Los Angeles region and the lures of the West were transmitted and promoted via the black press regionally and nationally in the *California Eagle*, *The Chicago Defender*, New York's Harlem-based monthly *The*

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<sup>67</sup> DeGraaf and Taylor, "Introductions," in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 21-22; Flaming, 92-93.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Flaming, 92-93, 281,284-289; DeGraaf and Taylor, "Introductions," in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 21-22; Octavia B. Vivian, *The Story of the Negro in Los Angeles County 1936*, Compiled by Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, Under the Supervision of Hugh Harlan, 1956, 35.

*Messenger*, the NAACP's *The Crisis*, other periodicals and by word of mouth. Descriptions of southern California's endless summer lifestyle, and the picturesque landscape were circulated in the black press and other media. As well by the 1920s, the West Coast's jazz culture was headquartered on Central Avenue, and it was exported nationally and international through the black and other press, Hollywood movies, performance tours and other media. But the black press also presented a frank portrayal of the challenges of the hypocrisy and frustrating restrictions and discrimination imposed by the dominant white mainstream, which undermined African American advancement. Even with this caveat, talented and driven African Americans heard the word they could acquire their version of the good life in Los Angeles with fewer restraints than in other parts of the U.S., and they moved to obtain it. The Parkridge was presented in the national, black media discourse as consistent and emblematic of the attainment of the community and heralded for its assertive enterprise in the face of opposition, and for its vision of African American leisure and business ownership.<sup>69</sup>

With the leisure palace in their possession, Dr. Eugene C. Nelson, Clarence R. Bailey and Journee W. White, the African Americans owners of the Parkridge, put the company into heavy marketing mode to their potential patrons and investors with promotional events, newspaper ads and story placements. It appears from the newspaper coverage that the Parkridge management hoped to attract an integrated club patronage that included black and white Americans. Or at least the African American management was hopeful that a proposal

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<sup>69</sup> DeGraaf & Taylor, "Introductions," in *Seeking El Dorado...*, 21-22, 26-27; 130-131, 143-144; Flamming 92-93, 128, 289; William Deverell and Douglas Flamming, "Race, Rhetoric, and Regional Identity, Boosting Los Angeles, 1880-1930," in *Power and Place in the North American West*, ed. Richard White & John M. Findlay (Seattle, WA and London, UK: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest/University of Washington Press, 1999), 124-125, 127; "Californians Purchase Fine Country Club," *Chicago Defender*, 2 June 1928, 7.

of inviting southland whites to continue Parkridge patronage, blacks visiting the leisure palace would encounter less harassment by locals in Corona. Or perhaps, based on the experience of the Hummingbird Café the new management did have real faith they could actually develop a multiple ethnic clientele of patrons at the Parkridge. Having a broader Parkridge patronage base would certainly have been beneficial to the financial situation of the club, and the local community generally.

From the post bellum period to the middle of the twentieth century African American business opportunities were limited by what African American capitalist and insurance company executive Merah Steven Stuart (1878–1946) in the 1940s first observed as the “economic detour.” In the U.S., African Americans faced an environment where they were restricted from involvement in business and as economic agents in the open market by state policies, local custom and sometime even violence as in the case of the destruction of black business districts in Wilmington (1898) and Tulsa (1921). At the same time while whites and other ethnic groups could do business with African Americans, whites, and whomever else they pleased, black businesses were prohibited from entering into any but all-black markets and excluded access to greater and more lucrative markets, except in a few rare situations. These effects of the economic detour had a harmful impact on the capability of African Americans to build and sustain flourishing businesses. Even with the effects of the “economic detour,” African Americans did created prosperous businesses under opprobrious conditions. Using their skills and ingenuity, the African American owners of the Parkridge



worked to develop their new project into a thriving venture despite the obstacles in their path.<sup>70</sup>

In April 1928, a letter was sent to the white membership over the signature of Journee W. White as the Secretary of the club, confirming the African American syndicate was taking possession of the Parkridge Country Club. (See Figure 7) In the letter published in the *Corona Courier* on April 20, 1928, White invited the Caucasian members to continue to patronize the club. He extended an invitation to “all persons, regardless of race, color, creed or denomination” to join the club. He informed life members of the past they could cancel their memberships and get their money back if they did not want to continue to participate. He informed the local white community in this letter that all visitors to the Parkridge had legal rights, including African American visitors. He expressed that the club owners expected from the local community respect, no destruction of their property or their guests’ property, and no abuse of the club’s visitors. As White was aware of the hostility the local community had expressed against the African American entrepreneurs taking over the Parkridge, his letter informed the members and by extension the local white community that his team was not afraid of them. He expressed his faith in the syndicate’s business acumen, (on some level) the legal system, and that inter-racial sport and recreation activities could easily take place at the Parkridge for those who wanted to participate. He and his team identified

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<sup>70</sup> Melvin L. Oliver & Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth, A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 47-48, (Merah Stuart citation) 49, 50-54. The concept of the “economic detour” appeared in Merah Steven Stuart’s book, *An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes* (New York, NY: Wendell Malliet & Company, 1940).

themselves and their potential patrons as American citizens entitled to exercise their rights to equality in leisure and consumption.<sup>71</sup>

As printed in the *Corona Courier*, Friday, April 20, 1928, “The Letter of Greeting That the Negro Syndicate Sends to Parkridge Club Members”

We have no desire to hinder or hurt but are builders of communities and have an improvement program for Parkridge rather than a destructive one. No one shall ever be rejected from the club as long as his deportment and conduct is within reason and fairly decent, although we do not hope to find saints among men, yet we do not expect violence. We offer none in return, neither do we expect destruction of our property.

As to the future, we wish to say that Parkridge is a club for the people and all persons, regardless of race, color, creed or denomination may become members and participate therein and thereon, with reference to the premises—as long as said person are of good repute, with good standing in the communities from whence they come and able to qualify financially in regard to their membership fees and dues.

The club as a whole is not for sale, merely memberships, a schedule of which will be posted in the near future. We aim to make Parkridge one of the show places of Southern California.

All life members of the past who do not care to participate may have their membership cancelled, their monies refunded and their notes handed back. We ask nothing which you do not care to give because we are able to support the club.

In the field of sport and recreation in America as well as abroad in all our travels we have found and still find all races of people have gotten along fairly well so why not [at] Parkridge. Therefore permit us to ask you not to abuse attendants and caretakers, they are human and are trying to carry out orders. I do not think they will be given any orders that will offend any of you gentlemen. Let’s try to make for Corona and vicinity a haven of clean sport and clean recreation and cheerfulness on that hill instead of a Monument of Hell, with a lot of unnecessary accusations and violence. Life is too short for that. We pursue no such tactics, whatever, only good will and surely are big enough to accept the same.

In conclusion, permit us to say that we are offering access and privileges to all persons regardless of race, color, creed or denomination who have a legal right to same. Please do not take advantage of the situation with abuse either to the attendants or the premises.

Respectfully,

PARKRIDGE COUNTRY CLUB  
By J.W. White, Secretary

**Figure 7.** Letter from Journee W. White, *Corona Courier*, April 20, 1928.

<sup>71</sup> “Negroes Claim Club, The Letter of Greetings That the Negro Syndicate Sends to Parkridge Club Members,” *Corona Courier*, 20 April 1928, 1.

The *Corona Courier* reported that local white citizens were “greatly incensed” by White’s letter. The newspaper reporter fulminated in response to White that the idea of “race mingling” was impossible and it would be bitterly contested by the people of Corona. Some citizens continued to complain that African American possession of the country club “was but the beginning of encroachment of an undesirable class of colored people in the community.” White challenged the people of Corona to be “good citizens.” By the words in the newspaper, white Coronans did not seem to be inclined towards that, or towards a more inclusive social environment and African Americans’ social mobility in their community. *The Corona Daily Independent* ran an article with the headline that could be viewed as a threat of potential destructive use of state power against the new Parkridge owners, “County Can Condemn the Parkridge Club for Public Park Purposes, Suggested.” Reported was Corona’s white citizens awareness of the successful use of state power against other African American, high profile landownership and development projects in Los Angeles to condemn an African American syndicate’s purchased property for a public park purpose Riverside County officials could follow the same course of action regarding the Parkridge situation it suggested. But the black investors legally owned the club, at least for the foreseeable future. At this point the white locals could only protest and harass the African American businessmen, and possibly their future patrons. This they would continue to do on various levels.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> “Negroes Claim Club, Secretary of Colored Syndicate Pens Letter...,” *Corona Courier*, 20 April 1928, 1; The newspaper article does not explicitly name the venture in Los Angeles County where land was condemned for a public park, but the correspondent was probably referring to the “Gordon Manor” development discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, “Negro Claim Club, County Can Condemn the Parkridge Club for Public Park Purposes, Suggested,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 20 April 1928, 1.

Beginning in May 1928, the Parkridge's new management placed many advertisements in the pages of *California Eagle* about the events and offerings of the club. In addition to the ads, some editorial features and paid promotional text appeared about the upcoming events and reviews of happenings at the club. It is likely that similar ads, paid promo text or editorial coverage appeared in other local African American periodicals, such as the *New Age* and the *Pacific Defender*. There was also media coverage in the out-of-town black press, such as *The Chicago Defender*. The grapevine and the trans-regional networks formed by African American professionals as well as anyone else reading the black press throughout the country no doubt communicated by word-of-mouth information about the lavish Parkridge, which also would have encouraged interest in the site.

In the *California Eagle*, the promotion of the May 30 grand gala opening included several activities designed to attract and engage different segments of the sporting and aspirational African American audience. The advertisements, paid promotional texts and editorial offerings featured booster rhetoric not unlike what one might have seen in editorial or ad content in any number of publications of the day. The new Parkridge Country Club geared that marketing towards the more affluent black reading constituency who it expected would want the California leisure lifestyle, luxurious facility access, social status and have the means pay for it.

An elaborate, half page text ad in the *California Eagle* on Friday, May 4 hailed the Parkridge County Club as “The Million Dollar Playground,” “California’s Finest and Most Distinctive Recreational Resort and Playground,” and “the Biltmore for the Race.” The ad announced the opening invitation for visitors beginning May 6, and the May 30 grand opening of the club under Nelson-White Company management. The sports facilities were

explicitly and invitingly described, much as they had been under the efforts of prior owner Gilkey in pitching to an exclusively white audience, using words to illustrate their fine quality, such as “championship golf course,” an “elaborate Gun Range,” a “modern Flying Field” and “superb Tennis Courts.” The opening sports events included a golf tournament, tennis matches and swimming races, with prize money being offered to the winners of many events. When the matches were finished, the swimming pool for recreational use would be available to anyone to paddle in the shallow area or dive in the deeper zone. Visiting guests could rent fifty bungalows for \$1.50 per weekend. Also available on site was a children’s playground. Additionally, in an article titled, “Parkridge Head Invites Corona Members To Fete,” *The Corona Daily Independent* reported the town’s people of Corona and previous club members were welcome, and that numerous Riverside County and Corona officials had been personally invited to attend the festivities. The correspondent expressed without saying it explicitly the economic benefits that were accruing to Corona due to the upcoming event, noting the Parkridge management had placed an order with a local bakery “for three hundred loaves of bread for sandwiches and a meat order of approximate size.”<sup>73</sup>

A beauty parade and contest to decide who would be “Miss Parkridge” featured the largest and most extravagant prizes of the opening event. The *California Eagle* ad text about the winning prize read, “The fortunate girl to be chosen to be ‘Miss Parkridge’ would win “a \$1,500 Founders membership in the Parkridge Country Club which includes a beautiful lot and cabin on the magnificent Parkridge estate, a regal country home to spend the week-ends

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<sup>73</sup> “Parkridge Country Club, ‘The Million Dollar Playground,’” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “Parkridge Head Invites Corona Members to Fete,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 29/30 May 1928, 1.

and a piece of valuable property.” In addition, \$500 in cash and a massive silver cup suitably engraved was a part of the winner’s prize.<sup>74</sup>

There was even more bounty for the winning “Miss Parkridge” to take home. As most of the young women who entered this beauty contest had an interest in public life on stage or the silver screen, the winning prize included a week’s engagement at the famed Lincoln Theater on Central Avenue. A screen test and a featured role in the moving picture to be taken of the parade of beauties and the grand opening event were also offered to the newly named “Miss Parkridge.” Nine other young women, in addition to the top prize winner, were offered smaller cash prizes. “Miss Parkridge” and her court were the honored guests at the invitation only “Grand Ball and Entertainment” fete, to celebrate the progress the African Americans had made in southern California on this day with the acquisition and opening of the leisure palace under the management of the African American team.<sup>75</sup>

Among all groups, beauty pageants featuring young women and babies appear to have been a new and popular entertainment form and promotion tool during the 1920s era. Even in contemporary times beautiful women and celebrities are used to draw people’s interest to products or causes. In reviewing another ad from May 25, 1928 in the *California Eagle* and the “Parkridge Country Club, Official Program” from the opening celebration on May 30, 1928 with the late Walter L Gordon, Jr. and the late Ann Cunningham Smith, both identified some of the women whose names were listed as entrants in the contest as having had occupations in the entertainment business as dancers, singers, actors and want-to-be

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<sup>74</sup> “Parkridge Country Club, ‘The Million Dollar Playground,’” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “Parkridge Beauty Contest” advertisement, *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “Parkridge, ‘Famous Because of it Beauty’ ...” ad, *California Eagle*, 31 August 1928, 2.

<sup>75</sup> “Parkridge Beauty Contest” advertisement, *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928; “... ‘The Million Dollar Playground,’” *California Eagle*, 4 May 1928.

performers. Some of these women would have been popular in the Los Angeles community for their work on stage or the silver screen, and as beautiful young women who might become beautiful wives to successful, handsome young men.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to reviewing or accessing the country club sports facilities and spaces and to make acquaintances with potential economic opportunities, there were many opportunities for potential match making at the Corona leisure palace. This club and its events exemplified glamour as well as leisure, that involved the participatory sport of people watching and being seen. The black syndicate surely hoped the excitement and success of the Parkridge opening event activities would continue, so they could draw the right kind of people to patronize their new club and to purchase lots within the subdivision. The big opening Parkridge fete of May 30 appears to have been very successful in attracting African American guests from Los Angeles and its environs. The event also provoked a few attempts to harass and do malicious harm to the Parkridge management and patrons that produced a few intended as well as unintended consequences for both the African American club management and the citizens of Corona.

On the day of the big Memorial Day event, the local Corona Police Department in what has the appearance of being an effort to inconvenience and harass African Americans visiting the Parkridge Club, issued many traffic regulation violation citations. In the days immediately following this event a dispatch was “alleged” to have been sent from Corona via an identified correspondent of the United Press news wire service all over the nation, stating that “a near race riot developed in Corona on Memorial Day” when long lines of African

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<sup>76</sup> “Folks Turn Your Thoughts Toward Parkridge, Decoration Day, May 30,” *California Eagle*, 25 May 1927; “Parkridge Country Club, Official Program, Opening Celebration,” May 30, 1928, Ann Cunningham Smith Collection (copy in author’s possession).

Americans were held up due to over two hundred traffic tickets being issued to these visitors to the area, reported the local Corona newspapers. There were also reports of multiple arrests due to this situation. Traffic conditions were described as being the heaviest they had been in many months, with most of the cars being filled with African Americans, and a few whites, going to and from the Parkridge Country Club. The local Corona newspapers offered a clarification and indignation at the story they viewed as unjustly exaggerated and that put them in a bad light, stating that only fifty or so traffic tickets were issued by local Corona law enforcement, to mostly African Americans for minor violations of traffic rules, and there were not arrests. Journee W. White agreed with the exaggerated, news dispatch portrayal of there being something close to a race riot in Corona, calling it deplorable, and affirming that he would have the matter looked into in Los Angeles to find out who the United Press service obtained the information from for this dispatch.<sup>77</sup>

Also reported in the local newspapers was that the Parkridge management and attorneys were “alarmed...[when] several complaints reached them that negro drivers had been stopped by traffic men and ‘ticketed’ on minor violations.” “The district attorney’s office in Riverside had been requested to make an investigation as to whether or not discrimination had been shown,” wrote *The Corona Daily Independent*. This wire service dispatch sent all over the nation resulted in newspaper article clippings about the purported Corona events being sent to Corona citizens from Los Angeles, other southland cities and eastern cities, including Boston. Details of even more egregious acts of harassment, directed

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<sup>77</sup> “Tell Distorted News of Race Riot, Los Angeles Papers Shy From Facts,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 31 May 1928, 1; “Corona Given Black Eye Through United Press Reports Going Back East,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2; “Parkridge Club Pays \$15 Fines For Traffic Tickets in Police Court Today,” *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928.



squarely at the Club's African American led management team also emerged in the local press following the Parkridge beauty pageant and opening fete.<sup>78</sup>

While representing black Angeleno alleged traffic rules and regulation violators and Parkridge Club patrons plus the club's management (with Journee W. White present) in the Corona Police court, Attorney Donohue of Los Angeles revealed a plot had been uncovered that someone was going "to plant liquor in the colored club...to bring about abatement proceedings as the result." If liquor had been found by state authorities at the Parkridge, the establishment could have been closed, as this was the Prohibition era. *The Corona Daily Independent* reported, upon learning of the plot details on May 29, Los Angeles Sheriff's officers thwarted the would-be perpetrators' intended action. Attorney Donohue revealed the harassment plot and the Los Angeles Sheriff's swift action of deterrence when he addressed the court regarding the citations for traffic violations and how they should be handled. The Corona newspapers reported the local government officers registered "distinct surprise" upon hearing of this uncovered liquor plant attempt for the first time, as they had not received any information on the matter from Sheriff Traeger's office in Los Angeles. The newspaper discussions evidenced Corona officials' surprise, as well as some embarrassment at this event, and the other situation of the unfavorable national media coverage that was resulting around the harassment occurrences of the Parkridge Club's patrons.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Tell Distorted News of Race Riot, Los Angeles Papers Shy From Facts," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 31 May 1928, 1; "Corona Given Black Eye Through United Press Reports Going Back East," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2; "Attorney Charges Plot to Plant Liquor in Colored Club, Before Police Court," *Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1; "Parkridge Club Pays \$15 Fines For Traffic Tickets in Police Court Today," *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928.

<sup>79</sup> No first name for Attorney Donohue was printed in the newspaper accounts. "Attorney Charges Plot to Plant Liquor in Colored Club, Before Police Court," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2.

In building his case for leniency regarding the traffic violation citations, Donohue noted the revenue the Parkridge was generating for the local Corona businesses. He stated to the courtroom observers and Judge C.D. McNeil, “that the books of the colored club showed the negroes to [have] spent more than \$3,000 among Corona business houses since the [new management began operation].” Additionally described was a successful event after the May 30 fete that he told of occurring on Saturday, June 2 at the club. The newspaper quoted him as saying, “we [my emphasis placed on ”we”] held a beautiful dress ball at the club...attended not only by the best colored people, but representatives of the governor of the state of California [were] there, as well as some of your best people from the district attorney’s office and sheriff’s office.” It appears Donohue was attempting to build a case for his clients’ respectability and victimization to obtain leniency around the traffic citations from the court and public opinion. He presented the evidence of racial harassment, possibility of white investors being involved (or at least his own involvement) with the club project, economic benefit to the Corona community and the club’s connections to upstanding citizens in varied (white and African American) communities of interest and power, in the state of California and the southern California region. Some of his words and the other events in the news printed in the press, may have worked in favor of the African Americans, the outcome of their traffic citations, and their future relations in Corona.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to the harassment action with the liquor plot that had been deterred, Donohue asserted by another illustration that the traffic violations were discriminatory harassment actions against the African Americans attempting to visit and enjoy themselves at

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<sup>80</sup> “Attorney Charges Plot to Plant Liquor in Colored Club, Before Police Court,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2; “Parkridge Club Pays \$15 Fines For Traffic Tickets in Police Court Today,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2.

the Parkridge. The Corona press quoted him as saying in reference to the (Memorial Day) May 30 event, “I can bring testimony into the court that on four different occasions, traffic officers turned their flashlights into cars which had been stopped and when they saw that the occupants were white, allowed them to proceed.” Donohue was also described as saying he was not familiar with local conditions, but he had canvassed a number of local Corona businessmen that morning, and there was a “general feeling the colored [people] had been discriminated against.” Donohue was also reported to have indicated the African Americans only wanted to be left alone. The African American citizens and their proxy, the Parkridge management along with their white associates, were all upstanding citizens who expected to be treated as such when they were visiting the club and the city of Corona. Upon the argument, Judge McNeil dismissed the majority of the traffic regulation and rules violation citations, and reduced the fines on the others, received by the African Americans and a few of their white friends who visited the Parkridge for the Memorial Day festivities. Journee W. White, representing the Parkridge management, paid the remaining fines for all those that were not dismissed.<sup>81</sup>

Was the exaggerated, news wire story released as part of a conspiracy to malign the African American venture and their patrons or the police of Corona? Both the citizens of Corona and the Parkridge management were unhappy over the hyperbole in the dispatch, at least with regards to the misrepresentation of the story about an near race riot in Corona due to backed up traffic, over two hundred traffic violation citations being handed out and arrests of mostly African Americans that United Press circulated around the nation. Journee W.

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<sup>81</sup> “Attorney Charges Plot to Plant Liquor in Colored Club, Before Police Court,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2; “Parkridge Club Pays \$15 Fines For Traffic Tickets in Police Court Today,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2.

White articulated to the local Corona press that the story “reflected seriously upon the opening of our club.” In a turn of events, the local newspaper writers, seemed to have at one point, sympathetically observed that this dispatch was not only unjust to the residents and officials of Corona, but also to the African Americans attempting to make a go of the county club facility. Or were Corona community leaders really only indignant and embarrassed because they were not in control of the message presented about their community and the new African American business venture as they had been over the last year? Or were they trying to erase the public expose of their local citizens being put on display as bigots in the national and regional press by calling the news stories unjust, even sensationalized?<sup>82</sup>

After investigation by Journee W. White and his associates, it was determined the origins of the exaggerated story was transmitted to the United Press correspondent via some disgruntled African Americans who returned to Los Angeles, feeling they had been maltreated because of the traffic violation citations that had been given out as *The Corona Daily Independent* reported on June 14. The Corona press noted it was learned the United Press correspondent also did not do a fact check about the events of May 30 with the Parkridge management or the Corona authorities due to deadlines before turning the story over to his manager. While the manager of the southern California office of the United Press wire service after learning more of the facts of the May 30 events came to recognize that the number of traffic citations and arrests was inflated and the racial tensions in Corona were over dramatized due to the relaying of the facts of the situation, he nonetheless stood by their

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<sup>82</sup> “Los Angeles Papers Shy From Facts,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 31 May 1928, 1; “Corona Given Black Eye Through United Press Reports Going Back East,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2; “Attorney Charges Plot to Plant Liquor in Colored Club, Before Police Court,” *Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1; “Parkridge Club Pays \$15 Fines For Traffic Tickets in Police Court Today,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 6 June 1928, 1 & *Corona Courier*, 8 June 1928, 2.

story that was released. Manager Ruel S. Moore of United Press was quoted as saying in this same Corona newspaper article, “I have analyzed our story carefully and I can find no errors in fact...as...the negroes claimed they were mistreated and discriminated against...The fact that sixty [tickets] were given out shows there was some ground to their complaints.” He continued, ”the actions of Judge McNeil in handling these traffic complaints, dismissing many and reducing normal fines in other shows the unusualness of the events.” Although there were problems with the United Press story in the correspondent’s fact checking that the African Americans were harassed with the traffic citations by white bigoted police of Corona. At the same time, the United Press wire service appears to have been more concerned with profit than the reliability of its journalism, and less concerned with the incalculable damage these types of embellished stories might have on society’s social dynamics and the public trust.<sup>83</sup>

Regardless of the impressions created about the events of May 30 from the white press, for the remainder of 1928, the Parkridge Club continued holding marketing and promotional events, including sporting matches, musical performances, dances and dining offerings as advertised in the African American press. More elaborate versions of these activities were planned around major occasions and holidays. A full page ad in the *California Eagle* on June 29, 1928 invited “the NAACP delegates and friends to visit Black America’s Million Dollar Playground” for the July 4, Independence Day holiday. The 1928 NAACP Convention in Los Angeles presented black Angelenos with an important platform to promote their accomplishments and the region’s offerings to a national audience of delegates

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<sup>83</sup> “Corona ‘Race Riot’ Story Given Out by Negroes Is Claim of the United Press” & “News and Comment,” *The Corona Daily Independent*, 14 June 1928, 1-2.

who attended, and to the people around the nation and the world who were reading about this meeting. Labor Day, Halloween, Armistice Day (or Veterans Day as we know it today) and Thanksgiving were also holiday times used to promote visiting the club, in addition to the continual advertisements of Parkridge subdivision lots for sale. Lots at the Parkridge subdivision were offered for purchase at around \$400 with ten percent down.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the gala promotions and press work, by January 1929, the black-owned, Parkridge Country Club and subdivision had financial difficulties due to lack of club patronage and lot sales. There was also an issue with the compensation due the local white labor force working at the Corona property. The black syndicate was also unable to raise the capital they had anticipated through the debt (bonds and loan) and equity (stock) financing program they instituted. Compounding their troubles, the debt tangles from Dan Gilkey's ownership era of the club property had not been resolved.<sup>85</sup>

### **The Parkridge County Club, Post-Leisure Palace Days and its Public Memory**

The Parkridge Country Club finally went into bankruptcy, with creditors taking charge of the property to protect their interests in early 1929. In a meeting at the Parkridge clubhouse in July 1929, the federal receiver presented a plan the bankruptcy court approved

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<sup>84</sup> "Parkridge Country Club Welcomes the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]," *California Eagle*, 29 June 1928, 8; "Parkridge" advertisements with Labor Day visit promotion, *California Eagle*, 10 August 1928, 5; "Parkridge, 'Famous Because of its Beauty'..." ad, *California Eagle*, 31 August 1928, 2; "Doings At the Parkridge by the Tattler," *California Eagle*, 12 October 1928, 7; "The Directors of Parkridge Country Club Invite You to a Big Week End," *California Eagle*, 9 November 1928, 10; "Thanksgiving at Parkridge," *California Eagle*, 23 November 1928, 4.

<sup>85</sup> "Country Club Value Placed," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1928, 6; "Negroes Seek to Issue \$325,000 in Bonds For Club," *The Corona Daily Independent*, 16 June 1928, 1; "Parkridge" ad with information about the Bond issue, *California Eagle*, 13 July 1928, 10; "Colored Club Is Shy on Cash for Help, Reported," *Corona Courier*, 7 September 1928; "Promoter White of Colored Club Facing Trouble," *Corona Courier*, 26 October 1928.

whereby the facilities would “revert back to the original and new members of the club, should they wish to consider it.” A *Corona Independent* article about the meeting made clear, the original and new members being offered this opportunity were “those of the ‘caucasian race’ [as] explicitly...set forth in the original bylaws of the club.” Eventually the property was sold to satisfy the claims of the creditors, after remaining in federal receivership for several years into the 1930s. The boom of the 1920s was fading fast, and one of the most dramatic economic downturns in American history was beginning, the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many country clubs around the nation were hit hard by these events, with this industry’s recovery only beginning to occur in the post-World War II years.<sup>86</sup>

For the next thirty-five years until it was demolished in 1964–1965, the club property’s ownership changed hands several times. Alongside twists and turns of the Parkridge’s occupancy and use, contestation and financial difficulties continued into the 1930s, and later in the twentieth century. The building also faced periods of vacancy and neglect, and housed squatters. In 1931 the property was acquired from federal receivership to transform “the building and grounds into one of the finest military academies in this section of the country.” The school was named Pershing Military Academy in honor of U.S. Army General John J. Pershing (1860–1948). This military academy venture was unsuccessful.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “Expect Many for Parkridge Meet,” *The Corona Independent*, 30 July 1929, Parkridge Club File, Special Collections, Corona Public Library; Mayo, 2-3; Roger D. Simon, “Country Clubs,” in *The Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, 193-194.

<sup>87</sup> Among his accomplishments, General John J. Pershing led African American troops in segregated regiments the American West and the Spanish–American War in the Philippines in the late 1800s, and in World War I. Pershing always expressed forceful, public admiration for the African American troops under his command for their bravery and patriotism. In an attempt to help African American soldiers advance in command in World War I, Pershing placed them under the leadership of the French who honored 171 of them (including Lieutenant Journee W. White) for their valor in hastening the Armistice that ended the conflict. “Military School Takes Over Old Parkridge,” unknown newspaper, 6 January 1931, Parkridge Club File, Special Collections, Corona Public Library; “One–Time Social Center Now Stands Stark, Lonely and Deserted

From the Parkridge's closing in 1929, mostly trespassers inhabited the clubhouse, and a speakeasy took over the building serving a white clientele until the end of Prohibition in 1933. The site was considered for a California state prison for first time offenders in the early 1930s. After 1937, the clubhouse became a sanitarium on and off until it finally closed in 1961. The once lavish leisure palace was vacant and deteriorating, when its new owner, the Parkridge Development Company took it over in 1964. Renaming the area Cresta Verde, the new owners built 522 homes and a new 18-hole golf course on 252 acres of the site. As part of the new subdivision, a new clubhouse was built to replace the original structure. The new owners determined it more cost effective to build a new structure, instead of repairing the older, Parkridge Country Club building.<sup>88</sup>

Historian Lawrence B. DeGraaf noted in a 1970 article on black Angelenos that the Parkridge and other similar leisure centers, mostly in beach areas, were places where African Americans attempted to join the urbanization of outlying areas for “new housing and long range opportunities for residential expansion and race enterprise.” According to DeGraaf, African Americans endeavors to join the 1920s-housing boom in suburban areas was thoroughly rebuffed. He included in that conclusion the Parkridge not by name, but as a white country club in Corona, between Riverside and Los Angeles, taken over by blacks in 1928 as an inter-racial recreation area, that failed for lack of patronage. He described, as I would agree, that these recreation centers “generally had the dual aim of providing a ‘more

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on Hill,” Golden Jubilee Edition, *The Corona Independent*, 27 April 1936; General John J. Pershing, Today in History: July 15, American Memory website, The Library of Congress, From the Internet: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jul15.html>, 2629 December 2014.

<sup>88</sup> “One-Time Social Center Now Stands Stark, Lonely and Deserted on Hill,” Golden Jubilee Edition, *The Corona Independent*, 27 April 1936; George Ringwald, “Old country club may recapture its days of glory,” *Press Enterprise*, 29 November 1964.



cultured and sophisticated recreation’ and of being nuclei for black residential colonies.” Parkridge exemplified this as well as a demonstration of entrepreneurial skill. Even when they were unsuccessful, the venture demonstrated a resourceful turn to leisure as a site for asserting full African American rights as citizens and consumers.<sup>89</sup>

The African American leisure lifestyle and suburban developments that DeGraaf spoke about in outlying areas were hindered or stopped by whites due to racism and their fears of a “negro invasion.” This concept of “negro invasion” was actively communicated in the media of the 1920s. White hostility towards African American upward mobility, racial equality and interracial association was an inhibiting factor and deterrent to the black populations ability to gain employment, develop investment opportunities and acquire residential housing in Los Angeles and outlying areas and in other places around the nation. As discussed in other chapters of this dissertation, places where African American Angelenos from the 1910s to 1920s attempted establishment of leisure and amusement centers and were rebuffed included: Santa Monica, El Segundo near the present day Los Angeles International Airport, Manhattan Beach and other sites in the Torrance district of Los Angeles County, and Huntington Beach in Orange County. In the case of the Parkridge Country Club, the African American principals were able to, if not totally overcome this resistance, go around it, to gain ownership of the project without any physical violence. And when harassed upon opening by local police, they resourcefully mobilized law and publicity beyond the local authorities to counter the oppressive tactics.

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<sup>89</sup> Lawrence B. DeGraaf, “The City of Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (August 1970), 348-349; “Double Crossed,” *California Eagle*, 18 June 1926.

The African American leisure resorts which did enjoy popularity for a longer time at Lake Elsinore, Val Verde and Murray's Dude Ranch resorts were not as coveted by whites as other southern California resort areas, particularly those imagined by whites as integral to a city's identity as the Parkridge was in Corona. The importance of the leisure ventures that flourished more briefly and their actors is not diminished, but should be defined as at the Parkridge with the vision and resourcefulness they presented, the struggle surmounted in the face of virulent opposition craftily resorting to public power, and ultimately for the purposes of this study, the composition and meaning of the leisure they imagined in the fuller definition of personal and community freedom, equality and cultural expression among African Americans who pursued them. This applies to the sites that were not so successful, as well as those more lasting in duration.

In the case of the White, Nelson and Bailey proprietorship of the Parkridge, its erasure from Corona's past has produced a void in understanding the evolution of the regional cultural landscape and the African American experience in constructive and legitimate business development, the different agents who attempted and participated in varied capitalist endeavors in California, and, the complicated layers of social dynamics of race, space, power and capitalism in California's frontier of leisure that this distinctive story illuminates. The exclusion of this history and public memory also erases the African American principals' accomplishment of overcoming the resistance of the Corona citizens on top of the difficulties that the white business operators had with this kind of endeavor, and would certainly have faced as White and company did in the first waves of the Great Depression.

As Delores Hayden discusses in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1995), the marking and remembrance of a place in a public past for any city or town is a political, as well as historical and cultural process, whether it is intended to be or not. Decisions about what is to be remembered and protected situate the narratives of cultural identity in the collective memory of and history about a place. Expanding our knowledge of various places, the actors associated with these places, exploring historical experiences from multiple vantage points associated with them makes history more fascinating, and tells a more accurate and inclusive story of about America and its citizens. The reassertion of memory of African Americans and other marginalized groups in contemporary southern California history and memory is especially important because it claims broader civic community identity and belonging.<sup>90</sup>

As African Americans and other communities of color battle to have their histories documented, recognized and remembered to claim a part of the public memory it is not surprising that struggle continues. As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, over many years historical narrators have engaged in banalization of and silenced the history of such groups as African Americans through erasure of facts or their relevance because history cannot be fit into Western historiographical traditions heavily guided by nationalism progress, and national interest. In the long term, recovered and counter interpretations and discourses such as those presented in this and other chapters of this dissertation has some impact on the structural nature of the problem of the exclusion of more diverse voices in

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<sup>90</sup> Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 7-9, 12-13.

history accounts. Parkridge Country Club with its actors was a site of African American history possessing value for local, regional and national collective memory.<sup>91</sup>

The vision that the White, Nelson and Bailey partnership showed in the Parkridge Club project and in their lives, in offering an elite leisure landscape to African Americans and anyone else who chose to participate in this endeavor, was groundbreaking in its social history implications. These African American capitalists imagined an entrepreneurial opportunity and pursued it, all along the way contesting opposing white assertions of inherent African American racial inferiority and subordination, and the danger of public, inter-racial mixing. These men were of the New Negro class of their era, moving and shaking up the older order of social heritage, changing its relationships, shifting its center of gravity, and breaking stereotypes of who African Americans were or could be in their American identity and accomplishments. As with the other sites discussed in this dissertation, the Parkridge project was a symbol of African Americans' assertion of civil and consumer rights that they were as entitled to places of leisure, profit making, aspiration and hope as any other citizen of the United States in the 1920s era and beyond. It is important to remember these persistent African American pioneers who took their own destiny in their hands to make places for African American leisure that was self-directed, despite repeated rejection, hostile environments, physical danger and sometimes business failure in the first half of the twentieth century. Their story can provide youth and others, with inspiration and

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<sup>91</sup> Paul A. Shackel, *Memory In Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 198-199, 209; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 95-107.

encouragement in pursuing of their California Dream, and American Dream, in facing American life.<sup>92</sup>

White, Nelson and Bailey endeavored to provide African Americans community, recreation and investment opportunities in the Parkridge. They acted as well, upon a capitalist ethos of seeking profit and valuing commercial culture. Involved in California's great oil boom, as well as the real estate promotion in their leisure building, they were broadly based contributors to the development of Los Angeles and southern California in the post-World War I decade. These men and their patrons were trailblazers in their resolve to achieve broader fulfillment and participation in American life, and for their courage and determination to fight discrimination and demand respect in their development of leisure and attempts at exurban residential development in southern California. Similarly to other leisure sites discussed in this dissertation, not only does the Parkridge story speak to leisure struggle in the African American experience, but in the shared story of the making of Corona in this case, and that of the Los Angeles region and American West in responding to the political, economic and social conditions of the late 1920s.

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<sup>92</sup> My discussion here of the distinctive, African American business pioneers associated with the 1920s era, Parkridge Club is also generally informed by Richard Bardolph's discussion of African American leadership characteristics from the 1900s-1936 in *The Negro Vanguard* (New York, NY: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1959); Mark Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Mark S. Foster, "Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of Negro History*, V84-2 (Spring, 1999): 146.

## CHAPTER 7

### EURAEKA! RACE, LEISURE, SUBDIVISIONS, PROMOTERS AND GAMBLING ON THE CALIFORNIA DREAM

Never Another OPPORTUNITY Like This!

-- *California Eagle*, 13 February 1925<sup>1</sup>

Here nestled among the beautiful mountains, we offer an opportunity to building up a beautiful community, which will not be only a credit to our group but will be a credit to the great State of California.

-- *California Eagle*, 3 July 1925<sup>2</sup>

In the 1920s African American Angelenos set out to create resort communities of various models and different leisure pleasures than what they experienced in their city life. The intent was to develop locations where African Americans could enjoy freedom from discrimination in the pursuit of healthy out-of-doors activities and social life, as well as business opportunities. In the case of some leisure sites, promoters also dreamed of incorporating new and permanent residential communities. In so doing, they joined the struggle for leisure to that of open and better housing, and the quest for economic self-determination, while they reimagined leisure in the process. As in the case of the Parkridge, selling residence and leisure was crucial to the success of their venture. Lot sales as much as membership, was calculated to capitalize the construction costs of facilities and amenities. Between 1905–1920s leisure land development ventures, some with the words “country club” and “subdivision development” attached as a descriptor, invited leisure seekers outside of Los Angeles’s city limits to Eureka Villa as well as the Parkridge Country Club and the

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<sup>1</sup> “Eureka Villa Community” ad, *California Eagle*, 13 February 1925, 3.

<sup>2</sup> “Eureka Villa News/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 3 July 1925, 8.

Pacific Beach Club. For various reasons such as legal and public obstruction, criminal destruction, and the economic crisis striking as the decade turned, most ceased existence in the 1920s. Yet others persisted in some form until the end of the Jim Crow era in the 1960s. Eureka Villa was one of these.<sup>3</sup>

With evolving uses from a rural African American leisure community to a multi-ethnic rural exurban community over the course of the twentieth century, Eureka Villa (later known as Val Verde) boosters' rhetorical strategy at its 1920s inception commixed leisure as industry and residential and vacation housing with some lots accommodating agriculture and livestock for food. They embodied in practice a progressively modern vision of leisure and land development at the core of the "California Dream" for the African American audience they sought to convince that they needed to buy into this idyllic community. This view of the community has lived on as it has evolved to make a place in the public memory that has persisted with more impact than that of other now defunct, African American leisure places in southern California of the Jim Crow era.

This chapter examines how Eureka Villa's history represented another aspect of the African American leisure lifestyle spaces associated with the California Dream, different from the ocean front resorts, lake front destination retreat and country club with modern recreational amenities discussed in this dissertation thus far. Envisioned for residing in leisure and work in everyday living for some and vacation visits for others this African American project to develop an inland, rustic resort community was very ambitious in its articulated vision of recreation, land development and wealth generation potential. As did the

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<sup>3</sup> There were also a few town clubs attempted in Los Angeles including the Business and Professional Men's Club, *California Eagle*, 27 November 1925, 7, and the Appomattox Club, *California Eagle*, 1 August 1930, 1.

other sites discussed in this dissertation, the Val Verde project of the 1920s developed in an American society characterized by urbanization, prosperity, leisure, technological advances, consumerism and major shifts towards modern values as well as in the struggle against Jim Crow racism. The technology of the automobile, recently available to the masses created entirely new ways of mobility in life, and fundamental to the vision, creation, growth and sustainability of Eureka Villa, because there was no public transportation conveniently nearby to access this place.

This modern leisure venture of rustic, recreational amenities and housing land development was a class project in a similar manner to the type emerging during this era marketed to whites, which later evolved to become suburban residential communities. Eureka Villa, though was designed by its founders to be exclusively African American, and not as ostentatiously expensive as some of the combined, planned communities of clubs and homes beginning to be marketed to whites around the nation, such as the original Parkridge project. Although the potential African American clientele may not have been as wealthy, Eureka Villa was premised on the expectation that they shared values similar to their white counterparts in seeking a place to spend leisure time to socialize and network with family and friends, as well as in creating a sense of community identity and traditions. African Americans also sought a place of shelter and security from the racial hierarchy stresses of their everyday living, an aim distinctively different from anything their white counterparts experienced in deciding upon living and leisure places. As Victoria W. Wolcott notes in the early twentieth century African Americans constructed such places apart in the twentieth



century to “[offer] safe spaces for consumers to picnic, dance and play without fear of confrontation with whites or hired guards.”<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, African American leisure site and exurban housing community developments like Eureka Villa, started during the period when Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey’s ideals about black pride and political and economic self-reliance rose to prominence in promotion in Los Angeles and across the nation even after his deportation to Jamaica, the land of his birth. Others such as Benjamin Singleton, Booker T. Washington, and in California Allen Allensworth and William Payne, had encouraged all black towns and land development schemes for economic self-sufficiency across the decades since the end of the Civil War. The rise of Pan-African Americans and global “New Negroes” in the 1920s intensified the local expressions of race consciousness, community self-determination, racial uplift, and sometimes self-defense as part of a larger international context to break free from the local, national and global order of white supremacy. Davarian L. Baldwin describes these “local expressions of race consciousness” as “the product of multidirectional conversations and collective action that crisscrossed the globe.” This was also a time when the Presidential administrations of Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover (1921–1932) continued to alienate African Americans from participating in U.S. politics, and refused to endorse anything related to civil rights.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For an examination of the evolution of new community promotion around southern California, see the analysis of Ontario, California from rural smallhold “colony” to integrated “agriburb” in Paul Sandul, *California Dreaming: Boosterism, Memory, and Rural Suburbs in the Golden State* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2014); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), (Wolcott quotation) 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom, Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 193, 231; Davarian L. Baldwin, “Introduction: New Negroes Forging a New World” in *Escape From New York, The New Negro Renaissance*, with forward by Robin D.G. Kelley, ed.

In the tradition of African American colonies like Allensworth founded in 1908 in California's central San Joaquin Valley, Eureka Villa promoted the possibility of becoming an independent, self-sufficient township centered on providing the social and economic infrastructure for African Americans' consumption of leisure activities and economic development in a bucolic California and American Western Frontier style setting. Not all African American Angelenos supported the black-town dream as they saw their freedom as exercising equal rights within mainstream society. But under the right circumstances, they were willing to participate in "Negro projects." Even after this southern California place faded from its initial use, its continual recurring reasserted remembrance has demonstrated it is a site of African American history and United States history that possesses value for local, regional and national collective memory and identity. The creation of this and other like separate spaces was a strategy of resistance that refuted white suppositions that blacks were not worthy of commercial amusements and other forms of public accommodations.<sup>6</sup>

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Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), (Baldwin quotation) 19; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 390-391; "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow, A National Struggle," From the Internet: [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/struggle\\_president2.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/struggle_president2.html), 21 February 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Allensworth in Tulare County, California was a black town project. "In August 1908 Colonel Allen Allensworth, William Payne, Oscar Overr, Josephine Cowes and Alice Hackett with other settlers established a town founded, financed and governed by African Americans. Their dream of developing an abundant and thriving community stemmed directly from a strong belief in programs that allowed blacks to help themselves create better lives. By 1910 Allensworth's success was the focus of many national newspaper articles praising the town and its inhabitants," Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, From the Internet: [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=583](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=583), 10 December 2011; B. Gordon Wheeler, *Black California, The History of African-Americans in the Golden State* (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1993), 171, 183-184; Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom*, 146, 348; Delores Nason McBroom, "Harvest of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment In Allensworth and Little Liberia" in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 149, 153-154; "Eureka Villa Over the Top," *California Eagle*, 12 September 1924, 1; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters, The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 18-19. For more on Allensworth, see Alice C. Royal, Mickey Ellinger & Scott Braley, *Allensworth, The Freedom Colony, A California African American Township* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2008). "Negro

Eureka Villa also represented African American anticipation of growth in southern California and claiming a role in determining it. Aspirational citizens of all colors invested in their expectation of which direction the city of Los Angeles would grow as their means and opportunities allowed, and tried to purchase property in that path. Transportation connections, the promise of public services and natural environment features could enhance the monetary value of property in looking for real estate investment while sating leisure and other endeavors. The flamboyant real estate entrepreneur Sidney P. Dones marketed Eureka Villa in the isolated San Martinez Chiquito Canyon of the Santa Clarita Valley in the northwest section of Los Angeles County as situated “among the most beautiful mountains to be found in this wonderful [California] state[,]” and as the last “great opportunity” for African Americans to buy a large swath of land “to build up a beautiful community.” The jury would be out for along while into the future before the answer to this question of whether purchasing land at Eureka Villa was a “great opportunity” for African Americans.<sup>7</sup>

In Eureka Villa promotional ads and narratives in the *California Eagle* newspaper and others in the 1920s, the black readership was reminded that several years ago “acreage on the Beautiful Pacific” could have been bought at “a ridiculously low price, [to build] homes of our own. [But] today that opportunity is GONE FOREVER.” For Dones and at least some of his associates, Eureka Villa was their health and leisure spot, with “land prices that [were] five years below the prices of other property that came near equaling Eureka Villa.” Dones challenged African Americans to look beyond the “crabs,” as he called the investment

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projects” refers to institutionalized programming that could implicitly sanction, and thereby reinforce exclusion and segregation of African Americans participation in such areas as education, employment, housing, accommodations, etc.

<sup>7</sup> “Eureka Villa Community” ad, 13 February 1925, *California Eagle*, 3; “Eureka Villa News/Editorial,” *California Eagle*, 19 June 1925, 8.

skeptics, and to not be satisfied with being discriminated against at every resort in the state. In his sales message he admonished African Americans to look further than Central Avenue for better jobs and better communities. From the beginning at least as evidenced by the rhetorical language promoters used in their black press advertising, Eureka Villa was a place of contestation and investment opportunity, alongside a place to have fun. The Dones' led promotional theme of investment and control of development offers part of the reason, along with an unbroken history of occupancy, that there has continued to be some public memory of this early black community of Eureka Villa (as Val Verde) in public memory in the second decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup>

### **“Santa Clarita, Valley of the Golden Dream”<sup>9</sup>**

The Santa Clarita Valley from which the black enclave of Eureka Villa sprung may have been fifty miles from downtown Los Angeles, but Angeleno leaders and boosters always saw the northwest county area as essential to the growth of city in connecting transportation, goods and people to other parts of the state. By the era of Eureka Villa's founding the area was envisioned as both an early satellite community and place of leisure retreat from Los Angeles. For a long time before that, from the days of California's indigenous inhabitants through the Spanish and Mexican periods and the Anglo Americans who followed, groups settled the Santa Clarita Valley as an intersection for travel and commerce. Connecting Mexico, the Pacific coastline and Channel Islands, northern

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<sup>8</sup> “Eureka Villa Community” ad, *California Eagle*, 13 February 1925, 3; “Eureka Villa News/Editorial,” *California Eagle*, 19 June 1925, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Title of the book about Santa Clarita Valley I though was appropriate for the title of this section giving context to the formation of the African American resort, “Eureka Villa.” Jerry Reynolds, *Santa Clarita: Valley of the Golden Dream* (Granada Hills, California: World of Communications, Inc., 1997).

California and other areas of North America, Santa Clarita Valley routes began as footpaths, later altered to accommodate horses, wagons and stagecoaches. Later some of the routes became railroad lines, followed by roads accommodating motorized vehicles for the California Aqueduct and twentieth century travelers. From the beginning of the American invasion in the 1840s to the early decades of the twentieth century, people endured bust and booms, as well as droughts, earthquakes, fires and other disasters in the Santa Clarita Valley region to make a living from crops, ranching, water, gold and other minerals, oil, real estate speculation, transportation infrastructure improvements, temporary worker and traveler accommodations services and the movie industry, with few becoming wealthy. Some legendary outlaws such as Tiburcio Vásquez (1835–1875) also known as “The Scourge of California” and mobster Bugsy Siegel (1906–1947) as well as Prohibition era bootleggers hid out and owned property in the Valley.<sup>10</sup>

The Valley drew a surge of interest in the late nineteenth century. Gold, silver and mercury mines opened in the Santa Clarita Valley’s Cedar Mining District beginning in 1870, across the Valley from Eureka Villa off today’s Route 14 close to Palmdale. An owner of some of the most famous and productive mines in the area during the 1890s, Henry T. Gage, Esq. was elected city attorney of Los Angeles in 1888 and governor of California from 1899–1903, and became a political ally of Theodore Roosevelt (who visited the area in 1903). From 1895–1897, gold valued at \$1.5 million was mined from his New York Mine

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<sup>10</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 44, 94; John Boston and the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society, *Images of America: Santa Clarita Valley* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 7.

(later known as the Governor Mine), making it the greatest producer of gold in Los Angeles County.<sup>11</sup>

Gage's mining also was responsible for producing the Valley's most well known citizen—Lou Henry, the daughter of Gage's superintendent at his Puritan Mine, who would marry fellow Stanford University Stanford University graduate Herbert Clark Hoover. In the pioneering tradition of her roots in Santa Clarita Valley, attending Stanford University at its opening in 1891, she became the institution's first female graduate. When she met her husband to be, Hoover was a young geology student from Iowa. He became an international mining expert and 31<sup>st</sup> President of the United States (1929–1933). It is said the Hoovers frequently visited Lou's parents in Acton, where her husband relaxed by fishing for native trout along the Santa Clarita River.<sup>12</sup>

Another factor attracting Los Angeles civic leaders' and citizens' attention to this area in the early twentieth century was that sites in Santa Clarita Valley, including Eureka Villa were believed to contain oil. Oil was already associated with the area. The industry had been

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<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 21-22; 64-67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Reynolds, 64, 68; In 1929, as first lady Lou Henry Hoover encountered uproar from racist whites for inviting Jessie DePriest (wife of Chicago Republican Congress Member Oscar Stanton DePriest) as a guest at the White House for a tea party honoring the spouses of Congress members. With this integrated social event, she broke the laws and customs of the exclusionary Jim Crow era in the presence of white women. This was most intolerable for racists in both the North and South, as historian Nancy Beck Young argues because as has been recognized “the racial caste system actually veiled white southern concerns about women, who were spending more time in the public sphere.” With this small act of activism in exercising her official duties as first lady she exposed the conflicting view about racial and gender etiquette in the time period, even if she did not address the larger social issues of racial and gender discrimination and inequality that was on display with the controversy. Although not a progressive on civil rights, Young asserts, Lou Henry Hoover recognized “the most egregious aspects of discrimination” within official social circles in the nation's capitol. Further she was purported to have a sense of social justice and belief in equality that had been part of her make up since her childhood in California in the hills of Santa Clarita Valley. Nancy Beck Young, quotations from except of *Lee Hoover: Activist First Lady in Traditional Washington* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2004), From the Internet: <http://www.whitehousehistory.org/an-activist-first-lady-in-traditional-washington>, 30 September 2015. Oscar Stanton DePriest was the first African American to serve (1928–1934) from outside of the South and to be elected to the House of Representatives after North Carolina's George H. White left in 1901, “DePriest, Oscar (1871–1951),” From the Internet: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/depriest-oscar-1871-1951>, 30 January 2014.

born in the Golden State in the Pico Canyon of Santa Clarita Valley in 1886 when California Star Oil Works' Number 4 well produced "emerald green petroleum." Ranching, railroads and water had preceded oil in drawing economic interest. Cattle and other livestock ranching begun during the Spanish and Mexico periods continued in some sections of the Valley into the early twentieth-first century. The descendants of George Washington Lechler and his wife Abigail Hazard in the 1990s continued the family's cattle business in the hills between Eureka Villa (modern day Val Verde) and Piru Lake. Abigail's brother, Henry T. Hazard, Esq., city attorney (1881–1883) before being elected mayor of Los Angeles (1889–1892), had been instrumental in the contract negotiations with the Southern Pacific Railroad to get the transcontinental rail line through Los Angeles City and County, making sure the city of Angels was directly connecting to northern California, the nation and global community.<sup>13</sup>

The railroad connecting Los Angeles with San Francisco and the rest of the nation had been laid in 1876 across Santa Clarita Valley's Newhall Ranch. Subsidized by the city of Los Angeles, the railroad's San Fernando Tunnel was excavated through the Soledad slopes adjacent to Santa Clarita Valley situated at a break in the Angelus National Forest, connecting California's south to the north. Later in 1887 a spur line from Santa Clarita Valley was built to Ventura, fifty-plus miles to the west on the Pacific Slope, with that line later extended to San Francisco.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Reynolds, 41, 78; Oscar T. Shuck, ed. *History of the Bench and Bar of California: Being Biographies of Many Remarkable Men, A Store of Humorous and Pathetic Recollections, Accounts of Important Legislation and Extraordinary Cases Comprehending the Judicial History of the State* (Los Angeles, CA: The Commercial Printing House, 1901), 867-868.

<sup>14</sup> Newhall Ranch was owned by large landholder and entrepreneur Henry Mayo Newhall. The 48,000-acre, ranch raised cattle, fruit and wheat, and was originally part of the Spanish/Mexico period Rancho San Francisco. He sold the right of way for tracks, and sites for a depot and town to the Southern Pacific Railroad. A labor force that included some 1,500 Chinese workers laid the track. Reynolds, 46, 49-53, 162; "About H.M. Newhall," The Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation, From the Internet: [www.newhallfoundation.org](http://www.newhallfoundation.org), 17 January 2014.

In 1913, the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Aqueduct with supply centers reaching from Santa Clarita Valley to Bishop, brought water through the Valley, appropriated by Los Angeles to propel and sustain growth. Aqueduct creator William Mulholland, Chief of the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power purchased 235 acres about ten miles from Eureka Villa in Santa Clarita Valley's Hauser Canyon in 1917, where he experimented with raising a variety of grains and cattle. He built a good size home with a barn and two out buildings from 'native rock and city cement,' as local legend has it. *Los Angeles Times* newspaper publisher and city booster General Harrison Gray Otis, California governor Hiram W. Johnson and comedian Will Rogers were said to have been guests at Mulholland's ranch.<sup>15</sup>

Highway connection and electricity came to the Valley in the same decade. The Ridge Route, a two-lane highway opened to traffic through the Tejon Pass and the Sierra Pelona Mountains in the Angelus National Forest, connecting the Los Angeles Basin with the San Joaquin Valley via the Santa Clarita Valley. Power came on line in 1917, generating electricity to supply the whole city of Los Angeles from three turbines installed in San Francisquito Power House Number One at the great aqueduct.<sup>16</sup>

The transformation of the Valley was not without tragic miscalculations. In the same year Eureka Villa's lot sales began in 1924, the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was creating the St. Francis Dam in San Francisquito Canyon to hold Owens

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<sup>15</sup> The Owens River was the first of the great and distant new sources of water Los Angeles appropriated to propel and sustain its twentieth century growth. A Progressive Republican, Hiram W. Johnson, Esq. was a reform governor of California from 1911–1917, a U.S. senator for 28 years (1917–45) and later an isolationist; Reynolds, 1997, 46, 49-53, 76-77; James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California, An Interpretive History*, Eighth Edition (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2003), 314; Maggi Perkins, *Images of America: Newhall* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 76-77.



Valley water arriving through the great aqueduct. The concrete dam stood 185 feet in height with a series of step offsets running up the front. The dam was completed in 1926, covering 300 acres with a capacity of 38,168 acre-feet of water. In 1928 the dam busted and the debris-filled water surge made its way fifty miles or so to the sea along the Santa Clara River bed and what is now Highway 126 (south of Eureka Villa), on the way killing over 500 people. Rebuilding occurred quickly in the areas struck by the disaster.<sup>17</sup>

As Hollywood was beginning to position itself as the motion picture capital of the world in the 1900s, Santa Clarita Valley became its “back lot.” The natural and in some places rugged scenery and old fashion towns were American West style picturesque, providing the perfect ambiance as backdrops to old-time Westerns and sweeping outdoor melodrama movies. Santa Clarita Valley landmarks were used as sets by such 1900s–1920s Western movie stars as William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson and Harry Carey. All four of these box-office-draws settled down on ranches in the Santa Clarita Valley. The “Monogram Western Town” studio created in the Valley in the 1920–1930s, later became Gene Autry’s studio. A few other Western towns were assembled from structures imported from Nevada and from the ground up for busy motion picture companies, later to be used for television Westerns.<sup>18</sup>

By the 1920s, the Los Angeles Aqueduct, the Ridge Route, train depot, agriculture, and the oil industry and movie production offered Santa Clarita Valley stimulation to growth. These ventures created employment for local citizens and temporary workers. There were increased opportunities for shops, stores, restaurants and accommodations, and service trade

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<sup>17</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 90-91; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California, An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1943/1973), 195.

<sup>18</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 84, 95-99; Boston, 2009, 8.

businesses to provide goods and services to permanent residents and temporarily housed workers, as well as travelers. Travel time to Los Angeles was greatly reduced, making access to Los Angeles markets, family, friends and attractions more easily accessible. With these changes, the Valley also developed as a leisure place, in response to Los Angeles and the area's imagery of the real and mythical American West. A real estate boom in southern California was launched from money generated by the movies, oil and tourism. Santa Clarita Valley took part in the investment speculation of this real estate boom, and Eureka Villa was one of the many themed resort community promotions emerging in southern California during the era. Boosters of all persuasions, including those of Eureka Villa combined leisure with promotion of speculation on the future with improvements and expansion plans. The region's population would heighten demand for their land in Santa Clarita Valley. Current leisure could also afford purchasers new wealth building opportunities beyond the contemporary use of the era. In 1925, Eureka Villa was a rustic resort, but some Eureka Villa boosters thought the area might become a bedroom community to the city of Los Angeles. Only time would tell how Eureka Villa's land use patterns would develop.<sup>19</sup>

### **Eureka, They Founded It!**

There are different versions as to how Sidney P. Dones came to found and promote Eureka Villa. At the time, the area was no more than a crossroads northwest of the intersection of the historic Ridge Route (now Interstate Highway 5) running between Los Angeles and Kern Counties, and north of the road (now Route 126) running from Santa Clarita Valley through Ventura County to the Pacific Ocean. The site had been known earlier

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<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 85-87; McWilliams, 1943/1973, 134.

as Val Verde (Green Valley) when it had been a short-lived boom town. It had sprung up after gold was found there in 1843 in the Santa Feliciana Creek, the site of California's first gold rush, and then depopulated as quickly as it had begun. Seventy years later in 1924, a version of the Eureka Villa story has it that Dones procured thirty acres at the site from the family of the colonial land grantee. The land purchased was said to be part of Rancho Temescal, the Eureka Villa Alline land tract. Senora Alline, the last Mexican heir of the Rancho, supposedly sold the tract to the industrious real estate agent. Dones and his district manager Arthur L. Provost then started selling half-acre lots in Eureka Villa to African Americans mostly from Los Angeles and other California cities, with some purchasers hailing from urban centers outside of California with African American populations.<sup>20</sup>

The less romantic, more supported by evidence version of events argues that the founding of Eureka Villa as a leisure and recreation center for African Americans began in the 1910s with a wealthy white woman, Mrs. Laura C. Janes from Pasadena, whose family then owned the secluded ranch in San Martinez/Chiquito Canyon. After World War I Janes was purported to have opened her family's ranch to African Americans as a result of her dismay at the discrimination against African Americans in southern California, especially around use of many parks and recreation areas. Whether it was motivated by her dismay at the discrimination African Americans faced or more by her interest in financial gain, Janes' San Martinez/Chiquito Canyon ranch soon became a 'weekend picnic spot for black Angelenos' as a February 6, 1925 editorial in the *California Eagle* attested, adding substantiation to this version of the Eureka Villa's African American resort community

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<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, 1997, 21-22, 92; "Eureka Villa and Community Center" ad, *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 4. From old maps of the Ranchos, the area of Eureka Villa appears outside and between Ranchos Temascal and San Francisco.

origins story. Through lot sales of this secluded ranch land to African Americans mediated by Dones, Janes and other white landowners including Harry M. Waterman, who joined her in this process, gained financially.<sup>21</sup>

The February 6, 1925 editorial spoke glowingly of Mrs. Janes for offering the land for sale and the impact her actions had on encouraging other (we assume white) landowners to also sell lots to African Americans in the Chiquito Canyon:

Mrs. Ja[n]es the owner of the tract of land which now offered in lots for a community center to our mind is a real benefactor for the members of our group in this country, for she has not only made it possible for them to procure homes at a minimum cost, but her act has had the effect to cause other land owners in the same vicinity to join forces with her, making as a grand result the finest body of land for community purposes that it is possible to secure.

The editorial lauded Sidney Preston Dones for “his discovery of this owner and intercession with her for this great body of land for his people.” It was not his ownership and resale of land, but Dones’ timely and foresighted business deal with Janes that offered her land for public sale as leisure living lots to black Angeleno consumers. Dones’ venture secured one place for African Americans at the time when several regional exurban efforts for pleasure use and investment were underway. Recognizing and incorporating the amenities of the

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<sup>21</sup> In different accounts the wealthy white woman from Pasadena is referred to with the last name as “Janes” or “James.” I verified the Eureka Tract land owners were Laura C. Janes and Burt N. Janes in the subdivision tract map book from the Los Angeles County Land Records Information, Dept. of Public Works, From the Internet: <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/sur/nas/landrecords/tract/MB0102/TR0102-095.pdf>, 8 January 2014. Douglas Flamming cites in a footnote obtaining his information on the founding of Eureka Villa/Val Verde in part from “Information and quote from online Val Verde historical file, Valencia Public Library, Valencia, California,” Footnote 41, page 423. This information noted in his citation is not currently available online or in the Valencia Library. Flamming, *Bound For Freedom*, 348; “Opportunity Knows/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 6 February 1925, 6; “Eureka Villa,” *California Eagle*, 23 July 1926, 2; Jocelyn Y. Stewart, “COLUMN ONE Forgotten Oasis of Freedom Val Verde, the ‘black Palm Springs,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 3; “Eureka Villa Over the Top,” *California Eagle*, 12 September 1924, 1.

popular country club into an idyllic place of leisure residence, Dones promoted at Eureka Villa what he would call a “country club subdivision.”<sup>22</sup>

African American investments groups had attempted to build leisure and recreation facilities for the black Angelenos for a few decades. Now these entrepreneurs extended this self-determination in leisure efforts to develop pleasure accommodations in exclusively African American communities that contested confinement and exclusion. A *California Eagle* editorial on April 24, 1924 entitled “Club House Movement Endorsed,” declared the movement “[would] be a monument to Negro enterprise, an expression of race progress, and an uncommon tribute to all responsible for its success; and if its worthy objects are successfully attained, it will bear witness to that restless, breathless, and dauntless spirit of race pride which has pleasantly resulted in a manifest impatience with restraints, segregation and confinement to a few sordid forms of recreation and play.” Using racial uplift rhetoric, Editor Joe Bass’s boosterism in support of country clubs summed up the way black Angelenos of the era could potentially find playground opportunities without discrimination, contest white racism through property control and community determination, and also prosper in the classic Los Angeles way through owning, buying and selling real estate.<sup>23</sup>

Country Clubs have heretofore been regarded as a luxury for none but the rich and golf courses a dream. Such things as these have now been placed within the reach of the average every day man with a choice of any location you might desire.

-- Editorials, *California Eagle*, 23 May 1924<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> All of the exurban, “clubhouse movement” land development projects described in this dissertation were leisure developments that included residential (cabin like structures or more substantial tents on platforms) and recreational facilities development. These leisure land development projects were sometimes referred to as subdivisions. These sites were in rural areas that would not have been seen in the era as becoming more than recreational and leisure residential communities in the near future of the 1920s era. “Opportunity Knows/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 6 February 1925, 6.

<sup>23</sup> “Club House Movement Endorsed/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 24 April 1924, 22.

<sup>24</sup> “Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 23 May 1924, 14.

As an editorial observed, in the 1920s black citizens of southern California wanted participation in what was portrayed in the text as “the average every day man” recreation and luxury dream that country clubs could offer. In addition to dissatisfaction with available recreation venues, African Americans increasingly faced “the cruel hand of segregation and discrimination in a way, never felt before on the Pacific Coast” due to the poisonous, racist propaganda spread especially by new white migrants from Dixie who provoked a few violent altercations. In addition to the attack by off duty white sheriffs on Arthur Valentine and his family on a public beach (see Chapter 3), another widely publicized example of violence and intimidation towards black Angelenos reported a white mob destroying property of a black family who moved into a district of mostly lower income whites. Further, a major bone of contention was the change in City Parks Commission policy limiting black Angelenos’ swimming pools use. Black Angelenos responded to these challenges to their freedom to consume leisure in southern California as white racial hostility rose and African American numbers grew in the 1920s. Throughout the third decade of the twentieth century in Los Angeles as in other part of the U.S., African Americans resisted and contested prejudice, segregation and exclusion through direct action at particular black and/or white claimed accommodations and spaces, the legal system and in the creation of black-owned leisure spaces.<sup>25</sup>

Both black and white entrepreneurs attempted construction of recreational playgrounds and subdivisions outside the city limits of Los Angeles in the 1920s, with varied levels of success and longevity. Norman O. Houston and Charles S. Darden, Esq. had tried in

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<sup>25</sup> W.J. Wheaton, “Comments, Residential Segregation,” *California Eagle*, 16 October 1925, 1; Wolcott, 19; Flaming, *Bound For Freedom*, 216-218.

1922 to build a leisure and recreation clubhouse and other facilities on the Pacific Slope in Santa Monica that the City Council thwarted through prohibitive ordinance (see Chapter 3). Frustration at their exclusion due to white racism was duly voiced in the *California Eagle* and other black press outlets as an affront to all peoples' ability to enjoy the liberty and pursuit of happiness guaranteed to them under the United States Constitution.<sup>26</sup>

Advertisements from an April 18, 1924 article entitled "A Country Club By Our Group Has Been Formed" (referring to but not mentioning by name, the Peaceful Valley Country Club) in the *California Eagle* proposed that "the colored people of the State of California are not to be denied an opportunity to keep abreast of all modern movements" in their "social and economic life." As this newspaper quote demonstrates, black Angelenos' participation in the "new movement" was a demand for their rights to consume recreation and leisure, a foundational feature of the 1920s version of the California Dream and popular cultural trends of leisure lifestyle imagery and real estate development business opportunities in the region.<sup>27</sup>

The Peaceful Valley Country Club formation was announced in spring 1924. It was located within an hour or so ride of downtown Los Angeles in the western part of Los Angeles County in the area known today as Calabasas. On Las Virgenes Road off Ventura Boulevard on a 100-acre tract of land "plans...[were] formulated for the construction...of a most up-to-date Country Club containing all those modern features" such as a golf course,

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<sup>26</sup> Alison Rose Jefferson, "African American Leisure Space in Santa Monica: The Beach Sometimes Known as the Inkwel, 1900-1960s," *Southern California Quarterly*, V. 91, No. 2 (Summer 2009): 169, 176-180; "Double Crossed/Editorials," *California Eagle*, 18 June 1926, 6; "What A Difference It Makes/Editorials," *California Eagle*, 26 September 1926, 6.

<sup>27</sup> "Opportunity Knows/Editorials," *California Eagle*, 6 February 1925, 6; "A Country Club By Our Group Has Been Formed," *California Eagle*, 18 April 1924, 4.

tennis, handball and croquet courts, swimming pool, baseball park, children's playground, large and elaborate clubhouse for use by members and guests for socializing year round, shade trees and mountain trails for hiking, well water and other outdoor recreational sports. A portion of lot sales proceeds were to be set aside for facilities and grounds improvements projected to cost \$150,000. In addition to the golf course, a large section of the tract was set aside for cabin sites. Charter membership buyers each received clear title to an individual cabin site free with this level of membership. Further these members were entitled to free use of all recreational features. Membership was subject to the approval of the Membership Committee. In a May 9, 1924, *California Eagle* advertisement the promoters asserted "The Rush [Was] On" to become members of Peaceful Valley Country Club, located only six miles from the city limits. The advertisement urged those interested in a membership and awaiting application approval to request that a membership be reserved for a 24-hour period at a cost of \$30.00.<sup>28</sup>

In the Peaceful Valley Country Club ads, Sidney P. Dones topped the list of real estate agents to contact for information on purchasing memberships. There was also an Advisory Committee, which characterized the development as a class project, lending additional validity to the venture by including "leading citizens" of the city and county of Los Angeles. Some also associated with other leisure land development projects included: Joseph B. Bass, editor of the *California Eagle*; Dr. Wm. B. Humphrey, M.D.; Father W. T. Cleghorn, pastor of St. Phillips Episcopal Church; E. Burton Ceruti, Esq.; Mrs. Nellie Turner; and Dr. Emily B. Childress (later Portwig), among others. A narrative news feature

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<sup>28</sup> "The People To Have Real Country Club," *California Eagle*, 25 April 1924, 1; "Opening Announcement, Peaceful Valley Country Club" ad, *California Eagle*, 25 April 1924, 10; "Peaceful Valley Country Club, Another Winner for Los Angeles" ad, *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 10; "The Rush Is On" ad, *California Eagle*, 2 May 1924, 10.



(which served as much as an advertisement) on the Peaceful Valley Country Club in the *California Eagle* on May 9, 1924 portrayed the Advisory Committee members as “professional people, leading business men, society leaders and ministers of the gospel [united] in praising this forward looking plan to provide the people with the facilities for pleasure and health that are naturally due to every resident in southern California without discrimination.” Peaceful Valley Country Club advertisements admonished readers to join now and profit later, as all memberships were transferable and would yield a handsome profit if sold in the future as their value went up as the improvements were constructed. Dones, the other real estate agents, and the advisory committee members promised a playground for all people with profit possibilities, hoping for a handsome return on their monetary as well as social capital investments in Peaceful Valley as the regional population and land values increased.<sup>29</sup>

The Eastside Realty Company run by F.L. Banks and O.L. Banks also began promoting the 240-acre Castaic Country Club subdivision in Charley Canyon of the “Thousand Canyons District” as “The Playground of Angelenos” in Spring 1924. The new development was located less than ten miles north of Eureka Villa in the area known today as the Castaic section of Santa Clarita Valley. The *Eagle* described the area in picturesque vocabulary as “nestled in the bosom of Charley Canyon, one of California’s most beautiful spots with hundreds of beautiful oak and cottonwood trees, canyon dells and wooded retreats, mesas, gurgling springs and babbling brooklets fanned by a constant breeze of pure mountain air.” In another day’s news testimonial-style feature, an unidentified visitor that a regular

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., *California Eagle*, 2 May 1924, 10; “Peaceful Valley Country Club, A Smashing Success” ad, *California Eagle*, 2 May 1924, 10; “Peaceful Valley Country Club,” *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 12; “Opening Announcement, Peaceful Valley Country Club” ad, *California Eagle*, , 25 April 1924, 10.

reader of the publication might readily assume was Joe Bass (editor of the *California Eagle*), invited by real estate agent F.L. Banks to the Castaic Country Club subdivision project described the clubhouse's proposed location as "supported by the majestic grandeur of a mountain background and commands a wonderful view of the valley below." This same visitor gushed that "a landscape artist could no doubt have drawn beautiful pictures" from some spots on the tour of the property.<sup>30</sup>

The Castaic developers enlisted black Angeleno and rising star architect Paul R. Williams to design the clubhouse. Williams a much in demand by Hollywood celebrities and rich others requesting his home designs, rendered of a "beautiful, spacious club house of Spanish design" with hills, trees and a lone golfer strategically positioned for lifestyle imagery and sales enticement. One hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) was to be set aside from lot sales and spent on the clubhouse, facilities and grounds improvements such as a swimming pool, tennis courts, a well-planned golf course, picnic grounds, gun club, winding roads, shaded paths leading to cabin sites and other improvements. With the purchase of any "beautiful scenic cabin sites [at a] \$150 opening price," the real estate agents offered free lifetime active club memberships with "full privilege to use all facilities included in a modern country club." Readers and potential buyers were advised terms were "within reach of all." They could put \$15.00 down with no taxes for one year and pay \$2.50 per week or \$10.00 monthly (with a no interest option) to own a lot. Castaic Country Club promoters advertised the northern Los Angeles County site's close proximity to the Forest Reserve (named the Angelus National Forest Reserve in 1925), "California's choicest hunting Reserve, where

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<sup>30</sup> "The People To Have Real Country Club," *California Eagle*, 25 April 1924, 1; "Opening Announcement, Peaceful Valley Country Club" ad, *California Eagle*, 25 April 1924, 10; "Eastside Realty Company Promotes Country Club," *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 1; "Castaic Country Club in Thousand Canyons District" ad, *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 12; "A Pleasant Trip to Castaic Country Club Sub-Division," *California Eagle*, 23 May 1924, 10.

deer and game of all descriptions abound,” and its forty-two mile, one hour and thirty minutes ride (probably more like at two- to three-hour ride at best at that time period) from downtown Los Angeles as further enticements for prospective buyers and country club members.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of an advisory committee to endorse their new land development project, the Castaic Country Club promoters offered up in ads the success of their business history as pioneer sub-dividers and lot sellers of the Central Avenue Gardens and Central Avenue subdivisions in Los Angeles. They also published a statement from their attorney, Afue McDowell, Esq. about his long familiarity with the land parcel and personal use of it, the owners of the land, and their ability to grant and guarantee title to each lot sold. Written in capitalized lettering, a series of Eastside Realty Company ads emphasized the Castaic Country Club subdivision was “A RACE ENTERPRISE, FOSTERED AND OWNED BY RACE BUSINESS MEN—FOR RACE PEOPLE.” This fact of the subdivision being a black enterprise not only proclaimed the place as one of black purpose and collective benefit, but could have allowed *California Eagle* readers dreams of the continual possibilities California offered them when racism’s constraints were surmounted, as they contemplated the possibilities of Castaic Country Club membership purchase and the promoters’ legitimacy.<sup>32</sup>

In *California Eagle* editorials and their newspaper ad campaigns both the Peaceful Valley Country Club and the Castaic Country Club promoters observed there had been

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<sup>31</sup> “Eastside Realty Company Promotes Country Club,” *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 1; “Castaic Country Club in Thousand Canyons District” ad, *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 12; “A Pleasant Trip to Castaic Country Club Sub-Division,” *California Eagle*, 23 May 1924, 10.

<sup>32</sup> “Eastside Realty Company Promotes Country Club,” *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 1; “Castaic Country Club in Thousand Canyons District” ad, *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 12; “Letter from Law Office of Afue McDowell,” *California Eagle*, 23 May 1924, 4.

several attempts by different groups of “colored people [(meaning African Americans in this case)] of the State of California” to establish country clubs for their group which for various reasons were not realized. Both promoters emphasized their ventures as ground floor opportunities which would not last long at the opening prices, and that all purchasers were being provided with a bit of “paradise” for pleasure, relaxation, clean sports and freedom in the great outdoors, as well as a real estate investment for their use and/or future financial gain.<sup>33</sup>

Peaceful Valley would be short-lived. By June 1924, Castaic Country Club subdivision issued a notice in their *California Eagle* ad, “To all Purchaser[s] in Peaceful Valley Country Club” informing them they could receive transfer “credit for the amount paid to the Peaceful Valley Country Club (not exceeding the down payment of \$30) on the purchase price of a cabin site,” for a Castaic Country Club site. Before the end of 1924, Rialto Park and Lincoln Gardens, both in Los Angeles County and another resort near Redlands in San Bernardino County, in addition to Peaceful Valley and Castaic Country Club developments had “sprung up overnight and died.” Available sources provide evidence sufficient only to speculate that all these land development projects most likely failed due to a combination of inadequate capital financing and public response.<sup>34</sup>

Eureka Villa meanwhile, persisted. Its founding visionary and business leader, Sidney P. Dones (ca. 1892–1947) was an entrepreneur whose primary occupation during his lifetime was buying and selling real estate as a broker and an agent. His business repertoire

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<sup>33</sup> “The People To Have Real Country Club,” 25 April 1924, *California Eagle*, 1; “Eastside Realty Company Promotes Country Club,” *California Eagle*, 9 May 1924, 1.

<sup>34</sup> “What Are We Coming To?, Eureka Villa News,” *California Eagle*, 18 December 1925, 5; “Castaic Country Club Subdivision, The Playground of Angelenos” ad, *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 7; “Clubs On The Taboo/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 8 October 1926, 6.

encompassed more, included loan financing (as in cash money lending), and life and fire insurance sales. In addition, he was a pioneering member of the Democratic Film Corporation, starring in “Reformation” which he also directed (1920) and “The Ten Thousand Dollar Trail” which he also wrote (1921). He was also a music dealer. Born to Dexter W. and Lucy P. Dones in Marshall, Texas, Sidney Preston Dones grew up in a farming community in rural East Texas where he obtained an education in local public schools. He went on to study English at nearby Wiley College, founded in 1873 during Reconstruction as effectively the first African American higher education institution west of the Mississippi River. While attending the preparatory school at Wiley before he could take college courses, Dones picked cotton or anything else on the local rural farms to pay for his educational expenses. Young Dones left his college studies after a few years, coinciding with his father’s death to assist with responsibility for the family.<sup>35</sup>

Seeking a better life for himself and to assist his family, Dones first traveled to Los Angeles around 1905. After working a year as a day labor in Los Angeles, he went to El Paso, Texas to join the team promoting the New Day Colonization Company. The venture’s team attempted to secure 50,000 acres of land for “colored people” in Mexico from President Porfirio Diaz before the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) ended their plan. After spending several years in Mexico, Dones returned to Los Angeles around 1910–1912 and opened his first real estate office. In his business’s formative period to pay his own office space rent and

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<sup>35</sup> “The Sidney P. Dones Co.,” *California Eagle*, 5 December 1914, 1; Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (James Stevensen Publisher, 1918/Reprinted 2004), 58d, 205; *Negro Who’s Who in California* (Published by the *Negro Who’s Who in California*, 1948 Edition), 127; *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who’s Who 1930-1931* (Published by The California Eagle Publishing Company), “Dones, Sidney P.,” no page numbers; “Sidney P. Dones,” Internet Movie Database (IMDb), From the Internet: [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0232452/?ref\\_=nmbio\\_bio\\_nm](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0232452/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm), 11 December 2013; “Wiley College History,” From the Internet: <http://www.wileyc.edu/history.asp>, 11 December 2013; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, 120-122.

help support himself and his family, Dones worked as a janitor for the building housing his new business and at Manual Arts High School where he earned twenty-five cents per hour. He continued his education, studying law with the La Salle Extension School of Law at Chicago and at Southwestern University in Los Angeles.<sup>36</sup>

By 1915 Frederick M. Roberts' *New Age* newspaper dubbed Dones, "Los Angeles' most popular young businessman." The newspaper waxed about his success that "[he] is enjoying the greatest real estate and insurance business of any race man in the West'." Dones married musician Bessie Williams in 1913, and in a few years they produced a daughter, Sydneta and a son, Preston. Sidney P. Dones divorced and remarried another musician, Louvenia Harper Dones by 1920. He would divorce, marry and divorce again before the end of decade.<sup>37</sup>

By all accounts, Sidney P. Dones was charismatic, courteous, hardworking, always the showman and an effective self-promoter. He identified with and used racial uplift rhetoric as a booster for African American-owned business development and community and in turn, for support of his own enterprises, in particular, including for Eureka Villa. In the *1930-1931 Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who* published by the California Eagle Publishing Company, Dones was cited as "perhaps the best known broker among our group [meaning African Americans] in Los Angeles, . . . and is considered an expert in the law governing real estate and finance. [He] has built up one of the largest businesses of its kind east of Main Street." Always one who believed in the credo, "help others and you help yourself," it was

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<sup>36</sup> "The Sidney P. Dones Co.," *California Eagle*, 5 December 1914, 1; Beasley, 205; *Negro Who's Who in California*, 1948 Edition, 127; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, *New Age* newspaper as quoted from 12 November 1915 & 11 February 1916, 121.

<sup>37</sup> "The Sidney P. Dones Co.," *California Eagle*, 5 December 1914, 1; Beasley, 205; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, 121.

said Dones was especially friendly to the African American masses of working people who were a substantial part of his client base and contributors to his business success. A *California Eagle* editorial opined that Dones' success was also in his "conduct[ing] business [in a manner] as to win the confidence and respect of the better class whites." It seems those observing him had admiration for Dones' as a person and his skills with people in winning friends and influencing others to do business with him.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout his lifetime, Dones was active in civic and political affairs, and as a philanthropist who donated to many worthy causes. He ran unsuccessfully for city and state elective offices several times during his life, beginning with a run for City Council of Los Angeles in 1917, then for California State Assembly seats in 1928 and the 1930s. In the interwar years leading up to World War II, Dones became a special investigator for the United States government. He was sent on confidential missions to Mexico and the Hawaiian Islands. His outstanding service and achievements earned him the highest honor given to a civilian, the Medal of Merit. During the war years, Dones earned the Selective Service Medal for his work as Director of Selective Services.<sup>39</sup>

In the marketing campaign for the initial 480-acre new leisure community at Eureka Villa, Dones used modern promotional tools of the time and enlisted journalistic expertise to garner attention. He enticed people to visit and come enjoy the outdoor setting, buy lots, and

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<sup>38</sup> Beasley, 205; *Negro Who's Who in California*, 1948 Edition, 127; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, 120-122; *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who 1930-1931*, "Dones, Sidney P.," no page numbers; "Central Avenue and the Eagle," *California Eagle*, 8 April 1916, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Beasley, 205; Douglas Flammig, "Becoming Democrats, Liberal Politics and the African American Community in Los Angeles, 1930-1965," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy and Quintard Taylor (Atrium Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 392n16; *Negro Who's Who in California*, 1948 Edition, 127; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, 120-122; *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who 1930-1931*, "Dones, Sidney P.," no page numbers.

build residential and business improvements through frequent and sometimes elaborate advertisements as well as narrative features that worked effectively as ads. These ads ran in the black press of Los Angeles and other cities in the early years of the development's sales push including on several pages of the *California Eagle* each week. Dones and other supporters of the "Eureka Villa" subdivision project described the place in its physical manifestation with race rhetoric and California lifestyle imaginaries as:

[A] beautifully wooded land in the Sunkist slope of the Santa Clarita Valley... Picnic amidst a beautiful grove of Sycamore, Oak and Cypress trees...situated in a beautiful valley continually fanned by the cool breezes from the canyons leading to the Ocean...

...One of the greatest and most high class projects ever put before our group... A community center and club that the entire race will be proud of...

...An all-year round playground and health resort for every member of the family...The improvements...of which will cost in the hundreds or thousands...will be without parallel in our history, and...will be an everlasting monument to our race...

...California Colored People's Greatest Achievement...The Most Beautiful Townsite and Community Center in the U.S.A.<sup>40</sup>

As further enticement and assurance to the black public of the resort enterprise's legitimacy, Dones presented the roster of his informal advisors and official board of advisors described as "some of the most influential and respected citizens of Los Angeles."<sup>41</sup> On December 26, 1924 a Eureka Villa Improvement Association, Inc. ad in the *California Eagle* included a photograph of each of the Advisory Board members with their Association committee assignments. These names, their professional and community standing and their

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<sup>40</sup> "Eureka Villa and Community Center" ad, *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 4; "What's In A Name?," *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 8; "Eureka Villa Community Center and Club" ad, *California Eagle*, 20 June 1924, 4; "California Colored People's Greatest Achievement, Eureka Villa" ad, *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 14.

<sup>41</sup> "Eureka Villa and Community Center" ad, *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 4.



Association affiliations published with the photographs represented community affirmation, as well as business legitimation and reassurance to buyers, and stressing their prominence and respectability to the black public. This encouraged the social practices of such leisure activity as respectable, and financial investment for pleasure and business purposes at Eureka Villa as solidly supported, forward-looking, and serving African American community advancement.<sup>42</sup>

An early published list of Board members with their photographs in a December 1924 Eureka Villa advertisement in the *California Eagle* included: Fred M. Roberts, California Assembly member, editor of the *New Age* newspaper and Publicity Committee; J.C. Banks, Sr. employed at U.S. Customs, former local head of the NAACP and vice president of the Association; Sidney P. Dones, president of the Association and president of the California Realty Board; Mrs. Ernestine Davidson, secretary of the Association and Eureka Villa Inn owner; Joseph B. Bass, editor of the *California Eagle* and chairman of the Publicity Committee; Dr. Emily B. Childress (later Portwig), pharmacist/community activist and Publicity Committee; Dr. E.D. Driver, pastor, Saints Home Holiness Church and Building Committee; Felix Waugh, Building Committee; Elbridge Lee, Street and Park Committee; Mrs. Virginia James, Building Committee; Mrs. Eliza Lawrence, Social Committee; Dr. Wm.B. Humphrey, M.D. a proprietor of the Oklahoma Drug Store (in Los Angeles) and on the Health and Sanitation Committee; W.M. Shelten, manager of the Indiana Realty Company and chairman of the Association's Building Committee; and George Cushnie, Water and Light Committee. These Board members' professional and civic work with their

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<sup>42</sup> "Eureka Villa Community Center and Club" ad, *California Eagle*, 20 June 1924, 4; "California Colored People's Greatest Achievement, Eureka Villa" ad, *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 14.

Association responsibilities demonstrated the breadth of commitment to this emerging leisure version of the “community assertion” uplift vision in the business venture of Eureka Villa.<sup>43</sup>

An early four-panel two-sided, sales brochure by the promoters titled “We Have Found It! Eureka Villa Community” with the subheading “Of interest to every colored American” stated, “Eureka Villa is, indeed, an ideal location as a health resort and future home, with great industrial and business possibilities.” The brochure features a cartoon map on one side with names of towns and the terrain one would drive through on a road from Los Angeles to Val Verde (including city buildings, and flat, rolling and mountainous landscape), giving viewers an impression of the contrast to the city they lived in and the place they could go to relax that was different a short distance away. On this page, an artist’s conception of the proposed clubhouse designed in a Spanish Colony Revival style is highlighted in a drawing in an insert box, which represented 1920s era modern, elite leisure and tourist services. The opposite side of the brochure features drawings of homes, farm and ranch products of chickens, eggs, grapes, corn and other produce, a rolling and mountainous landscape with a car and a truck on a road, and small industrial looking buildings, presenting an integration of economic self-determination, healthy living through real estate investment in a bucolic environment that might in the future offer further new economic development opportunities.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., “California Colored People’s Greatest Achievement, Eureka Villa” ad, *California Eagle*, 26 December 1924, 14; “Eureka Villa Over the Top,” Advisory Board Selected...,” *California Eagle*, 12 September 1924, 1; “Eureka Villa News,” *California Eagle*, 14 November 1924, 5; Flammig, *Bound For Freedom*, 195.

<sup>44</sup> “We Have Found It! Eureka Villa Community brochure (copy in author’s possession), Aubrey Provost Collection, no date. Evidence suggests this brochure was produced in the 1920s.

The collection of people, their institutional affiliations and responsibilities on the Association Board, the brochure's pictures and the text reinforced the themes of "health, wealth and happiness" that were the theme in Eureka Villa advertisements. These words were listed in the title block of the "Eureka Villa News" and subheading "Devoted Exclusively to the Interest of Eureka Villa" that topped a full-page insert, which ran for a good part of 1925 in the *California Eagle*, and other black press publications. This insert included expansive narrative sales articles, photographs and testimonials, little bits of gossip, lists of visitors and purchasers, and lot sales and business promotions related to Eureka Villa. Advertised in the black press were a variety of lot give away promotions as prizes at a beauty pageant, big community barbeques and picnics, and Sunday afternoon dances held at Eureka Villa to entice people to visit. In addition, black Angeleno real estate companies operated by W.M Shelten, A.J. Harris, Wood Wilson and Dones also ran Eureka Villa lot sales ads on other pages, separate from the full-page insert.<sup>45</sup>

As voiced through board member and chair of the Publicity Committee Joe Bass's editorial commentary in the *California Eagle* after a big picnic on September 28, 1924 dedicating the clubhouse grounds and opening of ranch properties for inspection, the promoters of Eureka Villa viewed its rise as a pioneering effort for black people with "great possibilities...and a rare opportunity...to test the capacity of our group to demonstrate their ability to do something for themselves along the line of real progress." In the early years the newspaper ad sales pitches and narrative discussions focused on this project as a "black business venture" for African Americans, the building of a clubhouse and recreational

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<sup>45</sup> "We Have Found It! Eureka Villa Community brochure (copy in author's possession), Aubrey Provost Collection, no date.

facilities, athletic and social activities possibilities, a town site, and an industrial and business center. Then and now, whether the location was indeed ideal for all these activities would be relative to one's tastes and vision, aspirations and access to opportunities for leisure and investment.<sup>46</sup>

The Eureka Villa sales pitch in the black press featured the development of leisure improvements and economic infrastructure along with the beauty of this California countryside construct of place, and its available water for health and daily use. The promoters touted a \$100,000 fund, or twenty percent of the gross sales of all lots that would be set aside to spend on recreational facility improvements at the community center "to make it the most desirable playground in Southern California." Forty acres were allocated for these improvements including building "a Club-house of massive Spanish design to cost \$50,000," a large spacious swimming pool with lockers and dressing rooms, pigeon shooting traps for gun marksmanship activities, tennis courts, a baseball diamond, picnic areas, a children's playground and other recreational features. Level Eureka Villa sites of 50 feet by 80 feet and larger were offered for \$75.00 and up with full deed and title to the land purchased. Lot purchasers could pay the low price of \$15.00 down, and \$10.00 per month with no interest or taxes. Free with each site purchased came a fully paid life membership in the community club, entitling the holder to all privileges the club would offer. Noted in more than one newspaper narrative was the covered open air dance pavilion constructed at the early stages of the marketing push and hunting opportunities for quail, rabbit and foxes along with hiking trails to see some of the Valley's natural wonders in such sites of Job's Peak and Zephyr

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<sup>46</sup> "We Have Found It! Eureka Villa Community brochure (copy in author's possession), Aubrey Provost Collection, no date; "Eureka Villa Over the Top," Advisory Board Selected..., *California Eagle*, 12 September 1924, 1; "Eureka Villa To Build Community Club," *California Eagle*, 19 September 1924, 3; "This Is Progress/Editorials," *California Eagle*, 3 October 1924, 6.

Cave. Transportation advertisements described the availability of reservations for bus service from Los Angeles to Eureka Villa. Ads also noted the accessibility and time schedule of two Southern Pacific Railroad trains per day stopping a mile from Eureka Villa, and that in the future arrangements might be made to collect passengers headed to Eureka Villa for a small fee.<sup>47</sup>

A combination endorsement and sales pitch narrative piece by Bass in the *California Eagle* on September 19, 1924 made explicit the participation as well as enthusiasm of the publisher for the new community. “Hon. J.B. Bass, a member of the Advisory Board of Eureka Villa, who has always been in the front ranks for things along progressive lines for members of the race,” asserted an industrial expert was making plans to construct a large laundry and a canning factory. He noted these two industries alone could employ more than 700 of “our people.” The article with Bass’s photograph at the top noted carpenters were already at work at Eureka Villa with “it [being] a known fact that nothing but Colored carpenters will be employed provided they can secure enough carpenters to work.” Announced here also, was that 160 acres of land (later identified as the Val Verde Tract) adjacent to Eureka Villa Tract was subdivided into one and half acre lots, and made available for chicken ranches and truck garden farms. A white Los Angeles resident who succeeded his father in the mercantile business as a successful manufacturer of automobile accessories and camping equipment, Harry M. Waterman (1878–1965) made this new Val Verde Tract subdivision available. Arriving in southern California with his family for health reasons in

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<sup>47</sup> “Eureka Villa and Community Center” ad, *California Eagle*, 13 June 1924, 4; “A Wonderful Investment!” ad, *California Eagle*, 27 June 1924, 4; “Eureka Villa Over the Top,” Advisory Board Selected...,” *California Eagle*, 12 September 1924, 1; “Eureka Villa News,” *California Eagle*, 14 November 1924, 5; “Eureka Villa News,” *California Eagle*, 21 November 1924, 8; “Eureka News,” *California Eagle*, 12 December 1924, 6; “Eureka Villa News/Geo. A. Cushnie,” *California Eagle*, 26 June 1925, 8.

1915 and initially living in San Diego, within three years time he moved his family to Los Angeles. Born in Michigan, Waterman owned a 700-acre ranch in the Eureka Villa/Val Verde area and was one of the area's original developers.<sup>48</sup>

Also described in this 1924 article and others, was the county of Los Angeles' extension, widening and surfacing improvements being made to the road off the main boulevard through Eureka Villa. Holding out the dream to get rich quick, there was the announcement of oil possibly being in the ground under Eureka Villa as described in a November 1925 article on the "Eureka Villa News" page. Courtland Petroleum Co. sought a community oil lease with individual lot purchasers after oil was found a mile north of Eureka Villa. Under this agreement the company would pay royalties to every property owner for any oil found at Eureka Villa regardless of which lot the oil was discovered under.<sup>49</sup>

Sidney P. Dones and his associates envisioned integrating all the basic components of both a leisure resort and a residential town infrastructure in Eureka Villa. They frequently reported their accomplishments to this end in the black press to entice people to visit, enjoy themselves, buy lots and build improvements at Eureka Villa. Practical concerns for a residential town site like a new schoolhouse and a place for church services were advertised, along with transportation infrastructure and water. A finance and building company was organized by Dones, which would build two to three room houses at a starting price of \$400. Businesses opened by those who bought lots within the first year of Eureka Villa's

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<sup>48</sup> "Eureka Villa To Build Community Club," *California Eagle*, 19 September 1924, 3; "Eureka Villa To Have Good Roads," *California Eagle*, 3 October 1924, 1; "Eureka Villa News," *California Eagle*, 19 December 1924, 3; Charles Hillinger, "Cattle, Oil Fields, Industries Thrive in Ridge Route Area, Negro Town Among Big Surprises," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1962, F1; "Val Verde Park, California 1960" bulletin, Presented by the Val Verde Chamber of Commerce, Saugus, California (copy in author's possession), 5; U.S. Census.

<sup>49</sup> "Eureka Villa To Build Community Club," *California Eagle*, 19 September 1924, 3; "Eureka Villa To Have Good Roads," *California Eagle*, 3 October 1924, 1; "Eureka Villa News," *California Eagle*, 19 December 1924, 3.

inauguration provided services and accommodations to visitors and potential lot buyers, and their individual and parties of guests were given extensive coverage in the *California Eagle's* regular feature, "Eureka Villa News."<sup>50</sup>

Several of the early business owners were members of the Eureka Villa Advisory Board. The Eureka Inn and Cafe, La Casa del Sol, the Three Buddies establishment, The Humming Bird Inn, Mosley's Oriental Lunch Room and Inn, and Mrs. Ethel Davis offered refreshments, meals and a few rooms for overnight stays. It was advertised that large picnic groups could make reservations to have their events catered by these local establishments. A limited number of camping tents and cots could be rented via reservation for weekends. Horses and burros were also advertised as being available to rent for rides around the valley and mountains surrounding Eureka Villa. The promoters and other groups created social events around holidays that included beauty pageants, dances, picnics, special religious services and specials on weekend stays to entice visitation and generate lot purchases.<sup>51</sup>

Extensive marketing in the black press in California and select cities across the nation, brochures, information meetings in Los Angeles and promotional social events at Eureka Villa and in Los Angeles were complimented by Sidney P. Dones' promotional tours to several U.S. cities. The *California Eagle* reported Dones spoke at the Negro Business League's national conference and chapter meetings with the "hopes to interest eastern capitalists and building manufacturers in industries of all kinds at Eureka [Villa]." On two

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<sup>50</sup> "Eureka Villa Townsite, The Week, Race Progress," *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa," *California Eagle*, 24 April 1925, 5; "Eureka Villa News" page, *California Eagle*, 26 June 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa News/Mrs. Ethel Davis Drills Well in the First Unit," *California Eagle*, 4 December 1925, 5.

<sup>51</sup> "Eureka Villa Townsite, The Week, Race Progress," *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa," *California Eagle*, 24 April 1925, 5; "Eureka Villa News" page, *California Eagle*, 26 June 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa News/Mrs. Ethel Davis Drills Well in the First Unit," *California Eagle*, 4 December 1925, 5.

different trips in 1925, Dones visited Tuskegee Institute (Alabama), Tulsa, Kansas City, Richmond (Virginia), New York, Atlantic City, Chicago, Memphis and many other places. A December 19, 1924, *California Eagle* article reported that Dones would take along on this tour commissioned professional photographs of “[Eureka Villa’s] grounds...park...the many beautiful oaks and cabins,” that were to be distributed for display with ads in various colored businesses throughout the U.S. This newspaper article added newsreels of Eureka Villa were to be made and distributed in the near future.<sup>52</sup>

Dones also stopped to visit the black soldiers of the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers) at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where Mrs. Mary E. Carver (the wife of Chaplain Monroe S. Carver) was recruited as a representative to give out information concerning Eureka Villa to soldiers. Some non-commissioned officers and enlisted men bought lots early at Eureka Villa. Chaplain Carver and his wife had purchased lots in Eureka Villa and Los Angeles for their life in retirement. Chaplain Carver seems to have been encouraging soldiers to secure land and homes for themselves at retirement in California, including in the Val Verde Tract at Eureka Villa. Two ambitious officers from Fort Huachuca even purchased “a beautiful site” to build the “Buffalo Hotel.” The “Eureka Villa News” section in the *California Eagle* on September 28, 1925 reported this structure would cost \$75,000 to construct, and would “be one of the finest erected by any group in America.” Other African Americans from across the U.S. were mentioned in the town site’s news page of the *Eagle* as visiting and sometimes purchasing lots. Dones and his associates were leaving no marketing

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<sup>52</sup> This author has not found evidence the newsreels were produced at this date. “Eureka Villa News,” *California Eagle*, 19 December 1924, 3; “Sidney P. Dones,” *California Eagle*, 4 September 1925, 1.



avenue and potential lot purchasers unexplored within their resources to make Eureka Villa a success.<sup>53</sup>

In the dawning months of 1925 during the height of Eureka Villa's promotion, lot sales and early improvements, the leisure community project contended for recruits with a new beach club project for black Angeleno consumers south of the city. Accessible by the Pacific Electric's Balboa Car, less than two hours by car and thirty-five miles south from Los Angeles near Huntington Beach in Orange County, the Pacific Beach Club development was announced in February 1925. Club construction was under way, "progressing as fast as it [was] humanly possible for it to do so." Membership promotion began almost immediately with a sales force, brochures and announcements in the black press, locally and in cities around the U.S. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Sunday, March 22, 1925. In a *California Eagle* article reporting this news and to entice people to attend the opening day program, Mr. Peace, the sale manager for the Pacific Beach Club boasted "the Colored people of Southern California will inaugurate one of the foremost progressive steps ever entered into by the race in any part of the country." The March 20, 1925 article linked the development to the struggle for public space, declaring that, "This opening will be a monument to many race leaders who have worked for many years to obtain for their people a piece of the Pacific with its surf and sands where they may go and enjoy a day on the beach." The advertisements urged everyone in the African American community to immediately get behind this project and purchase the limited number of club life memberships that would be sold, or they would lose out on the opportunity. For African Americans as citizen consumers

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<sup>53</sup> The pursuit of U.S. Army soldiers was also part of the Allenworth's lot sales effort. "Eureka Villa News/ Mrs. Mary Carter/ Eureka Villa Invades U.S. Army," *California Eagle*, 11 September 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa News/ Warrant Officers Wade O. Hammond and V.H. Marchbank," *California Eagle*, 28 September 1925, 8.

to finally obtain a place of their own at this premier “Frontier of Leisure” location, a California beach, was indeed a momentous occasion of group pride and mobility. Even as it contended for attention and membership with Eureka Villa, the African American ownership and agency in developing the Pacific Beach Club project was another significant moment of contestation of the era’s racial hierarchies and exclusion from leisure and other accommodations consumption.<sup>54</sup>

A *California Eagle* editorial item gave enthusiastic support to both Eureka Villa and the Pacific Beach Club. The April 3, 1925 text titled “Fortunate Indeed,” explained that just like Euro-American people, African Americans in southern California and visitors from other parts of the county could enjoy Eureka Villa’s country home site and the Pacific Beach Club “for seasonal pleasure and amusement.” Just as with the Eureka Villa promotion, Los Angeles’ leading black newspapers’ ownership and editorial departments at the *California Eagle*, *New Age*, and *Pacific Defender* had business, civic and personal relationship stakes in the success of the Pacific Beach Club. These newspapers reported and promoted these leisure ventures not only for their own reasons, but as news their primarily black readership would want to know and pay for.<sup>55</sup>

Editors Joseph B. Bass, Frederick M. Roberts and Fred C. Williams supported this project lead by E. Burton Ceruti, Esq., the president of the Board of Directors of the Pacific Beach Club. Born in 1875 in Nassau, the Bahamas West Indies, Ceruti’s family moved to

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<sup>54</sup> “Beach Resort A Reality,” *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; “Pacific Beach Club Announces Grand Opening & Ground Breaking Sunday, March 22, 1925,” *California Eagle*, 20 March 1925, 1; “Only One Way/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 11 September 1925, 6; “Pacific Beach Club Opening on March 22 Huge Success,” *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 1; “Opportunity No. 1 Passes Monday Morning, April 6” ad, *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 2.

<sup>55</sup> “Fortunate Indeed/Editorials,” 3 April 1925, *California Eagle*, 6; “10 Things To Remember” Pacific Beach Club ad, *California Eagle*, 18 September 1925, 4.

New York when he was four years old. A founder of the Los Angeles Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who also served as its legal advisor, Ceruti began practicing law in 1912 in California. The historian Delilah Beasley called Ceruti “the most competent attorney among the colored profession in California.” He was very successful fighting criminal cases and discrimination cases about housing and refusals to serve African Americans in public accommodations like movie theatres and restaurants. As an advocate for the NAACP, he prominently assisted in suppression of D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* film (1915) as well as the film titled *Free and Equal* (1918), and led the effort to end discrimination against African Americans by the Los Angeles County Hospital’s Training School for Nurses (1917).<sup>56</sup>

Hal H. Clark, a white lawyer and businessman, worked with black Angeleno leaders and financiers to launch the Pacific Beach Club project. In a Club association syndication deal with the black investment group, Clark provided more than seven acres, 1,000 feet along the ocean frontage between Huntington Beach and Newport Beach for lease along with the majority of the initial financing to develop the Pacific Beach Club, a pleasure ground organized exclusively for African American membership and use. The syndicate would get the beach property at the expiration of a ten-year period and the fulfillment of some financial terms. The Pacific Electric and Southern Pacific Rail lines, and the then new Coast Boulevard bordered the property. From available evidence about the Pacific Beach Club it is unclear whether Clark was recruited by, or sought out the African American partners for the

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<sup>56</sup> “Fortunate Indeed/Editorials,” *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 6; “10 Things To Remember” Pacific Beach Club ad, , *California Eagle*, 18 September 1925, 4; “Prominent Men Endorse Pacific Beach Club,” *California Eagle*, 15 January 1926, 6; Beasley, 192-194, 200.

business venture. Further it is unclear what Clark's previous business relationships may have been with Ceruti or other African American investors in the project.<sup>57</sup>

Clark proceeded with the project over strongly registered objections raised by various organizations in Orange County such as the Huntington Beach and Newport Beach chambers of commerce, and the Huntington Beach City Trustees. Clark had to use an obscure statute “[to petition] the State Railroad Commission for an order authorizing the construction of a private right of way to the property...shut off by other lands” to obtain access rights across the tracks from the Pacific Electric Railway and Southern Pacific Railroad. Clark's petition to the Commission occurred after the two companies rescinded their original permission to construct a concrete underground crossing for easy and safe access to the grounds, due to opposition pressure from Orange County groups. City of Huntington Beach officials tried to keep electricity and water services from being extended to the Club. Repeated efforts were proposed to and by the Orange County Supervisors to take the Club property through condemnation and eminent domain proceedings for public use as a (white only) park.<sup>58</sup>

The Pacific Beach Club's leadership included many of black Los Angeles' affluent and well established medical, dental and law professionals and aspirational business owners such as Dr. R.S. Whittaker, Dr. Charles S. Diggs, Dr. H. Claude Hudson, Dr. J.T. Smith, Clarence A. Jones, Esq., Mamie V. White (employment agency owner) and others of similar high standing. Other prominent black citizens, who were leading supporters and eventually

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<sup>57</sup> “Beach Club is Proposed by Negroes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1925, 19; “Beach Resort A Reality,” *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; “Beach Lost to Race for \$35,000 to House \$1,000,000 White Club House,” *Topeka Plain Dealer*, 1 April 1927, 4.

<sup>58</sup> “Beach Club is Proposed by Negroes,” 2 April 1925, *Los Angeles Times*, 19; “Beach Resort A Reality,” *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; George Perry, “\$100,000 Race Beach Resort Faces Foreclosure,” *Topeka Plain Dealer*, 29 October 1926, 2; “Refuse Permission to Extend Service,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1925, 6; Pacific Coast Resort Butted By Fire; White Who Made Threats Are Blamed,” *The Chicago Defender*, 30 January 1926, 1.

became members of the Club's Board of Directors, included several doctors who were also deeply engaged in other community building and civic endeavors. Dr. Wilbur C. Gordon, involved in Lake Elsinore and the Parkridge Country Club, and developer of the residential subdivision Gordon Manor was one. Dr. Albert Baumann, who owned several pharmacies and was civically active during the 1920s–1930s as chairman of the Board of Management of the Young Men's Christian Association, president of the Urban League, and other civic groups was another. Baumann and Gordon were both Board members of Liberty Building Loan Association, as well, founded in the 1920s. Other Pacific Beach Club Board members included Dr. (Georgia K.) Boone C. Offut (Chiropracist), Dr. William R. Carter, Dr. J.T. Smith and Dr. Batie Robinson. Whether a marketing ploy or a self-reflecting expectation, a *California Eagle* ad described the promoters as having lofty hopes “the membership of the Club [would be] filled with doctors, musicians, artists and business men of the Country.”<sup>59</sup>

In an ad to entice membership sales for their exclusive African American club, the promoters effusively proclaimed this project as one that “initiates the beginning of the very foremost step of progress that the colored people have ever attempted.” Just as the Eureka Villa promoters, they viewed their venture as a monumental accomplishment for all African Americans across the country. They pronounced the Pacific Beach Club “a permanent

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<sup>59</sup> “Pacific Beach Club Pays Off To All Members,” *California Eagle*, 28 January 1927, 1; “Prominent Men Endorse Pacific Beach Club,” *California Eagle*, 15 January 1926, 6; “Beach Resort A Reality,” *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; “No. 1, A Series of Ten Talks About Pacific Beach Club” ad, *California Eagle*, 9 October 1925, 6; *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who 1930-1931* (Published by The California Eagle Publishing Company), “Baumann, Albert–Pharmacist,” no page numbers.

landmark to the ever forward and aggressive spirit of those tireless leaders of Southern California.”<sup>60</sup>

In the 1920s there were only a few African Americans living in Orange County. Sometimes there were social mentions and news of their activities from Fullerton and Anaheim correspondents contributing to the *California Eagle*. To stake out a claim on prime beachfront property, in an area experiencing growth due to the era’s oil boom over objections by Orange County residents, on land that was many miles from Los Angeles’ Central Avenue District was an ambitious and bold move by this African American investment group and their white ally. This project may have also provided stiff competition for the promoters of the Eureka Villa subdivision.<sup>61</sup>

The description of the club’s buildings and their intended use indicates that the planners had a grand and luxurious vision for the beach leisure site they were erecting. Billed as the “Queen of the Pacific” in ads, the Club planned improvements were projected to cost \$250,000 for several buildings elaborately decorated in Egyptian Revival style architecture with an electrically lighted boardwalk. Once it was built, the clubhouse interior was called a “Mother of Pearl Fairyland.” The structure was described in a newspaper ad “[as a] gorgeously decorated palace [with] walls and ceiling...decorated with layers of Mother of Pearl Leaf” radiating the natural multiple colors of pearls in the dark of night or light of day. The building was touted as offering plenty of room and comfort to accommodate 5,000 people for lectures, conventions, concerts and other theatrical performances, dances and balls

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<sup>60</sup> “An Invitation to a Limited Number of Colored People in Southern California to Become Members...” ad, *California Eagle*, 13 March 1925, 3; “Draw Up Nearer Folks” ad, *California Eagle*, 27 March 1925, 4.

<sup>61</sup> The 2012 U.S. Census reported African Americans only made up two percent (61,917) of Orange County’s population (3,090,132). Orange County QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau, From the Internet: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06059.html>, 17 February 2014.

as well as banquets. There were also smaller lounges for more intimate group socializing, billiards and smoking. Balconies for entertainers and people watching, stage fountains and rest rooms were celebrated in the ad. The modern and sanitary bathhouse featuring generous sunlight into the interior was to accommodate 1,000 men and 600 women with 2,000 lockers, showers and dressing rooms.<sup>62</sup>

The clubhouse, dance hall and bathhouse exteriors were described as having a beautiful, cream stucco finish. Topping the clubhouse pavilion was to be a roof garden behind glass enclosures complemented by electric lighted towers where patrons could look out at the Pacific Ocean and see Catalina Island on a clear day. The plans also included a 450-seat auditorium with a huge stage and a concession area with a restaurant, drug store, small grocery store and other concessions generally found at the beach. Two hundred fifty tent cottages were to be constructed for patrons on the beach to rent for a nominal fee for a week or more, as well as a children's playground. The Club property was to be surrounded by a six-foot high ornamental steel fence with parking space provided inside the grounds, with property attendants. This security was necessary to maintain the property benefits for club members and their families and friends, and for safety to keep out undesirables, such as whites who might try to harass and do harm to the grounds and its inhabitants. When possible concessions were to be operated by club members and African Americans were to manage and perform all work upon the grounds.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "Beach Club is Proposed by Negroes," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1925, 19; "Beach Resort A Reality," *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; "A Series of Ten Talks About Pacific Beach Club, Talk No. 4" ad, *California Eagle*, 6 November 1925, 7; "Draw Up Nearer Folks," *California Eagle*, 27 March 1925, 4.

<sup>63</sup> "A Series of Ten Talks About Pacific Beach Club, Talk No. 4" ad, *California Eagle*, 6 November 1925, 7; "A Series of Ten Talks About Pacific Beach Club, Talk No. 5" ad, *California Eagle*, 13 November 1925, 7; "Beach Resort A Reality," *California Eagle*, 20 February 1925, 1; "Draw Up Nearer Folks," *California Eagle*,

Life memberships in the Pacific Beach Club were offered for \$80.00 with a deferred payment plan, if needed. Sales persons were recruited and a sales bonus incentives contest offered cash prizes, exotic domestic and international trips, and jewelry prizes to those who sold the most club memberships. Interested parties were encouraged to drive out or take the Pacific Electric Railway to see the construction of the club and beautiful beach front. Several big promotional events were held. The biggest event was the Bathing Girl/Children Contest and Beauty Parade on Labor Day, Monday, September 7, 1925. At the time bathing girl parades were considered all the vogue, with successful programs having recently taken place in Long Beach and Venice. The club's program was billed as the biggest entertainment event of the season, and the first ever beauty parade given for African Americans on the Pacific Coast. The Club promoters capitalized on this popular and modern trend to entice people to come out for the holiday with a contest offering black young women and children the opportunity to win eight various sized, engraved silver cups with cash prizes from \$25.00 up to the Grand prize of \$100. In addition for prosperity, and the young women with cinema aspirations, moving pictures were to be taken of the parade and the crowd.<sup>64</sup>

Several thousand people attended the beauty parade, waded in the surf, brought their lunch baskets and danced all day to a live band. The *California Eagle* wrote the event "was one wonderful gathering" and that "never before in the history of Western America have so many people of the Negro race gathered at one event." The local Orange County newspaper

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27 March 1925, 4; "No. 1, A Series of Ten Talks About Pacific Beach Club" ad, *California Eagle*, 9 October 1926, 6; "Bathing Beauties Attract Many Thousand Spectators to New Pacific Beach Club," *California Eagle*, 11 September 1925, 7.

<sup>64</sup> "Draw Up Nearer Folks," *California Eagle*, 27 March 1925, 4; "Attention Salespeople for Pacific Beach Sales Organization" ad, *California Eagle*, 3 April 1925, 8; "A Growing Success, The Pacific Beach Club" ad, 21 August 1925, 6; "Who is Your Favorite?...." ad, *California Eagle*, 8 January 1926, 10; "Pacific Beach Club Stages Spectacular Parade," *California Eagle*, 28 August 1925, 1.



noted the crowd was so large the local authorities requested assistance from the Sheriff's office to manage the highway traffic. The black newspaper noted that the programming ran with no confusion and that the "conduct of the monster crowd was above reproach" and peaceful. The "exceptionally clear," moving pictures taken during the entire Labor Day event of the beauties and crowd scenes was written about in the black press and shown for a few weeks at the Rosebud Theatre in Los Angeles. A few photographs taken at this Labor Day event are the only known visual archive available in 2015. The images of these "New Negro" people, their style and beauty, race, class, identity, political assertion and pride, as well as the Pacific Beach Club site, preserve these collective memories. In 1925, the moving picture and photographic documentation of the Pacific Beach Club event would have been a visual representation of African American contestation and resistance to being ascribed second-class citizenship. Then as now, these images were and are empowering as a self-representation and re-articulation of aesthetic and ideological issues, in the same manner as the racial uplift rhetoric of words written in the black press worked to promote their participation and desires as fully equal citizen consumers.<sup>65</sup>

The Pacific Beach Club promoters aggressively marketed lifetime club membership sales, made steady progress in their building program and towards a fully operational facility throughout 1925 into early 1926. Simultaneously, Eureka Villa promoters continued, and competed in their marketing and sales efforts to attract lot buyers with the Pacific Beach

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<sup>65</sup> "Bathing Beauties Attract Many Thousand Spectators to New Pacific Beach Club," *California Eagle*, 11 September 1925, 7. My discussion about the significance of the visual moving picture and photographic representations and preservation of cultural memories are informed by my reading of Deborah Willis' *Posing Beauty, African American Images from the 1890s to Present* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009). Images of the Pacific Beach Bathing Girl/Children Contest and Beauty Parade from September 7, 1925 can be view in Willis' book on pages 122-123. The author also has in her collection photographs from the September 7, 1925 Pacific Beach Club event found in Los Angeles. It is mostly professional historians documenting the Pacific Beach Club who are aware of the rich, although limited visual and written archives of the Club; scant is the popular memory of the site and sources about it.

Club's efforts to sell memberships. One promotion among many marked the first anniversary of Eureka Villa's founding on June 28, 1925 with a big parade down Central Avenue in Los Angeles and travel on to Eureka Villa for a special musical program for the occasion by the popular Sunnyland Band. Souvenirs and banners were furnished for all cars in the parade, and prizes were given to winners in various athletic contests. A Ladies Sport Suit Contest offered a \$5.00 cash prize and the first payment on any residential lot in Unit 3 at Eureka Villa. In 1925 Independence Day (July 4) was another big Eureka Villa promotional event. A free barbecue picnic held Labor Day (first Monday in September) at Eureka Villa, directly competed for much of the same audience's attention as the Pacific Beach Club's Bathing Girl/Children Contest and Beauty Parade and beach party promotion.<sup>66</sup>

Both sets of promoters were vying for black consumption spending on new safe places for leisure time opportunities in different kinds of lifestyle locations. Both ventures sought black investment dollars in land and improvements that could potentially increase tremendously in value over the years if the southern California population grew in the directions of these specific leisure developments. The Pacific Beach, however was not envisioned as a residential community development, though a subtext was that housing might develop in the vicinity, as some facility staff would need places to live outside the club grounds. Southern California black leaders and venture promoters of both developments asked African Americans to be bold and fearless, have vision and invest for their own current and future pleasure and prosperity, and that of their community.

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<sup>66</sup> "Eureka Villa News/Eureka Villa Mountains Are Calling You..." ad & "Big Celebration Sat. and Sun. at Eureka Villa," *California Eagle*, 26 June 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa News/Fourth of July Will be Big Day at Eureka," *California Eagle*, 3 July 1925, 8; "Eureka Villa News/Free Barbecue at Eureka Villa Labor Day" ad, *California Eagle*, 4 September 1925, 8.

Nineteen twenty-six (1926) was a decisive year for the ventures of Eureka Villa and the Pacific Beach Club as viable leisure communities and in how they would be remembered. In the early morning of January 21, 1926, the almost completed first phase construction of the Pacific Beach Club's clubhouse, bathhouse and dance pavilion mysteriously burned almost to the ground just weeks before the facility was to be formally opened on February 12, 1926, Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Open threats had been made by white Orange County citizens that they would never allow the Pacific Beach Club to operate as a pleasure resort for African Americans. The fire was the culmination of a series of obstacles and attacks made by opponents to halt the development. Local general and African American press reported authorities made an investigation, but no arrests for the arson attack were ever made.<sup>67</sup>

Clark had invested \$150,000 in the club's building program. There was talk of resuming the building program once he collected the fire insurance money. After long, continuous considerations of all the options for the Pacific Beach Club grounds and a review of all the complications of the business transaction, a majority of the Charter and other members voted to give up trying to rebuild the facility. From Clark's insurance proceeds and his sale of the property to white investors, the black investors fortunately were refunded their money plus a ten percent premium. All legitimate creditors also received the money they were owed with ten percent interest. The one bright spot in this whole affair was that the contract drawn up with Clark by Attorney Ceruti and the syndicate's management had

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<sup>67</sup> Pacific Beach In Ashes," *California Eagle*, 22 January 1926, 1; "Pacific Coast Resort Guttled by Fire: Whites Who Made Threats are Blamed," *The Chicago Defender*, 30 January 1926, 1; "Inquire Begun in Club Blaze," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 1926, A20; "Arson Arrests Expected," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1926, A8; "Arsonist Burn Negro Beach Club," *Santa Ana Register*, 21 January 1926, 1.

protected the interests of the Club members and creditors. This story of the Pacific Beach Club then went on to be mostly forgotten.<sup>68</sup>

### **Eureka Villa Emerges as Val Verde**

Eureka Villa continued on through and after the Pacific Beach Club's fire and its resolution. In *California Eagle* advertisements about Eureka Villa from 1926 to 1928 announcements were made of financial troubles, legal entanglements and their resolutions, new management, new investment and new improvements. Sidney P. Dones, the Eureka Villa Advisory Board he headed up, and the white landowner Laura C. Janes discontinued management of the promotion of Eureka Villa. The Eureka Villa Finance Corporation became the owners and underwriters of Eureka Villa now consisting of 720 acres of land. Dones continued to sell lots from the land in the original "Eureka Villa" area that he probably had personally interests in as an owner or real estate broker. His name would be less and less associated with Eureka Villa as the years went by.<sup>69</sup>

The pleasure site got a boost in 1927 when white business people associated with the development gave fifty-three acres to Los Angeles County for a park. In future years, Val Verde landowner and real estate developer Harry M. Waterman would become the white businessman most associated with the parkland donation and the area's continued development efforts. After money for improvements had vanished due to mismanagement by earlier area developers and some of their representatives no longer associated with

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<sup>68</sup> "Pacific Beach Club Pays Off to All Members," *California Eagle*, 28 January 1927, 1-2; "Beach Lost to Race for \$35,000 to House \$1,000,000 White Club House," *Topeka Plain Dealer*, 1 April 1927, 4.

<sup>69</sup> "Eureka Villa" ad, *California Eagle*, 23 July 1926, 2; "Eureka Villa" ad, *California Eagle*, 17 September 1926, 2; "Sidney Preston Dones/Eureka Villa-X-Mas Present" ad, *California Eagle*, 18 November 1927, 2; "Sidney P. Dones/Associated Loan Company" ad, *California Eagle*, 27 January 1928, 5.

management of Eureka Villa, one thousand lot owners of Eureka Villa and white landholder Waterman petitioned Los Angeles County supervisor Jack H. Bean (on Board 1919–1928) for assistance of a \$25,000 appropriation for needed improvements. The involvement of the county of Los Angeles and Supervisor Bean provided a new foundation, as well as much-needed financial and other stimulus for the growth of the black resort and the area in general.<sup>70</sup>

With a new park and this county of Los Angeles investment, the area began another transition from being known as “Eureka Villa” to “Val Verde,” the area’s earlier name. Immediately the county drew up plans to build for the public the amenities the early Eureka Villa promoters from the start had intended to develop for the exclusive pleasure of resort community lot holders and visitors. For starters “a beautiful Club House” costing \$20,000 was to be built. More money for landscaping and other improvements for use and pleasure at the park site would be spent. In a *California Eagle* ad promoting a free barbecue on July 4, 1928 at the newly designated park site “at Eureka Villa and Val Verde,” these improvements were enthusiastically described as “making this one of the most beautiful recreation parks in Southern California.” An improved water system was planned for installation. Like the Parkridge Country Club in Corona, Val Verde took the opportunity to capitalize on events to grab national attention for their pleasure site with a big event during the NAACP National Convention in 1928. Val Verde’s new amenities were promoted to the local and national public for potential lot sales by the Ambassador Park Company ad inviting delegates attending the 1928 NAACP National Convention in Los Angeles and everyone else to hear

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<sup>70</sup> “Val Verde Park – Historical Information,” Val Verde Park File, Department of Parks and Recreation, County of Los Angeles; “Free–Barbecue Picnic–Free” ad, *California Eagle*, 29 June 1928, 3; “Supervisor Jack H. Bean, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors,” From the Internet: <http://file.lacounty.gov/lac/jbean.pdf>, 20 February 2014.

public speakers and enjoy various forms of entertainment to celebrate America's Independence Day.<sup>71</sup>

The new Val Verde Park Community Clubhouse construction was completed in time to accommodate visitors for Easter Sunrise Hill services on March 31, 1929. This spring program would continue on as one of the big annual events held at Val Verde for decades into the future. From the top of Sunrise Hill on a clear day one can see a distance of fifty miles with "the natural eye." As for the clubhouse, the lovely building became a well-utilized facility as noted by the social events held there that were mentioned in the black press. Spending on landscaping and other improvements such as picnic tables, barbecue pits, ball fields and children's playground, and social event news and the names of visitors from varied southern California and out of state communities at Val Verde would continue to be announced in advertisements and the "Val Verde News" column in the *California Eagle* and the *New Age* throughout 1930s.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to Easter Sunrise Hill services, festivities planned at Decoration Day (now called Memorial Day), Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and during the Christmas holidays would also bring larger crowds of families, clubs and other larger organizations, sometimes numbering in the thousands out to the hills and canyons of Val Verde. From the names of visitors listed in the "Val Verde News" and those noted as signing the Guest Register at the Clubhouse, black Angelenos and visitors from other places were most often of the socially active, more affluent professional, business and entertainment

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<sup>71</sup> "Free-Barbecue Picnic-Free" ad, *California Eagle*, 29 June 1928, 3.

<sup>72</sup> "Thousands are Coming to Worship...on Sunrise Hill Val Verde" ad, *California Eagle*, 29 March 1930, 5; "Thousands of Dollars Are Being Spent at Val Verde..." ad, *California Eagle*, 2; "Val Verde News," *California Eagle*, 13 March 1931, 6; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 348-349.

classes. Other African Americans of the blue-collar class also visited, although, they were less likely to be written about in the black press. The “Val Verde News” section of the *California Eagle* cited people’s varied accommodations for overnight stays and day visits. Visitors continued slowly buying lots and building cottages or cabins. Some stayed with friends who owned places already in Val Verde, some camped in tents and others rented accommodations. They socialized, took hikes to view the natural scenery, barbecued, picnicked, played games of various sorts, participated in athletic competitions, hunted game, rode horses and burros and held varied cultural events. They rejuvenated themselves as well as celebrated various personal and public occasions. They also sometimes networked for employment or business opportunities, and gained knowledge from various public speakers invited to present at Val Verde events. A few continued to open establishments servicing visitors and some even has small livestock ranches. A few visitors even established permanent residence at Val Verde.

Val Verde came to be dubbed by some as the “black Palm Springs” in the 1940s. Its persistence represented meaningful progress for African Americans’ community pride and spatial imaginary in southern California’s public space after the struggle to build and sustain leisure projects in the 1920s and 1930s. Through organizers’ initiative, eventual public support and funding, and interest in subdivision development aided by sympathetic white capitalists, black Angelenos were able to construct a pleasure spot practically of their own. For the most part black Angelenos did not embrace the black town concept and rejected characterization of Val Verde Park as segregated facilities. Yet they adeptly won funding for a county park as a group excluded by the prevailing “Negro-only situation.” The government

funding helped the rustic resort slowly blossom during the 1930s and renewed community interest in Val Verde. This resort launched by African Americans in Los Angeles as a response of self-determination to the exclusion and humiliation they experienced from white Americans when they tried to exercise their rights as free and equal citizens and consumers, accepted this type of racial separatism.<sup>73</sup>

As scholar George Lipsitz argues, whites in southern California and across the U.S. created segregated neighborhoods and schools, all-white work places, exclusive country club and subdivisions, and the prosperous, properly gendered white suburban home, taking advantage of massively subsidized services, amenities, tax breaks and transportation opportunities unavailable to African American residences. Winning the government funding of park improvements in the same manner as whites had so many times before and after this time period, African Americans in conjunction with white capitalists allies were able to take advantage of the taxes they paid as citizens “for resources, rights, and recognition.” Black Angelenos put the government funding to advantageous use in developing the country retreat at Val Verde to create not only a place for leisure but new opportunities and life chances for accumulation of assets that could potentially appreciate in value and be passed down across generations.<sup>74</sup>

Having claimed and won a share of local funding, in 1936 Val Verde property owners and promoters pressed further through Los Angeles County supervisor Gordon McDonough to obtain a federal government New Deal Work Progress Administration (WPA) funded project to build a bathhouse and the latest fully equipped model of Olympic-size swimming

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<sup>73</sup> See “Eureka Villa News” articles in the *California Eagle* from 1930-1940 for site improvements, social and cultural news and events; Flammig, *Bound for Freedom*, 349.

<sup>74</sup> George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 51-56.



pool. Once built, the pool was the second largest in the entire county. The bathhouse design was in a Spanish Revival style with individual lockers, showers and dressing rooms. Eventually state and WPA funding allocations added up to more than a half million dollars for the bathhouse, swimming pool and other park improvements when the new pool opened in July 1940. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* newspaper highlighted that although most of the surrounding home and ranch sites are owned by “Negroes,” the area is not restricted to “the race.” The February 1, 1940 article also went on to remind its readers the public park grounds and facilities were always open to all citizens. The Great Depression may have been in full tilt, but it did not slow black Angelenos social mobilization and resourceful politics in adaptively developing public and private spaces in Val Verde.<sup>75</sup>

At the cornerstone laying and dedication ceremony for the bathhouse and the swimming pool on April 16, 1939, Dr. Emily B. (Childress) Portwig, the first property and home owner in Val Verde spoke for the pioneers in the community and for the Val Verde Improvement Association led by the then current president, Mrs. Hattie Baldwin. Dr. (Childless) Portwig gave a little history of how Sidney P. Dones discovered the tract owned by Mrs. Laura Janes through his sales efforts with the Peaceful Valley Country Club development in 1924. She gave thanks to deceased Supervisor Jack Bean and black Angeleno James “Jim” Vena, Jr. (1895–1966) of a pioneer family that arrived in the city in the 1890s, for first helping to make possible the clubhouse, and to other county officials who carried their good work forward to that April 1939 day.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> “Val Verde To Be Improved,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 2 July 1936, 1; “Swimming Pool At Val Verde Near Finish,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1 February 1940, 1; Flaming, *Bound For Freedom*, 349.

<sup>76</sup> “Item Number 15: Possible Speech of Emily Brown [Childress] Portwig,” Val Verde Time Capsule,

There were more than 3,500 people in attendance, including County of Los Angeles supervisors Gordon L. McDonough and John Anson Ford, the Jefferson High School band, and movie thespians Hattie McDaniels (who would soon make history as the first African American to win an Academy Award for her acting in *Gone With the Wind*, 1939), Louise Beavers, Clint Rosemond and Ernest Whitman. Harry M. Waterman, who gave the acreage for the park and Col. Wilkinson, the superintendent of Los Angeles County Parks, along with two representatives from the WPA took part in the program. Local and national black press reported that African American business and civic leaders in attendance mentioned in the local and national black press included Norman O. Houston and George A. Beavers (leaders of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance), Dr. H. Claude Hudson and Betty Hill (of the NAACP, Los Angeles Branch), Charlotta Bass (*California Eagle* publisher and civic activist), Frederick M. Roberts (*New Age* publisher, businessman and former California Assembly member), L.G. Robinson (head of the maintenance staff for the Los Angeles County, civic activist and an Angelus Funeral Home co-owner) and Dr. Vadia Sommerville (dentist and civic activist). For the *California Eagle*, civic activist and “well-known newspaper woman” Fay M. Jackson covered the event.<sup>77</sup>

The development of Val Verde Park was a history-making event for black Angelenos and the county of Los Angeles Supervisor Gordon McDonough enthused in the letter he submitted for inclusion in the bathhouse building cornerstone time capsule, “When the pool

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Department of Parks & Recreation, County of Los Angeles, 1939; U.S. Census. Whether Sidney P. Dones was at the event is not clear. He was not listed as being present at the program in any of the newspaper accounts or time capsule contents of the day available for review by the author.

<sup>77</sup> No first name for Col. Wilkinson was printed in newspaper accounts or was found in the records of the Department of Parks & Recreation, County of Los Angeles Archives. “Happy Throngs See Cornerstone Laid at Val Verde,” *California Eagle*, 20 April 1939, 1, 5A; Flammig, *Bound for Freedom*, 349.

is completed this improvement will establish Val Verde Park as one of the major regional recreational areas of Los Angeles County.” Although New Deal programs sanctioned discrimination against African Americans, there was a change in the status and perception about African Americans’ rights as a substantive political issue for government and society in the 1930s. The Park’s development was one of the tangible benefits that African Americans pulled from the federal government in the 1930s, part of the limited but greater public returns than previous decades had won. This project and others like it around the U.S. showed African Americans and their white allies potential for and hope in federal action against public exacerbation of inequality, and the influence of their agency and activism.<sup>78</sup>

Fay M. Jackson optimistically wrote in her article reporting on the new swimming pool facilities that it appeared “this colony will become one of the most exclusive Negro gathering places in the country.” Waterman had slowed his push to sell Val Verde lots in the lead up to the Park’s latest improvements until they were just about completed. He stated in a February 1, 1940, *Los Angeles Sentinel* article he wanted potential buyers to see the area as attractive, as “an ideal country home and ranch site for small wage earners and retired workers.” By the time the swimming pool opened, Waterman had built display homes that lot purchasers could choose to have built on them. Accounts tell of Waterman going up and down Central Avenue, Los Angeles’ main African American business district, recruiting people to come out to Val Verde Park for the aquatic facilities cornerstone dedication ceremonies, and to stop by his real estate office to put a \$5.00 deposit on a “ranch site.” It is

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<sup>78</sup> “Item Number 76c: Letter from Gordon L. McDonough, Supervisor 2<sup>nd</sup> District, Los Angeles County,” Val Verde Time Capsule, Department of Parks & Recreation, County of Los Angeles, 1939; Flammig, *Bound for Freedom*, 349; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: the Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix, 330-331; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country, Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 68-69; Anthony Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, publisher, 1989), 253-255.

said he also hired buses to bring people from Los Angeles on the weekends to experience the San Martinez Chiquito Canyon retreat and to sell them lots and cottages. Publically, all associated with Val Verde had faith in the community's potential and were "enthusiastic optimists" (to use Dr. Emily B. Childress Portwig's words from her speech at the cornerstone laying and dedication ceremony) about its future development.<sup>79</sup>

As the Val Verde swimming pool was making its way to its public opening in July 1940, the Great Depression was giving way to national economic and military demand fueled by World War II. European immigration continued to be shut off, the nation's military increased, and defense and other manufacturers needed workers, which eventually would include previously excluded women, African Americans and other groups. Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, organized African American pressure had forced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 forbidding racial discrimination in hiring by defense manufacturers and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate charges of racial discrimination. Black migration to defense industrial manufacturing centers rose dramatically and would have significant implications for these migrants' expectations that the federal government could be made to support a new phase of the civil rights movement. Los Angeles and California's San Francisco Bay Area saw their cities transformed by a massive wartime migration. For black Los Angeles, this was its

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<sup>79</sup> "Happy Throngs See Cornerstone Laid at Val Verde," *California Eagle*, 20 April 1939, 1-5A; "Swimming Pool at Val Verde Near Finish," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1 February 1940, 1; "Spend Your Week-Ends in Val Verde" ad, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 8 February 1940, 6; Cathy Naro, "A Page From History, How Green Was My Valley: Southland African Americans Remember Hayrides and Golf Games In Val Verde," *Westways*, February 1995, 71; Jill Nelson, Nanine Alexander and Pamela Douglas, "A Summer Place: Black Resorts Are Havens, Communities of Neighbors and Real Property," *Black Enterprise* magazine, August 1981, 59; In the mid-1990s as a result of damage from the Northridge earthquake the Val Verde Park, 1939 swimming pool was rebuilt, and the bathhouse was torn down and rebuilt. At this time the cornerstone and time capsule from the original bathhouse were removed and stored in the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks & Recreation Archives. "Item Number 15: Remarks (Possible Speech) of Emily Brown [Childress] Portwig," Val Verde Time Capsule, Department of Parks & Recreation, County of Los Angeles, 1939.

“First” Great Migration, rather than its “Second” Great Migration as was the case in eastern cities like New York, Chicago, and other northern industrial centers and Great Lakes cities. They had already experienced large influxes of black newcomers in pre- and post-World War I years. This internal mass migration of blacks and whites mostly leaving the South would continue until the 1970s, with a larger percentage of African Americans making the move out of the South. In seeking better livelihoods for themselves and their children, blacks had renewed aspirations for racial equality, and a shared loathing of the persistence of southern racism.<sup>80</sup>

The decade of the 1940s was a watershed in the growth and development of Los Angeles’ African American community and its influence on the city of Los Angeles. The black Angeleno population by 1940 had grown to 63,774 from a population of 2,131 in 1900 and then it nearly tripled in the next decade. By 1950 African Americans would grow to 171,209, or 8.7 percent of the total population of Los Angeles. They became much more visible in public spaces and civic consciousness, and had more frequent intimate contact with whites than in previous decades, while experiencing racial discrimination and white hostility that limited their options in housing, education, employment and other areas of their lives. At the same time, these latest migrants added new energy to the older and smaller African American community’s contestation efforts, as historian Josh Sides asserts in “challenging discriminatory employers, racist police, insensitive city councils and mayors, and obstinate white co-workers and neighbors through pickets, boycotts, protests, and organized electoral

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<sup>80</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora, How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 23-41; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits, African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 3-4, 37-43.

political activity.” As in other large American cities around the U.S., black Angelenos were important agents of history in shaping Los Angeles at mid-twentieth century and beyond.<sup>81</sup>

Expanded employment, rising income and new discretionary income for many of the increased numbers of African Americans in Los Angeles infused new energy into the recreational and residential development of Val Verde in the 1940s to 1960s. With the swimming pool opened, the advertisements in the newspaper indicated that Waterman appears to have made a more visible effort at selling lots directly through his company, rather than through brokers like Sidney P. Dones and others of the founding years of Eureka Villa/Val Verde. For a period of time Waterman employed the well-connected African American journalist, publicist and civic activist Fay M. Jackson to aid with publicity for his operation, Val Verde Properties, Inc.<sup>82</sup>

A *California Eagle* ad in May 1940 entitled “Go West The Val Verde Way!” included “Fay M. Jackson, Publicity” in very small print under Val Verde Properties, Inc. and its owner’s name in much larger text above. No doubt both Waterman and Jackson wanted to capitalize on the goodwill Val Verde had generated and their individual respect in Los Angeles County’s African American community and beyond to generate new lots sales and other business investment. Probably written by Jackson in consultation with Waterman, the copy narrative promoted Val Verde as “quaint and picturesque...where [owners of] charming rancheros [could] get the most out of living the outdoor Western way!” This ad encouraged people to buy their choice of lots “on the hillside, along the main drag for

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Sides, (quotation) 9, 47; U.S. Census.

<sup>82</sup> “Go West, The Val Verde Way!,” Val Verde Properties ad, *California Eagle*, 16 May 1940, 4A.

business, or...hidden in secluded section of the canyon” at that moment in 1940 “before it develops into the city which is planned.”<sup>83</sup>

Placed in the black press, Waterman’s advertisements of the 1940s did not include the African American race pride and uplift rhetoric used in the 1920s by Sidney B. Dones and others real estate agents. Rather, without explicitly naming African Americans as his target audience these black press advertisements by Val Verde Properties extolled the economic, recreational and social opportunities people could take advantage of for individual and community advancement. Waterman’s ads recycled the California Dream and Western ideal rhetoric of growth and prosperity in a peaceful and healthy environment for the era’s more urban population wanting a country home getaway without the inconveniences. His May 1940 ad promoted healthy and scenic county outdoor living with “city-like modernity” and conveniences of a water system piping an abundance of water to each lot, electricity, county maintained graded streets and telephone service.<sup>84</sup>

Even then new *Ebony* magazine recognized Val Verde as it joined in promoting travel to California and other resorts around the U.S, and encouraged a black spatial imaginary to their mostly African American, national readership. Founded in November 1945, the monthly coffee-table magazine modeled after *Look* and *Life* focused on presenting positive images of African Americans in a world of negative images, and particularly showcased their achievements. A July 1947 *Ebony* article entitled “Where To Go Vacationing,” placed California’s Lake Elsinore, Victorville (Murray’s Dude Ranch) and Val Verde on the list as “Favorite Resorts for Negro America.” With jobs and income at new heights due to the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., “Go West, The Val Verde Way!,” *California Eagle*, 16 May 1940, 4A.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., “Go West, The Val Verde Way!,” *California Eagle*, 16 May 1940, 4A.

wartime prosperity's financial boost, the *Ebony* writer observed that experts agreed all Americans were on the move to a record year for vacation travel. The article went on to say, "Never before have there been as many summer playgrounds open to colored guests and vacation-hungry visitors are expected to top all attendance records at these resorts." In a sign of the changing racial and social climate, *Ebony* informed its readers that many of these summer playgrounds were opened in the last few year to all races, and that "whites [were] not barred" at Negro-owned and -patronized places.<sup>85</sup>

From its opening in 1940 Val Verde Park swimming pool became the place's main amenity attraction during the summer months into the early 1960s. Some local residents who were not African American also enjoyed use of the facilities. The park, the local residents and its new visitors opened up wider public space, spatial imagination, social practices, employment and business opportunities for African Americans in recreation and accommodations in the region. From 1942 until he retired twenty-two years later, Leon Perdue served as Val Verde Park director. He was the first African American in the state of California to gain a permanent appointment of this type in the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. He supervised the Park's annual recreational programming for local residents and visitors, including sponsorship of sports leagues, arts, crafts and electronics instructions, dance instruction, water carnivals and ballets, talent and baby shows, and more. In addition he managed the County's Parks and Recreation Department's co-sponsorship of the signature Val Verde events held in the park with the Val Verde Improvement Association, such as the Bathing Beauty Pageant and Muscle Man

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<sup>85</sup> "Where To Go Vacationing," *Ebony* magazine, 1 July 1947, 14.



Show, the Fourth of July Dance for young people, the Christmas program for children and the Art Exhibit and Hobby Show.<sup>86</sup>

In the 1940s through the 1960s, business such as the Cartwright Cabins, Brown's Cabins, Carr's Rooming House, Casa de Baldwin, and Taylor's Ranch were available for overnight accommodations. Restaurants such as Scott's Tavern "with its prized collection of cactus, fountain and fish pond," Hi-Hat Inn, Maybel Henderson's Ranch, Lucille's Tumble Inn and the Val Verde Park Clubhouse Cafe, a small grocery store, and a few nightclubs such as Dudley's Inn which also sold cold drinks and barbecue during the day, comprised the commercial district and resort community establishments serving residents and visitors. McCoy's and Goldsby's Ranch House rented visitors saddles and horses for all day excursions, and Chet Hawkins supplied a Merry-Go-Round for the "kiddies" enjoyment. At one time there were three active churches holding services, First African American Episcopal Church, Salem Baptist Church and the oldest Macedonia Church of God in Christ, pastored by Rev. Samuel Dixon. In 1980, the Samuel Dixon Family Health Center was dedicated in a building behind the church in honor of the pastor's energetic service to the area. For a time there was even a United States Post Office in the Val Verde community.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "Val Verde Park, California 1960" bulletin, Presented by the Val Verde Chamber of Commerce, Saugus, California (copy in author's possession), 18; "Perdue Retires as Val Verde Recreation Head," ca. 1964, unidentified newspaper, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author's possession); "Hobby Show is Big Success," *Val Verde News*, August 1982, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author's possession), 3.

<sup>87</sup> "Display Ad 16--No Title," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 27 June 1940, 4; "Display Ad 48--No Title," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 27 June 1946, 23; "Go West, The Val Verde Way!" Val Verde Properties ad, *California Eagle*, 16 May 1940, 4A; "Val Verde Park, California 1960" bulletin, Presented by the Val Verde Chamber of Commerce, Saugus, California (copy in author's possession), 29-30; "Dedication Slated," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 21 June 1956, B2; "Where The Future is More Golden Than The Past," *Val Verde News* section, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 August 1964, C10; Kathleen Hendrix, "Moving Toward Progress," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1980, V-1.

There were many people in the post-1940s era who contributed to the wider spatial imaginary for African Americans at Val Verde and in Los Angeles. They made and shaped the Val Verde version of the leisure vision through their promotion of annual events, infrastructure development efforts, lot sales support, and their persistent civil engagement and leadership in community building. Their persistence carried forward the resort as a leisure enterprise, and social and cultural life center through the 1940s–1960s.

Alice Taylor Gafford (1886–1981) a resident of Los Angeles and the Val Verde community was one of these people. She founded and organized for seventeen years what became the Annual Art Exhibit and Hobby Show at Val Verde Park. Staged for over thirty years and drawing people from all over southern California as exhibitors and visitors, the event would eventually be called the Annual Alice Taylor Gafford Art Exhibit and Hobby Show honoring her distinguished career and life as an artist, educator, civic activist and member of the Val Verde Improvement Association. The show was one of the first in the region to present fine art by African American artists, as well as crafts and collectables of various types. Over the years diverse regional arts groups, grade school, and higher education programs joined the Val Verde Improvement Association and the County’s Parks and Recreation Department in co-sponsoring the annual show at Val Verde Park.<sup>88</sup>

Gafford shared her personal satisfaction with painting through her exhibits, teaching and community service. In the 1971 book, *Black Artists on Art* by Samella S. Lewis and Ruth

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<sup>88</sup> “Ceramists Exhibit to Be Held,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 August 1948, B6; “Dedication Slated,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 21 June 1956, B2; Marguerite Carr, “Val Verde,” 21 July 1960, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, C6; “Hobby Show is Big Success,” *Val Verde News*, August 1962, 3; “Where The Future is More Golden Than The Past,” *Val Verde News* section, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 August 1964, C10; “21<sup>st</sup> Annual Alice T. Gafford Art & Hobby Show, June 22–23, 1968” flier, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author’s possession); “Annual Arts And Hobby Show Set,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 19 June 1975, C14; “Annual Alice T. Gafford Art & Hobby Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1977, L32.

G. Waddy, Gafford passionately and succinctly summed up the fulfillment she received from her love of painting with her words, “It nourishes my soul as food nourishes my body. If I create something beautiful which enriches the lives of others, then my art serves a dual purpose.” As a pioneer organizer of black art associations beginning in the 1930s, she and her compatriots sponsored a book club called Our Authors Study Circle that invited guest lecturers and organized public presentations on black history and literature. Affiliated with Carter G. Woodson’s Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, this all-female group persuaded Fletcher Bowron, the mayor of Los Angeles (1938–1953), to authorize the city’s first Negro history week celebration, opening the initial public space for African American inclusion in municipal culture. At Val Verde and through organizing across the community, Gafford nurtured individual black artists and cultivated the broader appreciation of consciously black art. Through personal contact with other African American artists, as a promoter of varied cultural arts and civic improvement programming, and as a teacher in adult education programs in the County of Los Angeles’ Santa Clarita Valley school district and at Val Verde Park, she served her varied professional and civic communities of interest in Val Verde and Los Angeles.<sup>89</sup>

A striver, Gafford was a renaissance woman with interests in science as well as art and civic activism. She was born in Tecumseh, Kansas, educated there, and began a nursing career in 1910 in Kansas City. She went on to become the first African American registered nurse with the American Red Cross in Atlanta (1915-1916). Later she worked with Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a renowned surgeon of African American descent who was one of the

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<sup>89</sup> Samella S. Lewis & Ruth G. Waddy, *Black Artists on Art* (Los Angeles, CA: Contemporary Crafts, Inc., 1971), 84; Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West, Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 84, 169.

first surgeons to perform successful open-heart surgery and founder of Chicago's Provident Hospital and Nursing Training School, the first non-segregated hospital in the U.S. Like Gafford, Dr. Williams was a leisure community contributor, an original developer of Michigan's popular African American resort town, Idlewild (see Chapter 2).<sup>90</sup>

Gafford moved to Los Angeles in 1922. While continuing to work as a nurse, at almost fifty years old in the 1930s she began her art career by attending Otis Art Institute as one of its first African American students. She earned her teaching credentials at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1951 when she was sixty-five years old. After retiring from teaching, Gafford painted, participated in gallery shows and earned commissions into her eighties, before she retired again for good due to failing eyesight. At the time of her death in 1981, Gafford's paintings were represented in public and private collections on three continents. Through her cultural expression and promotion of art, Gafford like other African American artists constructed what George Lipsitz identifies as "discursive spaces" that were "sites of agency, affiliation and imagination." As an artist and civic booster Gafford's efforts "[spoke] to the spatial aspects of racial identity," that Lipsitz discerns. Her efforts created "repositories of collective memory, sources of moral instruction, and mechanisms for transforming places and calling communities into being through display, dialogue, and decoration" in Val Verde and Los Angeles. As an artist and activists, Gafford's work at Val Verde opened new cultural and economic spatial imaginary development for Los Angeles County's African American community as she forged broader inclusion of black

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<sup>90</sup> Lewis & Waddy, 1971, 136; "Memorial Service Held for Artist," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12 November 1981, C15; "History: Dr. Daniel Hale Williams," The Provident Foundation, From the Internet: <http://www.providentfoundation.org/history/williams.html>, 28 April 2014.

culture in regional civic cultural life for artists and promoted art appreciation, then and into the future.<sup>91</sup>

One of Val Verde's most visible shapers and community builders in the post-World War II years was Frank DeWitt Godden (1911–2012). Arriving in Los Angeles in 1939 from Alabama's Tuskegee Institute with a bachelor's degree in Commercial Industries, Godden "wanted to get as far away from the South as possible," he told the *Los Angeles Times* in a 1994 article about Val Verde. Born in the small northern Florida town of Live Oak, east of Tallahassee, Frank Godden's father (Rev. James G. Godden) was a Baptist minister, a livestock farmer, and a demonstration agent. His mother (Violet Jhelisa Godden) was a school principal and church musician. Frank D. Godden was the sixth of nine children. His parents moved the family to New Orleans in the 1920s from their comfortable life in Live Oak after they faced violent opposition to their efforts to encourage black residents to vote. Although Godden left the South to pursue his California Dream, he cultivated his ideas about achievement, community, politics, success and service from what he learned in his youth in Florida, Louisiana and Alabama. The strong influence of the ideals of Tuskegee Institute's founder Booker T. Washington were a visible thread throughout Godden's life. Godden

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<sup>91</sup> Collection which include Gafford's paintings are: Dr. Hans Schwepke (Germany); Howard University (Washington, D.C.); the Bowers Museum (Santa Ana, California); the Long Beach Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Art Museum; the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company (Los Angeles) and others. The author inherited an Alice Taylor Gafford painting in 1995 from the Estate of Marcelyn Cobbs Jefferson. The author remembers her mother, Marcelyn sharing a short discussion about the artist's life when this still life painting was purchased and first displayed at the family home in the mid-1970s; Lewis & Waddy, 1971, 136; "Memorial Service Held for Artist," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12 November 1981, C15; "Life Begins At Eighty For Gracious Artist," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 13 July 1967, A5; Lipsitz, 60.

carried with him from those early life experiences a determination and drive that served him well in his many entrepreneurial business pursuits and inspired his friends.<sup>92</sup>

Spending eleven years at the Tuskegee Institute campus, young Godden was educated from prep school through college. In addition to gaining a formal education, he began his entrepreneurial career at Tuskegee working in the office of the renowned scientist and educator Dr. George Washington Carver, and as a campus tour guide, photographer and mailman. Once in Los Angeles, skills learned at Tuskegee Institute found him early employment with the *California Eagle*. Publisher and editor Charlotta Bass hired Godden to photograph the 1939 Labor Day celebration at Val Verde, “beginning...his life long love affair” with the place. In his early years in Los Angeles, Gooden also worked as a porter on the trains, and continued working as a photographer. Before becoming the salesperson for real estate and cabins, and park concession manager for Waterman’s Val Verde Properties in 1947, during World War II Godden served as a leader on a Radar crew in the U.S. Army’s 90<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion, a unit of black soldiers in Europe and North Africa. During this time period he also worked as a war correspondent for the Associated Negro Press (ANP) with his stories appearing in African American publications throughout the nation, as well as in the armed forces overseas newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Stewart, “COLUMN ONE Forgotten Oasis of Freedom Val Verde, the `black Palm Springs,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 1; Jocelyn Y. Stewart, “The Life of Frank DeWitt Godden” Obituary, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 September 2012, A4.

<sup>93</sup> Stewart, “Forgotten Oasis...,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 1; Stewart, “Godden Obituary,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 September 2012, A4; “Mr. Frank D. Godden, Val Verde Park’s Distinguished Citizen, History,” 18 May 1962, Testimonial Dinner for Frank D. Godden bulletin, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author’s possession), 3; “Val Verde Attracts,” *The Chicago Defender*, 4 October 1947, 2.

While working with Harry M. Waterman's Val Verde enterprises in the post-World War II decades, Godden became a leader in the Val Verde Improvement Association (the Association), spearheading efforts creating a water district, a lighting district and obtaining additional street paving. His leadership was also important in establishment and management of the Val Verde's U.S. Post Office, which opened in 1956, and in the reestablishment of the Association's newsletter and other community projects. He along with others active with the Association instituted the election of honorary mayors, the Hattie S. Baldwin Award for community service, and the maintenance of regular town meetings for Val Verde. In the early 1960s when he was president of the Association, Godden was known as "Mr. Val Verde Park."<sup>94</sup>

In addition to his work at Val Verde, Godden launched a number of entrepreneurial ventures in Los Angeles where he ran the Woodlawn Funeral Home and a construction company that worked on the Los Angeles Freeway. He played a key role in building and operating Terry Manor, an apartment complex for low-income senior citizens in Los Angeles near the University of Southern California (USC). From the time he arrived in Los Angeles, Godden was very active with the Tuskegee Institutes Alumni Association in the city. He served on its national Board of Trustee from 1964–1967. Under his leadership, the local group joined other organizations in working to break down employment discrimination barriers and end racially restrictive covenants. He was deeply involved in politics as a supporter of many elected officials in their campaigns. In all these ways, Godden worked

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<sup>94</sup> Stewart, Godden Obituary, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 September 2012, A4; "Mr. Frank D. Godden, Val Verde Park's Distinguished Citizen, History," 18 May 1962, Testimonial Dinner for Frank D. Godden bulletin, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author's possession), 3; "Dedication Slated," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 21 June 1956, B2; Valerie J. Nelson, "Frank Godden dies at 101; helped develop African American resort," Obituaries, 19 April 2012, *Los Angeles Times*, From the Internet: <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/19/local/la-me-frank-godden-20120819>, 20 May 1014.

with his contemporaries to change the landscape of the region and the lives of generations of African Americans in southern California.<sup>95</sup>

Godden appreciated the Val Verde canyon's rustic charm and peaceful recreation, and spent a good part of his lifetime trying to build it into an exemplary leisure community. Though not precisely the kind of self-contained, economically self-determined community initially envisioned by its founders, the vision of Val Verde as a place of African American leisure freedom and community infused Godden's work. "I was trying to get something there that we could be a point of pride," Godden told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1994. "I wanted to build a first-rate community where black people could come up and just enjoy—and they did for a long time." With the large influx of people to California from all over the U.S. during the 1940s to 1960s, and Los Angeles' booming economy in the late 1950s, Val Verde's national reputation would help it to remain for a while longer a recreation area primarily patronized by African Americans. Many black newcomers joined older settlers in continuing to seek out the rustic canyon retreat for communal bonding, networking and the hassle-free environment of fun and leisure, where they would not be confronted with overt racism while they tried to relax and rejuvenate themselves.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Stewart, "Godden Obituary," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 September 2012, A4; "Mr. Frank D. Godden, Val Verde Park's Distinguished Citizen, History," 18 May 1962, Testimonial Dinner for Frank D. Godden bulletin, Frank D. Godden/Salaam Mohammad Collection (copy in author's possession), 3; Valerie J. Nelson, "Frank Godden dies at 101; helped develop African American resort," Obituaries, 19 April 2012, *Los Angeles Times*, From the Internet: <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/19/local/la-me-frank-godden-20120819>, 20 May 1014.

<sup>96</sup> Stewart, "Forgotten Oasis..." *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 1.



## **Personal Remembrances, Public Memories and Contemporary Realities**

Personal remembrances of Val Verde span the spectrum of appreciation for the natural features of the landscape and the views, the enjoyment of the social traditions created by family and friends, the relaxation the peaceful environment offered, and the pride of individual and community accomplishments. There are also the memories of the leisure traditions that were created and led by community members—formalized, planned, community building activities of physical, group experiences at this place. The persistence of physical, continuing and evolving practices of leisure and community building activities in public and private over almost a century has made the public memory of Val Verde stronger than most of the other Jim Crow era, southern California African American leisure places that did not persist as long. Having not been intentionally erased, nor struggled over in reclamation, public memory has played a more consensual and subtly community identity affirmation role in Val Verde since the 1970s.

Personal remembrance suggests the meaning of leisure community that residents derived from Val Verde to inform their social engagement and lives beyond the place and moment. For California native and retired schoolteacher Alma Phillips Hill, that meant economic opportunity and participatory community building as well as leisure. Hill remembers having great times at Val Verde and this era being a very happy time in her life. Her family bought a vacation home in the canyon in the early 1940s. Some of her parents' friends also bought property, with some of those friends becoming permanent residents of Val Verde. While in high school and college she was a cashier during the summer at the Val

Verde Park pool. She enjoyed her job, and all the young people would hang out at the pool and the clubhouse for parties and other activities.<sup>97</sup>

“There was always something to do and there were lots of young people around,” she fondly recalled. In addition to swimming for the teens there were games of baseball, tennis, cards and billiards, hayrides, picnics, dances and fishing nearby at Lake Piru. During the summer Hill loved to horseback ride early in the morning before it got too hot. “I remember one beautiful morning going horseback riding with about a dozen friends, boys and girls, and my mother cooking breakfast for us all.”<sup>98</sup>

After Alma Hill’s family bought a vacation home at Val Verde, she and her mother, Malvina Phillips, would leave their Los Angeles residence, and stay most of the summer there. Her father, Samuel Thomas Phillips, employed as a railroad waiter, would come when he was not working. Her father served as an honorary mayor of Val Verde for a time. Hill remembers he worked with the Val Verde Improvement Association on the water problems of the area and paving the path up Sun Rise Hill were the Easter Sun Rise morning services where held consistently each year from the 1920s to 1970s. “Dad would always work to get people to come up to Val Verde to participate in the [Easter] sun rise service,” she said.<sup>99</sup>

Not surprisingly, social conviviality and commonality of leisure was as much a valued feature as individual “escape” and vigorous recreation in the constructs of personal memory of Val Verde. Los Angeles native Marilyn Williams Hudson (1926–2015) has happy memories of summer stays at the “Not A Care” cabin when she was a young teen, owned by

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<sup>97</sup> Alma Hill, Pasadena resident and retired school teacher, interview by author, 16 November 2004 & 8 May 2014, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Hill interview, 16 November 2004 & 8 May 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Hill interview, 16 November 2004 & 8 May 2014.

early Val Verde property owner and booster Dr. Emily B. (Childress) Portwig. Portwig was also a Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) counselor, and the young women who were her guests were also members of the YWCA. From San Francisco, Los Angeles native and retired lawyer Hugh MacBeth, Jr. whose father was one of the first African American lawyers in California in the 1910s, remembered the peacefulness of the environment, the beautiful views from his family’s vacation cottage in one of the Val Verde ravines and how much he loved to hike up there. He recalled during the summer some visitors to Val Verde would camp under the stars in the park or on their undeveloped “ranch sites.”<sup>100</sup>

“When the Cosmos would go to Val Verde to throw a picnic or party [in the 1940s,] we would always take over Mr. Reeve’s restaurant across from the park,” said Wallace DeCuir (1922–2014), a Cosmos club founding member and retired Los Angeles Fireman and businessman. When the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company and other organizations held summer picnics, the park would be overflowing with visitors. Before the freeways were built beginning in the 1950s, even in the late 1940s it could still take more than two to three hours sometimes to drive out from Los Angeles on somewhat challenging roads to Val Verde for one of the Cosmos events.<sup>101</sup>

The Miss Val Verde Bathing Beauty and the Mr. Muscle Man competitions with a festival parade featuring simple floats were the biggest events of the summer for over thirty years from 1940s to 1979. Florence LaRue won the crown in 1965 before she became a

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<sup>100</sup> Marilyn Hudson, Los Angeles resident, interview by author, 27 October 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Hugh MacBeth, Jr., San Francisco resident and retired attorney, interview by author, 27 October 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

<sup>101</sup> Wallace DeCuir, Los Angeles resident, retired fireman and businessman, interview by author, 1 November 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone.

member of the popular Grammy-winning singing group the Fifth Dimension. The LaRue family members were regular visitors, with Florence's parents owning a cottage. Actor James Earl Jones, who raised thoroughbred horses at his Val Verde eight-acre ranch on Rainbow Drive, awarded the last beauty contest prize in 1979.<sup>102</sup>

For Elijah Canty (1911–2011) and his wife, it was the freedom they felt at Val Verde with its oak trees and rural environment that most defined the place, though active engagement in advancing the community was also part of their personal memory. Canty moved to Los Angeles in 1948 from New York after he and his wife visited during a vacation the previous year. In 1974 he retired as a manager from the now famous Clifton's Cafeteria chain that includes a flagship downtown Los Angeles local landmark restaurant site. He first visited Val Verde around the time of his arrival in Los Angeles. He and his wife bought a lot from real estate agent Frank Godden of Val Verde Properties (Harry M. Waterman's company), who Canty knew from his days as a student at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He and his wife built a retirement home in the 1960s that he affectionately called "Canty's Shanty." The Cantys began living full time in Val Verde in the 1970s. They became active members of the Val Verde and greater Santa Clarita Valley communities with their participation in various civic and social organizations. Canty and his wife, Miriam, a retired school teacher (1916–2001), worked tirelessly to secure public and private funding for a health care facility in the Val Verde community, which opened in 1980 as the Samuel Dixon

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<sup>102</sup> Photo Standalone 10, No Title (includes Florence LaRue and Bradley Polk when they were crowned Miss and Mr. Val Verde/Muscle Man, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 23 September 1965, A8; Stewart, "Forgotten Oasis...", *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 1.

Family Health Center. In 2015 this facility and others in the Santa Clarita Valley are part of the group of the Samuel Dixon Family Health Centers.<sup>103</sup>

Schoolteacher and sportswoman Marie Rogers (b. 1957) has a visceral sense of place remembrance of being in Val Verde as a child in the 1960s. “I would know we arrived at Val Verde in the family car from Los Angeles, as I smelled in the air barbecue being prepared,” said Rogers in an interview at her Los Angeles area home. As a young child and elementary school age girl visiting her family’s modest cottage with a small trailer nearby situated on the hillside on the north side of the canyon and adjacent to the Park, Rogers recalled the smells of the cottonwood trees and other native plant life in her movement around outside with her brother, James, III. They played, hiked and rode donkey or horses, picnicked and partied with their parents and family friends. Another remembrance is the smell of the chlorine from her regular visits frolicking at the Val Verde Park swimming pool, where her father James Fredrick Wilson, Jr. (b. 1906) was a lifeguard from the 1940s to the early 1960s. In addition to working as a lifeguard her father served in the U.S. Army in World War II and the Korean War, and worked as a U.S. Postal employee. After his day job work hours, and after he retired from the U.S. Post Office, her father repaired televisions and small electronics. Her mother, Lillian was employed as a clerk with Los Angeles Unified School District for most

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<sup>103</sup> Elijah Candy was 93, when the author interviewed him in 2004. Elijah Canty, Val Verde resident and retired administrator, interview by author, 30 October 2004, Los Angeles, California, via telephone; Leon Worden/SCVNEWS.com, “Val Verde Pioneer Elijah Canty Dies At 100,” KHTS AM 1220, From the Internet: <http://www.hometownstation.com/santa-clarita-news/val-verde-pioneer-elijah-canty-dies-at-100-26090>, 12 June 2015; Gena Nordenstrom, “Miriam Canty, Val Verde Leader,” SCVHistory.com, From the Internet: <http://www.scvhistory.com/scvhistory/sg022101b.htm>, 15, June 2015.

of her working career. Her parents did the best they could for their small family, providing everyone with what they needed and a bit more.<sup>104</sup>

Exploring various areas of southern California from their Los Angeles eastside residence at West Forty-third and Main Streets, the Wilson family did not take their leisure solely at Val Verde. They enjoyed year-round outdoor recreation from the mountains to the beach. The family's activities included hiking, hunting, and lake and ocean fishing and swimming. Rogers' maternal grandmother, Gladys Marine Toppins (1901–1998), was the first African American to graduate from high school in Fullerton, California in the 1920s before she moved to Los Angeles. One of her husbands maintained chickens and grew vegetables at their home. When a fire burned down the family's Val Verde retreat in the latter years of the 1960s, Rogers' grandmother chose not to rebuild after the insurance claim was collected. Yet, these family members and their Val Verde leisure passed a lasting appreciation of outdoor recreation and activities down to their daughter and granddaughter, Marie Rogers, who enjoys in her adult life horseback riding, running marathons and hiking, and sailing. In addition Rogers has a menagerie of rescued animals that are her pets, including dogs, horses, chickens from different countries and llamas, that she and her husband, Bill board at their rustic home site overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Rolling Hills, California on the Palos Verdes peninsula. The black spatial imaginary Rogers' elders surrounded her with during her formative years at Val Verde enriched and informed her, providing a place for young Marie to develop self-confidence to engage as an adult with a

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<sup>104</sup> Marie Rogers, School teacher and sportswoman, interview by author, 22 May 2014, Rolling Hills, California.

variety of sportswomen, intellectual and community pursuits not necessarily associated with African Americans of an urban Los Angeles environment.<sup>105</sup>

The good times, fond memories, and African American community building efforts and pride of ownership existed alongside perpetual challenges and complications for Val Verde's expansion and sustained existence as an African American resort, or any kind of community. Water supply issues in Val Verde were an ongoing problem, sometimes a big problem from the early days of the African American retreat's establishment. It was not until 1951 that Val Verde residents formed their own water district with the thinking this maneuver would bring more water into the area through supply system efficiencies. Again, in 1971 the water supply system was overhauled with federal grants and a local assessment district. In the mid-1960s the Val Verde community water district became part of the county system, and the water supply issue was resolved for the time being with new sources of water being piped in from the Santa Clarita River bed.<sup>106</sup>

As the era of flagrant overt white racism and racial segregation eased in the 1960s, and regional land development policies and new projects opened to African Americans, Val Verde began to fade as a popular African American resort and recreation site. African Americans began to spend their time and money elsewhere as more places of leisure and recreation opened up to them. The north Los Angeles county rustic canyon vacation community evolved into being mostly a retirement community of African Americans who

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Rogers interview, 22 May 2014.

<sup>106</sup> "Where The Future is More Golden Than The Past"/Val Verde News section, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 August 1964, C10; Mike Goodman, "Whites in All-Black Hamlet Accorded Peaceful Acceptance: More..." *Los Angeles Times*, 17 August 1972, SF1; Mike Goodman, "NAACP Gets Val Verde Complaints: Black Community Charges Bias," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1973, SF6; Mike Goodman, "Could Be Growing Pains: Val Verde Complains Expansion Stifled," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1973, S6; Stewart, "Forgotten Oasis..." *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1994, 1.

moved out there years before, and of former Los Angeles city dwellers whose vacation homes became their new permanent residences because they liked living in the southern California style, Arcadian rural environment. Vacation home use by African American owners still existed, but this practice was declining rapidly. By the latter half of the 1970s many vacation homeowners had become absentee landlords, renting their small houses to Latino farmworkers and their families sharing cramped facilities. At the same time a few whites that were more affluent than the incoming Latinos also began purchasing lots, building permanent residential dwellings and renovating others in Val Verde. The entire community of Val Verde continued utilizing septic tank systems with no public sewage system or means of trash disposal.<sup>107</sup>

At the same time urban development in Los Angeles County began moving northwest into the Santa Clarita Valley at an accelerated pace. In the 1950s and early 1960s the largest landholder in the area, the Newhall Land and Farming Company began a comprehensive examination of how to change its agricultural land holdings profitable into residential and amusement centers. In the early 1960s, the renowned urban planner Victor Gruen drafted a Master Plan and in 1965 the Los Angeles County Planning Commission accepted its proposal for the “new town” of Valencia named after the oranges grown on the ranch. Schools, swimming pools, clubhouses, golf courses, a hospital, shopping centers and a downtown were built for nearly 15,000 residents and over 5,000 housing units. Magic Mountain Amusement Park, a motorcycle park, a recreational vehicle campground and more golf courses were constructed. Los Angeles County also began construction on Castaic Dam (a

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<sup>107</sup> Martha L. Willman, “Influx of Latinos Felt in Santa Clarita Valley; Housing Squeeze Cited,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1980, V1; Sharon L. Warzocha, “Rural Retreat Wants to Stay That Way, Val Verde: Once a ‘kind of black Palm Springs,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1990, 2.



part of the Feather River Water Project) forming a huge lake that a 1964 *Val Verde News/Los Angeles Sentinel* article observed would become a “sportsman’s paradise.”<sup>108</sup>

Like everyone else in the northwest Los Angeles County area, African American full-time residents, vacation homeowners and civil leaders of Val Verde were aware of these growth trends and plans. With a new water system in place, and new nearby multiple use construction beginning, a 1964 *Val Verde News/Los Angeles Sentinel* article anticipated, “In the near future real estate values are expected to increase even more in the general area....Val Verde Park has a bright future and its position is now being felt in that it has been become an integral part of the Santa Clarita Valley area.” In the 1964 article entitled “Where The Future is More Golden Than The Past,” Val Verde’s civic leaders pronounced that they, too, hoped to profit in some way from the new development projects in their Santa Clarita neighborhood.<sup>109</sup>

Big changes and growing pains in the 1960s and 1970s accompanied the optimism Val Verde civic leaders had about the community’s future. As African American out-of-town recreation visitors stopped coming, businesses closed that served them and residents alike. Many of the older residents died or moved away. The surging Latino population rented houses that were never intended to be permanent dwellings. Constructed when the codes were less strict, the vacation retreat dwellings had become, in many instances, dilapidated and were easily overcrowded. The early African American owners built many of the Val

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<sup>108</sup> “Newhall Land Company History”/Valencia, From the Internet: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070222105212/http://valencia.com/NewhallLand/CompanyHistory.asp>, 23 May 2014; “Newhall Land and Farming Company” on Funding Universe, From the Internet: <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/newhall-land-and-farming-company-history/>, 23 May 2014; “Where The Future is More Golden Than The Past”/Val Verde News section, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 August 1964, C10.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 August 1964, C10.

Verde small houses when a full set of construction plans was not required, and by the early 1970s the structures were substandard unless they had been renovated or rebuilt. With a new water system installed in the early 1970s many residents wanted to build new cottages on the many small vacant lots scattered about Val Verde and renovate some existing structures. These “mini developers” in a community of mostly African American property owners, and an increasing number of Latino (mostly undocumented, non-English speaking) renters, wanted to construct housing units for workers who might be employed at the newly opened Castaic Lake, local farms, Magic Mountain amusement park, and businesses in Valencia. Hindering the sepia property owners moving forward with expansion at this time were “sky high” fire insurance rates, spiraling constructions cost and new stricter building codes.<sup>110</sup>

The fire insurance rates and realities of rural home building for communities on the fringe of brush areas and other outlying areas like Malibu and Val Verde changed after the 1961 Bel Air fire. Rates shot up even if property owners kept a 100-foot area around their houses clear of brush. In Val Verde many lots are less than 25-feet wide with absentee-owners. As a 1973 *Los Angeles Times* article noted under these conditions “[property owners] would need a lot of friendly neighbors to knock down rates.” Even with the challenges, some African American property owners did profit through renting and selling properties as Val Verde’s historic African American vacation community transitioned from the late 1960s into the twenty-first century to a multi-ethnic community of permanent residents. The new residents would live in a community with a mix of new and old houses on assorted large rural lots and city sized housing lots that originated with the 1920s community.

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<sup>110</sup> Goodman, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1973, S6; Willman, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1980, V1; Warzocha, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1990, 2.

On the larger ranchette lots, some people continued maintaining horses, a few chickens, livestock and small vegetable gardens.<sup>111</sup>

As the population in Santa Clarita Valley expanded and urbanized, more people discovered Val Verde. In the late 1970s to early 1980s, mostly white independent developers began purchasing vacant lots and building new, simple homes in Val Verde. In 1988 these new homes cost around \$115,000, while houses just three miles away over the hills cost \$350,000 and up. The buyers of these new Val Verde homes were mostly young, working class white couples looking for affordable housing and a peaceful place to raise their families. By the twenty-first century, Val Verde's newer residents started including more of the young upwardly mobile ("yuppie") class who built larger, custom designed homes at a more affordable cost than elsewhere in the northwest Los Angeles County area. Many of these new people worked in the Santa Clarita, San Fernando and Simi Valley areas. The diverse demographics of the area did not appear as an issue with new wealthier yuppies, who came from Los Angeles and other places outside of Santa Clarita Valley. On the contrary, at least on a superficial level, along with the lower costs of housing, the multi-ethnic demographic appears to have been an attraction to the Val Verde community.<sup>112</sup>

The Val Verde Civic Association again became reenergized with new community shapers and builders, as the construction on new homes and repair of dilapidated ones brought new people into the small, rustic, unincorporated area. From the 1980s into the dawning decades of the twenty-first century the ongoing mission of the Val Verde Civic

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<sup>111</sup> Goodman, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1973, S6.

<sup>112</sup> Carmen Ramos Chandler, "Changes In Store for Val Verde," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 7 February 1988, N1; Kimberly Heinrichs, "Revived Val Verde Enters '90s – Community Drawing Newcomers" *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 2 January 1990, SAC1.

Association and its supporters has been maintaining the rustic ambiance and limiting growth in Val Verde, despite the fact that most all the lots there were subdivided into city-size lots at the community's founding in the late 1920s. Civic leaders also began advocating for quality, custom designed homes, and opposed cheaply designed "box-like" houses, modular homes, trailers and multifamily housing.<sup>113</sup>

In the mid-1990s the Association began an aggressive stance fighting the expansion of trash dumping at the small, Chiquita Canyon Landfill constructed in 1971 to serve the trash disposal needs of the Santa Clarita Valley. The Association was concerned that turning this small landfill into a mega-pit, drawing in waste from Ventura to West Covina, would create airborne environmental contaminants, that could circulate around the area due to the prevailing ocean breezes. This landfill issue emerged as employment grew creating more than 3,000 jobs, and new multiple developments in the Santa Clarita Valley were pushing their way through the approval processes of Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita. As landfill development in nearby cities met powerful opposition, political pressure for Chiquita landfill expansion came from the dump's owners, its landlord Newhall Land and Farming Company, as well as from Ventura County officials and the recently formed City of Santa Clarita. A 1994 *Daily News* article described the situation as follows: " We are presented with two large, predominantly white communities rejecting landfills of their own

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<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Campos Rajs, "In the News – Civic Leader Maps Out Future for Val Verde," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 28 November 1988, N3; Patricia Farrell Aidem, "Val Verde Battles to Remain Rural," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 5 June 1989, N3; Kimberly Heinrichs, "Changing Face of Val Verde – Building Boom Transforms Town," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 6 January 1990, SAC1; Eureka Tract Numbers: 860, 8672 and 8673 (owners Laura C. Janes and Burt N. Janes) in the subdivision tract map book from the Los Angeles County Land Records Information, Dept. of Public Works, From the Internet: <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/sur/nas/landrecords/tract/MB0102/TR0102-095.pdf>, 8 January 2014; Val Verde Tract Numbers 5317 and 8676 (owner Harry M. Waterman) in the subdivision tract map book from the Los Angeles County Land Records Information Dept. of Public Works, From the Internet: <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/sur/nas/landrecords/tract/MB0108/TR0108-001.pdf> and <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/sur/nas/landrecords/tract/MB0113/TR0113-022.pdf>, 8 January 2014.

in favor of dumping on a small, predominantly minority community that has the misfortune to be situated between them.” The article’s writer, Sherry Joe Crosby, went on to explicitly state in the defense of the Val Verde community she also lived in, “There’s a term for forcing such undesirable land uses on politically underpowered minority communities. It’s called environmental racism.” California State Senator Diana Watson of Los Angeles chimed in to oppose the landfill expansion, citing “Val Verde’s historical and symbolic significance to African Americans” as the basis of this opposition.<sup>114</sup>

The issue of environmental racism proved an important concern as all discussion of new landfills in the region met extraordinary not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) politics may have been a factor on multiple fronts is a complicated analysis.<sup>115</sup> The Val Verde Civic Association after much protest saw the writing on the wall, the realization that the Los Angeles County Supervisors were going to allow the Chiquita Canyon Landfill’s expansion. The Association demanded mitigation, negotiating compensation for accepting landfill-expanded operation at the edge of Val Verde until 2019. The landfill company was required to make annual per year payments of \$250,000 in mitigation fees to a Val Verde community benefit fund based on how much garbage was dumped at the Chiquita Canyon site. The landfill company also agreed to stop dumping chemically treated human waste at the site and to strict public oversight of the landfill operations with a community board. As well the Los Angeles County Supervisors with Gloria Molina in the lead, insisted all residents of Val Verde regardless of official voter status, be allowed to choose the members of the citizen committee elected to oversee the mitigation fund’s expenditures and programming support.

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<sup>114</sup> Dion Lefler, “Integrated Town Faces Trash Apartheid,” *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 6 October 1994, N13.

<sup>115</sup> Beyond the scope of this author’s present study, this set of issues opens up opportunities for future study around the history of public policies implementation and the Val Verde community.

Funding has supported: kids education and sports programs, civic festivals, Sherriff Department community policing, park building renovations and infrastructure and landscaping improvements, health services, and other community benefit activities.<sup>116</sup>

Though the Val Verde Civic Association has sought to limit growth to retain the community's rural character and limit the landfill expansion in the face of encroaching development from all sides, the Association members have welcomed industrial development outside of Val Verde with the view that it has provided a beneficial development the community needs in employment for some of its residents. They have kept large tract developments and housing tracts out of Val Verde because of the community's lack of a regional sewer system and sidewalks, minimal street lighting, and narrow two-lane paved and some dirt roads. Other housing developments with rural characteristics have grown up in canyons north of Val Verde with some industrial development nearby. More new Santa Clarita Valley development has recently been proposed and approved. On the northeast rolling hills boundary of Val Verde the Sterling Gateway Company in 2003 proposed building over 200 homes, a 50,000 square foot neighborhood shopping center and park on

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<sup>116</sup> Timothy Williams, "Decisions on Use of Val Verde Funds Limited to Citizens," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1997; Dade Hayes, "Tentative Ruling Backs Landfill Expansion." [Valley Edition], *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 1998; Patricia Farrell Aidem, "Trash Brings In Cash Dump Deal Funds Val Verde Projects," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 14 August 2000, SC1; "Chiquita Canyon Landfill Expansion and Related Facilities Project 89-081, Statement of Agreements and Understandings by and between Newhall Land and Farming Co., Laidlaw Waste Systems (Chiquita), Inc. and Val Verde Civic Association," From the Internet: <http://www.valverdecac.com/pdf/StatementofAgreements.pdf>, 2 June 2014; "County of Los Angeles Integrated Waste Management Plan, 2011 Annual Report," in 2014 under study is the expansion of the Chiquita Canyon Landfill, From the Internet: <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/epd/swims/ShowDoc.aspx?id=391&hp=yes&type=PDF>, 2 June 2014; The Landfill manager stated in a 2012 *Signal SCV* newspaper article, "The majority of the landfill extension will be away from the community of Val Verde," Karen Jonas, "Landfill looks to expand," 5 January 2012, *Signal SCV* newspaper, From the Internet: <http://www.signalscv.com/archives/57442/>, 2 June 2014; "Master Plan Revisions – Chiquita Canyon," From the Internet: <http://www.chiquitacanyon.com/looking-ahead/master-plan-revisions/>, 2 June 2014.

200 acres of open land purchased in 1949 for its oil potential that never significantly materialized.<sup>117</sup>

In 2015 the Newhall Ranch housing and other development projects planned by Newhall Land and Farming Company continue in a two-decade fight with environmentalists in the courts for final permission to begin construction just south of Val Verde. This project would be the largest proposed development in Los Angeles County history, forecasted to accommodate 60,000 residents, 20,000 homes and 5.5 million square feet of commerce space. It would stretch for six miles along Highway 126 from the 5 Freeway to the Ventura County line. If fully built out, the Sterling Gateway and Newhall Ranch projects, along with Santa Clarita proposed developments northeast of Val Verde would dramatically change the little community and the region. The Santa Clarita Valley is considered among the fastest growing areas in the county of Los Angeles. Based on a 2005 County projection, its population could surge to more than 428,000 by 2030 from 249,000. With the encroaching tract developments and the increased population projected for the north county corner, Val Verde residents' diversity in demographics and lifestyles could be vulnerable to changes that intentionally and unintentionally could exclude them from continuing to live in this community.<sup>118</sup>

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the once totally African American community made up of a spectrum of middle class property owners has continued the trend

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Lefler, *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 6 October 1994, N13; Dan Boyle, "Civic Association Seeks Growth Limit," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 14 July 1989, SAC1; Eugene Tong, "Project Irks Some Rural Residents – Planned Homes Under Review," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 13 June 2005, SC1.

<sup>118</sup> Q McCray, "Newhall Ranch development project OK'd by appellate court," KABC TV Los Angeles, 22 March 2014, From the Internet: <http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?id=9477182>, 24 May 2014; Nicholas Grudin, "New Council Members Vow To Fight Development," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 26 May 2003, SC1; Maura Dolan, Louis Sahagun & Abby Sewell, "Newhall Ranch project suffers another setback," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 2015, A1.

of being racially integrated, as Latinos and whites with incomes from the lower end to middle classes move in. Some of the younger descendants of older African American property owners have bought into the new rural lifestyle as residents. Many younger descendants who inherited the vacation era property rent out the small houses built in the community's pre-1960s era or have sold their property. Some are unable to build on their land for reasons of economics, property tax encumbrance and hillside development rules.

“The change [in the population make up] has been gradual and not hostile,” observed Elijah Canty in 2004. “People still move to Val Verde for the sense of community and because they love the rural outdoors.” Miriam Canty, Elijah’s wife noted in a 1990 *Daily News of Los Angeles* article, that people then taking up residence appreciate the beautiful canyon just as the original community settlers did in the early years. The Cantys’ views remained valid if more tenuously so in 2015. Residents of the early twenty-first century decades seem drawn to the place’s quiet, rural landscape with access to the conveniences of commerce, local services nearby and access to the city. African American race pride, uplift rhetoric and economic self-determination no longer empower the community’s self-representation and re-articulation of aesthetic and ideological issues in their participation and desires as residents, citizen consumers and civic activists. The more contemporary history of Val Verde now informs local public memory revolving around the Civic Association’s fight to keep the nearby dump from expanding and the mitigation money they won for their small, rural enclave.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Canty, interview by author, 30 October 2004; Heinrichs, *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 2 January 1990, SAC1.



The African American population of Val Verde in 2004 was about four percent, and it had not materially changed in the decade to follow. In 2010 the population reached 2,468, a population increase of 67% since 2000. In 2010 the population was 61% Hispanic, and 30% white. Some of the pioneering African American families of the area are still represented as residents and non-resident property owners and landlords in the Val Verde community. During the summer some African Americans families and groups from the Los Angeles area continue to make an annual day pilgrimage to Val Verde Park for picnics.<sup>120</sup>

No extensive published narrative, exhibits or historic preservation landmark designations have been developed concerning the history and heritage of the black Val Verde leisure community site. A few articles have been written in the English language newspaper and a few short television program segments occasionally appear on local public television and some photographs of historical Val Verde's African American leisure escape seekers are in local institution collections and private scrapbooks. The memory of Val Verde's fun times for African Americans, the importance the historic district had for those who experienced its pleasures and its sense of place are mostly retained in the personal memories of those who visited the resort haven during the Jim Crow era.<sup>121</sup>

In the second decade of the twenty-first century the public memory of the historical African American, Eureka Villa/Val Verde resort community founded in 1924 has some

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<sup>120</sup> Val Verde, California data, 2004 & 2007. From the Internet: [www.city-data.com/city/Val-Verde-California.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/Val-Verde-California.html), 22 February 2014.

<sup>121</sup> A short segment on the history of Val Verde in a 1996 television program "More Things That Aren't Here Anymore with Ralph Story" airs on the local public television station KCET occasionally. This segment on the history of Val Verde features Retired California State Senator Diane Watson, businessman Celes King, singer Florence LaRue and others. It can be viewed on the Santa Clarita Valley History TV web portal, From the Internet: <http://www.scvttv.com/html/valverde1996kcet.html>, 30 November 2015. There is also suppose to be a film which the author has not been able to locate that KCET-TV commissioned independent filmmaker St. Clair Bourne to produce on Val Verde in 1978, "Progress presses in on black village," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 22 August 1978.

representation. Generally when the community's historical origins are discussed in the public collective memory, the description focuses on it being a contemporary "forgotten rural hamlet" with beginnings as a resort haven founded by black Angelenos seeking escape from the impacts of Jim Crow era discrimination on their lives in Los Angeles and America. The public collective memory also sometimes speaks of the heritage narrative of the Val Verde Park and swimming pool complex as building projects of the 1930s New Deal Work Progress Administration. This history is partially correct, but it excludes the effective political work with County of Los Angeles administrators, developer Harry M. Waterman and the community of African Americans' sustained contribution before the WPA funding appeared in the late 1930s.

Generally, the public memory does not incorporate the important element of the every day leisure and economic independence integration that the founder's imagined. It does not include the names of Val Verde's community shapers and builders, nor detail of the resourceful agency of these African American men and women to develop a district where they could visualize themselves as full equal citizen consumers. It does not include the pride they had about using and creating this place of varied recreational and networking activities. Not included is the memory of the empowering self-consciousness and self-determination of this leisure practice and dreams of economic development opportunities the venture provided. The limited public memory silences the ideals and events that resonate historically, intellectually, emotionally and unconsciously to link more recent generations to a sense of place of the African American experience in the California Dream and American history narrative. If the Latino, white, black and other newcomers to the Val Verde canyon

community understood more about the origins and history of the place they now call home, they might find a greater appreciation of and self-determination to preserve what many have determined has become the last area of exurban affordable housing in northwest Los Angeles County's Santa Clarita Valley environs.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> My interpretation here of public memory is informed by Pierre Nora's lieu de memoire or sites of memory and David Glassberg's ideas about the collective memory of communities, Pierre Nora, "From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory," From the Internet: [http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan\\_of\\_Arc/OLR/03\\_PierreNora\\_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan_of_Arc/OLR/03_PierreNora_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf), 13 June 2014, xv, xvi, xvii and David Glassberg, *Sense of History, The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: Massachusetts University Press, 2003), 122-126. As Val Verde has become a community of many Spanish speakers for who English is a second language, understanding their engagement with the public memory of this group of people about the historical African American leisure escape seekers could be another possible research study.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION / EPILOGUE

The challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present. It is the same challenge that confronts memory.

-- David Thelen<sup>1</sup>

In the course of their struggle toward a position of equality among the nation's people, [blacks]...have helped to make the West a part of America.

-- W. Sherman Savage<sup>2</sup>

Today few traces of the African American resort communities discussed in this dissertation survive to link us to the experiences, sentiments, tradition and memory of these Californians' Jim Crow era cultural production in the face of contestation. The buildings have been demolished, many of the people who enjoyed them in their heyday are dead, and those who are still alive reside apart from one another in many places near and far from these sites. While a few stories and advertisements from mostly African American newspapers of their era, photographs, pieces of ephemera, oral histories, and architectural ruins remain, the small quantity of material and visible markers on the landscape pose difficult challenges to history professionals, community members, and the heritage conservation movement. Yet the stories of these leisure struggles speak not only to African American history, but also to the historical and ongoing formation of the region and the United States. And the quest to reclaim this history for public memory has opened and informed contemporary life drawing

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<sup>1</sup> David Thelen, ed., *Memory and American History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), vii.

<sup>2</sup> W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1976), 199.

upon past struggles of people of these southern California towns to build shared understanding in contemporary communities.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation aims to expand our historical knowledge of the African American experience, the American West, and the U.S. in general, through local studies of struggles for leisure in southern California. The project adds to the illumination and reclamation of African American spaces and places of social and cultural history around leisure in the Jim Crow era of the twentieth century and the long civil rights movement, reconsidering the narrative of the southern California experience as it restores erased participants and events to the cultural landscape. The history reconstructed in this research challenges the invisibility of African American presence after a century of removal by restoring, reclaiming, and through public history, renewing the claim to place in leisure locations across southern California. It reconnects the material and non-material memory heritage of sites, people, ideals and events that resonate historically, intellectually, emotionally and unconsciously to deepen the landscape of national consciousness. These local historical narratives are the foundation for a richer, more accurate American public memory, or what Pierre Nora calls *lieu de memoire*—sites of memory. Only through concerted action documenting the history of the African American experience around leisure practices in these southern California communities has there been success, however limited, against the erasure and toward recall, reclaiming, reframing and incorporation of this history into contemporary place memory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term heritage conservation rather than historic preservation as it is a more inclusive term of the activities to preserve American “heritage” beyond the sole consideration of saving a historic building for its cultural significance.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Nora, “From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory,” From the Internet: [http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan\\_of\\_Arc/OLR/03\\_PierreNora\\_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan_of_Arc/OLR/03_PierreNora_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf), 20 March 2015, xv, xvi, xvii.

To imagine and write the historical narratives of each site examined in this dissertation, considerable historical reconstruction has occurred. All of the sites examined in this dissertation have varied presences and absences embodied in sources that have influenced the degree to which and how the African American leisure experiences have fared in its past incorporation into local cities and southern California historical narratives and memories. There is a structured institutional nature to the paucity and exclusion of sources and the dominant narrative that absents them. The availability of rare and scattered material culture sources in archives or personal collections such as photographs, ephemera, other documents, and *in situ* buildings, has been a significant factor influencing the extent of incorporation of these experiences. The scarcity and little institutional initiative to collect oral history and other accounts recalling the details of leisure practices or direct testimony of events at these sites by African Americans who enjoyed them, have in many instances cast a veil of silence about the specific practices at these places. Further, the missing history of the African American experiences has increased through multiple generations due to individuals of this community's modesty or being accustomed to considering their lives inconsequential as history. In these southern California towns, contemporary insertions aside, most local community histories where these African Americans experiences occurred and sites resided have almost entirely omitted black involvement, or have privileged some events over others that would not be the ones emphasized by the African American actors of the era or in the present. These types of silences in sources, archives, making of narratives, and making of public history of the African American experience in the various southern California communities, show the "inequalities experienced by the actors [that lead] to uneven historical

power in the inscription of traces” in the process of historical production. The expanded historical narratives about these sites in this dissertation contribute to shaping, or in some instances recasting, the history and memory of African Americans whose voices have been silenced, marginalized or overlooked in these communities and southern California due to their relative lack of civic, political and socio-economic power.<sup>5</sup>

The stories in these dissertation chapters offer more complex views of sometimes surprising interactions of local citizens’ relationships in southern California. They illustrate and open to analysis the broader pattern of struggle over leisure consumerism as it became an important element of American life. Local history narratives have excluded and silenced regional African American pioneers zealous participation in the civic life and socio-consumer life of these communities and the nation, and erased the active thwarting of their efforts by others. African American entrepreneurs were in the mainstream of the American economic experience when they purchased goods, services and land from non-black businesses to support and shape their enterprises to meet the leisure desires and needs of their clientele. Too typically, the histories of the communities examined in this dissertation have privileged nostalgic views to celebrate a partial past, featuring white city founders to make safe history for current privilege. That history is set neatly apart from the history of African American community building, and from the present. These local histories miss these towns’ original formation in, and persistence as entities of economic and spatial discrimination and exclusion that is racial in origin, and in doing so perpetuate misunderstanding in the present.

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<sup>5</sup> Russ Rymer, *American Beach, How ‘Progress’ Robbed a Black Town—and Nation—of History, Wealth, and Power* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 2009), 157; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 26-27, (quotation) 48; Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City, Civic Imagination and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 2.

These narratives do not reveal the past African Americans struggle against racial discrimination, harassment and violence for equal access to occupy public space, as well as for housing and employment that in some of these communities has impacted their limited residential presence today. In the locations where these African American leisure sites existed and their history was marginalized and excluded the more contemporary discourse opening about it has shown how history can have bearing on community understanding. These expanded discourses offer new understanding, showing how consciousness raising and history have stirred communities in the direction of slowly building a different and more complete identity of themselves.

Santa Monica's historical African American beach area has retained many material cultural resources and accounts of its leisure history in a few public archives and private, personal collections. This may be because African Americans enjoyed this ocean front space for over fifty years, leaving behind personal memories that have produced informally told narrative histories. Some of these stories have been recorded in oral histories now stored at community repositories and featured in local media reports. African American agency persisted in occupation of the public beach space in Santa Monica, enduring through a period of white infliction of discrimination and obstruction, but not violence, when whites arbitrarily decided the color line as they viewed it was breached at the public beach. Contemporary scholarship about Los Angeles with information on the African American experience have included references to the beach area, and there has been one scholarly article published by this dissertation author offering a restored vision the site's history. The city of Santa Monica's landmarking of the site, scholarly websites featuring history, popular press media,



and a few documentary films have also presented varied aspects of the history of this African American leisure site, and to a more limited extent, the history of the local, Santa Monica African American community in its public memory inscription. Additionally, recent and what appear to be on their way to becoming recurring public programming efforts by heritage and ocean stewardship conservation organizations, and surfing groups have begun actively contributing to heightening public memory of the site and its actors. Yet the prevailing popular narratives of local history have not included the African American beach and local community experience in their stories.

The source materials for Bruce's Beach at Manhattan Beach are much more limited. There are few items in public archives and private personal collections, in addition to limited, historical African American and general community press coverage, and few social experience accounts being passed across generations from the African Americans who made it "Bruce's Beach." A 1956 U.S. History Master's thesis was produced on the site's evolution into the mid-1950s, and a few local historians' have included mentions in their works, and these have proven valuable sources of information for the public. Contemporary scholarly history about Los Angeles with information on the African American experience have included a few references to Bruce's Beach, and this dissertation now expands that with a more in-depth investigation of the site's history. Though local amateur historians' work and activism that pushed the city of Manhattan Beach to rename the park site, and furthered by local media, the public has regained recognition of the African American leisure experience at Bruce's Beach, but that recognition has limited a complex story to a narrow and mis-emphasized interpretation in public memory.

Val Verde has retained many material cultural resources and accounts of its leisure history. Historical African American media reports, a few news feature programs periodically replayed on public television, a few public archives and private, personal collections, physical landscape remains, and some contemporary residents with historical connection to the community's rural leisure enclave roots have sustained awareness of the African American making of the place. Contemporary scholarly history about Los Angeles with information on the African American experience have included a few references to Val Verde. A few brief and narrow in scope narrative passages in amateur local historians' works have been produced. Personal memories of experiences passed down to subsequent generations have created informally told narrative histories, and some of these stories have been recorded in oral histories now stored at community repositories, as well as in contemporary, local media accounts. The public archive of the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation contains institutional history of the Park as a county owned facility, and federal government funded 1930s Work Progress Administration project. Especially informative to public historians, this county archive includes speeches, letters and other materials placed in a time capsule at the building of the original, Val Verde Pool House in 1939. In 2015, the Val Verde Park site landscape and the 1929 clubhouse are *in situ*, though not historically landmarked at the county, state or national level. The original Eureka Villa and Val Verde subdivision street names and plan also remain. The current residential community retains few of the original structures, as few have endured and others have been extensively modified. Still, these material resources and community memory sources have supported Val Verde's retention of public memory.

When I began this research on the African American leisure experience in the City of Lake Elsinore in 2003-2004, few members of the Lake Elsinore Historical Society (founded in 1996) or local government representatives knew any information about this history. Eventually a member of the Society recalled Thomas R. Yarborough Park was named (1968) to honor its African American namesake for his public service as the mayor and other activities to the City of Lake Elsinore. A member of the Society found in their collection, a forgotten (and very useful) 1982 brief history of the African American local and leisure community that was part of a program bulletin for an event of a defunct civic organization called the Hilltop Community Center. A few other ephemera and material culture sources also were rediscovered in the collection. The most comprehensive, widely available and referenced local history, *Lake Elsinore Valley: Its Story, 1776 – 1977*, published in 1978 by Tom Hudson, does not mention the African American (or Jewish) community leisure spaces or history. Disappeared from public memory, the story has held on in personal memories. The majority of the ephemera documentation and oral histories for the chapter in this dissertation were gathered from individuals in the African American community of Los Angeles with some connection to Lake Elsinore as visitors or vacation property owners during the Jim Crow era, and from a few public collections in Los Angeles. Other cultural material sources were found in the private personal collections of long-time African American residents of the Lake Elsinore area whose families arrived in the 1920s, and from historical African American print media.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From 2003 to 2015, all the members of the Lake Elsinore Historical Society and city government representatives I spoken with were white Americans and had been associated with the area for less than thirty years.

Memory, materials and public acts matter in reclaiming this important, silenced history. The scant formal public collection, narrative, and marking have buried a vibrant complex history, or as in this case, contained it minimally in nominally recognizing one individual on the landscape. Personal memories of the African Americans experience at Lake Elsinore in its leisure community heyday have been passed down to subsequent generations through informally told narrative histories. That those have not made it to public memory was evident in a recent public moment of historical remembrance. In 2013, the City of Lake Elsinore celebrated the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. As part of the celebration a timeline with a brief chronology of the Lake Elsinore Valley was added to the City's website. On this website timeline, under the heading of World War II, there is a very brief item identifying Thomas R. Yarborough as the first African American mayor in California and that he was also a council member. A photocopy of a *Lake Elsinore Sun* newspaper photograph and caption from March 27, 1969 around the time of his funeral is also featured. Additionally he is mentioned in the context information of the City's 2011 Downtown (Specific) Master Plan. The mention of Yarborough's city service and the city park named after him are the only new material culture sources and traces this author found while doing research in 2014-2015 on the Lake Elsinore's African American experience mentioned in the local public or historical documents. Public memory inscription of the African American experience for the City of Lake Elsinore is narrowly cast around one African American pioneering civil leader, and silent on the dynamic leisure community of national reputation involving business, residence

and recreational activities that was constructed and persisted for many years of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

The African American proprietorship of the Parkridge Country Club of Corona has the longest way to travel into public memory inscription. Only a few known pieces of ephemera and material cultural resources have survived in public archives and private personal collections. From the 1920s, there is some historical African American press coverage of the Parkridge, and, a surprising amount of historical, general local press reports. But the landscape of the short-lived pleasure development was erased as thoroughly as that of its contemporary arson-terminated Pacific Beach Club of Huntington Beach, and no extensive accounts of the leisure practices and events have been uncovered for either location. Only recently have either of these sites and the African American experience in their ventures been written about in scholarly or amateur history. In a recent effort “to provide a reliable source of information about the rich history of Orange County, California” and more specifically, “Orange County’s Diverse Population,” the County’s Archives Department has published a limited description of the Pacific Beach Club story on its website. Unfortunately, it privileges the story of the white developer who was the public face of the project in Orange County as a savior of sorts and is silent on the agency of the African American investors’ initiative to promote the project and to legally protect themselves. This story does not convey the nuisances and complexities of a business deal like this one, the legal requirements of the era and the series of obstacles the promoters had to overcome due

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<sup>7</sup> “City Timeline, City of Lake Elsinore,” From the Internet:

<http://www.lakeelsinore.org/index.aspx?page=418>, 3 April 2015; “Background/Historic Context,” Downtown Master Plan, City of Lake Elsinore, From the Internet: <http://www.lakeelsinore.org/index.aspx?page=678>, 5 April 2015, 21.

to white efforts to halt projects. A fuller public story of the Pacific Beach Club's development would contribute to the transformation of the understanding of the history of the African American experience, and of the nearby local Orange County communities. There is no official public memory inscription about the African American experience and the Parkridge Country Club in the public realm of Corona.<sup>8</sup>

To counteract the structural nature of the problem of the lack of inclusion of multiple voices in local history accounts by historical narrators and obstinate elites, who have participated in banalization of and silenced the history of such groups as African Americans, continuous multi-front efforts will be required to recover and represent the history, and reclaim its place. Professional scholars, museum curators, members of the heritage conservation movement, policy makers, along with journalists and other observers will have to more frequently research and present these boarder narratives before the general public. In a region of constant migration and continued assertion of leisure as a central part of its identity, it matters that we know the actual story of assertion, context, and creativity in the composition of southern California leisure for current and future practice. Illumination of these local stories can open up a spatial imaginary for more diverse participants to define, innovate, and participate in government planning and vision for leisure's future in these places. As minority groups become the majority in the U.S., it is in the national interest that all citizens gain a more sophisticated culturally diverse consciousness and understanding of history and contemporary experience of communities of color and other economically, politically, or socially marginalized Americans. Research studies have shown especially

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<sup>8</sup> "Orange Country History, Orange County, California," From the Internet: <http://ocarchives.com/history/>, 5 April 2015.

positive impacts of multicultural education for white students who learn about communities of color and the issues of race already familiar to minority group students. For the practice of democracy where everyone is included, it is essential that all citizens be incorporated in the American historical narrative and identity, especially those who have previously been kept on the periphery.<sup>9</sup>

Another important avenue for addressing how to increase historical narrative diversity is education policy and practices of implementation of multicultural grade school and higher education curricula to counter Euro-American-centric perspectives, and dismantle institutional racism and hegemonic structures that impede this knowledge. Multicultural education and the ethnic studies movements, which emerged during the modern civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, have historical roots in the African American and ethnic studies movements pioneered by scholars Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, José Martí and others that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even with this long history of labor by scholars, educators and others in the advancement of teaching multi-voiced narratives, in the nation's K–12 system of education it continues to be virtually absent, and in some states resisted by conservative legislators. Higher education has a better track record, as some form of multicultural or ethnic, American studies are taught at most of the nation's universities and required at many, whether the majority of students take these courses or not. Consideration of leisure as a social location of power, contest, and memory has made no entry into curricula.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Christine E. Sleeter, "The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies, A Research Review," National Education Association, 2011, From the Internet: <https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/NBI-2010-3-value-of-ethnic-studies.pdf>, 7 April 2015, 2, 5, 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Sleeter, 5-7; Noah Remnick, "Why ethnic studies: In California especially, understanding race and

The California State Legislature, the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition, National Education Association and other groups are making new strides in addressing educating the citizenry with an understanding of the diversity of human experience in California and the nation. The community stories in the chapters of this dissertation could be especially powerful and effective education tools for transforming California of the twenty-first century, as they are about local, African American agents in the history of active making of community and place, uses of space, power of memory and reclaiming it, along with inclusively composing the constantly shifting identity of people. These stories are also about social and state power of dispossessing and silencing. The legislative and civic coalition project are concentrated around expansion of the K–12 education curricula and textbooks currently dominated by Euro-American perspectives, to include the knowledge and perspectives of marginalized scholarship by and about African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, that reflect narratives and points of view rooted in these group’s lived experiences and scholarship. Students of color continue to demand the inclusion of knowledge and perspectives of their ethnic and race groups, and there are now more sympathetic allies in powerful, policy-making positions who are actuating their demands through public policy for the construction of a more inclusive public culture and national identity.<sup>11</sup>

In the last decade, the California Legislature has been engaged in revising legislation (the FAIR Act) in favor of a multicultural voice and inquiry-based instructional model for California K–12 history curricula. The FAIR Act expands the categories of history

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ethnicity isn’t a luxury, it’s a necessity,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 2014, A-19.

<sup>11</sup> Sleeter, vii, 5-6; Ethnic Studies Now Coalition, From the Internet: <http://www.ethnicstudiesnow.com>, 7 April 2015.



encompassed in social science education and makes stronger anti-discrimination policies in instructional materials and textbooks selected in the state of California. The revised bill as enacted states:

Instruction [and instructional materials] in social sciences shall include the early history of California and a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America.<sup>12</sup>

The American Historical Association (AHA) is an advocate of the California FAIR Act. In November 18, 2014, AHA submitted a letter supporting the upcoming revision of the California K–12 History–Social Sciences Framework. The organization urged those engaged in revising the curriculum to adhere to the parameters of the FAIR Act, in attempts to provide elementary school students access to a broad range of viewpoints in primary sources, thereby encouraging them to develop their own evidence-based arguments. The organization of history professionals concluded this model education legislation “is a step in the right direction for history education,” a sentiment that all who support more inclusive history instructional programming would agree with. This type of educational curricula will aid structurally in improving California students’ and eventually the general public’s knowledge of the diverse experiences of the American people.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pupil Instruction: Prohibition of Discriminatory Content, Senate Bill 48/Ch. 81, California Legislature, From the Internet: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml>, 6 April 2015.

<sup>13</sup> The American Historical Association (AHA) is the largest professional organization in the United States devoted to the study and promotion of history and historical thinking, From the Internet: <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership>, 7 April 2015; “AHA Supports FAIR Act in California K-12 History Education,” *AHA Today* (A Blog of the American Historical Association), From the Internet: <http://blog.historians.org/2014/11/aha-submits-letter-support-fair-act-revisions/>, 7 April 2015; 2014-2015 Draft History–Social Science Framework for California Public Schools for field review on 19 September 2014,

Additionally in 2014, California State Assembly member Luis A. Alejo led the introduction of Assembly Bill 101 requiring the development of a model curricula in ethnic studies, the establishment of an advisory committee on ethnic studies, and the establishment of ethnic studies offerings in school districts serving students in grades 7-12 as an elective course by 2016–2017, following a district’s adoption of a model curriculum. Courses would be taught in different disciplines, including history, social sciences, and literature, and would cover ethnic-specific, varied content, and include exploration of different perspectives in social justice. Some of California’s largest public school districts, Los Angeles and San Francisco, for example, and a smaller one in Pico Rivera have already made taking an ethnic studies class a high school graduation requirement for all students, before the state bill advanced towards being fully functional. In addition to teaching students about diverse cultures, research studies have shown these types of course specially help students of color academically in increasing student achievement and engagement, as well as socially, giving them a sense of empowerment and self-worth when they learn about histories of people who speak and look like them. These research studies also have found ethnic studies courses help bridge differences across existing experiences, and build discovery of commonalities of shared human experiences. Conceived in this way as the basis of public, historical collective understanding, ethnic studies, including the stories of African American leisure places and community builders, are intended not just as the stories and experience of specific groups of Americans but that of all American people. The courses intentions are to play a role in developing empathy and anti-racism, towards building a more fully realized multicultural

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California Department of Education, From the Internet: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssfwwforfieldreview.asp>, 7 April 2015.

democracy and public culture in America's future. As California is one of the most diverse states in the nation, some observers consider the state's ethnic studies for high schools legislation "as a powerful model for the rest of the country." Although Governor Jerry Brown vetoed the bill in October 2015, at the very least, it must be considered an important part of recasting more accurately and inclusively the public's history and memory.<sup>14</sup>

Many in the general public learn about regional and national experiences of America's people while visiting historic sites. At this time the National Register, and state and local historic registries are not reflective of the nation's history, let alone its changing demographics. The number of national, state and local landmarks designations reflecting the history of communities of color and women continues to be very small, and they do not reflect all the narratives in the American story. Less than three percent of the National Register's sites and approximately one percent of California's historical resources inventory are associated with ethnic and cultural significance. Less still consider the historical formation of leisure as an important determinant of contemporary society and culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Pupil instruction: ethnic studies, Assembly Bill 101/Amended in Assembly March 18, 2015, California Legislature, From the Internet: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billHistoryClient.xhtml>, 7 April 2015; Bill Analysis, AB-101 Pupil instruction: ethnic studies, From the Internet: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml>, 7 April 2015, 1, 4; Remnick, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 2014, A-19; Stephen Ceasar, "El Rancho schools don't wait on state, adopt ethnic-studies curriculum," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 2014; Stephen Ceasar, "L.A. Unified to require ethnic studies for high school graduation," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 2014; Cynthia Liu, "The case for requiring ethnic studies in high school," *The Washington Post/The Answer Sheet Blog by Valerie Strauss*, 8 December 2014; Sleeter, 20; Stephen Ceasar, "Governor vetoes ethnic studies bill," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 2015. In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), even some elementary schools are beginning to incorporate ethnic studies with visual arts in innovative curricula. In program partnership between LAUSD and Loyola Marymount University's (LMU) Family of Schools has in 2015 been awarded a four-year grant of more than \$1.65 million from the U.S. Department of Education to help teachers integrate arts education and ethnic studies to increase student achievement and engagement. LMU's faculty in Chicano and Latino studies and African American studies will present history, culture and context, and local artists and arts instructors will help teachers develop the skills and the process of creating art in the context of the cultural history instruction, Mary Plummer, "LAUSD teachers to learn visual arts and cultural history integration," 89.3 KPCC, From the Internet: <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/education/2015/02/13/17915/lausd-teachers-to-learn-visual-arts-and-cultural-h/>, 7 April 2015 and "Arts Education Wins Federal Funding," *The Magazine of Loyola Marymount University*, 26 February 2015.

Cultural landmark designations and public programming around them can infuse a cultural and natural resource site with complexities of human history and experience that strengthens both the heritage and nature conservation movements by giving these sites a critical dimension beyond beauty, rarity and environmental protection. From an environmental justice viewpoint, the inclusion of this history is symbolic of limited social change and pushes forth a sense of shared cultural belonging and common membership in American society that helps in forming a basis for social progress, learning and action in the future.<sup>15</sup>

In the more recent decades, the heritage conservation movement has reconsidered the definition of what is worth protecting. With some in the movement, now there is an understanding of a need for a definition going beyond architectural significance in the traditional sense. The movement has slowly acknowledged that there are layers of history at sites that deserve recognition, even when those layers reconsider the original character of the building or when there is no building extant upon which to situate the history. Sense of place stories, intangible cultural heritage or social value, such as oral traditions, performing arts and craftsmanship traditional knowledge, social practices, rituals and festive events are the “heritage” that makes many historic sites important to communities of color. These types of social value sites remain a tough sell in many circles of heritage conservation, as well as nature conservation. In order for the heritage conservation movement to be relevant in diverse communities, it is slowly finding its way towards more recognition and affirmation of

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<sup>15</sup> Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place, Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 8-9; Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story, Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group), 307; Stephanie Meeks, “Sustaining The Future,” California Preservation Foundation Conference: Preservation on the Edge, Santa Monica, California, May 16, 2011, 2, 4; Donna Graves, “The Legacy of California’s Landmarks: A Report for the California Cultural and Historical Endowment,” September 2012, From the Internet: [http://resources.ca.gov/docs/cche/TheLegacy\\_of\\_CaliforniasLandmarks.pdf](http://resources.ca.gov/docs/cche/TheLegacy_of_CaliforniasLandmarks.pdf), 7 April 2015, 36-37.

such sites and landmarks. The recovery and incorporation of the landscape of leisure in southern California invites this sort of creative marking and mediation.<sup>16</sup>

There are still large influential segments of white America, even in California, that continue to have a problem accepting an identity as a more diverse nation, and the loss of "whiteness" as a defining feature of the dominant group's American identity. Further this group continues to lag at embracing painful aspects of the past and the breadth of human experience in the nation's history as a more complex multiracial and ethnic landscape to see a common destiny. Popular memory of many historical events and sites has proven difficult to extricate from white-centered narratives, or to enrich with new information, even with new scholarship and more enlightened historical and cultural site administrators who began work in the 1990s.

The development of a more inclusive American national consciousness and American identity is a slow process that is occurring. As some of the research in this dissertation already has, this and other scholarship produced in the last forty years can be utilized by public and private policy making administrators and educators of western states and municipalities, as well as the nation to create more inclusive narratives about African Americans and other peoples of color in the curriculum of the education system that provides the young with knowledge and training. This scholarship should also be used in developing additional landmark designations of historical sites associated with these groups at the local, state and national level. Other types of public programming, which could include museum exhibits, information websites and public lectures also should be developed to engage the

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<sup>16</sup> Meeks, 5-7; Kaufman, 2-5, 12-13, 326; Hayden, 7-13, 15, 22, 46-48, 54; Ned Kaufman, "Putting Intangible Heritage in its Place[s]: Proposals for Policy and Practice," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 8 (2013): 21.

American citizenry in understanding the full experience of the nation's people. These acts would go a long way towards better instilling the history of western regional overlooked, neglected and marginalized groups into American national consciousness or historical public memory, and the American identity.

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