UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration via Baja California

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

by

Laura Kaye Fleisch Hooton

Committee in charge:
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June 2018

The dissertation of Laura Kaye Fleisch Hooton is approved.

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June 2018

Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration via Baja California

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The biggest thank you and acknowledgement goes to my family. They nurtured my love of history, my passion for writing, and my fascination with the power of words since I was a child. As an adult, they have supported my career and encouraged me to continue through thick and thin.

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PUBLICATIONS

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"Black Angelenos with the 'Courage to Do and Dare': African American Community Organizers in Lower California," *California History*, 94.1 (Spring 2017), 43-54.

Blackpast.org, Online Encyclopedia Articles, 2012-2013.
Fred Luter, Jr., Samuel J. Battle (http://www.blackpast.org/?q=contributor/fleisch-laura)

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Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity, Revised Edition
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"Dreaming of Asylum in Every County: Black Migration to the West Following Reconstruction" (in preparation for submission to the *Journal of Black Studies*)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Completed

Organization of American Historians, Sacramento, CA April 2018
Panel: Historicizing the Golden State: New Directions in California History
Presentation: "Co-Opting the Border: An African American Community Using the U.S.-Mexico Border to Fight Racial Injustice"

American Historical Association, Washington, D.C. January 2018
Poster: "Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration Via Baja California"

Western History Association, San Diego, CA November 2017
Workshop: "New Directions in Black Western Studies"
Paper: "Broadening the Horizons of the Black West: Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, and Immigration"

Pacific Coast Branch-American Historical Association, Northridge, CA August 2017
Panel: Remembering and Recovering African American History
Presentation: "Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration Via Baja California"

Western Association of Women Historians, San Diego, CA April 2017
Panel: New Perspectives on Africa American History
Presentation: "Little Liberia: The African American Agricultural Community in Baja California"

Maple Leaf & Eagle Conference, Helsinki, FIN May 2016
Panel: Land, Development, Disputes
Presentation: "'Opportunities in a New Country': African American Identity, Cross-racial Cooperation, and Social Change in Baja California"

Western History Association, Portland, OR October 2015
Panel: Bridging the Divide: Race, Violence, and Memory in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands
Presentation: "Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration Via Baja California"

Collegium for African American Research, Liverpool, UK June 2015
Panel: Black Communities
Presentation: "'Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race': Los Angelinos in Little Liberia, the African American Colony in Baja"

Collegium for African American Research, Atlanta, GA March 2013
Panel: Blacks in the West
Presentation: "Dreaming of 'Asylum in Every County': Motivations for Post-Reconstruction Black Migration"

Maritime Museum of San Diego First date of exhibit: June 16, 2010
Semi-permanent exhibit aboard the *HMS Surprise.*

OTHER PRESENTATIONS

UC Santa Barbara Department of History, Santa Barbara, CA November 2016
Race in America Scholarly Roundtable
Presentation: "An Unconventional Border Triangle: Los Angeles, Baja, and Oklahoma"

UC Santa Barbara Lunch & Learn, Santa Barbara, CA November 2016
Panel: Localization and Little Liberia
Presentation: "Borderlands and Black Studies: African Americans in Baja California"

Lompoc Public Library, Lompoc, CA May 2016
Created Equal: America's Civil Rights Struggle Programming
Presenter, *The Abolitionists* (PBS Documentary)

Bakersfield College, Delano Campus, CA March 2016
Invited Guest Speaker, Cultural Historical Awareness Program
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Paper Title: "A Transnational Harvest of Gold: African American Agricultural Opportunities in Baja California"

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Visiting Assistant Professor and Post-Doctoral Fellow, West Point
History of the United States Planned 2018-2019
Will teach three courses per semester of this this one-semester survey of United States history as part of the Post-Doctoral Fellow position. Course includes United States history from its colonial roots through the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Instructor of Record, Department of History, UCSB
The History of the North American Borderlands Winter 2017
Created and taught unique upper division seminar course, supported by the Dean's Prize Teaching Fellowship Award. Course covered history of North America and its peoples from 1700 to the present by discussing relationships across and through borders, including locations such as the mainland United States, Hawai'i, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United States Territories and themes such as the creation of political, economic, and social systems and ties on a national, transnational, and international scale, as well as identity formation, imperialism, globalization, and colonialism.

The Civil Rights Movement, 1930 to the Present Summer 2016
Designed and taught upper division course which covered diverse array of groups and issues from past and present, including lynching, marriage rights, voting rights, education, feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, prison reform and the legal system, segregation, police brutality, intersectionality, stereotyping, poverty, workers' rights, and affirmative action.

Lead Teaching Assistant, Department of History, UCSB
Department of History September 2014-August 2015
Part of a two-person team tasked with training and supervision of all Teaching Assistants in the Department of History. Collaborated with other Lead Teaching Assistant to create all programming for required training, including comprehensive Teaching Assistant orientation, quarterly events, and implementation and design of a mentoring program. In addition, was first point of contact between the department and Teaching Assistants for related issues and primary mentor for Teaching Assistants.

Teaching Assistant, UCSB
Department of History and Department of Black Studies 13 quarters

Guest Lectures
The Chicano Movement, UCSB History July 2017
Lecture Title: "Black and Brown Civil Rights Intersections"

World History Since 1700, UCSB History April 2016
Lecture Title: "The Industrial Revolution"

The American People, Colonial Through Jackson Era, UCSB History October 2015
Lecture Title: "Slave Trade, Slave Culture, Slave Resistance"

The American People, Sectional Crisis Through Progressivism, UCSB History Sep 2014
Lecture Title: "The Problem and Possible Solutions of the Color Line: 1890-1920"

SERVICE

Oral Historian and Humanities Consultant for African American History 2016-Present
"Digital Delano: Preserving an International Community's History" NEH Common Heritage Project, includes harvesting short oral histories, interpretation of materials and events for project website.

Member, Various Graduate Student Panels 2013-2017
UCSB Graduate Orientation and Department of History Training and Orientation

Graduate Representative, UCSB History Department 2016-2017
NEH "Next Generation Grant" committee

Graduate and Undergraduate Student Mentor, UC Santa Barbara 2013-Present
New graduate/TA mentor and assisting multiple undergraduates with outside research projects in Black Studies and history.

Workshop Leader, "Conducting Discussion on Sensitive Topics" 2015, 2014
All-campus TA Training

Head Instructor and Founder, Aikido of Ventura County 2012-Present
Founding Instructor for Aikido of Ventura County, a non-combative, non-violent martial art that stresses cooperation, personal connection, and interpersonal skills.

Apprentice and Assistant Instructor, Aikido of San Diego Summer 2012
Assistant instructor for children's class and apprentice, Aikido of San Diego.

LANGUAGES

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CURRENT ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

American Historical Association	2016-Present
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Western Association of Women Historians	2016-Present
Collegium for African American Research	2013-Present

ABSTRACT

Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration via Baja California

by

Laura Kaye Fleisch Hooton

"Co-Opting the Border: The Dream of African American Integration via Baja California" examines the emergence and fall of Little Liberia, an African American community in Baja California, Mexico. The Little Liberia community members saw possibilities for facilitating change in the social and economic system of the United States by existing outside its borders. The manuscript combines African American history, Black studies, and borderlands history themes and methods.

Established in 1917 by elite members of the Los Angeles Black community, and later joined by wealthy African Americans from Oklahoma, the community's initial goal was to change social and economic racial inequality in the United States by becoming an agricultural source for California while its members physically lived in Mexico. Its founders envisioned the border as a resource that could enable African Americans to gain access to U.S. markets and economic networks while dwelling in a nation that would not subject them to the injustices of the U.S. racial order.

As time went on, the community's leaders also proposed an African American-Mexican co-owned bank, a sanatorium, a hotel, and local trade systems to supplement cross-border commerce. The community, however, eventually succumbed to pressures from international politics emanating from the Mexican Revolution and U.S.-Mexico relations,

and from economic challenges and internal mismanagement of the community, which led to its eventual closure a decade after it began. A few members, however, lived out the rest of their lives in Baja California or kept contact with Mexican political leaders for decades after the experiment ended.

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's community, nicknamed Little Liberia, provided African Americans the opportunity to work together with Mexicans in Baja California to enact social change. Little Liberia community members built on other movements at the time, such as Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, that attempted to connect Blacks socially, economically, and politically throughout the world. Little Liberia's creators interpreted the border as a malleable space that could allow physical and economic mobility, while circumventing the negative effects of the United States' racial system. The ways these African Americans envisioned the border between the United States and Baja California, the social and political relationship between the two locations, and the community member's roles as Americans in Mexico drastically differed from the White filibusters in Mexico in the last half of the nineteenth century. This shift in thinking may not just be one of racial difference, but also of changing ideas about the border between California and its Baja counterpart.

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Prologue
"Independence stands with open arms beckoning those who possess the courage to do and dare"

In 1952, the headline "Mexican Rancher: Ensenada's lone negro male is hamlet's leading citizen" drew in *Ebony* Magazine readers' attentions, sharing the page with a picture of an African American man looking relaxed atop a horse with Ensenada's rolling hills in the background. Four pages of the widely popular national African American magazine were devoted to the man in the photo, James Littlejohn, highlighting his important impact on life in Baja California, then known in the United States as Lower California. A dual Mexican and American citizen, Littlejohn owned and operated a large farm, as well as a restaurant and motel that catered to Black tourists in Baja California. He and his wife, Elizabeth, periodically traveled to Los Angeles to attend church and visit friends, but the couple preferred to live in Mexico and had been doing so for about 35 years. Prior to moving to Baja California, James Littlejohn had never settled in any one particular place. Although he was born in Mississippi, he traveled throughout North America at a young age. At sixteen years old he moved to Guatemala to work on the Northern Guatemala Railroad. After he left Guatemala, he lived and traveled in every region of the United States and worked many different jobs, including as a Pullman porter, a cook, a dining car waiter, an express wagon helper, and a highway and sewer contractor. He held the latter position in Los Angeles, where his work led him to Baja California, the place where he lived for the rest of his life.[1]

[1] "Rancher Likes America But Prefers to Live in Mexico," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 88; "Mexican Rancher: Ensenada's Lone Negro Male Is Hamlet's Leading Citizen," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 84; "Mexican Citizenship Gives Littlejohn Right To Ranch," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 87; "Former L.A. Contractor Ensenada Businessman," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 11, 1963, C1.

Littlejohn initially began working in Baja California in 1917 helping to build a highway from Ensenada to Calexico for Baja California Governor Esteban Cantú.[2] Littlejohn was neither the first nor the last African American to venture to Mexico, nor was he the first in Baja California.[3] However, the business connection between Littlejohn and Cantú signaled the start of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, a unique African American agricultural community with large dreams for using agriculture in Mexico to enact social change in the United States. The following account of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's history and the historical events that accompany it moves and shifts along a jagged path with the decade-long history of the community, a history that took place on the streets of Black Los Angeles during the late 1910s, the farms of northern Baja California in the early 1920s, the charged racial landscape in Oklahoma throughout the mid-1920s, and between and around all three in the late 1920s. Through these varied histories, the U.S.-Mexico border remained ever-present, ever-apparent, and intrinsically connected to the development's goals, successes, and failures.

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's history is tied to local and national communities and movements, and its leaders' activism and business interests were integral to the community's formation. Chapter One's histories of Los

[2] "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," *California Eagle*, May 19, 1917, 1.
[3] There are few books that discuss African Americans in Mexico. The first major work, Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), discusses African Americans in Mexico during the Revolution, and although it provides a good snapshot for experiences of African Americans in Mexico, and a good foundation for work on the subject, it does not refer to the community in Ensenada or any of its members, and often refers to Mexico as a place of exile for African Americans, rather than a place of opportunity. Recently, Karl Jacoby's *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York ; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016) became the second major book to discuss African Americans in Mexico at length. Jacoby's telling of William Ellis, however, is drastically different from the experiences of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, since the members of this community never wavered in their identification as African Americans, whereas William Ellis, also known as Guillermo Eliseo, presented a more fluid and shifting identity.

Angeles, race in the American West, Black activism, and farming and migration illustrate the myriad of factors that contributed to the community's goals and structure. However, the community leaders' backgrounds are vital to understanding the passions and dreams that motivated African Americans to move to Baja California starting in 1917. Community leaders' individual profiles are important to understanding the community's roots, its growth, its challenges, and later its collapse, years before Littlejohn was featured in *Ebony*.

Dramatis Personae[4]

Theodore Troy

Theodore Troy was the first president of the board of directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company and, in many respects, was the face of the community. He moved to Baja California early in the company's tenure, and until health problems forced him to move back to Los Angeles he lived in Baja California with other community members. Troy, hailed as a "highly respected citizen" from a "distinguished and highly respected family," grew up in Cincinnati, where his father was a bank messenger and a founder of the Zion Baptist Church of Cincinnati. Troy made his way west and became the first African American letter carrier in Los Angeles. He then ran his own secondhand furniture store before investing in real estate and mining stock.[5] In the early 1900s he led the Forum Club of Los Angeles, an organization committed to African American advancement and moral and ethics-driven activities.

[4] This section gives a brief biography of main figures in the history of this community. For a more detailed history, see Laura Hooton, "Black Angelenos with the 'Courage to Do and Dare,'" *California History* 94, no. 1 (May 1, 2017): 43–54.

[5] Delilah L Beasley and Bancroft Library, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California; a Compilation of Records from the California Archives in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, in Berkeley; and from the Diaries, Old Papers, and Conversations of Old Pioneers in the State of California* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 133.

Charlotta Bass

While Theodore Troy was the face of the community, Charlotta Bass was its voice. Bass was editor for the *California Eagle*, the largest African American newspaper in the West. Born in South Carolina, she moved to Rhode Island at age twenty and began her newspaper career by working at a local newspaper for about a decade.[6] She moved to Los Angeles for health reasons and began working at the *California Eagle* and ultimately took over the paper at the request of its dying founder. She and her husband, Joseph Bass, ran the newspaper, and she wrote many of the articles that appeared within its pages. By the time the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company formed, Bass had already cemented her position as a trusted source for information and organizing in the West Coast, most notably in her campaign against D.W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* both in her paper and through litigation in court in 1915. In her paper and on the streets, Bass fought against institutional and social racism. She addressed a broad range of issues, including fighting to include Black workers in the hiring pool in Los Angeles county hospitals, working to desegregate schools, arguing for the erasure of restrictive covenants, and exposing Klan activities against Black organizers in Los Angeles, which led to physically fighting off Klan members in her own office. Bass participated in larger movements such as attending the 1919 Pan-African Conference in Paris, and served as president of the Los Angeles branch of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.).[7] This experience influenced her ideas about the community in Baja, and she spoke of the community's early

[6] Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 96.
[7] For Bass' history in her own words, see Charlotta A Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C.A. Bass, 1960), https://issuu.com/toussaint2/docs/forty_years_-_memoirs_from_the_page_7e8ee99e4d534e.

success as an impetus for other race movements, including attempts to promote larger immigration to Africa by organizations like the U.N.I.A.[8]

Hugh E. Macbeth

Hugh Macbeth was the secretary of the board of directors for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Unlike Theodore Troy, Macbeth remained in Los Angeles to coordinate community efforts north of the border. Originally from South Carolina, Macbeth attended college at the Avery Institute in Charleston. He later attended Fisk University in Nashville and received his law degree from Harvard University. He lived in Baltimore for five years, where he was the founding editor of *The Baltimore Times* newspaper. In 1913, Macbeth moved to Los Angeles to begin his law practice. He quickly became involved with Black organizing, including the Los Angeles Forum, whose purpose was to seek out new entrepreneurs and connect them with the Black Los Angeles community. In 1914 Macbeth, along with two colleagues, attempted to start a column in the *Los Angeles Times* specifically to applaud worthwhile African American achievements in the city. Macbeth joined, and later led, the All-American League, a group that aimed to combine the teachings of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, a melding of philosophy and industrialism. Under Macbeth's leadership, the group promoted interracial cooperation, as well as an end to lynch law and racial intolerance.[9] Like Bass, Macbeth was a member of the U.N.I.A.

[8] "In the Name of All That's Good and Brave In Us Let's Try It," *California Eagle*, October 18, 1919, 4.
[9] Delores McBroome, "Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia" in Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles : Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 157–58.

John B. (J.B.) Key

J.B. Key replaced Theodore Troy as president of the board of directors in 1922 and was associated with the community from 1921 until its end. Key was a well-known oil tycoon from Okmulgee, Oklahoma and was part of the Black Wall Street community in Oklahoma. His father, Hiram Key, was a Creek Freedman who helped build up Okmulgee's commercial district. J.B. Key and his wife, Annie, ran a dry goods and grocery store until oil was found on their land.[10] He then founded the J.B. Key Oil and Gas Company and played a crucial role in building up Okmulgee's historic commercial district in 1919 and 1920.[11] Key strove to unite all Black oil companies under one group to create a more powerful Black business organizing unit in Oklahoma.

Although Littlejohn, Troy, Bass, Macbeth, and Key were activists in their respective communities, their combined talents enriched the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, allowing them to imagine and pursue the creation of a more just society in the United States.

[10] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929* (Okmulgee, Oklahoma: City of Okmulgee Historic Preservation Committee, 1991), 44.
[11] Terri Myers, 47.

Chapter 1
"Be Something, Have Something, Do Something": Diaspora, Race, and the Plan of Little Liberia

In the early years of the twentieth century, African Americans faced discrimination in all sectors of society. On the eve of the First World War, inequity nationwide, including the American West, took many forms. People of color in the western United States faced restrictive covenants, redlining, decreased access to employment and housing, lynching and other forms of violence, threats from White supremacist groups, lack of voting rights, minimal access to the justice system, and Jim Crow laws that prevented African Americans from having full rights and citizenship.[1] Shortly after Reconstruction, all-Black agricultural towns sprung up throughout the United States as a means of creating opportunities for impoverished African Americans. After the turn of the century, many African American social movements continued the fight against injustices. Some movements kept a local profile, whereas others declared bold national or international goals. Many African American movements espoused progressive ideologies and racial uplift. International organizations, such as the U.N.I.A., sought to connect the Black diaspora to alleviate the effects of colonialism in both Africa and the Western Hemisphere. A group of African Americans from Los Angeles sought an answer to the race question through a business partnership in Mexico,

[1] Because of its diverse nature, and in part due to White migrants from the South to the West looking to transplant familiar power structures, Jim Crow laws and rules existed in the western United States, but often in a different form from other parts of the country. For instance, in Los Angeles Jim Crow laws kept communities of color segregated from White communities, even if these same communities of color were not always segregated by specific ethnic or racial groups. Jim Crow often applied to many non-White groups, not just African Americans, and the above list of Jim Crow rules heavily influenced them as well. For more information and instances of Jim Crow against African Americans in the West, see Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); B. Gordon Wheeler, *Black California: The History of African-Americans in the Golden State* (Hippocrene Books, 1993); Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramon, eds., *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* (New York: NYU Press, 2010). For information about lynching in the West, see Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

a country whose new leadership had just drafted a constitution promising unprecedented rights for its citizens after a decades-long dictatorial reign. These African Americans viewed the U.S-Mexico border as an integral part of this relationship, using the border as a malleable tool that could facilitate economic and social connections between the two countries but prevent White supremacy from poisoning the community's growth. This movement fully took shape in 1917 as the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, an African American agricultural community in Baja California roughly 40 miles outside of Ensenada and 180 miles south of Los Angeles.[2] Some individuals, including a few community members and organizers, eventually referred to the community by a nickname, Little Liberia.

Social Change Through Borderlands Agriculture

Middle-class and upper-class African Americans in Los Angeles started the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company in 1917 to create economic opportunities for African Americans in Baja California, with the hope that the community's success might eventually create lasting social change in the United States.[3] Initially the

[2] *Mapa de Baja California* (Chicago, Illinois: Rand McNally & Co., 1922), University of California, San Diego Special Collections; David Goldbaum, *Mapa Del Distrito Norte de La Baja California : . 32 a La Linea Internacional, Del Plano Del Ing. A.W. Lemon y Corregido Con Datos Proporcionados Por El Depositario de La Cia. Mexicana de Terrenos y Colonización.*, 1919, 1919, Baja California Collection, University of California, San Diego Special Collections.

[3] Although I cite as many sources as possible, there are some limitations to the source material in this chapter. A challenge with discussing the goals and plans for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company is the nature of the sources and the type of information they provide. Many newspaper articles about the community, which are the most numerous in number and information in terms of source material, are serving the double purpose of providing information about, and selling people on, the community. In later chapters, there is a significant increase in the amount of sources that speak specifically about the community's activities. In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, much like in Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).I provide citations where feasible and supply my best interpretation where the sources lack strength. In addition to relying on histories and theories about race in the American West and borderlands theories, in this chapter in particular I rely on Black Studies theories and epistemologies to inform my interpretation of these gaps in source material, particularly with respect to community knowledge, diasporic connections, and language around social movements.

company focused primarily on agriculture and livestock, although organizers also began a never-realized push to connect to existing mining efforts in Baja California.[4] As the company grew, particularly in the mid-1920s, so did its business strategy; community managers planned to attract tourists by building a hotel, a sanitarium, a bank, and additional paved roads to connect the community to Ensenada.[5] Although the company shifted economic tactics frequently during its decade-long life, its goals always looked beyond the Black elite's financial gain. Had these Black businessmen been exclusively focused on economic advancement, they most likely would have looked for an investment project closer to home with less risk. Instead, the Little Liberia project offered African Americans not only the opportunity for economic advancement but, more importantly, a chance to contribute to a project aimed at social change that could, over the long term, alter the nature of American social, political, and business relations by influencing national racial ideologies.[6]

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's board of directors aimed higher than simply achieving success as an agricultural community in Mexico that sold goods to local people and businesses in northern Baja California. Little Liberia's primary business goal involved becoming a bread basket for the state of California. Community creators argued that Little Liberia's closeness to Ensenada, San Diego, and Los

[4] This initial focus on agriculture and livestock, and the history attached to it, will be explained in more depth in Chapter 2.
[5] These later years will primarily be detailed in Chapter 3.
[6] The Little Liberia story has been told before, in pieces and whispers and spurts. The first large telling of the community appeared in Ted Vincent, "Black Hopes in Baja California: Black American and Mexican Cooperation, 1917-1926," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 204–13. Vincent's article began the conversation about Little Liberia by largely focusing on Hugh E. Macbeth's role in the community, including its downfall. Delores McBroome, in "Harvests of Gold" in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, drew comparisons between Little Liberia and the Allensworth colony in Northern California. McBroome's telling, which also focuses largely on Hugh E. Macbeth, was a useful chapter and a wonderful starting point to understanding the community in the context of other African American movements in California, but as a book chapter did not have the space to discuss much beyond a brief and rounded view of the community. Little Liberia has been referred to, by name or by subject, in books about African Americans and Baja California, but generally only briefly and often with incorrect dates.

Angeles meant "assuring a nearby market at all times for the products," implying that business connections on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border would provide stability. Although it already maintained an important place in the economy in prior decades, agriculture in the American West, and in particular Southern California, experienced a noticeable expansion in the early twentieth century.[7] The community's creators sought to begin selling goods gradually in markets in California, with the aim of eventually becoming a major supplier.[8]

The role of the border as both a unifying and a dividing force was central to the community's plans. Little Liberia organizers hoped that the community's location in northern Baja California would be close enough to allow goods to flow back and forth between Ensenada and these booming California markets, but far enough away that the community and its members could avoid the institutionalized economic and societal racism that had plagued the United States since slavery.[9] Even the Los Angeles Black elite, including some of Little Liberia's organizers, were limited in their possibilities for achievement due to deeply entrenched racial prejudice, a prejudice that still exists today. As Douglas Flamming noted in *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angles in Jim Crow America*, "many affluent blacks, having 'made it' economically, feel a deep sense of rage over America's color-bound sensibilities – the still widespread assumptions of black criminality and inferiority that slap them in the face every day," and in early twentieth century Los Angeles, these sensibilities

[7] For more on California's agricultural boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Chapter 5 from Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 128–75. This expansion, and in particular the importance of World War I to California's economy, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[8] Many articles about the community implied that the community intended to increase production gradually as more members, supplies, and capital came through. Some articles discussed "getting in on the ground floor," and similar language, of opportunities in Mexico, implying that there was the possibility of future growth, and that the community was a way to lay strong foundations for a much larger future prospect.

[9] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," *California Eagle*, October 22, 1921, 1.

were "more subtle than blatant, more unpredictable than not, and more diverse than black-white," and therefore harder to challenge.[10] African Americans involved in the community, many living in Los Angeles or the Imperial Valley before moving to the Santa Clara Valley, cited being held back by Jim Crow laws or being judged based on their race as reasons for looking to Mexico for opportunities.[11] To these Black Angelenos, the U.S-Mexico border had the potential to stop Jim Crow from following them to Mexico, and therefore to open up more possibilities for fair treatment and business prospects.

Exposing the existence of this anti-Black prejudice, even in an area like California touted as racially progressive, remained one of the community's basic goals. For instance, in a *California Eagle* article titled "In The Name of All That's Good and Brave In Us Let's Try It," the anonymous author remarked that the community would succeed "if enough of these colored Americans would get enough ginger in them to step across the border into Mexico and plant a colony that would attract the attention of even our white haters."[12] R.M. Massey, one of the first farmers to move to the community from the Imperial Valley in California, stated that he moved to Lower California with his son "to demonstrate to the white men of America that a colored man in the land of freedom and opportunity can develop as beautiful and as productive a country as ever Southern California dared to be."[13] Implied in Massey's comments, and in others like it, is the task of revealing that White discrimination necessitated the need to demonstrate Black people's abilities. In addition to productivity, community organizers believed in the sheer force of population numbers. In one instance, when

[10] Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 4.
[11] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," *California Eagle*, December 6, 1919, 1; "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1918, 15; B.C. Robeson, "Economic Independence," *California Eagle*, October 25, 1919, 4; Edna Johnson Boudoin, "As I See It," *California Eagle*, November 26, 1921, 1.
[12] "In the Name of All That's Good and Brave In Us Let's Try It," 4.
[13] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," 1.

discussing "the Lower California movement," community supporters remarked that "we believe that if enough colored people would go into Lower California to build a model as well as modern colony for the first time we would be seriously considered by the white man."[14] Although the community's primary concerns focused on building Little Liberia's economic viability and workforce, many community members mentioned or alluded to highlighting and challenging racial prejudice as secondary goals.

A Black agricultural community in Mexico, enjoying enough success that it altered the trajectory of the economy, could offer a critique of African Americans' treatment that upper-class Whites in the early twentieth century could not ignore. Scientific racism suggested that Black people were backward, slow, less capable, and had achieved less success in business because of genetic racial deficiencies.[15] This claim, of course, obscured the true limits to Black economic growth. Flamming mentioned, for instance, that "most white-owned businesses would not hire colored people, and that was perfectly legal…where blacks were employed, they were usually hired last, fired first, and paid less than their white counterparts."[16] These circumstances were a manifestation of a systematic problem, not proof of racial deficiency. A highly successful African American business venture in Mexico could theoretically chip away at these widely-held myths. When talking about Little Liberia

[14] "In the Name of All That's Good and Brave In Us Let's Try It," 4.
[15] Although there are quite a few works that draw on what we now call scientific racism, one main early contributor to these ideas is Johann Friedrich Blumenbach et al., *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. With Memoirs of Him by Marx and Flourens and an Account of His Anthropological Museum by R. Wagner, and the Inaugural Dissertation of John Hunter, on the Varieties of Man*, Publications of the Anthropological Society of London (London: Pub. for the Anthropological Society, by Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865); Arthur Comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (New York: H. Fertig, 1999); Francis Galton, *Essays in Eugenics.* (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1909); Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916); Nicholas Wade, *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).
[16] Flamming, *Bound for Freedom,* 11.

economic and social aims, creators hinted that the community's success could create business opportunities for African Americans while also exposing and fighting prejudice in the American West. Eventually, with enough success, the community's reach could even span the entire country. If the venture thrived, organizers believed it could unlock the potential for meaningful social change.

Black Social Movement History

Although the Little Liberia movement's combination of ideas and location was unique, it fit within a large and rich history of African American social movements in the United States. The focus on moving to another location and depending on agriculture for economic growth harkened back to the all-Black communities that sprouted up throughout the United States during the boom in post-Reconstruction migration. The reliance on the organizing and input of middle-class and upper-class African Americans gestured toward an economic version of W.E.B. Du Bois's Talented Tenth ideology, sprinkled with Booker T. Washington's focus on the inherent trade skills the Black community retained after Emancipation, in this case agricultural knowledge. A diasporic connection to the larger Black community, regardless of physical location or international borders, as well as the capacity for Black business to be the driving force for change, drew on Marcus Garvey's U.N.I.A. But Little Liberia community organizers conceptualized these Black ideas and ideologies in a new way when they incorporated the border as a tool to be used in this movement. Organizers, in addition, realized a community in Mexico created an opportunity to forge a bond between Mexicans and African Americans engaged in a similar fight against White racism in the United States. By breaking down discrimination, Black economic advancement

would theoretically facilitate their social and political inclusion as citizens of the United States and assert their dignity as human beings.

Little Liberia's focus on farming harkened back to a long history of agriculture's importance in African American life. African American community organizing and social movements, for decades before Little Liberia's creation, drew on the history of African American farm labor. Although some enslaved Black people in North America worked in trades outside of agriculture, many freedmen, especially in the South, became farm laborers on plantations or smaller farms, or acquired their own homesteads.[17] After Emancipation, some African Americans used this knowledge to start towns outside of the American South that focused on agriculture. Many of these communities worked toward achieving social and economic freedom through self-sufficiency and autonomy from mostly-White towns. The most notable and famous all-Black agricultural community arose in Nicodemus, Kansas.[18] Although these communities' goals often required or hinted at separation from post-Reconstruction Jim Crow in all its forms, as well as isolation from the larger biases and discrimination throughout the United States, most all-Black agricultural towns at some point relied on a larger city, state, or national economic or political system to function. These

[17] For African American property owners in the United States South, see Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction*, Reprint edition (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915*, Reprint edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); W. E. Burghardt Du Bois and David Levering Lewis, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, ed. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, 1st edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy*, 1 edition (College Station Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1985); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, New Ed edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005); E. Franklin Frazier and Anthony M Platt, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

[18] Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*, Reprint edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Nicodemus is not only one of the most well-known African American agricultural communities, it was also one of the most successful. Nicodemus boomed in the 1870s and 1880s, although it fell into decline in the late 1880s.

communities, therefore, could not be completely autonomous while remaining within the jurisdiction of the United States. In addition, this meant that these areas often suffered from lack of resources and funding, minimal political clout, and continuing racism.[19] By moving to Mexico and focusing primarily on recruiting members with disposable income, Little Liberia organizers built on their predecessors' vision while sidestepping some of the recurring problems that existed because there was no clear way to escape Jim Crow completely while in the United States.

Some African Americans regarded California as an ideal location for an all-Black agricultural community. In 1890, a community of Black farmers was established in Fowler in Fresno County, California, and more notably in comparison to Little Liberia, the Allensworth community was founded in 1908 in Tulare County. Five men, including the community's president, Colonel Henry Allen Allensworth, a highly decorated veteran and ordained Baptist minister, built on the idea of already existing towns in the Midwest and principles championed by Booker T. Washington when they established the town as a self-governed agricultural community that could function independently of Jim Crow California and be a location to set up a Tuskegee-type institution in the West. The Allensworth community, made up of African Americans originating from across the United States, was initially successful agriculturally and therefore brought in new settlers; it had a hotel, a church, a library, and a school, became a judicial district, had a few of California's first Black public

[19] Stephen A. Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765-1900*, First Edition edition (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Pr, 2002); Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 1st edition (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979); Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman, Oklahoma: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1982); Kenneth Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915*, First Edition edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Hannibal B. Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: The All-Black Towns in Oklahoma*, 1 edition (Austin, Tex: Eakin Press, 2003); Sitton Thad, James H. Conrad, and Richard Orton, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History. 1541-1972* (s.n.], 1974).

officials, and became California's first African American school district.[20] However, Allensworth relied heavily on the Santa Fe Railroad, which ran from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and on water pumped in from the White-owned Pacific Farming Company. In 1914, the Santa Fe Railroad bypassed the Allensworth stop by adding a spur to another town, taking the community off the railroad's path. By 1913, Allensworth still did not have electricity, and access to water became difficult when the Pacific Farming Company, which had initially agreed to supply water for the town regardless of size, failed to provide enough water. For agricultural communities, particularly in dry locations like Tulare County and Little Liberia's lands in the Santa Clara Valley, irrigation and water availability could drastically affect crop viability and the ultimate economic success of the community. Even though Allensworth eventually legally gained power over much-needed water, the system was outdated, the community was saddled with unpaid water taxes, and, once the taxes were paid off and the machinery was updated, the water table dropped too low for the new equipment to be used.[21] Although the Allensworth community remained active for decades, the events of 1914 signaled the community's decline, and by the time the Little Liberia community began, Allensworth's numbers had been decreasing for a few years.

Creating Community

Delores McBroome, in her chapter "Harvests of Gold," compares Little Liberia and Allensworth as parallel Black California booster agricultural communities. Although Little

[20] Alice C. Royal, *Allensworth, the Freedom Colony: A California African American Township* (Heyday Books, 2008), 5.

[21] For a comparison of Little Liberia and Allensworth, see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold" in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 149–80. For more information on Allensworth see Alice C. Royal, *Allensworth, the Freedom Colony: A California African American Township* (Heyday Books, 2008); Michael Allan Eissinger, *African Americans in the Rural San Joaquin Valley, California: Colonization Efforts and Townships* (Scotts Valley, Calif.: CreateSpace, 2008), 67–81; Randall Kenan, *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 328–94.

Liberia's creators did not specifically mention Allensworth as an inspiration, they undoubtedly were aware of it and engaged in many of the same economic and social conversations as the Allensworth community. However, this idea of boosterism, which focuses on a community's self-sufficiency and business enterprise, overshadows a key factor of importance to both communities – the physical act of moving somewhere as a means of creating new opportunities and possibilities. The harvests of gold that these communities were seeking for depended on agriculture, which could provide economic stability, but these two communities were created in new locations where Black-owned farms were scarce. This act of creating a new community in a new location, thus meant a new set of possibilities. Although, as McBroome points out, Little Liberia was started by California African Americans, and their ideas as Angelenos and Californians influenced the community's formation and trajectory, the importance of the border and their existence in it, which is the main focus of the next chapter, creates a new set of conversations and comparisons with Allensworth that go beyond Black boosterism in the early twentieth century.[22]

Another major difference between Little Liberia and its predecessors was the approach to land ownership. As Mark Schultz mentioned in his chapter "Benjamin Hubert and the Association for the Advancement of Negro Country Life," the story we know as "the tragedy of African American farmers in the South, a story burdened with repeating themes of sharecropping, crop liens, exploitation, dependency, poverty, and frustration" often ignores African American land owners, considering that "by 1910 a quarter of all black farmers had purchased their own land. A similar percentage held land in 1920."[23] For many African

[22] McBroome, "Harvests of Gold" in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 149–80. Additional comparisons between Allensworth and Little Liberia will appear in the last chapter.
[23] Mark Schultz, "Benjamin Hubert and the Association for the Advancement of Negro Country Life" in Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families*

Americans after Emancipation, part of the appeal of agricultural communities was the opportunity for land ownership, a key to economic advancement. Owning land was not only a means of self-employment and separation from White plantation culture, but over time it also became a social symbol of advancement, a benchmark for voting, a visible marker of progress and success, and a symbol of economic independence and freedom.[24] However, Little Liberia community members could not measure their success by or advance themselves through land ownership because Mexico outlawed foreign ownership of Mexican land within one hundred kilometers of the U.S.-Mexico Border under Article 27 of the 1917 constitution.[25] Toward the end of the Revolution, Mexico's government sought to make foreign land ownership illegal in order to curb the foreign intervention through investment that had plagued Mexico in the preceding decades. The Mexican government, therefore, required the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company to purchase the land through a Mexican trustee, so the company and its members did not fully own the land. If community members at any point in time obtained Mexican citizenship, they would then be eligible to own the land. However, it appears most Little Liberia community members and organizers did not intend to become Mexican citizens, which is most likely why these

since Reconstruction (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 83. Unfortunately there is no specific information about comparable land ownership statistics for the American West, other than national studies that show trends in Black ownership by time period. Communal land ownership in what is now the Southwestern United States was common prior to the U.S.-Mexico War, so individual African American land ownership in this area was less likely than in the United States West.

[24] Reid and Bennett, *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule*; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[25] Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution states "Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican companies have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, and their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions for the exploitation of mines or of waters. The State may grant the same right to foreigners, provided they agree before the Ministry of Foreign Relations to consider themselves as nationals in respect to such property, and bind themselves not to invoke the protection of their governments in matters relating thereto; under penalty, in case of noncompliance with this agreement, of forfeiture of the property acquired to the Nation." Mexico, "Constitution of the United Mexican States, 1917 (as Amended)" (Washington: Pan American Union, 1961).

African Americans focused on the possible economic impact of the land's output, rather than on the land itself.

As previously mentioned, for agricultural communities outside of the American South, a group's imagined possibilities of the virtue of existence in a different location, were as important as the physical location and the practical options a specific place provided. Little Liberia community members' views of an agricultural community *somewhere else* built on ideas ingrained in the Black experience in the United States. African Americans often focused on moving to a new location as a means of creating possibilities for advancement and change because they were building on ideas rooted in the legacy of slavery. Whites often restricted enslaved people's movements, in part because for enslaved people freedom of movement meant expanded possibilities for changing the status quo, including unchecked information sharing, organizing resistance and rebellion, and escape. For African Americans after Emancipation, this lack of restriction on movement transformed into a greater appeal towards migrating to another location, not just for the purpose of starting anew but because movement itself created possibilities for something new and different. Little Liberia organizers inherently connected to these ideas when creating a community where migration, even if it was not permanent, necessitated change.[26]

Little Liberia organizers also drew on a larger and longer history of Black social movements that focused on community-making. Little Liberia, like many African American

[26] For information about the Black community during Reconstruction I draw largely from W. E. B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1935); Foner, *Reconstruction*; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, Vintage Books ed edition (New York: Vintage, 1980); Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*. As Hahn argued that the origins of Black Nationalism and the Civil Rights movement fits into a larger conversation that draws on Black history from slavery to the Great Migration, I argue that Little Liberia's history, and the goals of Little Liberia organizers, cannot be understood without understanding the larger Black experience and ways of thinking and knowing rooted in slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction migration west.

communities formed as a social movement, began as an effort to create an alternative free space that could preserve and advance the Black community. Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* referred to this type of movement as reflective of "the continuing development of collective consciousness." This consciousness was inherently rooted in the fact that the Black community's greatest achievement was itself, its constitution and preservation as an aggrieved and insurgent collective polity. Despite the radical divisiveness imposed by poverty and White supremacy, the Black community perceived itself as linked by a shared fate (and of a shared faith) and by common aspirations.[27] Little Liberia organizers, rather than acting as an isolated group, instead connected to the larger shared aspirations of the Black community when they articulated a plan with goals of ambitious social change that would help the whole African American community. Although the community creators planned primarily to attract Black businesspeople, creators and supporters also spoke of larger gains for African Americans and members of the African Diaspora globally. The author of one article remarked that the community could "be the first real step towards immigration to Africa," which some African Americans at the time saw as a way of combating colonialism. The same article claims, "Now we believe that if enough colored people would go into Lower California to build a model as well as modern colony for the first time we would be seriously considered by the white man."[28] Ideally, this serious consideration would lead to changes in perceptions of African Americans nation-wide.[29]

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[27] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 171.
[28] "In the Name of All That's Good and Brave In Us Let's Try It," 4.
[29] Most articles about the community does not specifically state a geographic region where they were expecting the changes in perceptions about African Americans to occur. The articles did not specifically state that their target was Los Angeles, California, or the American West, and they did not particularly mention the nation as a whole. But many African American social movements at this time, even if they had a local focus, connected to a

Ideological Frameworks

Little Liberia members and organizers looked to their present moment as a possibility to imagine and create a better future for the entire community. This is inherent to many Black social movements. For instance, and Robin D. G. Kelley argued in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* that "the conditions and the very existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way" drawing on "*that* imagination, that effort to see the future in the present." Kelley also noted that "progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to re-live horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society."[30] The creators of Little Liberia were imagining a new society in both Mexico and America, and although they were creating a progressive social movement that physically transported African Americans to another space, Kelley's words here ring true because of the psychic change that this imagining could bring, not just the shift in location. In Mexico, Little Liberia's founders imagined a community that would allow African Americans and residents of Baja California to work together to grow and nourish the area.[31] Edward J. Sullivan, a businessman in Los Angeles, when discussing the community remarked that "there are many things we can learn from our friends to the south of us…it is our duty to cultivate their

larger national need for change, so it is likely that the community goals fit into this trend. In addition, the language in many of these articles matches other movements with national scope, such as articles pertaining to the U.N.I.A. and the NAACP. Little Liberia organizers quickly looked to other parts of the country for members and support, so it is reasonable to assume there was some sort of national focus in their movement and planning.

[30] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, New Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 9.

[31] Although there are no sources that explicitly states these aspects of the community goals clearly, it is implicit in many of the statements made to the *California Eagle* by Macbeth, Troy, and others, by community members' actions and attitudes towards their neighbors, and they were echoed in statements by officials in Mexico City and Baja California, which will be explained in more depth in Chapter 2.

friendship. They want to trade with us and it is our duty to meet them halfway."[32] In America, because of this friendship and trade, community creators imagined a new society that could be created out of the ashes of the imbalanced and unjust racial system at the time.

This community occurred largely in line with progressive and uplift movements in the early 1900s. Although some features of the community, such as the international scope and cross-racial nature, differed from other uplift movements, Little Liberia's focus on using middle-class and upper-class wealth as a means of social advancement sat squarely within uplift ideology's goals of using financial status as a way of helping the entire Black race. The best-known example of uplift ideology, W.E.B. Du Bois' Talented Tenth idea, first appeared in his contribution to Booker T. Washington's *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-Day*, although it appears more popularly in Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois stated that a main problem for African Americans was education, and to solve this the Talented Tenth, "the Best of this race that may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races," needed to be trained and integrated into fights against racism, rather than focus on money-making that did not develop well-rounded men who could lead.[33] Uplift ideology had roots much earlier than the Talented Tenth idea, since it was originally touted by reformers attempting to refute post-Reconstruction notions of biological inferiority as a barrier to full assimilation into society. Uplift movements used class distinctions and ideas about racial uplift to argue the possibilities for racial progress, and these same movements thought uplift ideologies could be used to battle and even end White racism. Although the uplift ideology

[32] "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," *California Eagle*, October 12, 1921, 1.
[33] Booker T. Washington, *The Negro Problem; a Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today;* (New York, J. Pott & Company, 1903), 33, http://archive.org/details/negroproblemseri00washrich; W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1961).

movement was fractured, most uplift movements shared a class-based focus and an ideological foundation that also had roots in White male culture and Black subjugation. Little Liberia as a movement shares many of these ideas with uplift movements, but diverges from them when discussing the cultural roots of the community. Although Little Liberia organizers focused on the power of middle-class and upper-class African Americans like themselves, the community's main economic focus, agriculture, had a much more complicated class history. In addition, Little Liberia organizers rarely discussed the moral implications of the type of uplift their community would hopefully create, setting them apart from most uplift movements' fixation on moral change in the Black community.[34]

Little Liberia most closely resembles, and is connected to, Marcus Garvey's U.N.I.A. movement, particularly after its relocation to Harlem in 1917. Marcus Garvey sought to create an international organization with various arms, all geared toward improving people of African descent around the globe. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, prior to his imprisonment and deportation from the United States due to charges of mail fraud, Garvey looked to create and promote a network of Black-owned businesses, create a Black-owned shipping company that would connect North America, Latin America, and Africa called the Black Star Line, and work toward loosening the grip of colonialism in Africa. Liberia, a United States protectorate, at this time represented what Marcus Garvey hoped would be a port of entry to recolonize Africa through Black repatriation. One aspect of Garvey's movement, arguably one of the first global Pan-African and Black nationalist social movements, sought to transport thousands of Blacks to Liberia to establish permanent

[34] For more information on uplift ideology, including an analysis of uplift movements in the early twentieth century, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, 2 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

business-driven communities. Garvey then planned to use this increased immigration of diasporic Blacks in Liberia to push back against, and eventually drive out, White settler colonialism throughout the African continent.[35]

The *Los Angeles Times* nicknamed the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's community near Ensenada "Little Liberia."[36] This was most likely due to a perceived connection between the community in Mexico and Garvey's U.N.I.A., and other Black communities elsewhere have used the label. But the name misrepresented the community and its goals. Although the Little Liberia community physically resided in another country and primarily focused on economic advancement, the community was not specifically patterned after Garvey's plans for Liberia, nor did Little Liberia members see their community as a means of challenging colonialism in Africa, nor were they attempting to relocate African Americans permanently to Mexico and become Mexican citizens. Some community leaders such as Hugh Macbeth, and supporters like Charlotta Bass, were Garveyites.[37] They did acknowledge the similarities between Little Liberia and the U.N.I.A., they discussed Little Liberia with other members of Garvey's movement, and Macbeth even requested funding from the larger organization Garvey created.[38] Rather than functioning as an extension of the U.N.I.A., however, Little Liberia instead existed in parallel alongside it. Little Liberia's creators' goals were inherently tied to the U.S.-Mexico border and agricultural success, whereas the U.N.I.A. was focused on creating a global Black

[35] For more information on Marcus Garvey, see Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*, 1 edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Emory J. Tolbert, *UNIA and Black Los Angeles: Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement*, 1st edition (Los Angeles: CAAS, 1980).
[36] McBroome, "Harvests of Gold" in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*.
[37] Tolbert, *UNIA and Black Los Angeles*. Note some of these members, including Charlotta Bass, were involved in other movements and organizations. Bass, for instance, attended the Pan-African Congress in 1919 and was an officer in the NAACP.
[38] Marcus Garvey and Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. III: September 1920-August 1921* (University of California Press, 1984), 321–23.

nationalism and economic growth through the Black Star shipping line. Garvey's movement touted a global support base; Little Liberia primarily recruited members from the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

What ties many of these seemingly disparate movements together, and serves as a common thread throughout African American history, is that African American social movements rarely cut themselves off from the larger Black community and the larger world in which they were embedded. In the same way, community connections between Los Angeles and Baja California provided essential support that contributed to Little Liberia's development and viability. For the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company to enact drastic change in California, it would need to draw from and rely on its Los Angeles roots because they were the main source of community support. Moving to another country, no matter the distance, did not mean disconnecting from one's home. Since Reconstruction, African Americans had built on the idea that a person could remain inherently connected to a past community, home town, place of birth, or spiritual home even after migrating. Farah Jasmine Griffin, in "*Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative*, discusses the importance and resonance of connections between original and new homes for African American migrants. Griffin notes that, for migrants leaving the American South after Reconstruction, their feelings about the home they left were complicated because the South was both a "site of terror and exploitation" and a celebrated location forever rooted in the African American community's past and formation. For African Americans leaving the American South, their connection to the area went beyond the violence and injustice inherent in life in the American South and the fear they evoked. Rather than attempting simply to flee the South and cut all ties, Griffin describes a much deeper and

more complicated connection between Black migrants and the home they were leaving that intertwined the positive aspects of the Southern Black community with the complicated history of Black enslavement.[39] The larger importance of this idea to African American migration more generally is an inherent community connection and knowledge that is both tied to the past and transplanted to the present.

Black California History

Although Little Liberia community members were not making the permanent migration that Griffin described, the importance of what Griffin calls the site of the ancestor, or the place migrants are moving away from, still applies to their thoughts about the importance of maintaining connections back to Los Angeles. Little Liberia community members did not intend to live in Mexico for the rest of their lives, so the pull of their original home location – California – was even greater than that of migrants after Reconstruction. But like Black migrants after Reconstruction, Little Liberia community members carried with them a complicated relationship to the place they were leaving, and they did not jettison their old past for a new future. Like African Americans who moved westward after Reconstruction, the geographical distance between their past and present homes was less impactful than the purpose and meanings tied to their new community. In fact, for Little Liberia organizers, the spectrum of their experiences in Los Angeles proved to be a powerful motivator for finding new avenues for social change outside the traditional scope of Black activism in Los Angeles.

Part of this rich experience for Black Angelenos included a long and rich past of African-descended peoples in the American West. Even within the American West, and

[39] Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin''?": The African-American Migration Narrative"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

California in particular, Los Angeles stood out as one of the most diverse cities in the country. California's diverse past includes the deep complexity of Native histories and cultures, its existence as a peripheral part of Mexico, the long history of Black life, and the impact of the Gold Rush and its resulting population and economic boom. The inclusion of non-Native peoples in California's history stretches back to before European contact, since there is evidence that African-descended people arrived in the Americas before Europeans. In addition, some people of African ancestry accompanied various European expeditions that touched the Pacific Coast of North America, and some of them may have made their way to California. Blacks were among the first settlers in towns in California, such as San Diego and San Francisco, and slavery in Spanish and later Mexican-controlled California, although sparsely populated, is likely. In Los Angeles, Afro-Spaniards founded the city in 1781, and starting in 1793 Francisco Reyes was the city's first Black mayor while under Spanish rule.[40] However, the Los Angeles that Little Liberia members knew grew more out of the real estate boom of the 1880s, and most Blacks in Los Angeles at that time had migrated from somewhere in the American South.[41] During and prior to that migration, African American fur trappers and traders worked throughout the American West. James Beckwourth, one of the most famous Black fur trappers, was in and out of California throughout the mid-to-late 1800s. Pio Pico, a mixed-race man with some Black heritage, governed California twice, starting in 1831. Just a few years later, Allen Light, who moved to Santa Barbara from New

[40] Paul Robinson, "Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles" in Hunt and Ramon, *Black Los Angeles*, 21; David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, With a New Preface edition (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2008); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past*, Revised Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[41] Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 2.

England, was most likely the first African American Mexican official. Even prior to the American invasion of Mexico and takeover of California via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, African descended people had a large impact on life in California and the Los Angeles area.[42]

Race and Organizing in Los Angeles

This long history notwithstanding, California to this day owes much of its diversity to the increased and sudden migration brought on by the Gold Rush in 1849. Although the history of the Gold Rush is often romanticized and generally provides the foundations for the booming economy and importance of California to the United States as a nation, it is also a key part of the history of race in California. An estimated four thousand African Americans traveled to California during the Gold Rush, whether of their own volition or under the force of slavery. But they were not the only people of color to migrate to California. Prior to Little Liberia's creation, Chinese, Japanese, Arabs, and Filipinos all had moved to the city. David Torres-Rouff argued in *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* that most studies of Los Angeles (including this one) focus primarily on a more recent and sensational history, rather than looking at the importance of the connections between the creation of the city and the racial dynamics that formed out of it. But the importance of the creation of Los Angeles' racial system cannot be overstated. As Torres-Rouff explained, the racial system in Los Angeles was an amalgamation of understanding of racial difference based on skin color brought in by European Americans after it was incorporated into the United States in 1848, and existing established notions of identity as

[42] For a longer and more in-depth history of Blacks in California and Los Angeles, see B. Gordon Wheeler, *Black California: The History of African-Americans in the Golden State* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993); Hunt and Ramon, *Black Los Angeles*.

markers of difference primarily rooted in status and social behaviors. Therefore, people in Los Angeles developed "their own racial identities while inventing and elaborating a new, local system that divided people."[43] This was reflected in infrastructure projects and the way the city was built. In 1903, for example, just seven miles south of downtown Los Angeles, Watts was created as a racially integrated community, consisting of Blacks, Whites, and people of Mexican descent.[44] Los Angeles' integrated neighborhoods and its large Mexican and Mexican American population meant Little Liberia creators and members already interacted often with Mexican-descended people.

In Los Angeles, because racial difference existed on a spectrum rather than just a White-Black binary, mixed communities were common. However, relationships between groups were complicated and often uncertain, and this combination may have led African Americans to view their city, and racial prejudice in it, differently. As Flamming mentioned, "Los Angeles styled itself a western city, and its black leaders identified both the city and their community with 'the West.' They spoke of themselves as westerners and insisted that racial prejudice was incompatible with western ideals."[45] Although this to a large extent is true, the Little Liberia project hints at an alternative view of African American thought in the American West: that being part of 'the West' perhaps also meant expanded options for fighting the racial prejudice that existed as a contradiction to their imagined notion of 'the West.' For example, restrictive covenants primarily separated housing communities for White Americans from other groups, labeled "alien races" and "non-Caucasians," but were not used to separate these other groups from one another. As Josh Sides noted in *L.A. City*

[43] Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 11.
[44] MaryEllen Bell Ray, *The City of Watts, California, 1907 to 1926* (Los Angeles, California: Rising Pub., 1985).
[45] Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 4.

Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present, this led Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, Jews, and African Americans to fight together in an attempt to eradicate restrictive covenants. These covenants, although originally enacted to keep some neighborhoods White, "had the effect of creating some of the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country. Like other cities, Los Angeles was clearly divided by a color line, but on one side of that line was a white (and largely Protestant) population while on the other was a large and vibrant patchwork of races and ethnicities," which meant that many African Americans lived in diverse communities.[46] These mixed communities, as well as their common struggles, may have been one reason that Little Liberia creators recognized power and possibility in creating a community that would, due to its location in Mexico, inherently meant a dependence and shared struggle with other people of color.

In the United States in the early twentieth century, Los Angeles acted as the hub for Black organizing in the West, largely due to the efforts of Charlotta Bass. Although she has a prominence in the history of American politics as one of the first African Americans to run for Vice President through her nomination on the Progressive ticket in 1952, her work on and through the *California Eagle* will forever leave her a position in the pantheon of African American organizing. The *California Eagle* was the largest African American newspaper on the West Coast, both in circulation and in impact. Although both were noticeable in Los Angeles prior to 1915, Bass and the *California Eagle* became visible and formidable forces of Black activism in the United States through Bass' fight against the exhibition of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. Bass used the *California Eagle* as a tool to amplify her fight against a movie some regarded as a glorified love letter to the Ku Klux Klan. Bass later

[46] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, First Edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 18.

fought Griffith in court, and although she lost the case, the *California Eagle*'s readership expanded dramatically and Charlotta Bass emerged as a major leader of Black Los Angeles and a trusted source for news and activism throughout the country.[47] Although Bass isn't the only reason for Los Angeles emerging as a major western hub of Black resistance, she, and by default the *California Eagle*, were involved in most major movements for racial equality in the West at the time. Bass personally exposed Ku Klux Klan activities against Black organizers in Los Angeles, a move that instigated threatening phone calls and brought eight men in Ku Klux Klan hoods to the *California Eagle* office at night, demanding to be allowed into the building. Bass responded by pulling a gun from her desk drawer and aiming it at the men, scaring them off.[48] Although Bass led most of these battles, and the widely-read but Los Angeles-based *California Eagle* acted "as a vehicle for [her] demands [and] became a lightning rod for protest," Bass did not simply focus on her paper and creating her own battles. For instance, she attended the 1919 Pan-African Conference in Paris, and served as President of the Los Angeles branch of the U.N.I.A., the biggest in the West.[49]

This history of organizing in Los Angeles, the history of the *California Eagle*, and Bass's role in both, are vital to understanding Little Liberia's history. Although not a member of the Board of Directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, Bass participated in many community activities, bought stock in the company when it was made available, and worked to gain support for Little Liberia from wealthy African Americans outside of Los Angeles. She appears to have had connections with community organizers prior to its creation, and she had a strong enough connection to

[47] Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, 95–96.
[48] Streitmatter, 98–99.
[49] Streitmatter, 96–97.

Theodore Troy, the president of the board of directors, to mention him in her memoirs.[50] Most importantly, throughout the life of the community Bass published advertisements and articles in the *California Eagle* about Little Liberia, most of them favorable. One article spanned the entire front page and offered readers photographs and high praise for the endeavor, introducing Mexico as a land of immense opportunity.[51] This meant that the many articles published in the *California Eagle*, the largest source of narrative information about the community, were often written by someone who had some sort of stake, both financial and social, in the success of this community and its members. The *California Eagle*, like any other primary source, therefore can be biased due to Bass's connections to the community. However, the *California Eagle* was also well-established, widely read, and trusted when Little Liberia began, and Bass's bona-fide organizing credentials lent an air of support and credibility that only she could provide. It is doubtful that Bass, already a trusted source for Black information and organizing, would intentionally jeopardize her powerful position in the Black community to make a few extra dollars from stock; this is simply not who Charlotta Bass was, and not what the *California Eagle* stood for. This telling of the Little Liberia story draws heavily on Bass and the *California Eagle*, not only because it is a main source of information about the community, but because of the position Bass and the *California Eagle* held in Los Angeles Black society at the time.[52]

Charlotta Bass had a strong past in Black organizing, but other important community organizers combined their experience in Black organizing with connections to communities

[50] Charlotta A Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C.A. Bass, 1960), 197–98.
[51] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
[52] For more information on Charlotta Bass' history, and her connections to Little Liberia, see Laura Hooton, "Black Angelenos with the 'Courage to Do and Dare': African American Community Organizers in Lower California," *California History*, Spring 2017 (Forthcoming).

and movements that involved other races. James Littlejohn already had experience in Spanish-speaking countries and ties to the government in Baja California prior to Little Liberia's creation. Hugh E. Macbeth, the secretary of the board of directors for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, worked in law offices in Los Angeles that, by necessity, catered to constituencies beyond the African American community.[53] Sometime in the interwar years Macbeth moved to a permanent residence in the Jefferson Park district, a largely Japanese area. Most of his son's friends were Nisei, and his son attended Japanese school with them, took judo classes with them, and learned Japanese. After arriving in Los Angeles in 1913, Macbeth joined the All-American League, an organization claiming to combine the industrialism and teachings of Booker T. Washington with the philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois. Macbeth later led the organization, where he encouraged members to focus efforts on ending racial intolerance and lynching through interracial cooperation.[54] Littlejohn's and Macbeth's diverse life experiences most likely contributed to their overall willingness to attempt to create a community that would need to connect to other cultures and groups of people to succeed. These African Americans were not the first to look to Mexico as a land of opportunity. Many groups had varied success at creating communities in Mexico. Russians, Chinese, Japanese, Jews, Mormons, Mennonites, and Middle Easterners all attempted to make Mexico their home; the first three groups, along with Black Mexicans,

[53] This is especially interesting considering Macbeth received his undergraduate degree at historically-Black Fisk University in Nashville. He received his law degree at Harvard University, and before moving to Los Angeles he worked briefly as the founding editor of The Baltimore Times newspaper.
[54] McBroome, "Harvests of Gold" in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 157–58; Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 172–75.

could be found throughout Baja California in the early twentieth century, and Baja California was a particularly diverse part of Mexico.[55]

Borderlands and Americans in Baja California

Although Baja California's multiracial makeup most likely had an impact on the Little Liberia community, the community's agriculturally-rich land in close proximity to the United States border was imperative for the success of the community. The physical connection between Baja and Upper California, the lack of specific physical or political division between the two locations, and political instability in Mexico and Baja California contributed to a long history of American businessmen and politicians attempting to take control of Baja California and unite it with Upper California. Filibustering, or the practice of using private armies to enter and invade another country for the purpose of colonizing without the consent of either country, had been a factor in the relationship between the United States and Mexico since the late eighteenth century. The largest surge of American filibustering in Mexico occurred from the late 1840s to the early 1920s.[56] For example,

[55] This diversity, as well as some of Baja California's history, will be covered in the next chapter. For more information on Baja California's diversity, see Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); William Harrison Richardson, *Mexico Through Russian Eyes, 1806-1940*, 1 edition (Pittsburgh; Chicago: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988); Karen Kenyon, "From Russia to Baja," n.d., 36–37; Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*, 1 edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Grace Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Reprint edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013); Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Thomas Cottam Romney, *Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2005); Jason Dormady, "Mennonite Colonization in Mexico and the Pendulum of Modernization, 1920-2013," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, April 2014, 167–94; Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

[56] Although the Neutrality Act of 1818 assigned fines and prison sentences to Americans who aided in a military expedition against a country or colony with which the United States was at peace, American filibustering schemes were still common, particularly because the United States government generally ignored the problem or the entity charged with policing the Neutrality Act did not have the means to enforce it. For more information about filibustering in Mexico, see Joseph Allen Stout, *Schemers & Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848-1921* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002); Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

around 1890 a Los Angeles company called the Mexican Land and Development Company began a Mexico filibustering campaign, paralleling a company in England at the same time called the Mexican Land and Colonization Company.[57] Both companies had plans to take over the same general geographic area as Little Liberia, and the British company even offered financial assistance to any American filibustering scheme, up to $100,000. The English company wanted to use the American company to help gain control of the peninsula, annex it, turn it into a colony, and eventually welcome Baja California into the British Empire as a new doorway into the Western Hemisphere.[58] The American company intended to provoke dissension in Baja California in order to jeopardize the British holdings in the area and intervene in local politics and claim power over the peninsula.[59] Through this revolution, American filibusters planned to take control of Baja California and create a united California.[60] In 1915, twenty-four people in Los Angeles were arrested on suspicion of "violating the neutrality of the United States…as the result of information furnished Federal authorities by Mexican officials investigating the alleged nationwide plot of American capitalists to gain possession of Mexico."[61] In addition to schemes like these, United States politicians continued to look to Baja California as a possible place to expand the empire. For instance, Senator Henry F. Ashurst in 1919 proposed that the United States offer to purchase Baja California, to which Governor Esteban Cantú, when asked his opinion, responded, "the

[57] Archive of the companies' registration office, 1844-1951.
[58] "Sensational Revelations," *The Buffalo Express*, June 6, 1890, 3.
[59] "$ $ $," *The Evening Telegram - New York*, July 10, 1893, 3.
[60] There are many questions and apparent difficulties both of these plans, but they will not be fully addressed because it is not the subject of this dissertation. The most glaring of these for the English company is that the peninsula would not be an ideal doorway into the Western Hemisphere because it did not have a direct ocean route to England, and there were other possible locations that may have served better. For the American company, among other issues, their plan, including using local people to turn against the English company, was clearly laid out in multiple publicly-accessible newspaper articles.
[61] "May Arrest 24 as Mexican Plotters," *The Journal and Republican*, March 4, 1915.

Mexican people would never concent [sic] to sell a portion of their territory" not just because it was not permitted by the constitution, but because "they feel just as much hurt when the purchase of Baja California is discussed in the American congress as the Americans would feel if the purchase of Upper California were discussed in the English parliament."[62]

However, Little Liberia's community members envisioned the border between the United States and Baja California, the social and political relationship between the two locations, and community members' roles as Americans in Mexico, in a much different way from White filibusters and politicians in the last half of the nineteenth century. As will be discussed in the next chapter, African Americans negotiated a complex relationship with colonialism and imperialism, but the community was a far cry from the inherently imperialistic projects White filibusters engaged in. While the thought of Americans coming to Mexico may have triggered memories of conquest and exploitation in Baja Californians, Little Liberia's founders came with the purpose of working side-by-side with the local population. This shift may not just be one of racial difference, but an early signaling of a shift in common national ideas about the border between California and its Baja counterpart. These African Americans viewed their role in Baja California not as people trying to unite Baja and Upper California to take over the peninsula and incorporate it into the United States as part of a larger California, but rather as a means of integrating the two economies while allowing Baja California to maintain its political autonomy. Community members envisioned cooperation with local Mexican authorities and interaction with friends, family, and even government back in the United States. This made the community location important, since the closeness to Los Angeles meant members could travel back and forth to maintain social

[62] "Gov. Cantu, in Wire, Says They Cannot Sell," *Calexico Chronicle*, January 20, 1919, 1.

ties, but its existence beyond the border meant the community was outside the reach of American social inequality. Other areas, such as Canada or Africa, were too far away from Los Angeles to allow for this type of connection and easy travel.

Although California historians such as Kevin Starr and border historians like Rachel St. John have discussed the relationship between Baja and California from the 1890s to the 1920s, there is currently no narrative that discusses the transformation from dreams of a united California to the definitive physical separation between the countries that, today, is seen as a politically-charged, militarized, contested space. As Rachel St. John points out in *A Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*, due to the Mexican Revolution there was an increased focus on troop movements and policing along the border between mainland Mexico and the United States. Mexican citizens moved into American-owned properties along the boundary line, expecting the Mexican government to revoke or undermine American land ownership, which eventually occurred. Some feared radical revolution based on the Magonista Rebellion, led by the brothers Flores Magón, that took over Tijuana and Mexicali in 1911. Governor Esteban Cantú created a military camp east of Tijuana, and rumors that Cantú and President Carranza were in league with Germans in 1917 put even more focus on the border.[63] But how did Baja California and Upper California become separate entities, in no way unifiable, in the eyes of common people in California? How Little Liberia members and creators perceived of the California borderlands may be an early signal of this shift.

These African Americans, like other groups, regarded the border as a complex location that connected to their world view. Little Liberia creators viewed the border within

[63] Rachel St John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*, First Edition (Princeton ; Oxford England: Princeton University Press, 2011), 135–39.

the lens of Blackness, Americanness, international politics, the fight against racism, and their envisioning of a possible future in the present. They took a balanced approach to the border as an invaluable tool in their larger goal of enacting social change. Although the Upper-Baja California borderlands was already starting to solidify as a physical entity, they focused primarily on it as a conceptual unit. Borrowing from free market ideologies, Little Liberia organizers envisioned unlimited possibilities for the movement and sale of goods across these borderlands. This aspect of the border was porous, a place where goods and capital, as well as people and community connections, could pass undeterred. However, this porous border also had the capacity to harden to prevent American racism from flowing across, so the community could flourish in Mexico. Although the border at this time did not fully exist and was constantly in flux, the California borderlands began shifting from an amorphous entity to a physical location. Here this African American community, in how it envisions its possibilities and use of the border and borderlands, gives us a glimpse into this period of border transformation. Connecting Los Angeles and Little Liberia across international borders connects to the growing movement of African Americans that regarded themselves as connected to the larger Black diaspora, a Black global community united by an African heritage but unfettered by political borders. But as Americans, Little Liberia creators were also aware that of the distinct and identifiable difference between the United States and Mexico, and this separation could provide them some protection. In this way, Little Liberia's story cannot be told solely from the lens of the community members' identity as Americans or as Blacks, but as the spectrum of possibilities that the combination of the two identities offered them in relation to organizing through and across the border.

Chapter 2
Baja California, the "land where freedom and opportunity beckon": Little Liberia's First Years

It is fitting that Little Liberia's history begins with the creation of a highway because good stories often begin with a venture into the unknown. New roads and routes often symbolize journeys into unfamiliar spaces or in unexplored directions. For African Americans, looking outward and exploring different pathways as a means of starting a new life elsewhere has been a common thread in envisioning freedom and advancement.[1] During slavery, restricted movement and the possibilities of self-emancipation through physical escape contributed to many African Americans looking at migration and creating new communities in faraway spaces as a means for change. Little Liberia's creators began envisioning this alternative type of space in Mexico when, in 1917, African Americans from Los Angeles and Mexicans[2] from the Ensenada area began work on a modern highway system in the northern region of Baja California. Governor Esteban Cantú hired Heraclio

[1] The perils of new roads and pathways were also part of this tradition. A common Black epistemological concept is the notion of the crossroads, stemming from African philosophy. As Robert Farris Thompson describes in *Flash of the Spirit*: *African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, the Yoruba Eshu-Elegba became the embodiment of the crossroads, "the point where doors open or close, where persons have to make decisions that may forever affect their lives" and may "test our wisdom and compassion" or signal "sudden changes of fortune." For the Kongo-Atlantic, the crossroads is a "point of inter-section between the ancestors and the living." In addition to the crossroads, the figure of the trickster is also part of this narrative, often appearing at the crossroads (both physical and metaphorical) to force travelers to make moral decisions about the direction they are taking. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, 1st Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage, 1984), 18–20, 109, 114.

[2] I use the term Mexican throughout this work with trepidation. I primarily use Mexican as a way of identifying people who lived somewhere in the country of Mexico. Although Mexican national identity at the time was in flux, particularly due to the Mexican Revolution, people in Baja California were members of a larger national group that separated them from their northern neighbor. However, they most likely self-identified more strongly with one or more regional, ethnic, or class groups. There is no clear-cut term to describe Mexican national identity that is not also tied to Mexico's complicated racial past. This can be seen, for instance, in Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*, Reprint Edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015). I use the term Mexican solely as a national identification, although African Americans often used it as a racial signifier as well. If used when discussing racial identities, I use it to describe the multitude of racial possibilities in Baja California, rather than the narrower national racial definition the Mexican government perpetuated at the time.

Ochoa to build a highway system linking Baja California's most important towns, part of an initiative to increase business in ports in Ensenada and to connect Ensenada to Tijuana and Calexico, and Mexicali to Tijuana.[3] Ochoa, a busy contractor from Ensenada, subcontracted the highway's construction to James Littlejohn, an African American highway and sewer contractor in Los Angeles. In addition, Ochoa retained the legal services of Hugh Macbeth, a previously mentioned prominent African American lawyer in Los Angeles.[4] It is likely this business connection among Cantú, Macbeth, Ochoa, and Littlejohn laid the groundwork for the Little Liberia community's creation.

From this initial connection in 1917 to early 1922, the Little Liberia movement primarily consisted of wealthy African Americans in California, mostly in Los Angeles, looking to northern Baja California's growing agricultural industry as an opportunity for economic growth; this economic progress, theoretically, could also act as a catalyst for combating racism in the United States. In May 1917, The *California Eagle* asserted that Black Angelenos were glad to be making connections "across the border," and that "quite a few of our people have already gone to the country and are doing well…that special efforts are to be made for a select number to get in on the ground floor in the development of this rich country."[5] For the Little Liberia community, their connections to the economy, politics, and society in Baja California and the United States were equally important. The Little

[3] Different sources name different locations for the highways – either Ensenada to Tijuana or Ensenada to Calexico – but since all three locations were important for Baja California business, it is reasonable to assume that there were plans for both, and different articles focused on only one specific portion. Note that there were other roads in existence at the time, and there were many dirt roads, but there were no modern highway systems connecting these main economic hubs in northern Baja California.

[4] "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," *California Eagle*, May 19, 1917, 1; "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," 8; "To Build Highway," *The Evening Tribune*, May 8, 1917, 7.

[5] "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," 1; "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," 8.

Liberia movement, from its initial push, truly embodied what we now would consider to be a borderlands framework, or way of thinking, because community organizers actively engaged with communities on both sides of the border simultaneously; this was necessary in order to fulfill their goal of using economic growth, particularly in agriculture and livestock raising, to facilitate social change in the United States. However, even though they worked and mobilized on both sides of the border, these African Americans were doing so as American citizens in Mexico, not as Americans wanting to become Mexicans.[6]

Economic Growth in Post-revolutionary Baja California

Although community organizers connected to existing Black movements, the development opportunities that African Americans engaged with, and that Charlotta Bass and the *California Eagle* pointed to, were also part of a larger distinct shift in Baja California. A modern highway system like the one Ochoa designed, as well as the economic development of Ensenada's piers, signaled a push along a new path for Baja California. Some national political leaders, led by Porfirio Díaz's example in earlier decades, created an impetus for Mexico to develop infrastructure, architecture, and technology that would usher it into the new century as a country that, from the point of view of the outside observer, radiated modernity and advancement. But these changes occurred mostly on a national scale, and Baja California remained peripheral to these efforts due to its large peasant class and geographical isolation. However, Baja California's governor, Esteban Cantú, strove to increase Baja

[6] This, in some respects, sets these African Americans apart from others who moved to Mexico and planned to leave behind their American identity. There are a few examples of this, but the most notable can be seen in Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York ; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). For more information, on Little Liberia, especially within the context of agricultural history in the North American West, see Laura Hooton, "Little Liberia: The African American Agricultural Colony in Baja California" in *Farming across Borders: A Transnational History of the North American West*, ed. Sterling David Evans (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017).

California's prosperity through local initiatives, including developments that connected to investors in the United States and encouraged economic growth through supporting Baja California's elites, rather than the larger peasant class.[7]

Cantú, Macbeth, and Littlejohn, as well as Theodore Troy and other creators and members of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's board of directors, all envisioned a variety of economic possibilities forming in northern Baja California. Little Liberia leaders claimed that the community's location, just over fifty miles from the U.S.-Mexico border and roughly thirty-five miles from Ensenada, constituted an ideal location near local and international markets; these included the locations Esteban Cantú marked for improvement. Cantú's efforts to create a modern, hard-surfaced highway connecting the northern part of Baja California's main centers also addressed new schemes to make Baja California profitable as a tourist destination. This was, in part, due to United States companies, like the American Automobile Association in Southern California, leading popular driving trips across the border that took advantage of the scenic, winding road to Ensenada.[8] The manager for the Imperial Valley Automobile Club of Southern California even contacted Cantú in the hope of making an arrangement to add the new road to their list

[7] Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 57; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 2: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 210; John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 32–33. Dwyer notes that Cantú "undertook an ambitious public works program that included the construction of roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, public buildings, electric power plants, telegraph and telephone lines, and sewer and water systems." Although many of these changes may have benefitted the peasant class in the long run, most of his initiatives were aimed primarily at aiding and supporting the elites.

[8] "Motor Trip to Ensenada Is Filled with Scenic Thrills," *The San Diego Union*, July 23, 1923, Automotive, 1, 5; Woollet Stages, ed., *Ensenada, Mexico: A Real Vacation* (Ensenada, B.C., Mexico ; San Diego, California: Woollet Stages, 1915), 6; *Road between Tijuana and Ensenada, 16 Photographs*, 1920, still images, 7X12cm, 1920, University of California, San Diego Special Collections.

of attractions for the Pacific Coast.[9] Modern hard-surfaced roads were needed for these ventures to become more widely accessible because, as one driver to Ensenada mentioned, the roads from San Diego to Ensenada "really cannot be called good" and required a decent car because they "demand all that is in a motor."[10] Modernizing the roads would accommodate a wider variety of cars, allowing more people to drive to places like Ensenada and therefore add to the growth of the already existing and expanding tourist industry.

By the mid-1910s, Ensenada had already attracted year-round foreign residents from countries like the United States, England, France, and Germany because, as a pamphlet in 1915 noted, it had "natural beauty and wealth."[11] The vice industry, including casinos and brothels, in border towns like Tijuana and Mexicali were a booming business that continued to grow and thrive with the start of Prohibition in the United States in January 1920.[12] Governor Cantú found a way to increase the benefits these businesses provided to Baja California by allocating taxes from these vice industries, as well as foreign land owners' property taxes, to develop public works programs.[13] Although some businesses practiced segregation, many African Americans did well in this industry; the only female-run cantina and brothel in northern Baja California was owned by a Black woman.[14] Little Liberia creators, however, considered the western U.S.-Mexico borderlands to be an economic powerhouse for a different and more traditional enterprise for the area – agriculture.

The Importance of Agriculture and the Border

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[9] "Would Put Cantu Highway in List of Club's Tours," *Calexico Chronicle,* January 2, 1919, 1.
[10] "Motor Trip to Ensenada Is Filled with Scenic Thrills," 1, 5.
[11] Woollet Stages, *Ensenada, Mexico,* 2.
[12] Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 2.
[13] Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*, 32–33.
[14] Catherine Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2013): 244–45. From this article and the sources that support it, it is unclear if Lina Lee, the person in question, was African American or Afro-Mexican.

Little Liberia's creators, in initially focusing on farming and livestock as possible commercial objectives in Baja California, built on decades of existing economic productivity and a legacy of American involvement in Mexico, particularly in the West. But their choice of joining the agriculture and livestock economies in Baja California foreshadowed Baja California's future importance in Mexico's primary financial sector, since by 1960 Baja California would become the largest agricultural producer for all of Mexico, with much of this production centered in the northern part of the state.[15] American filibusters had looked to take over Baja California long before the turn of the century, in part because they sought to unite the growing agricultural economies in Baja California in Mexico and the state of California in the United States. In the United States, a massive increase in crop prices due to World War I led to a booming agricultural industry in farming-rich states like California.

American entrepreneurs had been raising animals and growing crops in Baja California for decades prior to Little Liberia's creation. Laborers from a wide variety of racial backgrounds had contributed to the changing social landscape and the peninsula's continuing economic success. This prosperity continued in Baja California, unlike the economic and physical destruction that other areas of Mexico suffered during the Mexican Revolution, most likely because it was physically distant from and often ignored by more central areas of Mexico.[16] For instance, after 1905, over 100 Russian Molokan families in the Guadalupe Valley grew wheat and raised geese to provide for themselves.[17] These Russians, however, had a different outlook from that of their African American neighbors. Whereas these families focused on remaining hidden from prying eyes in Russia, and had moved to

[15] David Allen Henderson, *Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1964), 1, 4, 60.
[16] Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 2–3.
[17] Karen Kenyon, "From Russia to Baja," n.d., 36–37.

Baja California to escape from their home country, Little Liberia community members sought to shine a spotlight on their success so people in the United States would notice. But both groups were part of a larger racial shift that Veronica Castillo-Muñoz describes in *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands*, although neither group integrated into the mixed-race families she analyzes. This dramatic social shift, which included the blurring of racial lines via the agricultural labor force, transformed Baja California into the multicultural society these African Americans joined.[18]

Little Liberia organizers engaged with the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a complex geographic, political, and social space, which matched their goals of social change through economic advancement. The Guadalupe Valley's proximity to the Tijuana-San Ysidro border was logistically important because community members needed the freedom to travel and transport goods between Los Angeles and Little Liberia relatively quickly. Existing railroad and steam ship lines, along with a combination of dirt and paved roads, allowed for transportation of people and goods.[19] For instance, the new San Diego and Arizona Railroad connected to La Puerta, just twenty-two miles from the Santa Clara Valley, which Little Liberia members used in 1919 to transport thousands of dollars' worth of agricultural implements.[20] Little Liberia members traveled primarily by car when returning to Los Angeles for church, family events, and other social gatherings. Little Liberia organizers viewed the U.S.-Mexico border as a semi-permeable space that could allow this flow of

[18] Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 3.
[19] *Maps of the Pacific Coast Steamship Co. Routes* (San Francisco, California: Pacific Coast Steamship Co, 1915), University of California, San Diego Special Collections; A. C. Robinson, *Map of Lower California, Republic of Mexico: For Use Of The Miner And Prospector* (San Francisco, California: Edward Denny & Co, 1919), University of California, San Diego Special Collections.
[20] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," *California Eagle*, December 6, 1919, 1.

people, goods, and community connections, but could stop United States racism from following them. This meant community members could connect to the larger Black diaspora across physical and international borders, and the Black community, both in the United States and internationally, could reciprocate. For instance, when Roscoe Conkling Simmons, a well-known African American journalist and orator known for his work with the *Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Tribune*, traveled to the West Coast on a speaking tour that included meetings and speeches in Riverside, the Imperial Valley, San Diego, Oakland, Portland, Seattle, Spokane, and Bakersfield, he also traveled with a large party to visit the Little Liberia community.[21] Little Liberia members included the Los Angeles Black community in their celebrations, especially during an annual barbeque held on community lands that brought upwards to eighty guests from Los Angeles to the Santa Clara Valley.[22] Advertisements in the *California Eagle* during the holidays reminded Black Angelenos that the community members were still tied to the Los Angeles social scene. For instance, in a December 20, 1919 graphic, community organizers wrote "The boys who are now ploughing and planting the Santa Clara Valley wish each of you a Merry Xmas and hope that the year 1920 will find thousands of you enjoying the Peace, Happiness and Prosperity of the New Year with us in this great New Land of Golden Opportunity."[23] These events and small communications were pivotal in maintaining community ties between Little Liberia and its support system in California and ensuring that the community remained engaged with the Black diaspora.

[21] "Getting Ready for the Coming of the Mighty Roscoe Conkling Simmons," *California Eagle*, August 23, 1919, 1.
[22] John E. Prowd, "Big Celebration At Santa Clara Ranch, Mexico, Last Sunday," *California Eagle*, n.d., 1.
[23] The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Co., "Merry Xmas," *California Eagle*, December 20, 1919, 10.

Colonialism and Imperialism

Although the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company leaders referred to the community as a colony, it is debatable if Little Liberia was a colonial project. Many African Americans referred to post-Emancipation agricultural communities as colonies, but for these communities this phrase did not have any sort of colonial implications – colony was simply another term for an independent community. Without this distinction, an African American colony in Mexico could, in hindsight, be considered part of a United States settler colonial attempt. The United States has a long settler colonial past, including efforts in several parts of Mexico, and African Americans participated in the conversations about, and actions in, these attempts. For instance, some African American newspapers in the early 1910s asked why Blacks should become colonists in Mexico when Mexico instead could be made a colony of the United States, but these same newspapers then disapproved of the United States invasion of Veracruz in 1914, which many people in Mexico viewed as an imperial act.[24] An article about Little Liberia, when referring to comments made by Hugh Macbeth, secretary of the board of directors and one of the architects of the community, noted that:

> Mr. Macbeth thinks the Negro Colony of Lower California will serve as an entering wedge for the white man in Mexico. He holds the opinion that as the Negro gain foothold there and proves his value as a citizen there, the Mexican will be more friendly to American capital. 'That's why I am giving my best efforts to this colonization plan. It appeals to me as being a wonderful

[24] Arnold Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 46. Shankman's piece contains some helpful information about the relationship between the Black Press and Mexico, but it also reflects the time in which it was written. It briefly mentions the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company as a brief example of an opportunity-gone-wrong, but this mention only discusses the community's end. However, this section covering opinions about colonizing Mexico is supported by many sources.

> opportunity for Colored people, and too it will make colored people and Mexicans friendly'.[25]

Macbeth, in the confusing way in which he is placing himself and the community within the complicated nature of this project – racial and class systems in two countries, international, national, and local politics – highlights the fact that community managers most likely were, at least behind closed doors, grappling with the messiness of the project. Perhaps Little Liberia community members like Hugh Macbeth were, as Stephanie Leigh Batiste mentioned about African American culture in and beyond the 1930s in *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance*, "stealing, almost, some of the privileged tropes of imperial domination" that were "embedded within an attempt to define and articulate an inherent Americanness that was also black and to develop a diasporic sensibility that reached beyond national boundaries."[26] Perhaps these African Americans were acting as other American capitalists, in a class-based movement that primarily would use Mexican resources for their own benefit. Or, perhaps their public rhetoric reflected their true feelings and intentions, and their relationship with Mexican people in Baja California could transcend international and national belonging. The reality, most likely, was a complex interweaving of grandiose ideological rhetoric, honest desire to challenge United States racial and imperial actions, and an underpinning of American settler colonialism. The role and strength of U.S. imperialism cannot be overstated – these African Americans, in a movement dedicated to racial advancement, still found themselves caught in the trap of rhetoric and practices of United States goals and motives beyond their individual community.

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[25] "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," *The Hutchinson Blade*, December 10, 1921, 1; "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," *The Hutchinson Blade*, December 17, 1921, 1; "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," *The Hutchinson Blade*, December 24, 1921, 1.
[26] Stephanie Leigh Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), xv, 2.

Even more complicated within this settler colonial conversation is the fact that the Little Liberia community's creation, unlike most settler-colonial attempts, depended on participation by local and national entities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was formed with the consent of officials in both the United States and Mexico.[27] In addition, local and national leaders in Mexico publicly welcomed Little Liberia community organizers and members. For example, a Mexican official in Mexico City wrote to Hugh Macbeth that "Mexico desires immigrants who respect her country sufficiently to help build it up and live in the country. The Lower California movement has for its object the fulfilment in the peninsula of Lower California of the high purpose expressed by the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Mexico generally."[28] Due to previous experiences with filibustering schemes, as well as United States congress members' attempts to purchase Baja California and insistence on stationing United States military personnel below the border in other parts of Mexico,[29] the Mexican federal government had been wary for decades of possible Untied States intervention and invasion. These worries were well-founded, with the most recent event at the time being the United States invasion and occupation of Veracruz for half of the year in 1914 and the punitive expedition to capture and/or kill Pancho Villa two years later.[30]

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[27] "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1918, 15.
[28] "Lower California News," *California Eagle*, n.d., 8.
[29] "American Soldiers Will Peacefully Occupy Mexico," *Calexico Chronicle*, January 3, 1919, 3.
[30] The United States had a long history of invading Mexico by this point. Verarcuz, for instance, had been invaded in 1847, when over six hundred Mexican civilians were killed. The most recent, in 1914, began when nine United States soldiers in Tampico were arrested because they entered an off-limits fuel loading station. Although the sailors were later released, the commander of the United States Navy also demanded the men receive an apology and twenty-one gun salute. Although the apology was given, the salute never was, and while the U.S. Navy was already preparing to invade Veracruz, and awaiting approval from Congress, President Woodrow Wilson learned of a weapons delivery for Victoriano Huerta from a German steam ship, although later it became clear that the weapons had been from an American businessman with investments in Mexico and a Russian arms dealer. Wilson ordered the weapons and customs office seized, the United States declared Huerta an illegitimate usurper, embargoed all shipments to Huerta, and publicly supported Venustiano

Mexican officials, including Presidents Carranza and Obregón, viewed populating border towns as an economic and political necessity, and they often viewed groups seeking refuge or claiming some sort of systematic injustice in the United States as ideal candidates for settlement in them.[31] Many border towns had a drastically reduced population and a devastated agricultural infrastructure due to the Mexican Revolution; others had less infrastructure and people because they been outright ignored by the federal government. New communities like Little Liberia, committed to economic growth, meant a faster economic recovery with the added advantage of hopefully dissuading a United States invasion due to the placement of its citizens in the area. Presidential candidate Alvaro Obregón, in his 1920 election manifesto, proposed "to extend an invitation to all men of capital and enterprise, nationals and foreigners, who are disposed to invest their capital" in the development of "natural riches," most likely in this case referring to agriculture.[32] Although Obregón was, in part, speaking of a program he began to attract non-U.S. immigrants to invest in Northern Mexico, it is reasonable to assume that Little Liberia leaders, with whom he met and about whom he spoke favorably, were included in this group. Mexico wanted to avoid another American takeover like Texas, and needed to expand and improve the economy in border towns, so looking to agricultural ventures that were willing to expand the local communities became viable options for addressing this need.

Carranza's army. The United States military invaded the port at Veracruz, and occupied the port from April to November. Some American newspapers spoke of the military invasion as a conquering force, and since most Mexican troops had been ordered away from the city before the invasion, citizens of Veracruz resisted and fought off American soldiers. Carranza and Huerta both officially objected to the occupation, but the Mexican Revolution prevented them from responding to the United States. Eventually Huerta fell from power and the United States eventually ceded control to Carranza.

[31] One example of this was the creation of Mennonite communities, as explained by Jason Dormady, "Mennonite Colonization in Mexico and the Pendulum of Modernization, 1920-2013," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, April 2014, 167–94.

[32] Dormady, 173. Obregón on many occasions spoke of his plan to develop agriculture, and saw agriculture as the primary way to sustain the country.

Prior to 1917, most attempts at invading Mexico or taking over Baja California were led by White American men. In 1919 specifically, Arizona's Senator Henry F. Ashurst argued that it was time for the United States government to act on its three-quarters-of-a-century plan to purchase Baja California. Ashurst spoke publicly of the advantages the United States would have if it purchased the peninsula: military security, control of the Colorado River, water rights for the Imperial Valley, access to the Gulf of California, and further development of Arizona and Southern California. As Morris Milton Berger mentioned in his 1927 dissertation "United States Ambitions in Lower California," "another result would be the removal of the artificial barrier existing between Southern California and northern Lower California and the opening up of the country for the development which is kept back because of uncertain conditions in Mexico."[33] Senator Ashurst, in discussing the need for military security, noted that ownership of Magdalena Bay in Baja California would place the United States eight hundred miles nearer the Panama Canal, a source of peace and security for the United States, and that "the United States needs the Peninsula in order to keep out an oriental enemy which might colonize and set up a naval or military base. We must guard the Pacific Ocean in every way, as it is a possible theatre of war." These same arguments about the need to secure the Pacific Ocean were used in purchasing Alaska in 1867 and claiming Hawai'i as a territory in 1898. Ashurst also noted that "perhaps one of the greatest benefits from the viewpoint of maintaining world peace would be the elimination of possible friction between the United States and Japan."[34]

[33] Morris Milton Berger, "United States Ambitions in Lower California" (University of Pittsburgh, 1927), 101, University of California, San Diego Special Collections (E 183.8 .M6 B47 1927).
[34] U.S. Congress. Senate., "Congressional Record - Senate," no. 65th Congress, 3rd Session. (January 7, 1919): 1090, 1094.

This "friction" between the two countries, particularly over the issue of Mexico, had precedence. On the heels of World War I, although the United States and Japan had fought on the same side, tensions still existed between the two countries over influence and control over the Pacific. In addition, the U.S. rejection of the racial equity clause, an amendment to the Treaty of Versailles at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference that would have guaranteed fair treatment of all nations and peoples, regardless of race, increased the divide between the two countries.[35] However, Ashurst mentioned Magdalena Bay because in 1912, before World War I even began, Americans and Japanese fought for control over the bay. In what is now known as the Magdalena Bay incident, Mexicans and a Japanese syndicate were in negotiations for the syndicate to purchase of a large amount of land that included control over the bay, a strategic harbor in Baja California. The United States Senate, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, ratified the Lodge Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1912 in response to these meetings; the corollary forbade any foreign power from acquiring enough territory in the Western Hemisphere to have a substantial amount of power. Shortly after the corollary's ratification, Japan claimed no connection with the syndicate and the deal fell through. However, the event clearly displays United States attitudes towards Mexico, particularly the right to control locations that were strategic to the United States. This exchange was public

[35] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 181–82.

knowledge, and the below cartoon displays the influence the Monroe Doctrine and the views about Japanese people had on the incident.[36]

Image 3: Uncle Sam confronts a Japanese soldier who is fishing with a rifle and a bayonet in Magdalena Bay and orders him to leave in the political cartoon *Keep off! Monroe Doctrine*
Source: Thomas E. Powers, *Keep off! Monroe Doctrine*, 1912, //www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b31976.

Some Senators argued that the issue of United States, Mexico, and Japanese interest in Baja California should be brought to the League of Nations, and although another senator suggested that the League should give Baja California to the United States, Ashurst feared that the organization would give it to Japan.[37] Although the United States was not part of the League of Nations, Mexico and Japan were both members, and since Japan did gain control over some German possessions, this was a possible scenario. Ashurst also claimed that the

[36] For a full telling of the incident, see Eugene Keith Chamberlin, "The Magdalena Bay Incident" (University of California, Berkeley, 1940).
[37] Associated Press, "Senator Ashurst Wants U.S. Purchase Lower California and Other Parts of Mexico," *Calexico Chronicle*, January 2, 1919, 1.

Mexican Government was either unable or unwilling to prevent an "Asiatic invasion" or settlement of the Baja California Peninsula. Ashurst spoke to concerns of a Japanese invasion through Baja California that also appeared in local and national newspapers when Japanese land purchasing rumors began to circulate.[38] In addition, American citizens, not Mexicans, owned some of the land the Japanese were looking to purchase. Some legislators, including a senator from Iowa, claimed this provided additional proof that it was "all the more necessary that we should own and control Lower California."[39] American imperialism and the idea of Manifest Destiny were at the heart of this conversation, but ironically it was this imperialism that may have prevented the United States government from resisting the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's plans, because an active African American land company in Baja California could have meant a Japanese takeover of the area was less likely.

In these many reasons for American intervention in Mexico, and specifically in Baja California, there is common thread of a focus on American interests with little regard for the Mexican nation or its people. This may have led Hugh Macbeth to comment that "it has been demonstrated that the colored man is the only American who mixes harmoniously with the natives of Mexico"[40] and the *Chicago Defender* to note that Mexicans were much friendlier to African Americans than to White Americans.[41] However, Black people have a complicated history in Mexico, including some African Americans who placed their own interests or American priorities above others. For example, the segregated Buffalo Soldiers were the

[38] Two examples of these articles, of which there are many, include "Senator Phelan Sees Menace in Reported Grant to Japanese," *New York Tribune*, April 1, 1919, 4; "Land Contract Is Cancelled," *The Daily Gate City*, April 5, 1919, 5.
[39] U.S. Congress. Senate., "Congressional Record - Senate," 1088–98.
[40] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," *California Eagle*, October 22, 1921, 1.
[41] "Restless Mexico," *Chicago Defender*, March 11, 1922, 12.

initial invading troops sent to Mexico in 1916 in search of Pancho Villa.[42] From 1907 to 1919 Henry O. Flipper, one of the first African Americans to attend West Point, acted as a surveyor and used his Spanish language knowledge to study Spanish and Mexican Land Laws to find loopholes that would allow the United States to ignore parts of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo so the government could dispossess Mexicans of their land.[43] The African American prize fighter Jack Johnson, although he attempted to create a land company based out of Mexico City that could create Black communities free from racism in the United States, originally moved to Mexico to avoid United States authorities looking to arrest him for having consensual sex with a White woman.[44] In addition to specific imperialistic acts, in the early twentieth century African Americans like Johnson viewed Mexico as a means of escape, opportunity, and advancement, but these same people did not necessarily concern themselves with the communities they were entering. Others, like the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, spoke publicly about their intentions to create a brotherhood between Mexicans and African Americans. This complicated past is why the Mexican government's support of the community was so important to Little Liberia's leaders choosing Mexico as their new home.

Producers, Not Consumers

At the outset, Mexican officials publicly welcomed Little Liberia's creators and residents. Like the community's organizers, local and national Mexican officials openly

[42] Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), viii, 88–109, 133–55.
[43] As Gerald Horne points out in Horne, 40., ironically Flipper was left out of the official records for the claims – the name of a U.S. Attorney for private claims, G. Reynolds, was listed instead in both the Court of Private Land Claims and the United States Supreme Court documents – what he poignantly labels as a "double dispossession."
[44] Horne, 1, 25–45.

discussed their willingness to participate in a movement that could transcend national and racial boundaries to create mutual benefit. Just as Little Liberia creators negotiated a complex series of ideas about their place in race, class, and national identity politics, so too did leaders in Mexico. In 1918, Governor Esteban Cantú stated that he was interested in the new community because Mexicans, as a national group, had become frustrated with people from other countries who simply wanted to use Mexico for her resources, rather than "come to dwell with us and grow up with the country."[45] This may be a significant reason why Mexican officials officially sanctioned the community, offered to help the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company verify property titles, and assisted in navigating the land purchasing bureaucracy. However, Governor Cantú also spoke to the Mexican elite's deep-seated frustrations at the supposed backwardness and failure of Mexico's peasant class when he stated that Little Liberia's economic opportunities were "beyond the average man's imagination," and that "the native Mexican laborer has not taken advantage of his opportunity."[46] He proclaimed the new African American community members the "builders" that Baja California so desperately needed to succeed.

Little Liberia members and supporters echoed this same language; Theodore Troy mentioned he wanted to move to Baja California to become a producer, and the *California Eagle,* in a title for a full-page article, boldly declared, "Los Angeles Citizens Head Movement to Become Producers and Real Factors in Bringing Forth Food For the World." The article argued that this movement "offers the real solution to the future progress" of African Americans in California who had not been able to "become producers instead of

[45] "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.
[46] "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.

mere consumers."[47] In addition, in the World War I era there was value in producing goods, and rhetoric in the United States during war implied that producing goods needed for the war was a clear indication of a citizen's value and patriotism. Agricultural goods were especially needed, and in a 1918 *California Eagle* article Little Liberia organizers mentioned that one goal of the community was "producing food for our country in this time of stress" due to the war.[48] Here Little Liberia members were clearly staking their claim as American citizens, but were simultaneously funding an opportunity to improve African American standing in the United States. Production, not consumption, was the primary focus economically for the community, and this was as much a product of wartime propaganda and thinking as it was connected to racial thinking in the United States and Mexico.

Elites in northern Baja California echoed this sentiment. One lawyer from Ensenada, while in Los Angeles signing paperwork for the Little Liberia land purchase, stated in a speech at a local Black church that "my only regret is that it is not physically possible to immediately transport several millions of these fine people who are my brothers and sisters to my beloved Mexico," again signaling that members of Baja California's upper class viewed African American communities as a possibility for meaningful economic and social advancement in Mexico.[49] It is possible that these elites viewed these African Americans as different from previous American businessmen because their community's goals incorporated elements that could help Baja Californians and possibly even change the racial status quo in the United States, perhaps to a degree that would benefit Mexico and people of Mexican descent. Or perhaps these leaders chose to focus on Little Liberia's distinct racial

[47] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," *California Eagle*, March 30, 1918, 1; "Los Angeles Loses A First Class Man," *California Eagle*, n.d., 4.
[48] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1.
[49] "Says Mexico Welcomes American Negro," *California Eagle*, September 13, 1919, 8.

difference from previous Americans in Baja California as a way of uniting against the White businessmen that acted as a barrier for both racial groups, even though this meant, at least publicly, avoiding discussing similarities to other American businesses in Mexico and American imperialistic aims towards Baja California and the larger Mexican nation.

Land, Race, and Immigration

The differences in the history of and meaning of land and land ownership remained inherent in these conversations, but these differences were not explicitly stated or even mentioned by either side. Slavery had helped cement land and land ownership's importance in African American economic movements, primarily in migration and community formation. In Mexico, agriculture, land reform, and land ownership were inherently tied to three different vectors: indigeneity, elitism, and colonialism. Reform was not just shaped by government, but by various people on different social rungs, particularly during the Cárdenas administration that Little Liberia organizers were joining. The racially-charged claim of indigenous backwardness that Cantú mentioned had roots in Spanish colonial ideas about native peoples that existed historically right alongside colonial Spanish seizure of indigenous land. The theft of native lands led to slavery, stunted community growth, and led to outright annihilation of some indigenous communities. However, many peasants and indigenous communities resisted; some of this resistance manifested for centuries in the call for land reform and redistribution. During the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata embodied the movement to take land from the Mexican elite and foreign investors and return it to the Mexican people. Therefore, agriculture and land control played contrasting roles in the lives of the people who already lived in Baja California and the African Americans who were entering it. In addition to the colonial- and class-based dynamics, Little Liberia community

members were entering a conversation about agriculture and land ownership that had drastically different implications in Mexico than it did in their own history, an important byproduct of the transnational nature of the community's formation.[50]

Governor Cantú's and the rest of the Mexican government's openness and willingness to work with the community were especially rare, given the complex history of land reform in Mexico, the Mexican government's staunch refusal of foreign investment in and ownership of its territory, particularly along the border, the history of Americans' attempts to invade Mexico and use its resources for their own gain, and Mexico's racial climate. Little Liberia community members remained committed to their American identity as much as their Black identity; the need for a balance between the two may have been in part due to all three of these issues, but Mexico's long-standing internal racism was most likely the key factor. In addition to an elite disdain for indigenous communities and peoples, which was painfully visible in the policies and rhetoric during such instances as "orden y progreso" in the Porfiriato,[51] Mexican leadership and national rhetoric also shunned implicit connections between Blackness and Mexicanness.[52] For example, in 1925 José Vasconcelos,

[50] For this and more information on Mexico's land reform movement, and the United States' place in it, consult Susan R. Walsh Sanderson, *Land Reform in Mexico: 1910-1980* (Academic Press, 1984); Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*; Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*.

[51] "Orden y progreso," or "order and progress," was Porfirio Díaz's motto during his reign from 1876-1910, known as the Porfiriato. Díaz was known for his brutal enforcement of rules that claimed to create an ordered Mexico, but often also attacked and shunned non-elites. Although Díaz's reign was the longest period in Mexico's history, up to that point, where Mexico was stable and successful, his repressive policies also ushered in the Mexican Revolution and the need for drastic change. For more information on the Porfiriato, see Paul H Garner, *Porfirio Díaz* (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001); Enrique Krauze and Aurelio de los Reyes, *Porfirio Díaz: Místico de la autoridad* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987).

[52] This is not to say that there are no important Black Mexican figures commonly discussed in Mexican history. For instance, Vicente Guerrero was a major figure in Mexican independence, was the first Black President of Mexico, and was the first Black President in any country in North America. Even though he has a prominent place in Mexican history, many people in Mexico to this day think that Blackness and Mexicanness are at odds, and that a person cannot inhabit both spaces. There is, however, a movement to discuss the role that Blackness plays as Mexico's third root of history and culture, along with indigenous groups and the Spanish. Although this dissertation is not necessarily part of this movement, since Little Liberia members were not claiming a

at that time the head of the Secretaría de Educación Pública,[53] published *La Raza Cósmica*, or *The Cosmic Race*, a widely popular essay that lifted up the combined Native and European ancestry of many Mexicans. This conception of a mixed racial makeup, however, pointedly ignored the impact of other groups in Mexico's history and culture, most notably people of African descent.[54] Although Baja California was much more racially diverse than some areas in mainland Mexico, as I discuss later, this national anti-Black sentiment existed as part of the larger Mexican national identity politics.[55]

American politicians and businessmen were attracted to Mexico due to its relative geographic closeness to the United States and its consistent internal political instability. The largest surge of American filibustering in Mexico occurred from the late 1840s to the early 1920s. Little Liberia, therefore, formed during a time of heightened risk of an American takeover; the Mexican government was taking a chance by reaching out to the Little Liberia colonists.[56] A large tract of land with possibilities for rich natural resources and a weak

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place in Mexican identity or culture, it does add to the growing literature of the experience of Afro-descended peoples in Mexico.

[53] As the head of newly-formed SEP, or Secretariat of Public Education in charge of national education policy, Vasconcelos wielded an immense amount of power over the education system and its use for creating a national identity and narrative; *La Raza Cósmica* was even more important to national identity formation because of this power and notoriety.

[54] José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race / La Raza Cosmica*, trans. Didier T. Jaén, 51102nd edition (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[55] For more information about Blackness in Mexico and Latin America, see Elisabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffmann, eds., *Blackness and Mestizaje in Mexico and Central America* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2013); Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race*; Laura A. Lewis, *Chocolate and Corn Flour: History, Race, and Place in the Making of "Black" Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2012); Ann M Pescatello, *The African in Latin America* (Lanham (Md.); London: University Press of America, 1975).

[56] Although the Neutrality Act of 1818 in the United States assigned fines and prison sentences to Americans who aided in a military expedition against a country or colony with which the United States was at peace, as mentioned in Chapter 1 Americans running filibustering schemes were still common because the United States government generally ignored the problem or had reduced means of enforcement. [For this and more information about filibustering in the United States, see John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War*, First Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Joseph Allen Stout, *Schemers & Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848-1921* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002).

government constantly in flux made many Americans eager to invade. However, Little Liberia community creators were looking not to take over Baja California, but rather to work with local people. In May 1920, the *Chicago Defender* reported that, due to the successful nature of the community, "Mexican officials…expressed a desire that the Lower California Company put in many thousands of Colored settlers in the peninsula."[57] Like the Little Liberia organizers, Cantú and local Mexican elites saw a partnership between Baja California residents and African Americans as beneficial for all involved.

In 1919, just two years after the new Mexican constitution, Mexican official Manuel Aguirre Berlanga made a statement in Mexico City (and sent a copy of it to the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Offices) stating there was a new law, proposed by the Ministry of the Interior, that "contains many beneficent innovations in respect to immigration; also a new system and regulations covering colonization and the activities of foreigners in Mexico, who come not only to enhance their own fortunes, but to contribute also to the prosperity of the country." Berlanga echoed Cantú's existing rhetoric on the "immigrant topic," stating that people willing to develop Mexico, rather than abuse it, "shall be protected by our liberal laws and have the generous support of the administration." Macbeth, in response, stated that "the prospects for those who would go into Mexico to become part and parcel of that great, though struggling, Republic, are indeed bright."[58] In December 1921, numerous articles claimed that prominent Mexicans from Baja California would accompany Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company officers in the following Spring on a tour of the United States in support of the community and to garner

[57] "Harvest Big Wheat Crop," *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1920, 11.
[58] "Lower California News," 8.

moral and financial backing.[59] A country-wide tour was no small feat, so this commitment highlights the intertwining of the elite members of the Black Los Angeles and northern Baja California communities.

Why Mexico?

Little Liberia's president, Theodore Troy, was the first community member to fully articulate the social and political reasons why African Americans were so eager to move to Mexico. In 1919, when he left Los Angeles to join other community members in the Santa Clara Valley, Troy explained the need for what he described as the "most important move in his life":

> I am going to a land where freedom and opportunity beckon me as well as every other man, woman, and child of dark skin. In this land there are no Jim Crow laws to fetter me; I am not denied opportunity because of the color of my skin and wonderful undeveloped resources of a country smiled upon by God beckon my genius on their development.[60]

Troy's comments exemplified the range of qualities that Little Liberia's creators projected for Baja California: social equality, lack of prejudice, opportunity for economic and social advancement, lack of race-based violence, and a space where African Americans were needed for their knowledge and experience as well as their physical labor. In addition, he gestured toward the similarities at the time between many African American and Mexican religious beliefs. Christianity, often in Protestant denominations, and the church as a social and political organizing entity, had been important to the Black community in the United States for decades. The dominant religion in Mexico, equally important, consisted of a mixture of Roman Catholicism and local native beliefs, in large part due to religious

[59] "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," December 24, 1921, 1.
[60] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," 1.

syncretism during conversion efforts primarily at the hands of Spanish priests from a variety of Christian faiths in Mexico's colonial period, but was commonly identified as Catholicism. However, American Protestantism did exist in Mexico, since President Porfirio Díaz in the late 1800s and early 1900s had encouraged its spread in Mexico, although relatively few Mexicans practiced Protestantism.[61] Little Liberia supporter John P. Holland, in an article titled "Lower California Promises to be Canaan for Oppressed Children of U.S.," remarked that Mexico was "a country smiled upon by Go." Little Liberia member Edna Johnson Boudoin called Baja California "God's country."[62] Some of this language was common when African Americans described this type of rich opportunity and fertile land, but it could also be, in part, because the people in Mexico believed in the same God as African Americans, and were linked to one another in a similar cause in fighting for an equality and mutual respect that was often reflected in Christian teachings. Although many Americans, White and Black, in the United States believed in the same God at this time, finding this connection in another country may have been an important religious connection for Little Liberia members.

Although Little Liberia's creators and members spoke at length about the social benefits of a community in Mexico, they also constantly reiterated that they saw Mexico, and specifically the northern part of Baja California, as an ideal location for their movement. Members of Little Liberia's board of directors, community members, and visitors all hailed Mexico and Baja California as a Garden of Eden for African Americans and, economically, a land of milk and honey. Theodore Troy, for example, called the Santa Clara Valley an

[61] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 7.
[62] John P. Holland, "Lower California Promises to Be Canaan for Oppressed Children of U.S.," *California Eagle*, July 12, 1919, 1; Edna Johnson Boudoin, "As I See It," *California Eagle*, November 26, 1921, 1.

"earthly paradise."[63] One *California Eagle* article mentioned that "Lower California is a garden only waiting to be tilled by American Negroes to yield a harvest of gold," insisting that the land was perfect for hard-working African Americans.[64] Some articles and advertisements singled out Baja California as the best area in Mexico, claiming that "Lower California is one of the richest and healthiest and most beautiful parts of Mexico."[65] Two articles appeared in Black newspapers throughout the country including *The Savannah Tribune* in Georgia and *The Hutchinson Blade* in Kansas in late 1921 – one full-length and one an abbreviated version – and both versions argued that the "rich, dark soil land" was "highly suitable for agricultural purposes and the climate is the most salubrious in the Western hemisphere," coupled with the fact there was "no winter, an average temperature of not more than 70 degrees the year round make the proposed colony an ideal proposition from the very start."[66] Although some of this language was meant to entice other African Americans to the community, it also appears that community members ardently spoke about the weather and viability of the land because they believed it to be suitable for their community.

Little Liberia's creators and members spoke most passionately about the possibilities of racial freedom in Mexico. Black people in the United States West were frustrated with the lack of freedom and opportunity, despite the West's progressivism relative to the South and Midwest. Owen Troy, Theodore Troy's adult son, viewed the problems in California as part

[63] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," 1; Holland, "Lower California Promises to Be Canaan for Oppressed Children of U.S.," 1.
[64] "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," *California Eagle,* October 12, 1921, 1.
[65] "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," *Chicago Defender,* November 12, 1921, 12.
[66] "Negro State in California," *The Savannah Tribune*, November 17, 1921, 1; "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," December 24, 1921, 1; "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," December 10, 1921; "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," December 17, 1921.

of a larger conversation about national racial attitudes. For instance, Owen Troy spoke of racial violence in California in comparison to Mexico when he mentioned that, even though the Mexican Revolution was violent, "I feel much safer in Mexico with the Mexicans than I do in this part of the country which is being overrun by the southern white man who is used to lynching a Colored man for the least provocation."[67] The *California Eagle*, when discussing Theodore Troy's departure to Baja California, stated he had "gone to prepare and make possible a haven of refuge, when the storms of prejudice and discrimination breaks over his native land. He got tired of hearing the clanking of chains and the rumble of Jim Crow cars" and he "sought and obtained the ideal location, in a land which [did] not decry worth on account of the texture of hair and color of skin," where he would be able to "do and accomplish the things which do not only make a race but nation as well." Here the *California Eagle* article, most likely written by Charlotta Bass, was not referring to the nation of Mexico, but rather to the global Black nation forming through diasporic movements in the early twentieth century. Members and supporters saw a movement in Mexico as a means of safely growing a community that could advance the Black race in a location that was friendly to African Americans.

Little Liberia's creators built on existing African American rhetoric about freedom and brotherhood in Mexico. African Americans had seen the U.S.-Mexico border as a gateway into a land with less racism and better economic chances since before the Civil War, when the border between the southern United States and Mexico was also a border between slavery and freedom.[68] Jack Johnson, while in Mexico City, spoke of opportunities for Black

[67] Owen A. Troy, "Invades Lower California," *California Eagle*, November 11, 1922, 1.
[68] Since the abolition of slavery in Mexico in 1820, the Mexican government had offered full citizenship to freed Blacks who crossed the border, while also refusing to return escaped slaves to the United States. This act led to a few all-Black colonies in Mexico, although few existed in Baja California.

people in Mexico as well as the rest of Latin America, although his interpretation was influenced by his fame. Langston Hughes published a few short pieces, including his first published poem and some short pieces for children, about Mexico, and many of his works (as of 1977 over 200) were translated into Spanish.[69] In his Autobiography *The Big Sea*, he mentioned his father went to Mexico because he could make money more quickly than in the United States. His father had legal training so he was admitted to the bar in Mexico, something not possible in the American South at the time, and made enough money to own property in Mexico City and a big ranch up in the hills.[70] Langston Hughes struggled with complex feelings about Mexico, in part because of his poor relationship with his father. Langston Hughes was well-liked in Mexico, and an idol for some Mexican poets, and he later spoke favorably of Mexico and Indigenous Mexicans, even though his father consistently disparaged Indigenous Mexicans. In *The Brownies Book*, his collection of short pieces for children, Hughestold American children about "your beautiful neighbor country, Mexico" and sought to bring Mexican culture into the American mainstream in pieces like "The Virgin of Guadalupe" in *The Crisis* and translations of Mexican short stories into English.[71] Hughes arguably single-handedly brought to Mexico the Harlem Renaissance, one of the most influential Black art movements which, according to David Levering Lewis, demonstrated "the considerable creative capacities of the best and brightest of a disadvantaged racial minority." He also brought Mexico into the Harlem Renaissance.[72]

[69] A full list of Hughes' works translated into Spanish can be found in Langston Hughes and Edward J Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977), 47–65.
[70] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (London: Pluto, 1986), 39.
[71] Hughes and Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti*, 69–76.
[72] David Levering Lewis, ed., *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 13th printing edition (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 1995), xliii.

Little Liberia creators were connecting to an existing and growing conversation about Mexico in the Black community.

While some African American newspapers, like the *California Eagle*, primarily focused on the possibilities and positive implications of communities south of the U.S.-Mexico border, articles in non-Black publications, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and American Automobile Association advertisements, echoed this favorable view of Baja California and could have influenced the community's creation as well. Other African American newspapers took a pragmatic approach when discussing Mexico. Many African Americans were concerned about safety in Mexico due to the violence and political instability unleashed by the Mexican Revolution. The *Chicago Defender* wavered back and forth between discussing Mexico's ongoing political difficulties as a reason to avoid economic ties with its people, and declaring it to be a place of great economic opportunity ripe for African American participation.[73] Some articles in the seven years prior to Little Liberia's creation claimed that Mexico was a "glorious land, free from race prejudice" where "prosperous, industrious Negroes [were] carrying on business of their own" because "all men [were] treated alike," and "there is no prejudice on account of color."[74] In 1918, the *Chicago Defender* argued that, because most of the Baja California peninsula was separated from the rest of Mexico by three hundred miles of water, people in Baja California were "independent and under the immediate rule of Governor Esteban Cantu [sic]." The article's author

[73] Page 47 of Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935." declares "according to the Black press, the only plausible explanation for this sad state of affairs," meaning the underdevelopment of parts of Mexico, "was that the Mexicans were a backward and uncultured people." It is possible that Little Liberia community members, like Owen Troy, were actively pushing against this type of rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, although some parts of Shankman's piece are well-supported, others are not, and this section could have been as much a product of its 1975 date as it was historical sources.
[74] G. W. Slaughter, "Mexico Offers Negroes of United States Great Opportunities," *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1910, 1; "Color Line in Mexico; Race Made Welcome," *Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1915, 5.

reasoned that this geographical isolation, as well as the mountain range on the east coast of the peninsula, would be enough protection from any trouble that might arise from mainland Mexico during the revolution. In the same article, Hugh Macbeth said he wasn't worried about any potential danger caused by the revolution, asserting that there had never been any trouble in Baja California.[75] The community members seemed convinced that Baja California, although technically part of Mexico, was physically far enough away from Mexico City that any violence or changes in government would be inconsequential to their daily lives. In some facets of life this was true – from the sources available, it appears Little Liberia community members did not experience any physical violence or any drastic changes to their lives based on the events of the Mexican Revolution, especially in the community's early years.

Although in later years Baja California did not play a major role in the Mexican Revolution, this complete dismissal of Baja California as a possible revolutionary site was not completely accurate. The Magonista Rebellion in Tijuana was one of the earliest uprisings in the Mexican Revolution, although it was the only successful revolutionary event in Baja California. A few years after the Mexican Revolution had subsided, however, articles in the *Chicago Defender* stated that Mexicans had "the habit of starting a revolution every time the wind blows the other way," and "whether the Mexican people feel that they have something in common with the American Colored man or not is a debatable question." It was this fear of violence, of "bandits and the lawless element of Mexico," the *Chicago Defender* argued, that kept many African Americans out of Mexico, despite the fact that "the pictures drawn were the brightest hue and the reports of the emissaries were punctuated with golden

[75] "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.

opportunities."[76] Little Liberia leaders, however, pushed back against Black newspapers' negativity toward Mexico, instead arguing that Baja California was not involved with the Mexican Revolution, and that Mexicans should be treated as brothers, not enemies. One *California Eagle* article about the community even mentioned that African Americans across the country were coming to the conclusion that funding for the "Anti-Mexico propaganda" came from oil companies in the United States that wanted to undermine Mexico and any profitable ventures there, including businesses led by African Americans.[77] One article claimed that there was half of a million dollars per week spent on anti-Mexico literature, particularly but not limited to newspapers.[78] Although the *California Eagle* did not give specific sources, this does highlight the complex array of conversations in African American newspapers about Mexico and the role that Mexico could play in African American life and advancement.

With so many contradictory stories, and a rumor that these stories could have been influenced and even falsified by powerful people with lots of money, Little Liberia organizers made the decision to trust their own experiences and actively portray Baja California and its people in a positive light. Owen Troy came to a similar assessment as the *Chicago Defender*, insisting that rumors of violence and banditry were keeping African Americans from fully seeing the possibilities Baja California had to offer. Troy commented that, when initially talking about Little Liberia, many people expected to hear unfavorable accounts and gave him a "'come-on-boy-give-me-the-bad-report' look," and sometimes even admitted "I guess it would be all right down there, but I'm afraid of those Mexs."[79] This fear

[76] "Restless Mexico," 12.
[77] This will be explained in more depth in Chapter 3.
[78] "Lower California Notes," *California Eagle*, July 26, 1919, 8.
[79] Owen A. Troy, "Invades Lower California," 1.

of Mexico and its people, stemming from racial stereotypes and stories of violence from the revolution, could have prevented Little Liberia's board of directors from looking at Mexico, and specifically Baja California, as a possibility for a community location. Little Liberia members, however, doubled down on their goal of social change. In addition to striving to challenge notions of Blackness and racial deficiency in the United States, they also worked to change how African Americans thought about and spoke about Mexico and Mexicans during and after the Mexican Revolution.

Owen Troy, for instance, explained that his main strategy when talking about Mexico included discussing the country as if it were just next door, rather than as some far away and exotic location. Rather than painting a picture of Mexico as a land with massive sprawling deserts, an incorrect image still perpetuated today that largely ignores Mexico's geographic diversity, Troy insisted that the reality was much more complicated. He asserted "you must remember that Santa Clara is not more than seventy odd miles from San Diego. Besides, that imaginary line that separates U.S.A. from Mexico does not change the surface of the land, neither the climate conditions." He pushed back against the notion that everything changed the minute a person crossed over the boundary line into Mexico. The one noticeable transformation, he said, was "when you cross that line and get away from the white man, you are treated as God intended – as an equal, not an inferior."[80] Owen Troy's discussion of the border at that time was much closer to reality than many American's conceptions of it. The border was not just a physical landmark separating the two countries, but rather a conceptual idea that could change the way a person was treated, even if the look of the land remained the same. This image of Mexico was progressive for the time, and discussing lived experiences

[80] Owen A. Troy, 1; "Los Angeles Loses A First Class Man," 4.

in Mexico and pushing back against characterizing the border and an area of immense change were essential to altering conversations about Mexico and its people.

Creating Community

Little Liberia members used economic and social activities to connect with the diverse local community in Ensenada and the Guadalupe Valley. For instance, in January 1920, James Littlejohn headed up a pork carnival in the valley. He slaughtered at least 150 hogs to make ham, bacon, hogshead cheese, chitterlings, lard, crackling, and pork sausage. He sold hundreds of pounds of fresh pork to local people in Palm Valley, Valle de las Palmas, just twelve miles to the north.[81] In the same month, the owner of the largest flour mill in Ensenada agreed to purchase all the community's wheat that year, up to $100,000.[82] These economic connections between the Little Liberia community and residents of the Guadalupe Valley and Ensenada areas were vital for the early success and survival of the community. The Little Liberia community was not starting from scratch – one of the enticements for the particular ranches they procured was that the land was already under cultivation prior to their arrival. In fact, the Vallecitos crop under a previous owner from 1917 had sold for $9,583.95 and was projected to be one sixth the size of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's total yield.[83] However, before they could sell goods across the border to California, they needed to build houses for residents, import livestock, plant new plants, purchase equipment, and generally build up their production and economic strength before attempting international trade.[84] Economic

[81] "Great Hog Killing for the Santa Clara Valley," *California Eagle*, January 17, 1920, 1.
[82] "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," *California Eagle*, January 3, 1920, 1.
[83] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1.
[84] Building houses sometimes proved challenging. In "Pitching Tents in the Santa Clara Valley," *California Eagle*, December 20, 1919, 5.

connections with other local people in Baja California meant they could help improve the local economy, their own economic prospects, and set themselves up for the final goal of cross-border trade.

Socially, Little Liberia community members had contact with local residents early on, and created a community with a sense of both cross-racial cooperation and finding common ground that could create bridges between the two groups. A few members of the community, including James Littlejohn and Owen Troy, spoke Spanish before the community began, so for some members there was no language barrier between themselves and local residents. The African American and Mexican children spent time playing together. Teddy and Claudius Troy, Theodore Troy's grandchildren, in December 1919 had already begun to learn Spanish from playing with their new acquaintances. Their Mexican playmates accepted the Black children into their circle of friends, and had even jokingly dubbed Teddy the president of their group.[85] Owen Troy visited with neighbors and participated in a game of fútbol (soccer) while on a month-long trip to the community. He wrote about the experience in the *California Eagle*, exclaiming "my, those Mexicans have an art of making a person feel at home!"[86] The Little Liberia community was motivated not just by economic goals, but by mutual understanding and the underlying desire to create a better world for all involved. This mutual understanding was needed for the creation of solid bonds between the Little Liberia community and local people in the Guadalupe Valley.

This mutual respect fostered in the Little Liberia community an overwhelming feeling of brotherhood and acceptance toward Mexicans. Two community members, Leona Ellis and

[85] "The Furrows Are Flying in Lower California"," *California Eagle*, December 13, 1919, 1.
[86] Owen A. Troy, "Invades Lower California," 1.

Eugene Roberts, in a *California Eagle* article explained to readers in the United States that "the Mexican people and the colored people are brothers. They will always stand shoulder to shoulder in fair and square treatment to all men and will always oppose race prejudice wherever found."[87] Another member, R. M. Massey, in January 1920 mentioned that the community members and Mexicans in the area were getting along fine.[88] Equality and respect were paramount to members of the Little Liberia community, particularly because they saw the importance of connections to the local community and the importance of growing cultural and economic ties. Local Mexican residents were as much a part of the "land where freedom and opportunity beckon" as was the agricultural viability of the area.

In March 1918 the *California Eagle* ran a full-length, front page article complete with pictures, officially introducing the community to the public.[89] By July 1919, company organizers had already begun to look for members on a national scale, establishing an office on the East Coast in New York.[90] Black newspapers beyond the *California Eagle* began to cover the community beginning in 1918. Most of the newspaper articles were a few paragraphs long, mentioned at least one prominent member of the community, and gave at least a brief projection of the size and scope of the project. For instance, an article "Negro State in California" by *The Savannah Tribune,* after praising the land and its possibilities as explained earlier, clarified that "the scheme as announced by Hugh E. MacBeth, well known Negro attorney, is to place at least 200 families of industrious Negroes on a big block of agricultural land below the border and permit them to acquire possession of their farm on

[87] "Lower California Organization No Joke," *California Eagle*, February 7, 1920, 1.
[88] "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," 1.
[89] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1.
[90] "Lower California Notes," 8.

long-term payments."[91] Continuing to grow, by December of 1919, Little Liberia organizers shipped over a thousand dollars of equipment to assist in the first plowing of the land.[92] Although a few articles in smaller newspapers and some pieces by historians have mentioned that the community started sometime in 1920, this timetable, as well as Littlejohn, Troy, Massey, and others' arrivals prior to 1920, suggests that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was well underway prior to 1920.

Developing Santa Clara Valley Agriculture

In May1918, less than six months after the company was officially incorporated, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company had already secured over 25,000 acres of land to distribute.[93] When creating the community, the company purchased two adjacent properties, the Santa Clara and Vallecitos Ranches, in the Santa Clara Valley. The Santa Clara Ranch consisted of 8,762 acres and the Vallecitos Ranch contained 13,031 acres, totaling almost 22,000 acres).[94] The Santa Clara Valley sat between the Sonoran Desert to the east and chaparral and coastal scrub to the west.[95] The community was separated from the Sonoran Desert by the Peninsular Range, a set of mountains that begins south of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and runs from Southern California through Baja California. Little Liberia's founders believed the Santa Clara Valley was prime agricultural land because a 1913 agricultural report claimed that the Laguna Hanson Mountains, a small

[91] "Negro State in California," 1.
[92] "President Troy Of the Lower California Land Company Moves Into Mexico," 1.
[93] "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.
[94] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1. To visualize the sheer size of the starting community land holdings, one acre is roughly the size of an American football field, minus both end zones.
[95] Chaparral is a plant community that often consists of low-growing vegetation including shrubs and bushes, sometimes thorny, as well as dwarf trees. Coastal scrub are regions that often have low-growing and fragrant plants, such as sage, as well as succulents.

set of mountains in the larger Peninsular Range located close to the Santa Clara Valley,[96] helped make the area a viable prospect for agricultural communities.[97] Unlike most mountains in the Peninsular Range, the Laguna Hanson Mountains form a plateau at high altitudes. Mountains in Southern California have peaks that direct rainwater to streams that ultimately lead to the Pacific Ocean. The basins at the top of the Laguna Hanson Mountains instead allow the water to soak into the mountain, eventually becoming groundwater available for wells and agriculture.[98] This meant that, for farming, the land near the Laguna Hanson Mountains was superior to that of other areas. Community organizers claimed it was even superior to that of Southern California.

Even though the community creators were not agricultural workers, they recognized and asserted the importance of water to the community's production and goals. For instance, in a full-page advertisement in the *California Eagle* in 1918, community organizers mentioned that the "natural underflow" of water meant they had "numerous springs" on the ranches that purported to also allow for shallow wells that could provide water for more than one hundred horses.[99] In addition, in 1921 Hugh Macbeth claimed that wells could be dug

[96] Note that the Laguna Hanson Mountains sat roughly fifty-five miles from Ensenada, whereas the community was roughly thirty-five miles from Ensenada, so the mountains were within thirty miles of the closest community lands.
[97] "Lower California Flashes," *California Eagle*, April 13, 1918, 1; E Webster and Bartlett, *Report on the Northern District of Lower California: With Special Reference to the Climate, Water Supply, and Agricultural Production, Present and Prospective, of the La Frontera Subdivision of the Northern District, and the Mineral Resources of the Whole of the Northern District.* (San Diego, Calif.: Frye & Smith, 1913), 21.
[98] A similar, and more well-known, example of this occurrence is the difference between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountain Ranges. The Rockies, like the mountains in Southern California, are tipped mountains that do not create well sources of water, and therefore the surrounding areas are not as suitable for agriculture. The Appalachian Mountains, however, are basin-tipped, which is a large factor in the fertile soil in some areas of Georgia and Virginia. It is also important to note that the report does not mention how far the water would flow beyond the mountains, which means there was no way for colonists to know if the report was specific to their ranches. It appears that they took the information to mean that the flow of water would, in fact, reach the ranches, and this most likely informed many of their assumptions about the possibilities for agricultural productivity in the Santa Clara Valley.
[99] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1.

from six to twenty feet deep to create a water supply that "seems inexhaustible." In the same article, Little Liberia members also estimated that approximately seventy percent of the community land was irrigable, based on soil and water tests conducted on company land.[100] Land with an unlimited supply of water was especially important because, as other communities like Allensworth in California proved, importing water from other locations using irrigation technology could become expensive or create organizational problems.[101] North and east of Ensenada, where the Little Liberia community stood, groundwater availability meant that advanced irrigation methods and importing water might not have been necessary. Unlike Black farms and communities in Southern California and Allensworth that needed irrigation systems to bring water from other locations, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company did not need to factor major water costs into their business plan.

Comparing land in Baja California with land in Southern California was a clear way for Little Liberia organizers to explain the land's possibilities to African Americans in California. Parts of Southern California, including the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys, were not only seen as culturally progressive and racially accepting, they were also being hailed as a great economic opportunity for African Americans because they were fertile and productive. For instance, the *California Eagle* proclaimed that "the mighty Imperial Valley" had "soil, which surpasses the Valley of the Nile in its richness, which produces cotton, corn, cantaloupes, alfalfa, or anything which grows anywhere else, but in quantities so great that

[100] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
[101] For more information on Allensworth, see Chapter 1

one would really have to see to believe."[102] The same article stated that land in Baja California was even better than the north, noting that a few of the "foremost and forward looking citizens of California" had procured land in Baja California. This land had "topography much more favorable to the collection of underground water than is that of Southern California.[103] Given that the article claims Southern California agriculture was more productive than the Fertile Crescent in Egypt, the *California Eagle*, then, was claiming that the land in Baja California surpassed both areas in possible productivity.

Agricultural viability and land availability were inherently important to an agricultural endeavor. Primary concerns for economic viability included location, soil fertility, crop variability, and water availability. In the early 1900s most people usually underestimated the potential of agriculture in northern Baja California. Baja California is made up of distinct agricultural zones, and each region can differ significantly.[104] In places like Mexicali, as well as on mainland Mexico in Sonora, by this time agriculture was popular because of a booming cotton industry. However, as Little Liberia organizers stated, the Little Liberia community was too near the coast for profitable cotton culture, so the best results would come from growing other crops and raising livestock.[105]

Little Liberia members asserted that the same crops could grow in the Santa Clara Valley as in Southern California due to the fertile and water-abundant soil. Initially, wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, oranges, lemons, walnuts, and fruits of all kinds were listed as possible

[102] Note that African Americans were not the only people discussing Baja in this manner. For instance, Senator Ashurst on the Senate floor referred to the Colorado River as the "Nile of the West." (add source – congressional record 65 congress pages 1090/1094)
[103] "Lower California Flashes," 1.
[104] Henderson, *Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico*, 164.
[105] "Negro Colony in Lower California Plan of Company," December 24, 1921, 1.

cash crops. Community creators claimed that grass was so abundant that cattle, hogs, goats (especially goats for milking), chickens, turkeys, and other livestock and animals could graze with no significant impact on the landscape.[106] "It is estimated," community boosters maintained, "that outside of the tillable land 5000 head of cattle can be raised on the grazing lands, which the year around has a luxuriant growth of grass."[107] In 1921, Hugh Macbeth revised this plan with an announcement that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company "made a study of its agricultural and horticultural possibilities and is convinced that the best results will be secured by growing livestock and such crops as walnuts, deciduous and citrus fruits, alfalfa, potatoes and melons."[108] Little Liberia farmers, though, primarily focused on wheat. As of 1918, 4,000 acres of wheat were already planted, and there were plans for incubators for chickens, a nursery, a dairy, and a community-owned store to sell everything the colonists could need at as close to cost as possible.[109] When planning a community based on agriculture and livestock, a broad array of crop and livestock opportunities meant a greater chance of success and a more versatile economic proposition, even in case of disease or drought.

Although the community was primarily focused on agriculture and livestock, there initially were possibilities for mining because of reports of mineral, gem, and oil deposits in the area. In terms of availability, this move made economic sense.[110] According to mine

[106] Articles not written by or influenced by Little Liberia organizers also discussed similar crops and livestock in the Ensenada area. For instance, "Motor Trip to Ensenada Is Filled with Scenic Thrills," 1, 5.
[107] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1; "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15; "Great Hog Killing for the Santa Clara Valley," 1.
[108] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
[109] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1; "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.
[110] Politically, however, investing in mining could have proved disastrous. As footnote 18 in Chapter 1 notes, Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution forbade non-Mexicans from obtaining "concessions for the exploitation of mines or of waters." In addition, the subsoil and all products extracted from it – including products found in mines – were property of the Mexican government and its people. Depending on the agreements made between Little Liberia community organizers and Baja and Mexican officials, it is also

registers and permits, in the late 1800s and early 1900s there were gold and silver mines in Santa Clara, and gold, silver, iron, and copper mines in the municipality of Ensenada.[111] Residents on islands in the Gulf of California, southeast of Little Liberia, claimed to have discovered high-grade oil in late December 1919 and early January 1920. Petroleum officials were sent to the islands and adjacent lands to assess the land for oil. In addition, there were already existing mines in Baja California near the Guadalupe Valley, particularly to the south, as of 1919, particularly along the coast.[112] Miles Henderson, a prospector from Redlands, California, also arrived in Baja California in the last week of December 1919. Henderson was in search of an area to set up a copper mine, preferably somewhere in the Santa Clara Valley in the first six months of 1920.[113] In October 1921 Edward J. Sullivan, a Los Angeles Businessman, completed a survey of the Baja California peninsula claiming rich oil deposits, copper, and gold.[114] Although it appears the Lower California Mexican Land

possible the mines would have been allowed. Mexico, "Constitution of the United Mexican States, 1917 (as Amended)" (Washington: Pan American Union, 1961). However, as Dwyer notes, Article 27 wasn't fully enforced, particularly after Villa and Zapata's defeat, and agrarian reform (including mining) was often limited in practice.

[111] N.d. "Mine Sales Register" (Adam Matthew, Marlborough), Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters, accessed October 6, 2016, http://www.frontierlife.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/UCSD_MSS_778_01_28; "Baja California Mining Industry Statistics" (Adam Matthew, Marlborough, 1903), Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters, http://www.frontierlife.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/UCSD_MSS_778_01_32; "Mines Register for Baja California" (Adam Matthew, Marlborough), Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters, accessed October 6, 2016, http://www.frontierlife.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/UCSD_MSS_778_01_27; "Mining Documents" (Adam Matthew, Marlborough, 1916), Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters, http://www.frontierlife.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/UCSD_MSS_778_01_26; "'Noticias Relativas a La Industria Minera y Metalúrgica de Este Destrito , Correspondientes Al Año de 1909' with Documents Relative to the Mining Industry in Ensenada" (Adam Matthew, Marlborough, January 22, 1910), Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters, http://www.frontierlife.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/UCSD_MSS_778_08_07. Although some of these sources are not dated, they are most likely from the late 1800s or early 1900s. Some mines in the Ensenada municipality had the name "Santa Clara," and many mines were named after their location, so it is highly likely that these mines were near the location of what would be the Little Liberia landholdings.

[112] Robinson, "Map of Lower California, Republic of Mexico."

[113] "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," 1.

[114] "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," 1.

and Development Company did not create any sort of mining business in its initial years, the possibility of precious metals and oil most likely added to Baja California's list of appealing qualities.

Little Liberia's primary goal of social change through agriculture-based economic advancement depended on recruiting African Americans with disposable income to invest in the community. Unlike some other Black agricultural communities in the United States that began as havens for community members from all levels of society, Little Liberia focused solely on bringing in African Americans who could immediately contribute tangibly to the community. Community leaders originally planned to allow at least 200 families to purchase farmland on long-term payments to allow them to become owners of their own land.[115] Plots needed to be a minimum of five acres, and could be purchased in five, ten, fifteen, twenty, or forty-acre increments from the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company.[116] This way, experienced farmers could purchase land in larger increments, whereas new farmers could start off small.[117] The plan worked, since as of May 1920 two-thirds of the land had already been sold.[118] Hugh Macbeth stated that "it is not our purpose to establish this colony as a retreat for poverty-stricken Negroes," but rather to allow skilled agricultural workers and Black families with a small amount of savings to invest in the community and take part in the movement. The community members looked to "the best colored farmers the South has produced" as ideal members because of their agricultural experience, even if crop growth in the South was different than that of Baja California.[119]

[115] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
[116] "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land," 1.
[117] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
[118] "Harvest Big Wheat Crop," 11.
[119] "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.

They trusted that these farmers would ideally have become successful in their own right, and would therefore have the skills and funds needed to purchase land.

In 1919, prominent Southern California father-and-son farming team R.M. and Dewey Massey from Rivers, California joined the venture in Baja California, bringing credibility to the project.[120] In 1920, supported by recent comments by R.M. Massey that production was so profitable that he was planning on purchasing more land, community members led by James Littlejohn began to increase recruitment and land sales in Southern California's Imperial Valley.[121] Although Little Liberia was advertised as an opportunity available for anyone eager and willing with enough money, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company remained strategic in their recruitment practices by focusing on African Americans with experience in agriculture.

The Little Liberia community celebrated many milestones within the first three years of the colony's existence. In December 1919, Theodore Troy, comparing the colony to previous owners, declared an above average wheat crop yield, claiming that Little Liberia aimed to produce the largest wheat crop ever in Santa Clara Valley.[122] In May 1920, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company office reported that the company "will harvest more wheat in the next sixty days than will be harvested by all of the Colored Farmers in the state of California."[123] A plowing contest also began in early 1920, claiming to be breaking all California plowing records with the hope of a bumper crop due to ideal rains earlier in 1920. During this plowing contest there was a friendly rivalry that

120 "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," 1.
121 "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," 1; "Santa Clara Land Campaign To Open In Imperial Valley," *California Eagle*, February 14, 1920, 1.
122 "The Furrows Are Flying in Lower California," *California Eagle* (December 13, 1919), 1.
123 "Harvest Big Wheat Crop," *Chicago Defender* (May 15, 1920), 11.

formed between the Masseys and Eugene Roberts, another well-known farmer in the community, and articles in the *California Eagle* allowed Black Angelenos to share in the good-natured ribbing between the two families. In February 1920, a Los Angeles contractor named John E. Cresser began building a two-story, ten-room cottage with lumber from a neighboring town. In addition to the thousands of dollars of equipment already mentioned that was shipped along the San Diego and Arizona railroad, this grandiose house not only showed the extent to which the colonists were expecting success, but also the amount of money that was initially floating around the community.

Conclusion

Within the first five years, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company seemed to be on its way to fulfilling its goals. Community members had maintained clear and solid ties to the larger African American community across the U.S.-Mexico border while also connecting to the national and local governments in Mexico, as well as making inroads into the local community. There were no reports of any sort of violence or aggression in the Santa Clara Valley due to the Mexican Revolution, and the community had weathered changes in local and national political leadership with minimal difficulty. Although the community had not sufficiently grown to alter the economic or social fabric of California, in the eyes of many community members, the community in Mexico continued to "offer riches and freedom and perfect equality to the American Negro."[124] However, like the paved road connecting the main economic and social centers of Baja California that remained incomplete at the end of 1921, Little Liberia members were not finished exploring new roads and directions. The next phase of the community would explore

[124] "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," 12.

a new set of economic possibilities and take on a national scale that had the potential to unlock additional opportunities.

Chapter 3
"Beyond the average man's imagination": Moving beyond California, Race, and Agriculture

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's business plans, social activism, membership, and rhetoric remained relatively constant in its first six years. From 1917 to early 1922, for example, although the community maintained a national presence, and community organizers boasted about supporters and members from around the United States, the company and the community's identity were still clearly based on ties to Los Angeles. Events at the community were focused on drawing Black Angelenos' attention, and visitors to the community often had connections to the West. For instance, even though newspaper articles in Texas and Washington, D.C., discussed a famous architect who visited the Santa Clara Valley to admire the architecture in 1920, these same newspapers indicated the architect's ties to the Western United States was an important aspect of the trip.[1]

The company focused on economic growth in Baja California, and the sale of goods across the border to the United States, as a means of social change. Little Liberia members had some contact with local residents, businessmen, and government leaders, and community creators met with politicians in Mexico City when the community was created, but these connections ultimately were meant to serve the larger push for African American advancement. It appears that, prior to early 1922, community organizers were aware of local and international politics to a certain degree, but this had little impact on the community's formation and focus. They did not attempt to create a utopian community completely disconnected from the surrounding area, nor did they seek to integrate themselves into the

[1] "News Notes," *Washington Bee*, May 22, 1920, 6; Associated Negro Press, "Famous Architect Visits Santa Clara," *The Dallas Express*, May 29, 1920, 3, Newspapers.com.

fabric of Baja California life and U.S.-Mexico international relations. Beginning in 1922, however, Little Liberia's historical trajectory shifted. The company's goals became more layered and complex, including clearer international, national, and cross-racial components. At the same time, internal dynamics become more visible through a drastic change in leadership and organizational structures. Beginning in 1922, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's leaders sought out Black businesspeople outside of California to help fund additional economic growth. They especially found capital, innovation, and passion for the Little Liberia project in Oklahoma, particularly from the wealthy Black community in and around Tulsa, Okmulgee, and Muskogee Counties.

Connecting California, Oklahoma, and Mexico

Some of these new members from Oklahoma became involved with the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's board of directors, and some Black Oklahomans visited Mexico and eventually moved to Baja California. The creation of the International Community Welfare League, or the Liga Internacional Mutualista,[2] on September 15, 1922, indicates the large-scale adjustments to the organization. The League was most likely created as an arm of the Little Liberia movement as a means of uniting the existing efforts in California and Baja California with new plans for increasing participation from African Americans in Oklahoma and from Mexicans in northern Baja California and in Mexico City. The League's primary United States headquarters was located at the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's offices in the Lissner Building in Los

[2] This is not a direct translation for the community's name in Spanish, which would be closer to Liga de Bienestar de la Comunidad Internacional. Instead, this is the Spanish version of the name that appeared on International Community Welfare League documents, which contributes to the larger notion that this was an organization meant for English and Spanish speaking people, and that the organization was serious about connecting to people in Mexico.

Angeles, and the organization also immediately opened a branch office in Okmulgee. The Mexico headquarters were opened in Mexico City in the Centro Histórico, off of Avenida Francisco I. Madero, less than a mile from the Palacio Nacional.[3]

John B. Key, popularly known at the time as J.B. Key, an African American oil magnate from Oklahoma, was the company's International President. Theodore Troy was named the International Vice President, and Hugh Macbeth occupied the position of International Counsel. All position titles in the organization started with "International," and the phrase at the top of company stationary read "Every Negro, Every Latin-American and Every Indian His Brother's Keeper," indicating that participation in this organization, especially in leadership roles, meant coordinating activism on both sides of the border. The League, in addition to the positions already in existence in the company such as secretary and treasurer, also boasted a publicity director, statistician, and secretary of education.[4] It appears that the International Community Welfare League focused more on education than did the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, since it was self-proclaimed as "a non-profit, educational institution, covering the entire American continent." Within ten days of its creation, the International Community Welfare League, spearheaded by J.B. Key, opened fifteen local league branches in Oklahoma; Key aimed to recruit one million members by the first anniversary, expecting half of the membership in the United States and half in Mexico.[5]

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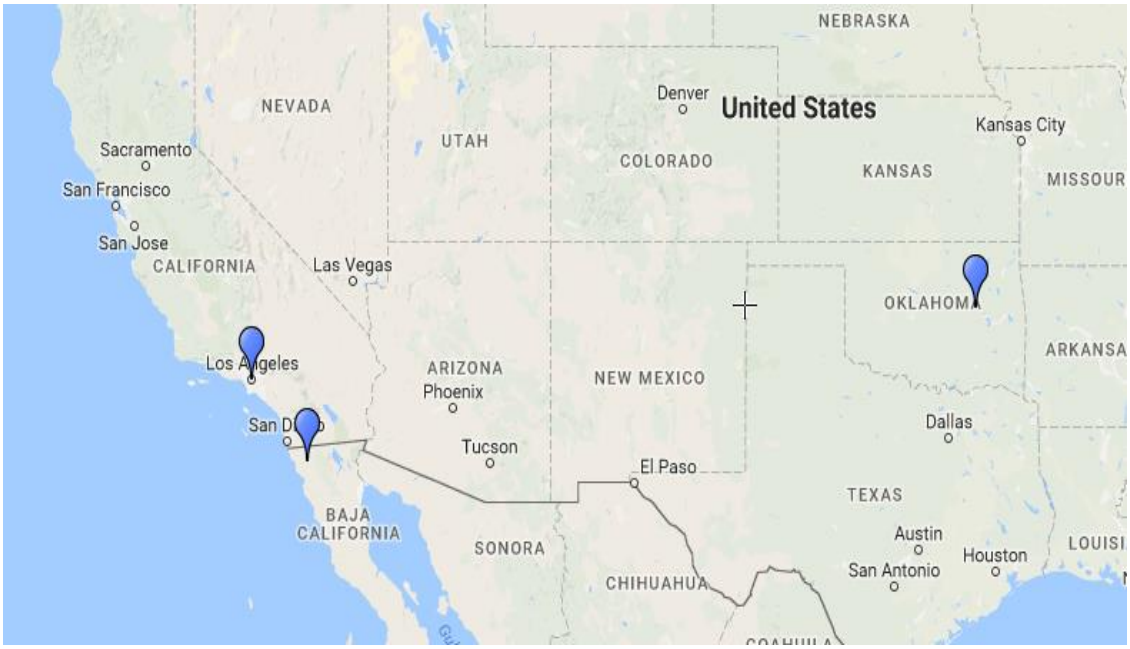
[3] The Centro Histórico, or Historical Center, is and was the central area in Mexico City, Mexico's capital city. The Palacio Nacional, or National Palace, among other important functions also serves as the main offices for the President of Mexico. This part of Mexico City is and was a bustling commercial center; placing offices there would guarantee visibility by foot traffic in one of the most important hubs of Mexican politics and life.

[4] J.B. Key, "Letter from J.B. Key, President of the International Community Welfare League, to President Álvaro Obregón, President of the Republic of Mexico," October 25, 1922, Fondo Obregón-Calles, caja 092, exp.241-A-K-6, Archivo General De La Nación.

[5] "International Community Welfare League's First Offer," *The Black Dispatch*, October 5, 1922, 5, The Gateway to Oklahoma History. It is unclear if Key based these figures on previous knowledge or experiences of

This shift in Little Liberia's physical locations, particularly the focus starting in 1922 on the new members from Oklahoma, meant an expansion in the approaches to, and use of, the U.S.-Mexico border. The primary locale for the community itself remained in Baja California, and the physical closeness of the Ensenada region to San Diego and Los Angeles remained important for the economic and social connections the community relied on. Although the International Community Welfare League opened offices in Mexico City, the main locations for the League's African American activism were Los Angeles, Okmulgee, and the Santa Clara Valley. Many Black Oklahomans who became key leaders and investors in the community traveled to Los Angeles before visiting the lands in Baja California. In this interaction between Los Angeles, Okmulgee, and the Santa Clara Valley, a triangular border space emerged. Although roughly 1,190 miles from the Santa Clara Valley and 1,260 miles from Los Angeles (see map below), members from the Okmulgee region of Oklahoma connected with the community and saw the possibilities for cross-border interaction to Baja California. The community bridge connecting the social and economic goals reached from the northern region of Baja California not only to Los Angeles, but now to Okmulgee. Similarities between the three locations, including the diversity of racial groups, experiences with White imperialism and White supremacy, and a visible and active wealthy African American community, most likely contributed to the forging of a strong bond among them.

another organization, such as the U.N.I.A., or if he chose a number that he thought would highlight the importance of the organization, regardless of feasibility. The International Community Welfare League, its goals (including education), and J.B. Key and his background, will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.



Author-Created Google Earth Map of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, Los Angeles, California, and Valle Santa Clara, Baja California Norte.
Source: Google Earth, 2016

African American History in Oklahoma

Although Oklahoma as a state had a radically different past from California, Hugh Macbeth remarked that the new community members would fit well with the larger organization, in part, because "there is perfect mutuality between California and Oklahoma."[6] This could be because the two states shared a similar space in Black community consciousness at the time. Much like California, Oklahoma was a source of hope and possibility for African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In parts of Oklahoma, some Native American Freedmen had been allotted land, and some tribes recognized them as official tribal citizens. For many newly-emancipated African Americans in the South, Oklahoma entered their lives as a beacon of optimism for a future much

[6] "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," *The Black Dispatch*, March 16, 1922, 2, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

different than their own. Some believed Oklahoma could be the first politically all-Black state in the United States, ushering African Americans into a new realm of political power. Others promoted all-Black agricultural communities, envisioning full dinner tables every night, with food made from abundant crops grown on land they owned, beholden to no one and free from debt. Children in Oklahoma would receive quality education in schoolhouses with proper desks and books, allowing the next generation the education many of their parents were denied. Jim Crow laws and rules would have no place here, no longer preying on innocent African Americans. For some, Oklahoma exemplified this bright future.[7]

Realities in all-Black agricultural towns in Oklahoma and other parts of the country, as well as the experiences of African Americans in mixed communities, were often less promising. For some towns in Oklahoma, like Okmulgee, "the relatively benign legal treatment of blacks by the Creek Indians was replaced with a series of Jim Crow laws adopted to effect a white-dominated and racially segregated state."[8] In addition to poor economic and educational conditions and exclusion from political positions and participation, White supremacist ideologies were brought to Oklahoma by Southern Whites and were used to reinforce this segregation. Segregation and violence perpetuated by the Ku Klux Klan were daily reminders that, although emancipation had occurred decades earlier, fully formed freedom and justice were still out of reach for many African Americans. Enacting Jim Crow

[7] For information about Black Oklahoma history, especially all-Black towns, see Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman, Oklahoma: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1982); Kenneth Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Hannibal B. Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: The All-Black Towns in Oklahoma* (Austin, Tex: Eakin Press, 2003); Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History. 1541-1972*, 1974).

[8] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929* (Okmulgee, Oklahoma: City of Okmulgee Historic Preservation Committee, 1991), 46.

legislation was one of the state's first acts after statehood in 1907.[9] This dichotomy between Oklahoma as a possible place for African American opportunity, and continued racial stratification and anti-Black animosity, became the staging ground for one of the most heinous acts of violence against the Black community in Oklahoma's, and in the country's, history.

Tulsa's Greenwood District was home to Black Wall Street, one of the most affluent centers of Black business in the country. This visible symbol of African American success led to White uneasiness in the region. The Tulsa Race War[10] began in Greenwood on the evening of May 31, 1921. The violence began when armed African Americans and Whites argued over the rumor that a young African American man, accused of raping a young White woman earlier that day, would be lynched.[11] After a few hours, shortly after ten o'clock in the evening, over 1,500 Whites had amassed at the courthouse, many armed, and in a struggle with at least seventy-five Blacks a firefight began, initially killing ten White and two Black people. Some of the Whites interpreted the presence of armed African Americans as an uprising, and others at least viewed it as an act of defiance. The African Americans left the scene and attempted to return to Greenwood, the African American community in Tulsa, but they were followed by a group of angry Whites who increasing in number. The Whites fired at the African Americans while continuing to pursue them, looting stores for weapons and

[9] The first law enacted in Oklahoma was for railroad car segregation, closely followed by a law prohibiting Black-White mixed-race marriages. Marriages between other groups, including Native American-Black marriages, for instance, were allowed.

[10] I use the term "Tulsa Race War" here, rather than the more common name "Tulsa Race Riot." As a few other scholars, as well as people who witnessed the events first hand, have noted, the flames, violence, incarceration, and death that engulfed the Tulsa community was not merely a riot, but a full-on war against Black Wall Street, the Black community in Tulsa, the idea of Black economic growth and success, and the existence of Black wealth and affluence. The was against steady growth and prosperity of a community of people who, according to racist beliefs and systems at the time, should not be capable of such things. The events in Tulsa, and silencing of this history, had a lasting effect on Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the nation.

[11] It is clear now that this man did not attack the woman and did not rape her.

ammunition along the way. While African Americans protected Greenwood, some Whites raided a local National Guard armory, and others were deputized by policemen and even provided arms as a civilian force. Some of these deputized citizens were members of the Ku Klux Klan, and many supported the Klan's activities in the area. Throughout the night, police and civilians fired upon armed and unarmed Blacks alike. Some African Americans fled the city, but many others stood their ground to defend themselves, their community, and those who couldn't escape. Rumors of a full train of armed African Americans from Muskogee on their way to help protect Greenwood escalated the White attack. Whites set fire to Black homes and businesses and they threatened firefighters at gunpoint to prevent them from putting out the blazes. A consistent rumor throughout the night and early morning, in Tulsa and in surrounding areas, was that African Americans were to blame for the violence, and that it was their armed action, rather than the mob violence on the part of the White community, that caused the death and destruction.

Throughout the night and into the next day, Whites continued to attack Greenwood, and some eyewitness accounts mentioned air raids, including firebombs, targeting Black houses and businesses. Other Whites, especially families with Black domestic servants, however, provided shelter for some African Americans. For some families this was short lived, because White rioters and deputized citizens demanded all Blacks be rounded up and taken to detention centers. Many African Americans who were not able to flee were taken to these centers; some sources state over 6,000 people were held in just two of the locations, some for over a week. City officials put Martial Law into effect mid-day on June 1, 1921. Only thirty-eight people were confirmed dead early on, twenty-five of them Black, but some historians argue that over three hundred people lost their lives, mostly African Americans.

1,256 buildings were burned, including all the main institutions important to Black life in Tulsa, totaling over 1.5 million dollars in property value. This does not include goods missing from the looted homes, especially priceless family pieces. As Mabel Little stated when talking about the effect the riot had on her family, "at the time of the riot, we had ten different business places for rent. Today, I pay rent."[12] In just a few short hours, White rioters had burned to the ground Black Wall Street, one of the most important symbols of Black economic improvement, along with the theatres, banks, shops, and restaurants that had grown alongside it. Its people were imprisoned, had fled, or were among the uncounted dead.[13]

This was the immediate and long-lasting lived experience Black Tulsans. For other African Americans in Oklahoma, the violence and destruction, although not experienced firsthand, served as a warning and a lesson of the consequences of visible Black economic success. For decades, official written histories ignored the war entirely. Public officials erased all proof of the war's existence from the public record, including destroying local Tulsa newspaper microfilm records.[14] The war did live on in the stories told in the African American community, as well as newspapers located outside of Tulsa. The silencing of the horrific events were part of the strategy of racial discrimination and violence perpetuated against this community, since attempting to erase stories is its own form of violence.[15] For

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[12] James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America's Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy*, Reprint edition (Mariner Books, 2003), 8.

[13] For more information on Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Race Riots, see Oklahoma Commission to Study the Race Riot of 1921, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Race Riot of 1921* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2001); Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2007); Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*; Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, Reprint edition (Middletown, DE: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003); Scott Ellsworth and John Hope Franklin, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, 8th Print edition (Baton Rouge London: LSU Press, 1992); Rilla Askew, *Most American: Notes from a Wounded Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

[14] Askew, *Most American*, 50.

[15] In Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015).Trouillot discusses a variety of instances of silencing specific histories, and how erasure or

the most part, most challenges to this concealment began after the turn of the century.[16] The Tulsa Race War, and the attempted obliteration of all knowledge and discussion of it, was not just placed on the Tulsa community. It was a burden borne by all African American communities in Oklahoma, especially affluent ones, and the ripples were felt throughout the nation.

In February and March 1922, on the heels of this horrific event and the strategic silencing of the terror in Tulsa, Hugh Macbeth traveled to Oklahoma to speak with business groups and associations interested in Mexico. Macbeth spoke at the Oklahoma City Negro Business League, the Chamber of Commerce, the Oklahoma City Hall auditorium, and other small venues, and he was the keynote speaker for a two-day convention held by the Afro-American Mexico Colonization Association. Macbeth announced, "I am in the position to announce that the colored men of brains and money in Oklahoma in common with those in California and elsewhere, realize that the hour is at hand for the American Negro to make an intelligent, concerted movement for his economic, social and political advancement" by joining the Little Liberia movement and moving to Mexico.[17] The Afro-American Mexico Colonization Association, at this point, had elected a group of leaders to travel to Mexico to discuss acquiring territory with Mexican government representatives; one of these leaders was already involved in the Little Liberia community, and many others later joined the organization. This organization appears to be entirely separate from the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, and they sought out Macbeth as an authority on

distortion of the past can give power to those attempting to control a narrative. Trouillot, for instance, discusses the absence of the Haitian Revolution from many textbooks, especially the erasure of the struggle enslaved Africans who led the revolt in new narratives of Haiti's struggle.

[16] The one exception is Ellsworth's *Death in a Promised Land*, first published in 1982.

[17] "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," 1–2; "Oklahoma Towns," *The Dallas Express*, February 11, 1922, 2, Newspapers.com.

African American businesses in Mexico.[18] Oklahomans hailed Macbeth as a man of integrity and drive, as well as "an intimate friend and supporter of the late Theodore Roosevelt" and "one of the founders of the Ensenada Lower California (Mexico) Chamber of Commerce."[19] Whether or not this was true, it shows the high regard Oklahomans had for Macbeth. Macbeth remained in Oklahoma for approximately six weeks, and in that time, he recruited a substantial number of African Americans to join the community or invest in stock, and even attracted a group so passionate about the community that they joined the board of directors for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company and created the International Community Welfare League.

The International Community Welfare League

It is likely that the Tulsa Race War had a direct impact on African Americans from Oklahoma looking to Mexico as an alternative location for African American economic advancement. It is possible that J.B. Key and other affluent African Americans viewed creating new opportunities in Mexico as a way of challenging this violent attack on the Black community, and that the Tulsa Race War may even have been proof that African Americans needed a new approach to combatting racial violence and inequality.[20] Improving African American communities in the United States, fighting racial injustice, and looking abroad for additional opportunities for advancement were not necessarily mutually exclusive endeavors. For instance, O.N. Gurley, a merchant in Tulsa whose building was destroyed during the

[18] "Afro-American Mexico Colonization Association," *The Black Dispatch*, February 16, 1922, 5, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.
[19] "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," 1. As discussed later in this chapter, Macbeth's interests in Mexico may have included some imperialistic gains. Given Theodore Roosevelt's own ideas about imperialism, especially in Latin America, it could be that this was a connection the two shared, or that Macbeth was influenced by this friendship.
[20] It is also possible that Macbeth, Key, and others exploited the attitudes in the aftermath of the violence in Tulsa to join their cause, and therefore increase the number of investors and members in the community. However, considering the power dynamics surrounding the Tulsa Race War, this is less likely.

Tulsa Race War, rebuilt his building soon after it was destroyed. He then sold it and investigated African American projects in Lower California, Mexico City, and San Luis Potosi, eventually deciding to move to Lower California. One newspaper article commented that he said he "favors the Lower California colonization project in preference to those far in the interior of the Republic" because "it is possible to live in perfect freedom and security amid ideal locations for farming yet within a few hours by automobile from San Diego and Los Angeles, Cal."[21] In addition, although Gurley did not explicitly mention larger dynamics within the nation, Baja California was still peripheral to Mexico, whereas San Luis Potosí was more integrated into Mexico, which might have held an appeal as well. Some African Americans already in Mexico applauded organizations like Little Liberia that attempted to change the lives of African Americans. One African American man in Tampico, Mexico, said that when he was reminded of "the Tulsa Riots and other happenings that have occurred recently, it made me think more of the Independent Industrial League [another African American company interested in Mexico]…you have made the right effort and do not let anybody turn you around."[22]

Little Liberia organizers, including members of the International Community Welfare League, drew a clear connection between their struggle and the injustice that occurred in Tulsa. Statements by the International Community Welfare League linked the suffering in Tulsa to the deaths and treatment of Black soldiers in and after World War I, including the fact that the violence in Tulsa was inherently against the values that the soldiers fought for in the war. Anyone who fought in World War I in No Man's Land, they argued, "could not

[21] "Wealthy Tulsa Riot Victim Moves To Mexico," *The Negro World*, March 17, 1923, 10.
[22] Dr. A. H. Tyson, "Tells of Opportunities in Mexico," *The Black Dispatch*, November 10, 1921, 1, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

return passively to lynchings, segregations and Jim-crowism in America." Not only could they not turn a blind eye to this injustice, but "our heroes [who fought in WWI] are no less insistant [sic] in their demands that those same ideals of justice be applied to Arkansas, Chicago and Washington" as applied to countries in Europe. Supporting those soldiers now at home the International Community Welfare League "demands that the Stars and Stripes represent a free democracy with liberty and justice for all. We would have the blue represent loyalty, rather than the stripes of the lynchers' lash; and the red represent bravery, rather than the lily white organizations of the South."[23] For members of the International Community Welfare League, actions taken against Black soldiers in World War I and Jim Crow violence were born of the same contradiction to American values, and the two experiences were therefore linked.[24]

In the same statement, after quoting a portion of the famous World War I poem "In Flanders' Field," the International Community Welfare League also stated,

> We, as American Negroes, have been [noted] for our ability to take punishment without rebellion. We have lived and suffered under oppressions which if applied to any other race would have resulted in red ruin and death, in riot and revolution. We have meekly borne our burdens in the heat of the day, scarce hoping, scarce expecting relief, until now patience has ceased to be a virtue and outraged justice demands reprisal. We cannot afford to remain passive sponges for absorbing injustice any longer. We owe it to our heroic dead, to justify their sacrifice and prove ourselves worthy of their having died.[25]

The League later commented that "we have learned that justice and liberty are not vague abstractions, are not mental delusions, but are living, pulsating realities that apply equally

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[23] "The Negroes' Duty to His Dead Viewed by the International Community Welfare League," *The Black Dispatch*, November 2, 1922, 7, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.
[24] For more information about African American soldiers in World War I, see Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
[25] "The Negroes' Duty to His Dead Viewed by the International Community Welfare League," 7.

well to suffering humanity regardless of race, color, nationality or creed." International Community Welfare League organizers recognized that actions like those against Greenwood in Tulsa were not unique incidents, but rather part of a longer line of death and destruction perpetuated against groups that were not seen as part of the mainstream American White Christian landscape. For League organizers, to justify the sacrifice of soldiers in World War I and people who died due to lynching and riots in places like Tulsa, to "prove [themselves] worth of their having died," part of the organization's purpose needed to be dismantling White supremacy, especially the main arm of that movement, the Ku Klux Klan.

To do this, the International Community Welfare League declared themselves "vigorously opposed to the Ku Klux Klan." They challenged the forced silence of Oklahoma by verbally denouncing the violence of the Ku Klux Klan, stating "that human beings should have their spirits of their flesh crushed from day to day, and from year to year, and from generation to generation, because of race, color or creed, is a crime against the laws of God so heinous in its nature, that the nation which permits or encourages it, and fails to use every means within its power, both educationally and governmentally to stamp it out, is not worthy of the respect and comity of truly democratic peoples." America was not truly a democracy, they argued, and would not be until the country cared equally for all its people, including African Americans. They demeaned the Klan as "a menace not only to human life and national security," in the United States, but as "a cancer growth in the International tissue" because "a man's right to live and enjoy the best and to successfully aspire to the highest in human life and material affairs should never be conditioned upon his race, his color, or his creed. The doctrine of 'white supremacy,' while it is the 'greatest unwritten law of the United

States,' is pure buncombe" because it denied that right.[26] The League stated that, for these reasons, White supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan "must be eliminated immediately and entirely. There must be no half-way measures," and that "The International Community Welfare League has a program of fight against the genius of the Ku Klux Klan which is unbeatable." This plan, although never fully articulated publicly, was to involve all groups in the United States who were opposed to the Klan and was supposed to target the Klan's spirit in White communities, because without that support the Klan would not be able to survive. League organizers saw this as the best course of action because "the methods of our fight against the Ku Klux Klan are not the methods of physical violence; they are methods of reason, of public appear, of first hand distribution of fact."[27]

If this course of action did not fully separate the Ku Klux Klan from its power the International Community Welfare League argued that the second solution was to lead the victims of White supremacy to a "more favorable community," "where the national and international battle against racial intolerance may be waged more successfully." League organizers argued that some places had managed to exist and prosper without White supremacy. By this they meant Mexico, where, "save on the American border and where American corruption has taken place, the people are utterly unable to comprehend the American race prejudice which is the great foundation stone of the Ku Klux Klan." This statement also implied that American corruption on the border was at least somewhat connected to White supremacist doctrines. To International Community Welfare League organizers, activities in Mexico were a vital second step to challenging White supremacy in

[26] Buncombe was used at the time to say that something was nonsense.
[27] "Public appear" most likely referred to public appearance, meaning publicly making statements, especially speeches, against the Ku Klux Klan. "The International Community Welfare League Is Vigorously Opposed To The Ku Klux Klan," *The Black Dispatch*, October 19, 1922, 2, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

all its forms, including the violence in communities like Tulsa. For these organizers, moving to Mexico was an act of resistance and defiance to White supremacist rule in the United States. They considered removing their bodies, their communities, and their wealth to Mexico as a departure from "taking punishment without rebellion" and "meekly" bearing their burdens. Fighting White supremacy from Mexico, therefore, was a radical act of defiance, where Little Liberia members chose to place their political, social, and economic support behind a country that they felt held truer to America's democratic values than the country that viewed itself as the bastion of democracy.[28]

The International Community Welfare League's comments, however, also highlights their lack of understanding of the intersecting roles of class and colorism in Mexico. The League was not the only African American organization that misunderstood race in Mexico, but it is also possible that the League's comments influenced other African Americans, thus perpetuating inaccurate ideas and assumptions. For instance, a single group not connected with Little Liberia investigating opportunities in Mexico, who sought to make known "the truth about conditions of Mexico despite the efforts of those who mis-represent Mexico in the same manner they misrepresent the American Negro," claimed "the people of Mexico are uniting with the Negro and all peoples of Latin or Indian blood. Political hatred and class rivalry have disappeared. Opportunity is given to competent citizens, and a solid spirit of

[28] "The International Community Welfare League Is Vigorously Opposed To The Ku Klux Klan," 2. Note that there have been no documents found showing that the Ku Klux Klan had any knowledge of Little Liberia or any of its organizing arms, or any of these plans to dismantle the organization's power source. President Calles became President of Mexico in 1924. Some historians believe Calles had some interest in fascism, including a rumor that Calles was seen reading *Mein Kampf* in bed in 1936 while exiled. Given that Calles had some political interests in line with the Ku Klux Klan, and as discussed in Chapter 4 displayed an antagonistic attitude toward African Americans, and Little Liberia specifically, it is not outside the realm of possibility that there may have been some interaction between the two groups. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this theory. John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 63.

work and unity prevails, without distinction of race, color or creed." Much of this rhetoric matches that of the International Community Welfare League, except this organization also assumed divisions based on class and political affiliation no longer existed in Mexico as well.[29] Although Mexico did not have the United States' clearly articulated doctrine of White supremacy, Mexican leaders placed greater focus on the contributions of people of Spanish or mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent than on darker peoples. Indigenous peoples in Mexico, as well as people of Asian, African, or Arab descent, were often pushed to the margins in the name of progress. Many of Little Liberia's organizers had looked to Baja California's Governor Esteban Cantú, as well as President Álvaro Obregón, as examples of Mexican leadership. Cantú, however, had an elitist agenda that often ignored or marginalized Indigenous Mexicans. Cantú's and Obregón's focus on growing Mexican business likely appealed to the African American businessmen, but Cantú's and Obregón's assertion that there were no racial divisions in Mexico ignored more subtle divisions between groups. It is possible that Mexicans were against White supremacy in the United States, especially because this same White supremacy harmed Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States and contributed to American imperialism in Mexico. However, other power structures based on racial and ethnic divisions had taken root in Mexico. From sources available it appears, after almost five years in Mexico, that Little Liberia organizers were either unwilling or unable to see the truth of class and racial dynamics in Mexico.[30]

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[29] "Says Mexico Is Real 'Promised Land.,'" *The Dallas Express*, October 7, 1922, 4; "International Community Welfare League," *The Black Dispatch*, September 28, 1922, 8, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.
[30] Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 2: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Michael James Winkelman, *Ensenada as a Birthplace of Mexican Democracy: A Political History of Baja California*, 1 edition (Las Vegas: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015); David Pinera and Jorge Carrillo, *Baja California a cien anos de la Revolucion Mexicana, 1910-2010* (Mexicali, Baja California : Tijuana, Baja California: Colegio de la Frontera, 2011); Robert R. Alvarez and Renato Rosaldo, *Familia: Migration and*

Oklahoma, Race, and Class

Although White supremacist ideologies, and White supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, played a large role in racial dynamics and racial history in the United States and impacted every part of American life, racial dynamics in the country drew on a more complex and diverse set of circumstances. For instance, Oklahoma occupies a unique space in the larger landscape of American racial history. Rita Askew, in *Most American: Notes from a Wounded Place*, asserted that "far from being a blank spot in the middle of the nation, Oklahoma *is* America: we are its microcosm; our story is America's story, intensified to the hundredth power."[31] Part of this realization for Askew came from Oklahoma's uniqueness as "an extreme distillation of what has taken place on this continent over the past five hundred years that it is nearly unrecognizable to the rest of the nation. Too southern to be midwestern, too western to be southern, too midwestern to be purely southwestern, Oklahoma has kept the secret of its identity as a chameleon does."[32] Although Askew may have exaggerated Oklahoma's importance and universality to a degree, especially since local racial dynamics vary widely across the country, there are clear connections between the spectrum of racial experiences and histories in Oklahoma and the rest of the United States. Askew also called Oklahoma a "wounded place" due to its complicated racial past and America's refusal to come to a full reckoning with the impact that past has on the present, both nationally and for

Adaptation in Baja and Alta California, 1800-1975 (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991); Linda B. Hall, "Alvaro Obregón and the Politics of Mexican Land Reform, 1920-1924," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (May 1, 1980): 213–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/2513216; John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War*, First Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Susan R. Walsh Sanderson, *Land Reform in Mexico: 1910-1980* (Academic Press, 1984); Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Wendy Waters et al., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

[31] Askew, *Most American*, 4.

[32] Askew, 5.

Oklahoma as a state. Indigenous peoples claim control and sovereignty over lands in Oklahoma. However, from the point of view of the American government, portions of Oklahoma were acquired from France during the Louisiana Purchase, but most of the area that would become Oklahoma came under the control of the United States after what is known as the Mexican-American War in the United States and the U.S. Intervention in Mexico in Latin America. This imperialism of the United States towards Mexico was the same act that largely established the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that were in effect when the Little Liberia community was founded.

For some Black people in the United States, Oklahoma entered their hearts and minds long before Reconstruction and the opening of Oklahoma lands to African American settlement. People of mixed Native American and African American heritage, although they were considered Black in the United States racial system, shared a complex connection to Oklahoma's past. The Trail of Tears was their story, as were slavery and Reconstruction, and everything in between. Oklahoma meant freedom in a different set of circumstances, including the eventual possible inclusion on the Dawes Rolls as people with Native American heritage. In some Native American communities African Americans could transition from an enslaved person in a Native American community to a family member with property and tribal rights.[33] Some Little Liberia community members and organizers, including J.B. Key, were descended from enslaved peoples in Native American communities. Some Black people with ancestors who were enslaved in Native American communities, including some members of the Little Liberia community in the 1920s, publicly identified as

[33] Some examples can be found in James F. Brooks, ed., *Confounding the Color Line: The (American) Indian - Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

"Negro," but this term denoting a unified Black identity does not fully articulate the myriad of experience of Black people and their ancestors.

As Tiya Miles asserts in *Ties That Bind: The Story of An Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, discussions around Native American ownership of Black slaves, as well as the trading and use of ownership as means of asserting power in and interacting with Anglo-American power structures, is difficult for African American and Native American communities alike. Miles comments that both sides want to forget this shared troubled history because it complicates the current ideas each of these communities maintains about the other. For instance, African Americans often view Native Americans as protectors of Black slave runaways. Some Native Americans outright deny the existence of Native-owned slaves, whereas others express a sense of regret or shame. When *Ties That Bind* was published in 2005, members of both groups voiced concern that this history could detract from their current social justice struggles, and for some Native American groups this includes the possible land seizure and erasure of already marginalized political power if they were in some way labeled as inauthentic.[34] As Miles notes, this shared past also prevented Blacks and Native Americans from speaking directly with one another, instead forcing them to interact through existing colonial structures. This experience varied by location; as Miles also proves, Blacks did not and have not lived in a simple position within Native American communities.[35] Different communities exhibited a spectrum of experiences for African

[34] This is based largely on White assumptions on Native American authenticity, which largely did not see Blacks as part of the Native American experience.

[35] Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Miles' focus here on the challenges faced by current-day African American and Native American communities around this subject, as well as discussing Afro-Cherokee Freedmen as Black individuals, is different from other scholars who primarily discuss the experiences of Afro-Native American peoples as a mixed-race experience. For instance, Circe Dawn Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), discusses Cherokee identity as a social and political construction that draws on color, race, and blood,

Americans. In Okmulgee, Oklahoma, for instance, enslaved peoples were more likely to be added to the Dawes Rolls and to become members of Native American tribes than in other areas because some of the Native American tribes in Okmulgee, most notably the Creeks, were more accepting to Black people.[36]

Many of the African Americans who initially joined the Little Liberia community from Oklahoma lived in the region that includes the towns of Okmulgee, Tulsa, Muskogee, and Bristow.[37] The most notable of these for the purposes of this study was Okmulgee, since J.B. Key and a few other initial investors from Oklahoma were from the city. In the early 1920s, Okmulgee was the location where the five tribes – the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Seminoles – met to do business with one another and the federal and state government. Okmulgee's Afro-Creek population, the majority component of the Black community in the city, contributed to the early development of the city before Oklahoma's statehood. The precedents established in Okmulgee, as well as the size of the Black population there, largely kept away the racism that was increasing in other parts of the state. Nevertheless, an influx of Whites after the 1901 oil discovery and railroad creation meant the relative size of the Black community lessened, and by the time Oklahoma was declared a state, Whites had control over the politics of the town. The city's population before the building of the railroad, and the larger oil discoveries in the 1910s and 1920s, was primarily Native American and Black, although Black contributions to the city's history have been overshadowed by the massive influx of White settlers shortly after the turn of the century.

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which sees Afro-Cherokee peoples as part of a conversation about Native American authenticity where their phenotypic Blackness but mixed blood creates challenges for the individuals and the community.

[36] Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 31–32.

[37] Rand McNally & Company, *Commercial Atlas of America. Rand McNally Black and White Mileage Map, Oklahoma*, Atlas Map (Rand McNally & Company, 1924), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/v9jf3e.

Prior to this rush of new settlers, although Okmulgee was the capital of the Creek nation, most people chose not to live in Okmulgee itself, but rather in the surrounding area. Despite being pushed to the city's periphery and growing segregation starting in the early 1910s, the Black population continued to contribute to the physical and social landscape of the region.[38]

Some of the first Black residences and businesses in Okmulgee were built on Afro-Creek land allotments, and as the town became more populous and more segregated, a substantial amount of the Black neighborhood was built on Creek Freedmen's land. For instance, J.B. Key's father, Hiram Key, a Creek Freedman, began development on what would later be known as the Key Block. According to Terri Myers, a preservation historian whose work *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: The Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy of Okmulgee (1878-1929)* is the foundation for any work on this area, the Key Block "was a catalyst for other black businesses" in the area during the first decade of the century.[39] In 1917, when the Little Liberia community was still in its infancy, J.B. Key and his wife, Annie Key, were the primary owners and operators of the grocery store that J.B. Key's father had built. In 1919, J.B. Key continued his father's work of investing in the community, including erecting additional buildings. Although he became known for his oil wealth later, Key was initially interested in supplementing his income with farming. He struck oil on the land he bought for farming. Many of the African Americans who joined the community from Oklahoma, like Key, had gained much of their wealth from oil discoveries

[38] Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 31–32; Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929*.
[39] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929*, 44–45.

on land that they had originally purchased and used for farming.[40] Others were, as the *Chicago Defender* claimed, "men of education and wealth, business experts, commercial wizards, lawyers, doctors and successful farmers."[41]

By 1920, J.B. Key was the president of the J.B. Key Oil and Gas Company.[42] As of 1922, when he joined the Little Liberia community, he owned approximately 2,800 acres of oil land in Oklahoma.[43] Other wealthy men who were involved with the Little Liberia community, including W.T. Haygood, first leased and then purchased several farms that later had significant oil discoveries; many of these men became members of Key's company. The oil boom helped other Black citizens in Okmulgee and the surrounding areas, and influenced White economic growth, which in turn provided more opportunities for work for African Americans.[44] *The Los Angeles Times* stated Key and his colleagues were "rated as the wealthiest members of their race in the world," and they proclaimed Key "the 'Rockefeller' of his race" because his wealth was in excess of two million dollars, all "self-made."[45] In May 1922, J.B. Key, along with ten other prominent African Americans from Oklahoma with a total net worth of an estimated five to six million dollars, went on a whirlwind tour of Los

[40] "Negro Oil Magnates Visit City," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1922, sec. II, 7, Newspapers.com. These men were initially leasing the land out to oil drilling companies, and when they made enough to purchase their own equipment they then started their own drilling.
[41] "Rich Oil Men on Way to Mexico," *The Black Dispatch*, June 1, 1922, 5, The Gateway to Oklahoma History; "Oklahoma," *Chicago Defender*, June 10, 1922, A7. Although the language itself may have exaggerated the level of expertise for these men, many of the Black Oklahomans were wealthy, had some education, had worked successfully in law, medicine, or farming, and many of the farmers had later expertly maneuvered themselves into wealth in the oil industry, not just because of oil discoveries on their land, but how they negotiated the sale and mining rights for that oil.
[42] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929*, 47.
[43] "Rich Oil Men on Way to Mexico," 5.
[44] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929*, 47.
[45] "Negro Oil Magnates Visit City," 7; "Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles," *California Eagle*, May 20, 1922, 1.

Angeles, Baja California, and Mexico City that resulted in the single largest influx of wealth and status in the company's ten-year history.[46]

Black Oklahomans Travel to Los Angeles and Mexico

This "trip-de-luxe into Mexico via California" included at least twenty individuals interested in the Little Liberia community. They first traveled to Los Angeles to meet other community organizers and view the business headquarters for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. While in Los Angeles, they met with the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and were given a tour of the industrial districts in Los Angeles, the first time the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had given this type of recognition to African Americans. Macbeth remarked later that he had the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to thank, in part, for the success of recruiting the Black Oklahomans into the Little Liberia project, including the realization that Los Angeles was the logical central location for buying and selling Little Liberia goods in America. The visitors from Oklahoma also took a car tour through the city, and they attended a banquet in their honor at the YWCA where Charlotta Bass' husband, Joseph Bass, acted as toastmaster. When they left Los Angeles, the Little Liberia organizers and prospective community members were joined by Charlotta Bass and Clarence Brooks. Bass, although a Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company stockholder, attended in her official capacity as editor of the *California Eagle.* Clarence Brooks, who worked for the Lincoln Motion Picture Company (an African American-owned movie production studio in Los Angeles) planned to film the trip for promotional material for the community. From Los Angeles they toured Southern California as they made their way to San Diego, and entered Baja California through Tijuana.

[46] "Rich Oil Men on Way to Mexico," 5; "Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles," 1.

From there, they traveled to Little Liberia properties in the Santa Clara Valley, as well as Ensenada, and other local areas in northern Baja California. After meeting with government officials, they traveled back to Los Angeles, and from there traveled to Mexico City.[47]

It appears that, while in Los Angeles, some of the African Americans from Oklahoma decided to join the community. J.B. Key, for example, replaced Theodore Troy as president of the Board of Directors; Troy had taken ill and could no longer fulfill his duties. Troy, however, shortly after accepted a position as International Vice President of the International Community Welfare League. One of the other new members of the community, D.J. Wallace, traveled back to Oklahoma, instead of continuing to Mexico City, to start working on organizing efforts in Oklahoma. The rest traveled to Mexico City. The primary reason for the trip was to meet with President Obregón, which they did at the Palacio Nacional twice on June 16, 1922. According to the *Washington Times*, "they said they represented fourteen million negroes who wanted to settle in Mexico and to engage in agriculture and industry," a significantly inflated estimate of the number of African Americans interested in moving to Mexico.[48] Although there are currently no records of their meeting with President Obregón, his continued support of the organization, the creation of the International Community Welfare League, and the upsurge of support from African Americans, especially in Oklahoma, implies that the African Americans were most likely well-received. It is likely

[47] "Negro To Mexico," *The Buffalo American*, April 6, 1922, 1; "Rich Oil Men on Way to Mexico," 5; "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," 1–2; "Negro Oil Magnates Visit City," 7; "Colony for Colored Folk," *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1922, sec. V, 5, Newspapers.com; "Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles," 1; "Colored Millionaires En Route to Mexico City," *California Eagle*, May 27, 1922, 1; "Oklahoma," June 10, 1922, A7.

[48] It is unclear how International Community Welfare League organizers arrived at this number, although according to the US Census Bureau there were roughly that same number of African Americans in the United States at that time. Surely not every African American in the country was interested I moving to Mexico. US Census Bureau, "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1922," accessed May 23, 2018, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1923/compendia/statab/45ed.html.

that, while in Mexico City, they also met with William H. Gleaves, an African American who, after leaving Oklahoma because of the unfair treatment of Black people, had lived in Mexico for about thirty years and was one of the Mexico City representatives of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Gleaves held a high position as the head of the election board in Mexico City, "one of the highest within the gift of the Department of Elections" due to his trustworthiness, an especially important position considering Mexico's struggles to establish elections recognized by the international community. Just a few months later, Gleaves became the Second International Vice President of the International Community Welfare League.[49]

Shortly after this monumental trip occurred, also in June 1922, a caravan from Bristow, Oklahoma brought new settlers, feed, and equipment to the community. In July 1922, five African Americans from Oklahoma permanently moved to Los Angeles to work on Little Liberia community matters.[50] D.J. Wallace and Frank Haywood, who both had taken the trip to Baja California, spoke in favor of the community in Oklahoma, including Wallace's address at a local NAACP meeting titled "My Observations Through California and Mexico."[51] Wallace and Haywood were not only members of the International Community Welfare League, but also held positions in the newly-restructured Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. The organization created a Special Boards of Management, which included:

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[49] "Colony for Colored Folk," 5; "Will Interview Pres. Obregon," *The Black Dispatch*, June 8, 1922, 1, The Gateway to Oklahoma History; "Obregon Told Negroes Plan Colony In Mexico," *The Washington Times*, June 16, 1922, 27, Newspapers.com; "Says Mexico Is Real 'Promised Land.,'" 4; "International Community Welfare League," 8; "Mexicans Honor Colored Man," *The Black Dispatch*, August 17, 1922, 8, The Gateway to Oklahoma History. It is unclear whether Gleaves was a Mexican citizen, but considering his position in Mexico City and the amount of time he lived in Mexico, it is likely he became a citizen.
[50] "Colony for Colored Folk," 5.
[51] "Oklahoma," *Chicago Defender*, June 24, 1922, 17.

> Immigration; Inter-Racial and International harmony, stock, cattle and hog raising; purchasing, manufacturing, transportation and communication, mines and gems, petroleum, construction, forestry, architecture, fisheries, publicity, hospital, sanitation and health, location, electrical engineers, general engineers, education, commerce and marketing, mechanical, horticultural and viticultural, agricultural, banking, advisory, and law supervision.

Each board would have from two to ten people, according to their ability and interests, selected from stockholders with at least five hundred shares each. These changes, the company insisted, were "in accordance with its policy of expansion so as to include the best brains and money interests of Colored Americans from all parts of the United States," and sought to include brilliant African Americans from across the country. From this long list emerges a clear indication of the community's interests moving forward, especially a combination of existing economic interests (such as horticulture and cattle and hog raising), new economic objectives (such as a hospital, petroleum, and banking), and new focal points of the community (such as inter-racial and international harmony, immigration, and education).[52]

African Americans' Interest in Mexico in the 1920s

The International Community Welfare League's creation, and the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's restructuring, are smaller developments in what appears to be increased African American interest in moving to Mexico in the early 1920s. Wealthy African Americans from Oklahoma especially had the means to investigate Mexico's possibilities.[53] An increase in the number of national and African American

[52] "Company Enlarges Organization," *The Black Dispatch*, July 27, 1922, 1, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

[53] There is no current comprehensive study of Mexico's appearances in African American newspapers and the popularity of movement to Mexico as an option for advancement, outside of Arnold Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 43–56. Shankman's piece, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a product of its time, and although Shankman does not specifically label an increase in the early 1920s, the number of instances Shankman

newspapers discussing African American interest in Mexico, including reporting on Black-owned companies researching Mexico's possibilities, perhaps indicates a national shift toward looking to Mexico as land of possibility for African Americans.[54] Many of these conversations included citing Mexico's interest in African American settlers. One African American, after visiting Tampico to consider the possibility of moving to Mexico, commented that "the Mexicans are anxious to have the Negroes to live among them," and he was interested in moving to Mexico because "one good thing in Mexico the Mexicans are in power and all men are handled by the same law. No JIM CROW."[55] Many African Americans frequently commented that Mexicans were interested in having African Americans move south across the border, and that all men were, supposedly, treated on equal footing in Mexico, regardless of race.

This change occurred in conjunction with other national and local events. For example, many African Americans after World War I voiced a patriotic condemnation of the continued racism and systematic inequality faced by people of color after many had risked, and some had given, their lives to protect those ideals in other parts of the world.[56] Some

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mentions does increase during this time frame. This is also based on authorial observations of a drastic increase in Mexico's appearance in major Black newspapers in the early 1920s when compared to other instances between 1910 and 1930.

[54] This is largely based on my own observation of the frequency of articles discussing Mexico and African American interest in Mexico from 1910 to 1935, based on microfilm and digital newspaper sources. Although Shankman does not notice this trend, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935" spends more time in the late 1910s and 1920s than any other time period. Although there is a steady increase in the number and size of Black newspapers over time, from my observations Black newspapers with a steady publication record during this time did discuss Mexico more often than before.

[55] Thos. B. B. Bailey, "Mexico As I Found It," *The Black Dispatch*, March 18, 1921, 4, The Gateway to Oklahoma History. Bailey's comments that Mexico was controlled by Mexicans was true to a point, since one of the successes of the Revolution was a new Mexican Constitution that asserted Mexico's control over its own territory and peoples. However, many areas in Mexico, including Tampico, were still largely under the control of companies based in the United States. In a sense, Mexicans had much more control over their own country than before the Revolution, but in many ways, especially in Tampico, American businesses, largely owned by White men, had the true power in the region.

[56] This is why some African American leaders spoke out against involvement in World War II, and why others so strongly argued for the Double V Campaign during World War II. For more, see Ronald Takaki, *Double*

African Americans may have seen moving to Mexico as the next logical avenue in their search for fully-formed freedom after fighting abroad. The International Community Welfare League, after discussing African American participation in the war effort, asked "is it enough that we just 'exist' in the United States?" Like those men who fought in Europe, African Americans looking to Mexico for freedom and equality were pushing America to become the best version of itself, not giving up on American ideals by leaving the country. They urged that, in this clearer version of American ideals, they "could without hypocrisy, pledge allegiance to our flag and the principles for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All!"[57] These are words of patriotism, not dissent, of faith in the promise of America, not of men and women searching for an escape.

The same war that prompted this critique of the American racial system also ushered in an economic boom in the United States. Although it primarily benefitted White-owned and operated businesses, increased production in and after the war did impact some African American businesses and workers, including African Americans in Oklahoma who discovered oil on their farmland and became overnight millionaires.[58] The same African Americans who spoke so eloquently in support of a better post-war America simultaneously referred to respectability politics, stating "let us adopt culture and refinement as our watchword, Christian manhood as our slogan" in order to "break asunder the barbed entanglements of prejudice, swarm over the battlements of discrimination, plunge through the no man's land of jim-crowism, and rest not until we triumphly [sic] stack arms in the

Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company, 2000); Paul Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II: Toward Victory at Home and Abroad* (Lexington Books, 2014).

[57] "The Negroes' Duty to His Dead Viewed by the International Community Welfare League," 7.

[58] "Rich Oil Men on Way to Mexico," 5.

fortress of racial equality. We are not alone, for those who lived and died in Flanders are watching from above our efforts here."[59] These same wealthy African Americans, having found untapped wealth, also discovered new economic and social barriers in the United States based on race and class politics, and looked to Mexico for growth and investment that would be connected to the larger ideals in Black America.

A few African American individuals and communities, including Little Liberia, had existed in various locations in Mexico for years. They appeared to be succeeding, and were celebrated as proof of the concept of Black settlement and investment. Some African Americans still questioned the wisdom of moving to a country less than a decade removed from a violent revolution, and therefore yet unable to prove the long-term stability of its government. An article in the *Chicago Defender* in 1922, for instance, averred that Mexicans had "the habit of starting a revolution every time the wind blows the other way" and that "border states have been the scene of miniature revolutions and there seems to be a general feeling of unrest" throughout Mexico.[60] Although it was not explicitly mentioned, some African Americans might have seen the task of setting up a community in Mexico, a country in the process of reconstruction and growth after a violent and turbulent upheaval, an ideal opportunity to take part in crafting an improved country and community. Many others did talk confidently about the positive qualities they witnessed in Mexico and its people.

Other Black movements at the time likely influenced this focus on Mexico as another possibility for advancement. The Harlem Renaissance, which began around the same time as the Little Liberia community, was gaining momentum in the early 1920s, and as mentioned

[59] "The Negroes' Duty to His Dead Viewed by the International Community Welfare League," 7.
[60] "Restless Mexico," *Chicago Defender*, March 11, 1922, 12.

previously, included references to Mexico and Mexican culture. The U.N.I.A.'s increased popularity and impact, including the launching of Garvey's Liberia plans in 1920, also influenced Little Liberia's growth. A few of the Little Liberia members from Oklahoma were Garveyites. For example, O.A. Williams, who was president of the local U.N.I.A., joined the board of directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company in 1922. When Hugh Macbeth wrote to the Assistant President General of the U.N.I.A. in New York, J.D. Gordon, asking for the U.N.I.A.'s support for Little Liberia, Gordon responded that the organization would not be able to support the community. He asserted, however, that Little Liberia's movement still fit within the U.N.I.A.'s larger goals. He wrote to Macbeth, "it might be well for you to consider one thing, that it is not our purpose to have every Negro go to Africa, but just such ones as can build Africa up. We have an empire dream. We hope to found an Empire as the ultimate aim of the U.N.I.A.; and from this Empire we can make Negroes safe everywhere, and they can live where they please under more favorable conditions than they can live now."[61] Little Liberia, in the eyes of U.N.I.A. leadership, had the chance of creating another arm of this Black empire.[62] In this context, Little Liberia was part of a larger liberation project that was also influenced by a push for equality that included the creation of a global Black empire. Even if Little Liberia did not receive financial support from Garvey and the U.N.I.A., the organization was still important enough to be acknowledged as part of this larger push for Black growth.

[61] Marcus Garvey and Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. III: September 1920-August 1921* (University of California Press, 1984), 321–22, 466–70; "Oklahoma," June 10, 1922, A7; "Okmulgee News," *The Black Dispatch*, September 28, 1922, 3, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

[62] It is possible that Macbeth's ideas and rhetoric of imperialism, which will be discussed later in this chapter, were influenced by this U.N.I.A. doctrine.

Although some African Americans had attempted to move to Mexico as freedmen since at least the mid-1890s, Black Oklahomans specifically had been looking into moving to Mexico since at least 1908.[63] In 1919, for instance, W.A. Cole, an oil operator from Oklahoma, moved to the Santa Clara ranch to join the Little Liberia community.[64] Independent of Little Liberia, in 1921, a new organization located in Wewoka, Oklahoma, called the Independent Industrial League began looking "to build in a new country, under new conditions, with equal opportunities where color is no bar to justice. Mexico and South America offers the opportunity."[65] Although the president of the organization, Dr. A.H. Tyson, occasionally mentioned Latin America generally as the focus of the organization, he primarily looked to Mexico, especially because he felt at home in Mexico when "the Mexicans everywhere hailed us with joy and made us welcome."[66] Tyson, after traveling throughout Mexico, remarked that Juarez would be a suitable place for Black Oklahomans because it "is the Tulsa of the Mexican Republic. Unlike Tulsa, there were no racial lines to be seen."[67] Tyson spoke publicly about Mexico's racial freedom and lack of discrimination, including the remarking about the opportunities for other racial groups in Mexico when he noted "we find the Jew, the German, the French, the Chinese and the Japanese helping to

[63] Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935," 43–45; Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York ; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016); Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," 1–2.
[64] "Lower California News," *California Eagle*, July 19, 1919, 8.
[65] "The Independent Industrial League," *The Black Dispatch*, January 21, 1921, 5, The Gateway to Oklahoma History. No other sources indicate where specifically in South America the Independent Industrial League was interested in settling. Many countries in Latin America were largely ruled by United States corporations, and racial and class divisions in these countries were influenced by these United States businesses, so it is unlikely that any of these countries, like Panama or Nicaragua, would have been acceptable options.
[66] "Tyson Returns!," *The Black Dispatch*, September 2, 1921, 7, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.
[67] "Tyson Writes On Way To Old Mexico," *The Black Dispatch*, July 29, 1921, 8, The Gateway to Oklahoma History. It is interesting that Tyson mentioned Ciudad Juárez, since the city had a direct connection to El Paso and grew largely because of this connection, including the railroads that brought workers to the borderlands in this region.

bring this country, that they may be the men of influence and power tomorrow."[68] On one trip to Mexico in 1921, like Little Liberia organizers, Tyson brought a delegation of members of the organization to investigate Mexico's possibilities. They remarked that the Mexican government not only invited African Americans to make a home in Mexico, but also that "the national government of Mexico guarantees that all men are free and equal under the law; where homes easily obtained, where climatic conditions are almost the same thru-out the year and every day a day of growth."[69]

In the mid-1920s, though, not all African Americans, even well-to-do ones, were interested in moving to Mexico. Some African Americans were unconvinced that Mexico was willing to welcome African Americans with open arms because African Americans were Americans. For instance, an article in the *Chicago Defender* insisted that, even after the Revolution, "Mexicans resent the exploitation of their country by unscrupulous, conniving, money-seeking foreigners, and especially are they hostile towards this class of Americans, and they cannot be blamed for taking this attitude," and that "large tracts of land and valuable concessions have been turned over to foreigners for a mere pittance by the ruling powers against the wishes of the proletariat. Naturally they became resentful and riotous." Although articles painted bright pictures of Black communities in Mexico, "the fear of bandits and the lawless element of Mexico kept hundreds from taking the step" and "whether the Mexican people feel that they have something in common with the American Colored man or not is a debatable question. It is nevertheless true their treatment of him is far more friendly than that accorded the white American." This friendly treatment, however, would only provide

[68] "Tyson Returns!," 7. Considering the future of globalization in the globe, and in North America in particular, this quote is especially ominous.
[69] "On To Mexico," *The Black Dispatch*, July 15, 1921, 6, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

temporary relief because the author claimed Mexicans are "restless people, clannish and vindictive" people, perpetuating common stereotypes about Mexicans.[70] Despite Little Liberia organizers' best intentions, not all African Americans looked to Mexico with a favorable approach.

Early 1920s Little Liberia Economics

It is possibly because of these incorrect assumptions that Little Liberia organizers sought to educate their own community members, and the larger African American community, about Mexico. In November 1921 there was talk that company officers and "several prominent Mexicans" from Baja would make a tour of the United States, "visiting many cities, where wealthy Negroes reside, to lay the facts before them and secure their moral and financial support for the undertaking."[71] In addition to openly recruiting African Americans to move to Mexico, some of these facts, undoubtedly, included favorable views of Mexicans and correcting stereotypes. Although some Little Liberia members, such as Owen Troy, did know Spanish, other community members did not. In August 1922, leaders announced "A Detention Camp or Training School will be immediately established, in which purchasers and settlers will be taught the Spanish language and made acquainted with the Mexican laws and customs and assisted in establishing themselves in such a way as to enable them to begin early to operate profitably on their acreage." The Training School would accommodate all people when they arrived in Mexico until they were able to settle on their land. This is the first indication of any language or cultural training for prospective community members. This may have been influenced by new members from Oklahoma and

[70] "Restless Mexico," 12.
[71] Associated Negro Press, "New Opportunities for The New Negro," *The Negro Star*, November 18, 1921, 5.

their experiences living with and around groups with many different languages and cultures, although many members from Los Angeles had similar lived experiences. It is also possible that the new Oklahoma members had the foresight that this was a necessary aspect to the community, or it was simply part of the community's natural evolution when its organizers realized that, with this type of training, its members would have a higher chance of success.[72]

Despite the existence of many other plans for expansion, agriculture remained Little Liberia's main focal point for concrete economic development. The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company devoted most of its land before 1922 to growing wheat, and doled out in large amounts. November 1921, the company announced that "complete soil and water tests have been made and the company is now ready to break the land up into units of forty acres and multiples thereof for the benefit of homeseekers" and that "best results will be secured by growing live stock and such crops as walnuts, deciduous and citrus fruits, alfalfa, potatoes and melons."[73] As of August 1922, the community reported that 1,400 acres were already under cultivation, and it had recently purchased another 8,760 acres, where "practically all tropical fruits as well as those common to the United States can be grown in great abundance. Grains, alfalfa, cotton, and other staples make larger than average yield." Community organizers also discussed later plans for vineyards, as well as orchards of pears, peaches, oranges, and walnuts. At this time, several tenant houses had just been erected and the company planned to establish dry goods stores, grocery stores, and general merchandise and hardware stores, as well as "fancy refreshment pavilions, billiard

[72] "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is? Here Is Your Opportunity.," *The Black Dispatch*, September 21, 1922, 5, http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152403/, The Gateway to Oklahoma History; "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is?," *The Black Dispatch*, August 24, 1922, 7, http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152399/, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.
[73] Associated Negro Press, "New Opportunities for The New Negro," 5.

halls, recreational centers, parks, etc." The company was interested in increasing stock sales to pay for additional land, purchasing more cattle, building improvements, and developing recently-purchased property. Due to all these factors, the company was charging an average of five dollars an acre and predicting a three-hundred-dollar-an-acre-value once fully developed. As of November 1921, "roads are not good but the company hopes to improve them when colonists arrive in large numbers," which would help increase the property value.[74]

Less than a year before the restructuring of the board of directors and the creation of the International Community Welfare League, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company began to sell stock nationally.[75] The company sold stock in Los Angeles as early as 1918, but the stock was not widely advertised, and African Americans in Los Angeles, many of whom had connections to the community, purchased most of this stock.[76] The stock that sold nationally in 1921 began at one dollar a share, with a minimum of ten shares and a maximum of ten thousand per person. Initially, 250,000 shares of stock

[74] As will be discussed in Chapter 5, there is no specific information available on how many Oklahomans moved to Baja California. In addition, there is little information about whether wealthy African Americans who worked land in the Santa Clara Valley also maintained residences and other businesses in the United States. Some families in Oklahoma did have homes in both countries, since their family homes built in the early 1920s are still standing, and some businesspeople, like J.B. Key, maintained businesses in both locations. There is little information that specifically clarifies how many people maintained lives on both sides of the border, but many did. "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is? Here Is Your Opportunity.," September 21, 1922, 5; "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is?," 7; "Negro State For Lower California," *New Journal and Guide*, November 19, 1921, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Norfolk Journal and Guide (1921-2000); Theo. W. Troy, President and Hugh Macbeth, Secretary, "Why Not Settle in Lower California?," *Chicago Defender*, October 15, 1921, 12; City of Okmulgee, "Okmulgee Oklahoma Black Heritage Tour Brochure" (Map Ink, Normal, Oklahoma, Fall 2003).

[75] This stock was authorized by the Corporate Commissioner of the State of California and was protected by the California Blue-Sky Law, which meant that stockholders were protected from fraud because of oversight by a California agency tasked to monitor these types of large stock sales. "Opportunities in a New Country," *California Eagle*, October 1, 1921, 1; "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," *Chicago Defender*, November 12, 1921, 12.

[76] "Southern Land Project," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 18, 1918, 16; "Negro State in California," *The Savannah Tribune*, November 17, 1921, 1.

were available, one share for every ten dollars' worth of estimated company land value. This means the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company valued its landholdings at $2,500,000 in October 1921. The company promised a return of no less than five percent a year. The company advertised in the *California Eagle* and the *Chicago Defender* in 1921 and 1922, sometimes providing a simple cut-off sheet that allowed people to apply for shares directly to the company's office (pictured on next page). The goal was to make purchasing stock easy and accessible to everyone.[77] Community organizers also used this opportunity to reiterate the benefits of joining the community outright and becoming a resident in Baja California, stating that "it is possible for every Negro to become an owner of a home and a farm in this wonderful country."[78] Stockholders could eventually convert land into additional stock, and stockholder land purchases were discounted by twenty to thirty per cent. Stockholders included African Americans from Arkansas, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, a few un-named states on the East Coast of the United States, and Canada.[79]

[77] "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," 12.
[78] Theodore W. Troy and Hugh E. Macbeth, "Why Not Settle in Mexico," *Chicago Defender*, August 20, 1921, 13. People, of course, could not fully own the land, since it was the property of the Mexican government, as outlined previously. However, people could own the home and the output from the farm, which was the main community goal, rather than outright land ownership. They did not specifically clarify this in the advertisements, however.
[79] "Lower California Stock Campaign Breaks All Records," *California Eagle*, October 15, 1921, 5; "'Cactus Kate III' Makes Trip to Lower California," *California Eagle*, October 29, 1921, 6; Theo. W. Troy, President and Hugh Macbeth, Secretary, "Why Not Settle in Lower California?," 12. It is unclear whether stock was sold in Mexico, and if there were any Mexican stockholders, since no advertisements have surfaced Mexican newspapers, or advertisements mentioning the price in pesos, and no master list of stockholders has been found.

A Ten Dollar Bill Will Tie You Into Lower California—the Land of Golden Opportunity!

Every Race loving Negro man, woman and child should invest in the stock of The Lower California Mexican Land & Development Company. Incorporated under the laws of Mexico and under the laws of the State of California. Authorized to issue stock by the California Corporation Commissioner. A two million dollar stock drive to develop thirty-four square miles of Mexico's richest lands (just acros the line from San Diego, Cal.)

DON'T DELAY—SEND IN YOUR MONEY TODAY. Shares now selling One Dollar ($1.00) each. You may buy from ten (10) to ten thousand (10,000) shares. Next issue will sell at Two Dollars ($2.00) per share.

(CUT THIS OUT AND MAIL WITH YOUR MONEY)

The Lower California Mexican Land & Development Company, Theodore W. Troy, President; Hugh E. Macbeth, Secretary; Robert W. Head, Treasurer, General Offices 220-221 Lissner Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal., Gentlemen:

Enclosed find.....Dollars, for which you will send me by return mail.....shares of stock of The Lower California Mexican Land & Development Company.

Name..... City.....

Street Address..... State.....

Source: "A Ten Dollar Bill Will Tie You Into Lower California - the Land of Golden Opportunity!," *Chicago Defender*, June 18, 1921, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Defender (1910-1975). A similar ad appeared a week earlier: "A Ten Dollar Bill Will Tie You Into Lower California - the Land of Golden Opportunity!," *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Defender (1910-1975).

The sale of stock and inclusion of wealthy African Americans from Oklahoma may be what jump started Little Liberia's push to expand beyond agricultural production. Ventures that more clearly connected African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans were likely seen as a natural next step in the community's evolution. It is also possible that agriculture could not provide the substantial economic boost that tourism could deliver, especially with the growth of the vice industry along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. It is likely that a combination of these factors led Little Liberia organizers to explore economic opportunities not connected to agriculture and livestock. Plans began to circulate to create an African American tourist destination in Ensenada, including a sanatorium, a hotel, and a co-

owned African American and Mexican bank. Each of these projects provided a unique connection between the African American and Mexican communities while also contributing to the larger goal of enticing African Americans to travel to Mexico.

In May 1923, Little Liberia leaders met with the Governor of Lower California, Mayors of Ensenada, Tijuana, and Mexicali, and the Chief of Police for Tijuana in a special conference in Tijuana to discuss these plans.[80] Of the three new ventures, the sanatorium,[81] also labeled a health resort, appears to be the most discussed plan, both in this meeting and before the American public. According to the *California Eagle,* at the meeting, the sanatorium was hailed as "a lasting memorial to the increasing friendship between the two races" that would also be "an opportunity to bring about a better understanding between the Mexican people and the colored Americans." Leaders estimated a one-hundred-thousand-dollar cost to build the sanitarium at the sulphur springs in the Santa Clara Valley, on Little Liberia lands provided by the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. These lands were chosen because the warm sulphur springs in Santa Clara were noted "for their medical qualities along the Pacific Coast from Canada to South America." These springs were rumored to be "particularly beneficial for persons suffering from bronchial, kidney or lung affection [sic]. There are also two mineral springs, the water of which have been found to be high in mineral properties and are recommended highly for blood and

[80] The two representatives from Little Liberia were Hugh Macbeth and Robert P. Fite, a White former efficiency expert for the Ford Motor Company who attended the meeting in the capacity as a member of the International Community Welfare League. Fite's role in the organization will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 4.
[81] There are a few spellings for this type of health resort, primarily sanatorium and sanitarium, but with variations such as sanitarium, (insert others here). Many people, in this time period as well as present day, use them interchangeably, and the Latin roots of the word similarly discuss health and healing. It appears that community organizers and newspaper reporters and editors used the terms interchangeably. I have chosen to use sanitarium because it is the most common appearance of the word in the records, as well as some arguments that state that sanitariums focused slightly more on natural springs and becoming a health resort

internal disorders."[82] The plans for the sanitarium itself were organized by physicians and architects in Los Angeles. The sanatorium would be created and organized as a non-profit. International Community Welfare League members, whether American or Mexican, would pay a minimum amount for treatment, and members of the general public were to be charged "at a reasonable compensation."[83]

Leaders at the meeting proposed to break the fundraising and building of the sanitarium into ten-thousand-dollar units. The mayor of Ensenada, Luis G. Beltrán, purchased the first unit on behalf of the residents of Ensenada. Mayor Beltrán proposed funding this unit by asking his constituents to purchase special bricks, at fifty cents per brick, as a donation to the cause. Mayor Beltrán, in addition, was appointed by Governor Lugo to be superintendent of the campaign to fund the sanitorium, and he proposed similar fundraising for additional units. Some of these units were for specific parts of the building, such as the roof, foundation, beds, sheets, and medical supplies. The International Community Welfare League organization gave local branches of the League a choice on which units they would fundraise for and furnish, and asked "every woman's organization, church society, and kind hearted member of the Race throughout the United States" to donate to the unit.[84]

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[82] Community leaders commented that "sulphur springs, iron springs, and cleavelite springs are numerous" and that all three were beneficial for this type of health treatment center, but most discussions about the sanitarium focused on the Sulphur springs. "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is?," 7; "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is? Here Is Your Opportunity.," September 21, 1922, 5; "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is? Here Is Your Opportunity.," *The Black Dispatch*, October 19, 1922, 6, http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152407/, The Gateway to Oklahoma History.

[83] "The Establishment Of An International Sanitarium For Negroes," *The Black Dispatch*, October 26, 1922, 1100, The Gateway to Oklahoma History; "$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico," *California Eagle*, May 12, 1923, 8.

[84] "The Establishment Of An International Sanitarium For Negroes," 1; "$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico," 8.

Additional fundraising efforts took place north of the border, especially in Los Angeles. The International Community Welfare League organized many of the events in Los Angeles, including a car raffle and a benefit concert. The benefit, held at Exposition Park on August 24, 1923, featured the Black and Tan Orchestra and Kid Ory's Orchestra, the two most popular orchestras in Los Angeles, which shows the popularity and pull that the benefit for the sanitarium had.[85] Some African Americans who participated in the raffle later noted that "they had bought and sold tickets ranging in amounts from 50c to thirty or forty dollars," including selling tickets to friends on the East Coast in amounts as large as forty to fifty dollars.[86] Not only was the effort to build the sanitarium a transnational effort on the West Coast of the continent, but it was also a national effort among African Americans, including people in Los Angeles who believed in the cause using personal connections across the country to raise funds and convince people with fewer personal and direct community connections to invest in the community, and specifically in this multiracial opportunity.

One main reason why the sanitorium drew such wide-ranging support, financially and socially, was that there was a great need at the time for this type of treatment facility, especially for African Americans. The International Community Welfare League stated that they conducted statistical research that claimed "three per cent of [African Americans in the United States] die annually from diseases that require sanitarium treatment. At present there is no place for them to go for treatment."[87] Tuberculosis was especially prevalent in Black

[85] "To Have Benefit for Lower California Sanitarium," *California Eagle*, August 17, 1923, 1; Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows, *California Soul: Music of African Americans in the West* (University of California Press, 1998); John McCusker, *Creole Trombone: Kid Ory and the Early Years of Jazz* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2012); Clora Bryant et al., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 1999).
[86] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared On Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, April 1, 1927, 2; J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," *California Eagle*, April 13, 1927, 2.
[87] "The Establishment Of An International Sanitarium For Negroes," 1.

communities, particularly in overcrowded neighborhoods that lacked proper ventilation and sanitation services. One of the main treatments for tuberculosis popular at the time, in addition to mineral springs, was fresh air and relaxation, which connects to the overarching goal of creating a tourist destination and the sanatorium's additional label as a health spa.[88] At the outset, leaders planned that the sanitarium would "be shared without discrimination by all citizens of Mexico, regardless of Race or color."[89] Given the politics around healthcare in the United States, especially given African Americans' exclusion from care facilities in the United States, it makes sense that African Americans would push to make this facility available to a spectrum of races, from a practical, moral, and financial perspective.

Community organizers planned to establish the co-owned African American and Mexican bank in Ensenada, where it would be "capitalized at $100,000, $50,000 of which is subscribed by the citizens of Ensenada, $25,000 of which is subscribed by J.B. Key and the remaining $25,000 of which is subscribed by the other members of our party."[90] The bank would advance the economy of the area while also connecting the two groups economically, especially because its foundations included capital from both races.[91] In addition, the bank would have been seen as a substantial boost for Black economic growth in the United States and Mexico. African Americans often had difficulty finding a bank willing to loan them money, a difficulty that prevented countless Black entrepreneurs from opening new businesses, caused the failing of Black businesses, and contributed to the low rate of Black home ownership. Denial of Black loans contributed to the perpetuation of White supremacy

[88] For more information about tuberculosis and the African American community, see Samuel Kelton Roberts, *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[89] "$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico," 8.
[90] "Colony for Colored Folk," 5.
[91] "Net Results Thus Far of Record Making Trip to Real Accomplishments," *California Eagle*, July 1, 1922, 1.

by keeping essential capital from Black people, which stunted economic growth, continued African American poverty, and contributed to the wealth gap between African Americans and Whites.

The planning of the sanatorium, bank, and hotel, symbolized the ambition of the community's prospects. The entire project could have been a symbol of friendship, cooperation, and unity between the two groups – a project started by African Americans in Mexico, meant to be used by both communities, operated by African Americans and co-funded by both groups, planned and completed with the cooperation of local people and Mexican officials. In a perfect world, with no outside influences or human failings, these plans would be the quintessential cross-racial and international economic pairing. These plans would supplement Little Liberia's agricultural goals and integrate them more fully with the local economy, would bring more African Americans to Mexico and therefore further the recruiting process, could provide medical benefits to both communities, and provide further business ventures to an already-growing Ensenada economy.

The community's vision for tourism as a possible mode of financial advancement coincided with other movements for tourism in Baja California at the time. For instance, during Prohibition in the United States in the early 1920s, towns in Baja California catered to White tourists from north of the border who frequented vice industry establishments, especially towns along the border like Tijuana and Mexicali.[92] Rather than focusing on the vice industry, which was the primary economic growth sector in towns like Tijuana and

[92] Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 3; Catherine Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2013): 215–47; Paul J. Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 2004); Eric Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass : Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965 /" 2018.

Mexicali, Little Liberia organizers instead articulated a cross-racial business plan that sought to lift up all groups involved. Rather than vice tourism, these plans focused on care, health, economic stability, and cross-racial friendship.

Colonialism, Imperialism, and a Multiracial Continental Movement?

Much of the language about cooperation between people in the United States and Mexico came from the International Community Welfare League or the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company as organizations. Hugh Macbeth likely wrote some of these statements, but interviews with Macbeth that were quoted in newspapers reveal a complicated shift in language that includes aspects of colonial and imperial thinking directed toward Mexico. For instance, Macbeth, when discussing Little Liberia, stated that "the new American Negro wants to be free. He craves dominion and empire."[93] When planning the sanitarium, the corporation created for it was composed of "colored, white and Mexican personages, philanthropically inclined, who are interested in promoting a better feeling between the three races throughout Mexico," including Robert P. Fite, a White man from Los Angeles who had connections with Macbeth.[94] However, around the same time, Macbeth and others had clearly stated that White people were not well received in Mexico, especially due to their repeated imperialistic actions in Mexico. It is possible that Macbeth saw including Fite as a means of gradually bringing White people into the larger organizing in Mexico, and eventually as a means of healing some of the strife between the races. Perhaps Macbeth felt that, for this type of project to work, he needed to bring in the most skilled people, regardless of race. It is clear that Macbeth, on some level, understood the

[93] "Oklahoma Financiers to Tour Southern Republic," 1.
[94] "$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico," 8.

implications of bringing White businessmen into Mexico, or at the very least the impact Little Liberia's progress could have had on White hopes of re-entering business ventures in Mexico. Because Macbeth was a well-known representative of both organizations, this raises deeper questions about whether these ideas were solely Macbeth's, or whether they were shared by other Little Liberia organizers.

On the other hand, although Macbeth's statements provide many questions about the language of imperialism and colonialism in Little Liberia's expanding goals, Macbeth and the International Community Welfare League sought to expand their actions to also include other people of color in the United States and Latin America. The League's motto at the top of all correspondence, "Every Negro, Every Latin-American and Every Indian His Brother's Keeper," implied all African Americans, Native Americans, and Latin Americans had a responsibility for the welfare of members of the other groups.[95] In an article in *The Dallas Express* in 1922, shortly after its official creation, the League argued that "the people of Mexico are uniting with the Negro, and all the peoples of Latin or Indian blood. Political hatred and class rivalries have disappeared."[96] Macbeth argued in a separate article that the reason Latin Americans, especially Mexicans, would be interested in organizing with African Americans is because "Latin-America, that certain aggregation of American countries which in common with the Colored peoples of the United States, has felt the sting of the whip of Anglo-Saxon racial intolerance. Of all the Latin American countries, Mexico offers not only the nearest, but also the richest field of endeavor. In fact, Mexico is the American Colored Man's great Golden Field of Opportunity." Macbeth refers to Native Americans at multiple

[95] J.B. Key, "Letter from J.B. Key, President of the International Community Welfare League, to President Álvaro Obregón, President of the Republic of Mexico."
[96] "Says Mexico Is Real 'Promised Land.,'" 4.

points in this article as well. When talking to African Americans in Oklahoma, Macbeth again observed connections between the three groups could be possible in Mexico because "the fifteen millions of Mexican people beckon to the American Colored people Negroes, Indians and others, to come and build, and be happy, live and enjoy."[97] The racial dynamics in Oklahoma, and the Creek and other possible Native American backgrounds of other Black Little Liberia members and leaders, likely had an impact on this new inclusion of Native Americans in the larger goals of the community.

The International Community Welfare League also sought to include Native Americans, peoples from Latin America, and other marginalized racial groups in the United States in the fight against White supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan. The League, when denouncing White supremacy, stated "we invite into our membership every Negro, every Latin-American, every Indian, and every other race or group of individuals who by their conduct evince their belief in the doctrine of equality of opportunity for all men." The International Community Welfare League, as well as the whole Little Liberia project, aimed to fight prejudice against all races, not just African Americans. As mentioned earlier, they believed White supremacy, with the Ku Klux Klan at the center, mandated a "battle against racial intolerance" which was a national and international fight because White supremacy was a "cancer growth in the International tissue." Therefore, all peoples affected by White supremacy in North America, not just African Americans, should band together to fight oppression. This was the only way to fully eradicate White supremacy.[98] In some respects, this drew on ideas in the Pan-African Congress about a global Black fight against White

[97] "Negro To Mexico," 1.
[98] "The International Community Welfare League Is Vigorously Opposed To The Ku Klux Klan," 2.

imperialism in Africa, since Africa's difficulties with European colonialism were part of a larger international White supremacist strategy. Macbeth and the International Community Welfare League were articulating a cross-racial, continent-wide strategy that would use the U.S.-Mexico border, and the passage of goods, people, and ideas across it, as a means of defeating White supremacy.[99]

It is possible that African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and mixed-race peoples in Los Angeles, the Okmulgee area of Oklahoma, and the northern regions of Baja California connected through the Little Liberia community due to common bonds and interests. Black people in Los Angeles and the Okmulgee area of Oklahoma lived in diverse mixed communities with strong, yet flawed, images of opportunity and advancement, especially compared to the Deep South of the United States. Esteban Cantú had been weaving similar narratives of possibilities for growth and freedom in Baja California, as did President Alvaro Obregón when speaking to African Americans about Mexico. Baja California had been a region in Mexico known for its diverse population. The three locations were, in their individual and unique ways, cultural borderlands, areas where the economies, families, cultures, values, and politics of individual and distinct groups also merged to create a region and group of people also connected to this shared experience. In these areas, these cultural borderlands were, in part, shaped by their perceived identity placed on them by external forces. In Oklahoma, communities of color were constantly forced into silence through trauma. In Mexico, Baja California was still peripheral to central Mexico, and Mexico's population struggled with post-Revolutionary national, racial, and political identity.[100] Los

[99] This multiracial global challenge to White supremacy could be a precursor to movements such as the Third World Left and other movement unifying the Third World.
[100] This, especially the political and racial identity in the mid-to-late 1920s, will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Angeles' multiracial yet segregated community was part of a state that was all at once a dream for American advancement in the West and the proof of continued struggles for communities of color.

This far-reaching strategy that cast a wide net did omit some groups, even though Macbeth did mention "others" in his list of people that he was interested in recruiting. Most striking is the absence of discussing anyone of Latin American citizenship who was not mestizo, Spanish, or Indigenous. It is unclear if community leaders understood the difference between those three groups in Latin America, especially Mexico. Although leaders discussed other parts of Latin America, it is likely that they were mostly interested in looking to Mexico for support in this movement, and when talking about Mexico they labeled Mexicans as one unified group. They did not once, in the ten years of documents currently available, mention the existence of Afro-Mexicans. Occasionally other African Americans in Mexico were mentioned, but there is no single instance of clearly discussing a Mexican of African descent, and at no point did community leaders indicate they even knew this group existed. Community leaders were either not interested, not able, or not willing to see the plight of Afro-Mexicans, as well as how their movement as African Americans in Mexico might have complicated existing racial politics for Afro-Mexicans. In addition, community leaders did not mention people of Asian or Arab descent in Mexico or the United States. This is especially surprising because some community leaders from Los Angeles interacted with Asian people daily; Hugh Macbeth lived in a Japanese American community in Los Angeles.[101] It is possible that community leaders did not think those groups were willing to

[101] Greg Robinson, *The Great Unknown: Japanese American Sketches*, 1 edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 143.

participate in the movement, that those groups' struggle were different from their own, or perhaps they simply forgot about or ignored Asians and Arabs. Whatever the reason, although the organizers were looking to create a much greater network of people, it appears the nuance of race in Latin America was not part of this discussion.

A clear indication of this lack of understanding of Mexican politics can be seen in the International Community Welfare League's recruitment of workers to move to Morelos in late 1922 and early 1923. Shortly after the organization's creation, a representative at the Mexico City office sent a request that the United States branches of the League locate ten Black farmers and families, either members of or recommended by the League, experienced in planting and harvesting sugar cane and willing to move to Morelos. The request, coming from a state engineer in Morelos, stated:

> The government will furnish each of these farmers from 25 to 50 acres of good land together with all the water required to irrigate it; government tractors and government drivers will be furnished at a nominal cost; a fine government school is near the land; the government will furnish agricultural supervision and protection; the government will loan $125 per acre for each acre planted. The government guarantees to buy all the sugar cane produced at $10 per ton, each acre producing from 35 to 50 tons.

Furthermore, the Mexican government would claim one percent of the produce as payment for use of water and land, and a quarter of the total land would be allocated for private use by the farmer. The League claimed that, after the initial ten families, there could be openings for at least one thousand sugar cane growers in Morelos. Important to this request is that Morelos was one of the centers of the land reform movement during the Mexican Revolution because the large Indigenous population, led by Emiliano Zapata, demanded access to land because much of the land in the area was owned by foreign companies or wealthy Mexicans. Little Liberia organizers may have assumed that, by recruiting experienced workers to harvest

sugar cane, they would be helping the economy in Morelos. However, the offer of subsidized water, tools, schooling, and decreased land prices was more than Indigenous people in Morelos had ever been offered by their own government. Recruiting Americans to work subsidized land in Morelos was inherently against Zapata's movement to cast off land expropriation and reclaim Indigenous ownership of Mexican land.[102]

The Question of Oil

Many African Americans involved in the community were interested in becoming involved in the oil business in Mexico. American oil companies, including ones in California, continued to look to oil-rich areas in Mexico, such as Tampico, for investment. Claims that Baja California had the greatest promise for oil, including newspapers claiming, "the next big discoveries [of oil] may be made in Lower California," paired with the fact the state of California was one of the top oil consumers in the United States, encouraged continued interest in Baja California. In addition, continuing rumors of political moves to unite Baja California with its northern neighbor and fears of Japanese interest in Mexican oil being satiated if Japan were to somehow gain control of Baja California encouraged Americans, White and Black alike, to consider Baja California's role in the oil boom. Rumors coming from Mexico City about new oil fields that could rival Tampico even brought a well-known

[102] "International Community Welfare League's First Offer," 5. Most revolutionaries in Mexico, including Zapata, came from privilege, and part of Zapata's movement included using the language taken from Spanish imperialism to stake the claim to their own land, and within these arguments on moderating modernity, nation, Mexicanness, and land ownership. Obregón belonged to an aspiring middle class, and it is possible that Obregon himself orchestrated the creation of this opportunity, especially considering the leader of Morelos at this time was put in place by Obregón. For more information see Douglas W. Richmond and Sam W. Haynes, *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940* (Texas A&M University Press, 2013); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 1: Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants*, Reprint edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 2*.

Mexican oil driller to the state.[103] In early January 1920, oil was discovered on islands in the Gulf of California far to the southeast of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's lands. Discovery of this oil brought government surveyors to Baja California in search of additional oil deposits, and for many this was concrete evidence of Baja California's certain future as an oil powerhouse. Although Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's lands were not near any of these oil inquiries, articles about the community mentioned "considerable excitement" on the entire peninsula in regards to the possibility of finding oil.[104] Theodore Troy, in December 1921, said that the oil outlook for the community was "quite as promising as the agricultural feature of the district," and community promoters, when encouraging stock sales, were quick to mention that "the company has wonderful prospects of oil and minerals, which mean millions of profits."[105] Some individuals took it upon themselves to travel to Baja California to see with their own eyes if the lands were as plentiful as the rumors suggested. For instance, Mrs. Evalin Duff Neal, a well-known woman in the African American oil industry in Oklahoma, who traveled to Lower California to inspect the lands in November 1921, was impressed by the agricultural and oil possibilities.[106]

Because many of the African Americans from Oklahoma who joined the community during and after 1922 had become wealthy due to the oil industry, it is unsurprising that these same African Americans would want to capitalize on their expertise and seek out options for

[103] "Great New Oil Field Looms On Pacific Coast Of Mexico," *El Paso Herald*, April 22, 1920, 17, Newspapers.com; "Booming New Oil Fields Predicted In Southwest," *The Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, January 27, 1919, 10, Newspapers.com.
[104] "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," *California Eagle*, January 3, 1920, 1.
[105] Associated Negro Press, "New Opportunities for The New Negro," 5; "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," 12; "Negro State For Lower California," 1.
[106] "'Katy Flyer' Makes Record Trip to Lower California," *California Eagle*, November 5, 1921, 1.

entering the oil business in Mexico. Often the oil prospects on Little Liberia lands were discussed in the same conversation as mining products such as gold, silver, copper, and iron. However, oil, unlike their other mining and agricultural endeavors, was the sole product that Little Liberia members also sought outside of Baja California.[107] Some members of the community, most notably J.B. Key, began investigating opportunities for additional communities in Mexico outside of the peninsula. In 1923, J.B. Key began investigating lands in the heart of the Mexican oil belt, especially around San Luis Potosí and Tampico. This itself was not necessarily a problem, particularly since President Obregón had stated that he was interested in allowing African Americans communities in Mexico. Although it is unclear whether Key was looking to capitalize on the oil in the region, it is likely that oil was a factor in Key's interest in the area, and it was this attention to lands in oil-rich areas that ignited the first major public scandal for Little Liberia.

Mexican and International Politics and Little Liberia

On February 7, 1923, *The Chicago Tribune Foreign News Service,* in the article "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed," with subheadings that stated "Mexico Bars Colored Folks" and "Negro Colonists Held as Undesirable," reported that immigration officials were ordered to have "the strictest vigilance to prevent colored persons from entering Mexico" because "colored colonists are not wanted in Mexico." The *Chicago Tribune Foreign News Service* pointed out that, just a few months earlier, that President Obregón had said that race or country of origin was of little importance for immigrants to Mexico, as long as the people would make good citizens and had good morals.[108] Later in the

[107] "Do You Want to Really Feel What A 100 per Cent Man Is?," 7; "Negro State For Lower California," 1.
[108] These conditions mirror those placed on White settlers in Texas in the 1830s. It is possible that the memory of incidents in Texas influenced Obregón's statements, as well as Calles' changes in policies that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

same interview, as the newspaper paraphrased, Obregón said that "colored people were not good prospective colonists on account of the ethnic problem" in Mexico City of attempting to assimilate large numbers of Indigenous people, "and the president felt that it would not be wise to increase the complexity of the question."[109] On February 17, the *Chicago Defender* reported that General Plutarco Elías Calles, who would succeed Obregón as President of Mexico the next year, notified all immigration officials that African Americans should be prohibited from entering Mexico. The *Chicago Defender* noted that the first set of African Americans who were stopped was rumored to be a group connected to the International Community Welfare League made up of twenty families, slightly more than a hundred people. This group, who had "chartered a train and took with them farming tools, live stock and household belongings," had obtained rights to lands in Sonora, San Luis Potosí, and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec via negotiations between J.B. Key and President Obregón. This same report claimed that "only white immigrants are wanted in Mexico in the future. Immigrants from the northern part of the United States and Europe are especially wanted, the Mexican officials say. The government, however, did not look favorably on the southern white man, declaring he descended from the convicts who were exiled by the English government and his reputation for hard work and morality were faulty."[110]

[109] "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed," *California Eagle*, March 3, 1923, 2.
[110] George Selden, "Color Line Bobs Up In Mexico," *The Chicago Defender*, December 17, 1923, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Defender (1910-1975). It is possible that the immigration restrictions in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921 and the following Immigration Act of 1924 had an influence in this change in policy. Mexico's border patrol, as Kelly Lytle Hernandez argues in *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010), was formed during this time alongside the United States border patrol in order to control unwanted immigration. It is possible that, in the creation of these new policies largely meant to restrict immigration from Asia, African Americans were also included. For more comprehensive information on American immigration, see Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2007).

However, less than a month later, articles appeared claiming "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed" and "Lie Given to Propaganda About Mexico." Both articles had sub heads stating "White Oil Interests Are Alarmed At Acquisition of Mexican Oil Lands By Negro Syndicates," as well as "Mexico Not Barring Colored Immigrants." These articles claimed that sources in Mexico City said the accusations were false, perpetuated by "white American and British oil interests who are alarmed at the headway being made by colored people." The *California Eagle* claimed that "high officials in The Mexican Government brand as utterly false and malicious the statement appearing in the American press" that Mexico was unfriendly toward African Americans and would bar African Americans from entering. The *Eagle* instead claimed that "according to these officials, Negro colonists are as welcome as ever."[111] There are numerous reasons why this may have occurred, including racism, unclear conversations or incorrect orders in the Mexican government, and politics around oil.

Similar articles in *The New York Amsterdam News* and the *California Eagle* insisted that "it is alleged that the white oil interests, through their press agency… [are] sending out propaganda to the daily papers stating that colored colonists are not wanted in Mexico, and that President Obregon objected to the colored people upon the grounds that they were not good prospective colonists" because they were "alarmed at the headway being made by the colored people in the United States in acquiring vast land holdings in Mexico, and the migration of thousands of colored farmers to the Mexican Republic."[112] The articles implied

[111] "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed," 2; "Lie Given To Propaganda About Mexico," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 7, 1923, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993); "Mexico Not Barring Colored Immigrants," *California Eagle*, March 10, 1923, 8.
[112] As will be discussed in Chapter 5, it appears that the number of Black famers moving to Mexico may not have even reached one thousand people, let alone thousands.

that, although the primary target was the convoy of African Americans moving to central Mexico, Little Liberia's success in Baja California contributed to the fears of these White businessmen. However, it is likely that the connection to oil lands was the primary reason these businessmen would participate in this type of a scandal, because it is unlikely that White-owned oil companies would not risk such a serious attack if unless it had some sort of explicit connection to the oil industry.[113] The allegations were substantial enough that, in 1926, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, in an article about continuing challenges to African American immigration and business in Mexico, discussed the "white foreign and American oil interests who started active anti-Negro propaganda several years ago following entry of a colony of Oklahoma Negroes to the oil districts around Tampico and San Luis Potosí."[114] It is possible that the claims of these three newspapers are true, and the statements from President Obregón were false, part of a smear campaign by White oil companies focused on preventing African American businesses from prospering in Mexico.

It is also plausible that President Obregón did make these statements about African Americans and Indigenous Mexicans, and had instructed his staff to implement new restrictions on Black immigration into Mexico. For African Americans this was no doubt a surprise coming from a President who had claimed that there would "never be a color line in Mexico." It is also conceivable that, somewhere within the Mexican bureaucracy still forming and evolving after the Mexican Revolution, someone made a mistake which resulted in the application of an incorrect policy. It is also possible that the Secretario de Gobernación Plutarco Elías Calles, known in the United States as the Secretary of the Interior, had

[113] "Lie Given To Propaganda About Mexico," 2; "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed," 2.
[114] "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Started," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 20, 1926, 9, Newspapers.com.

implemented the new rule and circulated the statements on his own. It is unsurprising that Calles would make statements disparaging African Americans and Indigenous Mexicans. As discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Calles was less-than-complimentary to ethnic and racial groups in Mexico that were not connected to Europe, especially Spain.

Calles, who was a trained teacher prior to entering politics, was likely influenced by the teaching and ideas of José Vasconcelos, at that time the head of the Secretaría de Educación Publica, or the Secretariat of Public Education, the governmental organization in charge of national education policy. Vasconcelos sought to bring education to the masses, in part to create a unified national narrative that included a shifting focus on the state rather than the church, as well as hailing Mexico's Spanish and mixed-race heritage through a fusing of national identity and racial ideology. Vasconcelos resigned the post in 1924 in protest of Calles' candidacy, and a year later he published *La Raza Cósmica,* or *The Cosmic Race.* Vasconcelos' piece continued his work as an educator by perpetuating the notion that Mexicans were not inferior due to their lack of racial purity, as some politicians and pseudo-scientists claimed, but in fact as a country were stronger due to this heritage. However, in *La Raza Cósmica,* Vasconcelos raised up the *mestizo* identity in Mexico as primarily a combination of Spanish and Indigenous background, conveniently ignoring African, Arab, and Asian peoples in Mexico and their contributions to Mexican history, culture, and everyday life. Like Calles, Vasconcelos largely saw Indigenous Mexicans as lesser groups to the Spanish, and it was only in the process of *mestizaje*, of combining with the Spanish, that Indigenous groups truly contributed fully to Mexican life. Although *La Raza Cósmica* was

not published until 1925, the ideas it espoused were visible in Mexico prior to its publication, and fit into Calles' ideas about African Americans and Indigenous groups.[115]

Race and national identity, however, were not the only changes after the Mexican Revolution that may have deterred African American immigrants from entering Mexico in 1923. During the Mexican Revolution, one of the main complaints many Mexican citizens had about previous administrations, particularly Porfirio Díaz, was foreign ownership of land and resources, including the exportation of Mexican oil. During the Revolution, oil and land became tied with race and class because the men in power who allowed so much of Mexico's wealth to fall in the hands of wealthy foreign White businessmen were upper-class men with little connection to the Indigenous Mexicans and peasant communities who largely supported the factions within the Revolution calling for land reform. American oil and land companies were linked in Mexico, and during the Revolution American oil companies, especially Standard Oil and companies in Texas, supported Francisco Madero when he deposed Díaz because they were frustrated that Díaz denied their demands for additional land concessions. After Madero was killed, armed parties took and occupied American-owned land in Mexico. Foreign ownership of land, including the pilfering of Mexican oil, directly led to the creation of Article 27 in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which allowed for the expropriation of land and declared that all subsoil materials, including oil, were the property of the Mexican government and its people. Although the Constitution was meant to allow Mexico's leaders

[115] For information on Vasconcelos, mestizaje, and Blackness in Mexico, see José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race / La Raza Cosmica*, trans. Didier T. Jaén, 51102nd edition (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, 5th Paperback Printing edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Laura A. Lewis, *Chocolate and Corn Flour: History, Race, and Place in the Making of "Black" Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2012); Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race*; Ann M Pescatello, *The African in Latin America* (Lanham (Md.); London: University Press of America, 1975). For an articulation of the multiracial roots of mestizaje in colonial Mexico, see Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodriguez O, *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

to confront foreign ownership, they often did not do so.[116] For instance, in April 1920 "world conference of oil company representatives" in Mexico City met and discussed the challenge of balancing nationalization of oil and international interests, especially the fact that foreign companies had failed to comply with Mexican oil laws.[117] J.B. Key and other African Americans involved in this debacle most likely did not clearly comprehend the importance of oil in Mexico, nor the role that oil politics played in the larger conversation about United States imperialism in Mexico. They may or may not have been aware of previous independent and private campaigns, originating in the United States, to take over Mexican Land with the primary purpose of obtaining oil and exporting it for profit. It is likely that this complicated history played a substantial role in these events, and the brief confusion around whether or not African Americans were able to immigrate to Mexico most likely kept some prospective community members from deciding to move to Mexico or invest in the community.

The issue of United States ownership of Mexican land and exporting of Mexico's raw materials continued in an international political capacity in mid-1923. Because Obregón relied on capitalist development from foreign investors and exportation of Mexico's raw materials, and he was attempting to gain favor of the United States government, he did not enforce Mexican land policy as much as the initial writers of the Constitution intended. President Obregón had led a national reconstruction program, but Mexico needed funds for these improvements, and recognition from the United States government could lead to additional investment. The United States government under Presidents Woodrow Wilson and

[116] John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008); Hart, *Empire and Revolution*.
[117] "Great New Oil Field Looms On Pacific Coast Of Mexico," 17.

Warren Harding, however, was still concerned that Obregón, whose policies were less conservative than his predecessor President Venustiano Carranza, would use Article 27 to expel American businesses from Mexico. Therefore, President Wilson, and later President Harding, with the support of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Mexican Affairs and the larger U.S. Congress, insisted President Obregón sign a treaty with the United States declaring four articles of the 1917 Constitution, including Article 27, not applicable to the United States. President Obregón refused, even when the Foreign Relations Subcommittee convinced Wilson to use the tactic of conditional recognition, meaning the White House would not officially recognize the Obregón government until Mexico agreed to the treaty. The Senate also recommended sending naval and terrestrial military units into Mexico to force Obregón to sign the treaty. Although these threats were not carried out, this shows the lengths to which the United States would go to see this treaty signed, the importance of Article 27 to American business in Mexico, and Obregón's resolve in resisting the United States.[118]

Although the United States never convinced Obregón to sign the specific treaty creating a wide range of exceptions to the 1917 Constitution, Presidents Obregón and Harding together negotiated the Bucareli Agreement in August 1923. Obregón's hand was forced due to pressures from an uprising led by Adolfo de la Huerta, who had also led the revolt that had ended Carranza's presidency, who claimed that Obregón was corrupt. President Obregón needed help from the United States in the form of monetary loans, weapons, and political recognition to defeat de la Huerta and his supporters. Under the Bucareli Agreement, the United States agreed to support Obregón against Huerta. In return,

[118] Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*, 36–37.

Mexico would exempt the United States from Article 27, meaning any rural or industrial titles that were in existence prior to May 1917 could not be expropriated. This covered a majority of American-owned properties in Mexico, and it improved relations between the two countries for a time.[119] However, the Bucareli Agreement was never ratified by the Congress of the United States, agrarian seizures still occurred in Mexico, and the agreement was finally canceled by Calles after he became President.[120]

Prior to the negotiation of the Bucareli Agreement, the International Community Welfare League attempted to convince the United States government to acknowledge President Alvaro Obregón's presidency. The League led a drive for signatures on a petition, addressed to President Harding and the United States Congress, asking for the recognition of Obregón and his government. This petition argued that Obregón's government stood for the best interests and the welfare of all citizens and immigrants of Mexico. This included African Americans, and that it would be in the United States' best interest, and the best interest of its people residing in Mexico, to recognize Obregón's rule. It was in the League's best interest to assist Mexico in obtaining recognition because it was more likely that their own movement would remain legitimate. The league argued that, "Mexico is a great land of opportunity for the American Negro and the Indian. When the United States recognized Mexico, the opportunities for the Negro and the Indian will be even greater." Macbeth argued that President Obregón "has brought order out of chaos in Mexico, and this with no outside assistance and in spite of outside intermeddling," and that "Mexico has never had a stronger or more beneficial government than is its present Administration." He also discussed

[119] Dwyer, 36–38.
[120] Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*; Hart, *Empire and Revolution*.

Mexico's modernization, that "civilizing influences are being developed" in Mexico, including schools, extended and improved railroads, highways, telephones and electric lights in small towns, power and water systems for irrigation and manufacturing, improved hospitals with better sanitation and cleanliness, and new farming and manual training schools. The United States, Macbeth argued, was supposed to be progressive and democratic, but was unwilling to recognize a sister republic, which is keeping pace with it in progress and democracy, and far ahead in the effort of social betterment."[121]

Macbeth and the International Community Welfare League planned to present the petition, in person, to Congress.[122] Announced by Hugh Macbeth in a variety of newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times* and local Black newspapers like the *California Eagle* and *The Dallas Express*, the petition was circulated among African Americans and Native Americans in at least twenty-one states, and by November 22, 1922, the League had obtained over ten thousand signatures in California and approximately one million in the United States. It is doubtful that a group of African Americans would be able to convince the President of the United States to change his and Congress' decision about recognizing the Presidency of a foreign government, especially when the argument included a critique of America's treatment of its own citizens, claiming that the United States government's main goal should be to protect Americans, and "President Obregon has done much more than merely protect Americans. He has protected his own people. He has restored law and order and popular rights and liberties completely throughout his whole country and for all classes,

[121] "Recognition of Mexico, Plea of Negro Voters," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1922, sec. I, 11, Newspapers.com; "Negroes and Indians Ask Harding To Recognize Mexico," *The Dallas Express*, November 18, 1922, 1, Newspapers.com; "Mexico A Land Of Peace And Prosperity," *California Eagle*, January 6, 1923, 3.

[122] It is unclear whether or not the petition was ever sent or taken to Congress. Many sources discuss the petition itself, but sources confirming Congress' receipt of the petition have yet to be found.

rich and poor regardless of race, color or creed," implying Obregón was able to serve his people better than the United States government had served its own. Macbeth went far enough to say that the United States should study Obregón's principles and politics to "learn a lesson from him." Although challenging the United States government in this way was a risk, this displays the extent to which Little Liberia community members were invested in Mexico's future as well as their own. Although they were American, and many of them were not interested in becoming Mexican citizens, they felt a strong enough connection to Mexico and its people to put themselves, either knowingly or unknowingly, into the middle of a strained international debate.[123]

Although Little Liberia organizers and members participated in a few clear conversations about national politics, and clearly outlined their intention to connect with Mexicans on a deeper level, after their meetings with northern Baja California leaders about the new economic opportunities there is little evidence that community leaders connected with local leadership at the same level as with Esteban Cantú. In July 1920, Governor Cantú was removed from power and exiled after leading a military uprising against President Obregón. Although he claimed the revolt was to prevent Obregón from distributing lands in Baja California to his friends and relatives, there is evidence that the rebellion was also a move by Cantú to separate Baja California and run it as an autonomous region. This move was backed financially by American oil companies and supported by the United States Secretary of the Interior because a military rebellion could have led to United States access to controlling lands rich with oil in other sections in Mexico.[124] Cantú escaped into the United

[123] "Recognition of Mexico, Plea of Negro Voters," 11; "Negroes and Indians Ask Harding To Recognize Mexico," 1; "Mexico A Land Of Peace And Prosperity," 3.
[124] Stephen Haber, Noel Maurer, and Armando Razo, *The Politics of Property Rights: Political Instability, Credible Commitments, and Economic Growth in Mexico, 1876-1929* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67;

States and remained in exile in Los Angeles.[125] After Cantú's departure, it appears Little Liberia organizers were impacted locally more by general political trends, and less by individual politicians. Whereas Governor Cantú appeared often, if briefly, in discussions about the community, other than one mention of Governor José Inocente Lugo's attendance at a meeting about boosting African American tourism, none of the governors of Northern Baja California, or any of the other local political leaders, appears in any Little Liberia sources.[126] It is likely that, due to the increasing focus on international connections and cross-racial organizing with Mexican individuals, Little Liberia organizers either were no longer interested in, or no longer needed, clear and visible support from local Baja California politicians.

Conclusion

After the inclusion of African Americans from across the country, including a large contingent from Oklahoma, the Little Liberia community expanded to include new economic possibilities while attempting to connect with a country still grappling with its own politics shortly after a dramatic political shift. Mexico's political and social landscape during this period was changing. For instance, the Cristero War upended the relationship between the

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Linda B. Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 55.

[125] There is no clear evidence to suggest that Cantú chose to live in Los Angeles due to his connections with the African American community there. It is, however, an interesting coincidence that he chose a city where he had a clear connection to wealthy community leaders. It is highly possible that his connection to Little Liberia, and Little Liberia's connection to Los Angeles, played some role in his choice of Los Angeles.

[126] One possibility for this shift is that, from 1920-1923, the Governorship in northern Baja California was unimportant enough that, even though there were six governors between the expulsion of Governor Cantú and the rise of Abelardo Rodríguez, who would later act as President of Mexico for two years during the Maximato, histories of Baja California largely do not discuss Governors in this time. Textbooks and other works by David Piñera Ramírez, arguably the most prevalent scholar of Baja California, do not even mention the names of the Governors between Cantú and Rodríguez. Rodríguez is well-known for capitalizing on the vice industry in cities like Tijuana and Mexicali, including imposing his own tax on increasing profits at casinos for personal gain. It is likely that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company and the International Community Welfare League were not connected with Rodríguez because they largely stayed away from vice tourism.

church and the government, impacting local and national structures and institutions. The Mexican leaders who wrote the 1917 Constitution were no longer in power; a new group of leaders were now interpreting the Constitution in new ways that made living as a foreigner in Mexico more difficult due to new ideas about citizenship, national belonging, and land ownership. The relationship between the United States and Mexico had shifted in an equally significant way after World War I in a way that had the potential for altering the course of Little Liberia's trajectory. The Little Liberia community's focus had shifted as well, both socially and economically, although the goal of social change through cross-border trade remained constant.

Chapter 4
"The whole proposition is going to blow up…this ship is sinking slowly but surely": The Collapse of Little Liberia

Until February 1927, from the point of view of the general public there was no reason to believe there were any serious problems with the Little Liberia community. In the mid-1920s, plans were underway for new business ventures, the company had been selling stock publicly with some success, new members were joining the community and moving to Baja California, and a significant amount of prestige came with the addition of the new members from Oklahoma. There were a few brief instances of pressure visible to the public, particularly some incidents relating to tensions created by a shift in leadership in Mexico. Nevertheless, most information available pointed to a community with a clear vision forward, a unified board of directors, and a strong group of dedicated members and supporters.

As can be true with many business ventures, public figures, and organizations, appearances can be deceiving. It is not unusual to project stability when there is chaos and to see the best possible outcome to unknown situations; it appears that this was the case with Little Liberia for a time. The public assumptions of success and stability ended abruptly in February 1927 when a cascade of newspaper articles unveiled truths about a slowly crumbling community marred by mismanagement, fraud, and misinformation. Little Liberia started to collapse after a few public revelations about the community that led to infighting within the board of directors. Internal debacles, uncontrollable weather problems, political difficulties with Mexico, changing economic conditions, and just plain bad luck all contributed to the community's end.

Some of the issues that contributed to Little Liberia's demise had existed for years. The ongoing drought in Baja California, particularly in the northern part of the peninsula

where the community was located, was perhaps the most substantial, even though articles about the community did not mention water scarcity until 1927. The main crop, wheat, required a substantial amount of water on a constant basis, and it was a lack of steady rainfall that ultimately prevented the community from producing a consistent wheat crop. Little Liberia organizers were not incorrect in thinking that Baja California, particularly the valleys to the north of Ensenada, could be good land for farming. David A. Henderson, a geographer whose 1964 dissertation on "Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico" remains the most comprehensive and detailed overview of the topic, remarked that the Northwest Coast, particularly the region north of San Quintín, is "where 85 per cent of the rainfall comes during the cool six months," but that during these months the amount of rainfall in the area often decreased around Todos Santos, the bay to the west of Ensenada.[1] As Henderson's maps below display, the area where Little Liberia stood, although not a desert, was also not as consistently wet as some nearby areas. Little Liberia's lands were nestled between Ensenada on the Northwest Coast and Valle De Las Palmas in the Northwest Plateau. Henderson's average annual precipitation figures show a decrease between Ensenada and Valle De Las Palmas, as well as widely varying numbers from one year to the next. Henderson also remarked that, "not only is the average annual rainfall meager along the Northwest Coast, but the amount of precipitation varies greatly between one year and another" and that, "rainfall in any particular winter month is extremely variable between one winter season and another."[2] For instance, annual rainfall in Ensenada could vary between

[1] David Allen Henderson, *Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1964), 102.
[2] Henderson, 102–108.

over 30 inches and just over 3 inches, a drastic difference when considering water needs for farming water-dependent crops like wheat.[3]

In addition to Henderson's observations there are also surviving records from Mexican meteorologists working for la Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganaderia, the Secretary of Agriculture and Cattle Raising. These records detail the average temperature, average rainfall, and number of days with rain for the Guadalupe Valley from 1924 to 1926 and for Ensenada from 1921 to 1928.[4] From these records what emerges is an incomplete but telling picture of weather in the area that mirrors Henderson's observations. In Ensenada and the Guadalupe Valley from 1924 to 1926, compared to later years, some months had a larger than average rainfall, but during the other months the amount of rain decreased significantly. In 1921 and 1922, Ensenada experienced some months with higher amounts of rain than later years, whereas other months were particularly dry. The abundance of rainfall in the last years of the community is also mentioned in notes from Peveril Meigs, a well-known American geographer who spent a substantial amount of time in Baja California. Meigs noted abnormally large amounts of rain in Ensenada in 1926 and 1927, but rainfall in earlier years remained low enough to avoid his list, with 1905 as the next closest year with abnormally large amounts with enough rain.[5] Some other sources, including the "War Declared"

[3] Henderson, 91, 93.

[4] Mexico. Secretaria de Agricultura y Ganaderia. Servicio Meteorologico Mexicano, "Manuscript Meteorological Data Charts Recording Temperature, Rainfall, Dominant Wind Direction, Number of Days of Fog, and Number of Cloudy Days for Reporting Stations in Baja California and Sonora from the 1920s to the 1950s. Completeness of the Data Varies for Each Station," 1954 1924, Peveril Meigs Baja California Research Materials, 1925-1979, University of California, San Diego Special Collections. Although there are a few areas labeled Guadalupe in Baja California, the latitude and longitude marked on the charts match the coordinates for the valley where Little Liberia was located. Although rainfall can be very localized, as mentioned earlier, the Ensenada numbers do shed light on general weather trends for the area, particularly because some of the records for Guadalupe are incomplete. There are gaps in some of the records, either because the sections were left blank rather than making a zero (other sections did have zeros notating dry months) or because records were not taken for those months.

[5] Mexico. Secretaria de Agricultura y Ganaderia. Servicio Meteorologico Mexicano, MSS 530, Box 2, Folder 4; Peveril Meigs, "Baja California Climatic Data Notes and Charts," 1967 1919, MSS 530, Box 1, Folder 15,

newspaper articles in the *California* Eagle written by a few members of the land company's board of directors in 1927, that will be discussed in more detail later, mention a drought in northern Baja California in Little Liberia's early years, including during the years for which government rainfall data is not available.[6] Although these records aren't specific about how dry the area really was, they also match up with the little information that is available. When this information is brought together it is clear that the Guadalupe Valley sustained a significant drought, which most likely had a drastic effect on the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's yield. By the time more substantial and reliable rainfall returned, Little Liberia had already begun to collapse.

The variety and infrequency of these records means it is unclear how much rain the community received, and if their difficulties in growing wheat were due to mother nature, lack of experience, or both. Some members of the board of directors claimed in the *California Eagle* in March 1927 that the lease of the Vallecitos ranch "does now appear and should have appeared to be a simple case of downright 'humbugging'" because the land did not produce as many crops as the board of directors was led to believe. Even though President Theodore Troy resisted the lease and spoke against it in board of director's meetings, other members still approved the purchase. Little Liberia organizers leased the Vallecitos ranch with the intention of expanding wheat production; by 1927 community organizers noted that the rainfall was "very light that season, hence the wheat crop was almost a complete failure."[7] Even though community organizers were correct in their

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Peveril Meigs Baja California Research Materials, 1925-1979, University of California, San Diego Special Collections.

[6] Ted Vincent, "Black Hopes in Baja California: Black American and Mexican Cooperation, 1917-1926," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 205; J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle,* March 17, 1927, 3.

[7] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3.

observations that the Santa Clara Valley had the capacity to provide enough rainfall to collect in the underground streams to irrigate their crops, Vallecitos and Santa Clara could be dry depending on the time of the year. More importantly, a few crucial early growth years for the company coincided with what were most likely years of drought, or at least drier years, in the valley. As Henderson remarked, "although local site differences may be very important in dry years, in that some places will receive just enough precipitation to produce dry-farmed grain crops while most of the coastal area does not, moist years…and dry years…are experienced, in their turn, coincidentally all along the Northwest Coast."[8] The community, therefore, needed some sort of additional irrigation strategy, and they had not planned to import water from other areas. Most of the Little Liberia organizers had little, if any, experience with farming and choosing farm land. It is probable that members of the board of directors were unfamiliar with the area and would not have known about the variations between local farms, and may not have known about the widely variable rainfall. There is no way to know how much community organizers did and did not know, but lack of natural water ultimately hurt the community's production and likely contributed to the move to tourism as a supplemental form of income.

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's water problems were not unique to their community or even to their location in Baja California. For African American agricultural communities elsewhere, water difficulties were not uncommon for a few reasons. Some African Americans who settled in the Midwestern United States after Reconstruction often traveled to areas where they knew little about the viability of the soil or the availability of water, and some recently-emancipated African Americans had only a

[8] Henderson, *Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico*, 109.

meager savings with which to buy land, so they were sometimes forced to purchase lower quality farmland. African American farmers also were at the mercy of White-owned water companies that could refuse to serve Black-owned farms. This was the case with Allensworth, an African American farming community formed in central California in 1908. Lieutenant-Colonel Allen Allensworth wanted to change White people's eugenics-supported views of African Americans and eventually turned to creating an all-Black agricultural community. As Delores Nason McBroome argues in "Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia," there are many similarities between Little Liberia and Allensworth, including their ties to Los Angeles, their goals of changing racial views, their focus on middle-class culture, and their water difficulties.[9] Allensworth's water problems, rather than due to natural occurrences, were instead predicated on a relationship with the Pacific Farming Company, the White-owned land company that sold the land to Allensworth with the agreement to supply water for irrigation no matter the growth of the community. When the Pacific Farming Company neglected its duties, and eventually tried to stop the sale of water to African Americans, the community fought back in court, gained control of water rights, and created the Allensworth Water Company, but the system the community inherited was outdated and the taxes were substantial. By the time the community paid off the taxes and upgraded the machinery, the water table had decreased enough that the equipment was useless, and by then many people

[9] McBroome's telling of Little Liberia, as mentioned in previous chapters, is substantially shorter than this one, and is directly influenced by the comparison with Allensworth. A key difference between the two that is strongly highlighted in this dissertation is the role of Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border in the history of the community and the mindset of the community organizers. McBroome focuses extensively on the role California boosterism played in the community's history, and although that is an important discussion, the community's location in Mexico necessitates a broader conversation that includes the border.

had left the community and the crops were failing.[10] Allensworth and Little Liberia each had a variety of reasons for their difficulties, but water scarcity's effect on the communities highlights to the importance of irrigation.

Unlike the Allensworth community, Little Liberia organizers were impacted by, and influenced by, international relationships, especially those between the United States and Mexico. As Key's interactions with the Mexican government around the subject of oil in 1923 proved, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was not immune to the effects of changes in the Mexican federal government, Baja California Norte Government, and the policy and cultural fluctuations that transfers of power often initiated. The shift from President Álvaro Obregón to President Plutarco Elías Calles in 1924, and their drastically different approach to policies about race and American investment, had a substantial impact on the small community. When Álvaro Obregón took power in 1920, African Americans in Mexico gained a powerful ally who spoke of cooperation, freedom for African Americans in Mexico, and who was the first Mexican official, since before Porfirio Díaz was in power, to confront the United States. As mentioned earlier, Little Liberia organizers, especially the International Community Welfare League, responded with public support, praise, and even a petition campaign to convince the United States government to officially recognize Obregón's presidency.

With Plutarco Elías Calles, however, the feeling of friendship and cooperation between African Americans, the United States government, and the Mexican federal

[10] Delores Nason McBroome, "Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia," in Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles : Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 149–80; B. Gordon Wheeler, *Black California: The History of African-Americans in the Golden State* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993), 171–84; Alice C. Royal et al., *Allensworth, The Freedom Colony: A California African American Township*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley, California: Heyday, 2016).

government deteriorated. Some of this was due to national and local Baja California policies focused on race and ethnicity. Compared to President Obregón, President Calles projected a much different national attitude towards people whose dominant racial characteristic was not Spanish or Indigenous. Calles was overtly racist, publicly supporting people of Spanish and Indigenous heritage, especially people with a mixture of both, while clearly marginalizing people of Asian or African descent. Outside of racial factors, John Dwyer in *The Agrarian Dispute* argues that, in the 1930s, in addition wanting land in the Mexicali Valley for its "economic potential, government officials and leading intellectuals resented the Americanization of the peninsula's border region and wanted to Mexicanize it." Many rural workers, in addition to resenting Americanization, "were equally antagonistic toward the thousands of Asians who worked locally."[11] The first public mention of this hostility toward foreign ownership in Baja California appeared in *The Pittsburgh Courier* in February 1925, in an article that mentioned that Calles had denied an application from an African American organization looking to bring one thousand families to Mexico.[12] Shortly after, in June 1925, articles surfaced in the United States that "a decree, taking effect [June 20, 1925], prohibits all foreign colonization in Lower California. This would eliminate the Russian soviet and Japanese colonies."[13] Although this announcement did not mention African Americans specifically, and focused more on Japanese and Russian efforts, Little Liberia was considered "foreign colonization," so this new law would possibly apply to all new prospective Little Liberia members. President Calles, at this time, expressed discontent at the increase in

[11] John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 7.
[12] Associated Negro Press, "Mexico Objects to All-Negro Colony," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1925, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier: 1911-2002.
[13] "Foreign Colonization In Lower California Barred," *The St. Louis Star and Times*, June 20, 1925, 1, Newspapers.com.

Chinese and Japanese immigration into Mexico, especially Baja California. This was as much due to his opposition to mixed-race unions in Baja California as it was connected to an ideological shift about implementing rules against non-Mexican companies, and both likely led to increased border security and prevention of new foreign land ownership.[14]

Two months later, on August 18, 1925, the Mexican government "rejected a petition from the sugar interests to permit the entrance of negro laborers into Lower California from the United States saying that with the large number of Japanese and Chinese already in the country the presence of a large number of negroes would prove a serious race problem."[15] This article confirms that Calles's uneasiness about large Chinese and Japanese populations in Baja California, and possibly racial mixing due to those large populations, likely influenced his actions towards African Americans in the same region, including Little Liberia community members. In addition, the sugar interests mentioned may refer to the instance, mentioned in the previous chapter, where International Community Welfare League organizers began recruiting famers to work on sugar cane farms at the insistence of government officials from the state of Morelos. Less than a week later, on August 23, 1925, the *New York Times* reported that Mexico "will prohibit the entrance of American negroes, despite the request of planters in Sonora, Sinaloa, Lower California, for request for permission. The Government states that with Chinese and Japanese problems it is not wise to

[14] For more information on Calles and his views of race, especially around people of Asian and Arab descent and in Baja California, see Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Grace Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Reprint edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013); Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

[15] "Mexico Doesn't Want Any Negro Laborers," *Daily Democrat-Forum and Maryville Tribune*, August 18, 1925, 1, Newspapers.com; "Mexico Bars Negros," *The Pittsburgh Press*, August 18, 1925, 1, Newspapers.com.

introduce another elsewhere."[16] It is unclear whether these planters were African American or not, but this does connect with earlier indications that there was at least some interest in Mexico for an increased African American presence, and that President Calles disagreed with those who were actively attempting to recruit African Americans.

The following year, on November 16, 1926, the *New York Times* reported that "the Mexican Government, in view of the large number of negroes trying to enter Mexico through Lower California, is planning a new law which will prevent them from entering any part of Mexican territory."[17] That same day, W.E.B. Du Bois, as a leader in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, contacted the Secretary of the Interior to inquire if there any rules that prohibited African Americans from entering Mexico.[18] Four days later, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Started," which claimed that White presses were exaggerating the "recent refusal of Adolfo Miranda, Immigration chief at Mexico, Lower California, Mexico to permit a criminal class of American Negroes to cross the line from the United States without special passports." The *Pittsburgh Courier*, in the subtitle of the article, blamed the over-blown press coverage on "White Oil Interests Active in Keeping Negro Out of Mexico," just as in earlier years. However, it appears that Mexico was creating additional regulations for African Americans crossing into Mexico, and from the language used the laws were especially focused on preventing supposedly dangerous African Americans from crossing. The new orders, requiring African Americans

[16] Special Cable to the New York Times, "Mexico Will Bar Our Negroes," *New York Times*, August 23, 1925, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2008).
[17] Special Cable to the New York Times, "Mexico to Bar American Negroes," *New York Times*, November 16, 1926, 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2008).
[18] "Asuntos Que Se Remiten A La Secretaria De Gobernacion Para Su Estudio Y Resolucion, Lista No. 2188," December 4, 1926, Fondo Obregón-Calles, caja 099, exp. 241-G-B - 241-G-L, Archivo General De La Nación. It is unclear who Du Bois contacted first, since there is no record of where the inquiry started, only that it was referred to the Secretary of the Interior "for resolution." So far the response from the Mexican Government is unknown.

"to carry special passports," and stipulated "they will be allowed to cross the line only between the hours of 12 o'clock noon and 9 p.m. and will not be permitted to remain overnight," according to Immigration Chief Miranda. Additional instructions were added to a 1924 federal regulation that was meant to "prevent the criminal classes from escaping from the United States border towns into Mexico."[19] The new rule about special passports was most likely based on this language of criminality because of increased immigration to Mexican border towns for the vice industry due to Prohibition in the United States.[20]

The new rules, according to Miranda, were targeting "the criminal class of all races" and not meant to target "reputable Black American farmers or citizens who desire to colonize or travel in Mexico."[21] However, contrary to Miranda's comments, the new law asked for special African American passports, and would impact all African Americans because they would be required to get additional paperwork. This could have prevented tourists from traveling to Ensenada once the sanatorium, hotel, and bank were complete. In addition, forcing African Americans to obtain special passports, while not asking other groups to do the same, and claiming the new law was meant to discourage criminal activity, implies that African Americans were more likely to be criminals than other groups. In this instance, it appears that the Mexican government may have participated in perpetuating some of the same racial stereotypes that existed in the United States. Those incorrect assumptions may have, consciously or unconsciously, contributed to new rules that likely led, in part, to Little Liberia's fall.

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[19] "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Started," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 20, 1926, 9, Newspapers.com.
[20] Eric Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass : Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965 /" 2018; Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*; Catherine Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2013): 215–47.
[21] "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Started," 9.

Calles was not necessarily anti-African American, even though he actively sought to stop the movement of African Americans to Mexico. For instance, on a visit to the United States in 1925, President Calles praised the Tuskegee Institute and expressed interest in establishing a similar school in Mexico.[22] Tuskegee's vocational focus fit well within Calles' focus on a national school system that could mold the consciousness of the entire nation while providing people, especially rural Indigenous communities, with skill-based training. This training in the United States and in Mexico, however, also had the capacity to limit these workers to subordinate jobs and undercut their political struggles. African Americans were also not part of the national identity that Calles conceived. It is even possible that Calles disapproved of the educational center that the Little Liberia organizers attempted to create to teach their own members about Mexican culture and how to speak Spanish. This school was most likely not controlled by Calles or the national education system in Mexico at the time, and therefore was not in line with the Mexican history and national rhetoric integrated into most schools in Mexico at this time.

Calles initially in disputes between American businessmen and local Mexican landowners returned some rural properties to Americans. In 1925, however, Calles expropriated several American-owned rural properties. When the United States government demanded he restore the properties to their American owners and claimed that Calles had defied the terms of the Bucareli Agreement, Calles responded that he would not change the country's policy toward agricultural land ownership. Later, through articles in American newspapers, President Calles stated that agrarian reform was a Mexican issue and therefore the United States had no right to interfere in Mexican agricultural policies. In 1927, for

[22] Associated Negro Press, "Mexico Objects to All-Negro Colony," 1.

instance, the Alien Land Act was signed in Mexico, which stripped non-Mexican landowners of diplomatic rights and required them to sell any properties near the border or any coasts within ten years, as well as requiring corporations to sell a majority of their shares to Mexican citizens. That same year, a new law transformed permanent land titles of non-Mexican petroleum companies into fifty-year leases. Although the two changes in 1927 caused significant tensions between the two countries, few American-owned businesses were expropriated under the Alien Land Law in the late 1920's, and in 1928 the Mexican Supreme Court ruled parts of the new oil legislation unconstitutional. Although the power struggle between the U.S. and Mexico over agrarian and petroleum land legislation continued into the 1930's, and contributed to the U.S.-Mexico relations over the next decade, the debate around United States land ownership in Mexico did not become a serious policy issue until the Cárdenas administration starting in 1934.

While there were many community difficulties prompted by external factors, the issues that most likely caused the greatest damage to Little Liberia's future were its internal struggles. Even though many of these problems existed prior to 1927, most of the mismanagement, including fraud and mishandling of funds primarily blamed on Hugh Macbeth, came to light from February through June in 1927. The public fracturing of the company's board of directors was primarily visible in a series of lengthy articles in the *California Eagle*, published on a weekly basis for months.[23] The articles were all titled some

[23] The "War Declared" articles were public, and in a newspaper owned by Charlotta Bass, a stockholder in the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, so there is the possibility of additional bias that perhaps would give a historian more pause than articles form a newspaper with fewer connections to the community. However, the reputation of the *California Eagle* and Charlotta Bass alone are reasons enough to give the articles at least some consideration. In addition, most articles have bylines of J.H. Stevens, James Littlejohn, and Claudius Troy, three people with intimate knowledge of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's business, as well as access to all meetings and internal discussions. Although they themselves most likely had a wide range of reasons for publishing the articles, the language and sheer spectrum

variation on "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company" because, as J.H. Stevens wrote, "war was declared in the offices of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Co. when the directors and stockholders had met in a joint stockholders meeting" on February 3, 1927 to call for an audit of the company's financial records.[24] This so-called war over Little Liberia pitted three members of the board of directors – James Littlejohn, Owen Troy, and J.H. Stevens (a member of the board of directors and the chairman of the recently formed auditor commission for the land company) – against the rest of the board of directors, led by Hugh E. Macbeth.[25] When possible, Little Liberia leaders' own words will largely be used to describe and analyze this infighting, especially because this is the part of Little Liberia's history where the most direct information appears in the historical record, and where the individual community leaders' voices are clearest.

This so-called war appears to have been a war for Little Liberia's soul, at least from Stevens', Troy's, and Littlejohn's point of view. The language of the articles alone, particularly the metaphors Stevens, the primary author, used to explain the events taking place, displayed both a passion to connect to the general public and explain the community's difficulties, and the frustration that Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn felt toward the process and

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of community problems detailed in the articles is compelling. From a practical sense, the articles are also the clearest and most substantive indicator of internal community problems.

[24] J.H. Stevens, "War Declared On Lower Calif.-Mexican Land And Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 4, 1927, 1.

[25] This chapter, especially the contents from this page onward, contains substantially more direct quotes than other chapters; this is largely due to the existence of the "War Declared" articles and the language used in them. Whereas discovering and telling the first parts of Little Liberia's history involves a substantial amount of work stitching together information from combining a variety of sources, the internal divisions within the community during its fall were well-documented, even if the microfilm itself is damaged in spots. Due to the sensational nature of much of the language, it is much clearer to show the tensions, emotions, and vitriol being spewed by providing the contents of the War Declared articles. There is a dearth of information on Macbeth's side of the kerfuffle, so the sources can be one-sided, but wherever possible I provide alternative and additional information from other sources.

the minimal amounts of power they could wield. For instance, in March, when discussing a meeting of the board of directors, Stevens remarked that some members of the board "brought along a large steam roller with which they had planned to flatten out the insurgent stockholders and belligerent directors." In this instance the insurgents were Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy, being smashed by the steam roller, Macbeth.[26] Most likely this imagery was meant to garner sympathy from the public by showing how the three men were struggling against a much more powerful opponent, whose primary goal was metaphorically to crush them. The following month, Stevens stated that "with all of these facts staring them in the face, some of Mr. Macbeth's admirers and a few 'would-be' and 'no-good' race leaders are trying to force us to shut up," but in the face of this pressure the three men reassured community members that "you can depend on us to keep fighting."[27]

Although the three men lamented Macbeth's power in the board room, they used strong language in the "War Declared" articles to attempt to characterize Macbeth and the other opposing board members. Stevens painted Macbeth as a man with no remorse because he "failed to raise his eyes" when Claudius Troy called him a "yellow Negro crook" in front of the entire attendance of the joint stockholders meeting.[28] In later articles in May, the three "insurgents" equated searching for and uncovering Macbeth's transgressions to hunting for a raccoon. Stevens remarked "at last we, the three adventurous huntsmen have smoked the old 'coon' from his hole!" and that "before we have finished this smoking process we expect to see rats, snakes, skunks and every kind of creeping thing come tumbling down like Joshua's wall of yore," again using colorful and inflammatory language that also contained racial

[26] J.H. Stevens, "War Declared On Lower Calif.-Mexican Land And Development Company," 1.
[27] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," *California Eagle*, April 13, 1927, 2.
[28] J.H. Stevens, "War Declared On Lower Calif.-Mexican Land And Development Company," 1.

slurs. But this time Stevens was implying a shift in the dynamic.[29] Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn were now the heroic hunters ridding the company of vermin, rather than victims with minimal power, because information about Macbeth's mismanagement was emerging with increasing frequency. The language around these metaphors, and the general feeling behind the language in the "War Declared" articles, although possibly helpful for the three men in gaining support from the public, also likely contributed to the existing tensions in the board of directors. Although Stevens often wrote passionately about issues with the community, especially with regards to Hugh Macbeth, he claimed that his purpose was not to attack the company, but rather to correct what the company had done and accuse those who had participated in wrongful activities.[30] It is likely that such a public display of tension among the board of directors prevented new members or investors from joining the community.

Most investors or members most likely would not have wanted to join the community in early 1927 anyway, due to the plethora of problems within it, regardless of the infighting in the company. In February 1927, some members of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's board of directors called for an audit. Some members, especially Stevens, Owen Troy, and Littlejohn, were suspicious that someone with connections to the company had committed fraud. Stevens, in his first article in the *California Eagle* about Little Liberia's troubles, claimed that he, Littlejohn, Claudius Troy, and some stockholders "practically forced the Board of Directors of the company into an audit of its books prior to the stockholders meeting." Although Claudius Troy had called for

[29] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Development Company," *California Eagle*, May 6, 1927, 2.
[30] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 11, 1927, 6.

an audit in 1923, this was the first audit in the company's history because other members had resisted audits with an assortment of excuses, especially by claiming that an audit was a waste of money. These three members of the board of directors finally succeeded in pushing an audit through because, as Stevens stated, they had become frustrated with the "apparent loose and careless way in which the book of the company and the people's monies were being handled."[31]

Conversations around the audit in early 1927 were not necessarily the first time there was any sort of suspicion of wrongdoing in the community, although it was the most visible and has the clearest records. Early on, it appears that there was some suspicion that either someone was exploiting the community, or that the community was exploiting others. There were advertisements in the *California Eagle* as early as 1921 offering a one-hundred-dollar reward for information that could "prove that this company has ever defrauded or deceived anyone out of anything." The point of contact for these advertisements was Hugh Macbeth, and surprisingly these advertisements sometimes appeared on the same page as articles about Little Liberia or advertisements for its stock. Since this request for information appeared before the proposal for the bank and sanatorium, as well as prior to the arrival of people from Oklahoma, and years before any raffles or other public events geared toward making money for new enterprises, it was most likely connected with the agricultural aspect of the community and the first set of community members and board of directors. Ironically, though, the articles mention Hugh Macbeth as the person in charge of collecting the information, even though he was later accused of being the primary culprit of fraud within

[31] J.H. Stevens, "War Declared On Lower Calif.-Mexican Land And Development Company," 1.

the company; however, his supposed misdeeds occurred after these advertisements appeared in 1921.

There is no context to these advertisements, and no articles or other sources explain the reason for investigating any wrongdoing. It is possible that, because the company had just started selling stock, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company made an effort to ensure that the public had a means of contacting the company about any problems. If this is the case, though, why place such a public notification, and on the same page as stock advertisements? It is possible that someone in Los Angeles had made allegations against the organization, and the advertisement was a means of publicly tracking down information about those claims. Wherever the reason, these "$100.00 Reward" advertisements only appeared for a few months and there was no outward sign of any fraud or other difficulties until early 1927, particularly concerning Macbeth.[32] Other than these foreboding advertisements, there was relatively little information about the community's inner workings in real time from 1923 to 1927, outside of reports on the new focus on the sanatorium and bank.

The audit in 1927 and the "War Declared" articles revealed much more about the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's business, including several financial problems in the community with Hugh Macbeth at the center. Macbeth, according to the first "War Declared" article, planned to try to hide the fact that he had misused company money. Stevens stated that he, Claudius Troy, and James Littlejohn "had differed with their fellow directors, and naturally their opponent directors had come to [the audit] meeting with full intentions to give [them] a sound thrashing into line or better out of line. In

[32] "$100.00 Reward," *California Eagle*, October 8, 1921, 2.

order that this might be thoroughly accomplished, the no-audit gentlemen brought along a large steam roller with which they had planned to flatten out the insurgent stockholders and belligerent directors." Macbeth, along with five other people in attendance, had a majority of the stock of everyone present in the room, and had used that majority to call to have the auditor's report adopted without reading it in the meeting first. Macbeth insisted that the report be put on file in the company's offices instead. Stevens argued that this would keep stockholders from learning how the company's money was spent because they would have to visit the company's office and read it for themselves without any assistance or explanation from the auditors. "How many of these old people and younger ones too will go to that office," Stevens questioned, "and will be able to read and understand that report. I dare say, 'only a few'."[33]

Stevens, continuing his steam rolling metaphor, elaborated that "for fear that some of his opponents might bodily tear a wheel off of the steam roller or punch the driver in one of his eyes" while rejecting this proposal, "Mr. Macbeth or some associate of his had ordered two large and well armed policemen" to attend the meeting. Stevens claimed that the policemen could see immediately that they should not have been called, and it was his opinion that the officers "felt like taking a punch at Macbeth for the treatment which was being served out to many an old gray haired mother and father, of whom some had year ago put in their last dollar in this unbusinesslike and ill handled proposition." It is interesting and unsurprising that Stevens brought in the stockholders in his first article about the difficulties in the community. Although the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was, first and foremost, a movement for wealthy African Americans, when the board of

[33] J.H. Stevens, "War Declared On Lower Calif.-Mexican Land And Development Company," 1.

directors began to sell stock in their efforts to expand now also sought financial support from people with much fewer means than the members of the board. Unfortunately, this also meant that the community's failures would also impact classes beyond the Black elite, a fact that Stevens repeated in a few of the "War Declared" articles.[34]

It appears Macbeth had good reason to be concerned about public disclosure of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's financial records. The auditor's report unveiled "the gross mismanagement under Macbeth's steam-roller regime, and threw light of day upon so many shady and crooked transactions."[35] Macbeth even pressured Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy to decrease the number of articles, or stop publishing them altogether, through the threat of a libel suit.[36] Stevens reported that the auditor found personal checks that proved Macbeth had deposited company funds into his own bank account and used company money to pay for his own expenses. There were no company minutes or other proof of authorization in any company records to account for these transactions, and company rules stated all money for Little Liberia needed to be deposited in the bank with authorization of the president, treasurer, and secretary of the board of directors. Stevens believed so strongly in the audit that he quoted some of the language verbatim in the *California Eagle* because "the intimation is so clear, and the reference so explicit, that only such weaklings and dudderheads as those spineless parties who continue to support Macbeth, can fail to see the application." The auditor stated that depositing corporate monies into personal accounts, particularly when said company had its own account, was "a strict

[34] J.H. Stevens, 1.
[35] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," 2.
[36] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3. Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy do not explicitly say Macbeth was threatening to sue for libel, but if there was a threat of a libel suit they most likely would not have mentioned specific information in the article because of possible uses in court if the suit occurred. Looking at this article within the context of the others, though, it is clear Macbeth was threatening a libel suit.

violation of good business procedure and the by-laws of this company." "Such negligence on the part of a fiduciary officer," the auditor continued, "is inexcusable, not only in the officer himself, but also on the part of the Board of Directors who fail to require such reports." Even if the deposits that the auditor found were simply a form of business carelessness and laziness, which additional information revealed later deemed highly unlikely, Macbeth was still in violation of company rules and had violated good business practices. Stevens even claimed "For a man of supposed intelligence and discretion, Mr. Macbeth has certainly made a dismal failure. Not only has be shown utter lack of business ability, but also lack of that thing which is most vital to successful business relationship, integrity and honesty of purpose."[37]

Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn, to attack his "integrity and honesty of purpose," accused Macbeth not only of mishandling company money, but of stealing fundraising profits meant for building the sanatorium and of using company funds to pay for costs related to his law firm that were not connected to the community. No Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company records have been found to validate this claim, but a few of the "War Declared" articles clarify some of the details alleged. Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy commented in March 1927 that there was a man who sued Macbeth due to a personal financial transaction that went awry, and that this lawsuit most likely had little connection to the community. Although some people objected, Macbeth convinced most of the men on the board of directors to pay for the legal fees for the suit. The board of directors also authorized payment for Macbeth to travel to Oklahoma and Mexico City to talk to President Obregón. This seems reasonable, since those trips were for Little Liberia business, but Stevens insisted

[37] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," 2.

that the board of directors were never given a concrete reason for the need to visit Oklahoma in person or to meet with President Obregón in Mexico City. According to Stevens, Macbeth received a consistent flow of money, "almost weekly," and "his Los Angeles office rent and many other local bills that modesty forbids us here to speak of were paid by us while he was away" on these travels.[38] It is worth noting that Macbeth, as a member of the board of directors and as someone who helped recruit new community members, including people from Oklahoma, probably spent a significant amount of time working on community affairs. Whether or not he was fully candid about why in-person travel was needed, Macbeth's many trips to Oklahoma, Mexico City, and Baja California were related to company business. It is possible that Macbeth was billing himself for services to the company, or had created some other similar arrangement to compensate himself for these and other services to the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Paying for his law firm's costs with Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company funds, however, is only the first instance where Macbeth likely mishandled company resources.

"The most apparent crooked deal that has ever been pulled off among Negroes in Los Angeles," Stevens wrote, "was pulled in a non-maturing or fake automobile raffle." This "crooked deal" was the previously-mentioned raffle, organized by the International Community Welfare League, to raise funds for the sanatorium. The raffle was the primary reason why the audit finally took place, since "after a year or two had passed and no raffle had taken place, some of the persons who had bought tickets from individual members of the

[38] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3. There is no indication, from any other sources, what these supposed immodest bills were for. Rather than fall into the realm of unsubstantiated conjecture, I will simply note that there is the possibility that there were additional monies spent on purchases not related to the community that perhaps were not fit to discuss in polite company.

Board of Directors of the land company began to complain for a refund of their money." The audit revealed that none of the raffle proceeds had been deposited in the company's bank account, and the car could not be accounted for. In a board meeting, Stevens claimed that after this revelation some people who had supported Macbeth suggested that the land company give the people their money back from the company's coffers. Tther members of the board "openly and loudly opposed the suggestion, for the company had not received a penny of this money." When openly asked during a board meeting about the location of the funds, Macbeth answered that he did not know the location of the cash. But when the board questioned Robert Fite, a White member of the International Community Welfare League and the man who assisted Macbeth in the raffle, the board of directors received a much different answer. Fite claimed that he and his wife spent all the money that they had personally collected, and that they supposed Macbeth had spent the money he had obtained, but that they personally did not see those funds.[39]

Upon additional investigation into fraud, it appeared to Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn that Macbeth had planned the deception thoroughly and from the beginning. One woman came forward in a Los Angeles Bar Association hearing to discuss her experiences with Macbeth and the car raffle.[40] Her husband had contracted tuberculosis, and the woman hoped that the sanatorium, once built, would provide much-needed relief for her husband. She not only spent her own money on the raffle, as a way of donating to the sanatorium fundraising efforts, but also "sold something like $40 or $50 worth of [raffle] tickets" to acquaintances.

[39] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 25, 1927, 2.
[40] Troy, Littlejohn, and Stevens, as will be discussed later in this chapter, petitioned to have Macbeth disbarred from the Los Angeles Bar Association, and this testimony is from the proceedings for that petition, as described by the three men in the *California Eagle*.

She assisted Macbeth with additional raffle sales and events, and "stated that on one occasion, Mr. Macbeth had made arrangements with her to park this Packard car that was to be given to the winner in her front yard for part of a day for it to be inspected by her friends and prospective ticket buyers. She said that on this occasion she had several invited friends and guests at her home to see the car but that it never appeared on the scene." She never saw the car, and in her statement at the hearing "she stated that all she has realized out of her work and sacrifices to this cause is that today she has lost her husband, a sum of money that she gave toward making the raffle a success, and the good will of a person or two whom she had persuaded to buy these tickets." Like this anonymous woman, other people in Los Angeles sold tickets to friends and family, including people across the country.[41] Therefore, "the most apparent crooked deal that has ever been pulled off among Negroes in Los Angeles" was not just a crime against African Americans in Los Angeles, but also affected Black people across the country who had bought raffle tickets. It fell to Black Los Angelenos, however, to answer to friends and relatives about where the money had gone and why they had backed an endeavor that later appeared to be a scam.

According to Stevens, Macbeth also made false statements to the State Corporation Commission to gain the permits to sell Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company stock. The backing by the commission was mentioned on advertisements for stock sales to provide legitimacy for the sales. Stevens noted that, at this point, Macbeth was not only the attorney for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, but also had been elected secretary, director, and general supervisor, so there was no argument against Macbeth's qualifications to talk to the State Corporation Commission or his

[41] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," 2.

knowledge of company information. Stevens claimed that Macbeth told the State Corporation Commission that the company had spent $26,000 on improvements through buying farming machinery and tools, as well as purchasing cattle and constructing buildings.[42] Stevens, however, contended that the company never bought cattle, and that no houses had been built since the stock campaign had started.[43] If this was true, then in addition to lying to the State Corporation Commission, Macbeth falsified information that later was printed in the *California Eagle*. If Stevens is correct here, then most likely Macbeth submitted information to Bass, who printed the articles based on the information of what she thought was a reliable source, one of the main community organizers based in Los Angeles whom she personally knew from other Los Angeles organizing efforts. Black newspapers relied heavily on information provided by the community, and it is likely that Bass could not travel to Baja California constantly to check on information given to her. It appears that Charlotta Bass and the *California Eagle*'s part in spreading the misinformation was never an issue for the community. This could be because the *Eagle* was also helping to uncover by the truth, and by publishing both the "War Declared" and "To Whom It May Concern" articles, the newspaper was giving each side its due. It is possible that some people even saw the *Eagle* as much a victim as the general public, duped by false information just like its readers. Bass, a reliable source in the Black community, most likely was not to be blamed for an honest mistake. Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn even thanked the *Eagle*'s editors and publishers, who were "not

[42] Some of these events were mentioned in earlier chapters, and Macbeth's name was specifically attached to many of these events. It is highly plausible that there were significant investment put into the community, particularly early on, but it is unclear whether all of the events reported in the *California Eagle* and by Hugh Macbeth indeed occurred. For instance, the purchase of a significant herd of cattle was mentioned early in 1919, but from these statements it is unclear whether the cattle purchase was completed, and whether those livestock made the trip to Baja California.

[43] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land & Development Company," *California Eagle*, June 10, 1927, 7.

opposed to answering the call for justice and fair play," for allowing them to discuss the problems with the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, since "these papers are only trying to give truth and thereby establish absolute justice without fear or favor."[44]

Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy looked to the justice system as the primary means of punishing Macbeth for his transgressions. Although the three regularly wrote articles in the *California Eagle,* Stevens believed "the press is not the place to correct the evils of this company nor any other company. The Civil and Criminal Courts are the places and that is where the stockholders of this company will go when the time seems expedient." Stevens stated that they wrote the articles because "too often has the charge been hurled at the Negro race and too often has it been true, especially among the 'higher up' that Negroes are gifted at shielding and protecting their criminals." Stevens implied that the "War Declared" articles were not meant to "correct the evils" of the company – that was for the justice system – but rather for informing the public so as to not appear to protect anyone from punishment.[45] This fits within the overall importance in the community of following a strict moral compass and focusing on educating the public. The court of public opinion, however, was most likely a secondary tactic the men were using to challenge Macbeth. The three men, though, were also insistent that the circumstances necessitated the use of the justice system. Stevens wrote, "we have continuously told you from time to time that our interest was not motivated by prejudice or hatred or unkindness, but by justice and fair play. We could have settled this thing long

[44] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle,* June 17, 1927, 2.
[45] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," 6.

ago outside of any kind of court if it had been possible. Mr. Macbeth denounces and says he knows nothing about this [raffle] money at all."[46]

Early in the process, right after the audit was released, Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn reported the raffle problems to the district attorney, who sent them to the city attorney who had jurisdiction. Before doing so, the district attorney warned the men that, even though there was an excess of one thousand dollars in ticket sales and money collections for the raffle, the charge brought against Macbeth would be a misdemeanor.[47] The city attorney then informed the men that he could not prosecute because the statute of limitations had passed, since the raffle had occurred more than a year before he was approached with the case. Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn then turned to the Los Angeles County Grand Jury. There the Grand Jury did look into the case, but the jury was dismissed before the investigation was completed. The three men then reached out to J.M. Friendlander, a man Stevens had initially talked to about Macbeth in 1926 when Friendlander was City Prosecutor in Los Angeles. Friendlander, now residing in San Francisco in the post of Corporation Commissioner of the State of California, responded in June 1927 that "the matter is now in the hands of the State Corporation Commission."[48]

Because the court cases were pushed to the Grand Jury because the statute of limitations had expired, Littlejohn, Stevens, and Troy filed charges of moral turpitude against Macbeth with the Los Angeles Bar Association. On May 16th, 1927, the last day of these hearings, Stevens noted that Macbeth appeared with "quite a delegation of his friends" and was represented by a White attorney. Stevens claims that, as the proceedings moved along,

[46] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," 2.
[47] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land & Development Company," 7.
[48] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," June 17, 1927, 2.

Macbeth's attitude progressively changed from "cocky," to "peeved," to acting "sassy" toward the grievance committee of the Bar Association. Macbeth "maintained this spirit of cockiness for a short while," but when questioned about his actions around the raffle and the handling of company money "he soon lost his spirit of arrogance and fell into the same old attitude of submissive meekness" that included the "debauching of his own soul."[49] Stevens claimed that Macbeth "has told us several times that he stood ace high with the district attorney and that we would never be able to get that office to do anything to him. It may be possible that he thinks he stands the same with the Bar Association. Probably he does, but we will wait to be shown." This, of course, is hearsay, and makes a convenient excuse in case the three men lost their case; it is also possible that Macbeth was well connected. Whether or not those connections were willing to dismiss these types of allegations solely based on their knowledge of his character due to their friendship is another matter entirely. It is also possible that, since some of the men in the Bar Association were White, their opinions could have been swayed due to racial stereotypes about African Americans' immorality and inability to conduct a well-run business.

Whatever the reason, it appears that the Bar Association dismissed the case. Stevens claimed that Macbeth made statements in front of the Bar Association that he knew were lies. For instance, Macbeth claimed "that no one had accosted him or spoken to him concerning a settlement to the people of the money which the people had contributed in the fake automobile raffle, prior to the time that we had attempted to take him to court." Macbeth also asserted that the board of directors "had passed a resolution or motion in one of its meetings for him to use that Five Hundred Dollars to pay off his personal obligations," referring to

[49] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared On Lower California Development Company," *California Eagle*, May 27, 1927, 2.

some of the company funds that Macbeth had used that the auditor found no record of a vote approving. To this end, Stevens remarked that there was not a single director that would testify under oath to having given Macbeth this permission, except possibly L.H. Bryant, who Stevens implied was a good liar and would say anything to help Macbeth.[50]

It is clear that many members on the board of directors, including L.H. Bryant, trusted Macbeth's statements and were willing to support him, whether or not it was to the extent that Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy claimed. They contended that several people on the board, including Stevens himself, were "foolishly and ignorantly led" by Macbeth.[51] They charged that the board "simply fell in line or acquiesced" with proposals not directly connected to existing company pursuits "without full investigation or weighing the significance of the matter presented to them," especially Macbeth's proposals, such as purchasing additional land in the Vallecitos Ranch.[52] In these assertions, though, the men blamed Macbeth for the board's poor decisions, rather than acknowledging mismanagement by the entire board. Stevens later remarked that the board "acquiesce[d] to the many ill advised and ill framed propositions of this company," particularly purchasing tractors from Robert Fite. Stevens stated that Fite and Macbeth were connected for a few years before Fite approached the board of directors, but none of the other board of directors knew him. Although he did not mention many details, Stevens stated that the board of directors agreed to a tractor purchase based primarily on the basis of Macbeth's vouching for Fite, rather than on doing their own investigation into Fite's business. In a "War Declared" article Stevens referred to the deal as

[50] J. H. Stevens et. al., 2.
[51] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," 6.
[52] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3.

"shady," but again ultimately blamed Macbeth for a board-wide decision to work with Fite.[53] Even though Macbeth likely committed some unsavory business deals, the board of directors often ignored company policies created specifically to protect the company and its financiers from these types of problems. The reason there were financial stop gaps in place, such as requiring the board to approve all expenditures, was so no one person was accountable for the entire financial future of the company. It is possible that what Stevens claims is true, that a majority of the board of directors relied more on their own relationship with Macbeth than their good business sense to the point of ignoring obvious cues that signaled possible problems. Although Stevens does not suggest it, it is also a possibility that Macbeth somehow bribed or paid off members of the board to speak on his behalf. But Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy were equally complicit in voting with the other members of the board.

Hugh Macbeth and the members of the board of directors on the other side of the so-called "war" did briefly push back publicly against the claims in the "War Declared" articles. L.H. Bryant, at that time the secretary of the company, authored articles titled "To Whom It May Concern" directly below the "War Declared" articles a few times in April and May. Unlike the "War Declared" articles, the "To Whom It May Concern" articles all had the exact same language. In the article, Bryant stated, "this is to certify that all of the insinuations which have been published against the character, integrity and ability" of Macbeth, with regards to Little Liberia, "are absolutely untrue, in fact, and are being published for the sole purpose of getting Mr. Macbeth to engage in a nasty public controversy with four disgruntled

[53] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," 6; J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared On Lower California Development Company," 2.

men which Mr. Macbeth will wisely refuse to do."[54] This proclamation fits with earlier claims Stevens made that Macbeth was protected and supported by his friends on the board of directors. Stevens responded along these lines, calling Bryant the "good man Friday" to Macbeth's Robinson Crusoe, insinuating that Bryant was servilely devoted to assisting Macbeth and therefore not an objective source.[55] In this instance, from the company's point of view, there might have been some sense in having the secretary of the board of directors make an official statement supporting one of its board members. On the other hand this article, as an official statement by the company publicly denouncing the "nasty public controversy," and in particular having someone other than Macbeth make the denunciation, reinforced the existing rift within the board of directors. The "To Whom It May Concern" articles may have even inadvertently added more weight to Stevens', Troy's, and Littlejohn's claims since they were significant enough to warrant a response, albeit months after Stevens's initial salvo.

Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy treated the "To Whom It May Concern" articles as a direct attack, and responded by reminding readers that they were chosen by the people to serve on the board. This was another direct reference to their insistence that they were serving all of the company's constituents, including those who bought small amounts of stock, not just the men with a substantial amount of money and community standing. Troy, Stevens, and Littlejohn pushed back against the "To Whom It May Concern" statements in a "War Declared" article by stating, "just to show you that the signer of this article has no special regard for the truth or that his mind is feeble, it is the common knowledge of the

[54] L.H. Bryant, "To Whom It May Concern," *California Eagle*, May 6, 1927, 2; L.H. Bryant, "To Whom It May Concern," *California Eagle*, May 20, 1927, 2; L.H. Bryant, "To Whom It May Concern," *California Eagle*, May 27, 1927, 2.
[55] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Development Company," 2.

entire Board of Directors that Mr. J.H. Stevens, who is one of the writers of this article appearing here was duly elected by the stockholders to that board in the last stockholders meeting with the largest majority of any candidate for the office of director." Stevens also mentioned that Bryant never spoke to him directly about the "To Whom It May Concern" public announcement, even though the bottom of the article stated it was "given with the knowledge and consent" of the board of directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Stevens continued attacking the article, asking "now how could a real intelligent man have made such a statement to the public. Something must be wrong or Hugh E. Macbeth would have had more knowledge how to better cover up himself than this poor fellow."[56] The "To Whom It May Concern" articles, and the "War Declared" articles in response, clearly displayed the fact that the board of directors no longer spoke publicly as a unified group. Prior to these articles in 1927, all public statements had the language of a unified vision, even if behind closed doors the board of directors disagreed with each other. The "War Declared" and "To Whom It May Concern" articles signaled a public shift in a longer and more drawn out fracturing of the board of directors that had been taking place for years.

There was also a shift in how Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn characterized the goals and possible outcomes of their so-called war for the community. On April 1, while discussing why they wrote the articles, the three men insisted, "these articles are quite taxing on both our time and mental capacities, but since we daily receive dozens of calls by the telephone, visitation communications and personal interviews demanding that we bring these acts and the perpetraitors [sic] thereof to the eyes of the public, we herewith promise to continue to

[56] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared On Lower California Development Company," 2.

give and to give more abundantly."[57] But they claimed the outcomes would be worth the "efforts to divorce the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Co. from the management which has carried it from an enthusiastic body of determined men to a total and disgraceful ruin." Although they saw the current community leadership was in shambles, this article was mostly hopeful because the men spoke of moving forward. They anticipated Macbeth would be forced to explain his actions, and "justice will be done on the strength of the proof and explanations submitted." To the three men, truth was on their side, and the information revealed would show it. They acknowledged that some of this truth might simply be a matter of bad business practices, but even in that case, they questioned "who ever heard of a corporation before this one, passing from month to month and year to year for almost nine years, collecting and expending money in vast amounts without ever a 'by your leave' or 'here is a report of the money that has been entrusted to me'"? Indicative of many of the first "War Declared" articles, the men discussed the difficulties within the community, but saw a path to moving forward, clearly stated with the article's ending of "bear with us – The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company will at last be cleared up."[58]

At some point between May 20 and May 27, 1927, the three men changed their overall outlook on the whole affair. In an article on May 27, Stevens openly admitted that the community was falling apart, writing "if Macbeth is ever fully disposed for the way in which he has handled this land company's affairs, that the whole proposition is going to blow up, but we had just as well tell you gentlemen that this ship is sinking slowly but surely. We are told that as simple a thing as a rat has sense enough to try to get off a sinking ship. We hope

[57] J. H. Stevens et. al., May 20, 1927, 2.
[58] J. H. Stevens et. al., May 20, 1927, 2.

our fellow directors will catch the significance of this statement."[59] Less than a month later, on June 10, the men argued that they were still looking to find the truth, and that "we rely on facts and facts alone to bring us victory and justice," even though the community's history was a "story of errors, injustice and deceit" and that people should "know within your soul we are justified as we are constant to our purpose."[60]

For these men, Macbeth's Grand Jury charges relating to the "automobile raffle, unfair tractor deal, and misuses of the company's finance" were representative of many of the larger issues within the community, because their social struggles and significant monetary loss were linked.[61] Stevens remarked that "one thing we do realize and that is that it cost us hundreds of dollars individually to pay off delinquent bills," providing some insight into the tangible cost of the community's difficulties.[62] Stevens stated he lost $2,200 as of March 11, 1927, and he also remarked that other members, including Claudius Troy and James Littlejohn, were unhappy with the "revelations" about mishandling company funds. He insisted that these men had also taken time in the meeting to ask for protection to the investors, particularly men and women who were not wealthy.[63] It could be true that the three men were primarily interested in gaining justice for the many investors, but it is difficult to ignore the substantial loss that these men felt because of the community's failings, and this could have contributed to why they were critical of Macbeth and the other board members that they disagreed with. Although it seems likely that the information they imparted in the

[59] J. H. Stevens et. al., May 27, 1927, 2.
[60] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land & Development Company," 7.
[61] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land and Development Co.," 2.
[62] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3.
[63] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," 6.

California Eagle was true, the truth was likely embellished because of the substantial amount of money at stake.

A fact made clear by the "War Declared" articles is that, regardless of which members of the board of directors had knowledge of specific dealings and difficulties in the community, the board of directors was aware that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company needed an influx of investment in 1921 in order to pay for outstanding debts on the Santa Clara ranch and to purchase the Vallecitos ranch. Macbeth specifically looked to Oklahoma to help raise these funds, and he told other members of the board of directors that their difficulties were over because he had found sufficient funding from people in Oklahoma to pay for the land, as well as to fund the community in its entirety. But the worries that Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn claimed they had in the early 1920s do not show up in any public records, including in any *California Eagle* articles, during that time. At no point in any conversations about the new investments from Oklahoma were existing debts mentioned, and there was no public indication that the company was facing any sort of financial difficulties until the "War Declared" articles in 1927.[64] This is not necessarily surprising, since the Little Liberia community was, first and foremost, a business venture that relied on public support. If articles had appeared in the *California Eagle* in 1920 and 1921 honestly explaining financial difficulties, it is possible that people would not have been willing to invest their money in stock for the community. It is unclear if the new Oklahoma investors were aware of the financial problems, but it is possible that they may not have been as inclined to participate if they knew the full history of the company's finances, particularly if there was a public perception that the community was not clearly and visibly successful.

[64] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3.

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's difficulties were such that, not only did it fall short of completing its goals, but the difficulties led the auditor to recommend that the company be placed in receivership, meaning that a third party would take control of the company and its finances. Although it appears that the company was never placed in receivership, the auditor's recommendation that someone outside the organization be put in control is a vivid indication of the seriousness of the problems the community faced.[65]

Even though the auditor, an outside observer with knowledge about the company, was able to ascertain significant complications within the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, none of the eighteen members of the board of the directors except Troy, Littlejohn, and Stevens visibly protested the community's problems. Stevens intimated that he suspected that others were unhappy, or knew that what was happening within the community was wrong, but that they didn't necessarily know what to do in response. The three men claimed they would give a list of the directors and, as of June 17, 1927, their most recently-voiced positions in a future article, in order to provide the public. Whether because the community fell apart before that time, or because they decided that publicly declaring the opinions of their other board members was not a subtle enough tactic, they never published the list. The board began to tear itself apart, where "there are a few who have openly supported Macbeth in this 'frame up,' while there are others who continue to pat Macbeth on the back one minute and then are ready the next minute to turn and grin and shake hands" and a group of a few men "superior" to the others because they "have not kept themselves informed about the land company's activities…they see and know that it is a mess, yet they

[65] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land & Development Company," 7.

see no solution! They hate to face the conditions as they realy [sic] are; they are seeking and hope for some other way out. They have our profound sympathy." The three men still argued that they were on the correct side of the war, claiming they were being praised by unnamed politicians who "congratulated us on having successfully put Macbeth entirely and unconditionally out of the fast political campaign."[66] Given the quantity of Macbeth's work in the United States and Mexico, he was perhaps seen as a future political player, and the praise Stevens mentions may be from people who viewed Macbeth's work as an indication of a future career in politics.

If there was one difficulty that signaled the end of the Little Liberia community, it was the revelations around the legality of the land purchase for the Santa Clara and Vallecitos ranches. The two ranches were, in fact, not owned by the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. When the land was purchased, the original members of the board of directors – Hugh Macbeth, Theodore Troy, Owen Troy, James Littlejohn, Louis Bryant, A.J. Roberts, and R.W. Head – purchased the land in a trust agreement between the men and Ricardo Romero, who acted as trustee. As Stevens explained, the issue was that "Mr. Romero is these men's trustee and not the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's Trustee." They purchased the land through Ricardo Romero because "Mexican laws are so framed that no foreigner can hold clear title to land in domains of Mexico. Therefore for any American to acquire a piece of property in Mexico, he can only hold title through the offices of a trustee who must be a boni fide [sic] Mexican citizen." Stevens was correct in his assessment that, due to Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, only Mexican citizens could officially own land. The issue,

[66] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," June 17, 1927, 2.

then, is that Mr. Romero was the trustee for the *members* of the board of directors, not for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company as a whole or the board of directors as an entity. As Stevens remarked later in the same article, "the records show that these seven men are in reality, the sole owners of Santa Clara ranch and that up until the present time no agreement of trust has been negotiated between these men and the Land Company." Stevens, who was not part of the initial board of directors, knew this because Claudius Troy and James Littlejohn said they had never seen any agreement, so even if one had existed it would have been void without Troy and Littlejohn's signatures. This meant that "the Lower California Land Company does not own the Santa Clara ranch and the person or persons who have purchased land from the above mentioned company have simply bought for themselves a great 'white elephant' in plain English 'nothing.' If the Company owns nothing, how can they sell land to other people, and if they cannot secure title to the lands as American citizens, how can they furnish titles for other persons"?[67]

Stevens, Troy, and Littlejohn placed the blame squarely on Hugh Macbeth's shoulders for these land purchasing errors, stating that "the Company's attorney who handled the contract, and so thoroughly did he handle it that we have never seen or signed any contract. Our knowledge is not sufficient to swear as to who the contract was made, whether to the company or some private individual."[68] Months later, when talking about a portion of land, roughly 8,000 acres, Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy stated that "no records or papers or even testimony was given the auditor to even prove that the company holds any kind of a title or claim to these properties. The records show that eight men of whom seven are now

[67] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," 6.
[68] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," March 17, 1927, 3.

members of the Board of Directors of the company, bought this land personally nine years ago when they were first incorporated but the records do not show that these men have made any transfer or sale of this land to the company which has been for several years and is still selling stock to the public." A "War Declared" article claimed the land had been purchased for $89,000, and the company had raised $78,000 specifically for land costs. This same article stated the company still owed a balance of $22,000 on the property as of the beginning of June 1927, likely including interest and fees from ten years of ownership.[69] If President Calles looked to prevent further African Americans from coming into Mexico, and removing those who were already there, the land title situation might have been all he needed to end Little Liberia with one action.

The collapse of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was so public, and due to the company's mission was so racially charged, that some White people even felt the need to weigh in and offer their opinions on how the community should handle its infighting. Robert Fite, for instance, in a letter to the board of directors wrote, "How is it possible for a company to succeed when members of the Board of Directors accuse others of being thieves and selling out the Race? How can you expect other people to have confidence in your project when you yourself tell them that you are associated with a thief"?[70] Fite also remarked on his general displeasure at working with the community, writing "I wish to say that my experience in trying to help Los Angeles Colored people has been most disappointing," which Stevens analyzed "will only serve to show the Colored people of Los Angeles what a cheap white man thinks of them when they are a little slow in allowing him

[69] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower California Land & Development Company," 7.
[70] Stevens had what appears to be a colorful rebuttal, but unfortunately the available sources are illegible because the bottom of the page was damaged and poorly copied to microfilm.

to exploit them." From the pieces of the letter that were quoted in the "War Declared" article, it appears Fite was chastising the board of directors for accusing Macbeth, in part because it may prevent other people from joining the community, even though he himself mentions that he doesn't know if the accusations are true.[71] At this point, however, the organization was falling apart and close to a point of no return, so bringing in new members was less of a priority for Stevens, Littlejohn, and Troy than telling the truth. Fite's letter does show that the atmosphere was so public and volatile that the main White person in Los Angeles with connections to the community felt he needed to step in to explain to the all-Black board of directors how to run an African American social movement-focused business.

There were many reasons for Little Liberia's collapse, and there was no sole problem to blame for the community's demise. The sanatorium and health spa were never completed, and neither were the planned improved roads connecting the major hubs of northern Baja California, other than a good road to Ensenada, which was not completed until 1926. The land itself was not ideal for agriculture, particularly for the wheat crop that the community relied on so heavily. Changes in the local Baja California and federal government in Mexico, racial tensions, and U.S.-Mexico relations brought new policies that directly and indirectly affected Little Liberia. It is possible that one of the main community organizers had misled the board of directors, misused and possibly stole company funds, and lied about events in the community. A series of public articles and court cases revealed a fractured and disillusioned board of directors, unable and unwilling to resolve their differences. The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company had acquired about $78,000 in debt and was bankrupt by the end of 1927.

[71] J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared On Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, April 1, 1927, 2.

Chapter 5
"Ensenada's Lone Negro": James Littlejohn and the Continuing Importance of Little Liberia

Epilogue

James Littlejohn's experiences with Little Liberia shaped the rest of his life. After the community disbanded, James and Elizabeth Littlejohn remained in Baja California, and he became an important part of Ensenada life as "Ensenada's Lone Negro," as he was dubbed by *Ebony Magazine* in 1952.[1] *Ebony*'s five-page article about James Littlejohn described him as the "only Negro male in the hamlet of some 30,000, the lumbering, leathery-faced ex-pullman porter, a Mexican citizen for 24 years, is also one of its top businessmen and most popular figures." The Littlejohns obtained some of the community's farmland when Little Liberia folded, including 4,432 acres of Rancho Santa Clara. According to *Ebony*, "when none of the other members [of the Little Liberia board of directors] became Mexican citizens or remained in Mexico in later years, the land company was disbanded by law and Littlejohn found himself in full possession."[2] The *Ebony* article mentioned that local rumors claimed that Littlejohn "maneuvered his partners out of their shares in the ranch by well-known legal trick, the Mexican citizenship clause. Stories claim that he used his citizenship status to sway Mexican officials to give him full right to the land." But Littlejohn ignored the rumors, simply producing the certificate of legal ownership anytime the stories surfaced. Regardless of how he gained ownership, Littlejohn cared for the land for at least 34 years after the

[1] As of 1952, James and Elizabeth had been married for 47 years, and she was described as "his industrious wife" who was "his only partner in business." They had one daughter, who died at age 20. Therefore, Mr. Littlejohn was not a "lone Negro" in Ensenada, since his wife lived with him. Given gender politics at the time, it is unsurprising that *Ebony* largely ignored Mrs. Littlejohn's contributions, even though her husband praised her abilities.

[2] Theodore Troy did become a Mexican citizen, but he did not remain in Mexico, and it is possible that the illness that prevented him from continuing his position as President also prevented him from remaining in Mexico. This is the only time *Ebony* discussed other Little Liberia members, and there are no other details about when and how other Little Liberia members left Baja California.

community fell. He hired local laborers to help him care for livestock and tend the fruit orchards, primarily picking Bartlett pears and tending to cattle. Littlejohn operated a store for local workers, some of whom lived on the Santa Clara ranch. In 1940, the Littlejohns opened a motel, the seven-cabin James Littlejohn Motel that catered to African American tourists, as well as an American-style restaurant. The business expanded, and by 1960 the motel had grown to twenty-four cabins. Littlejohn's businesses grew with Ensenada, and his hotel expanded alongside Ensenada's development as a tourist destination for Americans, especially as the only African American-friendly business according to a *Negro Travelers' Green Book* in 1956.[3]

James and Elizabeth Littlejohn remained in Baja the rest of their lives as Mexican citizens, but they never abandoned their African American identity or their connections to Los Angeles. For instance, they read American newspapers to remain in touch with life north of the border, and he shopped at a store in Ensenada that stocked popular American clothing brands. James Littlejohn became an elder in the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, and they attended service there regularly. They also traveled back to Los Angeles consistently for social functions, a trip that *Ebony* claimed anyone in Southern California looking for a vacation could make in a weekend. The Littlejohns lived within Little Liberia's basic premise. They remained connected to Los Angeles and kept their identity as African Americans, yet avoided the racism in the United States economy by living in Baja California.

[3] "Mexican Rancher," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 84–85; "Mexican Citizenship Gives Littlejohn Right To Ranch," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 87; "Rancher Likes America But Prefers to Live in Mexico," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 88; "Ensenada Rancher, Wife Visit City," *California Eagle*, September 8, 1960, 8; Wendell P. Alston, *The Negro Travelers' Green Book* (New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1956), 70, http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/greenbook.html. According to *Ebony Magazine*, the Littlejohn's "holdings [were] worth approximately $200,000," and that the Rancho Santa Clara was worth $500,000 on the American market in 1952. This included 250 Hereford and Durham cattle, 27 horses, and an unknown number of pigs. *Ebony* also noted that most Americans he served at the hotel were not White, and that his largest source of income was the hotel because of Ensenada's booming tourism industry.

Although he claimed that the weather initially attracted him to the area, James Littlejohn also stated, "I like the states….and have lots of friends there, but I enjoy most living in Mexico," in part, according to *Ebony*, because "in Mexico he has never had trouble because of his race."[4]

James Littlejohn spoke proudly of his connection to the local Ensenada community. He was an important person in the town, members of the public referred to him as a "good person," and he was also popular with local children, all likely reasons why the city chose him for the citizen of the year honor. He contributed to the town life in important ways, including actively participating as member of the Ensenada Chamber of Commerce for over twenty years. He was close friends with a town mayor, but Littlejohn insisted he stayed away from politics because he wanted to keep out of trouble.[5] Littlejohn was especially proud of his Mexican citizenship, and he emphasized that he chose to become a Mexican citizen, and was not pressured into becoming a citizen as some people thought. Littlejohn boasted that his official citizenship papers themselves were unique, since they were signed by President Plutarco Elías Calles, who *Ebony* described as "one of the country's most colorful presidents, unyielding…who waged a personal war to keep American capital out of the country." Ironically, President Calles signed the citizenship papers for someone who initially sought to bring American capital into the country, but who by doing so found his place in Ensenada and became a staple of life there.[6]

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[4] "Mexican Citizenship Gives Littlejohn Right To Ranch," 87; "Rancher Likes America But Prefers to Live in Mexico," 88.

[5] Littlejohn was friends with ex-Mayor Julio Dunn. Dunn supported Littlejohn, for instance, when he threatened to call out militia to evict squatters from Ranch Santa Clara when the title was in dispute. But it appears Littlejohn did not publicly involve himself with Dunn's political affairs outside of receiving Dunn's support on property-related issues.

[6] "Mexican Rancher," 85; "Rancher Likes America But Prefers to Live in Mexico," 88.

Littlejohn was not the only Little Liberia member who remained connected to Mexico. For instance, in 1934, Hugh Macbeth and his wife met with former President of Mexico General Pascual Ortiz Rubio while in San Diego.[7] Macbeth formed the Association for International Good Will, a good neighbor organization primarily run by Mexicans. At the time of Macbeth's death in 1956, the organization's leaders planned to create a world peace center in the Santa Clara Valley in Baja California where Little Liberia once stood. To facilitate their work across the border, Macbeth and other Association for International Good Will leaders planned to create a superhighway from San Diego to the southern tip of Baja California. They reportedly had official approval from the Mexican government for the facility and the highway. Macbeth continued to look and think globally for opportunities to advocate for social change. He also founded the Society of Truth and Justice and United Races of the World, and was general counsel for the Utopian Society of America. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed Macbeth to a position in the consulate in Los Angeles for the Republic of Liberia in 1936, and he held the position for five years.[8] Hugh Macbeth remained active in the African American community in Los Angeles as well, including fighting the American Legion to allow Black boxers to fight at the Hollywood Legion Stadium and challenging segregation and restrictive covenants in court.

Macbeth also continued his cross-racial organizing in other ways. He is most well-known for fighting against Japanese American internment during World War II. Macbeth organized support in Los Angeles to end internment and fight for reparations, counseled

[7] Thelma S. Hardon, "Los Angeles," *Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1934, A6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Defender (1910-1975).
[8] Although the original sources claim Macbeth was the consul, that position is normally held by a Liberian appointed by the Liberian government. It is more likely that Macbeth was given a similarly important position within the consulate, meant for American citizens.

Japanese American draft resisters, joined the Japanese American Citizens League, and attempted to meet with President Roosevelt to advocate for an end to all internment. Macbeth authored one of the briefs for *Fred Korematsu v. United States* in 1944, the Supreme Court case that decided the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066, which ordered Japanese American internment. He was the primary lawyer on the lower court case that eventually became *Oyama v. California*, the Supreme Court case that ended the enforcement of the Alien Land Act, which particularly targeted Japanese and prevented people who were ineligible for American citizenship from owning land, setting a precedent that lawyers later used to argue against racial segregation. Macbeth's importance to the Japanese American community was recognized in a commemoration at the 2013 Manzanar Pilgrimage.[9] Although J.H. Stevens remarked in 1927 that Little Liberia, with Macbeth, "a great race and political leader…acting as chief councilor and adviser" should not have "been allowed to drift into such a complete and uncompromising 'mess'," and largely blamed Macbeth for the community's collapse, it appears that Macbeth's image and reputation remained largely untarnished by Little Liberia's fall.[10]

Like Hugh Macbeth, Charlotta Bass and Theodore Troy remained involved in Los Angeles activism. Theodore Troy, after moving back to Los Angeles, kept contact with Charlotta Bass and remained active in organizing in Black Los Angeles. In her memoirs, Charlotta Bass mentioned that Theodore Troy was part of a group of "noble pioneers" whose "spirits, too, were dedicated to the ideals of true freedom and brotherhood," and who shared

[9] "Death Claims Veteran Atty. Hugh Macbeth," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 25, 1956, A1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Baltimore Afro-American; Greg Robinson, *The Great Unknown: Japanese American Sketches*, 1 edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 143, 146–47.
[10] J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 11, 1927, 6.

her "hopes and ambitions to build a great city in which they had a stake for themselves and posterity."[11] Charlotta Bass became the most active and accomplished Little Liberia activist on a local and a national scale after the community folded. Bass continued her position as the editor and publisher of the *California Eagle* for decades, often discussing and lobbying for local and national social justice causes in the paper. She challenged employment-related discrimination, including leading and sitting on labor councils, and lobbying for unemployed African American workers in the Great Depression. In the 1930s, she transplanted Chicago's "Don't Spend Where You Can't Work" movement to Los Angeles, insisting Blacks boycott businesses that refused to hire African Americans. She also continued her work with the Los Angeles NAACP fighting these and other instances of racism, especially inequality targeting African Americans. Bass gained national attention for her continuing fight against restrictive housing covenants when, after local organizing failed to enact significant change, she brought the issue to the California Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court, which eventually led to a 1948 ruling declaring state enforcement of restrictive covenants unconstitutional. In 1951, Bass sold the *California Eagle* and began her campaign as the nominee for Vice President on the Progressive Party ticket. After her unsuccessful political campaign, she continued to speak publicly and fight for African Americans and labor rights for the rest of her life.[12]

The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company did not achieve the social or economic goals that the community's creators laid out in 1918, nor the more all-encompassing changes championed by the International Community Welfare League in 1922

[11] Charlotta A Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C.A. Bass, 1960), 197–98, https://issuu.com/toussaint2/docs/forty_years_-_memoirs_from_the_page_7e8ee99e4d534e.
[12] Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 103–6.

and 1923. James and Elizabeth Littlejohn were the only Little Liberia members who made Mexico their home and lived as African Americans in Mexico, connected to Los Angeles through society, politics, and economics, but physically separate from the United States in an act of self-liberation. However, many Little Liberia organizers built on their organizing experience, business, political, and social connections, and ideological goals after Little Liberia fell. Some of their work after 1928 continued in the spirit of the community. Their time organizing and supporting Little Liberia was a small, but significant, piece of a much larger life of community organizing, and the experience certainly impacted their lives in later years.

Conclusion

This account of Little Liberia's history, first and foremost, illuminates an important intersection in African American history, Black studies, borderlands history and studies, migration and immigration history, and Mexican history. It provides a unique context for the history of Latin American and African American activism. Little Liberia's history highlights how, even in a small community in Baja California, economic, social, and political worlds in the United States and Mexico were intertwined in a way that affected individual citizens and communities in both nations. This historical understanding is crucial to our conception of the history of both countries, as well as the people within them.

I told this history mainly in a chronological order that reflects the story of the community as the general public, especially from Los Angeles, encountered it. For instance, rather than discussing the drought in Baja California in Chapter 3, where the information fit chronologically, I did so in Chapter 4, where I discussed the community's end, when most of the public became aware of water troubles. I did this for two main reasons. First, from a practical perspective, the fall of the community involved many moving parts, so laying the groundwork in manageable pieces meant a higher likelihood of a more complete understanding of the history. Second, theoretically, by engaging with the story in the way everyday citizens did, we are more open to thinking of the community's opportunities, possibilities, and realities as its members, and the general public, became aware of developments during the community's life. Instead of projecting our own assumptions as to why the community failed or why Black Angelenos initially created Little Liberia, based on the community's fall, we instead can attempt to consider the movement within its own time. This is critical for Little Liberia, especially as an African American social movement in the

early twentieth century, given the history of movements in the United States for the rest of the century.

For social movements, scholars often begin discussion and analysis based on the movement's results because there is an assumption that the most important lesson can be derived from the movement's outcome. For instance, if a social movement was unsuccessful, then the failure itself is often the primary source of analysis. Perhaps Little Liberia's history has been relatively untold for many years because it is not a story of success in the traditional sense. Racial dynamics in the United States remained largely unchanged, White people did not look at Black business or the Black community in a positive light because the community did not alter United States markets, and no continent-wide multiracial coalition formed to take down White supremacy. As a Black business venture, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development failed to make a profit, in part because the company faced challenges similar to most other Black businesses in the early twentieth century.

But the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company gave African Americans and Mexicans in Baja California the opportunity to work together to enact social change for their respective societies. These African Americans existed in this complicated and often-precarious position that, in some ways, parallels the experiences of people of color in the United States and Mexico in the present. This form of telling of the community's existence embraces the possibilities of multiethnic communities and cross-border movements as an option for social change, as well as considering the difficulties and challenges that this type of movement presents.[13]

[13] This form of narration also gestures toward the uncertainty of social movements in the current moment, in 2018, where simply having a dream for a better future for people of color is often attacked. The experiences of Little Liberia community members, particularly those from Oklahoma, has an eerie similarity to current-day

There are many questions left unanswered in the history of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Scholars who study marginalized groups in the United States know this struggle all too well. Even though many Little Liberia community members were wealthy, that did not prevent the erasure of their history. For example, although the *California Eagle* was one of the most prominent African American newspapers at the time, it was the leading Black newspaper in the American West, and its editor later ran for Vice President, only two microfilm copies of the newspaper from 1917 to 1928 have survived; both have significant damage and missing pages. Many archives in Los Angeles have done excellent work in recovering and archiving as much African American history as possible, including some sources connected to Little Liberia's history, but only so much work can be done now to preserve that which has already been destroyed.

The struggle continues to preserve what historical sources remain. For instance, passionate African Americans in Okmulgee have been fighting for years to prevent demolition of historic buildings vital to African American history, and some buildings already on the National Register of Historic Places are in dire need of repair and maintenance. Terri Myers, in *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men*, states that a few buildings, including some structures in the Key Block, could be nominated for addition to the register, especially "not only because Creek Freedmen were among its earliest residents and their presence may have encouraged subsequent black settlement in the town, but because several of the first black residential additions were carved from their allotments and many of the extant historic buildings associated with Okmulgee's black residents were built by

movements, especially the importance of imagining and articulating a possible future, which often is a driving force when fighting for equality when living in an extremely hostile environment, locally and nationally.

Freedmen or their descendants."[14] With the addition of Little Liberia's history, these buildings are important because they tell a story that leads up to and includes African American interest in Mexico, especially how Oklahomans looked to Mexico as a possible location for advancement after the Tulsa Race War.[15] These buildings and their related histories connect Oklahoma, and Okmulgee specifically, to U.S.-Mexico border history, Black history in the American West, and multiracial international organizing movements in the first half of the twentieth century. These buildings are, as Myers argues, "legacies of the significant impact of Okmulgee's early black citizens on the architectural fabric of the city." They are also part of the larger fabric of Black history in North America that includes conversations about the border and international movements that connect African Americans to current-day conversations about U.S.-Mexico border politics, including immigration of people, businesses, and products crossing the border in both directions.[16] It is my hope that this research will help to protect the remaining buildings, although those with power and money often trump those with passion. Like the history of the Tulsa Race War, Little Liberia's history, and the larger unique conversations it reveals, has been largely hidden as much because of decades of systemic racism as because of present-day politics.

Most of the people in this history do not appear in any national archives in the United States, although they can be found fleetingly in archives in Mexico City. As in the United States, Little Liberia's records are largely missing from local archives in Baja California, but for an unrelated reason. Although it appears that the Cristero War in Mexico, a struggle for

[14] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929* (Okmulgee, Oklahoma: City of Okmulgee Historic Preservation Committee, 1991), 2.
[15] History is written in buildings, in architecture, and in physical spaces. If history is present in the physical landscape, then that space is a reminder of that history's existence, and can work toward preventing its erasure.
[16] Terri Myers, *From Creek Freedmen to Oklahoma Oil Men: Okmulgee's Black Heritage and Architectural Legacy, 1878-1929*, 2.

power between the national government and the Catholic Church, did not have much of an impact on the Little Liberia community during its tenure, it is likely that the war reduced our potential access to knowledge about the community and its relations with local residents in Ensenada and the Guadalupe Valley. During the Cristero War, many churches, at that time repositories for local records and many official documents, were burned or ransacked, and during the process countless documents were lost. Many archives in the Ensenada area do not contain documents prior to the Cristero War and Baja California Norte's admission to Mexico as a territory.[17] Baja California's peripheral status in Mexico in the early 1900s also contributed to this absence. I believe Little Liberia's history needs to include the voices of Mexicans with connections to the community, especially people in Valle Guadalupe and Ensenada, but as of this writing those voices seem to be few and far between in the archival record.[18]

One obvious fact in Little Liberia's history that I have not discussed, due to missing sources, is the number of African Americans who moved to community lands in Baja California. This is simply due to lack of information. I have searched high and low for Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company records, but I have not found any. It is likely they no longer exist. Baja California census data during this time are vague and unreliable. Community organizers purchased the land through a third party, therefore local land ownership records, if they did exist, would likely not provide the needed information to

[17] This is based on brief phone and in-person conversations with archivists at archives in Ensenada, Tijuana, and Mexicali.

[18] As of this writing there has not been any significant contact with residents of the area that remember hearing stories of the community or its impact. There are rumors and whisperings of descendants living in the area, but so far they have not surfaced. The Littlejohns only had one child, and she died at age twenty and did not have any children of her own. It is my hope that future versions of this monograph can include oral history components from either side of the border.

determine how many African Americans rented land. If border crossing data did surface, it is likely that the numbers would not indicate new migrants versus returning community members, and may not distinguish Little Liberia community members from other African Americans traveling across the border, if race was even recorded.[19] Because there is no concrete data, I hesitate to estimate how many African Americans lived on company lands or bought company stock. As Chapter 4 indicates, company statements that included facts about the community are likely inflated or misleading. For instance, in March 1921, the U.N.I.A. reported, via Little Liberia organizers, that at least four hundred African Americans had joined the Little Liberia community, with another thirty arriving from North Carolina in mid-April of the same year. Although this information still originated with Little Liberia organizers, this number is more likely to be close to accurate than others because it is being reported by an outside source. It is also possible that the U.N.I.A., as an outside organization, did not have correct information, and the numbers could be much lower.[20] At least forty community members, stock holders, and organizers were mentioned by name in various publications. If these numbers are to be believed, and considering that the community continued for years after 1921 and may have had some turnover, there could have been as many as six hundred African Americans who lived in this Baja California settlement at one time or another. There were likely hundreds more who bought community stock. But, without community records or border crossing data cross-referenced with landowner

[19] I have found some immigration records in Mexico City for African Americans traveling to Baja California during this time. However, there are only a handful of records, and some well-known community members do not have entries, so these documents are not comprehensive. For instance, the Troy family appears in the records, as does James Littlejohn, but Elizabeth Littlejohn and the Massey family does not.
[20] Marcus Garvey and Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. III: September 1920-August 1921* (University of California Press, 1984), 279; "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," *California Eagle*, October 12, 1921, 1.

information, it is difficult to determine how many African Americans in fact moved to Baja California.

An equally important question is why these numbers matter. Would we consider the community differently if one thousand African Americans moved to Baja California versus five hundred? Or two hundred? At what point is a community successful? At what point is it a failure? Why does this binary matter? I have, at this point, refrained from speculating about the number of community members, stockholders, and visitors, not only because I am reticent to make claims based on unsubstantiated data, but also because of this traditional value judgement placed on social movements. Little Liberia's importance is not attached to the themes and meanings of accomplishment and disappointment. One reason Black studies and African American history scholars are interested in many other movements that occurred in this same time frame – the creation of all-Black agricultural communities, the U.N.I.A., Pan-Africanism, uplift movements, even the classical debate of W.E.B. Du Bois against Booker T. Washington – is not because any of these movements were necessarily more prosperous or numerous than others, but because they show a gamut of possibilities that African Americans envisioned for advancement. The variety of possibilities demonstrates a community using its assortment of talents and strengths to attempt to fight for a better future, and the Little Liberia community project is a movement that fits within the realm of many of these projects. Little Liberia stands on its own not because it lasted for a decade, not because it fell after that decade, and not because of some other quantifiable data that can help measure impact in quantitative terms. Little Liberia's history highlights the capacity that the African American community had to dream beyond their current boundaries, to connect across borders, and to connect to another community of people fighting against similar

problems. As Robin D.G. Kelley asserts in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* this type of imagining in the Black community has the capacity to transform society.[21]

My telling of the Little Liberia history did not discuss the gendered dynamic of the community, not out of ignorance of the impact that gender had Black life at the time, but rather due to a lack of information about gender dynamics within the community. Most histories of large Black movements, especially in the early 1900s, tend to focus on the male leaders of the movements, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Colonel Allen Allensworth, and Edward P. McCabe. Sometimes scholars discuss women, such as Ida B. Wells and Charlotta Bass, but they are often seen as exceptions to the rule of Black masculinity as the main identifier for Black movement leaders at the time. Women were vital to Black organizing in the early twentieth century, but they were often left out of public view. Some gendered language in the movement points to this public focus, since articles about Little Liberia discuss being a "full man" in Mexico. However, "man" and "men" were used as equivalents to "person" and "people" in some cases, and some women responded to these calls to action, so it is unclear whether community members were inherently ignoring women, or simply following the grammatical convention at the time. Considering Charlotta Bass wrote some of these pieces, it is likely that the articles were using common language associated with movements at the time, not specifically excluding women. Although women played a vital part in organizing, in male-dominated societies in the United States and Mexico in the 1910s and 1920s, the hard work of women of color was not publicly

[21] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, New Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

recognized; having polite and confident male leaders also played into respectability politics. In Little Liberia's history, a few female voices do emerge in the documents, although they are rare. Charlotta Bass' efforts, and the role of the *California Eagle*, were vital. In addition, the community organizers consistently argued for the importance of bringing families to Baja California, and the women who moved to Baja California were as pivotal to any possible community success as the men. It is unsurprising that many of the sources for this history focus on the men as the primary leaders for the community; it would be equally unsurprising if hereto undiscovered sources discussed more in depth the hard work of women in the movement. It is certain that women were essential to the community's existence, even if gender politics at the time mean that their contributions were often kept in shadow. There is much work to be done, still, in discussing the work of women and non-binary folks in Black organizing in the early twentieth century, and it is my hope that more histories of Black organizing outside of the male sphere in the early twentieth century will emerge.

Even though there are a number of pieces of information connected to Little Liberia's story that remains obscured, the community's history as it is known is vitally important to our understanding of a variety of topics, most importantly the experiences of African Americans in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Neil Foley's *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* touches on the experiences of Black people in the Texas borderlands, and is one of the main works that integrates African Americans into borderlands history.[22] However, it is primarily interested in looking at African Americans in a borderlands space that is defined by its relationship to the U.S. South, U.S. West, U.S.

[22] Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, New Ed edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Midwest, and Mexican North. The U.S. South, in borderlands histories like *The White Scourge* that take place in spaces like Texas and farther east, is the focal point for understanding the Black experience because people of all races were involved in racial systems influenced by Southern racism and Jim Crow. Little Liberia's history and historical context, however, is impacted by power struggles inherent in bordered spaces further West, including capitalist expansion, colonialism and imperialism, and more complex and diverse racial systems. This dissertation challenges readers to think about the Black experience in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in a region that has no clear ties to the U.S. South, and with peoples whose relationship with race in the United States is influenced greatly by the American West, as well as national ideologies and class dynamics.

Of the many structures visible in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, imperialism's impact on Little Liberia's history is the clearest and most pronounced. Not only did Hugh Macbeth and members of the International Community Welfare League use language and actions that connected them to American imperialism in Mexico, but United States-Mexico relations, especially those rooted in American business in Mexico, contributed to the community's fall. The Mexican government's strong response to American land ownership in the late 1920s, including expropriation of American-owned Mexican land, evolved from decades of American attempts at controlling Mexico through business. Some aspects of the Mexican Revolution, and laws in the 1917 Constitution, were direct responses to this imperialism, although the Mexican government's explicit use of these laws varied over time. For instance, although Presidents Obregón and Calles expropriated American land, President Lázaro Cárdenas is the most well-known in Mexican history for land reform. Cárdenas created ejidos, or collective agrarian communities, including a substantial reform movement in Baja

California. In 1938, he nationalized Mexico's oil industry, purchasing all foreign-owned oil lands, including those in areas like Tampico that that J.B. Key and other Little Liberia investors were interested in purchasing. President Calles' actions towards Little Liberia members, especially his unsuccessful attempt to expropriate the land, were not just the motives of one person, but also part of a longer history of American imperialism and Mexican response. Historians of Mexico disagree on the most important moment of Mexican resistance to American policies, especially for land reform, especially because Cárdenas built on decades of more subtle intervention in American ownership. President Calles' expropriation of American land, and the lack of American government response to this land seizure, likely formed the building blocks President Cárdenas used to nationalize Mexican oil.[23] Due to the time of Little Liberia's fall, it is possible that the lands in the Santa Clara Valley were one of the first, although unsuccessful, attempts at American land expropriation. Given Calles' racial opinions, as mentioned in previous chapters, it is unsurprising that he would chose an African American community as a primary target. Given racial dynamics at the time, it is unsurprising that the American government did not challenge Calles' ruling. If Little Liberia lands were some of the first expropriated American-owned properties under the Calles administration, then the lack of response by the American government to protect an African American community in Baja may have planted the seeds for Cárdenas' actions a decade later.

The relationship between the State of California and Baja California was especially important in understanding U.S.-Mexico relations, especially American imperialism.

[23] This lack of response on the United States side was due to a number of factors, including international politics around the rise of fascism leading into World War II. Later, the United States needed an ally in the war effort, especially for oil, which also influenced the United States government response to Mexican land policies. Cárdenas' policies and timing were influenced by these issues as well.

Scholars including Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, in *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands*, have identified the importance of understanding this connection to larger U.S.-Mexico politics and regional life.[24] For instance, as John Dwyer indicates in *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, although there was expropriation of Mexican-owned land alongside American-owned land in other parts of Mexico, in Baja California only foreign-owned land was expropriated. This was, in part, due to local resentment about Americanization in the border region, as well as the large increase in people from Asia settling in Baja.[25] Therefore, expropriation in Baja California was a tool to Mexicanize the area, fight American imperialism, regain control over Mexican land, and create a definitive separation between Baja California Norte (which became a separate territory from Baja California Sur in 1930 and became a Mexican state in 1952) and the State of California. During this same time, there is a shift in American views of the separation between the State of California and Baja California. In 1917, when Little Liberia began, many Americans sought to control Baja California, either through filibustering schemes, military invasion, or payment. California historians, including Kevin Starr, have noted Californians' interest in uniting with their southern neighbor. By time Little Liberia fell, however, Californians were no longer viewing the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as an amorphous space, but rather as a definitive physical separation between the two countries. Although Little Liberia organizers were Black, and White men often led filibustering schemes, and Little Liberia organizers drew on their own experience as African Americans when thinking about the border, their

[24] Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016).
[25] John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008).

imaginings of a semi-porous border space may also be an indication of the greater shift from envisioning the U.S.-Mexico border as a flexible region to a physical border location demarcating a solid separation between countries.

Little Liberia organizers, though, also articulated a borderlands region that moved beyond the traditional California-Baja California divide, and rather conceived of the borderlands as a region of possibilities that was less about a physical space, and more about a theoretical separation. The division between the United States and Mexico would allow individual members to live outside national racial barriers in their everyday lives in Mexico, but could still alter national ideologies in the United States. The triangle connecting Los Angeles, the Santa Clara Valley, and Okmulgee reflected a more complicated view of international and local dynamics. Often the story of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is about Mexican migration into the United States, but Little Liberia members saw Mexico, not the United States, as the land of dreams and opportunity.[26] These Oklahomans looked to Baja California for advancement, not to the State of California. Some Mexicans and African Americans viewed each other as possible allies, economically and socially. In the modern era, historians often discuss the importance of industrialization as a tool of advancement, but in this case business leaders and activists looked to agriculture in an underdeveloped region of Mexico for economic and ideological growth.

African Americans, however, stopped looking to Mexico as an area of advancement, and it is highly possible that Little Liberia's demise, and the events surrounding it, contributed to this shift. In 1929, the *Chicago Defender* noted that Mexican immigration

[26] Globally, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Latin America was a more popular immigrant destination than the United States.

officials asked American authorities not to give Black people permission to cross the border. In 1932 and 1934, *California Eagle* articles claimed that the Mexican government changed immigration laws to make African American immigration into Mexico all but impossible. The *Eagle* articles may indicate a larger shift in Los Angeles, away from thinking about the California-Baja California Norte border region as a beneficial business opportunity for African Americans. According to Arnold Shankman, in *The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935*, by 1935 all conversations in the Black community about moving to Mexico had ended, and most African American newspapers were not willing to admit they had endorsed Black immigration to Mexico.[27]

Even though many African Americas no longer looked to Mexico as a possible location for opportunity and advancement shortly after Little Liberia ended, the fact that Oklahomans looked to Mexico in the 1920s can have a drastic impact on the interpretation of the history of the Tulsa region in the decades after the Tulsa Race War. Although a deafening silence descended upon Tulsa and the surrounding region after the Tulsa Race War, Little Liberia's history and the existence of members, organizers, and stockholders from Oklahoma amplifies the actions Black Oklahomans took despite, and possibly because of, the attack on their community. Terri Myers notes that it is difficult to tell the impact of the Tulsa riots on surrounding areas like Okmulgee. Some people who lived in Tulsa and lived through the riots moved to surrounding towns, like Okmulgee, after the riots. It is this influx, and the general feeling after the Tulsa Race War, that could have led to additional segregation in these towns – more defined segregation appeared in Okmulgee after 1920, for instance.

[27] Arnold Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 45–46.

Black Oklahomans' involvement in Little Liberia provides an additional piece of information about Black life after the violence. Some Black Oklahomans continued to fight locally for their rights, but others sought connections with African Americans elsewhere, such as Los Angeles, and with other people, including Mexicans, in order to fight the injustices of White supremacy that destroyed one of their most well-known towns. Some people from Los Angeles, like Hugh Macbeth, sought out activists in Oklahoma shortly after the events in Tulsa. This suggests that the Tulsa Race War did not isolate Black Oklahomans from the rest of the country, and that African Americans from Oklahoma and the rest of the country actively sought out connections with each other despite the violence and intimidation in Oklahoma.

Many of these African Americans have been left out of Oklahoma history altogether, or left out of their own regional histories. For instance, *The History of Okmulgee County Oklahoma*, written by the Heritage Society of America and the Okmulgee Historical Society, which is almost 1,500 pages long, hardly discusses any of the members of the Little Liberia community, even though many of them were well-known businesspeople, and some of the wealthiest in the county. J.B. Key, any members of the Key family, and Key's oil business are never mentioned.[28] In the popular "Images of America" series book *Okmulgee,* in the chapter "Oklahoma Statehood and the Oil Boom Years 1907-1929," Black people are barely mentioned or pictured.[29] The Okmulgee Chamber of Commerce, starting in Fall 2003, distributed a pamphlet for a Black Heritage Tour of historic buildings, "financed in part with Federal Funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior." Some

[28] Heritage Society of America and Okmulgee Historical Society, *History of Okmulgee County, Oklahoma* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Historical Enterprises, Incorporated, 1985).
[29] Beth Kieffer, *Okmulgee* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2016).

homes and buildings connected to Little Liberia members were included, but the Chamber of Commerce no longer distributes the pamphlet, in part because some of the buildings are in poor shape.[30] The brochure mentions that the buildings show the legacy of Okmulgee's Black citizens. Little Liberia's history reinforces the fact that these Black Okmulgee citizens were not only important to local history and life, but also nationally.

For these Black Oklahomans, and for all members of the Little Liberia community, their history explains that, whether as Black people in the United States or as African Americans living abroad, there is and was no universal African American identity, nor was there an overarching strategy for improving the experiences of African Americans long term. Some of the Little Liberia organizers from Oklahoma were Afro-Creek descendants and identified as African American, especially when in Mexico. This isn't the case for all Black Americans in Mexico. As Karl Jacoby notes in *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire*, William Ellis explored his racial fluidity when he crossed physical and cultural borders.[31] Little Liberia members instead reified their Black and their African American identity when moving to Mexico because they claimed their African American identity. Even though he felt a kinship with people in Baja California and chose to become a Mexican citizen and live the rest of his life in Mexico, James Littlejohn was unapologetically an African American connected to Los Angeles. Rather than identifying a clear approach to fighting for African American equality and advancement, or a

[30] City of Okmulgee, "Okmulgee Oklahoma Black Heritage Tour Brochure" (Map Ink, Normal, Oklahoma, Fall 2003). This information is based on a conversation I had with a secretary at the Chamber of Commerce, who was generous enough to scan part of the pamphlet for me, and allow me to take color photos of the parts of the pamphlet that included color photographs of the buildings as of Fall 2003. The Chamber of Commerce only has one copy of the pamphlet left. It is unclear whether the program was discontinued based on lack of funding, as well as the poor condition of the buildings, but it is likely that it was not discontinued based on interest, since there is only one well-worn copy of the pamphlet left.

[31] Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016).

unifying identity formation, Little Liberia's story instead indicates that, although there were some shared experiences and ideas within the Black community in the United States, this same community included a multitude of experiences and opportunities, but these regional differences did not prevent African Americans from organizing on a national scale.

Because Little Liberia's history has been largely ignored or absent for so long, and so much of the chain of events is still hidden, I hesitate to claim a single unified interpretation for this narrative. The beauty of Little Liberia's story is not in its simplicity – the existence of an African American agricultural community in Baja California – but in its complexity. Little Liberia's complicated history is equally familiar and foreign, both commonplace and unique. For example, African Americans looking to Mexico for freedom and equality were more ordinary than most historians on either side of the border have admitted. But even within this common occurrence, Little Liberia's brand of social movement is distinctive. By deeming Little Liberia extraordinary, however, we run the risk of assuming this type of community could not exist unless it was in this very specific set of circumstances. By labeling Little Liberia as an abnormality, we run the risk of marginalizing the very movement that, simply by its existence, celebrated the unbounded possibilities that African Americans perceived for change. Little Liberia was not atypical, but rather an indication of Black social movement possibilities. Like many other movements, however, Little Liberia organizers uncovered divisions as well as opportunities. In later years the community sought to connect with people of color throughout the continent, but at the same time did not fully comprehend the differing existences and realities for different marginalized peoples in the United States and Mexico, including anti-Asian sentiment, colorism, and indigenous land rights. This is not uncommon within the history of social movements – the Suffragettes largely ignored, and

actively fought against, women of color; the Black Freedom Movement and the Feminist Movement pushed aside the LGBT community; and movements seeking to do away with racism often downplay the severity of anti-Semitism, to name a few. In the Little Liberia movement, the language of imperialism and class divisions in profit-driven activism, in a country with a history of outside interference via economic and military imperialism, seeped into a movement that sought to fight White supremacy, one of the byproducts and nutrients for this form of imperialism. Although Little Liberia used a unique combination of ideas in formulating its agenda, the complicated nature of its history is common for social movements.

Little Liberia's history is important beyond its historical implications. Members of the Black diaspora, particularly African Americans, are assumed to be historically absent from U.S.-Mexico borderlands history with a few well-known exceptions, namely buffalo soldiers and enslaved peoples self-emancipating through migration to Mexico. The histories that do discuss Black people in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands region rarely do so within the context of immigration, borderlands, and bordered spaces; the fields of Black studies and borderlands studies rarely intersect when discussing North America. Although this is an area with clear room for growth, the absence of these conversations has consequences beyond a dearth of scholarship at this intersection. There is a common assumption that, because of lack of historical legacy, Black people do not have a clear reason to take part in present-day discussions about the U.S.-Mexico border or immigration concerns. Little Liberia is not the only instance of Black people immigrating to or from the United States, and it is not a rare occurrence of Black engagement with the U.S.-Mexico border. People of African descent have been immigrating to the United States since before the country was founded, whether

voluntarily or forced, including present-day Black immigration from around the globe. Uneasiness surrounding immigration policing, and the intersections and parallels with police brutality and the increasing militarization of law enforcement, concern Black people in the United States as well as people of Latin American descent.[32] Highlighting the history of Black people in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, including Little Liberia community members, places African Americans squarely within these historical and timely conversations.

The United States is in an era of border militarization and increased cross-border migration while people of color, particularly African Americans, are still subject to injustices based on inequality in the social, political, educational, and economic systems in the United States. In addition, increased migration to the United States from Central America, through Mexico, is in part due to the history of United States social and economic policies in Latin America; some of the roots of these policies can be seen in Little Liberia's history. Although more heightened and visible in 2018 compared to the prior decade, these experiences are not new. Little Liberia's absence from memory is owed, in part, to this institutional legacy. Programs that study these issues, especially ones with a large focus on non-White, cis-gendered, heterosexual men, have been under attack for years, and disciplines in the humanities, like history, that encourage a critical interpretation of our present and our past face monetary crises because funds are increasingly diverted to STEM research. Little Liberia's history, its deafening silence for decades, and the erasure of sources that could have illuminated the community's history, all indicate the vital importance of programs that study

[32] These intersections have now been acknowledged in the creation of a new term and a new field, Crimmigration, which primarily discusses the overlap between criminal law and immigration law.

people of color and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Little Liberia's story is a lesson, and a reminder, that the answers to present-day issues are likely found in the past.