

SACRAMENTO AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE HISTORY PROJECT HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
[22020]

PREPARED FOR



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FINAL



Cover image: Members of Adah Chapter #1, Order of the Eastern Star (1924). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/115.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

African Americans have played an integral role in the history of Sacramento since its founding in the mid-19th century. To date, their contributions have been significantly under recognized. In 2022, the City of Sacramento received a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) to fund the development of a historic context statement (HCS) to document the African American experience in Sacramento from roughly the era of the Gold Rush to the 1980s. This HCS highlights Sacramento's Black history and begins to rectify historical disparities through the identification of community sites, persons, and events that are of historic importance to Sacramento's African American community. It is not intended as a comprehensive history of this community, which has been and continues to be documented by community members and scholars. Instead, this context statement draws upon new and existing research, including oral histories with members of the community, and re-frames it through the lens of the physical geography and built environment, that is, the places, sites, buildings, structures, and incidents that tell the story of that legacy.

This context begins with an overview of the migration and settlement history of Sacramento's African American community from approximately the founding of the first non-native settlement in 1839 to the 1980s. The overview is intended to provide a broad foundation for the thematic sections that follow, which include Businesses and Commercial Development; Religion and Spirituality; Civic Engagement, Activism, and the Fight for Civil Rights; and Arts, Culture, and Recreation. A list of potentially eligible properties related to each theme, as well as guidelines for assessing the eligibility of properties for historic designation is included in the Appendices. Due to limited available research and time constraints tied to the project's grant funding, not all possible themes associated with Sacramento's African American community were examined. Suggestions for future research to expand this HCS are included in the "Preservation Goals and Policies" section of the Appendices.

Sacramento's African American community remained small compared to the city's overall population through the 19th century but grew noticeably in the early 20th century and after World War II. This growth coincided with the periods during which the City of Sacramento experienced massive population spikes and expansive residential and commercial development beyond its initial settlement areas. These periods of growth parallel the First and Second Great Migrations during which African American individuals and families moved from the South to the Northeast and Western United States in search of economic opportunities, homes, and community. In Sacramento, African Americans settled in homes and apartments, found jobs

and started businesses, attended schools and churches, and socialized and supported each other through clubs and organizations. Anchored by two of the oldest African American churches on the West Coast, St. Andrew's AME and Shiloh Baptist Church, the African American community formed a vibrant community that tirelessly supported and provided for its own.

As African American populations grew in cities throughout California, racism and acts of discrimination increased. The pervasive use of restrictive housing covenants allowed developers to create white residential and commercial enclaves and deny homeownership and commercial investment to people of color. Government-sanctioned redlining policies obstructed loans and mortgages to homeowners and prospective buyers in older multiracial and multiethnic neighborhoods. Sacramento was no different. Over the course of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, discriminatory housing practices concentrated the majority of African American residents in Sacramento's West End neighborhood, along with other marginalized racial and ethnic groups.

The responses of Sacramento's Black residents to pervasive racism reflected the broader aims of nationwide civil rights movements to strategically address widespread discrimination throughout California and across the United States during the 19th and much of the 20th centuries. In the face of direct and indirect discrimination, Sacramento's African American residents worked to uplift their community and achieve greater racial equality through the efforts of their churches, community clubs and organizations, and countless individuals. In spite of the Black community's relatively small size compared to Sacramento's overall population and that of other larger California cities, it had an outsized impact on the fight to broaden the rights of African Americans throughout California, thanks in part to its proximity to the State Capitol and the wide-ranging influence of several powerful community leaders. Sacramento's African American community achieved major victories in the fight for equal rights, particularly during periods of heightened civil rights activity across the country in the lead up to the Civil War during the 1850s, the Reconstruction era of the 1860s and 1870s, and again during the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s.

In many cities across the United States, a large number of the historic places associated with Black communities are no longer extant. Widespread patterns of government-sanctioned destruction through financial disinvestment, post-World War II redevelopment, and retaliatory racial actions, such as the 1921 Tulsa Massacre and 1960s urban rioting, decimated the Black urban landscape and cultural assets associated with Black commercial and residential areas. In Sacramento, the redevelopment of the West End neighborhood in the mid-20th century

destroyed large swaths of Sacramento’s downtown, including the homes, businesses, churches, and other significant gathering places of the African American community. As a result, very few buildings related to the history of the local African American community before the 1950s survive. The majority of those that remain standing from this early period are located in outlying neighborhoods where African Americans were able to settle in the early 20th century due to a lack of restrictive housing covenants, such as Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, and some areas at the periphery of the central city, including Highland Park and Southside Park. The vast majority of surviving buildings and sites with ties to local African American history were built or used by members of the community after the 1950s and are located in the neighborhoods previously mentioned, as well as recent postwar developments, such as Glen Elder and Meadowview.

As there are so few places remaining, built resources associated with the history of African Americans before the 1950s may possess greater historic importance because of their rarity. The guidelines for historic designation recognize this and offer a broad basis for determining significance. Throughout this document, properties that are known to survive are labeled as “extant.” Properties that do not include this label have either been demolished or require more research to determine their status.

Members of the public, the academic community, and City staff will continue to research the history of Sacramento’s African American community, leading to future discoveries, new observations, and more detailed analyses of this history. Historic context statements can be living documents, and with time and as more information is revealed, this context may be amended and expanded to add more themes, time periods, and details to recognize the continued contributions of the African American community to Sacramento’s development.

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND & GOALS

The Sacramento African American Experience History Project (AAE History Project) is one step in the documentation and recognition of the contributions of the African American community to the City of Sacramento. Beginning in 2016, City Preservation staff sought grant funding from the National Park Service to build upon prior research on the civil rights advocacy efforts of Sacramento’s Black churches. Efforts to increase community awareness of African American social justice concerns arising from the police-involved death of Stephon Clark (2018) and the murder of George Floyd (2020) sparked a series of City initiatives, including, among others, the

formalization of the City's Office of Diversity and Equity, Implicit Bias training for management staff, and Office of Preservation staff efforts to advance landmark designations for properties with strong Black historical associations in the hope that such history, once highlighted, has the potential to enlighten and advance inclusivity in Sacramento's civic life. The historical analysis being conducted as part of the AAE History Project may inform the study of racism and discrimination against African Americans undertaken by the Office of the Mayor and by the California Reparations Task Force.

Inspired by the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, City of Sacramento staff submitted and was awarded a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund (AACHAF). Since it was first established in November 2017, the AACHAF has supported approximately 200 projects across the United States. The stated purpose of such grants is "to preserve and protect places that have been overlooked in American history and represent centuries of African American activism, achievement and resilience," against the backdrop of America's complex, often difficult past. The goal is to achieve "equity-driven outcomes that benefit all Americans."¹

Sacramento African American Experience History Project Mission Statement

PROJECT GOALS

- Acknowledge racial injustice using history
- Document Black history in an accurate narrative
- Recognize historic properties important to the Black community
- Challenge misinformation about the Black experience
- Record Black voices for future generations

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Celebrate Black history embedded in neighborhoods and places
- Lay a foundation for future grant-funded projects
- Leave the community with a toolkit for understanding the past
- Preserve places and stories important to the Black community
- Help advance City and statewide efforts to address racial injustice

¹ "African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund," National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://savingplaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage>.

Historic Context Statement

As part of the effort to accomplish these goals and outcomes, the Sacramento AAE History Project provides a historic context statement (HCS) as a foundation for the identification of significant individuals, key events, buildings, and sites associated with Sacramento's African American community. An HCS is a specialized historic study. As defined by the National Park Service, it is an organizational structure for the interpretation of history that groups information about historic properties sharing a common theme, a common geographical area, and a common time period. That is, it is the history of the physical development of a place during a certain time and organized by themes and patterns.

In this case, the Sacramento AAE History Project HCS focuses on the history of the African American community (theme) in Sacramento (geographic area) from the 19th century through 1980 (time period) during the time people of African descent are known to have lived here.

While the African American community extended across the greater Sacramento area, the focus of this context is within the current boundaries of the City of Sacramento. The end date, approximately 40 years ago, was selected to allow for sufficient time and distance from the events described to adequately understand their impact in the context of the past. However, in several instances, individuals and events that occurred during the 1980s or later have been included, which were identified by members of the Black community as being of particularly high significance and worthy of inclusion.

It is important to note that the HCS is not a comprehensive history of Sacramento or the African American community's contributions to the city. It does not include all themes, potentially significant built resources, or individuals related to the city's African American history. Instead, it provides a general overview of the community's presence in Sacramento and the forces that shaped its growth, settlement, and activities over a specific period of time.

Project Team

Page & Turnbull, in partnership with Damany M. Fisher, Ph.D, and Caru Bowns, Ph.D, AICP, prepared this HCS. Page & Turnbull is a California-based architecture and planning firm that has been dedicated to historic preservation since 1973. With its headquarters in San Francisco, the firm has had a local office in Sacramento since 2006. Page & Turnbull staff responsible for this project includes Principal-in-Charge Ruth Todd, FAIA, AICP, Project Manager/Associate Cultural Resources Planner Clare Flynn, with support from Associate Principals Christina Dikas

and Flora Chou, all of whom meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards in Historic Architecture, Architectural History, and/or History. Cultural Resources Planner Walker Shores also contributed to the project.

Damany M. Fisher, Ph.D. is a native of Sacramento, California. A graduate of the University of California, Davis with a B.A. degree in History, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in History from the University of California, Berkeley, his program of research investigates the origins of residential segregation in Sacramento, California and the fair housing movement of the 1950s and 1960s. A dedicated educator, Damany has built a career working in service of students in secondary and higher education settings. He was tenured as an Instructor of History at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California, and served as a member of the teaching faculty at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. These divergent experiences have helped shape Damany's teaching philosophy and have greatly influenced current research interests in the areas of restorative justice and teacher education.

Caru Bowns is a planner certified by the AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) and a practicing landscape designer. A graduate of the University of California, Berkeley with masters degrees in Landscape Architecture and City and Regional Planning, her Ph.D. is in Geography from the University of California, Davis. As a planner, she has worked with communities in Sacramento, the Bay Area, Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River Valley, the Middle East, and Brazil, engaging residents in community revitalization efforts. Caru has also taught planning and design as a faculty member at Pennsylvania State University and as adjunct faculty at California State University, Sacramento, American River College, and UC Davis. Beginning in 2014, she served as a member of the City of Sacramento Preservation Commission, until she termed out in 2021. She has also served as a director of Sacramento Heritage Inc. Bowns lived in Davis between 1990 and 2003 and became a Sacramento resident in 2012.

Coordination of the project was undertaken by City of Sacramento Preservation Director Sean deCourcy, retired Preservation Director Carson Anderson, and Preservation Planner Henry Fues. Public outreach efforts were led by the City's Community Engagement Manager Lynette Hall, with assistance from her mother Ella Hall Kelly. Kelly Fong Rivas, Racial Equity Advisor to the Mayor's Office, also helped plan and coordinate public outreach and community meetings for the project. Considerable day-to-day assistance on the project was provided by City of Sacramento interns Kristen Ross and Ashlee Green. Additionally, members of the Preservation Commission and local subject matter experts, including Clarence Caesar and Susheel Bibbs, were of great support to the project. Shiloh Baptist Church Deacon Dan Fontenot worked

tirelessly to document the oral histories of Shiloh's oldest members. Finally, Jay King and Former Police Chief Daniel Hahn assisted as valuable community liaisons early in the public outreach efforts for the project.

Special acknowledgement goes to the long-term Sacramento residents who shared their personal and family memories through oral histories, emails, phone calls, and other methods of communication. Their assistance has added invaluable insight and perspective to create a document that provides a more accurate account of the history of Sacramento's African American community.

Methodology & Public Outreach

The Historic Context Statement is organized thematically, beginning with an overview of the history of the migration and settlement of Sacramento's African American community from the 19th century to 1980. The overview is intended to provide the necessary background information for the thematic discussions that follow. The organization and content of this HCS are consistent with federal, state, and local guidelines for developing historic contexts and registering historic properties. These include the guidelines found in the following publications:

- National Park Service: National Register Bulletin No. 15 *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*
- National Register Bulletin No. 16A *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*
- National Register Bulletin No. 16B *How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*
- National Register Bulletin No. 24 *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning*
- State of California, Office of Historic Preservation "Instructions for Recording Historical Resources"
- California Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2006-2010
- Marie Nelson, State of California, Office of Historic Preservation, "Writing Historic Contexts"
- State of California, Office of Historic Preservation, "OHP Preferred Format for Historic Context Statements"

Numerous and varied sources of information were reviewed to create this report. Primary source documents that originated within the historical period include media accounts, federal census records, official reports and records, records of building construction, personal narratives, maps and photographs. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of Sacramento

from 1895, 1915, and 1950 illustrate lot-by-lot, building-by-building development during much of the period under discussion. Of particular importance are oral histories and biographies written by family members that are archived at the Center for Sacramento History or which were newly conducted purposely for this project. These oral histories and biographies provide a first-hand account of the lives and experiences of individual members of Sacramento's African American community and are an invaluable resource for continued research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough review of existing written academic research and popular histories related to the history of African Americans in Sacramento, as well as the state of California, formed the basis of the HCS. Principal literary sources that informed this study include Clarence Caesar's unpublished master's thesis, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980" (1985), Damany M. Fisher's doctoral dissertation, "Far From Utopia: Race, Housing, and the Fight to End Residential Segregation in Sacramento, 1900-1980" (2008), David Covin's book, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement: Activity and Beliefs in Sacramento, 1970-2000* (2009), and William Burg's book, *Sacramento Renaissance: Art, Music & Activism in California's Capital City* (2013). Research term papers completed by students at California State University, Sacramento in 2021 were also referenced, as well as biographies completed by family members of local African American residents, such as Clarissa Hundley Wildy's master's dissertation, "Mend A Broken Chain: The Story of My Grandfather" (1973) and Eva Rutland's autobiography, *When We Were Colored: A Mother's Story* (2007).

Recent historic context statements for African American communities in other California cities were also referenced to provide general background information about African Americans in California. These include the SurveyLA context, *African American History of Los Angeles*, as well as contexts recently completed for Santa Barbara and Altadena.

Other literary sources that informed this HCS include journal and magazine articles, such as Clarence Caesar's journal article in *California History*, "The Historical Demographics of Sacramento's Black Community, 1848-1900" (1996) and the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans' "Interim Report" (June 2022). Landmark nominations and historic resource evaluations for the City of Sacramento were additional sources.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

The following is a summary of the archival research that informed the HCS:

- Historic photographs, city directories, city and subdivision maps, historic burial records, exhibitions, oral histories, archival collections donated by members of the African American community, and other research materials at the Center for Sacramento History
- Online historic newspaper articles in the *Sacramento Bee*, *Sacramento Union*, *Sacramento Star*, and others at Newspapers.com
- Online newspaper articles from the *Sacramento Observer*
- Online map, aerial photograph, and historic photograph research from the Sacramento Public Library, Calisphere.org, and UC Santa Barbara's FrameFinder website,
- Archival materials held by the Shiloh Baptist Church, St. Andrews AME Church, and African American Museum and Library at Oakland
- United States federal census records, city directories, and other records held by Ancestry.com
- Photographs, booklets, pamphlets, and other materials provided by members of the public

City of Sacramento interns collected the addresses of Black-owned or -operated businesses from archival copies of the Negro Motorists Green Books and the United States federal census records, including Sacramento's population numbers by race available in printed tables from 1850 to 1980. Individual census records, available through Ancestry.com, were collected for the years 1850-1940 through a search by race; such electronic searches are inexact, and some records may not have been collected. For years in which there were more than 200 recorded African American residents, a sample of approximately 200 records was collected. The individual records for the 1950 census were released in early 2022 and were not searchable at the time research for the HCS was conducted.

It should be noted that questions asked at each decennial census change over time, as do terms and definitions. Not all information gathered in previous censuses continue to be asked in later censuses, such as homeownership or place of birth, and some years were not searchable by race.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ORAL HISTORIES

The City of Sacramento conducted an extensive public outreach program to inform and engage the local African American community in the project. Prior to the start of the project, the City coordinated with California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) professors Rebekkah Mulholland, Ty Smith, Mark Beason, and Bryan Larson to have students of the Public History program complete a series of term papers on topics related to the history of Sacramento's African American community, as well as oral histories with prominent, long-standing members of the community. In June 2022, the City invited project partners from the community to an initial project kickoff meeting in Oak Park. Based on public feedback from the meeting, the City initiated a wide-ranging effort to collect additional oral histories from members of the African American community, created a training video to provide guidance on how to conduct an oral interview, developed a dedicated website for members of the public to upload their oral histories, and embarked on an extensive community outreach campaign to raise awareness of the oral history project. The City held recording sessions with elders at the Shiloh Baptist Church and at a February community meeting at the Oak Park Community Center. City staff also conducted in-home recording sessions with individual community members on request. As the oral histories were completed and submitted, they were reviewed by City staff and Page & Turnbull, and relevant information was incorporated into the HCS. The oral histories will ultimately be archived in a collection at the Center for Sacramento History so that they can be freely accessed by the community and inform research for generations to come.

The City, with assistance from Page & Turnbull and consultant Caru Bowns, conducted a series of public meetings and workshops at various stages of the project to hear the opinions, suggestions, and recommendations of the community. The meetings were held throughout the city, alternating between neighborhoods where Black residents formed a large portion of the population historically, such as Oak Park, Meadowview, North Sacramento, and Del Paso Heights. Members of the project team also delivered presentations to students in the Sacramento State Public History program.

Organizations and individuals such as Shiloh Baptist Church, Williams Memorial Church of God in Christ, City Church of Sacramento, a coalition of Sacramento's retired Black police officers, the Greater Sacramento African American Genealogy Society, the Roberts Family Development Center, Dale McKinney, and others held meetings and workshops to promote the project and to collect oral histories.

The City's community outreach efforts were bolstered by a significant number of media announcements on television, local radio, and in newspapers. These served to amplify the City's social media postings and those of its community partners

Stipend Program

City staff recognized the need to compensate members of the community for their contributions to the project. To respond to this need, City staff partnered with Preservation Sacramento, with support from a supplemental grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to create a stipend program. The stipend program provided a total of \$10,000 in stipends to community members and organizations who contributed to the project.

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

In conjunction with the HCS, Page & Turnbull developed a Survey Methodology and Framework (SMF) to guide future survey work to identify and evaluate places with important historic associations to the local African American community. For each of the individual themes included in the HCS, a summary statement of significance, description of associated property types, eligibility standards, and integrity considerations were prepared. The SMF is included in the appendix of this document.

In April 2023, students in Sacramento State's Public History program were asked to contribute to the Sacramento African American Experience Project as part of their final class project. Each student was assigned a property that was identified in the HCS and considered potentially eligible for historic designation. Utilizing the SMF to guide their work, the students photographed the properties, conducted detailed historic research, and completed full historic evaluations of the properties. After they were completed, the final class submittals were delivered to the City. City staff subsequently peer reviewed the reports and prepared those for which properties had been found to be eligible historic resources for landmark designation on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources (Sacramento Register). To supplement the student's survey work, Sacramento State University identified additional grant monies to support Ella Cross, a student assistant, to document additional properties identified in the HCS as being potentially significant. Student interns with the City also evaluated and documented additional properties during the course of the project.



MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT

Circa 1839-1980

Photograph: Charles Nelson Gibson with family on the porch of their home, likely in the West End (address unknown, ca. 1880s). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/078.

OVERVIEW THEME: AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT IN SACRAMENTO, CA. 1839-1980

The African American presence in California traces back to the 18th century. As early as 1769, persons of African descent took part in Spanish military expeditions that occupied San Diego and Monterey. Settlers of mixed African-Mexican ancestry had been among the group that founded Los Angeles in 1781 and several held administrative positions in California during the late eighteenth and early 19th centuries. Others continued to settle in the Sacramento region throughout the early 19th century. In the 1830s, Black fur trader and entrepreneur James P. Beckwourth, via Missouri and Puebla, Colorado, made the first of several trips to the Sacramento region, utilizing a traditional Native American trail in the Sierra Nevada that became known to countless migrants to California as “Beckwourth Pass.” During the 1840s, William Alexander Leidesdorff, of Danish-African background, left the West Indies for Louisiana before settling in the village of Yerba Buena (now San Francisco), then part of Mexico, where he established a successful steamboat company, as well as the city’s first hotel. After becoming a Mexican citizen, Leidesdorff received a 35,0521-acre Mexican land grant on the south side of the American River. The land grant covered most of the land which later became the cities of Folsom and Rancho Cordova, directly to the east of Sacramento.² In addition to his land grant, Leidesdorff eventually acquired much of the land in San Francisco’s present-day financial district, becoming one of the wealthiest men in California, the country’s first Black millionaire, first Black U.S. diplomat as vice-consul to Mexico, and first Black elected official when he became a San Francisco city councilman and city treasurer. Leidesdorff’s steamship “Sitka” appears on the California State Seal.³

Early Settlement of African Americans, ca. 1850-1900

Blacks were well-represented among the thousands of gold-seekers who rushed to California soon after the discovery of gold at John Sutter’s mill in Coloma in 1848. Like other new arrivals at this time, Blacks also made their way to the “Mother Lode”—the area east of Sacramento where vast gold deposits were known to exist.⁴ During the Gold Rush, no fewer than 65 sites in the Mother Lode were given names, marking the presence of Black miners, including “Negro

² Jack D. Forbes, “The Early African Heritage in California,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, ed. Lawrence B. de Graaf and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001); Lonnie G. Bunch III, *Black Angelinos: The Afro American in Los Angeles, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum, 1988); Rudolph Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

³ James Reede, “Leidesdorff Narrative,” undated, sent via email to Carson Anderson, March 9, 2023; Sue Bailey Thurman, “William Alexander Leidesdorff,” *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco: Acme Publishing Co., 1952).

⁴ Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 50-52; James A. Fisher, “A History of the Political and Social Development of the Black Community in California, 1850-1950,” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1971), 9.

Hill” near Mormon Island and “Negro Bar,” near Folsom.⁵ By no means restricted to the Sacramento area, small Black enclaves took shape throughout northern California, including surrounding towns such as Marysville, Stockton, and Placerville.⁶

Resettlement in California’s “gold country” brought freedom and new opportunities, as well as hardship, for Black families. In 1849, Peter and Nancy Gooch were brought by their enslaver from Missouri to California to work in the goldfields. Unable to bring their three-year-old son, Andrew, with them, the couple was forced to leave him behind in Missouri. Although the couple obtained their freedom in 1850 and eventually amassed 320 acres of land, including the gold discovery site in Coloma, Nancy and Peter spent more than 20 years working to earn enough money to buy Andrew’s freedom and reunite their family.⁷ Their story reflects the complicated legacy that the Gold Rush left on many Black families. Even as racism and slavery persisted, enslaved and free Black people manifested resistance while pursuing human rights.

Sacramento, the gateway to California’s gold fields, attracted hundreds of African Americans, second only in the size of its Black population to San Francisco. Together, the two cities contained 80 percent of California’s African American inhabitants. The majority of the remaining 20 percent lived in the small towns and settlements of the Mother Lode.⁸ While many pursued mineral wealth, others sought economic opportunities by providing services to miners and travelers, such as operating barbershops, bath houses, and restaurants.

The growth of Sacramento’s African American community in the mid-19th century coincided with the overall flood of newcomers to the city during the Gold Rush and the years immediately following. By 1850, the year California was admitted to the Union, 191 Black individuals lived in Sacramento, representing roughly three percent of Sacramento’s population. City directories from the 1850s show a cluster of Black businesses and residences along 3rd Street and adjacent intersections during this period in what later became known as the West End. Generally, however, Black residents tended to share neighborhoods with other minority groups, such as the Chinese and Mexicans.⁹

⁵ David Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement: Activity and Beliefs in Sacramento, 1970-2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 16.

⁶ Clarence Caesar, “The Historical Demographics of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1848-1900,” *California History* 75, no. 3 (1996): 199-200.

⁷ Shirley Anne Wilson Moore, *Sweet Freedom’s Plains* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 160-162.

⁸ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 16.

⁹ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 2.

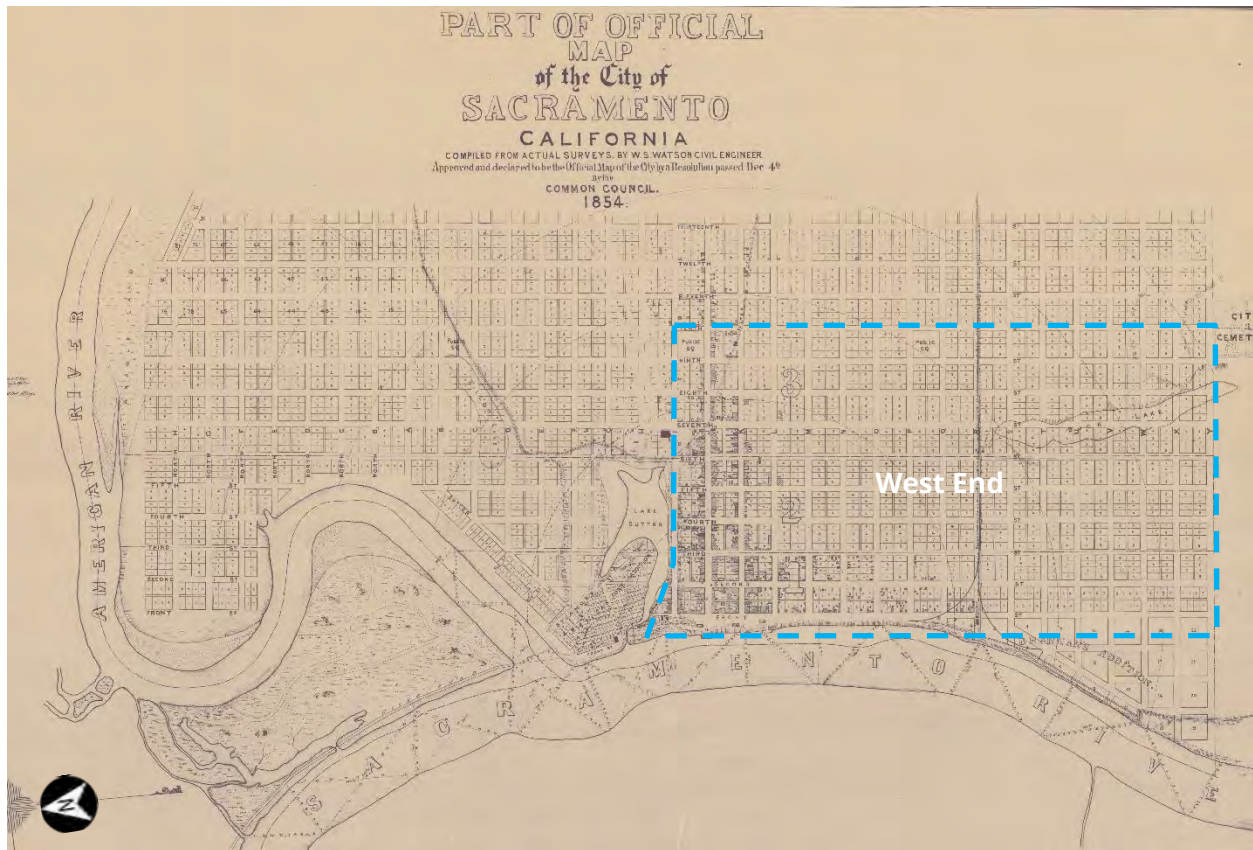


Figure 1. Map of Sacramento, showing the growth of the city along the waterfront of the Sacramento River and on the blocks to the east (1854). The approximate boundary of the West End is outlined with a dotted blue line. Source: Center for Sacramento History. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

Over the course of the 1850s, Sacramento’s population, including its Black community, continued to grow at a rapid pace, even as fires and floods threatened to destroy the fledgling city. The most devastating fire occurred in 1852 when 55 blocks of the city’s business district along the Sacramento River, approximately 70 percent of the city’s building stock, went up in smoke. Another fire in 1854 destroyed 12 city blocks. These conflagrations led to the reconstruction of much of the city using fireproof brick or stone.

In spite of these devastating events, Sacramento continued to grow and mature. In 1854, the city was selected as the permanent capital of the state of California, due to its growing population and advantageous location at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers.¹⁰ By 1860, 394 Black residents called Sacramento home.¹¹ Sacramento’s Black population had a relatively high level of parity between men and women, compared to some

¹⁰ Page & Turnbull, *Sacramento Historic District Plans*, 2019, 20.

¹¹ 1850-1860 United States Federal Censuses, Ancestry.com.

other ethnic groups, such as the Chinese community, which was primarily male at the time.¹² As a result, Black families contributed to the formation of a well-established Black community early in Sacramento's development.¹³

Sacramento functioned as an important social and cultural center for California's growing Black population. Into the pre-Civil War years, as slavery and racism constrained economic opportunities and social mobility of the state's Black residents, free Black communities grew, establishing their own institutions. In Sacramento, the social and spiritual life of the city's early Black community was enhanced in 1850 when the Methodist Church of Colored People of Sacramento City was founded. This church, soon to be named St. Andrews African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, became the first African American-controlled religious institution on the West Coast. A second church, Siloam (later renamed Shiloh) Baptist Church, followed in 1856, as well as social and fraternal organizations, such as the Philomathean Lodge in 1853 and its female adjunct, Adah Chapter No. 2 of the Order of the Eastern Star, in 1871.¹⁴

Following the initial fervor of gold discovery, the number of Black residents in Sacramento began to level out and became more insular and self-contained.¹⁵ The population grew at a slow but steady pace through the 1880s before declining at the end of the century. By 1890, the Black population had fallen from 455 in 1880 to 402 individuals, a reduction of almost 12 percent. The population hovered around 400 people through 1900, forming a little more than one percent of the total population. African Americans had few incentives to migrate to Sacramento in the late 19th century. Routine discriminatory practices kept most Black residents confined to menial work. Even educated and skilled African Americans found themselves mostly shut out of professional occupations. Black entrepreneurs, meanwhile, found it difficult to gain a strong foothold in the city, as a result of intense competition either from white businesses or from other ethnic groups. Those that did manage to thrive in business tended to provide personal services (i.e., barbershops and restaurants) that often catered to whites exclusively.¹⁶ By the late 1800s, white labor unions across California began to bar non-whites, particularly Chinese Americans but also Black individuals, from positions they had previously dominated, including positions in the hotel, hospitality, restaurant, and craft trade industries. With opportunities to support themselves dwindling, many Black residents left Sacramento in search of better paths to economic advancement elsewhere. The expansion of railroad connections to

¹² Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 59-60.

¹³ Cesar, "The Historical Demographics of Sacramento's Black Community," 208.

¹⁴ Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 103-4, Caesar, "The Historical Demographics of Sacramento's Black Community," 208-210.

¹⁵ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 16.

¹⁶ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 5.

Southern California cities and their subsequent growth made cities such as Los Angeles particularly attractive destinations for Black residents, due to a perception of greater job opportunities that could be found there. By 1890, Los Angeles had the largest Black population in California.¹⁷

TABLE 1: SACRAMENTO'S POPULATION FIGURES, 1850-1900

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
African American and Black Residents	191	394	418	455	401	402
Percent Change from Previous Decade	N/A	106.28%	6.09%	8.85%	-11.87%	0.25%
Total City Population	6,280	13,785	16,283	21,420	26,386	29,282
Percent of Total Population	3.04%	2.86%	2.57%	2.12%	1.52%	1.37%

Source: U.S. Census, 1850-1900.¹⁸

In spite of the growing hostility toward African Americans and other non-white residents, a distinct African American community emerged in Sacramento. While a sampling of addresses for Black residents recorded in the 1880s federal census indicates that the African American population was relatively spread out throughout the extent of the developed portions of the city through much of the 19th century, a similar sampling of Black residences recorded 20 years later in 1900 federal census data shows that by this time the local African American population began to be concentrated primarily in the West End. The West End was a multi-ethnic district that stretched roughly from the Sacramento River waterfront east to the Capitol on 10th Street, and from the Southern Pacific Railroad depot on the north to Y Street (now Broadway) on the south. J and K Streets emerged as Sacramento's main commercial streets, with the largest concentration of businesses on the blocks closest to the riverfront, including hotels, restaurants, saloons, grocers, barbers, and other businesses. Lumber and planing mills, box factories, and other industrial factories lined the Sacramento River waterfront to the west, while the workshops of the Southern Pacific Railroad were located to the north, on the south side of the American River.¹⁹ The proximity to numerous employment hubs and transportation attracted a diverse mix of residents to the area. As a result, the West End became home to a

¹⁷ Caesar, "The Historical Demographics of Sacramento's Black Community," 208-212.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882); *Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I – Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892); United States Census Office. "Statistics of Population." *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Census Reports, Volume 1, Population, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Office, 1901).

¹⁹ Fire insurance map, Sanborn-Peris Map Company, Sacramento, California, 1895, Library of Congress.

mixture of Black, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and white residents and businesses. The area served as the center for economic activity in the Sacramento region through World War II.²⁰

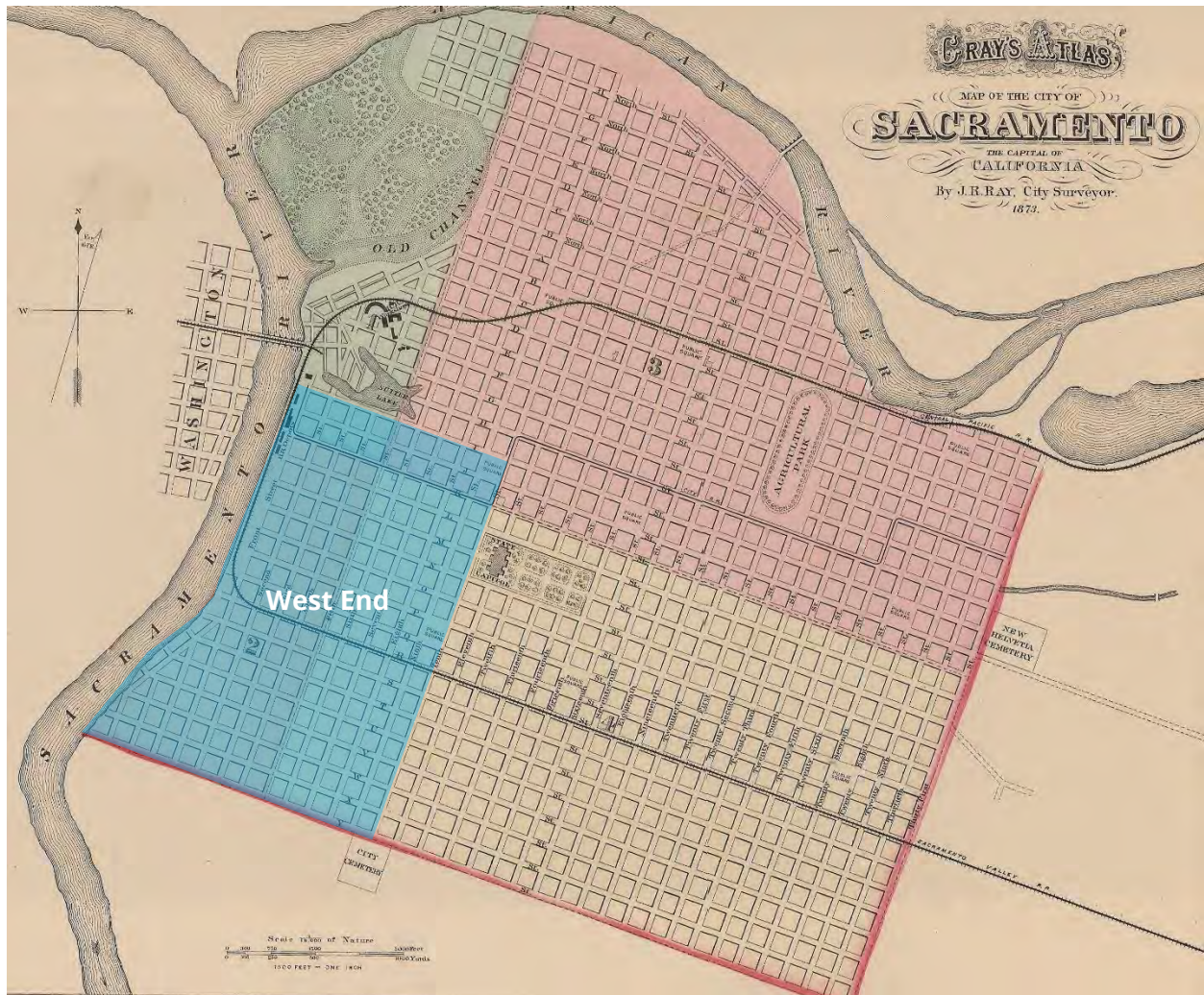


Figure 2. Map of Sacramento, showing the original city grid. The approximate location of the West End is shown in blue (1873). Source: Center for Sacramento History.

²⁰ Sacramento City Planning Commission, *Sacramento Urban Redevelopment: Existing Conditions in Blighted Conditions* (Sacramento, CA, 1950), 4-5.

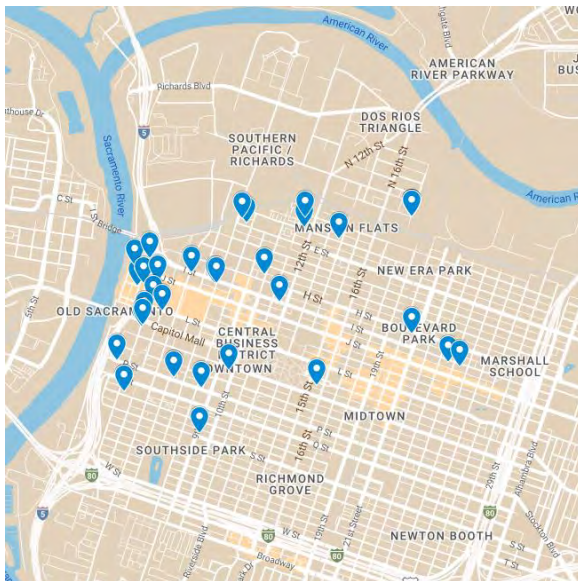


Figure 3. Map showing the distribution of Black residents in 1880, based on a sampling of addresses listed in the 1880 federal census data. Source: Google Maps, edited by Page & Turnbull.

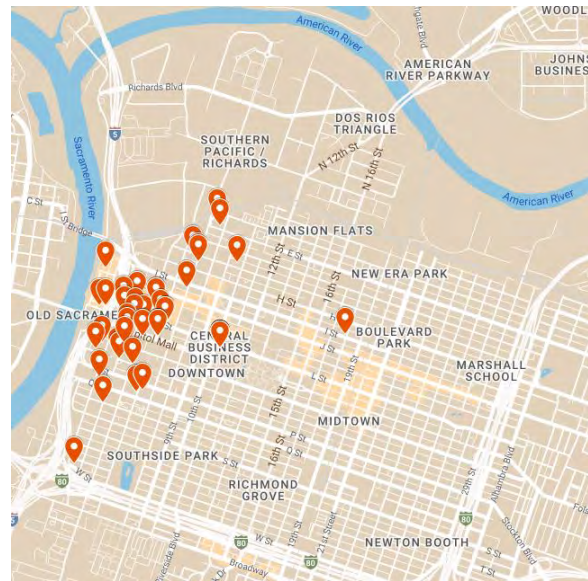


Figure 4. Map showing the distribution of Black residents in 1900, based on a sampling of addresses listed in the 1900 federal census. Source: Google Maps, edited by Page & Turnbull.

First Great Migration & The Early 20th Century, ca. 1900-1940

After the decline and stagnation of the city’s Black population in the late 19th century, it began to grow again in the first few decades of the 20th century. From 1900 to 1910, the number of Black residents jumped 20 percent to 486 individuals, then nearly 40 percent to 675 people in 1920. By 1930, the local Black population increased by another 60 percent to just over one-thousand residents for the first time. Although the Black population continued to consist of roughly one percent of Sacramento’s overall population through the first three decades of the 20th century, its growth during this period reflected a nationwide pattern of Black individuals leaving the South for cities in the Northeast and West in search of greater economic opportunities from around 1910 to 1940. Known as the First Great Migration, the mass migration of African Americans was in part an effort to escape from the racial violence and discrimination experienced in the Jim Crow-era South.²¹ The slow growth also reflected Sacramento’s physical expansion during this period. In 1911, the city annexed new territory for the first time since its founding, adding the neighborhoods of East Sacramento, Oak Park, Land Park, and Curtis Park into its boundaries.

²¹ “The Great Migration, (1910-1970),” National Archives, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration>.

TABLE 2: SACRAMENTO'S POPULATION FIGURES, 1910-1940

	1910	1920	1930	1940
African American and Black Residents	486	675	1,086	1,468
Percent Change from Previous Decade	20.90%	38.89%	60.89%	35.17%
Total City Population	44,696	65,908	93,750	105,958
Percent of Total Population	1.09%	1.02%	1.16%	1.39%

Source: U.S. Census, 1910-1940.²²



Figure 5. May Russell with her grandmother in front of their home, possibly 1419 4th Street in the West End (1914). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/081.

²² United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*. Volume II, Population 1910 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911); United States Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*. Volume III, Population 1920. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922); United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, "Population,"* Volume III, Part 1. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932); United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, "Population,"* Volume II: Characteristics of the Population (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943).

Although a few Black families had managed to acquire homes in other parts of the city by the early 1900s, most Blacks and other ethnic minorities still lived in the West End on the eve of World War II. This remained the case in spite of the city's growth after the turn of the century. The city's expansion siphoned off much of the area's largely white middle- and upper-class residents. Newer suburbs like Oak Park, Curtis Park, East Sacramento, Land Park, North Sacramento, and Del Paso Heights attracted working- and middle-class whites as a way out of the old city. Oak Park, Sacramento's first suburb located to the southeast of the original city grid, emerged as one of the preferred residential districts in the city shortly after its creation in 1887. Its relatively inexpensive homes, lower taxes, thriving businesses, and relative autonomy attracted thousands of white home seekers.

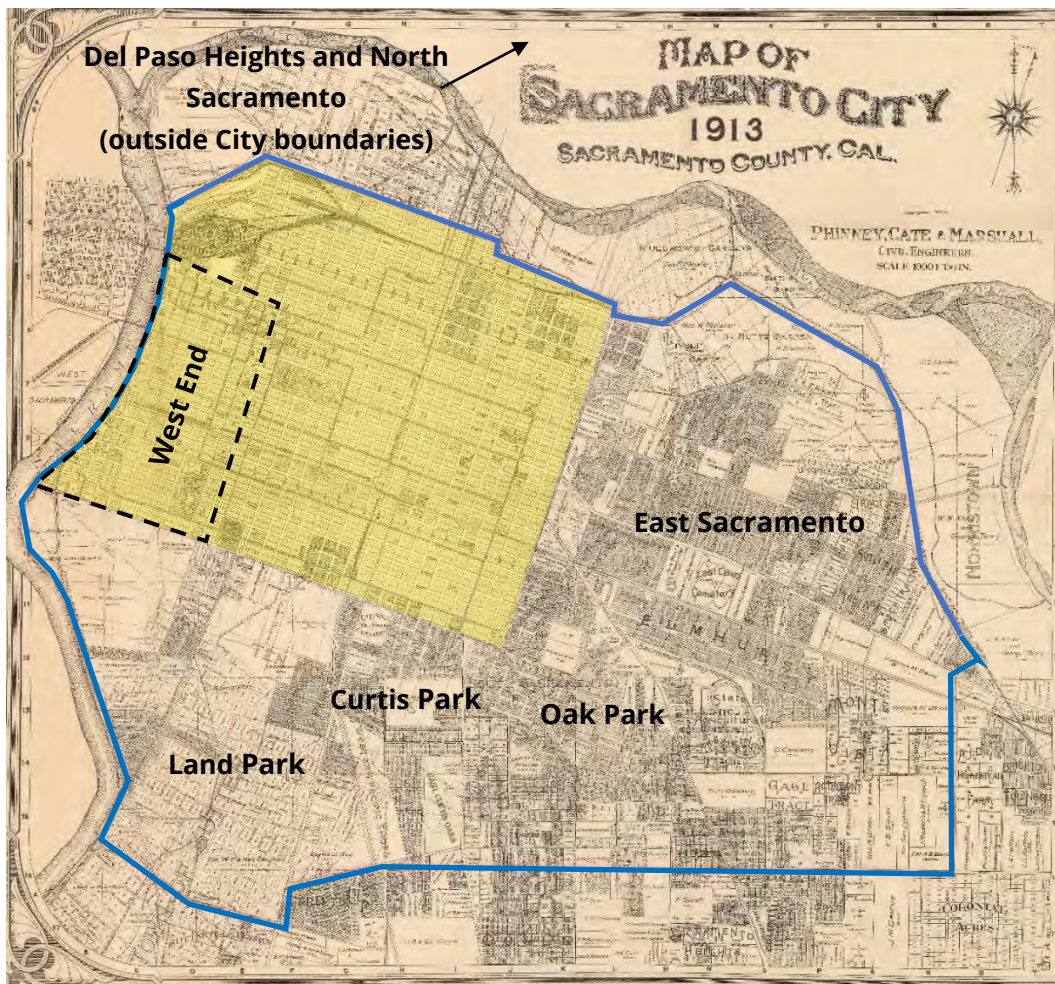


Figure 6. Map showing the boundaries of Sacramento (outlined in blue) and its subdivisions in 1913, following the annexation of new land in 1911. The original city boundaries are highlighted yellow. Source: Center for Sacramento History. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

Meanwhile, by the early 20th century, much of the West End had become what one observer described as “the quarter that people who made money moved away from.” Southern European and Asian immigrants poured into the West End, taking up residence in many of the neighborhood’s older homes. The continuous stream of migrant families into the West End put additional pressure on an area already dealing with overcrowding and an aging building stock. Speculators in the West End subdivided properties and constructed shanties in alleys that had previously been stables. They converted what were once opulent private homes into rentals, “flophouses,” flats, and boardinghouses.²³

Most African Americans and other ethnic minorities had to endure substandard housing in the West End due to intense housing discrimination. The rise of racial zoning and restrictive covenants coincided with the emergence of the modern city planning profession in the early 1900s.²⁴ Although zoning was introduced as a means of improving public health and safety by designating particular areas of a city for specific uses and densities, it became a tool for racial suppression. Fueled in part by the Great Migration of African Americans into cities, as well as the dramatic increase of Southern European immigrants to the United States, these public sector (racial zoning) and private sector (restrictive covenants included on property deeds) tools reflected the unfounded belief among members of the white community that homogenous neighborhoods – that is, communities of one race, ethnic group, religion, etc. – would remain peaceful if people of similar backgrounds lived together. As a result, cities across the United States stepped up efforts to segregate white and non-white residents, often leading to the containment of residents of color into urban slums.²⁵

Once the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against racial zoning ordinances in the 1917 *Buchanan v. Warley* decision, cities used their zoning authorities in more indirect ways to segregate neighborhoods.²⁶ Also as a result, restrictive covenants became more widespread, particularly as the 1920s saw a residential building boom across the country. Often placed on deeds by the private subdividing developer, restrictive covenants often listed “building restrictions” such as setback lines, minimum building cost, or prohibited uses like oil drilling, in addition to exclusions of African American, Asian American, Mexican American, Jewish, and other non-

²³ Steven Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 77.

²⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter and Susan Cianci Salvatore, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2021), 8-11; SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 41.

²⁵ Carson Anderson, “Historical Overview: The Civil Rights Effort to End Segregation in Housing in America, 1910-1960,” September 2022, 2-3.

²⁶ Lassiter and Salvatore, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 44-48.

white residents.²⁷ Italian and other Southern and Eastern European immigrants were sometimes included among that list, given the nativist, anti-immigration sentiments of the period. Some covenants had time limits, such as 20 to 50 years.

The national real estate industry supported and advocated for restrictive covenants in order to maintain homogenous neighborhoods, and thereby property values, by steering African Americans and people of color away from white neighborhoods.²⁸ In 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) Code of Ethics, Article 34 stated that “a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood ... members of any race or nationality ... whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.” This provision remained in effect until 1950. In spite of legal challenges, courts routinely maintained the constitutionality of covenants. In 1926, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld restrictive covenants in *Corrigan v. Buckley*. It would not be until 1948 when, in the landmark case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed itself and ruled enforcement of restrictive covenants unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the inclusion of restrictive covenants in property deeds persisted through the 1950s.²⁹

Sacramento became one of many cities to follow this trend. Restrictions became so widespread throughout the city that on April 13, 1928, the *Sacramento Bee* ran a special article in its real estate section dedicated to the issue. Citing a study on new subdivisions from the Institute for Research in Land Economics and Public Utilities, the *Bee* stated that,

...the man who buys a subdivision lot to-day looks to it carefully to see the deed to his lot limits him as to what he can build thereon in order that he may be spared a shack, factory, garage used as residence, or some other inappropriate building on the lot adjoining his property or at the corner of the block, and a more striking recent restriction, so he may be sure what the color and race of his next door neighbor will not be.³⁰

Outside the West End, many Sacramento neighborhoods – including Oak Park, Highland Park, Curtis Park, Land Park, East Sacramento, North Sacramento, and Hagginwood, among others – had restrictive covenants. Heilbron Oaks, one of the subdivisions in Curtis Park, provides a clear example of how these restrictions were used to exclude African Americans. A 1927 deed from

²⁷ *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 41.

²⁸ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 52.

²⁹ "Code of Ethics, National Association of Real Estate Boards, Article 34," *California Real Estate Magazine*, June, 1939; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 33-37.

³⁰ "Subdivision Trend Shows Lot Purchasers Demand Restriction," *Sacramento Bee*, April 13, 1928.

California Trust & Savings Bank to a Clarence Bovey declared that “no Negro, Japanese or Chinese, or any person of African or Mongolian descent shall own or occupy any part of said premises.” The deed made it clear that these restrictions were needed “for the mutual benefit and advantage of all of the purchasers of lots in Heilbron Oaks, and are intended to enhance the value of such adjoining property and increase its desirability for residence purposes.” All restrictions were legally binding for the next twenty-five years dating from April 25, 1923. If residents violated any terms of the agreement, “the title to said property” reverted back to the previous owner.

The North Sacramento communities of Woodlake and Norwood Acres also had race restrictive covenants. An article from the *Sacramento Bee* in 1938 reported that the Hagginwood district, which had no restrictive covenants when it was first subdivided in 1911, attempted to enact them in 1939 when the Hagginwood Improvement Club sponsored a campaign to enact “building and racial restrictions” in the district. Presumably, increased Black migration into Del Paso Heights gave impetus to such efforts.³¹

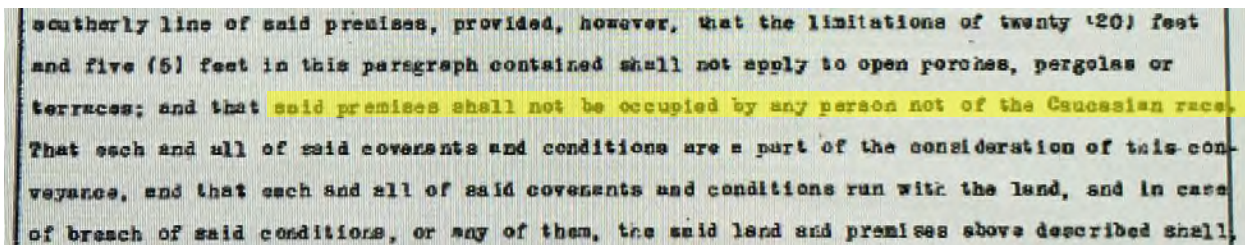


Figure 7. Portion of a 1923 property deed containing a restrictive covenant (highlighted in yellow). Source: Sacramento County Clerk-Recorder's office.

As a result of these discriminatory practices, even the city's handful of educated professionals had few options outside the West End. For instance, Dr. Roscoe Brewer, the city's first African American dentist, moved to Sacramento from Berkeley during the 1930s to establish his practice. Local realtors refused to show him vacancies in predominantly white sections in the city. Faced with no other option, Dr. Brewer's eventually set up his practice on Seventh Street in the West End. This scenario became routine for Black Sacramentans.³²

Federal housing policies also contributed to this pattern of racial segregation and discrimination. During the Great Depression, Sacramento was among the cities in the United

³¹ California Trust & Savings Bank to Clarence E. Bovey, Sacramento County Recorder's Office, Deed Book, 200; "North Sacramento Has Growth," *Sacramento Bee*, September 1, 1938.

³² *A Long Look Back: A Special Look at the History of Sacramento and the Black Citizens Who Played a Major Role in That History*, ed. Terris McMahon (Sacramento, California: William H. Lee, 1973), 64.

States that was mapped by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). Established in 1933 as a New Deal program to refinance mortgages and grant low-interest loans to prevent foreclosures, HOLC established an appraisal system for rating neighborhoods for their potential “security risk” when underwriting such loans.³³ Among the factors considered were topographic features, the age and mix of the housing stock, and most crucially, the racial makeup of an area. Those with homogenous attributes in many factors received higher ratings than racially/ ethnically mixed and mixed-residential-density areas. The resulting HOLC-produced, color-coded maps, with blue and green for newer, mainly single-family, and almost exclusively white neighborhoods, and yellow and red for older, multi-family, and racially and ethnically mixed communities, became the origin of the term “redlining.” HOLC’s appraisal system was adopted by another New Deal program, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which became the most important program for home ownership in the nation and helped to fuel the postwar suburban housing boom.³⁴ Created by the National Housing Act of 1934, the FHA revolutionized home financing by providing mortgage insurance and other incentives that revived the nation’s construction industry, providing millions of Americans the opportunity to purchase homes, typically in new suburbs. Redlining denied residents in diverse, inner-city neighborhoods, such as the West End, access to credit and insurance that could be used to improve housing and economic opportunities for residents and contributed to a decline in the condition of these neighborhoods.³⁵

In Sacramento, the Sacramento County Housing Authority identified the West End and the bordering Southside community – two neighborhoods with large African American, Mexican, and Asian populations – as having the city’s worst housing and living arrangements. The Housing Authority descriptions of these areas included wording such as “overcrowded;” “home is old and hazardous;” “poor sanitation facilities;” “house in need of major repairs;” “unfit for human habitation;” and “appearances and surroundings not conducive to decent living.” Indeed, a 1940 City Housing Authority report identified the worst block as located between 2nd and 3rd Streets, S and T Streets, an area that consisted of “mostly negroes and Mexicans.” The same document also mentioned that African Americans and Mexicans paid “excessive [rent] for [the] amount of accommodation.”³⁶

³³ SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 44.

³⁴ SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 45.

³⁵ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 159.

³⁶ Sacramento County Housing Authority, “Report of Survey of Sub-Standard Dwellings in a Portion of the County of Sacramento Made to the Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the County of Sacramento by the Executive Director,” ed. Sacramento County Housing Authority (Sacramento County Housing Authority, 1940).

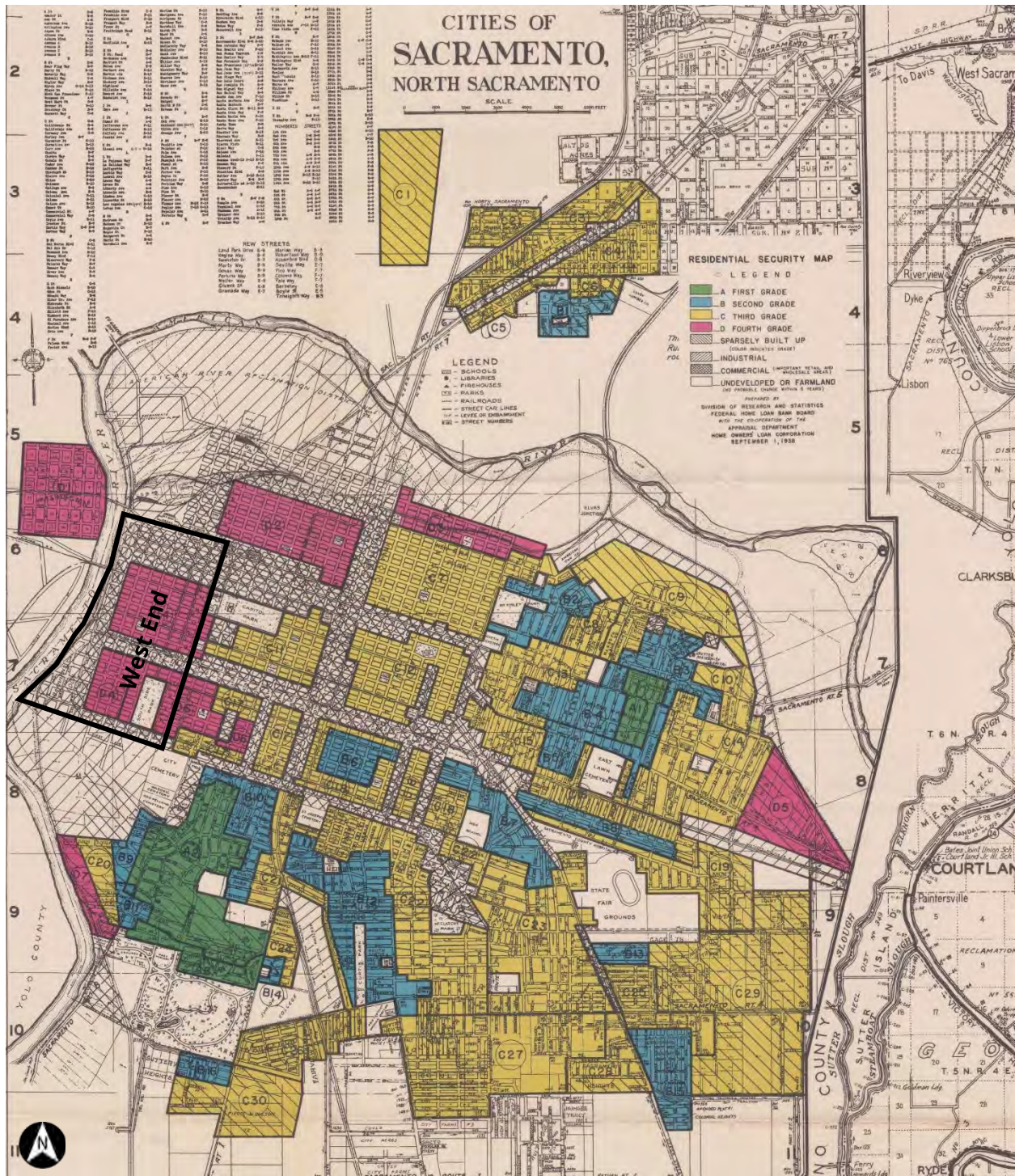


Figure 8. HOLC redlining map of Sacramento. The approximate location of the West End is outlined in black (1938). Source: Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America.

SETTLEMENT OUTSIDE THE WEST END

While neighborhoods annexed into Sacramento in 1911 – such as Curtis Park, Land Park, and East Sacramento – remained effectively off-limits to African American settlement in the early 20th century, a few African Americans were able to find housing in unrestricted pockets outside the West End in the early 20th century. Oak Park and Del Paso Heights in particular gradually opened up to a handful of African American families, a precedent that would have enormous consequences on future patterns of Black settlement during World War II and beyond.

Despite the fact that many Oak Park properties contained restrictive covenants, they were not strictly enforced. In 1937, the HOLC survey noted that “deed restrictions have expired in sections of Oak Park and Highland Park.” For East Oak Park, HOLC surveyors interpreted the presence of several Black families living between Fifth and Eighth Streets on San Jose Way as evidence that “deed restrictions were not enforced” in that particular section, prompting “active resistance [from local white residents] to further infiltration of all subversive [nonwhite] elements.” Apparently, Oak Park whites failed to put up much resistance as the district saw more African Americans move into the area. Given the weak enforcement of restrictive covenants, it is no surprise that by the 1940s Oak Park had developed pockets of African American, Mexican American, and Japanese American settlement.³⁷ The popular Black restaurateur, George Dunlap, and his family moved to a house at 4322 4th Avenue (extant) in Oak Park as early as 1906 but he was an exception. Other Black families trickled into the community throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but evidence suggests that their presence was unwelcome. Missouri Nash recalled her white neighbor’s apprehension when she and her husband began to build a house on an Oak Park lot they had purchased. Several years later, when her daughter attempted to buy the home across the street, the seller refused her. Nash later discovered that the sellers of the property included in their deed a clause prohibiting its sale to any nonwhites. When Gladys and Frank Canson tried to move to Oak Park in 1930, white realtors refused to sell to them. Both the Cansons and the white sellers of the property received several death threats.³⁸

Although the Black community in Oak Park was small it was significant enough to support the founding of a Black church in the neighborhood in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1917, Reverend Thomas Allen Harvey established Sacramento’s third Black church, the African

³⁷ “T-RACES: a Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California’s Exclusionary Spaces,” R. Marciano, D. Goldberg, C. Hou, <http://t-races.net/T-RACES>.

³⁸ *A Long Look Back*, 64.

Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, or Kyles Temple AME Zion at a building formerly occupied by an Episcopalian church at 36th Street and 4th Avenue in Oak Park.³⁹

Still by 1940 Oak Park's racial character remained mostly white due, in part, to the rapid assimilation of European immigrants. Several Mexican, Asian and African American families had either purchased or rented homes, but their small numbers were not enough to significantly alter the neighborhood's image as a largely white working-class enclave. Not until after the redevelopment of the West End in the 1950s and 1960s did Oak Park experience a significant influx of African Americans, accompanied by white flight.

Del Paso Heights, outside the city limits of Sacramento until it was annexed into the city in 1964, was also largely unrestricted. Cheap land, abundant space, and less housing discrimination permitted several Black families to move into the area by the early 1920s. This included Reverend Hercules D. Benbow, who migrated to California from Alabama in 1913, and became one of the first Black residents in the district. When he first came to Sacramento, Reverend Benbow found lodging in a West End boardinghouse on Sixth Street and landed a job as a server at the Sutter Club, an all-white male restaurant across from the State Capitol building that catered to lawmakers and the city's elite. In 1922, after having saved up enough money, Reverend Benbow bought several lots in Del Paso Heights and hired a contractor to build a large duplex at 3705 Maple Street (later Dry Creek Road). At the time, the Benbows were only one of a small number of Black families residing in the area, all of which lived near the Benbow property, amongst Native American, Latino, and white residents. As one of the few areas in Sacramento County where Blacks could live, more and more African American families relocated there.⁴⁰



Figure 9. Hercules Benbow with his wife and child (ca. 1922). Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Benbow Love.

³⁹ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 116.

⁴⁰ Sacramento Ethnic Community Survey, "An Interview with Elizabeth Benbow Johnson Love," ed. Clarence Caesar (Sacramento: City of Sacramento, 1983).

Some middle-class Black residents were able to find housing in other pockets outside the West End, either due to the lack of restrictive covenants or by asking white friends to purchase property and transfer it to them. Realtor L.N. Crawford and his wife Frances purchased a house at 2685 26th Street (extant) in an unrestricted area of Highland Park, to the west of Oak Park.⁴¹ By at least 1930, Alex Moore, owner of the Mo Mo Club, owned a house on 41st Street in the otherwise almost entirely white neighborhood of East Sacramento. According to conversations with local residents and census records, several Black families lived on the stretch of 41st Street between H Street and D Street as early as the 1930s. Due to the concentration of middle-class Black families in the area, the area gained the nickname “Sugar Hill,” possibly in reference to a middle-class Black neighborhood in Harlem, New York, where W.E.B. DuBois, Cab Calloway, and other famous Black individuals lived in the early 20th century.⁴² Another small enclave existed on 55th and 56th streets, north of Folsom Boulevard. The first known Black resident in this area was Reverend Amos Nash, who lived at 1356 56th Street (extant) from at least the 1920s through the 1940s. The Nash family reportedly invited members of their religious community to purchase lots in the area, resulting in a small concentration of Black homeowners in the area.⁴³



Figure 10. L.N. and Frances Crawford (seated, second and third from the left), celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary at their house in Highland Park (ca. 1932). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/008.

⁴¹ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 70.

⁴² Conversation with Barbara Covington, conducted by Damany M. Fisher; United States Federal Census, 1930-1950, Ancestry.com.

⁴³ Conversation with Dawn Basciano, conducted by Carson Anderson, March 3, 2023; United States Federal Census, 1920-1950, Ancestry.com.

Second Great Migration, 1940-1970

Between 1940 and 1960, corresponding to the national trends of the Second Great Migration, thousands of African Americans entered Sacramento in search of economic opportunity, better education, and to escape Jim Crow conditions in the South. Although it lagged far behind other West Coast cities, Black migration to Sacramento climbed dramatically during the 1940s with the onset of World War II. In the first few years of the decade, the Sacramento region experienced a decrease in population as employment opportunities in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area greatly expanded. The opening of defense jobs in other locales combined with military service obligations siphoned off a large portion of the white male labor force in Sacramento, therefore opening the door to greater employment opportunities for African Americans and women.⁴⁴

The construction of McClellan Field (later Air Force Base) and Mather Army Air Base were the single most transformative events in reshaping Sacramento's African American community in the middle decades of the 20th century. Combined with other military bases in the surrounding area, including the Sacramento Signal Depot, Camp Beale (now Beale Air Force Base), and Travis Army Air Base in Fairfield, the region's military bases brought thousands of African Americans to the Sacramento area.⁴⁵ Many settled in Del Paso Heights and North Highlands, which were just to the south of McClellan Air Force Base and were unrestricted to non-white residents, and parts of Rancho Cordova that were close to Mather Field.⁴⁶

With its canneries, military bases, and various other plants, Sacramento experienced heightened labor demands to meet wartime production needs. Borrowing a strategy from the Kaiser shipyards, the Southern Pacific Railroad sent recruiters into the South to hire Black labor, promising free transportation and a "good job" once they arrived. In 1942, Matthew Flowers signed up with Southern Pacific and came to Sacramento on a train that included three full cars of Black men recruited in Houston, Texas, all of whom had been promised jobs in Sacramento. After hearing of higher-paying jobs in the Bay Area shipyards, several left Sacramento shortly after their arrival. Mr. Flowers, meanwhile, found lodging in a rooming house in the West End and secured a job in the Southern Pacific shops working in a boiler room. Several weeks later, he saved up enough money to send for his wife and her son, Willie. "In the evenings, two or three times a week, train loads of black [*sic*] men from all over the South would come in at

⁴⁴ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of the Development of Sacramento's Black Community, 148.

⁴⁵ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 141-142.

⁴⁶ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 21.

Southern Pacific," recalled Phelix Flowers, "Some of them came in overalls, bare-footed, their belongings in cotton sacks."⁴⁷

Wartime migration created acute housing shortages in Sacramento. This hit Black migrants especially hard, who had few options outside of the West End and Del Paso Heights. In 1940, the majority of African Americans in Sacramento still lived in the West End. The Second Great Migration only produced greater congestion and overcrowding in the area. Many residents who owned homes took in boarders. Sometimes, garages were converted into extra bedrooms. Several boardinghouses, including the Lincoln Hotel, Senator Hotel, and the Berkshire provided temporary living quarters for Black workers and their families. In addition, the Negro Women's Civic Improvement Center (NWCIC, simply WCIC at a later date) housed dozens of single Black women with no family ties to the Sacramento area.⁴⁸ Like the Flowers family, the Reverend Shelly Williams, his wife Edna, and their five children traveled to Sacramento from Houston, Texas on a train operated by the Southern Pacific Railroad. Upon their arrival, they moved in with four family members who had already settled into a three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment above Nardelli's grocery store at 4th and P streets in the West End, bringing the number of family members living in one apartment to eleven.⁴⁹

While the war sparked an increase in the African American population living in the West End, it shattered the lives of the area's Japanese residents. The U.S. government's decision to forcibly relocate Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II devastated Sacramento's Japanese community and institutions. Many were forced to sell their businesses and properties at prices far below their actual value. These tragic circumstances opened up opportunities to African Americans who took over former Japanese American homes and businesses in the West End. Examples of Black-owned businesses purchased from Japanese residents in the 1940s include A&J Liquors, owned by Louise Anderson, Ike Anderson, and Nitz Jackson; the Greenfront Poolroom at 315a Capitol Avenue, owned by Charles and Dorothy Boyd; and the Lincoln Hotel, owned by Oscar Williams. The Lincoln Hotel housed many Black migrants during the war and was one of the few hotels available to African Americans in the city.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West*, 19-20; *A Long Look Back*, 75.

⁴⁸ Grace Carter-Douglas, "A Historical Study of the Women's Civic and Improvement Club," in *The Griot: An Anthology of African Necromancers*, ed. Grace Carter-Douglas (Sacramento: Rumble, 1988), 22.

⁴⁹ Lois Evelyn (Williams) Brown, Historical Preservation – Sacramento History, September 29, 2022. Shiloh Baptist Church.

⁵⁰ Caesar, 148; *A Long Look Back*, 39.

The Second Great Migration fueled a surge in Black entrepreneurship, particularly in the West End. In 1944, Bennie Johnson purchased a three-story building at Fourth Street and Capitol Avenue, which she converted into three separate businesses—Twiggs Taxi Company, Twiggs Record Shop, and Twiggs Beauty Shop—that operated well into the 1950s. The following year, Bessie Whitney opened Bessie’s Place, a café on Fourth Street near Capitol. The café’s location was ideal because it was in a densely populated area near several “pool rooms, bars, cafes, and lots of places to get people to spend money.”⁵¹ The presence of Black military personnel at McClellan Air Force Base and Mather Air Force Base, to the north and east of Sacramento, respectively, and at Beale Air Force Base in nearby Marysville provided a steady flow of income that allowed these businesses to thrive. Officers and civilian employees in search of recreation and entertainment came to the West End.⁵²

Capitol Avenue—the West End’s main thoroughfare—showcased several Black-owned establishments and others that catered to Black clientele. These included the Banks Café, Little Roma, the Congo Club, the Mo-Mo Club, The Stag Café, and Club Zanzibar. The Crystal Palace Hotel Building and Barbershop, near the corner of Sixth and Capitol, included fourteen rooms, a four-chair barbershop, a shoe repair service and cleaners. In 1951, the Crystal Palace was considered “the Capitol City’s largest Negro owned and operated enterprise.” Naturally, the concentration of bars and nightclubs attracted musicians as well. Vincent “Ted” Thompson, Harold Wiley, Douglas Greer, Dr. James Morris, Ray Jenkins, “Snuffy” Drake, Julius Harris, Dick Brown, Larry Burnett, George Walker, Walter Graham, John Herbert, and Edith Griffin were among the many Sacramento-based musicians who performed around the West End.⁵³

POST-WORLD WAR II

In the postwar years, the African American community continued to increase. By 1950, the Black population had grown to 4,538, an over 200 percent increase from 1940; by 1960, it had climbed to 12,103, doubling in proportion from approximately three to six percent of Sacramento’s total population. Meanwhile, the county’s Black population (which still included Del Paso Heights and Glen Elder until they were annexed into Sacramento in the 1960s) stood at 19,805. Though small compared to other major urban centers in California, the Black population increased at a higher rate during the 1950s than the city’s white majority.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “A Religious Pioneer: An Interview with Rev. Bessie Whitney,” in *A Long Look Back: A Special Look at the History of Sacramento and the Black Citizens Who Played a Major Role in That History*, ed. Terris McMahon (Sacramento, California: William H. Lee, 1973), 59.

⁵² *A Long Look Back*, 76.

⁵³ Stephen Magagnini, “Faint Echo of Jazz Mecca at Sixth and Capitol,” *Sacramento Bee*, June 5, 2005.

⁵⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960 Census Tracts, Sacramento, California*, (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1960).

As these migrants soon discovered, Sacramento did not always live up to its reputation as a place of boundless opportunity. Local unions often excluded Black artisans. The most coveted jobs in state and local government were limited to only a few Blacks. Local manufacturing plants had few Black employees and typically confined them to menial roles.

TABLE 3: SACRAMENTO’S POPULATION FIGURES, 1950-1970

	1950	1960	1970
African American and Black Residents	4,538	12,103	27,247
Percent Change from Previous Decade	209.13%	166.70%	125.13%
Total City Population	137,572	191,667	254,417
Percent of Total Population	3.30%	6.31%	10.71%

Source: U.S. Census, 1950-1980.⁵⁵

Housing posed an even greater challenge. Despite the 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *Barrows v. Jackson* in 1953 that determined racial restrictive covenants were not enforceable by law, residents of color continued to be excluded from some neighborhoods, including newly-constructed postwar subdivisions. Real estate agents steered them away, and homeowner associations and neighbors pressured homeowners on who to sell to or intimidated African American and Black residents.⁵⁶ For instance, on January 21, 1944, homeowners in the Curtis Oaks subdivision circulated a “Declaration of Restrictions” that essentially reinforced earlier clauses regarding the exclusion of “any person of either Hindu, African, Japanese, Chinese, or Mongolian descent” from renting, leasing or owning property in the neighborhood. Probably owing to the increased presence of Black women, the declaration made an exception for “persons not of the Caucasian race...kept...by a Caucasian occupant, strictly in the capacity of servants or employees actually engaged in domestic service of the occupant, or in the care of the premises for the occupant.”⁵⁷ Over 200 homeowners in the subdivision signed the document. Whereas earlier restrictive covenants included provisions

⁵⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1950, Volume II: Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1953); United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1960, Volume I: Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1963); *Census of Population and Housing: 1970* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1972).

⁵⁶ SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 41-46.

⁵⁷ Declaration of Restrictions, Curtis Oaks homeowners circulation, 1944.

governing physical use of the property, this particular agreement seemed only concerned with the race of occupants in Curtis Oaks.⁵⁸

Such efforts succeeded in making the process of buying a home a nightmare for African Americans. Consider the case of Virna Canson in the early 1950s. After inquiring about a listing on 58th Street, her real estate agent flatly refused to show her the house. The agent acknowledged the illegality of restrictive covenants but admitted to Canson that de facto enforcement of racial restrictions still remained in certain areas of the city. “It’s not the law, of course,” the agent told Canson, “but just sort of an agreement that Negroes won’t be sold property in a block where there are no other Negroes.” Canson’s experience was not unique.⁵⁹

A distinct pattern of Black settlement began to take shape by the dawn of the 1950s. Although the West End continued to take in the majority of Black migrants, neighborhoods such as Del Paso Heights and to a lesser extent, Oak Park, became secondary sites for Black settlement. As in prewar times, realtors continued to play a major role in shaping Black residential patterns. With more and more African Americans entering the city, however, racial steering intensified. “Any black who ventured from the confines of the lower end [West End] or Del Paso Heights, the Black areas, and attempted to purchase property was faced with much opposition,” said Dr. Kenneth Johnson, one of Sacramento’s earliest African American physicians. “The strongest coming from Sacramento’s realtors.” In 1944, Freddie Martin had little choice but to buy a home in Oak Park. “The [white] realtor would take you to Del Paso Heights,” said Martin, “if that didn’t suit you, he would take you to Oak Park, and if that didn’t suit you, they had to see you later.” One of Martin’s friends had a similar experience. After showing a white realtor a house he wished to buy, the realtor advised him to “pick a block that had colored [people] living on it.”⁶⁰

Arkansas native Carrie Murchison-Denson remembered a similar experience when she and her husband tried to move their family from Foresthill in Placer County to Sacramento in the 1950s. Realtors told the family they only had houses available in Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, or certain parts of North Sacramento, or that they had no houses at all. Attracted by the clean, new homes and, above all, the number and quality of schools in the North Highlands neighborhood, the family sought housing in the area. Mrs. Murchison-Denson remembered having to change her voice on the phone to get the landlord to show her the property they eventually rented.

⁵⁸ *Tract Restrictions of Curtis Oaks to Joseph Korn*, January 2, 1945, Page 346, Sacramento County Recorder’s Office.

⁵⁹ Virna Canson, “The Hunt for a Home,” *The Progressive* (1954): 18-20.

⁶⁰ *A Long Look Back*, 78-82.

When she arrived, the landlord increased the rent from its original price and only later lowered it back to its original price after a white neighbor complained. At the time, they were one of only a handful of Black families in the North Highlands area.⁶¹

With the influx of Black residents, Del Paso Heights developed into a vibrant community with a character all its own. Many of the Black families who settled in the neighborhood during World War II and shortly afterward relocated from the South for work at McClellan Air Force Base, located a few miles to the north. Residents who lived in “the Heights” remembered it as a wonderful place to live with its own thriving commercial area at the intersection of Grand Avenue, Rio Linda Boulevard, and Palmetto Street, and a strong sense of family and community pride, much of which centered around the neighborhood’s nearest high school, Grant Union High School. Del Paso Heights retained a bucolic, rural character through the 1950s and did not have sidewalks or streetlights through the middle of the 20th century. The area remained sparsely developed, and many residents had home gardens or raised livestock that they used to feed their families. Vacant or undeveloped land was used as farmland, and some residents raised and rode horses.⁶²

In the years surrounding World War II, the growth and establishment of an increasing number of Black households in Del Paso Heights and North Sacramento was aided by established Black residents. In 1947, a group of local women founded the Good Neighbors Club to assist African American families who relocated to the area during and after the war. Later supported by and headquartered at Allen Chapel AME Church, the Good Neighbors Club became a linchpin of the Del Paso Heights community, offering a childcare program and other important services.⁶³ The area’s first reported Black landlords were Bob and Versie Robinson, who offered apartments to rent to Black residents.⁶⁴ Some residents purchased property and built their own houses on the land. By the 1970s, Black individuals with professional careers in the construction industry contributed to the residential development of the Del Paso Heights and North Sacramento neighborhoods. Scott Hall, owner of Hallcraft Construction Company, and real estate broker C.B. Frazier, built homes in the area, including 1857 Grand Avenue (extant). Frazier’s firm was located in the main commercial center of Del Paso Heights at 921 Grand Avenue.⁶⁵ Ernest Lee Black left his mark on residential development in Sacramento, as well. Born in Oklahoma, he

⁶¹ Carrie Murchison-Denson, interview by Ashlee Green [transcription] at 6324 Long Dale Drive, North Highlands, CA, January 2, 2023, African American Experience History Project, City of Sacramento Community Development Department.

⁶² *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated and Unpublished).

⁶³ Sheila Roundtree and Joyce Burney Askia, North Sacramento/DPH Community Meeting, March 10, 2023, notes taken by Carson Anderson, City of Sacramento.

⁶⁴ *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated and Unpublished).

⁶⁵ "North Area Homes On Display," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 May 1980.

moved to Pasadena in 1948, where he joined the Carpenters Union. In 1951, Black moved to Sacramento and built a home for himself in Del Paso Heights. Almost 20 years later, in 1970, he became one of Sacramento's first licensed African American general contractors. Over the course of his career, Black built federally subsidized homes for the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency, as well as custom homes in Del Paso Heights and West Sacramento, ultimately constructing more than 1,000 homes and a 38-unit apartment complex. He retired in 1985.⁶⁶



Figure 11. Ernest Lee Black. Source: "Ernest Black Was Longtime Home Builder in Region," *Sacramento Bee*, 9 June 2012.

In spite of the overall pattern of steering residents of color to older neighborhoods, there were some exceptions. A small enclave of African American households appeared in the South Land Park Hills neighborhood during the late 1960s, west of South Land Park Drive in the vicinity of Volz Drive and Warren Avenue.⁹² Most notably, on September 29th, 1954, the *Sacramento Bee* reported that the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors approved the construction of a new subdivision on the northwest corner of Elder Creek Road and Power Inn Road called "Glen Elder." The article quoted the Sacramento County Engineer, Arthur L. Kiefer, who told the board that the new community was "for Negroes only, first of its kind in the county."⁶⁷ The next day, Kiefer issued a correction to this statement, claiming that his office had been "misinformed." Rather than being for "Negroes only," Kiefer said that the builders of the tract, Sun River Homes, Inc., insisted that homes in Glen Elder would be sold to "all qualified veterans or non-veterans." George W. Artz, the President of Sun River Homes, called Glen Elder a "pioneer" subdivision in south Sacramento, no doubt in reference to the sea of all-white suburbs surrounding it.⁶⁸ In fact, advertisements for Glen Elder emphasized that it was an "unrestricted" community. Artz was sincere in his efforts to make Glen Elder the county's first integrated suburb. In 1955, he proudly boasted that Glen Elder was "70 percent Negro and 30 percent other races" and that

⁶⁶ "Ernest Black Was Longtime Home Builder in Region," *Sacramento Bee*, 9 June 2012.

⁶⁷ "Subdivision is Set for Negroes Only," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 September 1954: 21.

⁶⁸ "Kiefer Corrects Statement on Glen Elder Tract," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 September 1954: 29.

"gradual steps like this could lead to genuine integration throughout the county."⁶⁹ If Artz's goal was to create an integrated community, it proved far too utopian for Sacramento in the 1950s. Despite his efforts, Glen Elder was a predominately Black neighborhood by the 1960s and hardly resembled an integrated neighborhood.

Glen Elder represented one of the few postwar suburbs open to Black occupancy. The vast majority of new subdivisions in Sacramento County built after World War II followed a strict policy of excluding African Americans. Government policy, in fact, encouraged this form of residential segregation. The FHA and VA continued to support race restrictive covenants even for at least another decade after the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court decision.⁷⁰ As they did elsewhere, FHA- and VA-insured subdivisions throughout Sacramento County usually contained restrictive clauses in their deeds or contract.⁷¹

URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

Another contributor to the residential segregation of African Americans in Sacramento was the redevelopment of the West End. For years, the West End had been excoriated by city officials as a slum due to the large amount of substandard housing, old commercial buildings, and ethnically diverse population. In 1945, the California state legislature passed the California Redevelopment Act to provide state funds for local improvement projects. The Act allowed cities to acquire property deemed blighted, clear it, and sell or lease it to a private developer to create new uses that complied with the community's general plan and remained in the public interest.⁷²

Sacramento was at the forefront of redevelopment efforts in California. In 1954, the Sacramento City Council voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution authorizing the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency (SRA) to issue its own bonds to subsidize the so-called "Capitol Mall Project" that would cut right through the heart of the West End. The ceremonial demolition of an old Victorian home at 526 Capitol Avenue in January 1957 initiated the first

⁶⁹ "Winners of Glen Elder's Garden Contest Are Named," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 October 1955: 62.

⁷⁰ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 85-91.

⁷¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 190-218; Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 94-109; David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 99-139, 176-242.

⁷² Page & Turnbull, "Capitol Towers National Register of Historic Places Registration Form," 2014, 8.19.

phase of the Capitol Mall Project. By the end of 1961, all buildings located within the fifteen-block project area had been razed.⁷³

The demolition of the West End had enormous consequences for all people living in the area. It eviscerated Sacramento's Japan Town (one of the then-largest on the West Coast), and although African Americans made up a minority within the project zone, redevelopment struck an especially devastating blow to Black-owned businesses, homes, and institutions. Black business owners in the West End often faced financial ruin following confiscation of their property. Many just could not afford the costs of relocation. Though they claimed otherwise, the SRA typically failed to adequately compensate West End property owners for losses incurred by relocation. Ted Thompson, who opened his mortuary at Seventh and N Streets in 1948, was forced to move his business to Oak Park in 1957 after the SRA used eminent domain to acquire his property. The state placed certain types of businesses in different categories where, instead of receiving market value, property owners were to receive "real value" established by the cost of replacement. But Thompson and countless others never received "placement in kind" for their properties. Thompson, acknowledged as one of the most successful Black entrepreneurs in the city, estimated that it took him 18 years following relocation to regain all the assets of his original business. But Thompson was fortunate compared to others who could not afford to reestablish new businesses elsewhere.

The SRA's utter and racist disregard for displaced residents and haphazard relocation process (which was not unique to Sacramento) had profound negative consequences.⁷⁴ "Where we failed," said attorney Nathaniel Colley, "and where the [SRA] failed is in trying to provide for the integration of these people who were removed from the community...and...instead of integrating them into the community, they just disbursed them to Glen Elder, Del Paso Heights, and Oak Park, to create new slums."⁷⁵ That same sentiment was shared by many others, including Ted Thompson, who compared the SRA's relocation of Black families to "moving checkers on a checkerboard." Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, and Glen Elder, "were only three main directions [the SRA] were sending Blacks" from the West End.⁷⁶

⁷³ Brian Roberts, "Redevelopment at the Crossroads: How Sacramento Chose between Priorities in the 1950s," *Golden Notes* 35, no. 2 (1989): 7-10.

⁷⁴ Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: Harper, 1955).

⁷⁵ Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, "An Interview with Nathaniel Colley, Esq," 16-17.

⁷⁶ Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, "An Interview with Vincent "Ted" Thompson."

ANNEXATION OF NORTH & SOUTH SACRAMENTO

By the dawn of the 1960s, the combination of redevelopment, restrictive covenants, and government policy contributed to the continued residential segregation of African Americans in Sacramento, this time in subdivisions outside the West End. During the decade, Sacramento gained 7,565 African Americans, from 4,538 to 12,103. In 1950, the greatest concentration of African Americans in the city had been located in a section of the West End where Blacks made roughly a quarter of the population. By 1960, this distinction had been transferred to Oak Park, which experienced a net gain of 2,832 Blacks, roughly 74 percent of the 3,824 African Americans added to the city's Black population during the decade. Census Tract 28 in Oak Park, for example, increased its Black percentage from 6.8 to 42.7 percent.⁷⁷As a result of redevelopment, between 1950 and 1970, the non-white population of Oak Park increased seven-fold, while the Black population increased nine-fold. The neighborhood's overall population, however, declined by a third, reflecting the flight of white residents from the area. As a result, by the 1970s, Oak Park had become a neighborhood of primarily non-white residents.⁷⁸

A large proportion of the increase in Sacramento's African American population came from the annexation of several subdivisions south, east, and north of the city in the 1950s and 1960s. In Del Paso Heights, which was annexed into the city in 1964, the Black population rose by 250%, from 1,160 in 1950 to 4,060 in 1960. The increase in residents of color and coinciding exodus of white residents to newer subdivisions to the east, such as Carmichael, transformed Del Paso Heights into a primarily non-white neighborhood by the 1960s.⁷⁹ Glen Elder, meanwhile, was annexed into the city in the 1950s. In spite of being designed as an integrated subdivision, the neighborhood had become a predominantly Black subdivision by 1960 with a total of 1,974 African Americans. Census Tract 48 in Glen Elder recorded the highest percentage of Blacks (78 percent) than any other tract in the county. Altogether Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, and Glen Elder accounted for approximately half of African Americans in the Sacramento Metropolitan Area.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Leonard D. Cain, *Housing Discrimination in Metropolitan Sacramento* (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Committee for Fair Housing, 1961), 2-4.

⁷⁸ William Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 41.

⁷⁹ Pauline Bartolone, "North Sacramento Was Annexed Decades Ago. Some Residents Say the City has Long Neglected It," CapRadio.org, 9 August 2022, accessed March 14, 2023, <https://www.capradio.org/articles/2022/08/09/north-sacramento-was-annexed-decades-ago-some-residents-say-the-city-has-long-neglected-it/>.

⁸⁰ United States Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960 Census Tracts, Sacramento, California, (D.C. Washington: Government Publishing Office, 1960); Cain, *Housing Discrimination in Metropolitan Sacramento*, 3-4.

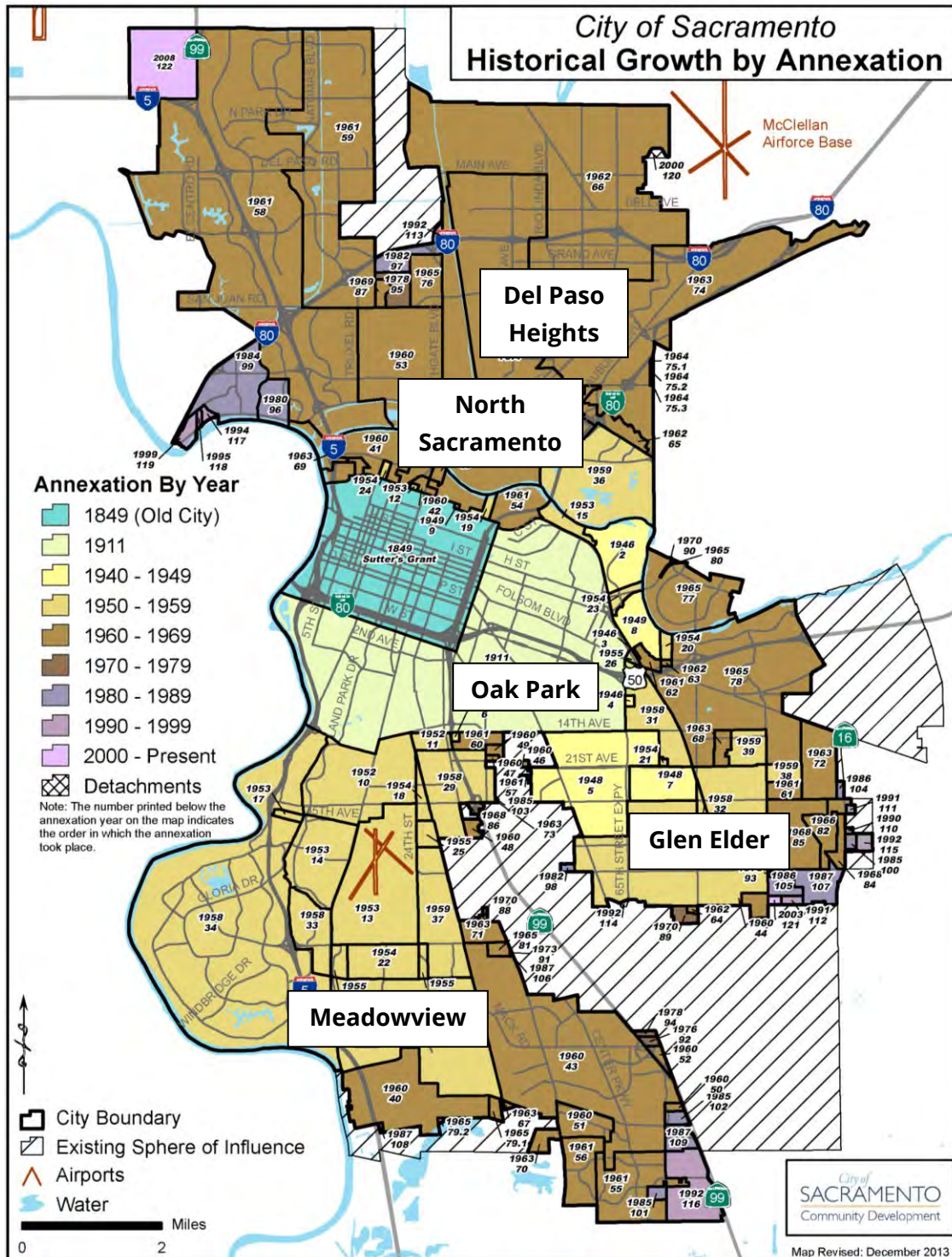


Figure 12. Map showing the history of annexations into Sacramento. Source: City of Sacramento. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

The flight of white residents and annexation into the City of Sacramento contributed to the deterioration of thriving integrated communities in many of Sacramento's northern neighborhoods. Prior to annexation in the 1960s, the neighborhoods of Del Paso Heights, Northgate, Gardenland, Natomas, Robla, and Hagginwood were unincorporated communities that fell under the jurisdiction of Sacramento County for taxation and public services. North Sacramento was a separate sovereign city with its own city council, police force, and fire department that were dedicated solely to providing for the needs of its own residents. While the City of Sacramento had promised that annexation of these northern communities would bring improved water quality and police protection, as well as an increase in customers for area businesses, in reality, annexation was "a disaster" for many residents.⁸¹ With annexation, Sacramento's northern communities became part of District 2, one of several districts governed by the Sacramento City Council. The loss of local government focus left the city's northern communities neglected and led to a long spiral of declining living conditions in the formerly tight-knit communities that corresponded with the departure of white residents. As white residents fled the area in the 1960s, so did many of the businesses along Del Paso Boulevard and the intersection of Grand Avenue and Rio Linda Boulevard. Attention from City government officials declined, as well as access to services and resources. Incomes, home values, and homeowner occupancy declined rapidly in the decades following annexation. According to resident Bob Slobe, "[annexation] just let the potholes grow and let the poverty rise and the crime rate rise. ... It was a place for the City of Sacramento to put everything bad."⁸² A major flood in the winter of 1986 further transformed the communities of northern Sacramento. Flooding of Arcade Creek extensively damaged nearly 250 houses in the Strawberry Manor neighborhood and additional houses in nearby Richardson Village.⁸³ Tracts in the neighborhoods had been marketed to residents, many of whom were Black, without disclosing the area's flood hazards and without developers completing necessary flood mitigation measures. The flooding elicited minimal response from local officials. As a result, many households in the area suffered major economic losses, as the country inched toward recession in the early 1990s.⁸⁴

Sacramento's southern neighborhoods and communities experienced a similar period of rise and decline in the latter half of the 20th century as a result of white flight and misguided or misused government policies. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Sacramento's Black population

⁸¹ Bartolone, "North Sacramento Was Annexed Decades Ago."

⁸² Bartolone, "North Sacramento Was Annexed Decades Ago."

⁸³ Jim Sanders, "Project Repairs Homes, Hopes," *Sacramento Bee*, 6 September 1986.

⁸⁴ Carson Anderson, "Notes from March 10 Community Meeting (North Sacramento-DPH)," email to Clare Flynn, March 14, 2023.

expanded into south Sacramento suburbs. The area that saw the largest spike in Black residency was Meadowview. Meadowview's development began in the mid-1950s, extending from Freeport Boulevard to Twenty-fourth Street and from Florin Road to an area south of Meadowview Road. Meadowview offered middle-class Sacramentans an affordable single-family home. In 1957, one three-bedroom home in the Meadowview Terrace subdivision cost only \$13,000.00. The Carella Gardens subdivision advertised three-bedroom homes for only \$98 move-in cost and payments that cost "less than rent." In addition to having affordable homes, Meadowview also offered a lot of new amenities that attracted homebuyers such as new schools, recreation, and a shopping district on the corner of Twenty-Fourth Street and Meadowview Road. A community study of Meadowview from 1965 stated that Meadowview lacked any "deficiencies."⁸⁵

For a brief period in the 1960s, Meadowview appeared to some observers as a model for racial integration in the city. In 1968, the *Sacramento Observer*, a Black-owned newspaper, included Meadowview as part of the "Successfully Integrated South Area." "If one were to drive down a street in the [South Area]...he would experience a scene of Black and white children playing together in the streets, and Black and white adults talking with each other in the yard or doorway," the article stated. The article explained that for the "past four or five years a substantial number of Black citizens" moved to the area due primarily to three factors: first, many of these Black newcomers were educated and working professionals who could afford to purchase homes; second, places like Meadowview, unlike many other postwar suburbs in Sacramento, did not restrict Blacks from buying homes in the area; finally, Meadowview had a surplus of "FHA and VA resales" available to anyone who could afford them regardless of race. The combination of civil rights laws and the evolution of the south area's housing market opened up previously all-white neighborhoods in Meadowview to African Americans. "Consequently," the article continued, "when black citizens relocated in Sacramento, or moved into Sacramento from some other area, they, or many of them selected the South area. They have located in areas which have been traditionally closed to them solely because of the color of their skin."⁸⁶ For African Americans who had been systematically excluded from much of Sacramento's housing market, Meadowview offered them their piece of the American Dream.

Unfortunately, whatever degree of optimism surrounding Meadowview began to wane by the early 1970s as the area began to deteriorate. Several factors explain this transition. First, Meadowview suffered from overdevelopment and competition from other suburbs. Developers

⁸⁵ Sacramento City Planning Commission, "A Community Plan for Meadowview," November 1985.

⁸⁶ "The Successfully Integrated South Area, *Sacramento Observer*, November 14, 1968.

built more homes in the area than they could actually sell. The availability of homes attracted many renters who were eager to gain access to comfortable single-family homes. Other developers sought to take advantage of Meadowview's burgeoning rental market by building apartment complexes.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, fair housing legislation designed to stem divestment in urban communities like Meadowview actually had the opposite effect. For example, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 made federal programs, particularly FHA/VA financing, more accessible to inner-city communities like Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, Glen Elder, and Meadowview. The rationale behind the legislation was to remove barriers to these federal programs and increase homeownership among low-income communities. But what was presented as a positive development in the fight against poverty made the situation in urban communities worse in numerous ways. First, it enabled unscrupulous mortgage companies and real estate speculators to take advantage of loopholes in the legislation that allowed them to profit from poor communities that now qualified for FHA-insured and VA-guaranteed loans. Because there was essentially no risk involved, mortgage companies frequently issued loans to low-income families who could not afford them, thus leading to foreclosure. Speculators often purchased properties that had been foreclosed or that were on the verge of foreclosure. Such properties were given "cosmetic" repairs in order to meet FHA standards, and then sold at a higher price to prospective homebuyers. In historically redlined communities like Oak Park and Del Paso Heights, this cycle resulted in high numbers of foreclosures and abandoned properties during the 1970s.⁸⁸

Another policy that exacerbated conditions in Meadowview was Section 235 of the Federal Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968. This law sought to encourage homeownership among low-income Americans by subsidizing down payments and monthly mortgage payments. However, many of the homes sold to Section 235 eligible buyers were FHA repossessions that had been vacant and in disrepair. Many of these new homeowners did not possess the financial resources to make necessary repairs or improvements to the property. By 1974, more than half of the housing sold under Section 235 in Meadowview had been foreclosed.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ William E. Mahan, "Rebirth of a Community: Meadowview," (September 2006), 9.

⁸⁸ D.W. Urquidi, Daniel Leighton, and Burt Hubbard, *Speculation in Redlined Areas: Investigation into Relationship between Redlining and Housing Speculation* (Los Angeles, CA: California State University, Los Angeles, 1977).

⁸⁹ Mahan, "Rebirth of a Community," 9-10.

The combination of Black in-migration and the problems created by overdevelopment and speculation only hastened the departure of white residents from the area. One Meadowview resident, Deborah Gibson, moved to a street in Meadowview in 1976 that only had three Black families. Shortly thereafter, she recalled white neighbors moving out in droves. “Now we can’t sell our house for what it’s worth,” she lamented. This pattern—commonly referred to as “white flight”—further drained Meadowview, and other multi-ethnic neighborhoods such as Oak Park and Del Paso Heights, of resources and capital and contributed to what one *Sacramento Bee* reporter described as a “bleak vision of urban despair.” Many properties in Meadowview fell in the hands of absentee landlords eager to take advantage of cheap properties that they, in turn, rented to low-income residents.⁹⁰

In spite of the many trials and barriers in their way, many Black individuals and families experienced growing prosperity in the latter decades of the 20th century. By 1980, Sacramento County boasted a substantial educated Black middle and upper-middle class. Many African Americans found employment with state agencies and local military installations. State figures showed that 2,895, or 7.7 percent, of the 37,598 state employees in the county were African American. According to the 1980 Census, 9.7 percent—or 1,400 of Sacramento County’s 14,476 Black families—earned at least \$35,000 a year. About 2.8 percent—or 400 Black families—earned a minimum of \$50,000. These figures were commensurate with statewide income statistics where eleven percent of the state’s Black families made at least \$35,000 annually, while three percent earned a minimum of \$50,000. At the same time, more African Americans with economic mobility began trickling into predominately all-white enclaves like Fair Oaks, Carmichael, and Greenhaven.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Mahan, “Rebirth of a Community,” 11.

⁹¹ Hilary Abramson, “A Long Road to Racial Equality,” *Sacramento Bee*, December 11, 1983; Hilary Abramson, “Black Couple Chases American Dream in White Fair Oaks,” *Sacramento Bee*, December 15, 1983.



BUSINESSES & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Circa 1839-1980

Photograph: Palmer Pinkney in front of his business, The Stag Café, Billiard Parlor, and Liquor Store. Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

THEME: AFRICAN AMERICAN BUSINESSES AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN SACRAMENTO, CA. 1839-1980

Black Sacramentans contributed to the city's economy and commercial development since the 1850s both as workers and by founding their own businesses. Racial discrimination limited the types of jobs available to African Americans, as well as their ability to purchase property to establish businesses, depressing their economic growth, both collectively and individually. In spite of these challenges, clusters of Black-owned businesses developed in the West End prior to its redevelopment in the 1950s and in the later decades of the 20th century, in larger numbers in neighborhoods outside the Central City.

Pre-World War II, ca. 1839-1940

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

With the lack of a permanent non-indigenous settlement in the area until the mid-19th century the commercial activity of individuals of all races and ethnicities who came to the Sacramento

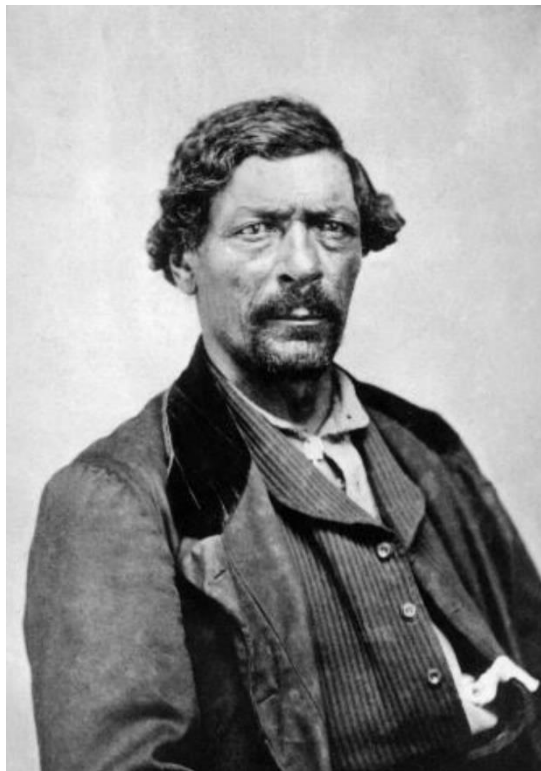


Figure 13. James P. Beckwourth (1860). Source: History Colorado Collection.

region from the early 19th century to the Gold Rush was primarily of a speculative, transient nature. Like white men during this period, Black individuals, most of whom were young men, sought wealth from the abundant natural and mineral resources that the Sacramento Valley and surrounding area offered. In the early 19th century, several young Black men reportedly came to the region as fur trappers. Documented examples include Peter Ranne (alternately spelled Rannee or Raney), who was hired by frontiersman Jedediah Smith to join his beaver trapping expeditions on the Buenaventura (Sacramento), American, and Klamath rivers in 1827 and 1828, respectively. Another Black fur trapper and entrepreneur named James P. Beckwourth made several trips to the Sacramento area in 1850 and 1851, using Native American trails through the Sierra Nevada mountains. One of these trails became known as Beckwourth Pass and was later used by Euro-American settlers traveling to California. Born in Virginia in 1800 to an enslaved woman and English

white man, he was apprenticed as a blacksmith and hired out as a hunter during his youth, before joining his first fur trapping expedition in 1824. Over the course of his life, Beckwourth traveled throughout the West and was adopted as a member of the Crow Indians. He served as an explorer, fur trapper, guide, and interpreter before his death in 1866. Due to the nature of their work, these men did not establish permanent business establishments in the area, but instead passed through on individual ventures before moving on to the next opportunity.

According to articles written in the 1930s, Sacramento's first Black resident was a skilled cooper, who was recruited by John Sutter during a trip to Monterey in 1841 to work at Sutter's Fort, the first permanent, non-indigenous settlement in the area. The cooper produced barrels, casks, buckets, tubs, and other containers and tools made from heated or steamed wood. Reliable sources of information about the cooper are limited and little is known about his life and identity, including his name. Nevertheless, he provided an invaluable service to the early occupants of Sutter's Fort.⁹²

After the discovery of gold in the foothills to the east of Sacramento in 1848, more Black men came to Sacramento as miners in search of gold. These men arrived both freely, hoping to find personal wealth in the goldfields, and involuntarily, brought by their white enslavers to work the mines.⁹³ Some of these men decided to permanently settle in Sacramento after the initial fervor of the Gold Rush had passed and opened permanent business establishments in the fledgling city. The majority of Black men recorded in the 1850 census worked as washermen, with six of the 14 men listed as working in the laundering, cleaning, and dyeing services. One man, J.H. Sands, worked as a coffee burner. Others worked as skilled craftsmen or provided important services to the miners passing through Sacramento, as well as the city's early residents. Of the 19 Black individuals included in the census, only five were women. No occupation was listed for them, except for one woman, Deianira Paullin, a native of Mexico who worked in a billiard saloon.⁹⁴

Among those who settled in Sacramento were Daniel Blue, who used the fortune he amassed mining on the Sacramento River to open a laundry and later became a key founding member of the first African American church on the West Coast, St. Andrews AME Church.⁹⁵ Nelson Ray also initially arrived in Sacramento as a miner but took a different path to personal wealth. In 1852, he was taken from Missouri to California by his enslaver's brother to mine for gold. Ray used the money he earned to purchase his freedom, as well as that of his wife and three

⁹² Clarence Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," master's thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 1985.

⁹³ Asal Ehsanipour, "How the Founder of California's First Black Church Fought its Last Known Slavery Case," KQED, February 25, 2022, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11818409/how-the-founder-of-californias-first-black-church-fought-its-last-known-slavery-case>.

⁹⁴ 1850 United States Federal Census, Sacramento, California, Ancestry.com.

⁹⁵ Ehsanipour, "How the Founder of California's First Black Church Fought its Last Known Slavery Case," KQED, February 25, 2022.

daughters. He also purchased property in Placerville, which he rented as a source of income. After the buildings burned down, he moved to Sacramento and supported his family working as a carpenter and blacksmith, skills he had acquired during his captivity in Missouri. His son, Francis Marion Ray, followed his father into the same professions.⁹⁶

The diversity of occupations held by Black residents increased in the decades following the Gold Rush; however, available job opportunities were extremely limited through the mid-20th century, due to racist hiring practices that prevented Black men and women from working in many of the fields of their choice. Many business owners refused to hire Black workers

regardless of their skills, educational background, or other qualifications.



Figure 14. An African American worker at the Southern Pacific Railroad's shops in Sacramento. Source: Center for Sacramento History.

As a result, most African American residents of working age were constrained to low paying, low-skill positions in the service and hospitality industries or building trades.⁹⁷ Census records taken between 1860 and 1870 show that the most common positions held by African American men during these years included porters, laborers, cooks, barbers, and stewards, with a smaller number working as blacksmiths, whitewashers, bricklayers, carpenters, and other similar positions. A small handful of men operated bars, saloons, or hotels, notably including Charles Hackett and Charles Parker, who operated Hackett House, one of the earliest documented Black-owned hotels in Sacramento. Historic photographs indicate that some men were able to find work with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Most women over school age took care of the home. A few worked as domestic servants, and a smaller number

worked as laundresses, washers, or ironers. One woman, M.L. Givens, was a tailor.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Clarissa Hundley Wildy, "Mend A Broken Chain: The Story of My Grandfather," Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1973, 34, 113-115.

⁹⁷ Damany M. Fisher, "Far From Utopia: Race, Housing, and the Fight to End Residential Segregation in Sacramento, 1900-1980," PhD diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2008, 13-15.

⁹⁸ 1860 and 1870 United States Federal Census, Sacramento, California, Ancestry.com.

Service-oriented jobs were the most common among Sacramento's African American residents into the early 20th century, with some exceptions. A small number of professionals established careers in Sacramento in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Two men, William Ellis and J.S. Potter, were listed as physicians in the 1860 and 1870 censuses, respectively, perhaps the first Black medical professionals in Sacramento's history. One man, Carl C. Finckler, a mixed-race immigrant from Germany, worked as a secretary to the California Supreme Court in 1870. In the late 19th century, Robert J. Fletcher, captain of the Black militia and civic organization the Sacramento Zouaves, was a highly regarded podiatrist who served as the personal nurse for Lieutenant Governor Spencer Millard in 1895.⁹⁹ Sarah Mildred Jones was one of the first teachers of African American descent in Sacramento. A graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio, she was appointed principal of the racially integrated Fremont School in 1894. She continued to



Figure 15. Sarah Mildred Jones (ca. 1914). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/040.



Figure 16. Anne Virginia Coker's graduation photo from UC Berkley's Boalt Hall (1929). Source: Stephens Family papers, African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

⁹⁹ William Burg, "From Civil War to Civil Rights: Black Sacramento in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century," *The Metropole*, accessed August 25, 2022, <https://themetropole.blog/2018/04/09/from-the-civil-war-to-civil-rights-Black-sacramento-in-the-late-19th-and-early-20th-century/>.

serve as principal until her retirement in 1914.¹⁰⁰ In the 1930s, Dr. Roscoe Brewer opened a dental practice in the West End at 1519 7th Street. Many of his patients consisted of Portuguese immigrants who he served pro bono.¹⁰¹ The first known Black attorney in Sacramento was named Anne Virginia Coker, who received her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of California, Berkeley's Boalt School of Law and became the first Black woman admitted to the California State Bar in 1929. After leading a private law practice in Virginia for ten years, she moved to Sacramento, where she worked for the State Office of Legislative Counsel from 1939 until her retirement in 1973.¹⁰²

While Black individuals generally were barred from white collar positions and jobs with the fire department and police force, some found work in lower-level municipal and civil service positions. In the 1920s, a new career path opened after sanitation workers, most of whom worked for private companies and were of Italian descent, went on strike in 1921. The City of Sacramento responded by establishing a municipal sanitation force. Spearheaded by the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the City instituted an unwritten policy of hiring African American workers to fill sanitation positions.¹⁰³ Black individuals who filled these positions effectively became the City's first Black employees.¹⁰⁴ Although the work was hard and low-paying, sanitation positions became the most coveted jobs by African American residents, because they offered regular, steady employment, wages, and benefits, allowing Black men to earn more money than any other positions available to them at the time and increase their financial and social standing. As a result, sanitation jobs came to symbolize the possibility of upward mobility and were viewed as positions of honor.¹⁰⁵ Some of the men who held these positions were highly educated individuals with college degrees, reflecting the degree to which discriminatory practices prevented Black men and women from obtaining jobs in fields for which they were well trained and educated. In addition to these City sanitation positions, some Black residents were able to find employment with large organizations such as the U.S Postal Service and the Southern Pacific Railroad as their hiring practices changed. In addition to City sanitation positions, these became the most prestigious jobs among members of the local African American community.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

¹⁰¹ Fisher, "Far from Utopia," 26; Wildy, "Mend a Broken Chain," 122.

¹⁰² Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 133.

¹⁰³ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 129-132.

¹⁰⁵ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 18-19.

¹⁰⁶ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 129-130.

BLACK BUSINESSES AND COMMERCIAL AREAS

Despite numerous social and economic barriers placed in front of them, Black men and women founded businesses of their own that contributed to the vitality and diversification of Sacramento's economy as the city grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, the majority of Black-owned businesses were small and located in the West End neighborhood, where the largest number of Sacramento's African American residents lived and worked. The West End contained Sacramento's primary commercial streets along J and K Streets and Capitol Avenue. Businesses owned by white, Black, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and other ethnic groups clustered around these streets. A Chinatown was located around I and 3rd streets, directly to the south of the Southern Pacific Railroad depot. Among the Black businesses in the West End in the early 20th century were O'Riley's Shoe Repair Shop (not listed in city directories), Taylor Walker's Barber Shop at 10th and J streets, Frank Canson's Safeway Cleaners at 1108 5th Street, and O.A. Johnson's Palace Laundry at 1300 R Street.¹⁰⁷ All of these businesses were demolished during redevelopment of the West End in the 1950s and 1960s.

Due to the small size and limited economic power of the African American community until World War II, Black-owned businesses survived through their resilience, pragmatism, ability to adapt, and by cultivating relationships with other minority groups.¹⁰⁸ Black businesses faced strong competition from white- and minority-owned businesses. Without a large enough African American community to independently support Black-owned businesses on its own, many Black businesses were forced to cater exclusively to white clientele in order to survive or risk losing white customers. A barber shop owned by Taylor Walker at 1008 7th Street, for instance, served only white customers and employed an all-white staff, in spite of being owned by a Black man.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, because African American individuals were typically refused service at white-run establishments, they often patronized businesses owned by other minority groups rather than Black-owned businesses. Commercial relationships between racial and ethnic minority groups also extended to medical establishments. Due to the poor treatment they received at white-run hospitals, African American residents frequently sought medical treatment at hospitals operated by Japanese individuals.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 135.

¹⁰⁸ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

¹⁰⁹ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 15.

¹¹⁰ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 11-12.

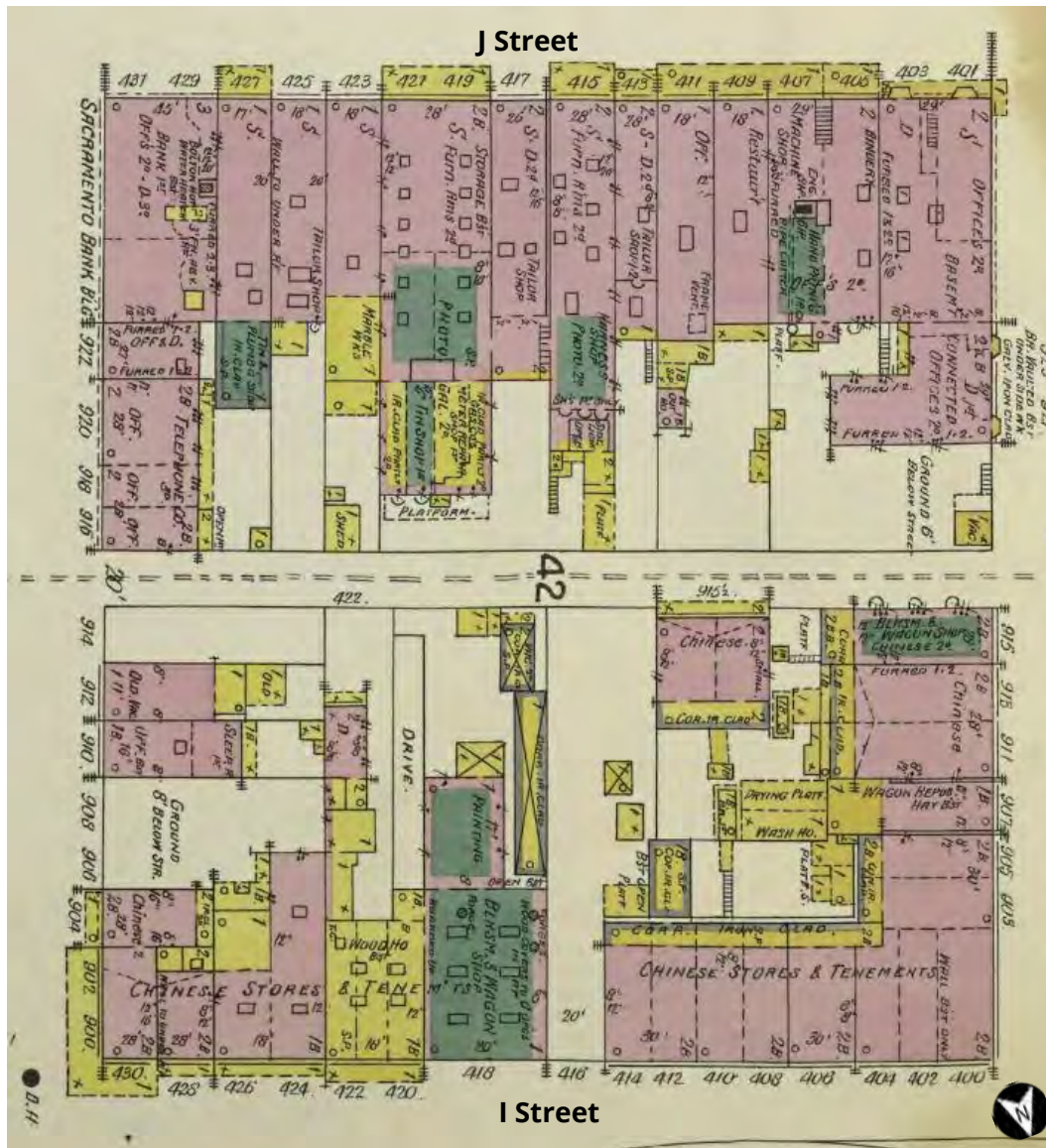


Figure 17. Fire insurance map of the block between J, I, 4th, and 5th streets in 1895, showing a concentration of Chinese businesses on I Street and mixture of businesses in the West End. Source: Library of Congress. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

Outside of the West End, prior to the 1950s, a small number of Black-owned businesses were scattered in other pockets of the city where African American residents were able to find housing. Successful restaurateur George Dunlap moved to a house (still extant at 4322 4th Avenue) in Oak Park in 1906 as the neighborhood was being developed. Dunlap initially learned his trade as a professional chef while working as a cook on Southern Pacific Railroad dining cars. As his career progressed, he opened several restaurants in Sacramento, including one on the ground floor of the Capital Hotel at 6th and K streets, a dining car service for the Sacramento Northern Railway and Suisun Bay ferry, the Ramon. Another of his businesses was a diner at the State Fairgrounds off Stockton Boulevard that operated for 34 years and served an average of 3,000 guests per day.

In 1930, he opened Dunlap's Dining Room out of his house in Oak Park. The restaurant was highly regarded for its Southern-style cooking and hospitality and became a popular dining destination for Sacramento's political and social elite, serving between 50 and 300 guests per day. Guests included governors, legislators, judges, and other federal, state, and city officials. Although Black patrons were allowed to dine at the restaurant any day of the week, the customers were primarily white, and Black patrons often felt unwelcome except on Monday nights, which were specifically set aside for them. The restaurant remained prominent in Sacramento's dining scene until it closed in 1968.¹¹¹



Figure 18. Advertisement for the opening of Dunlap's Dining Room at the Capital Hotel in 1920. Source: *Sacramento Bee*, 15 May 1920.

¹¹¹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 45; "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

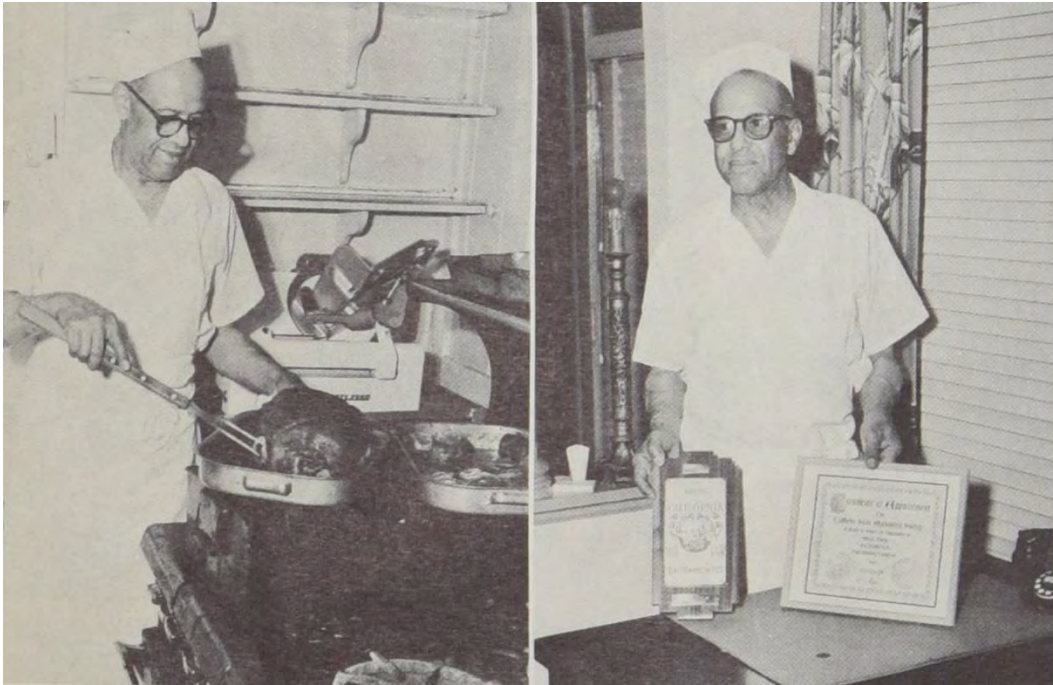


Figure 19. George Dunlap, cooking at his restaurant Dunlap's Dining Room (1952).
Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 20. Employees waiting for customers inside Dunlap's Dining Room (1952). Source:
Colorfornia: The California Magazine 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

World War II and Postwar Period, ca. 1940-1980

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

Hundreds of thousands of African American men and women relocated to California during World War II and in the years immediately following. As part of the Second Great Migration, they were attracted by the prospect of steady, lucrative job opportunities in defense-related fields and nearby military bases. After the war, Sacramento's easy-going lifestyle and its better-than-average economic opportunities for skilled African Americans convinced many Black servicemen to permanently settle in the city. By 1950, more than 250,000 Black men and women had moved to the state. Sacramento received the fifth-most number of Black migrants during this period, after only Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and San Diego. Although Sacramento did not have any major aircraft or shipbuilding facilities, like these other cities, several military bases and installations were within a 50-mile radius of the city, including McClellan Air Force Base, Mather Army Air Base, Camp Beale, (now Beale Air Force Base), the Sacramento Signal Depot, and Travis Army Air Base in Fairfield. These military facilities brought thousands of workers to the Sacramento area.¹¹² By 1943, the workforce at McClellan alone topped 22,000 people, as the base raced to meet wartime demands.¹¹³

Although hiring discrimination continued to limit where and what kind of work African American residents were able to obtain after World War II, in general a greater number and variety of career opportunities became available to African Americans. An increasing number of Black professionals moved to Sacramento and established practices during the postwar period. In the 1940s, Dr. Brewer and Dr. Kenneth Johnson were the only Black dentist and physician in Sacramento, respectively. They operated a medical practice together in a "modern professional building" in the West End at 1602-1604 8th Street. Dr. Brewer would eventually commission a new medical office building at 2014 10th Street (extant), designed by



Figure 21. Realtor J.R. Smith (1952). Source: *Colorifornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

¹¹² Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 141-142.

¹¹³ Kyle Byard and Tom Naiman, *Images of America: McClellan Air Force Base* (San Francisco: Acadia Publishing, 2007), 31.

local Japanese American architect George Muraki. Approximately 40 percent of the practice's clientele was reportedly white.¹¹⁴ The city's first known Black pharmacist, Daniel Taylor, arrived in 1943, followed by its first Black mortician, Vincent "Ted" Thompson in 1945; the first known Black licensed realtor, J. R. Smith, in 1946; and its second Black attorney, Nathaniel Colley, in 1948.¹¹⁵ Clarence Craig, Sr. served as a special delivery mail carrier at the Oak Park Post Office and delivered mail across the city. He later became one of the first Black United States Postal Service employees in Sacramento to advance to a supervisory position.¹¹⁶

In the 1950s, Sacramento's Black legal community grew and matured with the additions of attorneys Douglas Greer, Clarence Canson, and L. Archie Harris.¹¹⁷ After completing degrees at the University of California, Los Angeles and Howard University, Dr. Arthur R. Trent, Jr. moved to Sacramento in 1950 to complete his postgraduate studies at Sacramento General Hospital. Like many other Black professionals and business owners at the time, Dr. Trent initially struggled to find anyone willing to rent office space to him. He eventually opened his own medical practice at 1602 8th Street in Downtown Sacramento and became known as a pioneer in the local African American medical community, recognized by the Capital Medical Society and local chapter of the National Dental Association as a trailblazer and role model in his field. He was also an active member of the local chapter of the NAACP, California Medical Association, and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternal club.¹¹⁸ Dr. Leroy Bradford Brown was also among this pioneering group of Black physicians in the postwar period. After graduating with his medical degree from Howard University in 1958, he opened an internal medicine practice in Sacramento at 3031 G Street (extant) in 1962. During the same period, he also served as a physician for the City of Sacramento, staff physician at the Sacramento Community Hospital and Mercy Hospital, and senior aviation medical examiner.¹¹⁹ Dr. Thomas Slaughter II and Dr. Thomas Marshall were early OB/GYN specialists serving Sacramento beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s period. Slaughter served on the clinical faculty at the UC Davis School of Medicine, on staff at the County Hospital and Chair of Obstetrics/Gynecology at the Methodist Hospital. He maintained a separate office at 801 Alhambra Boulevard (extant) in East Sacramento outside Sacramento's majority Black neighborhoods, presumably, in order to serve an interracial clientele.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22; City directories, Sacramento, 1956-1960, Ancestry.com.

¹¹⁵ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 150.

¹¹⁶ Conversation with family of Clarence Craig, Sr., conducted by Carson Anderson, May 2023.

¹¹⁷ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 159.

¹¹⁸ "Dr. Arthur Trent, Dedicated Physician," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 September 2004.

¹¹⁹ William C. Matney, ed, *Who's Who in Black America, 1975-76*, 1st ed, vol. 1 (Northbrook, Illinois: Who's Who in Black America, Inc., 1976), 74-75.



Figure 22. The medical offices of Dr. Kenneth Johnson and Dr. Roscoe Brewer (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

Others, such as Anthony Rene Francis, initially found work at the nearby military bases before beginning their professional careers. When Francis first moved to Sacramento from Louisiana in 1947, he worked at McClellan Air Force Base while awaiting an appointment for a job with the State of California. He began his career with the State as a junior clerk, rising to become an analyst. After obtaining a degree from Sacramento State University, he worked as social worker with the Sacramento County welfare department and later in various roles with the State, including with the California Office of Corrections, State Personnel Board, Department of Rehabilitation, and Department of Justice.¹²⁰

The growth of the Black professional community also benefited neighborhoods such as Del Paso Heights. Born in South Carolina and raised in Georgia, Dr. Clarence Wigfall decided to move to the neighborhood in 1955 after surveying locations throughout Northern California and deciding that it was the area that needed his services the most. He subsequently opened a medical practice at Roanoke Street and Branch Street, becoming only the fifth practicing African American physician in Sacramento at the time. He later relocated his practice to Grand Avenue and Haywood Street.¹²¹ Driven by a desire to help the community, Dr. Wigfall often purchased medicine for his patients out of his own pocket and was nearly bankrupted for the first 10 years after opening his practice. He went on to serve for three years as trustee of the American River Health Care Center and as a physician at the Sacramento County well-baby clinic.¹²²

¹²⁰ Interview with Anthony Rene Francis, conducted by X Pasha, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021.

¹²¹ *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated and Unpublished)

¹²² Walt Wiley, "Clarence Wigfall, Longtime Del Paso Heights Doctor," *Sacramento Bee*, 11 September 1998.

African American residents also entered into law enforcement, education, and other fields. Robert Canson joined the Sacramento police force in 1947, becoming the city's first Black police officer. In 1948, his wife, Fannie Canson, became Sacramento's first Black teacher since Sarah Mildred Jones.¹²³ Edgar J. "Pat" Patterson worked as a state police officer in the 1940s. During Governor Earl Warren's three terms from 1942 to 1953, he served as Warren's personal driver and body guard, developing a close professional and personal relationship with Warren that continued for the rest of both men's lives. Patterson became an important confidant of Warren's and had a quiet but powerful influence on shifting Warren's views on race relations as several of California's long-standing discriminatory laws started to be challenged and overturned during his terms. Warren went on to be appointed chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953 and wrote the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.¹²⁴ The infusion of Sacramento's new class of Black professionals during and after World War II propelled the African American community forward, providing essential services to which members had previously been barred and lending their voices to the fight for more rights that opened up even more opportunities to Black individuals, both in Sacramento and further afield.¹²⁵



Figure 23. Edgar Patterson (1952). Source: *Colorifornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the local Black community challenged discriminatory practices that had limited their job opportunities. Nathaniel Colley, attorney for the Sacramento chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), challenged employment discrimination by labor unions in a case in which he defended African American tile setter, Albert Bacon.¹²⁶ The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) campaigned against

¹²³ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 150.

¹²⁴ Justin Panson, "Governor's Driver," Confluence Studios, accessed August 31, 2022, <http://www.confluencestudio.com/governors-driver.html>; "Edgar Patterson; Driver for Earl Warren," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2001.

¹²⁵ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 159.

¹²⁶ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 36.

employment discrimination at the Bank of America. Another case in 1964 led the Southern Pacific Railroad to hire six African American workers, including Joe Debbs.¹²⁷ During roughly the same period, Black employees working for the State of California formed a union, the Black Advocates and State Service (BASS), to bring attention to and address discrimination in State departments. After BASS was formed, similar coalitions were formed by Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders.¹²⁸ As a result of these efforts and countless others that remain untold, the African American community progressed increasingly toward employment equality.

BLACK BUSINESSES AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the largest number of Black businesses remained centered in the West End, with relatively few other Black owned businesses in outlying mixed-race neighborhoods, such as Oak Park, Highland Park, and Del Paso Heights. However, unlike older cities on the East Coast and Midwest, Sacramento did not have a predominantly Black commercial district.¹²⁹ Black-owned establishments were interspersed among businesses owned by people of Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, European descent, as well as members of other minority groups, who lived and worked in the racially mixed West End. Sacramento first appeared in editions of the *Negro Motorist Green Books* in the 1940s, indicating that the size of the local Black population had grown large enough by the postwar period to support a substantial number of businesses. Created by Black mailman Victor Green in New York to compile a list of Black-friendly businesses in an annual guidebook, the *Negro Motorist Green Books* provided Black travelers with a guide to businesses and services where they would be welcomed in cities across America during the segregated, often physically dangerous, Jim Crow era.¹³⁰ The Sacramento editions of the Green Books show a concentration of businesses either owned by Black individuals or where Black patrons were welcomed in the blocks around Capitol Avenue between 4th and 7th streets from the late 1940s to the 1950s. These included the cocktail bar the Congo Club at 329 Capitol Avenue, owned by Carl Buckner and Jerlean Colley (wife of attorney Nathaniel Colley), and the Mo Mo Club, a popular jazz club with a hotel on the upper floor located at 600 Capital Avenue, which was owned and operated by brothers Alex and Don “Hovey” Moore. Other Black-owned businesses near the intersection of Capitol Avenue with 6th and 7th streets included the 14-room Crystal Palace Hotel, barber shop, shoe repair

¹²⁷ Interview with Joe Debbs, conducted by Harvey Jones, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, November 2021.

¹²⁸ Interview with Frederick K. Foote, conducted by Dane Nicolas, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, November 2021.

¹²⁹ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 72; Oral History of Vincent “Ted” Thompson, by Clarence Caesar, 1984, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Collection, Center for Sacramento History.

¹³⁰ The Negro Motorist Green Books, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://negromotoristgreenbook.si.edu/virtual-exhibit/>; Dr. Gretchen Sorin and Ric Burns, “Driving While Black: Race, Space and Mobility in America” [documentary], 2020, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/video/driving-while-black-race-space-and-mobility-in-america-achvfr/>

shop, and cleaners at 1317-1321 6th Street, which was owned by barber M.L. Vann. The hotel and three businesses were considered the largest Black-owned and operated business establishment in the city at the time. Thompson’s Funeral Home, founded and run by Vincent “Ted” Thompson, was located nearby at Capitol Avenue and 7th Street.¹³¹

TABLE 4: SACRAMENTO BUSINESSES IN THE *NEGRO MOTORIST GREEN BOOKS*, 1948-1967¹³²

Business	Address	Years in Green Books
Barber Shops		
Mrs. Mikes	1350 56th Avenue	1952
Beauty Parlors		
Twigg's	421 Capitol Avenue	1952-1954
Leftridge	3102 Sacramento Blvd. (Broadway/Martin Luther Kind Blvd.) (poss. extant)	1952-1954
Nannette's	1241 5th Street	1952-1954
Larocco's	1630 7 th Street	1952-1954
Drug Stores		
Taylors	1230 6th Street	1952-1954
Hotels		
Center Hotel	420 1/2 Capitol Avenue	1948-1959
Capitol Inn Motel	Highways 40 and 99	1957-1962
Night Clubs		
Zanzibar	6th Street and Capitol Avenue	1952
Capitol	6th Street and Capitol Avenue	1952
Mo-Mo	600 Capitol Avenue	1953-1954
Restaurants		
Dunlap's Dining Room	4372 4th Avenue (extant)	1952-1967
Taverns		
Helen's	505 Capitol Avenue	1952
Tourist Home		
Mrs. R.C. Peyton	2202 ½ 4 th Street (extant)	1953-1956

¹³¹ “Colorfornia Visits California’s Capitol City,” *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

¹³² The Green Book, New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book>.

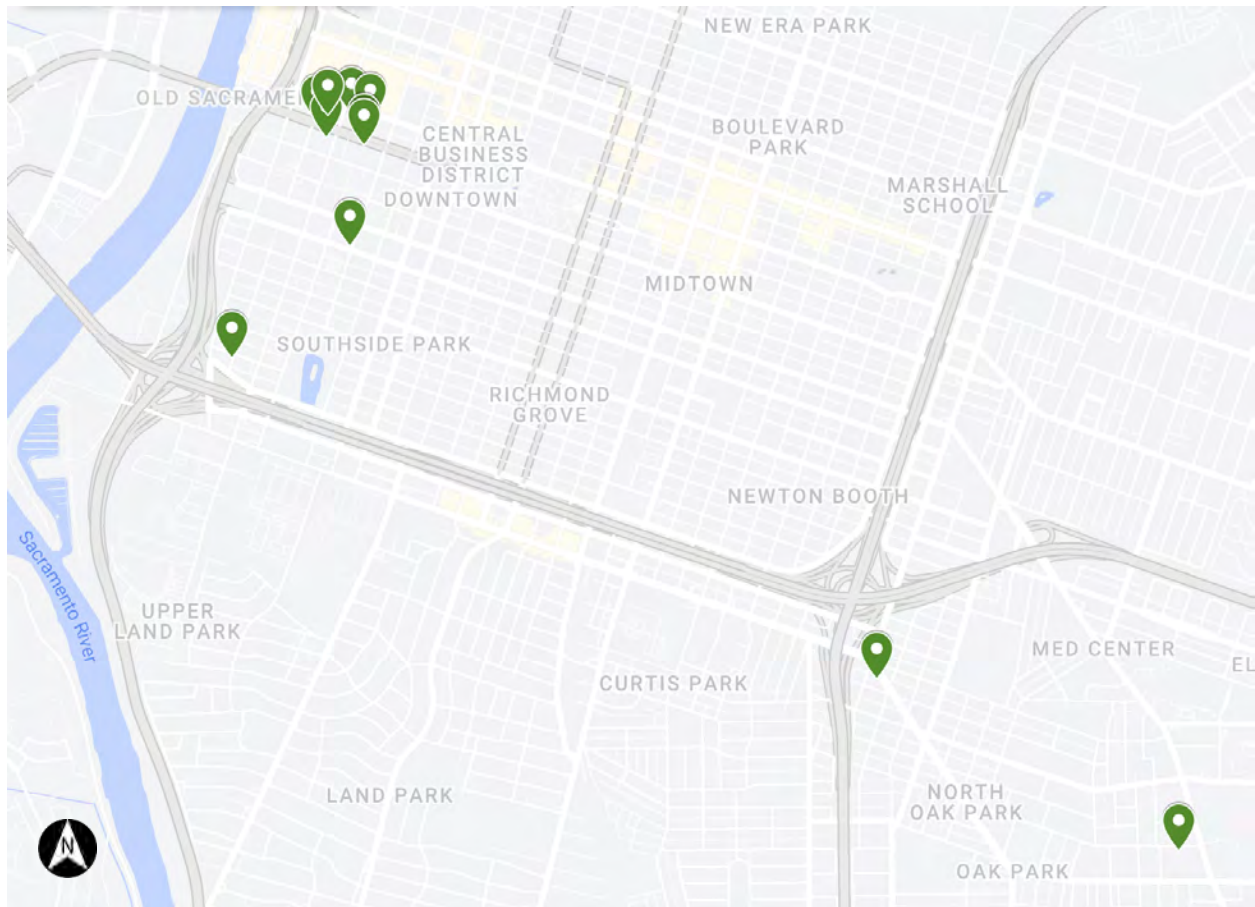


Figure 24. Map of businesses recorded in the *Negro Motorist Green Books*, ca. 1948-1967-. Source: Google Maps, 2023. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

Several Black entrepreneurs began their careers in a specific field but expanded and diversified their business ventures into a variety of other commercial endeavors, sometimes under the same roof. Similar to M.L. Vann, Palmer Pinkney owned a building at 1120-1122 4th Street (roughly L and 4th streets) that housed the popular restaurant The Stag, as well as a separate billiard parlor and liquor store. A nationally known hunter, himself, Pinkney's establishment was popular among athletes and sportsmen who visited Sacramento.¹³³

¹³³ "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 25. The Stag Café (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 26. Employees and patrons inside the Stag Cafe (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 27. Employees inside the Stag Liquore Store (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 28. Patrons playing billiards at The Stag (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 29. The Mo Mo Club (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 30. Waitresses at the Mo Mo Club (1952).
Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4
(1952): 14-22.



Figure 31. Bartenders, patrons, and owner Hovey
Moore (grey suit) at the Mo Mo Club (1952). Source:
Colorfornia: The California Magazine 1, no. 4 (1952):
14-22.

For many, the opportunity to purchase property and start a business came as a result of racial mistreatment of Japanese American residents. Executive Order 9066 forced Japanese American citizens living on the West Coast into internment camps. In their urgency to sell their property before relocation, many sold their property at rates that were well below market value. Black individuals, who were otherwise unable to afford the prices to buy commercial property, saw an opportunity to purchase property for the first time and open businesses of their own, in buildings formerly owned by Japanese Americans.¹³⁴ Among them were Louis Anderson, her husband Isaac Anderson, and their business partner William “Nitz” Jackson, who opened the A&J Liquor store at building that had been vacated by Japanese individuals when they were forced into internment camps during the war. Jackson and Anderson later used the wealth they earned from the liquor store to open one of Sacramento’s leading nightclubs, the Zanzibar.¹³⁵ Other formerly Japanese-owned businesses that were purchased or managed by African Americans during the war included the Center Hotel at 420 ½ Capitol Avenue, the Lincoln Hotel at 1306 ½ 4th Street, and Greenfront Poolroom at 315a Capitol Avenue.¹³⁶

A few Black-owned or managed businesses were located in the southern parts of Sacramento’s original street grid in the similarly multi-racial Southside Park and Richmond Grove neighborhoods. A boarding house owned by Mrs. R. C. Peyton was located at a still-extant building at 2202 ½ 4th Street.¹³⁷ Another Black mortuary, the Morgan and Jones Mortuary owned by Grace Morgan-Jones, opened at 1200 Q Street, also extant, in 1949.¹³⁸

The redevelopment of the West End, and resulting demolition of the majority of the buildings there in the 1950s, had a devastating impact on the businesses and the men and women who operated them. As a diverse, multi-racial neighborhood, the impacts of redevelopment of the West End fell hardest on the area’s working and middle-class minority groups. Many buildings housing businesses owned and operated by Black individuals were demolished and the businesses forced to relocate. Among them is Thompson’s Funeral Home. Originally opened at 7th and N streets in 1948, it was one of the few Black mortuaries in Sacramento along with the Morgan and Jones Mortuary. Thompson – a graduate of Fordham University, New York University, and San Francisco College of Mortuary Science – moved to Sacramento in 1945 and was considered one of the best morticians in the state of California by the 1950s. After the State

¹³⁴ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 145-146.

¹³⁵ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 146-147; Oral History of Vincent “Ted” Thompson, by Clarence Caesar, 1984, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Collection, Center for Sacramento History.

¹³⁶ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 148.

¹³⁷ The Green Book, New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book>.

¹³⁸ “Colorfornia Visits California’s Capitol City,” *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

of California acquired his property via eminent domain in 1957 to build a parking lot for a new office building, Ted Thompson relocated his business to 3601 5th Street in Oak Park. It took 18 years for him to complete the new building to a comparable standard to what had been lost in the West End.¹³⁹



Figure 32. Thompson's Funeral Home (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 33. Ted Thompson (right) and his wife, Georgia (left). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

¹³⁹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 47; Oral History of Vincent "Ted" Thompson, by Clarence Caesar, 1984, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Collection, Center for Sacramento History.

The law office of Nathaniel Colley, Sacramento's first Black attorney and the recognized leader of the African American community during the postwar period, was originally located at 421 L Street (now the site of the Macy's department store) in the West End. As a result of redevelopment, the firm had moved to 621 P Street by 1953.¹⁴⁰ He opened a third office in the Richmond Grove neighborhood at 1810 S Street in 1967. The building was designed by local African American architect James Dodd.¹⁴¹

The displacement of Black and minority-owned businesses from the West End resulted in the emergence of new concentrations of Black-owned businesses in neighborhoods to the north, south, and east of the Central City, such as Oak Park and Del Paso Heights. In Oak Park, a new commercial district of businesses owned or patronized by Black residents developed on Sacramento Street (now Broadway) from Alhambra to 35th Street.¹⁴² Among the businesses to relocate to Oak Park was the Mo Mo Club, which was reopened at 2963 35th Street across from McClatchy Park.¹⁴³ In 1968, Black real estate agent George Seabron partnered with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) to purchase a property at 2939 35th Street and convert it into a grocery store. The business not only added a valuable amenity for residents but also provided jobs and career training for members of the community.¹⁴⁴

Prior to World War II, North Sacramento and Del Paso Heights, remained mostly agricultural with a very small population. Most residents lived on farms with their own orchards or dairies. As Sacramento continued to grow outside its original street grid and residents moved into the area in the early 20th century, Del Paso Boulevard developed into the main commercial corridor for North Sacramento, Del Paso Heights, and other subdivisions to the north of the central city.¹⁴⁵ By the 1930s, a business district emerged at the intersection of Grand Avenue, Rio Linda Boulevard, and Palmetto Street.¹⁴⁶ By 1965, the *Sacramento Negro Directory*, published by the *Sacramento Observer* showed that the center of Black commercial activity in the Del Paso Heights neighborhood was centered on of Grand Avenue and Rio Linda Boulevard. Black-owned businesses along the streets included Taylor's Pharmacy at 1201 Grand Avenue (extant), C.B. Frazier Real Estate at 921 Grand Avenue (extant), Cecil York's Quick Employment Agency and Barber and Beauty Shop at 1228 Grand Avenue (extant), the general medical practice of Dr. Clarence Wigfall at 1129 Grand Avenue, the law offices of L. Carter McMorris at 1542 Grand

¹⁴⁰ Sacramento City Directories, 1949-1953, Ancestry.com.

¹⁴¹ Cory Quon and Sean de Courcy, "Nathaniel Colley & Associates Law Offices," California Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record, 2020; Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021.

¹⁴² Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 43.

¹⁴³ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 57; Advertisement, *Sacramento Bee*, 20 September 1962: 47.

¹⁴⁴ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 51-52.

¹⁴⁵ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 57.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 59.

Avenue, Joe's Barbeque at 3646 Rio Linda Boulevard, and LeBerry's Professional Barber Shop at 3733 Rio Linda Boulevard. Other local African American businesses included Washington Barbershop, founded by Rev. Eugene Washington at 3804 Fig Street in 1966. The barbershop remained in operation for at least 50 years.¹⁴⁷ Willie Hausey, Sr. opened a successful Chevron dealership in the area and later the first African American independent lobbying firm in Sacramento, Willie Hausey & Associates. He went on to become the president of the Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council (SAEOC) and was a leader in Sacramento's local efforts in the War on Poverty in the 1970s.¹⁴⁸

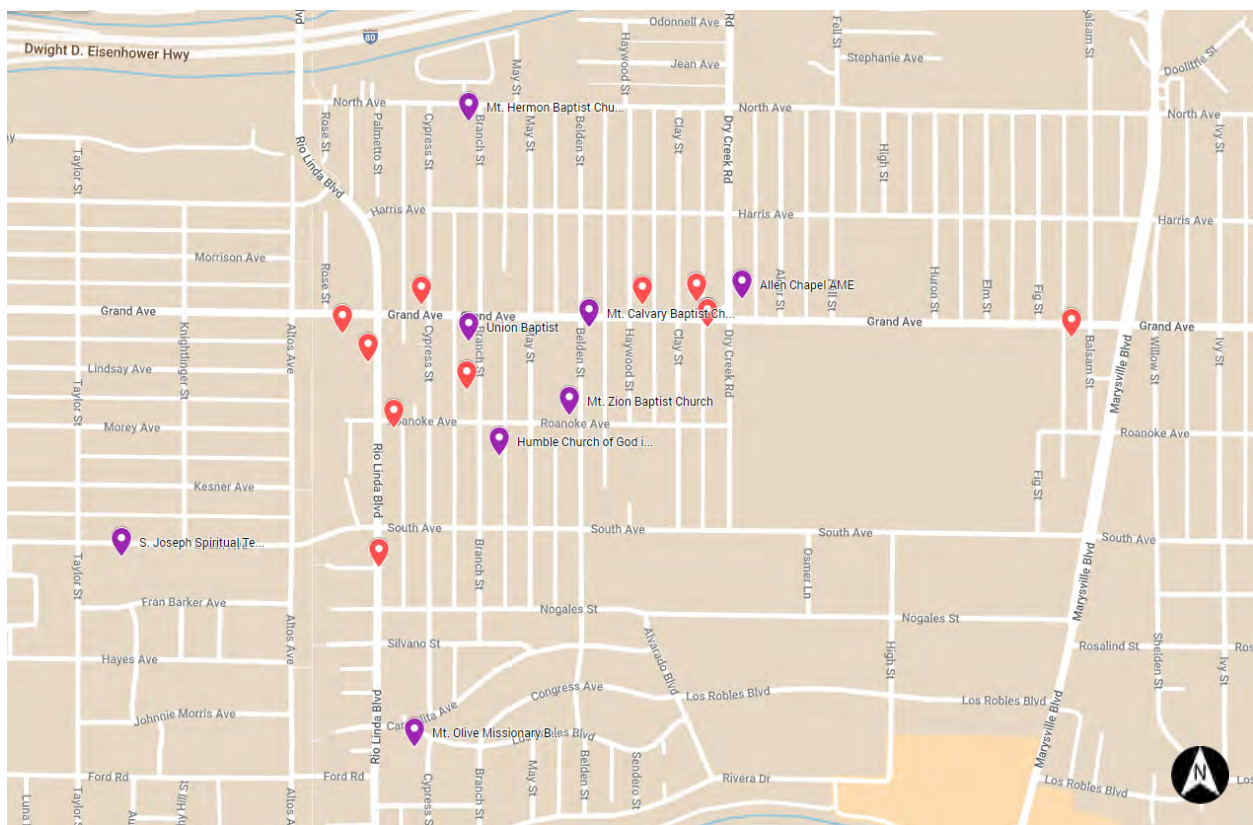


Figure 34. Map of Black-owned businesses (red markers) and churches (purple markers) in the Del Paso neighborhood based on the 1965 *Sacramento Negro Directory*. Source: Google Maps, edited by Page & Turnbull.

The stretch of Rio Linda Boulevard south of Grand Avenue developed into a popular hang-out location called "The Front," known for its collection of bars, pool halls, gambling houses, and

¹⁴⁷ "The 'Barbershop Preacher,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 10 September 2006.

¹⁴⁸ "Willie R. Hausey Sr.," *Sacramento Bee*, 24 September 2022; Del Paso Heights Civic Leader Heads Poverty War Council," *Sacramento Bee*, 14 July 1970.

liquor stores. Among the most popular hang-outs were Bill's Pool Room at 3617 Rio Linda Boulevard and Rock's Liquor Store at 3601 Rio Linda Boulevard, near the intersection of Rio Linda Boulevard and South Avenue.¹⁴⁹ Bill's Pool Room was opened by Dave Wilburn in 1952, while Rock's Liquor Store was opened in 1967 by a group of 25 Black investors who together formed Rocks Investment Corporation.¹⁵⁰



Figure 35. Men sitting outside a business at 3545 Rio Linda Boulevard, near the intersection of Rio Linda Boulevard and South Avenue in Del Paso Heights (1975). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPM04410.

Just as many of these businesses and commercial areas were becoming established, highway construction in the 1960s and 1970s erased much of the progress. Highway 99, running north-

¹⁴⁹ "The 'Barbershop Preacher,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 10 September 2006.

¹⁵⁰ "Peacemaker Suffers Injury in Gunfight," *Sacramento Bee*, 16 September 1958; Patty Henetz, "City to Evict Liquor Store on 'The Front,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 19 October 1989; Bertha Gaffney-Forman, "Black Business – Part 3, No Profanity in Pool Hall," *Sacramento Bee*, 1 June 1976.

south to the east of Oak Park between 31st and 32nd streets was completed in 1961. The highway created a distinct border between Oak Park and Curtis Park and other primarily white, affluent neighborhoods to the west and impeded connections to important commercial amenities, such as the nearest supermarket on Franklin Boulevard. Further exacerbating Oak Park's isolation from the rest of the city, Highway 50 was completed to the north of the neighborhood in the early 1970s, separating it from East Sacramento. Combined with a series of racial conflicts that shook Oak Park in the summers of 1969 to 1971, the impact on Oak Park's formerly vibrant commercial district was devastating. Many Black-owned businesses closed during this period and never reopened. Ginger Rutland remembered that when she returned from college "all of the stores were gone. They were boarded up. It was a dead community."¹⁵¹ Several of the businesses that had been along Oak Park's thriving commercial strip on 35th Street relocated to Stockton Boulevard, creating a third generation of Black businesses there. By the late 1970s, a popular new Black commercial district had developed along the Stockton Boulevard south of Broadway, including the A Touch A' Class restaurant and nightclub at 4217 Stockton Boulevard (extant), and Warners' Mercedes Service at 4411 Stockton Boulevard (extant).¹⁵²

Highway construction also impacted racially mixed neighborhoods to the west. Highway 50 split Southside Park in two, while Interstate 5, running along the east side of the Sacramento River, between Front and 3rd streets, cut the neighborhood off from the waterfront, destroying much of the industrial district along the river that provided the source of employment for many nearby residents.¹⁵³

By the late 1980s, the flight of white residents, neglect from local City government, rising drug epidemic, and increasing crime rates resulted in the closure of many businesses along Del Paso Heights' main commercial corridors on Grand Avenue and Rio Linda Boulevard. Most of the buildings and businesses surrounding Rock's Liquor Store and Bill's Pool Room were demolished by 1989, leaving the buildings surrounded by empty lots. The same year, the City of Sacramento initiated eminent domain proceedings against the two properties in order to reduce crime in the area and redevelop the stretch of Rio Linda Boulevard into a new senior housing development.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021.

¹⁵² Sacramento African American Experience public meeting, February 3, 2023.

¹⁵³ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ Henetz, "City to Evict Liquor Store on 'The Front.'"

In spite of these challenges, Black business men and women persevered and continued to establish and lead businesses that enriched the daily lives of Sacramentans. By delivering valuable services to their communities, they demonstrated a business acumen that offered economic development opportunities for the next generation.



RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

Circa 1839-1980

Photographs (clockwise from top left): St. Andrews AME at 715 7th Street, Shiloh Baptist Church at its present location at 3565 9th Avenue, the congregation of Shiloh Baptist Church at its former location at 6th and P streets.

THEME: AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN SACRAMENTO, CA. 1839-1980

Throughout the United States, churches have been central to the life of African American and Black communities over the course of history. For enslaved Black people in the 19th century, religious expression often served as a means of catharsis, while churches were places of safety and refuge. In addition to being places for spiritual worship, Black churches served an essential role as community gathering places, sometimes acting as performance halls or temporary school buildings until permanent buildings could be completed, as well as centers for social and political organization where protests, marches, and rallies were organized. Black preachers were religious as well as community leaders, frequently leading a variety of organizations and efforts aimed at providing for the health, financial, social, and educational needs of the community.¹⁵⁵

Likewise, in Sacramento, Black churches played a fundamental role in the lives of African American residents, where they provided places for spiritual guidance, respite from racial injustices, and community uplift. Many influential civic community leaders also led in these spaces, and the churches played a major role in the movement for racial equality, both at the local and national scale. The influence of the Black church spread outside the walls of the church buildings themselves and into the surrounding neighborhood and homes of parishioners, where meetings, gatherings, concerts, and other events sponsored by the churches were often held. In this way, Black churches influenced every aspect of Black life and were an essential part of the community.

Even as Black churches experienced many of the same impacts of discrimination and redevelopment as Black residential and commercial development, their perseverance and longevity in the city are evidence of their importance to the fabric of the community.

Pre-World War II, ca. 1850-1940

From the 1850s to the turn of the 20th century, Sacramento's Black community was anchored primarily by two congregations, St. Andrews African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Shiloh Baptist Church (originally founded as Siloam Baptist Church). Both congregations continue to serve Sacramento residents today and are two of the longest continuously operating Black churches in California.

¹⁵⁵ "The Black Church in America, a Story," African American Registry, accessed December 22, 2021, <https://aaregistry.org/story/the-Black-church-a-brief-history/>.

Recognizing the large number of Black miners in the Sacramento area after the onset of the Gold Rush, several attempts were made to establish a Black church in the fledgling city. Those efforts came to fruition in 1850, when brothers Barney and George Fletcher began organizing weekly religious meetings at the house of Daniel Blue on I Street between 4th and 5th streets. Other original trustees included James R. Brown, John Barton, John L. Wilson, and Chesterfield Jackson.¹⁵⁶ By late 1850, the small group of original church members had gathered enough support and funding to construct a wood frame church building on 7th Street between G and H streets in the West End. This became the first church building of St. Andrews AME, the first major visible African American institution founded in Sacramento and the first African American church established on the West Coast. In 1867, construction began on a new brick building for the congregation near the site of the original church building on 7th Street. When it was completed, the congregation's church building was worth \$1,000 and could seat up to 150 people. By 1870, the church had been expanded and could seat 250 people. The building served as a meeting place for many social, political, and community groups through the 19th century.¹⁵⁷



Figure 36. St. Andrews AME founding member, Daniel Blue (undated). Source: St. Andrews AME Church.

The spread and establishment of specific church denominations to Sacramento reflected the demographics of the population. The arrival of the African Methodist Episcopal Church appears to be linked to the origins Sacramento's early Black residents, many of whom came from states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in Philadelphia in the late 18th century and developed a reputation as a strong force in the fight

¹⁵⁶ Patricia Penn, "Historical Summary," St. Andrew's African American Methodist Episcopal Church brochure, 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 79, 104.

for Black rights throughout the northeastern United States. St. Andrews AME continued this tradition and quickly emerged as the political and social leader of Sacramento's Black community.¹⁵⁸ The three of the first four California Colored Conventions were held at St. Andrews AME in 1855, 1856, and 1865. The conventions brought delegations of Black leaders from across California together to discuss strategies for addressing civil rights grievances and obtaining greater rights. The conventions helped overturn the state law prohibiting people of color from testifying in court in 1863, which allowed Daniel Blue to file and ultimately win the last known slavery case in California in 1864.¹⁵⁹



Figure 37. St. Andrews AME Church at 715 7th Street (1938). Source: California State Library.

As the local Black population continued to grow in size and diversity, additional churches were founded. In 1856, Siloam Baptist Church (later renamed Shiloh Baptist Church) was organized by Reverend Charles Satchell, becoming Sacramento's second Black church. Reflecting the ethnic diversity and collaborative spirit between Sacramento's minority groups, the church's small congregation met at the Chinese Chapel on 6th and H streets for its first three years, before purchasing a former synagogue on 5th Street between N and O streets around 1860. In

¹⁵⁸ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 37-42.

¹⁵⁹ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 4.

1905, the church purchased a property at the corner of 6th and P streets and built a new church building on the site. By 1934, Shiloh Baptist Church had 800 members and was the largest Black Baptist church in Sacramento. The church remained at the site on 6th and P streets for over 50 years until the 1950s when it was demolished as part of redevelopment of the West End and relocated to its existing building in Oak Park. Many other churches and organizations would spring out of the congregation of Shiloh Baptist Church over the decades.¹⁶⁰

Together, St. Andrews AME and Shiloh Baptist Church became the spiritual, social, cultural, and political heart Sacramento's African American community. From the beginning, the congregations of these churches demonstrated a strong commitment to providing needed services to the community where the city of Sacramento refused. With the state and local governments denying funding for public schools for children of color in the mid-19th century, St. Andrews AME housed Sacramento's first "colored school" for the Black community, and Shiloh's pastor Jeremiah B. Sanderson tirelessly petitioned the Sacramento City School Board for years in the late 1850s to include funding for a colored school.¹⁶¹



Figure 38. Rev. Charles Satchell, founder of the Shiloh Baptist Church. Courtesy of the Shiloh Baptist Church.

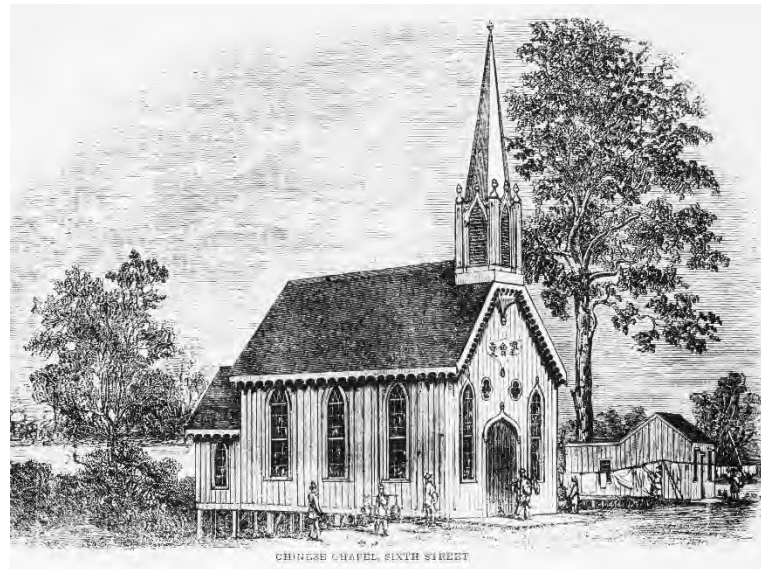


Figure 39. The Chinese Chapel, the site of the first meetings of the Shiloh (Siloam) Baptist Church. Source: Center for Sacramento History, Frank Christy Collection, 1998/722/1709B.

¹⁶⁰ Kathleen Forrest and Genevieve Entezari, City of Sacramento, Preservation Office, "Shiloh Baptist Church," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2012.

¹⁶¹ Susan Bragg, "Knowledge is Power: Sacramento Blacks and the Public Schools, 1854-1860'," *California History* 75, No. 3 (Fall 1996): 215-221.

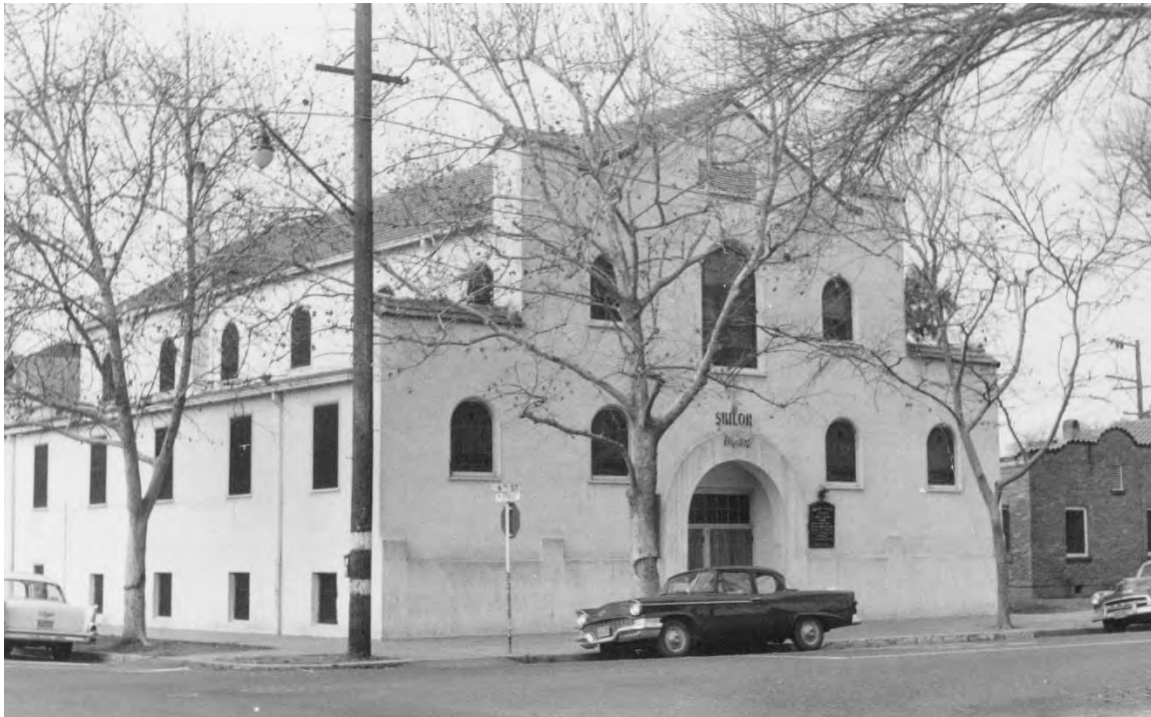


Figure 40. Shiloh Baptist Church in its former location at 6th and P streets (1957). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Gunther Grumm Collection, 1991/087/SBPMP1059.

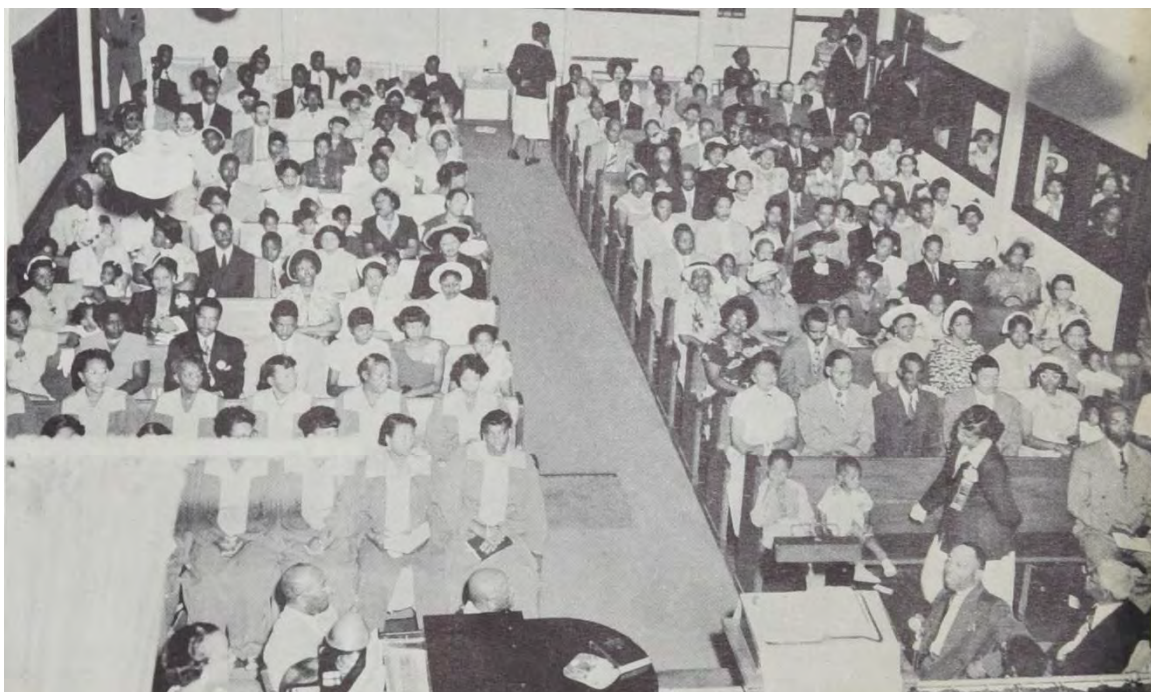


Figure 41. Congregants inside Shiloh Baptist Church (1952). Source: *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

The influence of Sacramento's Black churches in civil rights activism and community betterment continued into the 20th century. Reverend Thomas Allen Harvey founded the local chapter of the NAACP in 1916. One year later, he established Sacramento's third Black church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, or Kyles Temple AME Zion at a building formerly occupied by an Episcopalian church at 36th Street and 4th Avenue in Oak Park. Reverend Harvey used his position of leadership to address racial grievances and bring about positive change for his community. He won the first racial discrimination case in Sacramento's history and was the city's first Black political candidate in 1919. Other organizations would spread under his leadership of the church, such as the Crispus Attucks Soldier's and Sailor's club in 1921.¹⁶²

As the African American population grew rapidly during the First Great Migration in the 1920s and 1930s, more churches were established to meet the spiritual and social needs of the community, as well as its expansion into neighborhoods outside the central city. By this time, St. Andrews AME and Shiloh Baptist, as the two most prominent Black churches, had gained a reputation for attracting members of Sacramento's Black elite and middle class, including doctors, attorneys, engineers, and members of the longest standing Black families in the city. These mainline churches had a conservative, formal, and generally more solemn style of worship than other denominations. This did not appeal to the new flood of residents, many of whom had migrated from the South, were from a working-class background, and were accustomed to more lively and enthusiastic styles of worship that were popular in many Southern churches at the time. These new arrivals brought their religious traditions and styles of worship with them, founding "sanctified," "holiness," or other denominations based on Southern traditions to Sacramento and expanding the city's religious diversity.¹⁶³ Similar to St. Andrews AME, some of these new congregations initially met in the homes of members before enough funding could be gathered to purchase or build a church of their own. One such church was the Del Paso Heights Deliverance Center, founded in the living room of Alabama native Hercules D. Benbow at 1705 Dry Creek Road in 1924.¹⁶⁴ The church appears to have relocated to several different locations, including 1216 Roanoke Avenue, 3116 Stockton Boulevard (extant), and 3629 Del Paso Boulevard (extant).¹⁶⁵ The church spawned the creation of several other related Black churches in the Del Paso Heights neighborhood.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 116.

¹⁶³ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 62.

¹⁶⁴ "Sallie Benbow, Wife of Pastor, Dies at 73," *Sacramento Bee*, 28 October 1971: 11.

¹⁶⁵ Sacramento Ethnic Community Survey, "An Interview with Elizabeth Benbow Johnson Love," ed. Clarence Caesar (Sacramento: City of Sacramento, 1983); *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965); and "Spectrum," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 September 1973: 43.

¹⁶⁶ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 62.

Post-World War II, ca. 1940-1980

In the wake of increasing violence in the South and the lure of job opportunities in defense-related industries, thousands of African Americans moved to Sacramento during World War II and the years immediately following. Meanwhile, the redevelopment of the West End in the mid-20th century, where the majority of African American residents and institutions had been located since the mid-1800s, forced Black churches in the area to relocate to other neighborhoods. The number of Black churches in Sacramento grew at a corresponding pace to keep up with the growing size, diversity, and displacement of the local African American population. In 1958, the *Sacramento Outlook*, a local African American newspaper, listed 23 Black churches in Sacramento.¹⁶⁷ By 1965, the Sacramento Negro Directory included 35 Black churches. None of the churches were located in the downtown area (formerly the West End neighborhood). Instead, the Black churches were located in Oak Park (16), North Sacramento/Del Paso Heights (9), Glen Elder (3), and Southside Park (2), with one church in Midtown on R Street between 16th and 17th streets and one church just south of Broadway on Burnett Way and 18th streets. The denominations of these churches reflect a shift in the dominant denominations represented by Black churches in Sacramento from the 19th century to the second half of the 20th century. Whereas there had been more parity among denominations in the 19th and early 20th centuries, by 1965, 19 of the city's 35 Black churches (54 percent) were Baptist or Missionary Baptist churches. Pentecostal denominations made up the second largest group with roughly five churches, followed by two African Methodist Episcopal or Christian Methodist Episcopal churches and two Seventh Day Adventist churches.¹⁶⁸

Among the prominent Black churches founded after World War II was the Allen Chapel AME Church in Del Paso Heights. The congregation was organized at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Rivers at 3712 Belden Avenue (extant) in 1948. In order to attract members, for the first two years of its existence, the church operated solely as a Sunday School. The school was housed at the home of Alfred and Gadra Manuel at 3718 Branch Street (extant), with Mrs. Manuel serving as superintendent, and Mr. Manuel working two jobs to support his family, as well as the church. The church's early membership included some of the most prominent and influential residents of the Black community, including pioneering childcare leader and Good Neighbors Club president Minette Smith, beloved Grant Union High School custodian Wendell

¹⁶⁷ Caesar, *An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980*, 165.

¹⁶⁸ *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965).



Figure 42. Allen Chapel AME at its original location (ca. 1950).



Figure 43. The Building Committee of Allen Chapel AME (ca. 1960). Front row, from left to right: Hattie Burnside, Florence Pruitt, Gloria Rowe, Auntine Burney, James Vinson. Back row: James Pruitt, Layron Nelson, Louis Brown, and Mamie Johnson.



Figure 44. The Trustee Board of Allen Chapel AME (ca. 1962). Seated, left to right: Essie Brown, Minette Smith, Beatrice Bryant, Charles Bradley. Standing: Alfred Caesar, Henry Hailes, Alfred Manuel, Wendell Echols.



Figure 45. The intermediate Sunday School class of Allen Chapel AME (ca. 1960). First row, left to right: Rev. Piney Pendarvis, Dianne Vinson, Gwendolyn Roundtree, Minnie Banks, Ann Brown. Second row: Mr. Charles Bradley, Patricia Roundtree, Patricia Scott, Nolia Rowe, Mr. Essex Foulks.

Echols, eventual City councilman Charles Bradley, and prominent family and childcare advocate and community organizer Auntine Burney. The first church services were held in 1950, when a small building was rented at 1061 Orange Avenue. The following year, the church's membership raised money to build its own church at 3744 Belden Street (extant). The building was completed in 1953, largely through the efforts of Reverend Howard Walker, Alfred Manuel, and Leon Honeycutt. The congregation grew rapidly over the following decade under the leadership of Reverend Vivian Bowers from 1957 to 1961 and Reverend Piney Pendarvis, who served from 1961 to 1968. Bowers, an Arkansan, made appeals to fellow Arkansans to join the congregation, and is credited with the surge in membership during the late 1950s—just as many Black Southerners from Arkansas, and other places in the Deep South, were relocating to California in search of greater opportunities. To accommodate its growing congregation, Reverend

Pendarvis acquired the current church property at 1239 Grand Avenue (extant) in 1961, on which a larger, new church was constructed. The Building Fund Committee, including Essie Brown, Auntine Burney, and Wendell Echols, spearheaded the fundraising and design efforts.¹⁶⁹

TABLE 5: BLACK CHURCHES IN 1965

Church	Address	Neighborhood
Allen Chapel AME	1239 Grand Avenue	Del Paso Heights
Bircher Temple, Christian Methodist Episcopal	2812 29 th Avenue	South City Farms
Christ Temple Apostolic Church	1619 R Street	Midtown
Christ Temple Missionary Baptist Church	3030 26 th Avenue	South City Farms
Church of God in Christ	4158 4 th Avenue	Oak Park
First Baptist Tabernacle	1800 Burnett Way	Curtis Park
Friendship Baptist Church	Odd Fellows Hall, 2471 34 th Street	Oak Park
Glen Elder Baptist Church	Elder Creek Road	Glen Elder
Greater Light Baptist Church	3909 36 th Street	Oak Park
Humble Church of God in Christ	3632 Branch Street	Del Paso Heights
Kyles Temple CME Church	2940 42 nd Street	Oak Park
Macedonia Baptist Church	700 Benton Avenue	North Sacramento
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church	3744 Beldon Street	Del Paso Heights
Mt. Hermon Baptist Church	940 North Avenue	Del Paso Heights
Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church	920 Los Robles	Del Paso Heights
Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church	3779 9 th Avenue	Oak Park
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	1075 Roanoke Avenue	Del Paso Heights
New Hope Baptist Church	[3700 32 nd Street] ¹⁷⁰	Oak Park
New Pleasant Grove Baptist Church	8017 38 th Avenue	Glen elder
Oak Park Seventh Day Adventist	3841 4 th Avenue	Oak Park
Oak Park United Church of Christ	3308 4 th Avenue	Oak Park

¹⁶⁹ 1961-62 Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church Anniversary Booklet, 1962; “The History of Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church 1948-Present,” 67th Church Anniversary Booklet; 2015. All cited materials courtesy of Ms Sheila Roundtree, Evangelist, Allen Chapel AME Church.

¹⁷⁰ The address for the New Hope Baptist Church was omitted in the 1965 *Sacramento Negro Directory*, likely due to the fact that its church building was under construction at the time. The congregation’s church building at 3700 32nd Avenue opened in December 1965 (“New Hope,” *Sacramento Bee*, 18 December 1965.)

Church	Address	Neighborhood
Prayer Temple Church of God in Christ	4000 8 th Avenue	Oak Park
Rising Star Baptist Church	4201 8 th Avenue	Oak Park
Sacramento Deliverance Center	3116 Stockton Boulevard	Oak Park
Capitol City Seventh Day Adventist	2828 33 rd Street	Oak Park
Shiloh Baptist Church	3565 9 th Avenue	Oak Park
St. Andrews AME Church	2131 8 th Street	Southside Park
St. John's Baptist Church	2130 4 th Street	Southside Park
St. Paul Baptist Church	4020 12 th Avenue	Oak Park
Triangle Church of Christ	3779 9 th Avenue	Oak Park
Trinity Baptist Church	3120 20 th Avenue	North City Farms
Union Baptist	3737 Branch Street	Del Paso Heights
Williams Memorial Church	4495 Sacramento Blvd. (Broadway/MLK Dr. Blvd.)	Oak Park
Church of the Living God	7435 Lemon Hill Avenue	Glen Elder

Source: *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965).

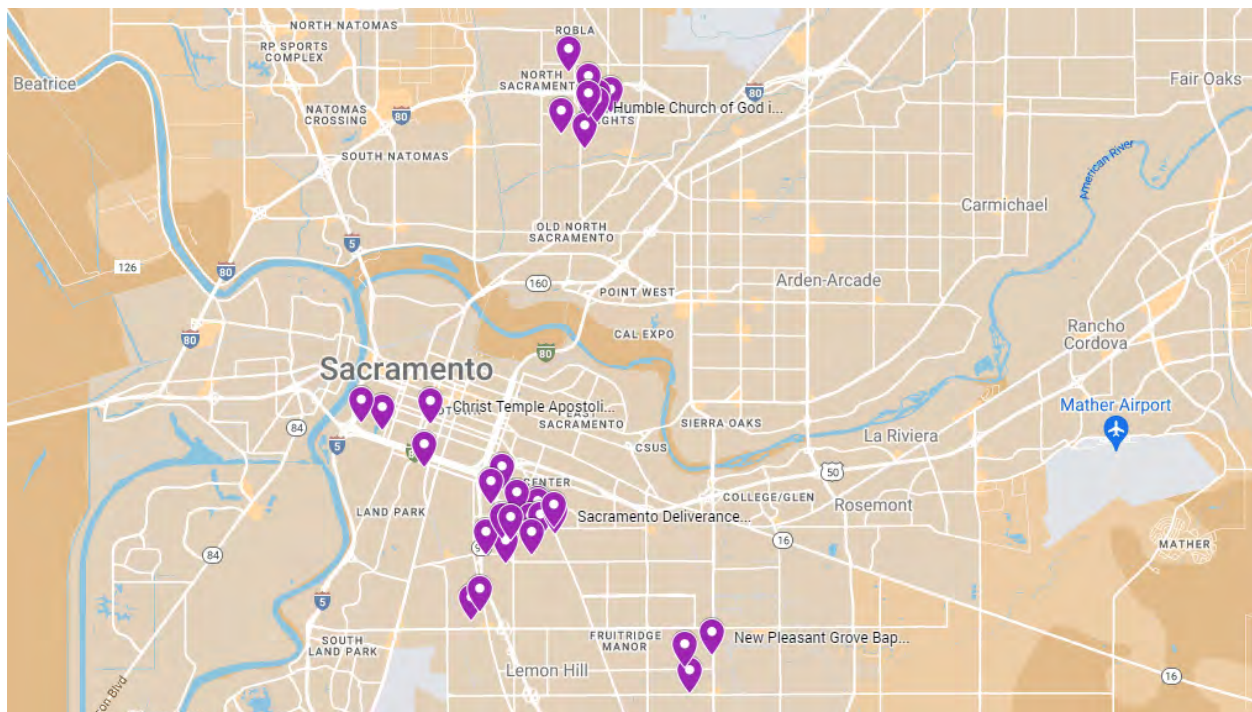


Figure 46. Map showing the distribution of African American churches listed in the 1965 *Sacramento Negro Directory*. Source: Google Maps, edited by Page & Turnbull.



Figure 47. The New Hope Baptist Church, ca. 1952. Source: "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

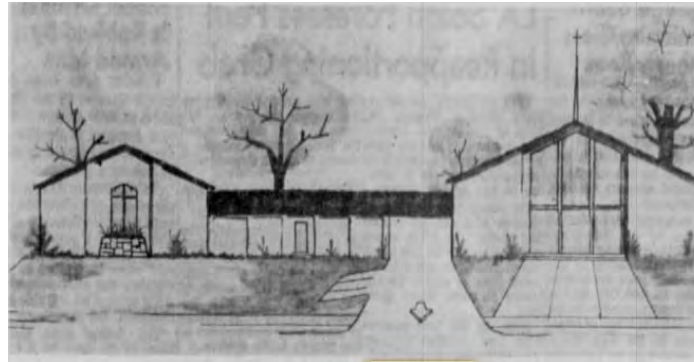


Figure 48. Drawing of the New Hope Baptist Church's new building at 3700 32nd Street (1964). Source: "New Hope Church May Move by September," *Sacramento Bee*, 20 June 1964: 13.

Research indicates that the locations of African American-led churches throughout Sacramento often changed multiple times over the span of decades as their congregations grew or they were pushed out by redevelopment projects or the construction of freeways in the mid- to late-20th century. The New Hope Baptist Church, for example, was located at 2540 20th Street and



Figure 49. Reverend Willie P. Cooke. Source: Shiloh Baptist Church.

20th Street and Burnett Way in the 1930s and moved to 2109 X Street in 1948.¹⁷¹ With its church in the path of the planned W-X Freeway, the congregation built and relocated to a new church at 3700 32nd Street (extant) in 1964. Other churches forced to relocate due to construction of the freeway included the Church of God in Christ, then at 8th and W streets.¹⁷²

Anticipating the arrival of the wrecking ball in the West End, the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Reverend Willie P. Cooke, moved his congregation to a new church building at 3565 9th Avenue (extant) in Oak Park in 1958. The building was designed by Sacramento's first licensed Black architect, James Dodd. Much of the construction of the building, itself, was completed by Reverend Cooke, who had been an electrician prior to his ordination, with assistance from members of the congregation. The new

¹⁷¹ "Rally is Planned," *Sacramento Bee*, 12 July 1934: 11; "Church Services in Sacramento," *Sacramento Bee*, 17 August 1935: 25; "Church Will Present St. Louis Gospel Singer," *Sacramento Bee*, 21 August 1945: 13.

¹⁷² "New Hope Church May Move by September," *Sacramento Bee*, 20 June 1964: 13.

church reflected the motivation, dedication, and determination the congregation of Shiloh Baptist had to see their church continue to thrive in its new location.¹⁷³

The arrival of one of the most prominent Black institutions to Oak Park attracted many local Black residents to move to the neighborhood, helping to usher in Oak Park's transformation into a major hub of the local African American community. The concentration of Black residents and their churches in Oak Park led to the development of church-led food pantries, breakfast programs, daycares, and Sunday Schools to serve the local community, many of which still operate today.¹⁷⁴

Although the primary role in leading civil rights efforts on behalf of the community had shifted toward the NAACP over time, the churches continued to be strong forces for progress. Pastors and congregation members joined the NAACP and supported its activities. In the 1950s, a group of pastors from local Black churches formed the Interdenominational Minister's Conference to cooperate on addressing civic matters related to their communities.¹⁷⁵



Figure 50. Members of the Interdenominational Ministers' Conference (1952). Source: "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

¹⁷³ Forrest and Entezari, "Shiloh Baptist Church."

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 51.

¹⁷⁵ "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

In the late 1960s, the United Christian Centers operated multiple community service centers throughout Sacramento, providing meeting places, study centers, recreation opportunities, and personal services for people of all ages, with a special emphasis on youth. The organization was first established at 5th and P streets in the West End in 1921, primarily to assist Chinese immigrants. Locally, the organization remained largely white-led through the early 1960s but began to shift its focus toward providing services to the African American community in the late 1960s under the directorship of African American Reverend Rosenwald Robertson. After gaining experience working in the American Baptist Home Mission Societies Centers in Boston and on the Lower East Side of New York City, Robertson moved to Sacramento in 1962 and became executive director of the local United Christian Centers in 1966. Under Robertson's leadership, the organization expanded rapidly into Sacramento's diverse, underserved neighborhoods.

By 1968, there were three United Christian Centers in the Sacramento area at 2620 21st Street (extant) in Curtis Park, 1445 Nogales Street (extant) in Del Paso Heights, and 5th and Andrew Streets in West Sacramento, with plans to expand into the Oak Park and Glen Elder neighborhoods. Likely influenced by the philosophies of Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Power Movement, the local United Christian Centers' focus on providing service centers specifically for African Americans in the late 1960s reflected a broader shift in the organization's approach at the national level, away from integration toward encouraging Black consciousness and equality with white communities.¹⁷⁶

In the latter half of the 20th century, the mission of Black churches thusly evolved from their early goals of providing spiritual and material succor for their communities in the 19th century to organizing and spearheading community action for civil rights and social justice. Reflecting the politization of African Americans during the civil rights era of the 1960s and subsequent emphasis on providing

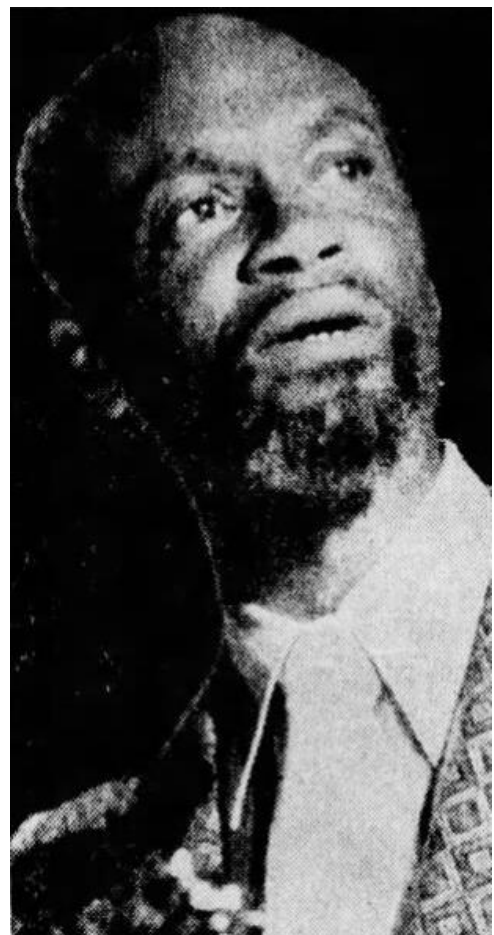


Figure 51. Reverend Rosenwald Robertson (1972). Source: Cornel West, "Black Liberation: Action On Local Level Is Bringing Progress," *Sacramento Bee*, 15 October 1972.

¹⁷⁶ "Christian Centers Director Says Sacramento Can Forestall Consequences of Urban Unrest," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 March 1968: 14.

community services in the 1970s, Sacramento's Black churches were social and political forces in the 1970s. The most involved Black churches tended to fall into one of two categories: the oldest, most established churches with a long history of community leadership, such as St. Andrew's AME and Shiloh Baptist Church, and those that were led by passionate pastors with a personal commitment to making their congregations catalysts for social uplift. In the 1960s, St. Andrew's AME was led by the most politically influential Black minister in Sacramento, Reverend Cyrus Keller, who was twice elected president of the Sacramento branch of the NAACP. As part of its commitment to serve the surrounding community, Shiloh Baptist Church, meanwhile, took the ideologies of self-sufficiency, self-determination, and community service popularized by the Black Panther movement to another level under the leadership of Reverend Samuel Cooke, building the Shiloh Arms affordable housing development at 4009 23rd Avenue (extant) in 1970 to ensure the availability of low-income housing for the community.¹⁷⁷ As with its Oak Park church building, the housing development was also designed by James Dodd.

Other politically active churches included Allen Chapel AME in Del Paso Heights, with its childcare center and Good Neighbors Club, and St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Oak Park. Under the nearly 50-year leadership of its founder, Dr. Ephraim Williams, St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church emerged as a leader in political and social action, offering more than 65 community programs and initiatives, including health and fitness programs, reading and tutorial services, clothing giveaways, employment assistance, mentorship programs, and classes on parenting, financial literacy, and homeownership.¹⁷⁸

In the 21st century, local historically Black churches continue to serve a fundamental role in uplifting the Sacramento community through their varied and wide-ranging community service activities.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 66-67; Maria Heeter, "Longtime Sacramento Pastor Ephraim Williams to Retire," *Sacramento Bee*, 28 July 2020.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, ACTIVISM & THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Circa 1850-1980

THEME: BLACK CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, ACTIVISM & THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN SACRAMENTO, CA. 1850-1980

In spite of the small size of Sacramento’s African American community through the mid-20th century, it had an outsized impact on the local, state, and national fight for racial equality, thanks to its location in California’s state capital and resulting access to state legislative bodies, as well as the tireless efforts of numerous remarkable individuals and organizations.

Churches & Individual Residents Lead the Fight, ca. 1850-1916

At the time California became a state in 1850, the Civil War and abolition of slavery were still more than a decade away. The decade between statehood and the start of the Civil War in 1861 were a turbulent time across the United States during which the question of the status of Black individuals was at the forefront of national discourse and politics. In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise of 1850, requiring that the U.S. government aid in returning freedom seeking African Americans to their enslavers. The act enflamed tensions between the slave states in the South and free states in the North and led to an increase in abolitionist activity across the country.¹⁷⁹ Although California officially entered the Union as a free state, meaning that slavery was not legally permitted within its boundaries, many proslavery individuals held positions of power in the state government – including the California Supreme Court and the state legislature. In the 1850s, proslavery legislators helped pass laws that stripped rights from African Americans and other people of color. During the Gold Rush, white individuals brought enslaved Black men and women by force from other states to California to work for them in the gold mines. By 1852, up to 1,500 enslaved African Americans lived in California. The same year, California passed its own strict fugitive slave law, authorizing white Californians to kidnap and traffic African American individuals to Southern enslaving states.¹⁸⁰

The responses of California’s Black communities, including that of Sacramento, to this atmosphere of increasing racist federal and state policies reflected the nationwide growth in anti-slavery activity during the 1850s and 1860s. During this period, the largest Black populations in California existed in the north part of the state in the counties of San Francisco (1,176 free Black residents in 1860) and Sacramento (468), followed by El Dorado (277), Yuba

¹⁷⁹ Catherine A. Paul, “Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, VCU Libraries Social Welfare History Project, accessed October 23, 2022, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/federal/fugitive-slave-act-of-1850/>.

¹⁸⁰ California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, “Interim Report,” June 2022, 134-135.

(233), Tuolumne (166), Nevada (156), and San Joaquin (126).¹⁸¹ The Black communities in these areas – particularly in San Francisco, Sacramento, Oakland, and Stockton – frequently overlapped and banded together throughout the mid- to late 1800s to support each other and the overall advancement of California’s Black residents. Many of the state’s early Black civil rights leaders originally came from cities in the Northeastern United States, where they were influenced and empowered by the national abolitionist movement and prominent leaders such as Frederick Douglass. They brought the ideas and strategies from their experiences in Northeastern abolitionist circles with them to California. While many prominent Black leaders were based in San Francisco, including Franchise League founder Mifflin Gibbs and Mary Ellen Pleasant, known as the “Mother of Civil Rights in California,” Sacramento became a hotbed for Black organizing due to the size of its Black population and its status as the state capital. Sacramento had a prominent role in the fight for Black education and in court cases to expand Black rights, several of which were argued in front of the California Supreme Court, which was based in the city.¹⁸²

During this early period in the Sacramento’s African American community formation and development in the decades following California statehood, the congregations of the city’s first two Black churches, St. Andrews AME Church and Siloam (later Shiloh) Baptist Church, led the local fight to expand the rights of Black individuals. Daniel Blue, one of the key founding members of St. Andrew’s AME in 1850, was one of the most influential figures in the early history of civil rights activism in Sacramento. He and his wife, Lucinda, opened one of the first schools for Black, Native American, and Asian American children at a time when there was no state or municipal support for schools for children of color. In 1855 and 1856, the first two Colored Conventions to be held in California took place at St. Andrews AME. The fourth convention also met in Sacramento in 1865. Inspired by the nationwide Colored Convention Movement, which began in the Northeastern United States in 1817, the California Colored Conventions aimed to address the conditions of African Americans across the state and develop strategies to challenge discriminatory state legislation.¹⁸³ The call to hold the first conference in Sacramento was issued in September 1855. Signatories included San Franciscans J.W. Townsend, Peter Anderson, W.H. Newby, and D.W. Ruggles, all of San Francisco. The sole signatory from Sacramento was James Carter.¹⁸⁴ When the convention convened in November

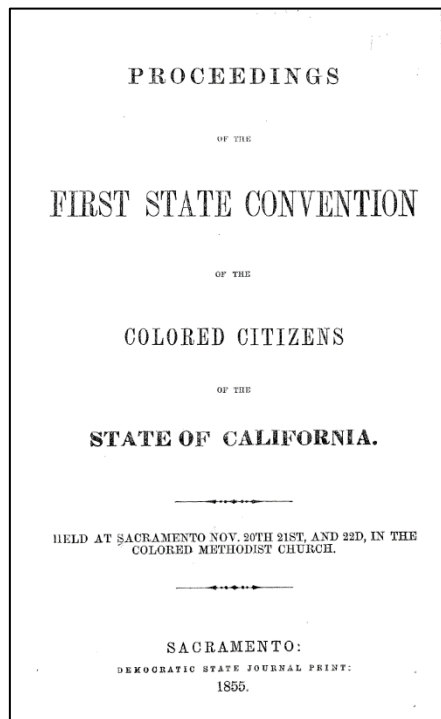
¹⁸¹ United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882).

¹⁸² Susheel Bibbs, “Voices for Freedom: The Hyers Sisters’ Dream, Change, and Legacy,” sponsored by LHF, Inc. (Sacramento, CA: M.E.P Publications, 2022), 5.

¹⁸³ Herbert G. Ruffin II, “The Conventions of Colored Citizens of the State of California (1855-1865), February 4, 2009, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/conventions-colored-citizens-state-california-1855-1865>.

¹⁸⁴ Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 211-212.

1855, Sacramento County was represented by Reverend Jeremiah B. Sanderson, George W. Booth, John G. Wilson, Emory Waters, Thomas Detter, David Brown, David Nicholas, Clayton Miller, James R. Starkey, and David Lewis. In his early remarks to the convention, Reverend Sanderson neatly summarized the significance and goals of the proceedings:



When first it was announced that this Convention was to be held, I rejoiced. We are scattered over the State in small numbers; the laws scarcely recognizing us; public sentiment is prejudiced against us; we are misunderstood, and misrepresented; it was needful that we should meet, communicate, and confer with each other upon some plan of representing our interests before the people of California...it is the most important step on this side of the Continent.¹⁸⁵

The California Colored Conventions attracted representatives to Sacramento from 27 California counties and became the driving force behind the successful efforts to establish the first schools for “colored” children in San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, and Stockton, and repeal the state law barring people of color from testifying in court in 1863.¹⁸⁶

Figure 52. Cover of the proceedings for the first California Colored Convention, held in Sacramento in 1855. Source: Colored Conventions Project.

Echoing the nationwide increase in abolitionist activity during the mid-19th century, several important trials were held in Sacramento in the 1850s and 1860s that challenged

the hypocrisy of California’s status as a free state with proslavery laws. In the 1857, a young enslaved Black man named Archy Lee was brought to Sacramento from Mississippi by a white man named Charles Stovall. At the time, California state law allowed visiting slaveholders, such as Stovall, to enter the state as long as they did not permanently settle in California. However, after their arrival, Stovall opened a school. When Lee learned of Stovall’s plans to take him back to the South, he fled to the Black-owned Hackett House hotel but was quickly captured and arrested. The local Black community mobilized in support of Lee, holding church fundraisers to

¹⁸⁵ *Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California* (Sacramento: Democratic State Journal Print, 1855), 5-6, Colored Conventions Project, accessed June 9, 2023, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/>.

¹⁸⁶ Damany Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 4; California Task Force, “Interim Report,” 136; Bibbs, “Voices for Freedom,” 5; Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 16.

collect money for his legal defense. Mary Ellen Pleasant aided in the efforts to free Lee, helping to hire lawyers to represent Lee and arranging hiding for him.¹⁸⁷ Prominent white attorney and founder of the Crocker Art Museum, Edwin B. Crocker, defended Lee in front of the California Supreme Court in Sacramento, arguing that Stovall had violated state law because he had established residency in the state when he opened his school. The judge ruled in Lee's favor, setting him free. Despite later attempts to have Lee rearrested, he ultimately achieved his freedom and resettled in British Columbia.¹⁸⁸

The question of the status of Black people brought to California continued to be raised over the next several years. Just after people of color regained the right to testify in court in 1863, Daniel Blue seized the opportunity to file a legal case to free the last known enslaved Black person in California, a 12-year-old girl named Edith. Edith had been illegally purchased by a farmer from Tennessee, abused, and forcibly held at a farm in rural Sacramento County. In 1864, Blue filed a writ of habeas corpus (a petition to "produce the body") to have Edith brought to court. The judge trying the case found



Figure 53. A member of the Sacramento Zouaves. Asher. Source: Burg, "From The Civil War to Civil Rights," *The Metropole*, April 9, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Susheel Bibbs, "Notes on The Archy Trials," October 6, 2022; Susheel Bibbs, "Mary Ellen Pleasant – A Brief Biography," October 6, 2022.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Beth Barber, "Archy Lee: The Golden State's 'Dred Scott' Legal Case," California State Library Foundation, June 12, 2020, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://cslf.medium.com/archy-lee-80a41d1ffeda>.

that Edith had been unlawfully detained and granted her guardianship to Blue.¹⁸⁹

After the repeal of the ban on Black testimony in 1863 and abolition of slavery with the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865, Black activists turned their attention to obtaining the right to vote. A Black militia, the Sacramento Zouaves, was formed in 1867 and made its first appearance at an emancipation celebration on January 1, 1868. In addition to being a paramilitary group, the Zouaves advocated for and encouraged support for Black voting rights and civic participation. Although Zouaves militia members themselves could not vote, they marched in support of the local Republic Party and its pro-abolitionist platform. Known early members include Lieutenants William Gault and William Quinn, Captain Sims Emory, First Lieutenant Isaiah Dunlap, Second Lieutenant Albert Grubbs, Sr., and Captain Robert R. Fletcher, perhaps Sacramento's first Black medical professional.¹⁹⁰ Black men received the right to vote with the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Asal Ehsanipour, "How the Founder of California's First Black Church Fought Its Last Known Slavery Case," KQED, February 25, 2022, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11818409/how-the-founder-of-californias-first-black-church-fought-its-last-known-slavery-case>.

¹⁹⁰ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

¹⁹¹ California Task Force, "Interim Report," 136.



Figure 54. Portrait of Elizabeth Scott Thorn Flood taken in the 1850s. Source: African American Museum & Library at Oakland.



Figure 55. Rev. Jeremiah B. Sanderson. Source: LocalWiki, Oakland Wiki.

One of the primary causes around which the Black community mobilized during the first decade after the Gold Rush was access to public education for Black and minority children. At the time, Black, Native American, Chinese American, and Japanese American children were not allowed to attend schools with white children, and no other provisions were made for their education.¹⁹² As such, the first schools for Black children were segregated, founded by private individuals and organizations, and funded entirely by community donations. The first known school in Sacramento for Black children was founded by Elizabeth Scott Thorn Flood in 1854. The school was organized at the St. Andrew's AME church building and later operated out of a house on 2nd Street between M and N streets before closing when Flood left to get married.¹⁹³ The educational goals of Sacramento's Black community were carried forward by the 1855 Colored Convention in Sacramento, which produced a mandate to establish schools for California's Black children. To help enact this mandate, Reverend Jeremiah B. Sanderson, recently arrived from Massachusetts, was invited to reorganize and run Sacramento's "colored" school at the corner of 5th and O streets.¹⁹⁴ Reflecting the close ties between San Francisco's

¹⁹² Wildy, "Mend a Broken Chain," 122.

¹⁹³ *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 174.

¹⁹⁴ Bibbs, "Mary Ellen Pleasant – A Brief Biography," October 6, 2022; Bibbs, "Voices for Freedom," 5.

and Sacramento's Black communities, Sanderson's schools, including the one in Sacramento, were sponsored by prominent Black San Francisco activist Mary Ellen Peasant.

Like other African Americans who arrived in California from the Northeast, Elizabeth Scott Thorn Flood and J.B. Sanderson's drive to advance the rights of Black residents of California was influenced by their upbringing in Massachusetts, the center for the abolitionist movement in the United States in the 19th century. Sanderson and Flood were both educated in New Bedford, Massachusetts, one of the only cities in the country that supported integrated public schools in the 1850s. Shortly after his arrival in Sacramento, Sanderson successfully petitioned the city school board for financial support for Black schools. Sanderson's petition led the City Council to pass an amendment to the city charter in 1855, authorizing the creation of free public schools for children of color.¹⁹⁵ Sanderson went on to found other schools for children of color in San Francisco and Stockton. He continued to work for the education of Black children across California throughout the 1860s and 1870s. In 1871, as an officer of the District Educational Conventional, meeting in Stockton, he helped petition the state legislature to allow Black children to attend public schools with white children. The petition led to the introduction of bills to the State Assembly and Senate. However, it wasn't until 1874 that a state law was passed, securing the right of all California children to public education.¹⁹⁶

Although the amendment to the city charter allowed for funds to be appropriated to the "colored" schools, this funding was repeatedly denied over the following years. In 1860, a state law passed that permitted racially segregated public schools to receive public funding from local authorities for the first time. These early segregated schools were important predecessors to Sacramento's first racially integrated schools, which were authorized in 1894.¹⁹⁷ Sarah Mildred Jones, who had taught at one of the city's colored schools, Ungraded School No. 2 – Colored, was appointed principal of the Fremont Primary School at 24th and N streets, becoming the first Black principal in Sacramento's history. Upon her appointment, 36 white parents threatened to remove their children from the school unless she was removed. Ninety-

¹⁹⁵ Susan Bragg, "Knowledge is Power: Sacramento Blacks and the Public Schools, 1854-1860," *California History* 75, No. 3 (Fall 1996): 215-221.

¹⁹⁶ Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Delilah L. Beasley, 1919), 174-182.

¹⁹⁷ Bragg, "Knowledge is Power: Sacramento Blacks and the Public Schools," 215-221.



Figure 56. Sarah Mildred Jones (center) with students at Ungraded School No. 2 - Colored (1882). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/030.

eight local educators responded by signing a letter of support for Jones. She remained in the position until her retirement in 1914.¹⁹⁸

Because of their small number and shared experiences with racial discrimination, the African American community often banded together with members of other ethnic minority groups, especially the local Chinese American community, to challenge the state's racist laws, policies, and practices. Lacking the size and economic and political power to build other large, dedicated buildings for gatherings, few if any known non-religious meeting halls were built specifically or exclusively for Black groups and organizations during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, local African American activists used other existing establishments that were owned or controlled by Black or minority residents, such as the Chinese, to meet and address issues facing the community. With much of the community's leadership springing from the local Black churches during the 19th and early 20th century, church buildings, especially St. Andrews AME,

¹⁹⁸ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

became some of the most common meeting places. In the 1850s, Hackett House, a hotel owned by Black abolition leaders Charles Hackett and Charles Parker at 3rd Street between K and L streets, also gained a reputation as a popular gathering place for local abolitionists and civil rights activists. Archy Lee fled to Hackett House to escape capture and transportation back to the South in 1858.¹⁹⁹

In the early 20th century, racism toward anyone who was not white and Protestant increased across the United States in reaction to the large influx of immigrants into the country. In 1915, Alabama preacher William J. Simmons revived the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), modeling it after the popular fraternal organizations of the period with a central headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia and a national recruitment structure that allowed it to rapidly spread outside the South to the Midwest and Western states.²⁰⁰ New KKK chapters formed across the country, including cities in California.²⁰¹ The growing visibility of, and increased participation in, the KKK during the 1910s and 1920s presented a new, growing threat to Sacramento's Black residents. Between 1908 and 1915, Black residents organized several times to protest local performances of Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s racist play, "The Clansman," which vilified the Reconstruction era in the South and glorified the rise of the KKK. Protests were held at the Clunie Theater in 1908 and 1910 and at the Deipenbrock Theater in 1911. Due to the small size of the Black community and limited avenues available for Black people to address racial injustice at the time, mounting meaningful protests proved to be initially challenging, and they failed to prevent the performances from going forward. In 1911, Rev. R.H. Herring of St. Andrews AME filed a formal protest with Sacramento Mayor Marshall Beard to halt performances of the play. His appeal was ignored. After the play was adapted into the 1915 film "The Birth of a Nation," Black activists, now more organized from their earlier experiences, mobilized again. A delegation of 24 representatives from the city's Black churches and community groups joined to voice their opposition to City Commissioner Ed Carragher. In response, Carragher granted a limited concession: the film would be shown but with the most offensive scenes edited out. At a time when racism was growing across the country, this was a significant win for the local Black community.²⁰²

In spite of efforts such as these, membership in the KKK across the country continued to grow, peaking in the early 1920s. The first known local meeting of the KKK in Sacramento occurred in

¹⁹⁹ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

²⁰⁰ "Ku Klux Klan, Realm of California Collection," California State University, Northridge University Library, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://library.csun.edu/SCA/Peek-in-the-Stacks/KuKluxKlan>.

²⁰¹ Marcia Eymann and Kim Hayden, producers, *The KKK in Sacramento - What We Didn't Learn In School* [video] (Sacramento, CA: Center for Sacramento History, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3hyl004cyg>.

²⁰² Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

1921 on the Lower Stockton Road (now Franklin Boulevard), just south of downtown Sacramento, when more than 4,000 members gathered. One year later, more than 300 new members, including several City employees, were initiated into the KKK at the organization's first initiation ceremony in Sacramento at the Masonic Muddox Hall at 3455 5th Avenue (extant) in Oak Park. In the early 1920s, the KKK sought to spread its racist ideals by donating to local Presbyterian churches and by infiltrating the local government and other positions of power.

The Sacramento Bee worked to expose known KKK members. Upon learning of the organization's growing presence in Sacramento, City Manager Clyde Seavy made several attempts to prevent the organization from gaining a foothold, banning the organization from Sacramento, authorizing City departments to investigate reports of staff joining the organization, dismissing City employees who were found to be members, and passing a local ordinance banning the wearing of disguises or masks in public places. Yet, KKK activity continued, and several KKK-backed candidates were elected to political office in the 1922 Sacramento County elections. The organization declined, although white supremacist views persisted in the second half of the 1920s, in part due to internal corruption.²⁰³

Activism & Resistance, ca. 1916-1960

THE NAACP

In 1916, a major new development occurred that would bolster the local African American community's ongoing fight for civil rights. That year, Reverend Thomas Allen Harvey arrived in Sacramento as the founding pastor of Kyles Temple AMEZ Church and soon established Sacramento Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), one of the earliest branches of the organization on the West Coast.²⁰⁴ One of the later founders of the Negro Women's Civic Improvement Club (NWCIC) and a prominent member of Shiloh Baptist Church, Netta Sparks,



Figure 57. T. Allen Harvey. Source: "Sacramento NAACP 100th Anniversary: A Century of Civil Rights," *Sacramento Observer*, 2006.

²⁰³ Eymann and Hayden, *The KKK in Sacramento*.

²⁰⁴ Burg, "From Civil War to Civil Rights."

served as the branch's first secretary.²⁰⁵ Subsequently, leadership in the local fight for civil rights began to gradually shift from Black churches to the NAACP.

Reverend Harvey served as the bridge between the churches and the NAACP. He was the local branch's first president and became a leading political and spiritual figure in Sacramento's African American community as a result of his work for numerous causes throughout the city. In 1918, he won the first known racial discrimination case in Sacramento's history when he successfully sued the W.L. Bigelow Restaurant at 3008 35th Street for unlawfully refusing him service. Under Harvey's leadership, the NAACP brought Black speakers to the city to discuss prominent issues facing the community, bringing greater attention to them. Looking to gain more powerful means of serving the Black community, he unsuccessfully ran for the position of City Commissioner in 1919 and City Council in 1921, becoming the first Black person to run for political office in Sacramento. Undeterred, Harvey continued to organize on behalf of local Black residents and founded the Crispus Attucks Soldiers' and Sailor's Club, also known as Crispus Attucks Lodge No. 19, Knights of Pythias.²⁰⁶ By 1921, the club had its own community center at 3401 2nd Avenue (extant).²⁰⁷ The club remained active through at least the 1970s.²⁰⁸

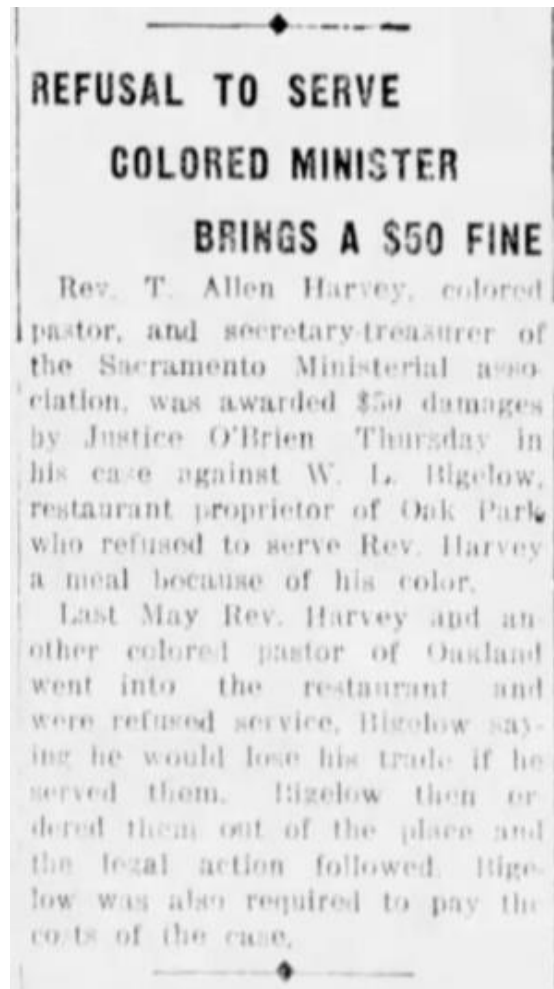


Figure 58. Newspaper article about T.A. Harvey's discrimination case against W.L. Bigelow's restaurant. Source: *Sacramento Star*, 25 July 1918: 2.

²⁰⁵ Forrest and Entezari, "Shiloh Baptist Church," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

²⁰⁶ Burg, "From the Civil War to Civil Rights."

²⁰⁷ "Oak Park," *Sacramento Bee*, 4 November 1919: 6; "Rev. Harvey Asks City Aid For Center," *Sacramento Star*, 1 April 1921: 2.

²⁰⁸ Untitled article. *Sacramento Bee*, 7 September 1978: 40.

With the KKK and racial violence on the rise, the Sacramento NAACP branch aggressively fought discrimination on numerous fronts during the 1920s. The branch pushed back against derogatory representations of African Americans in the *Sacramento Bee* and *Sacramento Union* by organizing letter writing campaigns, surveys of local Black residents, and meetings with the newspapers' administration to force them to publish an apology. The branch also led a successful effort to convince the City of Sacramento to hire Black garbage workers as part of its sanitation force. After a young Black boy was lynched in Oakland in 1923, the Oakland and San Francisco branches of the NAACP asked the Sacramento branch to join them in efforts to get Congress to pass an anti-lynching bill. That April, the NAACP held an integrated mass meeting of Black and white supporters, who pledged to keep the KKK out of Sacramento and drafted a resolution to send to the leading white organizations in the city, asking them to speak out against the KKK.

As efforts to get anti-lynching legislation passed intensified in 1925, several nationally prominent figures came to Sacramento to drum up support by speaking to members of the local branch of the NAACP. On January 19, 1924, renowned Black author and lecturer Dr. W.E.B. Dubois came to Sacramento, with the intention of speaking to a racially mixed audience. Unable to find a public hall willing to host the event – and reflecting the strong, interwoven relationship between the local Black churches and NAACP – the event was held at St. Andrews AME to a standing-room only crowd.²⁰⁹ In May of the same year, Missouri Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer, who had earlier introduced the first anti-lynching bill to Congress in 1918, spoke to the Sacramento NAACP about his renewed efforts to get legislation passed. The meeting, held at the Supervisors Hall of the County Court House, attracted a crowd of approximately 120 people.²¹⁰ In spite of widespread interracial support, opposition from Southern legislators prevented an anti-lynching bill from becoming federal law until the passage of the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act in 2022.²¹¹

The Sacramento NAACP branch dissolved in 1930 due to declining membership, likely at least in part as a result of the effects of the Great Depression.²¹² The influx of a large number of new African American residents from the South into Sacramento during the 1940s and postwar period revitalized the organization. The new arrivals, many of whom had held professional careers in the South and were used to resisting entrenched discrimination, brought a renewed

²⁰⁹ "Sacramento NAACP 100th Anniversary: A Century of Civil Rights," *Sacramento Observer*, 2006, 6.

²¹⁰ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, Volume 65, Issue 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 297.

²¹¹ Louis P. Masur, "Why it Took a Century to Pass an Anti-Lynching Law," *The Washington Post*, 28 December 2018; Felicia Sonmez, "Senate Unanimously Passes Anti-Lynching Bill After Century of Failure," *The Washington Post*, 8 March 2022.

²¹² Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 96.

SACRAMENTO NAACP PRESIDENTS	
Term	Chapter President
1916-1918	Rev. T. Allen Harvey
1920-1921	James Covington
1922-1923	Rev. Fred Hughes
1924-1925	J.W. Mills
1926-1927	O. Mills
1928-1929	Fred Brooks
1930	Branch lost its charter
1931-1932	Rev. D.D. Mattocks
1932-1933	Douglas McFarland
1934-1935	Frank Canson
1936-1939	Douglas McFarland
1940-1942	Rev. D.D. Mattocks
1943-1944	Talma Colbert
1945-1946	Douglas McFarland
1947-1948	Rev. Odom
1948-1950	Alvernon Tripp
1951-1952	Netta Sparks
1953-1957	Alvernon Tripp
1958-1960	Douglass Greer
1961-1962	Eugene Covington
1963-1966	Rev. Cyrus Keller
1966-1968	Milton McGhee
1968-1969	Pearl Bennett
1969	Leonard Dixon
1969-1970	Morris Tatum
1971-1972	James Williams
1973-1974	Bertha Jones
1974-1975	Sam Porter
1975-1976	James Williams
1977-1978	Randolph Cooke
1978	Wendell Echols
1979-1980	Milton McGhee
1981-1982	Nathaniel Colley, Jr.
1983-1990	Dr. Ester B. Nelson

energy and drive to push back against the status quo. Under the leadership of these new arrivals, NAACP became the most powerful force for racial justice in Sacramento during the post-World War II period. New programs and strategies established by the national offices of the NAACP bolstered their efforts. Among these were the establishment of the Legal Defense and Education Fund in 1939, which provided support for local attorneys dealing with civil rights cases across the country. This was followed by a national conference held by the NAACP in 1945 to discuss racial covenants, entitled “Successfully Challenging the Constitutionality of Enforcing Racial Covenants at the Supreme Court.” The conference was attended by many of the leading Black attorneys involved in restrictive covenant cases and laid out a strategy for combating racist housing policies that was taken up by local Black attorneys and branches of the NAACP, including those in Sacramento. The strategy included arguing the unconstitutionality of racial covenants, increasing the number of legal challenges against covenant enforcement to inflict economic pain on litigants and show the resolve of the African American community, and focusing cases on Northern cities, where official policies were non-discriminatory on paper if not in reality.²¹³ Bolstered by a new class of African American professionals and greater coordination with the national office, the Sacramento branch of the NAACP achieved major victories in the fights for equal housing, education, employment in the 1950s and 1960s that impacted not just Sacramentans, but African Americans across the nation, largely through its involvement in major state and federal court cases.²¹⁴

²¹³ Carson Anderson, “Historical Overview: The Civil Rights Effort to End Segregation Housing In America, 1910-1960,” September 2022.

²¹⁴ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 139-141.

Much of the local NAACP's success and expansion of civil rights achieved during the postwar period were the result of the tireless efforts of one of the newly arrived professionals who settled in Sacramento, attorney Nathaniel Colley. Colley arrived in Sacramento in 1948 shortly after graduating from Yale Law School and established the first known African American legal practice in the city. Colley immediately threw himself into taking up cases that challenged racially discriminatory practices. In 1949, he represented Albert Bacon, a Black tile setter who had not been allowed to join the local trade union, and two young men who had been beaten by police into giving a confession. One year later, he successfully argued a case to integrate the Land Park Plunge, a public swimming pool located on Riverside Boulevard in the Land Park neighborhood that prohibited people of color from using the pool. By 1951, he joined the local branch of the NAACP as legal counsel, and by 1952, he was vice-president of the organization. The same year, the African American magazine, *Colorfornia*, dubbed Colley "the undisputed leader in the colored community" of Sacramento.²¹⁵ Working on cases with local, state, and national reach, Colley became a recognized national leader in the effort to end racial discrimination and achieve equal rights for African Americans across the country.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

²¹⁶ Paula Boghosian, "New Helvetia Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2014, 8.16.



Figure 59. Nathaniel Colley with Governor Edmund “Pat” Brown (right) and Senator Clair Engle (left) (ca. 1962).
Source: Center for Sacramento History.

Spearheaded by Colley, Sacramento became a hotbed for the fight for fair housing. Even after the 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *Banks v. San Francisco* in 1953, which declared that racial restrictive covenants were unenforceable, Black individuals continued to be excluded from living in many neighborhoods in Sacramento by real estate agents who steered them away. Homeowner associations and neighbors also pressured homeowners to only sell to white families or intimidated African American and Black residents to prevent them from buying in certain neighborhoods. This included the majority of newly

constructed postwar subdivisions.²¹⁷ Racial discrimination persisted in public housing as well. In 1951, the local chapter of the NAACP, under the leadership of Reverend Dr. L. Sylvester Odom, formed a housing committee headed by Clarence Bell to challenge racial discrimination and segregation of Black residents at the New Helvetia public housing project (extant), which was



Figure 60. Reverend Sylvester Odom (left) and Alvernon Tripp (right), ca. 1950. Both Reverend Odom and Tripp served as president of the Sacramento Chapter of the NAACP. Source: St. Andrew's AME Church.

located on Broadway on the west side of the Old City Cemetery and operated by the Sacramento Housing Authority. Of the 310 available units at New Helvetia, only 16 were set aside for African American residents. These units were segregated into two buildings, separate from those that housed white residents. If vacancies occurred in any of the other buildings, Black applicants were not allowed to apply. Realizing the need for a community-wide effort to win the case, Nathaniel Colley organized the Sacramento Committee Against Segregation in Public Housing (Sacramento Committee) with Myra West in December 1952. Other committee

²¹⁷ SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: African American History of Los Angeles*, 41-46.

leaders included Virna Canson, who served as committee secretary. The Sacramento Committee included 25 local entities, including churches, political groups, unions, charities, and labor unions who supported an end to racial segregation. The committee met with the Sacramento Housing Authority to challenge discriminatory practices at New Helvetia but, in spite of promises from the SHA, the segregation of nonwhite residents continued. In response, Colley filed a suit on behalf of the NAACP in 1952. A group vote was taken to pursue litigation against the SHA at an organizational meeting of the NAACP which occurred at St. Andrew's AME. The Sacramento County Superior Court ruled in Colley's favor, finding that segregation was not legal in public housing projects.²¹⁸

In 1954, Colley teamed up with prominent Los Angeles attorney Loren Miller and San Francisco attorney Franklin Williams to challenge racial discrimination in developments funded by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA). Led by Colley, the legal team filed a lawsuit on behalf of Oliver A. Ming, a Black World War II veteran and employee of McClellan Air Force Base, and nine other African American residents, against several of the largest real estate and construction firms in Sacramento County. Collectively, the firms had built or sold nearly all of the FHA- and VA-funded housing in the county over the previous decade, including numerous postwar subdivisions in the area. The plaintiffs alleged that these firms had discriminated against African American residents by refusing to sell any of their housing units to them because of their race. In its *Ming v. Horgan* decision, the Sacramento Superior Court declared that real estate developers and builders who received federal funds for housing projects could not engage in racial discrimination against individuals who were qualified and wanted to purchase a home.²¹⁹ Along with the end of the doctrine of "separate but equal" facilities in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, these rulings legally ended racial discrimination and segregation in federally-funded housing.

In spite of these decisions, racial discrimination persisted in private housing in California through the 1960s. In 1964, Colley joined other attorneys to successfully overturn California Proposition 14, which had blocked the 1963 Rumford Fair Housing Act from going into effect. The Rumford Fair Housing Act eliminated, once and for all, the use of restrictive covenants in California that denied housing to anyone on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sex, marital status,

²¹⁸ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 37-38.

²¹⁹ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 240-252.

handicap, or family status.²²⁰ The law was an important forerunner to the 1968 National Housing Act, which prohibited housing discrimination by race, color, creed, or national origin.²²¹

Colley tackled other race issues as well. In 1959, he helped secure passage of the state Fair Employment Practices Act as co-chair of the California Committee for Fair Employment Practices. The law prohibited discrimination in the workplace. The following year, he was appointed to the State Board of Education by Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown where he drafted regulations to end segregation in California school districts. In 1961 and 1962, President John F. Kennedy appointed Colley to serve on the Committee on Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces and, where Colley subsequently worked to end racial prejudice in the U.S. military.²²²

The NAACP’s work to uplift Sacramento’s Black community extended beyond Colley’s efforts. In 1950, the local branch established its own credit union, the first such institution established by any branch of the NAACP in the United States. The credit union provided credit to African American residents at the lowest possible interest rates, giving them access to low-cost loans, savings plans, life insurance, and financial counseling that were otherwise denied to them or financially out of reach. It also provided training, experience, and income for young Black students with an interest in business.²²³ The credit union was originally located at the same location as the NAACP’s branch office at 621 P Street. Following redevelopment of the West End and demolition of the original branch location in the late 1950s, the NAACP Credit Union was relocated to 2404 21st Street (extant), which also housed the law offices of African American attorney and NAACP vice-president, Clarence Canson.²²⁴

²²⁰ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 93-94.

²²¹ Herbert G. Ruffin II, “The California Fair Housing Act [The Rumford Act’ (1963-1968),” June 2, 2022, Black Past, accessed August 41, 2022, <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/california-fair-housing-act-rumford-act-1963-1968/>.

²²² Quon and de Courcy, “Nathaniel Colley & Associates Law Offices,” California Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record.

²²³ “Explains NAACP Program,” *Sacramento Bee*, 25 January 1963.

²²⁴ *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965).



Figure 61. Leadership of the Sacramento chapter of the NAACP, circa 1950s. The top row includes Palmer Pinkney (far left), Nathaniel Colley (center), John Sims (second from the right), Douglas Greer (far right). The first row includes Virna Canson (far left), Novelyn Sims (third from the left) and her son, and Jerlean Colley (far right).
Source: Virna Canson Papers, African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

The NAACP Credit Union was founded by Reverend David Daniel Mattocks of the Kyles Temple AME Zion church, who served as its secretary until his death in 1954.²²⁵ By 1965, leaders of the credit union included president Nathaniel Colley, secretary Gertrude Blackwell, vice president Reverend Joseph Williams, and treasurer-manager Virna M. Canson, Clarence Canson's wife. Next to Colley, Virna Canson became one of the most prominent leaders of the NAACP at the local, state, and national levels, earning her the nickname, "Mrs. NAACP."²²⁶ She served as treasurer-manager for the NAACP Credit Union from 1953 to 1965. Under her leadership, the credit union's assets grew from \$35,000 to \$400,000. Canson was born in Oklahoma in 1921. After graduating from high school in Oklahoma at the top of her class, she graduated from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the Credit Union National Association for Credit Union Personnel at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She moved to Sacramento in 1940, following her marriage to Sacramento native Clarence Canson, who she had met at the Tuskegee

²²⁵ "D.D. Mattocks, ExPastor Of AME Zion, Dies," *Sacramento Bee*, 26 June 1954.

²²⁶ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 149.

Institute and fellow member of the NAACP. Virna Canson became a consumer education and credit specialist and advocate of statewide significance.

She served on Governor Edmund G. Brown's advisory committee to the State Office of Consumer Counsel, which she lobbied to establish in 1962 with the support of consumer education organizations and credit union organization across the state. In 1965, she left her position with the NAACP Credit Union to lend her expertise to the State, where she worked as Credit Union and Consumer Education Specialist for the California State Office of Economic Opportunity until 1967. During this period, she helped establish the State's first experimental Service Center Program. She also served as a member of the National Council of Negro Women and Racial Justice Task Force of the Northern California Conference of the United Church of Christ (Congregation Church), president of the Democratic Women's Club of Sacramento, and was tapped several times during the 1960s by the California Democratic State Central Committee to



Figure 62. Virna Canson, ca. 1975. Source: Virna Canson Papers, African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

help select candidates for state elective office and rally support for those candidates. In the 1960s and 1970s, Canson continued to rise as a leader within the NAACP, becoming Field Director and Legislative Advocate of the organization in 1969 and Western Regional Director in 1974. As regional director, she was in charge of eight states, spanning from Alaska to California and Idaho to Hawaii. In her role with the NAACP, Canson was involved with several important pieces of legislation and court decisions, including the Rumford Fair Housing Act, the victory against Proposition 14, and overturning the decision in *Bakke v. Board of Regents of the University of California*, which upheld the use of affirmative action in college admissions. She also helped develop the NAACP Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) to recognize the achievements of Black youth. She retired from the NAACP in 1988.²²⁷

²²⁷ "Canson, Virna M.," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 April 2003.

Other prominent local NAACP leaders included Alvernon Tripp, who served as secretary of the local chapter for seven years and president for another six years. Under her leadership, the chapter's membership increased fivefold. She was chosen as Sacramento's Woman of the Year in 1968, and, at the time of her retirement in 1970, she was voted the local NAACP Woman of the Decade.²²⁸

GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

Individuals and grassroot organizations in Sacramento's African American community, apart from the substantial efforts of Nathaniel Colley and the NAACP, joined the quest to expand civil rights and equality of opportunity.

Without support from the City or local officials through much of the first half of the 20th century, the African American community organized to provide needed services and other support for its members. Individual community members confronted both written and unwritten forms of housing discrimination by providing housing options for local African American residents. From at least the 1920s, pioneering Black realtors opened real estate firms to sell property to residents of color in an era when no other realtors would do so. These included L.N. Crawford in the 1920s, J.R. Smith in the 1940s, and George Seabron and Lucille Williams, wife of Reverend Joseph Williams of the Shiloh Baptist Church, in the 1950s.²²⁹

Black institutions and organizations also took it upon themselves to provide housing for their members. One such example is the Negro Women's Civic Improvement Club (NWCIC). Founded in 1936 by a group of women, including Viola Brooks and Netta Sparks, the organization provided safe, comfortable housing for single Black women, who otherwise found their options for housing extremely limited or non-existent. During World War II and the postwar period, guests included women employed at McClellan Air Force Base and Mather Field. The organization was led by elder Black women and initially located at 19th and T streets before relocating to a Victorian mansion at 1219 X Street. This building was demolished during the construction of Highway 50, forcing the NWCIC to move once again, this time to its existing

²²⁸ "Capitol Civic Leader Retires," *Sacramento Bee*, 1 July 1970.

²²⁹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 33, 51-52; "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.



Figure 63. Viola Brooks (ca. 1920). Source: St. Andrews AME.



Figure 64. Netta Sparks. Source: Center for Sacramento History newspaper collection.



Figure 65. Image of the Women's Civic Improvement Club building (extant) from the building's dedication. Source: African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

location in Oak Park at 3555 3rd Avenue (extant). NAACP leader Alvernon Tripp served as executive director of the organization in the 1960s and was instrumental in the relocation effort.²³⁰ The organization continued its mission in its new neighborhood. In 1970, the NWCIC joined with the Shiloh Baptist Church to construct the Shiloh Arms, a low-income housing complex at 4009 23rd Avenue (extant) in Oak Park.²³¹

Local Black women also founded and led organizations to help Black families in Del Paso Heights. In 1947, a group of women, including Auntine Burney, Minette Smith, Hattie Thornton, Georgia Leeberry, and Hattie Williams, established the Good Neighbors Club to help Black families relocate from the South to Sacramento during and immediately following World War II.²³² The club received support and was headquartered at Allen Chapel AME Church. The club created and operated a state-funded non-profit Food Neighbors Child Care Center on Morey Avenue, which offered childcare to Del Paso Heights children on a sliding scale.²³³ Families without enough money to pay were offered childcare for free. Some of the club's other notable accomplishments included receiving funding for the first Head Start program in Del Paso Heights and sponsoring Boy Scout Troup #157.²³⁴



Figure 66. The board of the Good Neighbors Club of Del Paso Heights (ca. 1960). From left to right: Mrs. Connor, Essie Brown, Queenola McKnight, Mable Dillard, Gertrude Blackwell, Gladys Luster, Minette Smith.

²³⁰ "Capitol Civic Leader Retires," *Sacramento Bee*, 1 July 1970.

²³¹ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 51.

²³² Sheila Roundtree and Joyce Burney Askia, North Sacramento/DPH Community Meeting, March 10, 2023, notes taken by Carson Anderson, City of Sacramento.

²³³ "People," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 April 1991.

²³⁴ *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated and Unpublished).

New Approaches to Resistance & Community Uplift, ca. 1960-1980

In the 1960s, new approaches to resistance against racial prejudice and community uplift began to emerge. Until this point, the local African American community's strategy for addressing racial injustice had been primarily characterized by traditional methods that worked within existing power structures and institutions to affect gradual change. Under the leadership of the NAACP, much of this change in Sacramento occurred through court cases and petitions to local political leaders. By the 1960s, however, members of the local African American community grew dissatisfied by the continuing racial injustices they faced and sought more aggressive, direct means of bringing about real, demonstrable progress. These direct approaches evolved from marches, protests, and sit-ins in the 1960s to the founding of a wide range of community organizations to provide needed community services and increasing direct participation in the local political process as elected officials in the 1970s.

The shift was partially influenced by the influx of new Black residents from Southern states in the 1940s and 1950s. Many initially found their lives in Sacramento to be a welcome improvement from the overt racism they experienced in the South. As California experienced an unprecedented period of growth and prosperity in the postwar period, however, many Black residents became increasingly frustrated by their lack of experiencing a fair share of the state's successes. Following the lead of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the broader civil rights movement's model of enacting change through peaceful civil disobedience, Black residents in Sacramento organized community groups and participated in protests, rallies, and sit-ins to resist and bring awareness to continuing issues of racial injustices that pervaded many aspects of their daily lives.²³⁵ By the late 1960s, local responses reflected the growing popularity of the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements nationwide. The Black Power movement was inspired by the teachings of Nation of Islam leader, Malcolm X, who called for combating centuries of oppression through Black self-determination, Black self-reliance, and Black pride. Malcolm X's philosophies gained steam following his assassination and the Watts Riots in Los Angeles in 1965. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, then chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), popularized the term "Black power" during several speeches. Breaking with the broader civil rights movement, Black power advocates demanded political and socioeconomic power for Black people in their own right, rather than integration into white society, in order to strengthen Black communities and allow them to determine their own futures. The Black Power movement's expression of self-sufficiency inspired the establishment

²³⁵ Fisher, "Far from Utopia," 226.

of Black bookstores, schools, clinics, stores, and other businesses and institutions in cities across the United States, including Sacramento.²³⁶

COMMUNITY GROUPS & ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous community groups and organizations were founded throughout Sacramento's history to uplift the African American community and address race issues more broadly. Many of these groups were formed in the 1960s, as Sacramento's growing number of Black residents continued to experience a lack of housing and employment opportunities. Increased poverty in Sacramento's ethnic minority neighborhoods, such as Oak Park and Del Paso Heights, also drove the activism. In Oak Park alone, groups such as the Oak Park Neighborhood Council, Oak Park Action and Service Group, Pyramid Club of Oak Park, and the Oak Park Merchants Association were established in the 1960s to address community concerns. In 1968, eight of these groups joined to form the Oak Park Federation of Organizations. The federation aimed to coordinate the actions of the many neighborhood community groups to create a more streamlined and potent force for change in the community. Community groups such as these served as important training grounds for individuals who would become leaders in the African American community, as well as those in the local civil rights movement.²³⁷

Organizations such as the Sacramento branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and Sacramento Committee for Fair Housing (SCFH) also formed in the 1960s and bolstered the legal efforts of the NAACP through more direct actions. At the national level, CORE pioneered the use of nonviolent direct actions – such as sit-ins and bus boycotts – in the civil rights movement, gaining fame for organizing the Freedom Rides in 1961 and providing guidance to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1950s and early 1960s. By the late 1960s, the organization broke from its earlier strictly nonviolent tactics and adopted many of the ideologies of the Black power movement, including Black nationalism and self-determination.²³⁸ The actions of the Sacramento branch of CORE echoed those of the national organization. In the early 1960s, the Sacramento CORE organized numerous civil rights protests, including a sit-in in the rotunda of the State Capitol building in 1963 to support passage of the Rumford Fair Housing Act.

Reflecting its wide range of activity, in 1969 the organization partnered with real estate agent George Seabron to purchase a grocery store at 2949 35th Street with the intention of using it to

²³⁶ "The Foundations of Black Power," Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/foundations-black-power>.

²³⁷ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 60.

²³⁸ "Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)," Martin Luther King Jr. Encyclopedia, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/congress-racial-equality-core>.

provide food, jobs, and employment training to members of the Oak Park community.²³⁹ The SCFH's purpose, meanwhile, was more focused, seeking to ensure equal housing opportunities for all residents of Sacramento, regardless of their race, religion, or national origin. Its membership included a range of professional, academic, civic, and religion leaders, such as Dr. Leonard Cain, Jr., Dr. Paul F.C. Mueller, realtor Ed Bussey, and CORE president Robert Tyler.²⁴⁰ In 1961, Dr. Cain published a report titled *Housing Discrimination in Metropolitan Sacramento*, which provided a detailed analysis of residential segregation in Sacramento. They distributed pamphlets to white property owners and published a follow-up paper in 1962, *Successful Integration in Sacramento*, to show that there was no loss in property value when Black residents moved into predominantly white neighborhoods. These efforts were accompanied by more direct actions, such as demonstrations to protest housing discrimination in South Land Park Hills and conducting experiments to assess differing experiences of Black and white residents when looking for housing.²⁴¹

Other groups sought to address the root of race issues by confronting prejudice on a person-to-person basis. In 1964, a group of local African American residents – including James Morgan, Dr. Thomas Slaughter, John Braxton, Oliver Sims, Lois Printz, Peggy Matheson, and Jessie Theard – formed the Interracial Home Visiting Committee to welcome white residents into the homes of Black residents. According to chairman, Dr. Thomas Slaughter II, the goal was to promote “racial harmony [and offer] a concrete way for men and women of goodwill to participate in the urgent and necessary task of reducing the misunderstanding which develops when people are isolated because of race.”²⁴² In one such event in 1964, 23 Black families hosted 230 white visitors into their homes.²⁴³

Such community organizations provided coordinated strategies and a platform for local Black residents to respond to racial injustice in their neighborhoods, as well as the wider city, and played a significant role in the multi-faceted fight for racial equality.

STUDENT ORGANIZING

Much of the direct actions taken by members of the African American community to address racial injustice in the 1960s and 1970s revolved around the issue of educational inequality. A major turning point was the destruction of Stanford Junior High School at Martin Luther King Jr.

²³⁹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 52.

²⁴⁰ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 254.

²⁴¹ Fisher, “Far From Utopia,” 254-258.

²⁴² “Home Visit Publicity,” *Sacramento Bee*, 15 May 1964: 72.

²⁴³ “Home Visit Publicity,” *Sacramento Bee*, 15 May 1964: 72.

Boulevard and 10th Avenue, the only middle school in Oak Park, in a fire in 1963. At the time, over half of the school's student body were Black, while Latinos, Asian Americans, and white students made up an additional 30 percent, reflecting the changes that had occurred to Oak Park's demographics since the 1950s.²⁴⁴ Due to the high percentage of students of color, the City of Sacramento considered the school to be segregated. As part of its efforts to integrate the city's school system, the Sacramento City Unified School District decided not to rebuild Stanford Junior High, leaving the Oak Park community without a nearby middle school for its children to attend. However, the City School District did not provide transportation for students. As a result, children had to walk several miles to the nearest schools, California Middle School in Land Park, Sutter Middle School on the border of Midtown and East Sacramento, Kit Carson Middle School in East Sacramento, and others.²⁴⁵ Local residents who were children at the time described having to travel in groups for safety and cut holes in fences along the railroad tracks to reduce the walking distance to school. Children living in the "Four Corners" intersection of 4th Avenue and 42nd Street were sent to different public school in spite of being neighbors.²⁴⁶ The destruction of Stanford Junior High School brought into sharp focus the de facto discriminatory educational conditions experienced by Sacramento's students of color and catalyzed efforts to address inequalities in the local education system over the following decade. The demographics of the city's schools reflected the shift of the city's minority residents from the West End into other neighborhoods. By the 1960s, the student populations of elementary and junior high schools in Oak Park, Glen Elder, Del Paso Heights, and others were predominately Black and Latino.²⁴⁷

In the late 1960s, local students organized to expose these unequal conditions and the lack of representation in school curriculums. On March 22, 1968, approximately 200 Black and Mexican American students walked out of an assembly at Sacramento High School, just a few weeks after similar walkouts (known as the Chicano Blowouts) at five high schools in predominately Latino neighborhoods of eastern Los Angeles garnered national attention. The Sacramento students held a rally to bring awareness of the underrepresentation of their cultures and histories in the school's curriculum. The same year, a visit by Black Panthers Party co-leader Eldridge Cleaver inspired students at California State University, Sacramento and Sacramento City College to form branches of the Black Student Union (BSU). By 1969, the

²⁴⁴ Fisher, "Far From Utopia," 275.

²⁴⁵ Princetta Purkins, interview by Deacon Dan Fontenot, Shiloh Baptist Church [transcription], December 17, 2022, African American Experience Oral History, Center for Sacramento History and Community Development Department; Joe Debbs, interview by Michael Benjamin at the Oak Park Community Center [transcription], February 3, 2022, African American Experience History Project, City of Sacramento Community Development Department.

²⁴⁶ Public comment, Sacramento African American Experience Project Partners Kickoff Meeting, Oak Park, June 7, 2022.

²⁴⁷ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 181-182.

university had a BSU chapter. Early officers of the City College BSU included president Emile Palmer and officer Frederick K. Foote.²⁴⁸

The BSU organized a sit-in at the City College administrative offices, resulting in the formation of the Oak Park School of Afro American Thought, the first Black ethnic studies program in the city. Students appointed an administrator for the school, chose the classes that should be taught, and selected teachers for the program. The school was initially given a room the size of a janitorial closet at the American Legion Hall in Oak Park for classes. The students held a press conference to express their dissatisfaction with the facilities. In response college officials arranged for trailers to be stationed at the former site of Stanford Junior High School, until a permanent building was found.²⁴⁹ By July 1969, the program had a permanent location and theater, the Uhuru Theatre, at 3545 Sacramento Boulevard (now Broadway, possibly extant).²⁵⁰ The school had relocated to 3635 4th Avenue (extant) by the summer of 1970.²⁵¹



Figure 67. A rally held by Black and Mexican American students of Sacramento High School on March 22, 1968.
Source: Center for Sacramento History.

²⁴⁸ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 63.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Frederick K. Foote, conducted by Dane Nicolas, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, November 29, 2021.

²⁵⁰ "Afro-American School Slates Talent Show," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 July 1969: 34.

²⁵¹ "SCC Again Offers College Classes In Oak Park School," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 September 1970: 21.

In 1969, the BSU issued a list of demands to Sacramento City College administrators, including the creation of a full Black Studies Program under the control of the school's minority students and that Black history instructor James Fisher, who also taught at the School of Afro American Thought, be named chairman of a new Black Studies Department. The BSU's demands inspired the college's Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) to present a similar list of demands to the school.²⁵²

The effort to expand ethnic studies locally extended to grade school age children, as well. According to Bertha Gorman, an early Black female writer for the *Sacramento Bee*, the Saturday School, also known as Shule Jumamose, taught nearly 100 local children to have pride in their Black identities every Saturday during the 1970s by providing classes about African American history and culture. The school, located at the Alpha Kappa Sorority Clubhouse at 3500 Second Avenue (extant) in Oak Park, organized and reportedly hosted the first Kwanzaa celebration in Sacramento around 1970.²⁵³



Figure 68. James Fisher (center) teaching students at the Oak Park School of Afro American Thought (1969). Source: George Williams, "Oak Park Facility Sponsors Black Studies," *Sacramento Bee*, 13 July 1969: 30.

²⁵² "City College Nears Confrontations Over Negro Controlled Black Studies Program," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 February 1969: 29-30.

²⁵³ Conversation with Bertha Gorman, conducted by Carson Anderson, August 7, 2022; "Kwanzaa Festival," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 December 1978: 11.

These student actions and ethnic studies programs helped to uplift the local African American community by bringing awareness to unequal conditions in the education system, closing the gap in educational representation, and fostering a sense of cultural pride in the city's African American youth.

UNREST IN OAK PARK & THE BLACK PANTHERS IN SACRAMENTO

Despite the ongoing efforts of community groups and organizations and progress in the fight for equal treatment in many sectors of daily life, frustration with employment opportunities and living conditions continued to grow, particularly among young Black people in Oak Park. The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 marked a significant turning point for many in the Black community, as it showed that tactics of peaceful organization could still be met with violence and a lack of progress. McClatchy Park became a popular gathering place for Oak Park's restless youth and developed into a hotbed for social unrest that exploded into a series of conflicts with law enforcement in the late 1960s.²⁵⁴ The arrival of the Black Panther Party and growing police surveillance in the neighborhood in response to fears by white residents as the local Black population grew added fuel to the embers.

The Black Panther Party was founded by community college students in Oakland in 1966 with a goal of uplifting Black communities by dismantling entrenched systems and institutions that suppressed them and providing necessary community services. The party adopted a doctrine of self-help, providing essential services such as youth breakfast programs and health clinics, as well as self-defense in order to protect the community against police brutality.²⁵⁵

The Black Panther Party first became a major force in Sacramento on May 2, 1967, when a group of approximately 30 Panthers – armed with pistols, rifles, and shotguns – marched from Oakland to the floor of the Assembly Chambers at the State Capitol building to protest passage of the Mulford Act. The law proposed to prohibit open carrying of firearms on city streets and was perceived as a direct attack against the activities of the Black Panthers, who had begun conducting armed patrols of Oakland to monitor police activity. The event led to a spike in Black Panther membership among Black youth attracted to the group's expression of militancy and support for a Black person's right to self-defense but also increased perceptions among government officials and the media that its members were violent and dangerous.²⁵⁶ The

²⁵⁴ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 61.

²⁵⁵ Jasmine Senegal, untitled term paper, History 281C, University of California, Sacramento, 2021-2022, 5; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 61-62.

²⁵⁶ Justin Honeycutt, "The Effects of Adopting Militant Ideology for Social Justice: A Look at The Black Panther Party for Self Defense," term paper, History 281C, University of California, Sacramento, 2021, 10-14; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 63.

following year, a Sacramento chapter of the Black Panther Party was founded by Charles Brunson with offices located at 2941 35th Street in Oak Park. Members were recruited from BSUs at local high schools, colleges, and universities, while others were disillusioned Vietnam War veterans. The organization provided tutoring, legal aid, and a free breakfast program for schoolchildren at the United Church of Christ at 3308 4th Avenue worked with other local community groups; and organized rallies and demonstrations.²⁵⁷

During the summers of 1969 to 1971, however, growing unrest in Oak Park and the presence of the Black Panther Party erupted in conflict. In June 1969, members of the Black Panthers placed a lacquered sign with professionally painted white painted letters reading “Brotherhood Park” over the park sign at McClatchy Park. After the police removed the sign on June 12, a group of individuals cut down and burned the official park sign.²⁵⁸ The incident enflamed tensions in the neighborhood. On Jun 15, the police were called to Oak Park to respond to complaints from residents about disruptive behavior in the park. Gunfire broke out, and more than 100 shots were fired by the police and civilians, injuring between 15 and 20 people.²⁵⁹ In the aftermath, 40 people were arrested, and the Black Panther Party office was ransacked and destroyed.²⁶⁰ In response to property damage, many businesses on 35th Street, one of Oak Park’s main commercial corridors, closed and never reopened.

The following summer, on May 9, 1970, seven young Black men were arrested after police officer Bernard Bennett was shot while patrolling Oak Park and died. Three of the men were eventually released, but four – artists and Black Panther Party members Mark Teemer and Jack Strivers and BSU members Booker T. Cooke and Ceariaco Cabrillo – were tried.²⁶¹ The men were represented by three newly minted local Black attorneys, James L. Long, Joseph Cooper, and Douglas Grier.²⁶² In 1971, Sacramento Superior Court Judge Joseph A. DeCristoforo dismissed the case against the four men, labeled the Oak Park Four by the media, due to a lack of evidence and credible witnesses.²⁶³ The case and preceding summers of conflict united Sacramento’s Black community and brought increased attention to the issue of police brutality against the local Black community and helped spur progress in Black representation on the police force and in local politics.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁷ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 63.

²⁵⁸ “Vandals Burn McClatchy Park’s Sign,” *Sacramento Bee*, 13 June 1969: 30.

²⁵⁹ “Oak Park Violence Erupts; Police, Snipers Trade Shots,” *Sacramento Bee*, 16 June 1969: 1.

²⁶⁰ Senegal, untitled term paper, 10-12.

²⁶¹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 65-66.

²⁶² Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 42-43.

²⁶³ Steve Gibson, “Oak Park 4’ Go Free As Bennett Death Case Ends,” *Sacramento Bee*, 28 January 1971: 1.

²⁶⁴ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 65-66.



Figure 69. Members of the Black Panther Party on the steps of the State Capitol in 1967. Source: Chapman University, Frank Mt. Pleasant Library of Special Collections and Archives.

RACIAL VIOLENCE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Racial violence, such as the events in Oak Park, spurred other community actions to push back against racial discrimination and violence. In 1972, Raymond Brewer, a standout student and athlete at Grant Union High School, was walking through a neighborhood in North Sacramento that had few non-white residents, while carrying a large stick to ward off the neighborhood's aggressive dogs. Undercover police officers, patrolling the area in response to a sting of armed robberies at nearby bars, assumed Brewer was a suspect and shot him as he ran away. One of the police officers involved in Brewer's death was indicted by the County Grand Jury on a charge of involuntary manslaughter, but the charges were later dismissed by the 3rd District Court of Appeal.²⁶⁵ In response to Brewer's killing, Mayor Richard H. Marriott formed a 25-member Advisory Citizens Committee on Police Practices, including residents of Del Paso Heights and

²⁶⁵ "Sgt. Somers' Grand Jury Indictment Is Struck Down by Court of Appeal," *Sacramento Bee*, 15 June 1973: 1.

local Black organizations, to probe the incident and overall police practices in dealing with minorities.²⁶⁶ Seven months later, the committee issued a report with a series of recommendations, including the establishment of a police review board, psychological testing of officers, changing the rank of captain from an appointed position to a civil service classification.²⁶⁷ Although the Sacramento Police Officer's Association did not agree with all of the committee's findings and recommendations, they admitted their fault in the tragedy and agreed to cooperate by implementing some of the committee's recommendations. The aftermath of Raymond Brewer's murder reflected a rare instance at that time in which Black voices prevailed in Sacramento's political hierarchy.

The murder of 17-year-old Milton Baker, Jr. in 1979 produced a similar reaction after the two men responsible for killing Baker were not arrested. Black residents and activists responded by forming the Milton Baker, Jr. Community Coalition for Justice, which organized residents and held meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and other events throughout Sacramento County to scrutinize the policing practices of the county sheriff's department and develop a series of demands. The County eventually adopted three of the coalition's five demands, including reopening the investigation into Baker's murder, directing the district attorney to properly investigate the incident and carry forward a prosecution if warranted, and demanding the Board of Supervisors to open a grand jury investigation into the case.²⁶⁸

Racial violence also touched members of the Nation of Islam. In 1974, a series of shootings took place in Sacramento around the same time as the so-called Zebra murders in San Francisco. Police in San Francisco alleged a link between the murders and members of the Nation of Islam. Assuming the shootings in Sacramento to be connected, the Sacramento Police Department organized a sting operation around the Nation of Islam Mosque (Temple 73) on 35th Street in Oak Park in which the mosque was broken into and ransacked during the search for evidence.²⁶⁹ Individuals such as Dale McKinney were entrapped during the raid, wrongfully imprisoned, and later exonerated.²⁷⁰ Enraged by the disrespect shown to a Black place of worship, the Black community, most of whom identified as Christian, organized to support their Muslim brothers and sisters to demand apologies and restitution from the City. Incidents of racial violence such as these in the 1960s and 1970s united Sacramento's Black population,

²⁶⁶ "Mayor Fills Police Study Vacancies," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 December 1972, 8.

²⁶⁷ Lee Moriwaki, "Kinney, Citizens Unit Chairman Disagree," *Sacramento Bee*, 13 October 1973, 5.

²⁶⁸ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 50.

²⁶⁹ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 49-50.

²⁷⁰ Dale E. McKinney, interview by Carson Anderson and Kristen Y. Ross [transcription], December 7, 2022, African American Experience History Project, City of Sacramento Community Development Department.

bringing members together of all religions, classes, and backgrounds to fight for the rights of all.²⁷¹

THE WAR ON POVERTY

The civil rights era and Black Power movements politicized African Americans across the United States more than any other events in history to that point, inspiring a new generation of Black leaders to use politics and community organizing to uplift their communities. The War on Poverty provided a government supported outlet for African Americans to work toward these goals and achieve meaningful change. Rooted in legislation passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 to address the nation's growing poverty rate, anti-poverty programs inspired by the War on Poverty became the focus of national, state, and local political agendas.

The Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council (SAEOC), Sacramento's overarching anti-poverty program, was founded the same year as President Johnson's legislation. Neighborhood Councils and Federation of Neighborhood Organizations (FONOs), were established, in turn, to enlist the participation of the Black and brown communities at the neighborhood level, with the operational costs of those neighborhood groups funded through the SAEOC. In 1971, SAEOC's priorities included employment development and job training, family health and planning, childcare, consumer education, and program coordination and improving community knowledge of SAEOC programs.²⁷²

Other programs and organizations inspired by the anti-poverty movement and Black Capitalism approach to the ideals popularized by the Black Power Movement were established in Sacramento in the late 1960s and 1970s, including Head Start, Legal Aid, Planned Parenthood, summer job programs, and drug addiction recovery efforts. Among these were the Greater Sacramento Urban League, which was established in 1968 by *Sacramento Observer* owner William Lee, Oliver Sims, Howard Harris, and Marion Wood, who later became director of SAEOC.²⁷³ The organization is a local chapter of the National Urban League, which was originally founded in New York City in 1910 to help Blacks migrating to the city assimilate into urban life and evolved into a national organization that works for the economic empowerment of underserved urban communities.²⁷⁴ Seeking to increase employment opportunities for Black youth in Sacramento, the Greater Sacramento Urban League established youth mentorship

²⁷¹ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 49-50.

²⁷² Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 30-36.

²⁷³ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 38.

²⁷⁴ "National Urban League," Black Past, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-urban-league-1910/>.

programs and other programs to connect Black youth to jobs. In the 1960s, Woods and other League founders worked to expose discrimination in State employment. After walking through 35 State agencies and counting fewer than 10 Black employees, the League took its findings to a state legislative committee. In 1974, the League successfully fought to integrate the Southern Pacific Railroad, opening new job opportunities there for Black men and women.²⁷⁵ The Urban League continues to work to uplift communities through encouraging civic engagement, working to increase educational opportunities, providing job training and leadership development opportunities, and working to eliminate health disparities and build healthy and safe communities.²⁷⁶

Another example is the Valley Area Construction Opportunity Program, led by director W.L. Woodfin and founded in 1969. The program, located at 2910 35th Street in Oak Park, offered training in a variety of construction industry trades to enable minority youth from 17 California counties to obtain well-paying jobs in the construction industry.²⁷⁷ Together, these anti-poverty programs were instrumental in forming a powerful structure of Black community activists and leaders throughout the local Black community and building connections within the local Democratic Party.

African Americans throughout the United States, many of whom lived in impoverished neighborhoods, adopted the War on Poverty and its many manifestations as their own. Unlike many other cities in the United States, Sacramento did not have any neighborhoods with a homogenous or majority Black population. Rather, by the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans lived in mixed-race neighborhoods, scattered across the city. Anti-poverty programs and initiatives focused on these areas. Despite not being the majority demographic in many of these neighborhoods, African Americans participated in anti-poverty efforts to a greater degree than any other racial demographic. In Del Paso Heights, for instance, a survey found that although the area was majority white in the 1970s, almost three times the number of Black residents knew of the Neighborhood Councils than white residents. Meanwhile, 80 percent of those who participated in the Neighborhood Councils were Black, while only 20 percent white. No individuals surveyed were of Asian or Latino descent.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Stephen Magagnini, "Troubled People Get a Leg Up," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 December 2008.

²⁷⁶ "About Us," Greater Sacramento Urban League, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://www.gsul.org/about-us/>.

²⁷⁷ Dale E. McKinney, interview by Carson Anderson and Kristen Y. Ross [transcription]; "Funds Will Provide Minority Groups with Apprenticeships," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 October 1969.

²⁷⁸ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 29-32.



Figure 70. Willie Hausey, president of SAEOC (1970). Source: "Del Paso Heights Civic Leader Heads Poverty War Council," *Sacramento Bee*, 14 July 1970.

This participation spilled over into leadership roles within anti-poverty organizations. Black residents felt it was their right to run these organizations and reap the benefits. They operated them as Black spaces that not only served Black residents but also hired and contracted members of the Black community to complete the work. The most prominent members of the anti-poverty movement were the leaders of the SAEOC. The organization's first executive director was Marion Woods. A graduate of Morehouse College in the same class as Martin Luther King, Jr., he was considered the "MLK of Sacramento" by members of the Black community.²⁷⁹ After serving in the Air Force at Mather Field, Woods decided to permanently settle in Sacramento in 1956. Woods parlayed his experience leading the SAEOC to a role leading the state's poverty initiatives as director of the California Department of Benefit Payments, director of the California Department of Social Services, and director of the Department of Human Resources for the District of

Columbia.²⁸⁰ Following Woods, SAEOC's next three directors – Naaman Brown, Essie Brown, and John Robinson – were also Black. Other local community leaders who arose from the War on Poverty included Willie Hausey, board president of the SAEOC; O.W. Clanton, chair of FONO; Callie Carney from Oak Park; George Heard from Glen Elder; and Charles Bradley from Del Paso Heights.

Margarette "Mama" Marks offers a particularly notable example of an individual citizen who took it upon herself to address poverty in her community. Marks arrived in California from Louisiana in 1941 and worked as a shipyard welder in Oakland before moving to Sacramento in the 1950s, where she joined the WCIC.²⁸¹ In 1970, she started a lunch program called the Arms of Mercy with 50 cans of Campbell's soup, which she had persuaded the company's managers to donate to feed the hungry, and turned it into meals for 200 people. Shortly afterward, Marks convinced the Asbury United Methodist Church to let her use its church as the location for her lunch program. The church provided its kitchen for Marks and her assistant, Helen Bell, to cook

²⁷⁹ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 33.

²⁸⁰ "Champion of Social, Economic Justice in California Dies at 87," *Sacramento Bee*, 5 May 2019; Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 38.

²⁸¹ Norman D. Williams, "'Mama' Marks' spirit Won't Die, Friends Vow," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 April 1991.

the meals, as well as space for community members to eat. Food was supplied by donations from local bakeries, food manufacturers, private organizations, and private residents. At every meal, Marks and her assistants served roughly 60 to 100 people. Every weekday, she prepared 125 lunches for children at McClellan Elementary School as part of the SAEOC's children's feeding program. On holidays, she and her assistants served an estimated 500 to 600 people.²⁸²



Figure 71. "Mama" Marks distributing lunches to preschoolers and kindergarteners (1974). Source: Harlin Smith for the *Sacramento Bee*, Sigrid Bathen, Angel of Asbury," *Sacramento Bee*, 26 May 1974.

In addition to her work providing food for those in need, Mama Marks also fostered as many as 50 children during her lifetime. In recognition of her herculean efforts to aid Sacramento's poor and hungry, U.S. House Representative Robert Matsui wrote a letter to the Speaker of the House in 1986, describing Marks as "one of Sacramento's most outstanding humanitarians."²⁸³ Marks received other honors for her service to her community, including being honored at a

²⁸² Sigrid Bathen, "Angel of Asbury," *Sacramento Bee*, 26 May 1974.

²⁸³ *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated).

ceremony at the State Capitol by the Older Women's League, the NAACP's community service award, the National Enquirer's Good Samaritan Award. In 1982, the State Senate passed a resolution honoring Marks as "a distinguished Sacramento resident and civic leader (who) through her civic accomplishments, has contributed extensively to the improvement of the community."²⁸⁴ At time of her death in 1991, the headline in the *Sacramento Bee* called her a "Sacramento legend."²⁸⁵ Del Paso Heights Park on Roanoke Avenue in Del Paso Heights was renamed Mama Marks Park in 1992 in her honor.²⁸⁶

Together, Sacramento's anti-poverty programs and initiatives provided the training ground for Black community leaders, some of whom became some of the city's earliest Black elected officials.²⁸⁷

AFRICAN AMERICAN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Over a century of activism, community organizing, and grassroots efforts by members of the African American community laid the groundwork for the election of the first Black individuals to local political office, starting in the late 1960s. Through determination and hard work, these individuals often worked for decades prior to achieving political office to overcome discrimination and seemingly insurmountable odds to prove they were the most qualified individuals for the job.²⁸⁸

In 1967, attorney Milton McGhee became the first African American person elected to City Council. The conflicts in Oak Park in the summers of 1969 to 1971 increased awareness of the lack of representation that local Black residents had on City Council and in other elected positions. In 1971, Sacramento's city charter was amended to shift its election system from at-large elections to district elections. The change allowed Sacramento residents to directly elect their council members and mayor with the goal of increasing City Council representation from predominately ethnic minority neighborhoods, such as Oak Park, Del Paso Heights, South Sacramento, and others.²⁸⁹

The same year, Councilman McGhee came within 800 votes of being elected mayor of the city. He later served as vice-mayor under Mayor Richard H. Marriott. One year later, William Lee,

²⁸⁴ Jon Ralston, "Capitol Honors, 'Mama Marks,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 25 June 1982.

²⁸⁵ "Sacramento Legend Buried," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 April 1991.

²⁸⁶ Maria E. Camposeco, "Gathering Honors 'Mama' Marks," *Sacramento Bee*, 12 April 1992.

²⁸⁷ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 33-34.

²⁸⁸ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 9.

²⁸⁹ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 67.

founder of the *Sacramento Observer* newspaper, organized a meeting of Black community leaders at his newspaper's offices to establish a council that could speak with a united voice for all of Sacramento's Black residents. The council became the Sacramento Area Black Caucus. Empowered by participation from Black leaders and organizations throughout the city, the caucus became a powerful force in Sacramento politics. Among its early accomplishments were protests against the lack of Black appointees on City boards and commissions, pushing Sacramento County to establish an office of affirmative action, and appointing one of the caucus' members to the commission to investigate the murder of Raymond Brewer.²⁹⁰



Figure 72. Sacramento's first Black city councilman, Milton McGhee (right) next to Mayor Richard H. Marriott (center) in 1971. Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPMP05521.

After McGhee, other Black men were elected to City Council. Reverend Rosenwald “Robbie” Robertson, pastor and executive director of United Christian Centers, was elected as the councilman for District 2 in 1971. After his untimely death in 1973, an adult day care center at 5400 Elvas Avenue and a community center at 3525 Norwood Avenue (extant) in Del Paso

²⁹⁰ Covin, *Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement*, 51.

Heights were built and named in his honor.²⁹¹ World War II veteran and member of the Tuskegee Airmen, Herman Lawson, was appointed to replace him, becoming the third Black man to serve on the City Council.²⁹²

The first African American woman was appointed to serve on the City Council in the mid-1970s. In 1975, Phillip Isenberg, city councilmember for District 5 (Oak Park, Tahoe Park, Curtis Park, and part of the Fruitridge area) was elected mayor. In a closed-door meeting, the remaining City Council members unanimously appointed Callie Carney, an Alabama-born Oak Park resident and community activist, as his replacement. Initially considered an underdog for the appointment due to her outspoken and candid nature, Carney convinced the council members that she was the most qualified individual for the position. An active and highly regarded community leader who had worked with people from low income and minority backgrounds from at least 1960, her background included work with the Oak Park Neighborhood Council; the Upward Bound program for minority students at the University of California, Davis; the Sacramento Urban League; National Council of Negro Women; and the Women's Political Caucus.

At the time of her appointment, she served as community services coordinator for the



Figure 73. City councilman Herman Lawson (1968). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPMP04896.



Figure 74. Callie Carney and her husband Jim (1977). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPMP00548.

²⁹¹ Sue Boylan, "Health Center to Open," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 July 1985: 40.

²⁹² "Setting It Straight," *Sacramento Bee*, 11 May 1995: 24; "Capital Activist, Decorated WWII Flier Lawson Dies," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 May 1995: 13; "Vigorous Leap Toward Oblivion," *Sacramento Bee*, 28 December 1975: 61.

Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA), which was created to provide affordable housing for the City and County of Sacramento. She resigned from the position at the time of her appointment to City Council to avoid any accusations of a conflict of interest.²⁹³ She served as the councilmember for District 5 until 1979, when she was beaten by another member of the African American community, Dan Thompson.²⁹⁴ Her long-term residence at 3288 9th Avenue remains standing in Oak Park.

Contributions of local African Americans extended to state and national politics as well. Del Paso Heights native Grantland Johnson enjoyed a successful and far-reaching career in city, county, state, and national politics. Driven by a desire to dedicate his life to public service and mobilizing people for change, Johnson's path to a career in politics began as a leader of the Black Student Union at American River College, inspired by the work and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. While studying for a degree in government at California State University, Sacramento, he was mentored by his professor Joe Serna, Jr., who was later elected city councilman and then mayor. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he gained experience serving on the Sacramento Regional Transit board and as a member of the lieutenant governor's task force on postsecondary education and the governor's task force on public investment.

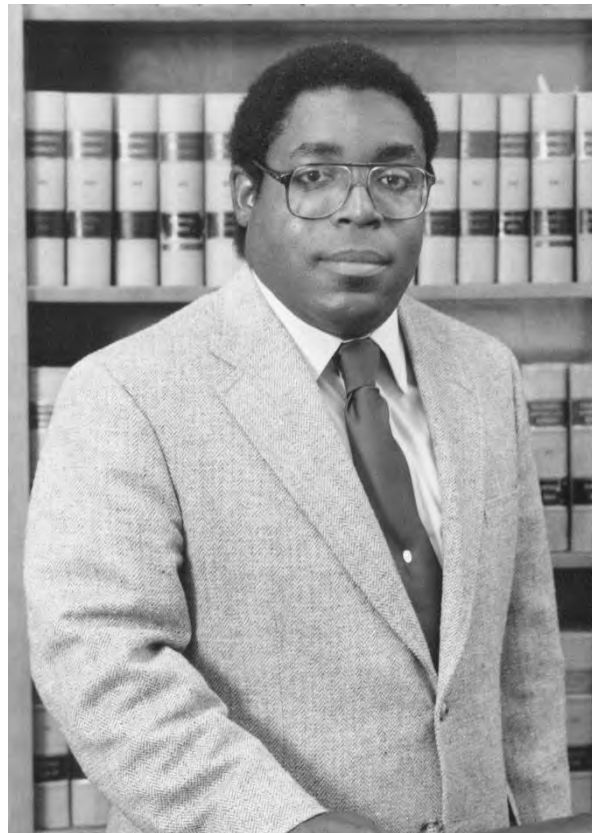


Figure 75. Grantland Johnson during his term as a city councilman in 1985. Source: Center for Sacramento History, Suttertown News Collection, 1995/026/0474.

He won election to serve as the city councilmember for his home district of District 2 in 1983, beating out incumbent Blaine Fisher. During his term, he helped to establish the city's Economic Development Department and Neighborhood Services Department. Three years later, he was elected county supervisor. He was reelected to serve a second term in 1990. In 1993, Johnson

²⁹³ Manuel Valencia, "New Councilwoman – Rough, Frank, Callie Carney 'Tells It Like It Is!,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 28 December 1975, 21.

²⁹⁴ "The Only Proposition," *Sacramento Bee*, 2 November 1979, 25.

left local politics to serve in President Bill Clinton’s administration as the Western regional director for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Following federal service, Johnson was appointed to join Governor Gray Davis’s cabinet as director of the California Health and Welfare Agency, the first Black man to hold the position.²⁹⁵

These individuals paved the way for other African American individuals who were later elected and have served distinguished terms in local, state, and federal politics in the decades following the 1970s and 1980s. Among these individuals were Sacramento native and former NBA basketball star Kevin Johnson, who became the city’s first Black mayor when he was elected to office in 2008. He remained in the position until 2016.

²⁹⁵ Robert D. Dávila, “Leader Praised As A Conciliator,” *Sacramento Bee*, 20 August 2014, A1-A2.



ARTS, CULTURE & RECREATION

Circa 1839-1980

THEME: BLACK ARTS, CULTURE & RECREATION IN SACRAMENTO, CA. 1839-1980

Throughout the city's history, Sacramento's dynamic African American community has led rich, multi-faceted lives that included an array of fully realized artistic and cultural expressions, social activities, and other recreational pursuits. These activities provided a social and cultural outlet for Black residents and fostered opportunities for strengthening interpersonal connections both within the African American community and with the wider population of Sacramento and beyond.

In spite of its relatively small size, Sacramento's African American community has produced an abundance of multidisciplinary high achievers in the arts, culture, and athletics over the course of its history. Over time, the community's growth and increasing cohesiveness, forged partially by discriminatory housing practices that concentrated the Black residents into specific neighborhoods, created a strong sense of community pride and identity that propelled a sustained fight for greater opportunities, particularly for the community's youth. At the grassroots level, strong and supportive church and community organizations provided invaluable support for youth activities that incubated the talents of local children. During and after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, these local efforts were bolstered by federal and state government efforts to desegregate schools, as well as increased funding for artistic and athletic opportunities for underserved communities. These forces allowed talented Black artists and athletes to compete and excel in larger, more inclusive settings, reach greater audiences, and achieve wider success.

The following section provides a brief overview of some of the ways in which Sacramento's Black residents contributed to the diversity and vibrancy of the arts, culture and recreation activities in the city during the 19th and 20th century, with the recognition that time and research constraints make it difficult to fully and comprehensively describe the complete scope of these contributions.

Music, Theater & Fine Art

The performance and enjoyment of music and theater in all of its expressions and iterations have been a vibrant part of Black life in Sacramento since the 19th century. The roots of Black musical theater in the United States trace back to performances given by enslaved African Americans for the amusement of their Southern enslavers in the early 19th century. These performances evolved into the minstrel show, which typically included joke-telling, dance, and

music based on African American spirituals and folks songs. By the early 1830s, the minstrel show was appropriated by white performers who performed bawdy, disparaging caricatures of African Americans in blackface. Their performances introduced white audiences to stereotypes of the ridiculous, "happy-go-lucky," uneducated "Negro" and became, in some cases, the primary way in which many white Americans understood or experienced Black life and culture. Such blackface minstrel shows dominated the popular American music scene during the mid-to late 19th century and became the foundation for modern musical theater. By the 1870s, African Americans began to push back and reclaim their place on the stage through productions with Black subject matter, reworked treatments of minstrel shows, concert recitals of African American spirituals alongside Western classical music pieces, and other innovative music and theater performances.²⁹⁶

One of the most significant examples anywhere in the United States came out of Sacramento. Sisters Anna Madah Hyers and Emma Louise Hyers were raised in Sacramento and received their musical training in San Francisco. The sisters first performed at the Metropolitan Theater in Sacramento in 1867 at the ages of eleven and nine, respectively. Managed by their father, Samuel Baltimore Hyers, they were quickly recognized for their extraordinary singing abilities and performance of Western classical concert music. In 1872, they traveled to Boston to perform at the World Peace Jubilee, the first major musical production in the United States where interracial performers shared the same stage. The Hyers Sisters became internationally renowned musical and theatrical stars whose talents took them across the United States, making them the first known African American women to succeed as national, touring concert-opera artists.²⁹⁷

After achieving popular success as performers, the sisters turned their attention to using their talents to uplift the African American community. The shift in their careers reflected the sisters' upbringing in an atmosphere of growing social consciousness among African Americans during the turbulent Reconstruction era of the 1860s and 1870s. During the mid-1800s, Sacramento was a hotbed for African American activism, while San Francisco was home to the oldest African American community in the state, including many leading Black businessmen, financiers, and activists, as well as Black poets, artists, actors, and writers. Enabled by their success and inspired by their surroundings, the sisters formed a theater company, the Hyers Sisters

²⁹⁶ Carson Anderson, "Minstrelry and the Evolution of Musical Theater During the Mid-to-Late 20th Century," October 2022; Eileen Southern, "The Origin and Development of the Black Musical Theater: A Preliminary Report," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 2 (1981-1982), Center for Black Music Research – Columbia College Chicago and University of Illinois Press: 1-14.

²⁹⁷ Susheel Bibbs, "Voices for Freedom: The Hyers Sisters' Dream, Change, and Legacy," sponsored by LHF, Inc. (Sacramento, CA: M.E.P Publications, 2022), 1.



Figure 76. Anna Madah Hyers (ca. 1880). Source: Miriam Matthews Photograph Collection, OpenUCLA Collection.



Figure 77. Emma Louise Hyers (ca. 1880). Miriam Matthews Photograph Collection, OpenUCLA Collection.

Combination, in San Francisco in 1875 to produce their own musical dramas. The Hyers Sisters' productions became part of a national movement of Black resistance performances that portrayed the Black experience with respect and humanity, thereby challenging the derogatory stereotypes of African Americans commonly portrayed in the popular minstrel shows of the period. Their first major production, *Out of Bondage* (1876), was one of the earliest dramatic works performed by African Americans that sensitively portrayed the story of enslaved African Americans. Their second, *Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad* (1879), was a slavery-to-freedom epic that contained jubilee songs, spirituals, and classical concert music. It was the first play written by an African American female and performed by an all-Black cast. Their next play, *Urlina, the African Princess* (1879), was the first known African American play set in Africa, an early expression of Black pride that marked the beginning of Black professional artists using their skills to celebrate their African ancestral roots.²⁹⁸ Following their successful careers, the sisters eventually retired back to Sacramento by 1900.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Jocelyn L. Buckner, "'Spectacular Opacities'" The Hyers Sisters' Performances of Respectability and Resistance." *African American Review* 3. No. 3 (Fall 2012): 309-323.

²⁹⁹ Burg, "From Civil War to Civil Rights: Black Sacramento in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century."

Opportunities to make a living as a graphic artist were virtually nonexistent for Black men and women in the 19th century. A rare exception was Grafton Tyler Brown, a gifted graphic artist, lithographer, and painter who was born free in Pennsylvania in 1841 and earned a good living as a commercial artist, producing advertising bills, birdseye views of cities and towns, banknotes, and certificates of stock. Brown received no formal art school training and reportedly mastered his craft as a lithographer under the tutelage of Charles Conrad Kuchel, who moved from Philadelphia to Sacramento in 1853. Though Brown was only in Sacramento from approximately 1853 to 1861, that period was formative in his development as an accomplished artist. In 1859, “the remarkable quality of [Brown’s] watercolor paintings was first noticed” by the *Sacramento Union* newspaper. In 2018, the Pasadena Museum of California Art held an exhibit of Brown’s art, titled “Grafton Tyler Brown; Exploring California.”³⁰⁰



Figure 78. Grafton Tyler Brown at his studio in Victoria, British Columbia (1883). Source: Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Exposure to the national arts and culture scene increased during World War II as a result of the influx of Black military servicemen and women stationed at the nearby military bases and the arrival of new residents from different parts of the country in the 1940s and 1950s. After the war, Sacramento’s easy-going lifestyle and its better-than-average economic opportunities for skilled African Americans convinced many Black servicemen to permanently settle in the city. Expanding employment opportunities during the postwar period included not only professional careers as dentists, lawyers, or physicians, but also work as singers, actors, comedians, and increasingly jazz and blues musicians.³⁰¹ Because musicians were required to be union members to play in Sacramento’s nightclubs, Black musicians were able to make a living in Sacramento and enjoyed standardized wages and working conditions that other professions did not experience.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Pasadena Museum of California Art, “Grafton Tyler Brown: Exploring California,” exhibition brochure, 2018.

³⁰¹ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 166.

³⁰² Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 48.

With the rising popularity of jazz and blues in the 1940s and 1950s, a circuit of local jazz clubs with Black owners and interracial crowds was established along Capitol Avenue in the West End. The clubs often paired local jazz musicians with national touring acts on the “Chitlin Circuit.” The clubs were housed inside existing buildings, some of which were purchased at bargain rates from Japanese residents who had been forced into internment camps during the war, as well as entirely new or remodeled venues.³⁰³ The Eureka Club at 326 ½ L Street, operated by Charles Derrick, was a popular venue for live music and dining during the Prohibition era of the early 1930s.³⁰⁴ The Zanzibar Club at 530 ½ Capitol Avenue, owned by Isaac and Louise Anderson and William “Nitz” Jackson, and the Mo-Mo Club at 600 Capitol Avenue, owned by brothers Alex and Don “Hovey” Moore, formed the core of Sacramento’s Black entertainment night spots in the 1940s and 1950s. The clubs hosted national, regional, and local Black talent, including many of the most prominent Black musicians of the period, including Count Basie, Dinah Washington, Duke Ellington, Dizzie Gillespie, Cab Calloway, and many more.³⁰⁵ Other jazz clubs, such as the Congo Club at 320 Capitol Avenue, the Stag Club at 1120-1122 4th Street, the Mel-O-Dee Club at 908 11th Street, and the Clayton Club beneath the Hotel Marshall at 1126 7th Street (now the Hyatt Centric hotel) contributed to Sacramento’s jazz scene.³⁰⁶ Local musicians also formed close relationships and deeper collaborations during casual weekly jam sessions held at other



Figure 80. Advertisement for a performance at the Mo-Mo Club (1948). Source: *Sacramento Bee*, 21 February 1948.



Figure 79. The Congo Club (1955). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Ernest W. Myers Collection, 1989/041/1479.

³⁰³ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 31-33.

³⁰⁴ William Burg, “West End Jazz,” *Midtown Monthly*, March 14, 2012, accessed April 26, 2023, <http://www.midtownmonthly.net/music/west-end-jazz/>.

³⁰⁵ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 147-148.

³⁰⁶ Burg, “West End Jazz,” *Midtown Monthly*.

locations, including the ODES Hall (also known as Portuguese Hall) at 6th and W streets.³⁰⁷ Together, these venues and events created a vibrant environment for Black musical entertainment and expression.



Figure 81. Black military servicemen at the Zanzibar Club (undated). Source: Collection of Keith Burns in "Historic Offers Webinars on Sacramento's Black History," *Sacramento Bee*, 29 July 2020: A4.



Figure 82. A jazz performance at the Mo-Mo Club (1952). Source: "Colorfornia Visits California's Capitol City," *Colorfornia: The California Magazine* 1, no. 4 (1952): 14-22.

³⁰⁷ Oral History of Vincent "Ted" Thompson, by Clarence Caesar, 1984, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Collection, Center for Sacramento History.

Jazz clubs remained popular until the late 1950s when the redevelopment of the West End forced many to close or relocate. At the same time, the rising popularity of rhythm and blues began to supplant jazz as the most popular form of Black music. The Mo-Mo Club reopened at 2963 35th Street in Oak Park. Meanwhile, to accommodate the much larger crowds that rhythm and blues shows attracted, concert promoters began to rent larger facilities, such as the Memorial Auditorium, for prominent touring musicians.³⁰⁸

As with other facets of Black life, local Black churches in Sacramento provided an early foundation and outlet for musical expression through the performances of their choirs at weekly services and other special events. Without a population large enough to support a purpose-built performance venue of its own, the churches were often used to host musical and theatrical performances. St. Andrews AME's church building, in particular, appears to have been a popular destination. Perhaps the most successful local choir, the Voices of Inspiration, was founded in 1959 by real estate developer William H. Thompson. The choir started when eight to 10 boys came to Thompson to start a social club and within four years developed into



Figure 83. Teenage members of the choir at St. Andrews AME (1928). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/026.

³⁰⁸ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 168.

the most popular youth social club in the Oak Park neighborhood, with a choir of 125 teenagers from throughout Sacramento between the ages of 15 and 19. Most of the children had no experience singing when they joined. The choir met weekly at Shiloh Baptist Church and primarily sang religious music, including classics, spirituals, and gospel songs. A youth group as well as choir, weekly meetings also included planning for social events, discussing community problems, listening to speakers, and charity work.

In 1959, the choir received national recognition when revered gospel singer Mahalia Jackson offered the group the opportunity to sing with her at her performance at the Memorial Auditorium. Afterward, members remembered Jackson praising the choir as “the best singing group of teenagers she had ever heard.” The Voices for Inspiration propelled their success to a performance at the national convention of the NAACP in Atlanta, Georgia. “It’s a source of great pride to these kids to be wanted and appreciated,” Thompson said as the choir gained national attention in 1962.³⁰⁹



Figure 84. The Voices of Inspiration Choir singing with gospel singer Mahalia Jackson at the Memorial Auditorium (1959). Photograph courtesy of Marcia Jones-Wylie.

A well-known and respected Jazz bassist, Rufus Reid graduated from Sacramento High School, where he played trumpet in school bands. After completing service in the U.S. Air Force, he turned his attention to pursuing a career as a professional bassist and trained with renowned bassists and instructors at the Seattle Symphony, Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and the Chicago Symphony. His career as a band leader, sideman, and recording artist led him

³⁰⁹ Aaron Epstein, “Youths Flock to Singing Group,” *Sacramento Bee*, 25 March 1962.

to play and record with many of the top musicians in modern jazz. The extensive list includes giants such as Dexter Gordon, Kenny Burrell, Art Farmer, Eddie Harris, Stan Getz, Lee Konitz, J.J. Johnson, and Donald Byrd. Reid has also won many awards and accolades for his involvement in promoting jazz through community and academic endeavors, including the International Association of Jazz Educators' Humanitarian Award (1997), *Down Beat Magazine's* Achievement Award for Jazz Education (1998), and International Society of Bassists' Distinguished Achievement Award (2001).³¹⁰

Another talented musician to come out of Sacramento during the postwar period was Robert Brookins. Brookins was a musical prodigy, who began singing at the age of four and playing drums at the age of five. He also learned how to play the keyboard, lead guitar, bass guitar, and several horns. In 1974, he won the Motown Soul Search contest as the leader for the nine-member musical group Little Robert and the Fondells. The group performed on television for



Figure 85. Little Robert and the Fondells (1970). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 2000/061/088.

³¹⁰ "Past Awardees," Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, accessed April 26, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20080820080111/http://www.midatlanticarts.org/funding/artists_programs/living_legacy/reid.html.

Ed Sullivan, Dean Martin, Dinah Shore, Johnny Carson, and others. After graduating from Grant High School, Brookins began a career in the recording industry with ARC label, founded by Maurice White of Earth, Wind, and Fire. He later performed with the group in the late 1990s and early 2000s before his death in 2009.³¹¹

Raised in Oak Park and a graduate of Sacramento High School, Cynthia Robinson learned to play trumpet as a student at Sacramento High School. In the 1960s and 1970s, she became one of the first female trumpet players in a major American band as one of the founding members of the soul and rock and roll band Sly and the Family Stone. The band had five Top 10 hits, including "Everyday People," "I Want to Take You Higher," "Dance to the Music." After her time with the band, she continued her music career playing in bands that were headed by other musical luminaries, such as her cousin and fellow Sly and the Family Stone bandmember Larry Graham (Graham Central Station), George Clinton, and Prince. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993 as a member of Sly and the Family Stone.³¹²



Figure 86. Sly and the Family Stone in 1968. Cynthia Robinson is in the center of the second row. Source: Wikipedia. Public Domain.

³¹¹ Robert D. Davila, "Robert Brookins Rose from Del Paso to R&B Heights," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 April 2009.

³¹² Chris Macias, "Local Trumpeter Was a Co-Founder of 1960s Sly and the Family Stone," *Sacramento Bee*, 27 November 2015: A3.

In the 1980s, Del Paso Heights-native Jay King launched a successful career as a musician, producer, and businessman. King learned the music business as a dancer and concert promoter in Vallejo. Along with producers Denzil Foster and Thomas McElroy, King produced the single, "Rumors" for the group Timex Social Club. The song became the highest selling 12-inch single of 1986. After no major label would pick up the song, King decided to create his own record label, King Jay Records, out of a spare room at a law office on 12th Street. King, Foster, and McElroy followed up their success with Timex Social Club by forming their own group, Club Nouveau. Four more hits followed: "Jealousy," "Situation #9," "Why You Treat Me So Bad," and the group's biggest hit, a cover of Bill Withers' song "Lean on Me," which topped the charts in the summer of 1987 and won a Grammy in 1988. With King Jay Records, King worked to develop and record local Sacramento musicians and produced tracks for other record labels. In 1996, he was named senior vice president of operations at the Atlantic Records-backed label, Young Black Brotha.³¹³

Reflecting the rise of Black community organizations and programs inspired by the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements, members of the local Black community founded cultural organizations in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of helping Black youth learn skills that could help them in their professional careers. Inspired by his mother's desire to have a career in the theater, Mike Benjamin and his wife, Dorothy, founded the Sacramento Repertory Theater in 1969 to help Black youth gain experience in the entertainment field. The 60-seat theater, located in a former converted store and church building at 3116 Stockton Boulevard (extant), presented one act plays, musicals, and other theatrical performances, often with all-Black casts.³¹⁴

Local Black residents entered the national arts and entertainment scene more broadly in the latter half of the 20th century. Sacramento native Akinsanya Kambon developed a passion for fine art during visits to the Crocker Art Museum as a child and grew up using drawing as a form of therapy while recovering from polio. During the Vietnam War, he served as an infantryman and combat illustrator. Following the war, he joined the Black Student Union and Black Panther Party, where he served as Lieutenant of Culture creating graphic layouts and illustrations for the party's newspaper, *The Black Panther*. Among his best-known work are his illustrations in

³¹³ J. Freedom du Lac, "King for a Day," *Sacramento Bee*, 21 January 1996.

³¹⁴ Mike Benjamin, interview by Michael Benjamin at the Oak Park Community Center [transcription], February 3, 2022, African American Experience History Project, City of Sacramento Community Development Department.



Figure 87. Akinsanya Kambon at a festival at McClatchy Park in the 1980s. Source: Larry V. Dalton, *The Observer Newspaper*, from "American Expressions/African Roots: Akinsanya Kambon's Ceramic Sculpture," Crocker Art Museum.

The Black Panther Coloring Book, which was designed to bring attention to racial inequality and social injustice. He remains an active working artist.³¹⁵

Another artist, John Franklin King, had a wide-ranging impact on the local arts community. Shortly after moving to Sacramento with his wife and children in 1968, King began exhibiting sculptures and works of art in a variety of mediums at the Crocker Art Museum, as well as other museums and galleries throughout Northern California. In 1970, King joined with a group of local artists – including Bob Burge, Alex Miller, Allen Gordon, and Don Price – to open their own art gallery at 33rd Street and 2nd Avenue in Oak Park called The Black Affair. The gallery was intended to highlight works of art by Black artists, craftspeople, and students. King was one of three artists whose work was showcased in the gallery's first exhibition.³¹⁶ King was also well-known for his caricatures

and live portrait sketches, which he completed at street festivals, Venice Beach, and the California State Fair, as well as large-scale murals, including one at the WCIC headquarters. King's impact spread to the many students he taught as a teacher, administrator, vice principal, and art department chairman for the Elk Grove Unified School District; associate professor at San Jose State University; and local community groups and organizations. During the course of his life, he has served on the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ "Akinsanya Kambon," Norman Rockwell Museum, Illustration History, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/akinsanya-kambon>.

³¹⁶ "Black Affair, New Art Gallery, Opens Doors," *Sacramento Bee*, 8 March 1970.

³¹⁷ John Franklin King Memorial Service Booklet, July 2013, provided by St. Andrew's AME Church.

Actor LeVar Burton was raised in the Meadowview neighborhood and attended Christian Brothers High School before moving to Los Angeles for a drama scholarship at the University of Southern California.³¹⁸ When he was 19 years old, he won the starring role in the miniseries *Roots* (1977). The show became one of the most popular television shows in the history of American television and earned Burton an Emmy nomination for best actor in a drama series.³¹⁹ He later served as host and producer of the popular children's show, "Reading Rainbow," for which he won 12 Emmy Awards and a Peabody Award. From 1987 to 1994, he gained further success for his role as Geordi La Forge in the television series "Star Trek: The Next Generation."³²⁰ In recognition of his contributions and success in film and television, Richfield Park in Meadowview was renamed LeVar Burton Park in 2019 in his honor.³²¹



Figure 88. Press photograph of LeVar Burton for "Reading Rainbow" (1983). Source: PBS.

Black Journalism

Black newspapers have been a vital force of community-building since the early 20th century. The newspapers – owned, operated, and written by African American men and women – helped build a sense of community and interconnectedness among Sacramento's African American residents by publicizing social, political, and cultural events; advertising for Black businesses; and reporting on events important to the Black community. They also served as a powerful public voice in the fight for civil rights, providing honest reporting on issues of racial discrimination and publicizing outspoken editorials advocating for Black rights. The newspapers

³¹⁸ "Sacramento Native LeVar Burton Named 2022 Grand Marshall of Rose Parade in Pasadena," *Sacramento Bee*, 8 October 2021: A8.

³¹⁹ "LeVar Burton Park," *Sacramento Observer*, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://sacobserver.com/community/places/levar-burton-park/>.

³²⁰ "Sacramento Native LeVar Burton Named 2022 Grand Marshall of Rose Parade in Pasadena," *Sacramento Bee*.

³²¹ "LeVar Burton Returns to Hometown for Dedication," *Sacramento Bee*, 12 June 2019: A3.

served as an important method of organizing around civil rights campaigns and provided an outlet to air grievances.

In 1906, Reverend J. Gordon McPherson of the Shiloh Baptist Church published Sacramento's first Black newspaper, *The Sacramento Forum*, with assistance from Dr. R.J. Fletcher and Shiloh Baptist Church minister J.M. Collins. The newspaper only published one issue before Reverend McPherson relocated to San Jose, but it provided Reverend Collins with the experience to start his own paper. In 1915, Reverend Collins began publishing the longer-lived *The Western Review*. A third Black newspaper, the *Sacramento Enterprise*, was started by attorney and Spanish-American War veteran, P.J. Clyde Randall, in 1910. In addition to his work in the *Enterprise*, Randall penned editorials in the white-owned *Sacramento Union*, utilizing the newspaper's close connection to progressive Republican politics to criticize the treatment of Black veterans and describe the general state of Black Sacramentans. Similar to *The Sacramento Forum*, *The Sacramento Enterprise* did not last long, ending publication when Randall left Sacramento. In spite of their relatively short existences, these early Black newspapers provided Sacramento's African American community with an important means of communicating with each other, disseminating the views of community leaders, and organizing around important issues. The success of these papers convinced the white-owned *Sacramento Union* to provide regular column space for members of the African American community to express their opinions on local matters to a wider audience.³²²

After the short run of these early Black newspapers in the first decades of the 20th century, the local Black community remained without a dedicated media outlet of its own until the 1940s. Recognizing a need for a voice for the community, Reverend J.T. Muse of the Shiloh Baptist Church founded *The Sacramento Outlook* in 1942. The newspaper delivered information on national events from the Black perspective, provided a means for community members to organize and communicate about local events, and publicized the activities of Sacramento's growing Black community professionals, who were increasingly able to offer essential services to Black residents that had previously been inaccessible to them. *The Sacramento Outlook* was also more outspoken on civil rights issues than earlier Black newspapers and embraced its role in providing coverage of local and national civil rights events to its readers.³²³ In the 1960s, local

³²² Burg, "From Civil War to Civil Rights: Black Sacramento in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century."

³²³ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 159-1960.

civil rights leader Nathaniel Colley had a regular column in the newspaper.³²⁴ The newspaper ran successfully for over twenty years.³²⁵



Figure 89. William H. Lee, founder of the *Sacramento Observer* (undated). Source: *Sacramento Observer*.

The standards and precedents established by *The Sacramento Outlook* set the bar for future local Black publications, most notably its successor, *The Sacramento Observer*. The newspaper was created in 1962, when Reverend Muse sold *The Sacramento Outlook* to the Men's Civic League, a group of six Black professionals, including realtor William H. Lee. In 1965, Lee bought out his partners and became the newspaper's sole owner and publisher. Its offices were established at the former Oak Park post office at 3540 4th Avenue.³²⁶ *The Observer* sought to be a "communication bridge" for the Black community. Under Lee's leadership, the newspaper increased its coverage of local and national events related to the African American community and gained a reputation as a strong community advocate by publicizing the accomplishments of Black residents and providing straightforward political reporting and outspoken editorial pieces. By 1966, the newspaper boasted a circulation of 10,000 copies and 8,000 paid

³²⁴ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 33-34.

³²⁵ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 159-160.

³²⁶ Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 52.

subscriptions.³²⁷ The newspaper continues to serve the Sacramento community and remains a vital voice in the local media landscape.

African American individuals began to join the staff of local media outlets in the latter half of the 20th century. Bertha Gorman, a native of Oak Park, began writing for the *Sacramento Bee* around 1970.³²⁸ Mel Assagai (formerly Mel Whitaker) started his career in journalism at the *Sacramento Observer* after Greater Sacramento Urban League leader Howard Harris took him under his wing and helped him get his first reporting job at the newspaper.³²⁹ Assagai joined the staff of the *Sacramento Bee* in the early 1970s and later became a successful lobbyist. Ginger Rutland, raised in Curtis Park and South Land Park Hills, was hired by local NBC television affiliate KCRA in the 1970s, becoming the station's first Black female reporter. While with the station, she won an Emmy for her coverage of the construction of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant in San Luis Obispo County. She later joined the editorial board of the *Sacramento Bee* in the 1980s and worked there for 25 years. She later republished a memoir, *When We Were Colored*, written by her mother, Eva Rutland, and adapted it into a popular play.³³⁰

The previous discussion represents a small portion of the overall contributions and activities of Black individuals in the fields of media and journalism.

Social Clubs, Fraternities, and Sororities

Social clubs, fraternities, sororities and other groups provided further enrichment to the social lives of Sacramento's Black residents, as well as an important means for organizing responses to issues facing the local African American community. The first Black social clubs and fraternal organizations were created nearly at the same time as the city's founding as the small Black community joined in solidarity to protect its citizens from fugitive slave laws. Realizing the power of forming a unified front to respond to civil rights abuses, and barred from joining white social clubs and fraternal organizations, Black residents formed social clubs and organizations of their own, modeled after their white counterparts. The first Black fraternal organization in Sacramento was the Philomathean Lodge, No.2, a Black chapter of the Free and Accepted Masons. Founded by podiatrist Dr. R. J. Fletcher in 1853, the lodge was the first Black fraternal organization founded on the West Coast. The lodge joined with other Black Masonic lodges founded shortly after in San Francisco and Oakland to organize a Grand Lodge of Black Masons

³²⁷ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 198-200.

³²⁸ Various articles in the *Sacramento Bee*; communication with Carson Anderson, August 2022.

³²⁹ Stephen Magagnini, "Troubled People Get a Leg Up," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 December 2008.

³³⁰ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021.

for California in 1855. They met in Sacramento the following year to ratify a constitution and by-laws and elect leaders. The Philomathean Lodge and later fraternal organizations like it brought men from different social, religious, educational, and economic backgrounds and with different skillsets together to find effective solutions to common causes facing the African American community.³³¹

The clubs founded by Black Sacramentans ranged from the purely recreational to groups with strong civil rights agendas focused on improving conditions and elevating the African American community. In the early years, African American clubs often did not have dedicated buildings. The community was small and generally located in the West End through the mid-20th century. Meetings and events were typically held inside personal residences, churches, or the meeting halls of other organizations. The Philomathean Lodge was no different. In the 19th century, the lodge, as well as many other clubs and organizations, held regular events at St. Andrews AME.³³²

As newcomers expanded Sacramento's local Black population during the First Great Migration of the 1920s and 1930s and again after World War II, the number of Black social clubs and fraternal organizations increased to reflect the growing diversity of the community and its interests.³³³ Other Black fraternal orders founded in Sacramento included the Crispus Attucks Lodge No. 19, the Knights of Pythias; Adah Chapter 1, the Order of the Eastern Star; and the Harmony Lodge No. 61 of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, though there were likely others.³³⁴

By the 1930s and 1940s, some Black social clubs and fraternal organizations were large and influential enough to rent or build their own meeting halls. These were often shared with other like-minded groups. In 1930, the Philomathean Lodge was listed in the Sacramento city directory in the Odd Fellows (IOOF) Hall at 1025 9th Street. In the 1950s, the lodge attempted to obtain a permit to construct a lodge hall on the north side of 9th Avenue between 35th and 37 streets, adjacent to the new Shiloh Baptist Church in Oak Park, but its permit was denied by the City due to complaints from local residents.³³⁵ Research did not indicate whether a lodge was ever built.

³³¹ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 45-57.

³³² "Social Entertainment," *The Record-Union*, 7 November 1883: 5; Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 104.

³³³ Caesar, "An Historical Overview of Sacramento's Black Community, 1850-1980," 151.

³³⁴ "Masonic Lodges Plan St. Johns Day Rites," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 June 1955: 21.

³³⁵ "Protests On Church Plan Are Overridden," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 October 1957: 3; "Planners May Rule on Eagles Club Tomorrow," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 October 1957: 27.



Figure 90. Members of Adah Chapter No. 1, Order of the Eastern Star (1924). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Clarissa Hundley Wildy Collection, 2000/061/115.

Women’s clubs became particularly popular amongst Black women, both as outlets for social interaction through the organization of social events such as lunches and sewing circles, as well as civic and political engagement. A particularly influential group, the Negro Women’s Improvement Club (NWCIC) was founded in 1936 to provide housing for single Black women. The organization relocated multiple times. It was initially located at 1830 T Street (extant) before relocating to a Victorian mansion at 1219 X Street in 1949. Both locations offered dorm-like living environments for Black women. In 1958, the organization moved to its present home, a custom-built office in Oak Park at 3555 3rd Avenue (extant). The organization continued its mission in its new neighborhoods, opening the first Head Start Program in Sacramento in 1966 and the Shiloh Arms low-income housing complex with the Shiloh Baptist Church in 1971.³³⁶

Women’s auxiliaries of fraternal orders were established with similar missions as their male counterparts, organizing social events for members and performing community service. Among these were the Queen Ester No. 41 of Worthy Masons and the Grace Pugh Order of the Eastern Star, No. 125. Local chapters of Black sororities associated with particular universities were also established. By the 1960s, at least three Black sororities existed in Sacramento, including chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Gamma Phi Delta, and Iota Phi Lambda.³³⁷ Through these women’s clubs and sororities, Black women were able to exercise power, influence, and

³³⁶ Interview with Ginger Rutland, conducted by Danielle Baza, City of Sacramento Oral History Project, December 2021; Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance*, 51; Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 152; Women’s Civic Improvement Club of Sacramento, “WCIC History,” accessed September 16, 2022, <http://wcicinc.org/wcic-history.html>.

³³⁷ *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965).

independence apart from their families or husbands and become leaders in their communities in their own right.

By 1965, the “Who’s Who in the Negro Community” directory listed over twenty different Black social clubs and organizations in Sacramento, including fraternities and sororities, church groups, and more. The largest institution listed was the Sacramento Branch of the NAACP. Reflecting the diversity and richness of the local Black community, the represented groups included four women’s clubs, a local Baptist minister’s conference, charity groups, social event clubs, among others.³³⁸

While social clubs, sororities, and fraternal organizations peaked in the first half of the 20th century, some groups emerged in the latter half of the century. In 1973, a group of members of the historically African American fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, met at the law office of attorney Clarence S. Brown in the United California Bank Building at 4920 Freeport Boulevard to establish a local chapter of the fraternity. The chapter received its charter later that year. The first group of elected officers included Brothers Richard A. Harris, Polemarch; Clarence S. Brown, Vice Polemarch; John Robinson, Keeper of Records; and Attorney Joseph Russell, Keeper of Exchequer.³³⁹

Although the popularity of social clubs and fraternal organizations waned in the late 20th century, some, including the WCIC, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and Kappa Alpha Psi, continue to be active in Sacramento and some other new organizations have been founded. Social clubs and organizations such as these emerged typically in response to community needs, and many existed only for a short period. As such, the groups described in this section represent only a small fraction of the total number and types of social clubs and organizations that members of the Black community participated in during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Athletics

Over the decades, athletics have served as an important outlet for youth education and development, social gathering and enjoyment, and a powerful source of Black community pride in Sacramento.

³³⁸ *Sacramento Negro Directory*, 1965 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Observer, 1965).

³³⁹ James Reede, “Sacramento Alumni Chapter History,” undated, sent via email to Carson Anderson, March 11, 2023.

YOUTH SPORTS

Youth sports, centered around youth leagues and particularly around Sacramento's high schools, fomented a powerful sense of community identity among Black residents and fostered lively rivalries between the city's various neighborhoods and communities. The most prominent schools in the Oak Park area and Central City were Sacramento's two oldest high schools: Sacramento High School and McClatchy High School. In the neighborhoods to the north, Grant Union High School and Rio Linda High School developed into athletic powerhouses. According to residents of Del Paso Heights, sports were "everything" to the community.³⁴⁰ These schools, among many others in the Sacramento area, produced many student-athletes who went on to have successful professional careers.

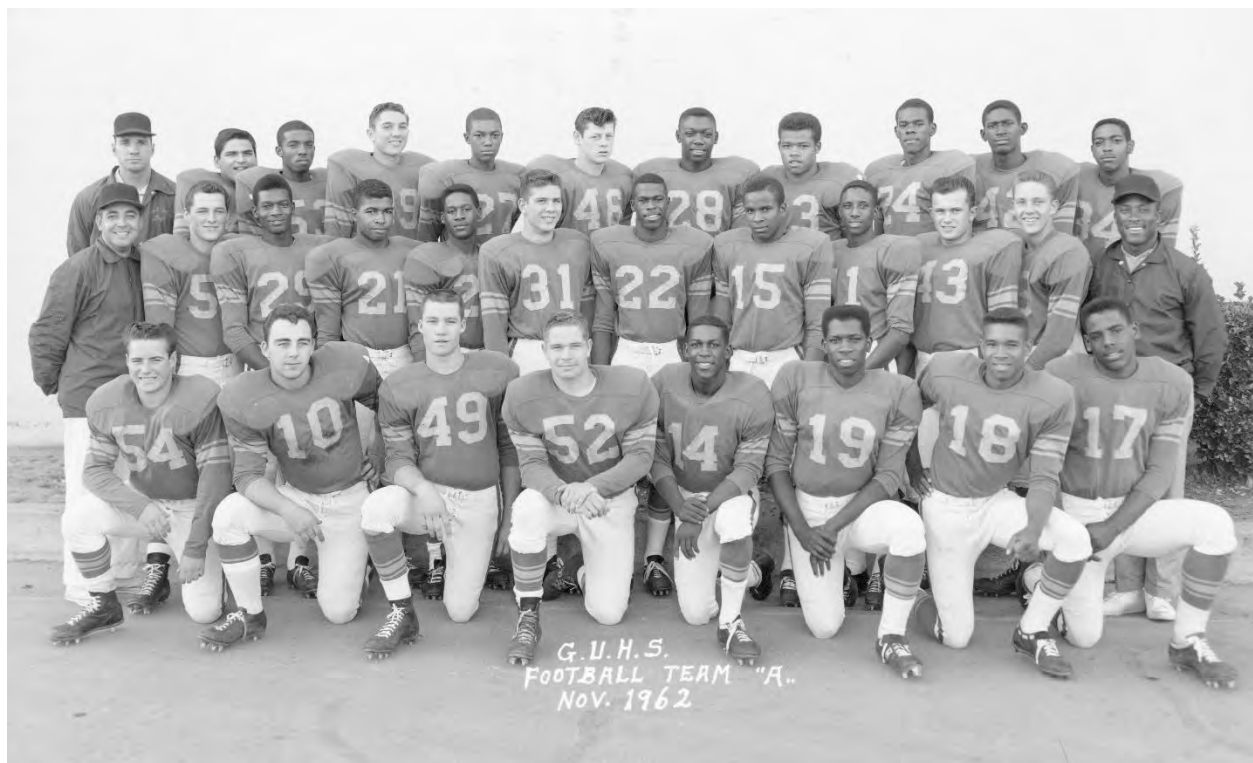


Figure 91. Members of Grant High School's 1962 football team "A." Source: Center for Sacramento History, Michael T. Benning Collection, 1983/232/02574-75.

Perhaps more than any other sport in the Sacramento area, baseball has been a major unifying force and source of pride among the African American community. The sport served as a social linchpin particularly in the Oak Park neighborhood, where it helped bring the Black community

³⁴⁰ Oshay Johnson, North Sacramento/DPH Community Meeting, March 10, 2023, notes taken by Carson Anderson, City of Sacramento.



Figure 92. Norman Blackwell playing semi-professional baseball in the Winter Baseball League (1959). Source: "Triple Bill Will Aid Busher's Fund, Open Winter Baseball Play," *Sacramento Bee*, 27 September 1959.

together as it established its roots there in the 1950s. The Oak Park Little League was first chartered in the 1950s. Coached by men from their community, the youth baseball league gave Black boys and young men models to aspire to who looked like them.³⁴¹

One such influential coach, Norman Blackwell, played baseball in several semi-professional divisions and leagues in the Sacramento area in the 1950s, including the Rural League and the Sacramento Winter Baseball League, the top division in the Sacramento area, which featured professional baseball players who competed in Sacramento during the major league off-season. Blackwell was the only Black player in the division at the time. Frustrated at the lack of opportunities for Black players, he sponsored several all-Black teams.³⁴² Blackwell was eventually offered a contract to play for the St. Louis Cardinals' farm team in Georgia but turned down the offer because of hostile playing conditions in the South and to raise a family. After ending his semi-professional career, Blackwell turned his attention to coaching and became one of the foundational figures in the Oak Park Little League. Seven of the players Blackwell coached went on to sign contracts with professional baseball team, including his sons Orlando Blackwell and Juan Blackwell.³⁴³

Another beloved coach of the Oak Park Little League coach was Jimmie Lee Royster. Royster was a coach and manager for the league for approximately two decades and later also served as league president. During his long tenure with the league, Royster inspired and mentored generations of young Black athletes, including his son, Jerry Royster, who went on to play in the major leagues. Beyond the playing field, Jimmie Royster

³⁴¹ Ailene Voisin, "Crump, Blackwell to get LL Honors," *Sacramento Bee*, 2 April 1999.

³⁴² Norman Blackwell, interview by Michael Benjamin at the Oak Park Community Center [transcription], February 3, 2022, African American Experience History Project, City of Sacramento Community Development Department.

³⁴³ Kris Hooks, "The Many Faces of Oak Park," *Sacramento News and Review*, June 16, 2016, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/content/the-many-faces-of-oak-park/21211139/>.

instilled discipline, hard work, self-esteem, pride, and the difference between right and wrong in his players.³⁴⁴

Harrison Crump, Sr. was also a giant in the Oak Park Little League. He served as president for approximately 30 years from 1979 to 2009.³⁴⁵ As an indication of the popularity of the league and its regular games, players and family members remembered roughly 200 people attending the “hot games” at noon when the summer temperatures were high. The Oak Park Little League’s primary home field appears to have been a baseball field at the former site of Stanford Junior High on Martin Luther King Boulevard and 10th Street, later renamed Christensen Field (now the site of the Oak Park Community Center).³⁴⁶ League sign-ups and tryouts were also held at McClatchy Park, the First Lutheran Church at 3860 4th Avenue (extant), and the Arata Brothers store at 34th Street and 3rd Avenue.³⁴⁷ Membership in the league began to decline in more recent years as the price to play and compete in the sport outpriced the means of the local community.³⁴⁸ In 1999, the baseball field at McClatchy Park was renamed Crump-Blackwell Fields in honor of Harrison Crump, Sr. and Normal Blackwell.³⁴⁹

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

Prior to the 1940s, careers in professional sports were not open to Black individuals. The successful integration of the Brooklyn Dodgers by Jackie Robinson in 1945 opened opportunities for Black athletes across the nation, including Sacramento. By the 1950s, the successes of the first Black athletes in integrated professional baseball, football, and basketball leagues prompted the focused recruitment of Black athletes from colleges and high schools across the country.³⁵⁰

The following sections provide brief biographies of some of the most well-known and successful professional athletes to come out of Sacramento through roughly the 1980s.

³⁴⁴ Robert D. Dávila, “Oak Park Coach, Mentor Jimmie Lee Royster, 78,” *Sacramento Bee*, 21 July 2006.

³⁴⁵ Voisin, “Crump, Blackwell to get LL Honors.”

³⁴⁶ “Youth Baseball,” *Sacramento Bee*, 12 March 1969: 18.

³⁴⁷ “Youth Baseball,” *Sacramento Bee*, 7 February 1969: 22; “Youth Baseball,” *Sacramento Bee*, 12 March 1969: 57.

³⁴⁸ Public comment, Sacramento African American Experience Project Partners Kickoff Meeting, Oak Park, June 7, 2022.

³⁴⁹ Voisin, “Crump, Blackwell to get LL Honors.”

³⁵⁰ Caesar, “An Historical Overview of Sacramento’s Black Community, 1850-1980,” 169.

Boxing

One of Sacramento's earliest known professional Black athletes was lightweight and middleweight boxer Lloyd Marshall. Considered the best boxer from Sacramento through at least the 1990s, Marshall's career lasted from 1937 to 1951, during which he fought in bouts across the country, some of which drew over 12,000 spectators and faced several of the top fighters of the 20th century.³⁵¹ He beat at least seven boxers who were once world champions or went on to become champions after fighting him. Despite his prowess, he was never given a title fight because of his race and never made more than \$3,000 for most of his fights. As a result, local boxing historians considered Marshall the best boxer to never receive a title shot. He was the "the ne plus ultra," boxing historian and *Sacramento Bee* reporter Bill Conlin wrote. "There was nobody even close."³⁵² Marshall was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame in 1996 alongside Sugar Ray Leonard, Carlos Zarate, and Pipino Cuevas.³⁵³ He was posthumously inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2010.³⁵⁴



Figure 93. Lloyd Marshall, Sr. with his son Lloyd Marshall, Jr. (1969). Source: Center for Sacramento History.

Baseball

Sacramento's first known professional Black athlete was Leonard Keene, a baseball player whose training took place in the neighborhood park and high school sandlots of Sacramento's predominately Black neighborhoods. Keene was drafted in 1950 by the St. Louis Browns, the Major League Baseball (MLB) parent club of the minor league Sacramento Solons. Keene played with the Solons for years before retiring to raise a family in Sacramento. Keene would remain Sacramento's only Black professional baseball player until the 1960s when several other local

³⁵¹ "Lloyd Marshall Wins Clean Cut Decision Over Christo Before 12,099," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 April 1943; Ben Swesey, "Boxing Legend Is Dead," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 August 1997.

³⁵² Bill Conlin, "Marshall Was Capital's Best," *Sacramento Bee*, 14 April 1996.

³⁵³ Swesey, "Boxing Legend Is Dead."

³⁵⁴ "Patrick Makes It Official - Signs with JR Motorsports," *Sacramento Bee*, 9 December 2009.

athletes joined the major leagues. The following is a short list of some of the most successful athletes to come out of Sacramento between approximately 1950 and 1980.

Born in Riverside, Johnnie B. “Dusty” Baker, Jr. grew up in Sacramento. He played 19 seasons in Major League Baseball (MLB), debuting first with the Atlanta Braves in 1968. Baker won two Silver Slugger Awards and a Golden Glove Award. After retiring from his playing career, he served as manager for several MLB teams, including the San Francisco Giants, Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati Reds, Washington Nationals, and Houston Astros, with whom he won the World Series in 2022.



Figure 94. Dusty Baker playing with the Los Angeles Dodgers (1981). Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

Jerry Royster, son of Jimmie Lee Royster, debuted in the MLB with the Los Angeles Dodgers as an amateur free agent in 1970 at age 17. Royster played 16 seasons of American and Korean professional baseball. He was promoted as a full Dodgers team member in 1973. In 1976, he was traded to the Atlanta Braves and remained with the team until 1984, when he joined San Diego Padres (1985-1986).



Figure 95. Jerry Royster (center), winning an award with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1979. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

Greg Lamont Vaughn, a cousin of Jerry Royster and Mo Vaughn, attended Kennedy High School. He played baseball at the University of Miami and debuted professionally in the MLB with the Milwaukee Brewers (1989-1996) and later played the San Diego Padres (1996-98). During the 1998 season with the Padres, Vaughn hit 50 homeruns, the fourth highest number in the MLB that season. Vaughn was a four-time All Star in 1993, 1996, 1998, and 2001.

Along with the Royster and Blackwell families, the Lee family has been one of the most prolific and dominant baseball families in Sacramento. Leron Lee graduated from Grant Union High School in 1966 and was drafted with the seventh overall pick by the St. Louis Cardinals. He played several seasons in the MLB before going to Japan, where he became the first Black man to play in the country. Leron's brother Leon Lee, Jr. was also drafted into the major leagues. After playing a few years in the minor leagues, Leon joined his brother in Japan. The brothers played baseball in Japan for over ten years.³⁵⁵ Leon's son, Derrek Lee, was a two-time major league All-Star and Golden Glove winner, who played 15 seasons in the major leagues. He won a World Series championship with the Florida Marlins in 2003 and the National League batting title in 2005.³⁵⁶

After starring at Sacramento High School, Drungo Hazewood signed a letter of intent to play baseball for the University of Southern California but turned the offer down after the Baltimore Orioles drafted him in the first round of the MLB draft in 1977, just before his high school graduation. Hazewood played seven minor league seasons and a short stint with the Orioles in 1980.³⁵⁷

Born in Georgia, Jerry Manuel moved to Sacramento as a youth and excelled on the baseball team at Rancho Cordova High School. In 1972, he was drafted in the first round of the MLB draft by the Detroit Tigers. During his ten-year career, he played for the Tigers, Montreal Expos, and San Diego Padres. After his professional career, Manuel turned to coaching. In 2000, he led the White Sox to a first-place finish in the American League's Central Division and was named the American League's Manager

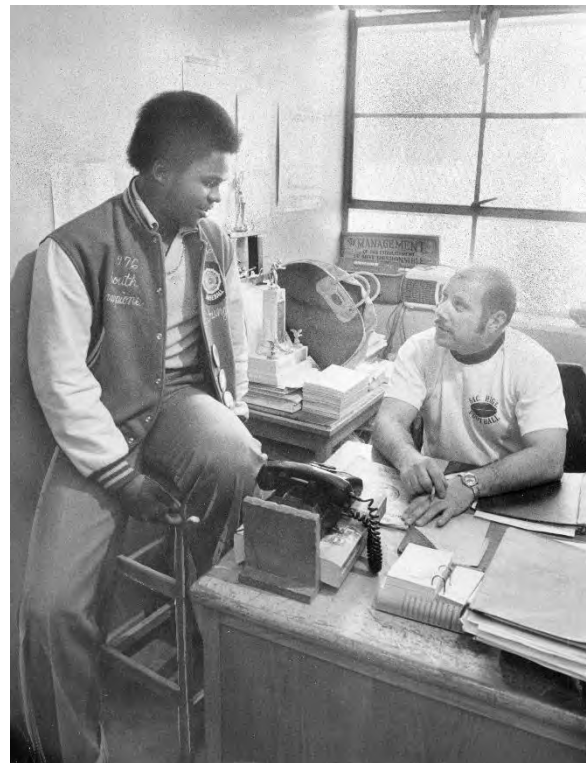


Figure 96. Drungo Hazewood chatting with a coach as a student at Sacramento High School after signing a letter of intent to play for USC. Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPMP03138.

³⁵⁵ *Del Paso Heights & Hagginwood: Our Roots, People, Places, and Memories* (Undated and Unpublished).

³⁵⁶ "Derrek Lee," Baseball Reference, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.baseball-reference.com/players/l/leede02.shtml>.

³⁵⁷ Joe Davidson, "Local Legend Is Gone Too Soon," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 July 2013.

of the Year. He later joined the New York Mets as a first base and outfield coach.³⁵⁸

Born in Philadelphia, Dion James grew up in Sacramento and attended McClatchy H.S. where he starred on the school's baseball team. He had an 11-season career in the MLB and Japanese professional baseball leagues, debuting with the Milwaukee Brewers (1980-1987), Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, and the New York Yankees.

Football

Charles Mann attended Valley High School and played college football as a defensive end at the University of Nevada, Reno (1979-82). During his senior year, he led the Big Sky (College) Conference in sacks and was named the conference's Most Valuable Player as a defensive lineman. He debuted in National Football League (NFL) with the Washington Redskins (now the Commanders) (1983-1993) and played one season with the San Francisco 49ers (1994). Following his professional football career, Mann became a philanthropist, working with organizations such as the Good Samaritan Foundation. Donald Lavert Rogers played football for the NFL's Cleveland Browns for two seasons from 1985 to 1985. Reggie O'Keith Rogers played four seasons in the NFL for the Detroit Lions, Buffalo Bills, and Tampa Bay Buccaneers between 1987 and 1992.³⁵⁹

Basketball

Sacramento has also produced its share of professional basketball players. Darnel "Dr. Dunk" Hillman starred at Hiram Johnson High School as a youth. In 1971, the Golden State Warriors selected him with the eighth overall pick in the first round of the NBA draft; however, Hillman opted instead to play for the Indiana Pacers, then of the American Basketball Association. He earned the nickname "Dr. Dunk" for his high-flying and stylish dunks.³⁶⁰

Elk Grove-native Bill Cartwright is one of the best basketball players to come out of the wider Sacramento area. In the 1973-1974 season, he led Elk Grove High School to a perfect 30-0 record. The following season, the team won the Northern California high school boys basketball title. The seven-foot center starred at the University of San Francisco before being drafted by the New York Knicks in 1979. Cartwright enjoyed a 16-season career in the NBA, during which

³⁵⁸ Cameron Salerno and Joe Davidson, "Alpha Charter Advances to NorCal Baseball Title Game," *Sacramento Bee*, 4 June 2022; "Jerry Manuel," Baseball Reference, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/manuejie01.shtml>.

³⁵⁹ Jay King, Sacramento African American Experience public meeting, October 18, 2022.

³⁶⁰ "Darnel Hillman," Basketball Reference, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/h/hillmda01.html>.

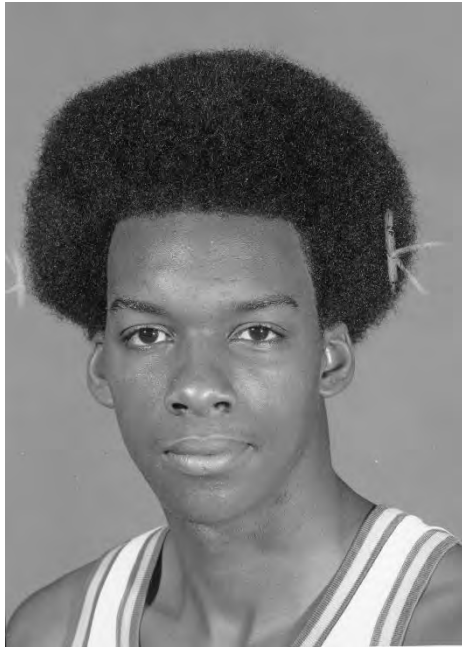


Figure 97. Darnel Hillman (1973). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPMP03431.

he was selected as an All Star and won three NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls in the 1990s.³⁶¹ In the early 2000s, Cartwright continued his basketball career as head coach of the Chicago Bulls.³⁶²

Of Afro-English ancestry, James Donaldson was born in Sacramento and attended Luther Burbank High School, where he starred as a center for the basketball team. He played four seasons as a center with the Washington State University basketball team, after which he went on to play professional basketball for Italian, Spanish and Greek divisions in Europe, and for the National Basketball Association (NBA) as part of the Seattle Supersonics (1980-83), San Diego/Los Angeles Clippers (1983-85), and Dallas Mavericks (1985-1991). Donaldson became a successful businessman following his professional basketball career based in the Seattle area.

In 1987, Kevin Johnson, an Oak Park native and alumnus of Sacramento High School, was drafted seventh overall in the NBA draft by the Cleveland Cavaliers. He later joined the Phoenix Suns (1988-1998, 2000) and became a three-time All-Star. In 2008, he was elected the first African American mayor of Sacramento and served in the position for ten years until 2018.³⁶³

This brief overview of some of the exceptional Black athletes, artists, musicians, writers, and other talented individuals who came out of the Sacramento's schools, youth programs, and other organizations reflects the many ways in which the African American community's tight-knit bonds, dedication to family and community service, resilience, ingenuity, and multi-faceted talents propelled many over the barriers placed before them to new heights.

³⁶¹ Darrell Smith, "Elk Grove Basketball Title Sparks Memories for Cartwright," *Sacramento Bee*, 16 March 2022.

³⁶² "Bill Cartwright," Wikipedia, accessed April 17, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Cartwright.

³⁶³ "Inductees," Sacramento Sports Hall of Fame, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.sacsportshof.com/inductees>.

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APPENDICES

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this document, the terms used by individuals or groups to self-identify at specific periods of time are used where possible, except where the terms are outdated or considered slurs. The terms “African American” and “Black” are generally used interchangeably throughout the document.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Historic Context Statement (HCS)?

A Historic Context Statement (HCS) is a specialized historic study. It focuses on the physical development of an area—how and why it developed, what types of properties characterized that development, and whether or not they may be historically significant. An HCS identifies significant themes, patterns and property types, so that interested parties can recognize the forces that shaped the built environment over time. This provides a framework that helps in the identification, evaluation, and treatment of historic properties.

Why is a HCS needed?

1. To better understand historic resources, even in the absence of comprehensive knowledge about specific buildings.
2. To establish historic and cultural preservation goals and strategies.
3. To support and update the City’s inventory of historic properties.
4. To provide the basis for future preservation planning decisions and programs.
To inform other aspects of larger planning processes.

What is not included in an HCS?

An HCS is a summary of an area's physical development. It is not intended to be a comprehensive community history, nor does it evaluate the significance or eligibility of individual properties to be considered historic resources.

Who uses the HCS?

The HCS may be used by anyone. It is intended to help property owners, members of the public, architects, historic resources planning consultants, city planners, and decision-making bodies such as the Historic Landmarks Commission or City Council to recognize and consider protection of historic properties.

A photo of my property appears in the HCS. Does this mean it is historically significant?

Not necessarily. The photos in the HCS are intended to support the text descriptions or to provide examples of property types. However, just because a photo of a building appears in the HCS does not automatically mean that the property is an eligible historic resource.

Will the HCS place restrictions on my property?

No. The HCS is an informational document that integrates with existing plans and policies. It is designed to help building owners, planners, and other interested parties evaluate the potential historic significance of a property, but it does not create any official designation, development restrictions, or other limitations. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the City of Sacramento Municipal Code are the regulatory documents that guide the treatment of historic resources in the area.

PRESERVATION GOALS & POLICIES

Based on the work to date, the following recommendations are offered to continue preservation efforts:

Recommendation: Complete Site-Specific Survey and Research on the Properties for Further Research

From the research conducted, addresses related to the themes and which appear to remain extant were collected in a spreadsheet as properties for further research. They may be candidates for designation as landmarks or historic districts in the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources. City staff or members of the public can conduct additional research to confirm their association with the African American community, the dates of association, and appearance during that association or alterations since then. Field surveys should also be conducted to determine if the properties retain integrity per the considerations in this context. As this HCS is not comprehensive, additional properties associated with Sacramento's African American community likely to be discovered over time. They should also be researched and surveyed following the same methods.

Recommendation: Designate Eligible Resources at Local and National Levels

For properties that meet the eligibility standards and retain integrity, nominations for Sacramento Register designation should be prepared. The City of Sacramento may also consider preparing a National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission for Sacramento's African American Community. The historic overview and themes in the historic context statement may be used as the content of the Multiple Property Documentation nomination form. At least one property with property-specific site history and significance under one of the themes will need to be submitted along with the form. Once the Multiple Property Submission is approved, future nomination of individual properties to the National Register under this topic will need to provide only property-specific information and a statement identifying the criteria and theme(s) the property is significant under and why.

Recommendation: Amend Existing Designations to Include Association with Sacramento's African American Community

Existing designations of individual landmarks and historic districts that are listed on the Sacramento Register should be amended to reflect the stories and contributions of this community. As opportunities arise to update other designations or the Sacramento Register,

the City should consider researching the properties to see if they are also associated with the African American community.

Recommendation: Continue to Update and Expand the Historic Context Statement

Historic context statements are living documents that can and should be updated regularly. The end period will extend as time passes and later decades become historic. Additional research materials may become available, such as the archives of the *Sacramento Observer*. Potential areas of expansion include, but are not limited to:

- Detailed analysis of United States Federal Census records to better understand where concentrations of Black residents were located at different time periods and why
- Changes to the growth, development, and experiences of the Black community as a result of events in the 1990s and 2000s
- Analysis of the characteristics of the African American community compared to other racial and ethnic minority communities in Sacramento (such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican American communities), including a comparison of the size, composition, locations, and other forces that impacted the development of these communities.

The schedule imposed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation grant for this historic context statement limited the amount of research that could be conducted. Not all important themes could be adequately studied, and for some themes, not enough associated important individuals, events, or properties were addressed. As is typical with historic context statements, additional themes can be added as resources become available or more information is discovered. This may include themes for Education, among others.

Recommendation: Documentation and Recognition of Sacramento's African American Community

Much more remains to be documented and shared about Sacramento's African American community, including in the greater Sacramento region beyond the city. This may include publishing books and articles or creating exhibits from the research already conducted. Additional stories of long-term residents and families can be recorded as interviews and oral histories. The artifacts, photographs, and papers of significant individuals and organizations can be collected and donated to existing archives for public use, such as the Center for Sacramento History. The research and findings compiled by the Sacramento African American Experience Project may be used to support future grant and other funding opportunities to support efforts to recognize and celebrate important historic sites in local Black history, particularly those that have been lost over time. They may also be used to support local and state-wide reparations

efforts. Support from the City and the Sacramento community as a whole for these and other efforts to preserve the area's Black legacy is encouraged.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY & FRAMEWORK

IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL HISTORIC PROPERTIES