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MAKING A “BLACK BEVERLY HILLS”:
THE STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING EQUALITY IN MODERN LOS ANGELES

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

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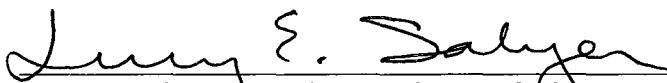
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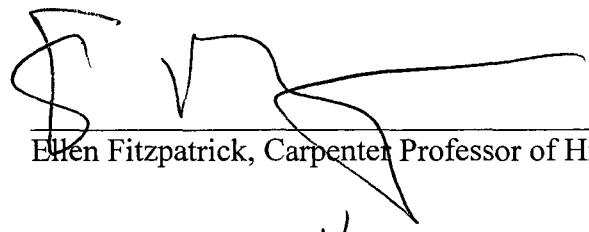
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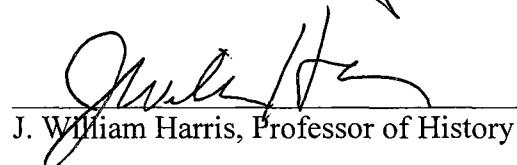
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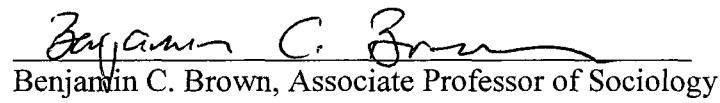
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ABSTRACT

MAKING A “BLACK BEVERLY HILLS”:
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University of New Hampshire, December 2010

This dissertation explores the black struggle for housing equality through mid-twentieth century Los Angeles, California. Alongside the rise of Los Angeles as a major metropolitan center, residential discrimination became embedded in the fabric of the city and African Americans found themselves forced to live on the increasingly run down Eastside. In response, a number of middle- and upper-class blacks led a campaign against housing discrimination by migrating to the Westside. While they were accused of abandoning low-income blacks and adopting white norms, affluent blacks defied racial restrictive covenants, endured white intimidation, and pursued lawsuits in an effort to live in some of the city’s desirable neighborhoods and attain full access to the city. Claiming their right to better housing and services, improving their financial status, and becoming regularly consuming Americans served as political statements for African Americans in a city that forbade people of color from fully enjoying those opportunities. Affluent blacks challenged the divisions that segregated the urban, racially diverse Eastside from the suburban, mostly white Westside. As they migrated westward, they invalidated housing discrimination and opened up more neighborhoods to people of color.

While most whites ultimately responded to black in-migration by moving away, affluent blacks forged alliances across racial lines to keep their communities both integrated and prosperous. After moving to historic West Adams Heights and winning the legal battle against restrictive covenants, affluent blacks migrated further westward into the highly-regarded Crenshaw district. In an effort to thwart real estate blockbusting and maintain racial integration, affluent blacks established interracial neighborhood associations, worked with public schools, and organized community outreach programs. Despite white fears of neighborhood deterioration, as more blacks settled in the Crenshaw district and adjacent Ladera Heights, property values soared. Successful black doctors, attorneys, and entertainers heightened the reputation of the area. But the efforts toward integration proved no match to white resistance. By the 1980s, the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights comprised of a majority black population and earned the ambiguous nickname the “black Beverly Hills,” a title that celebrated black achievement, yet kept affluent blacks in the shadow of mostly white Beverly Hills.

INTRODUCTION

When you asked a Negro where he lived, and he said on the West Side, that was supposed to mean he was better than the Negroes who lived on the South Side; it was like the white folks giving a Beverly Hills address. —*Bob Jones, the central character of Chester Himes's If He Hollers Let Him Go (1945)*.¹

Novelist and social critic Chester Himes worked hard to uncover the deep-seated racial discrimination and class antagonisms of mid-twentieth century Los Angeles, California. His first published novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, a semi-autobiographical account set in the Second World War, centered on African American defense industry laborer Bob Jones as he attempted to navigate through the deeply entrenched, racially-driven practices of the burgeoning city. The expansion of aircraft and shipbuilding manufacturing, and the federal government's promise of equal employment in the defense industry in the early 1940s, impelled tens of thousands of African Americans, mostly from the South, to take part in the Second Great Migration and relocate to Los Angeles. By mid-1943, over ten thousand blacks were arriving in the city each month, and by 1946, the city's black population had increased by more than 100 percent.² Himes joined the wave of migrants seeking to leave behind racial segregation, take advantage of the employment boom, and achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their

¹ Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945; repr., New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986), 48.

² Lawrence de Graaf, "Significant Steps on an Arduous Path: The Impact of World War II on Discrimination against African Americans in the West," *Journal of the West* 35.1 (January 1996): 27; Josh Sides, "Battle on the Home Front: African American Shipyard Workers in World War II, *California History* (Fall 1996): 252.

families. However, in his brief three years in Los Angeles, while working in a succession of low-waged jobs, he discovered the hypocrisy of a city known for its abundance of opportunities.³

Despite its reputation as welcoming and open-minded, Los Angeles sustained an inequitable system that kept people of color from fully enjoying the opportunities of the city. The forced removal and internment of Japanese Americans, and attacks on Mexican Americans by members of the United States armed forces in the Zoot Suit riots during the Second World War showed a city shrouded in racial and ethnic turmoil. Fearful that African Americans would become the next targets of attack, Himes used the written word to expose the multiple layers of racism and antagonism in Los Angeles. On one level, throughout *If He Hollers*, the protagonist confronted the city's racial inequalities by challenging whites who attacked him. When a white female coworker refused to work under Jones at the shipyard, Jones boldly retorted with an acerbic slur and an intimidating glare. After the department superintendent ordered Jones to contain his temper and cultivate a courteous relationship with his white colleagues, the protagonist adamantly defended his actions. "I'm not going to have nobody call me a nigger," he insisted.⁴

³ For biographical information on Himes and literary analysis of his works, see James Sallis, *Chester Himes: A Life* (New York: Walker & Company, 2001), 76-83; Gilbert H. Muller, *Chester Himes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), chapter 2; and Stephen F. Milliken, *Chester Himes: A Critical Appraisal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), chapter 3.

⁴ Himes, *If He Hollers*, 27-30, 60-61, 63. Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977) provide excellent histories of Japanese Americans and internment in Los Angeles. For works on the Zoot Suit riots, see Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, & Riot in Wartime L.A* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas, 1984); and Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans*

For Himes, the black middle-class also served as a major barrier toward the attainment of racial equality. Throughout the novel, the relationship between Jones and his love interest Alice Harrison remained burdened with distress. Raised by affluent parents, Harrison learned at a young age that success came to those who earned an education, worked hard, and resisted the temptation to protest openly against racial discrimination. The formula resembled the conservative teachings of Booker T. Washington. Dubbed by his critics as the “great accommodator,” in the years following Reconstruction, Washington urged blacks to turn their focus away from a campaign for civil rights and acquire the vocational skills needed to attain financial independence. While Jones sought to “get even” with whites who curbed black advancement, Mrs. Harrison advised the protagonist to show whites respect. “You must accept whatever they do for you and try to prove yourself worthy to be entrusted with more.” Alice echoed her mother’s sentiment, and although she encouraged Jones to set goals, she also recognized the limitations of her race. “You need some definite aim, a goal that you can attain within the segregated pattern in which we live,” Alice stressed. “We *are* Negroes and we can’t change that. But *as* Negroes, we can accomplish many things.”⁵

and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵ Himes, *If He Hollers*, 48-52, 168 (italics in original). For the teachings and criticism of Booker T. Washington, see Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: Authoritative Text, Contexts, and Composition History, Criticism*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Norton, 2006); Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up From Slavery 100 Years Later* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003). For further criticism on the black middle-class, see E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe, IL: Falcon’s Wing Press, 1957); and Lawrence Otis Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

While the Harrisons saw themselves as exemplars of the black race, living proof that more people of color possessed the ability to advance beyond their means, Jones found their actions rather arrogant and hypocritical. Their two-story house, situated in a “clean, quiet, well bred” neighborhood on the Westside of Los Angeles, served as a lavish symbol of their success. The well-manicured lawn, and the beds of plants and flowers surrounding the exterior of the property, set a tone of splendor. The Harrisons furnished their home in high-priced décor and modern amenities, and they relied on hired help to take care of their routine needs. “Their house reminded me of a country club,” Jones chided. “You knew they had dough, you saw it, it was there.” Himes set the Harrisons’ house in the West Jefferson district, an area situated west of Vermont Street, which was populated by elite whites until the interwar years, when upwardly mobile blacks defied racial housing restrictions and moved to the area. Himes used the Harrisons to condemn middle- and upper-class blacks for making as their priority the attainment of wealth and prestige in white society, rather than racial equality. He argued that affluent blacks conformed to white standards and lacked sympathy for working-class blacks who struggled to make ends meet.⁶

Despite Himes’s criticism, blacks’ journey to reside on the Westside required a great measure of fortitude, resilience, and endurance. By the 1940s, African Americans had become concentrated in the eastern portion of the city along the major roadway of Central Avenue. Running south from downtown Los Angeles, Central Avenue served as

⁶ Himes, *If He Hollers*, 48-51. On the West Jefferson district, see Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 58-59; and Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 97.

an entryway for recent arrivals into the city. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when migrants disembarked at the downtown railroad station, racial discrimination drove people of color southeastward, in what became known as either the Eastside or, in the words of Himes, the “South side.” In the interwar years, the city’s diverse population created several dynamic and vibrant multiethnic Eastside enclaves, and Central Avenue became the center of black social and economic activity in the city.⁷ But over time, as a result of the World War II housing shortage, negligence of local officials, and acute racism, the adjoining neighborhoods became overcrowded, run down, and deeply oppressive.⁸ Consequently, middle- and upper-class African Americans took the lead in challenging the city’s highly organized system of housing exclusion. They endured white intimidation and violence in an effort to gain full access to the city, migrating westward into some of the city’s most desirable middle- and upper-class white enclaves.

Westside Los Angeles seemed like a world away from the Eastside. As the city’s population expanded in the twentieth century, the unofficial border that distinguished the

⁷ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 25, 98-100; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 40-42; Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2005), 13. For more works on the ethnic enclaves of the Eastside, see Max Vorspan and Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1970); Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁸ For works on Central Avenue, see Bette Yarbrough Cox, *Central Avenue—Its Rise and Fall, 1890-c. 1955: Including the Musical Renaissance of Black Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: BEEM Publications, 1996); Clora Bryant and others, eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006). For works on the 1940s housing shortage, see de Graaf, “Significant Steps,” 24-33; and Charles B. Spaulding, “Housing Problems of Minority Groups in Los Angeles County,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 248 (November 1946): 220-225.

two major sections of Los Angeles shifted gradually westward from Main Street to Western Avenue, and Arlington Avenue to Crenshaw Boulevard. But race and class especially distinguished the Eastside from the Westside. The Eastside gained a reputation as a multiethnic, impoverished, and crime-ridden part of the city, whereas the Westside became known as a white, privileged, and prosperous locale.⁹ Scholars have indeed shown a more nuanced history of the diverse Eastside communities of the interwar years. But, as the conditions of the Eastside worsened through the Second World War, the Westside became a more desirable area. For the most part, Westside residents enjoyed less congestion, a larger selection of newer single-family houses, higher quality public facilities (including better public schools), and greater access to what became a more central part of the city. Claiming their right to better housing and services, improving their financial status, and becoming regularly consuming Americans served as political statements for African Americans in a city that forbade people of color from fully enjoying those opportunities. Affluent blacks sought to secure those privileges, and in so doing, move toward racial equality in the city.

Ridding Los Angeles of Its Racial Limits

While urban growth and expansion marked the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the explosion of suburban communities outside of the downtown core

⁹ In *Bound for Freedom*, Douglas Flamming discusses the stigmas attached to Eastside and Westside Los Angeles. “In broadest strokes,” he explains, “‘Westside’ meant wealthier and whiter; ‘Eastside’ meant poorer and ethnically diverse” (p. 93). Historian Greg Hise also explains, “West and east served then and serve now as a putative divide separating landscapes of leisure from landscapes of production and labor, separating those whose privilege flows from affluence and influence and those who aspire to attain the rights others assume are a birthright.” See Greg Hise, “Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004): 550.

fundamentally transformed the political and social landscape of the post-World War II era. Federal policies, the automobile, housing demands, and an economic boom helped set in motion a massive demographic shift that resulted in a majority of the nation's population residing in suburbs by the end of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Alongside these developments emerged two standard narratives that told of suburban growth on the one hand, and urban decline on the other. As developers and public policies favored suburban development for the white middle-class, urban areas fell into disrepair. Indeed, in Los Angeles, the mostly white, suburban Westside and mostly black, urban Eastside followed those national trajectories. Nevertheless, at the same time, middle- and upper-class blacks charted a different course that sought to remove the arbitrary racial borders from the city.

Until recently, scholarship treated suburban and urban development as separate movements that functioned independently from one another. Early scholars of suburbanization established a pathbreaking field within the framework of the popular mythology that cast the post-World War II suburbs as idyllic and picturesque, the place where the white middle-class fled urban congestion. Lewis Mumford, Robert Fishman, and Kenneth Jackson argued that, on the whole, these prefabricated, mass produced communities encouraged uniformity, weakened family and community relations, concentrated wealth, and led to the decline of urban centers. In *Crabgrass Frontier*,

¹⁰ Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, "Introduction," in *The New Suburban History*, eds. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1.

Jackson acknowledged suburban class differences, but, along with other scholars, depicted suburbanization as a white middle-class phenomenon.¹¹

By contrast, poor urban blacks occupied a separate field of study. In an era marked by prosperity, John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958) and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) ignited a national debate on the poor. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family* (1965) argued that the breakdown of the black nuclear family caused subsequent generations to carry on the cycle of poverty. In the wake of the late 1960s urban uprisings, the Kerner Report (1968), conducted by the National Advisory Commission on Social Disorders, reinforced the idea of a urban-suburban binary by identifying "two societies" in the United States, "one, largely Negro and poor, located in the central cities; the other, predominantly white and affluent, located in the suburbs." Joining the debate, Arnold Hirsch, William Julius Wilson, Michael Katz, and Thomas Sugrue saw urban decline as an outcome of not only social pathologies, but also inequitable public policies, deindustrialization, economic stagnation, joblessness, and other systemic problems. This literature skillfully diverted the blame for urban poverty away from individual behavior. But, by positioning urban decline as a crisis that trapped people of color into blighted clusters of cities, scholars provided only a partial account of the rather multifaceted metropolis.¹²

¹¹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformation, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

¹² John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958; repr., New York: New American Library, 1985); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1981); United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Los Angeles expanded outward from its downtown core into many individual yet interconnected communities. What scholars criticized as chaotic urban sprawl, however, began as planned housing developments intrinsically connected to the larger city structure. Neighborhoods became grouped into individual districts that appointed their own officials to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. While city dwellers shared the same mayor, districts competed for the city's resources and received varying qualities of public services.¹³ Residents of affluent neighborhoods tended to live in areas with better quality public schools and well-kept streets, and closer to a broader selection of goods and services. Whites first took up residence in the newly developed Westside, and they employed a combination of overt and covert methods to prohibit people of color from moving to their neighborhoods. For decades, the federal government crafted and endorsed these exclusionary policies, and the courts upheld the practices. As a result, the working-class, ethnically and racially diverse Eastside communities grew overcrowded and run down. African Americans with the financial means, however, refused to let housing discrimination obstruct their desire for a

Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1965); *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: New York Times Co., 1968). For structural analyses, see Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987); Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹³ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). For works that show the interconnectedness of the city, see Jon Teaford, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge of Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Richardson Dilworth, *The Urban Origins of Suburban Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

better quality of life, and through the mid-twentieth century, they surmounted the racial borders that separated the Eastside from the Westside.¹⁴

Because Los Angeles maintained one of the highest rates of black homeownership in the nation, African Americans in the city had a large base from which to assert their right to property. In 1910, compared to the nation's major cities, black homeownership in Los Angeles topped the list. While New York City stood at 2.4 percent; Chicago reached 6.4 percent; Detroit claimed 17.2 percent; San Francisco had 16.3 percent; Houston rose to 20.1 percent; and Oakland grew to 29.9 percent; Los Angeles boasted a rate of 36.1 percent in black homeownership, which fell only slightly below the city's overall average of 44.7 percent. In 1930 and 1940, some cities surpassed Los Angeles in black homeownership, yet the rate remained around 30 percent of the city's black population.¹⁵ Before the 1920s, while some African Americans resided in a handful of mostly undeveloped sections of the Westside, settling across Main Street remained a perilous endeavor for people of color. But beginning in the 1920s, local African

¹⁴ For some of the pivotal works on housing discrimination, see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005); and David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 233; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 19, 49; Delores Nason McBroome, “All Men Up and No Man Down’ Black Angelenos Confront Refracted Racism, 1900-1940,” in *City of Promise: Race & Historical Change in Los Angeles*, eds. Martin Schiesl and Mark Morrall Dodge (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2006), 62; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910, vol. 1, Population: General Report and Analysis* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1913).

American leaders, professionals, and entertainers made a concerted effort to challenge housing discrimination and migrate westward. They first settled across Vermont Avenue in the middle-income enclaves of the West Jefferson district, and then set their sights directly northward on the highly esteemed and exclusively white West Adams Heights. In the face of protracted court battles and relentless white resistance, affluent blacks peeled back the multiple layers of housing discrimination and slowly migrated westward, surmounting one racial border at a time from Vermont Avenue to Western Avenue, and from Arlington Avenue to Crenshaw Boulevard.

From the 1950s, after landmark legal victories against housing discrimination, as affluent blacks migrated further westward into some of the Westside's most desirable communities, the Crenshaw district and its neighboring Ladera Heights became major destinations. Situated west of Arlington Avenue, the communities boasted newly built single-family homes, modern street improvements, scenic views overlooking the Los Angeles basin, and high quality public schools. Moreover, before black influx, the enclaves exemplified white, middle-class suburban bliss. But as middle- and upper-class blacks overcame white intimidation and violence to move to the area, they faced yet another set of problems. While blacks migrated westward, whites fled Los Angeles proper, and the unofficial racial border that distinguished the Eastside from the Westside shifted further westward. Increasingly, city dwellers began to view black westward migration as an expansion of the urban ghetto and redefine the Westside desirable communities as undesirable Eastside locales. In response, black residents joined forces with local white homeowners in a campaign to maintain racial integration as well as the high property values and esteemed reputation of their communities.

Recent scholars have indeed challenged the idea that suburban development was a solely white, middle-class phenomenon. Richard Harris, Becky Nicolaides, and Robert Lewis highlight class diversity in suburbs, and the lengths to which blue-collar suburbanites went in order to maintain their property and standard of living.¹⁶ Timothy Fong, Stephen Pitti, and Charlotte Brooks, among others, find ethnic minorities and immigrants increasingly significant in shaping the twentieth century suburban landscape.¹⁷ Black suburbanization has also become a growing field of investigation. In the first published synthetic account, historian Andrew Wiese examined black suburbanization on a nationwide scope, which unfolded as “a cumulative process linked through time and space by contested racial struggle.” By exploring black suburbanization by region, throughout the twentieth century, Wiese showed the extent of the movement across time and space. Ultimately, Wiese argued, suburbs became unlikely “arenas of struggle” where African Americans helped establish, shape, defend, and make into “places of their own.” Scholars such as William H. Wilson, Bruce Haynes, and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore used a more focused approach of case studies to

¹⁶ Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert Lewis, ed., *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Timothy P. Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Leland T. Saito, *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

examine in more depth the socioeconomic and political importance of black suburbs.¹⁸

Nevertheless, with the exception of some brief references in a handful of histories, the affluent communities of Westside Los Angeles have received limited attention.

Historians of twentieth century, black Los Angeles have uncovered a city abounding with both opportunities and shortcomings. In the first study of African Americans in Los Angeles, a dissertation completed in 1936, sociologist J. Max Bond found that, alongside the rise of the city's population in the early twentieth century, racial intolerance intensified and the urban landscape became segregated. Since then, Lawrence de Graaf, Douglas Flamming, and Josh Sides, among others, have added rich historical background to show that African Americans became increasingly mobilized in their effort toward racial equality. In *Bound for Freedom*, Flamming found that the black quest for freedom in Los Angeles emerged not as a distinct "movement" defined by a series of events, but rather as "a way of life" that African Americans committed to and pursued. While Flamming centered his study on the "strivers," the city's early black middle-class leadership that established a foothold and broke down racial barriers for later generations, his study ended in the 1940s. Sides's *L.A. City Limits* picks up in the 1930s, around the time Flamming's work concludes. Sides examined the transformation of the urban landscape as a result of black influx from the Great Migration, and the key

¹⁸ Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3, 6. See also Bruce B. Williams, *Black Workers in an Industrial Suburb: The Struggle Against Discrimination* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); William H. Wilson, *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Bruce D. Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

events and leaders in the black struggle for equality in the city. While Sides addressed black settlement in many of Los Angeles's neighborhoods, including those in this study, the broad scope of his work allowed for only a brief discussion on the import of the affluent Westside communities.¹⁹

African Americans have historically used their buying power to further civil rights and contest racist practices of white-owned institutions. From boycotting public transportation systems to shunning local white businesses, African Americans expressed their political views through the use of their pocketbooks. In the 1930s, beginning in Chicago and spreading to cities across the country, including Los Angeles, blacks carried out the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign to protest against employment discrimination and demand more job opportunities. Throughout the modern civil rights movement, southern blacks boycotted segregated buses and businesses.²⁰ While post-World War II America hailed homeownership and consumerism as cornerstones of comfort, wealth, and advancement, African Americans purchased homes and goods as a way to assert their civil rights. To middle- and upper-class blacks, homeownership and consumerism signified wealth, status, and power in American society. Indeed, affluent blacks in Los Angeles acted alongside a broad-based effort toward racial equality that was occurring in communities around the country and erupted in the mid-1950s as the

¹⁹ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 3. See also J. Max Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1936); Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1962); Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001); and Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²⁰ Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), chapter 3.

modern civil rights movement. But because of the West's promise of opportunities and the resources available to city dwellers, middle- and upper-class blacks in Los Angeles took the lead in the struggle for housing equality.

“Black Beverly Hills” – A Case Study

From the 1980s, in a number of local and national publications, reporters began referring to the affluent, majority black communities of the Crenshaw district and neighboring Ladera Heights by their increasingly popular nickname the “black Beverly Hills.”²¹ While Chester Himes associated West Jefferson with Beverly Hills in the 1940s, the comparison became increasingly common as more blacks settled in the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights, and more whites moved away. Through the second half of the twentieth century, the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights underwent a significant population shift from majority white to majority black. Between 1950 and 1980, in sum, the affluent enclaves of the Crenshaw district swung from a 99.7 white population to an 82.6 percent black population. Between 1950 and 2000, Ladera Heights shifted from a 99.8 percent white population to a 70.8 percent black population.²² The popular nickname simplifies the long-standing struggles of African Americans against

²¹ For references to the nickname “black Beverly Hills,” see Marshall Ingwerson, “Jesse Jackson Tugs at Traditional Political Loyalty of L.A. Blacks,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 November 1983, 3; Penelope McMillan, “Baldwin Hills on ‘Day After’: Grim Contrasts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1985; Penelope McMillan, “Assistance Center Opens for Baldwin Hills Victims,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1985, 3; Nancy Mills, “Allen’s Claim to ‘Fame’ is Making Right Moves,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1985, F1; Aldore Collier, “Black Celebrities Have Become the Powerbrokers in the Boardroom and on the Glitz Social Circuit,” *Ebony*, September 1995, 55; and Ben Quinones, “Brother Man,” *L.A. Weekly*, 24 June 2005, 102.

²² U.S. Census of Population: 1950, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

racism and discrimination, and keeps the prosperous black neighborhoods in the shadow of predominantly white Beverly Hills, which sits less than ten miles north of the Crenshaw district. Nevertheless, the term provides a useful tool for understanding the valued, respected, and renowned reputation of these communities.

The chapters that follow are organized into two parts. Part I, “The Pioneers,” focuses on the first African Americans who endured fierce white racism and engaged in numerous legal battles when they purchased property and settled in some of the most prosperous neighborhoods on Los Angeles’s Westside. Chapter 1 centers on West Adams Heights, the historically elite white enclave located on an elevated portion of the eastern edge of Westside Los Angeles, which gained its high reputation for its large, custom-made estates and wealthy entrepreneurs of nineteenth century Los Angeles. In the 1920s, professional blacks, from insurance business owner Norman O. Houston to actress Hattie McDaniel (*Gone With the Wind*), set in motion a campaign against housing discrimination by moving from Central Avenue to West Jefferson. Then, in the late 1930s, Houston stepped up the fight as the first African American to move into West Adams Heights. Soon thereafter, McDaniel and many other African American entrepreneurs, entertainers, and local activists followed. The white homeowners’ “improvement” association immediately responded by reinstating the community’s racial restrictive covenants and filing a lawsuit against the black newcomers.

Chapter 2 focuses on the legal battle against racial restrictive covenants. Attached to property deeds, registered with the city, made between neighbors, and backed by the federal government, racial restrictive covenants prohibited, often for decades, the use of, and sale of homes to, any racial, ethnic, or religious group not befitting white standards.

The use of restrictive covenants appeared in early twentieth century Los Angeles, but as the Westside developed and the number of people of color in the city grew, whites increasingly made use of the practice. When white homeowners in West Adams Heights reinstated their restrictive covenant in 1938, they promised to uphold the contract through 2035. They also filed eight lawsuits against over one hundred residents of color. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, hundreds of lawsuits over restrictive covenants emerged across the country, but the “Sugar Hill case,” named after West Adams Heights’s popular moniker, marked a major turning point in the campaign against housing discrimination. Thanks to its famous defendants, shrewd defense team, and courageous judge, the case foreshadowed the legal demise of restrictive covenants. Two years after Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Thurmond Clarke in the Sugar Hill case ruled restrictive covenants unconstitutional, the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) declared the contracts legally unenforceable.²³

Following the landmark Supreme Court decision, African Americans had to enforce the court orders through their own determination, in their daily actions. Chapter 3 introduces the first African Americans who overcame white resistance to move into the prosperous communities of the Crenshaw district. In the late 1940s, middle- and upper-class blacks began purchasing property in the district’s easternmost community of Leimert Park, and steadily through the subsequent decades, they migrated further westward into the more affluent neighborhoods of View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills on the southerly slope of the district, as well as Baldwin Hills Estates and

²³ The court records of the 1946 Sugar Hill case are on microfilm, under *Anderson v. Auseth*, L.A. No. 484808, at the Los Angeles Superior Court archives. See also *Shelley v. Kraemer* 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

Baldwin Hills Vista in the northern section. Whites continued to mobilize into “improvement” associations,” place restrictions on their homes, carry out boycotts and strikes, make verbal threats, and vandalize property in an attempt to bully blacks into selling their property and leaving the area. As middle- and upper-class African Americans used their financial resources and resolve to assert their right to high quality housing, the Crenshaw district became an unlikely site in the civil rights struggle.

Part II, “Negotiating Space,” explores African Americans’ effort not only to make their communities “places of their own,” but also to share the space with their white neighbors. While whites carried out a number of legal and extralegal methods to deter people of color from their neighborhoods, the majority ultimately responded by moving away. As blacks settled in white areas, real estate agents seeking to profit from “transitional” areas employed blockbusting tactics that encouraged white exodus. Realtors went door-to-door, circulated flyers, and made telephone calls to put fear in white homeowners of black encroachment. Concerned that the value and reputation of their communities would decline, black and white residents in the Crenshaw district joined forces and formed Crenshaw Neighbors, Incorporated (CN), the focus of chapter 4. In one of its first tasks, CN opened a real estate office, hired a fair housing broker, and set out to counteract blockbusting and encourage whites to stay in the district. As its membership grew, CN expanded its efforts by working with the public school system, organizing community events, running educational workshops, teaming up with other local groups, and distributing a national journal. CN forged an effort across racial lines to maintain integration and, in the words of their slogan, create “a balanced community.”

While affluent blacks faced criticism for abandoning their low-income counterparts on the Eastside, many sought to expand the opportunities to all people of color in Los Angeles.²⁴ Chapter 5 focuses on the emergence of Leimert Park in the late 1960s as the hub of black cultural expression and social activism in the city. Thanks to the dedication of African American artists and entrepreneurs, the Leimert Park business district became a small-scale, Westside version of early twentieth century Central Avenue, and Brockman Gallery stood at the center of the movement. While Brockman Gallery emerged within a nationwide black arts movement, most of the black-owned art initiatives in Los Angeles remained on the Eastside. But Brockman Gallery expanded the movement westward. Initially founded as a space for black artists to showcase their work, Brockman Gallery was turned by the owners Alonzo and Dale Davis into an outreach center that sought to engage the city's black population to embrace their racial heritage and stand up for equality. Artists and local activists organized music festivals and street fairs, hosted an annual film festival, led workshops, and created jobs in the visual arts.

Despite the effort toward integration and inclusion, the Crenshaw district and its adjacent enclaves underwent a marked population shift that impacted the surrounding environment. In the 1970s, affluent blacks migrated further westward, across La Brea Avenue, and into the esteemed upper-class enclave of Ladera Heights, the subject of chapter 6. The rate of black influx and white exodus came at a slower pace than it had in the Crenshaw district, yet residents of Ladera Heights had to contend with the increasing resegregation of its public education system. While residents in the Crenshaw district

²⁴ In addition to the criticisms of Chester Himes, see Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*; and Graham, *Our Kind of People*.

fought the Los Angeles Unified School District, Ladera Heights joined the charge against the Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD). By the late 1960s, local activists had not only urged school officials to take steps toward correcting the racial imbalance in school system, but also filed lawsuits against local school boards for aiding educational inequality. Amid heated debate and mounting pressure, a Los Angeles Superior Court judge ordered IUSD to carry out a desegregation plan by the start of the 1971-1972 school year. But five years later, as students of color made up the majority of IUSD schools, desegregation had made little difference, and the court overturned the order. The resegregation of IUSD showed that racism remained deeply entwined in the fabric of the community and raised more questions about the likelihood of Los Angeles ever becoming a truly integrated city.

While middle- and upper-class blacks in Los Angeles relocated into several other neighborhoods through the mid-twentieth century, this study deliberately focuses on black westward migration into the prosperous communities of Westside proper. Other communities in Los Angeles saw similar developments. In the late 1940s, after the *Shelley* decision, affluent blacks surmounted the arbitrary northern border of Washington Boulevard that segregated whites and blacks and moved into two of the most exclusive white communities in the city, Hancock Park and Lafayette Square. Crooner Nat King Cole and his family paved a path for other people of color by facing white intimidation and violence to live in Hancock Park. Architect Paul Williams not only endured discrimination in his profession, but also became one of the first African Americans to settle in the exclusive Lafayette Square.²⁵ However, this study focuses on the black effort

²⁵ For a discussion on Nat King Cole and his move to Hancock Park, see Daniel Mark Epstein, *Nat King Cole* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 178-183; and “Hancock Park Home

to breach the Eastside-Westside divide and claim for themselves better quality communities in the beloved Westside.

Black settlement across greater Los Angeles became one of the most significant achievements in the campaign against housing discrimination. While middle- and upper-class blacks led the migration, working-class blacks also began to move away from the Eastside and into the communities of Los Angeles proper in the second half of the twentieth century. By 1970, virtually all of the census tracts located between Alameda Street (roughly two blocks east of Central Avenue) on the east and the Crenshaw district on the west, Washington Boulevard on the north and Artesia Boulevard on the south, included at least a 75 percent black population. By 1980, African Americans began to migrate further west of the Crenshaw district into Culver City.²⁶ Moreover, by the mid-1950s, black migration beyond the city of Los Angeles became a noticeable trend. In a 1956 article of the local newspaper *Mirror-News*, entitled “Negroes in L.A. Moving Out from Center of City,” a reporter identified the movement “as dramatic as” the migration of blacks to Los Angeles itself. According to historian Lawrence de Graaf, between 1960 and 1990, blacks moved in significant numbers into suburban areas surrounding Los Angeles, including Carson, Inglewood, and the West Valley.²⁷

“Purchase Stirs Quandary,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 1948, B16. For works on Paul Williams and his home in Lafayette Square (also spelled La Fayette), see David Gebhard, “Introduction,” in *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*, Karen E. Hudson (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1994), 25-26 (for photos of his residence, see pp. 157-161); and Paul Williams, “I Am a Negro,” *American Magazine* (July 1937): 59, 161-163.

²⁶ See census maps in Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 213-216.

²⁷ Paul Weeks, “Negroes in L.A. Moving Out from Center of City,” *Mirror-News*, 2 May 1956, 14, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California Records (Hereafter cited as ACLU), Box 28, Folder 3, Special Collections, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles (Hereafter cited as UCLA/SC); Lawrence B. de Graaf, “African American

While a host of renowned African American entertainers, activists, and entrepreneurs brought prestige to the neighborhoods of this study, tens of thousands of lesser-known and yet equally important individuals also helped heighten the value and reputation of these communities. In an effort to bring to light the day-to-day personal struggles of middle- and upper-class black homeowners who demanded their right to live in high quality communities, and those of the white residents who responded to the population shift, my research relies especially on their oral histories to make a case. The oral histories of homeowners in these communities that I have conducted, as well as those carried out by other scholars of Los Angeles history, provide material that printed documents mostly exclude. Nevertheless, manuscript collections of community leaders and local organizations, as well as local and national newspapers, help support the memories of those residents. Because middle- and upper-class blacks worked against a discriminatory legal system to attain housing equality, this study also uses local and national court records as a guide to follow the setbacks and the major turning points in the struggle. Finally, census reports at the level of census tracts, and real estate records, help highlight the demographic changes that took place over four decades.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, the city of Los Angeles became defined by its diverse population. Although whites attempted to isolate people of color to the Eastside, middle- and upper-class African Americans used their financial resources and resolve to confront residential discrimination one street block at a time. As they migrated westward, affluent blacks broke down the racial divide and expanded housing

Suburbanization in California, 1960 through 1990,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 405-449.

opportunities for people of color across the city. While whites employed a number of methods to deter blacks from moving to their neighborhoods, ultimately most whites responded to black migration by moving away. Deeply rooted racism indeed resulted in resegregation and a majority black population in much of Los Angeles proper. But despite white fears of property deterioration and ghetto expansion, as increasingly more blacks settled in the prosperous communities of the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights through the second half of the twentieth century, property values soared well above the city average, and the esteemed reputation endured.

CHAPTER 1

SCALING THE HEIGHTS

From the moment her son learned to walk and talk, Norman O. Houston's mother encouraged him to pursue a career in business. Living near the burgeoning city of San Francisco in the late 1890s, Lillian Houston was struck by the city's vibrant and lucrative commercial activity and urged her son to make use of the opportunities. After high school, Norman enrolled at University of California, Berkeley, and with his mother's confidence, majored in business administration. The First World War cut short his completion of a degree. The United States armed forces commissioned him to serve in the 92nd Infantry Division, or "Buffalo Soldiers," an all-black unit of the segregated military, and he worked his way up to lieutenant. However, Houston never gave up on his professional goals. When he returned to northern California after the war, he found a position as an office assistant in a San Francisco insurance firm. But for an African American in the early twentieth century, the glass ceiling hung low and the range of employment opportunities remained slim. Then, on his trek home from work one day, he encountered a friend who offered him a job at a white-owned insurance agency in Los Angeles selling policies to Pullman cooks and waiters at a railroad commissary. Houston needed little convincing, packed his belongings, and traveled south to the city.¹

¹ Ivan J. Houston, "Black Leadership in Los Angeles," interview by Ranford B. Hopkins (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1989), UCLA/SC, 6-7, 9-10, 12, 36-37; Norman O. Houston, interview by R. Donald Brown, 27 October 1966, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton (Hereafter cited as COPH), 1-2; George

In Los Angeles, Houston went into business with William Nickerson, Jr. and George A. Beavers, Jr., and the entrepreneurs thrived. They noticed the steady wave of black migrants coming into the city and had a good sense that the movement would continue for years to come. They also knew that African Americans had little or no opportunity to obtain inexpensive, full coverage life insurance, and decided to fill a much-needed void by establishing their own company. Their predictions proved right. The hundreds of thousands of African Americans that flocked to the city through the First and Second World Wars in the Great Migration wanted to protect themselves and their families in the unpredictable urban climate with an insurance company they could trust. In a matter of years, the business, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, far surpassed its goals. Nickerson, Houston, and Beavers multiplied their assets, opened offices across the state of California, and extended their services into home and business loans. In a climate of acute job and housing discrimination, they created hundreds of white-collar jobs for African Americans, invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans to help blacks improve their conditions, and actively supported the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the local Urban League, and other civil rights groups.² Success gave Houston and his colleagues

Beavers, “In Quest of Full Citizenship,” interview by Ranford B. Hopkins, (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1985), UCLA/SC, 83-88; “Norman O. Houston,” *Who’s Who in Colored Los Angeles—California* (published by *California Eagle*, 1930-31), Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (Hereafter cited as SCL), 83; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 254.

² Norman O. Houston, interview by Brown, 2-7, 8-9; George A. Beavers, interview by R. Donald Brown, 15 October 1966, COPH, 1-3; Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 50-52. For documentation on Golden State Mutual’s value placed on providing white-collar jobs to blacks, see William Nickerson, “Employment Opportunities,” Before the Nineteenth Annual Session, National Negro Insurance Association, 12 July 1939, Nickerson Family, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company Papers (Hereafter cited as NF/GSM), Box 1, Folder 15, SCL. See also Flamming,

the opportunity not only to improve their quality of life, but also to advance the conditions of African Americans across the city.

At the time Houston arrived in Los Angeles, the relative freedom that blacks had enjoyed began to deteriorate. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in what scholars call the “Golden Era” for African Americans in Los Angeles, blacks had a considerable amount of freedom to engage in local affairs and seek economic advancement. The small black population, which seemed to have posed only a minor threat to most whites, established a host of businesses and churches, headed political groups and local newspapers, and participated in a rich cultural life along the main roadway Central Avenue.³ Yet through the interwar years, blacks’ conditions and free choices significantly declined. In the 1920s, writes historian Jules Tygiel, Los Angeles “assumed much of its modern form.” The population doubled, industrial and entertainment sectors grew, and the city expanded its margins into the San Fernando Valley and San Pedro harbor. Over the next several decades, residential and commercial developers also built up the vacant land in the city’s interior.⁴ But alongside these

Bound for Freedom, 258. The company’s original name was Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company of Los Angeles.

³ For descriptions of this time period as the “golden era” or “golden age,” see Bette Yarbrough Cox, *Central Avenue—Its Rise and Fall, 1890-c. 1955: Including the Musical Renaissance of Black Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: BEEM Publications, 1996), 3; Anthony Charles Sweeting, “The Dunbar Hotel and Central Avenue Renaissance, 1781-1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 1, 3; Lonnie G. Bunch, *Black Angelenos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum, 1988), 21.

⁴ Jules Tygiel, “Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s,” in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, eds. Tom Sitton and William Francis Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2. See also Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York:

changes, whites imposed increasingly greater restrictions on people of color. Violence served as the most straightforward method to keep blacks at bay and “in their place.” Nonetheless, whites also worked within the legal system to relegate blacks to the Eastside of the city.

Zoning ordinances and racial restrictive covenants served as the most popular methods to segregate the city landscape between the Eastside and Westside. Developers and municipalities in Los Angeles became some of the first in the nation to use zoning laws to allocate areas of the city for certain uses, and to keep unwanted industries, institutions, and city dwellers out of particular neighborhoods. For the most part, the laws relegated factories and multi-use, working-class housing to the Eastside, while permitting low-density housing on the Westside. White homeowners also sought to “protect” the value and reputation of their neighborhoods by placing racial restrictive covenants on their properties, which prohibited, oftentimes for decades, the use or sale of their homes to any racial, ethnic, or religious group not befitting their standards. Through social pressure and homeowners’ “improvement” associations, whites urged their neighbors to cover their houses with the contracts. Consequently, through the interwar years, the Westside became blanketed with occupancy clauses, and people of color had little option but to live on the increasingly overcrowded and rundown Eastside. Yet the city’s black leadership refused to stand by and accept these measures. By the mid-1920s, a small group of elite blacks began to mobilize a grassroots campaign to end to the use of restrictive covenants. When Houston joined the effort and moved into affluent West Adams Heights, he helped turn the

Basic Books, 1987); Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

center of the battle to the elite neighborhood, and took a significant step in the struggle against residential discrimination.⁵

By the time Houston reached his mid-forties, in the late 1930s, he had earned enough money to move into West Adams Heights, a historically white elite neighborhood situated on an elevated portion of the eastern edge of Westside Los Angeles. But as the first African American to purchase property in the white area, he had to contend with neighbors who fought tooth and nail to keep him out. Once they heard the news about Houston buying property, white residents rushed out to reinstate their restrictive covenants and stop the business owner and other blacks from moving in. They formed a homeowners' association, hired attorneys, and attempted to intimidate Houston into reselling his home. But Houston remained unshaken by their attempts, and his brave feat opened the door to blacks that had been limited to the Eastside. Once Houston moved in, black professionals and entertainers with the financial means flocked to the area. They wanted to live in a high-quality neighborhood, with beautifully designed and spacious homes, but like Houston, they also aimed to dismantle the deeply rooted system of racial inequality and improve the quality of life of people of color across the city.

⁵ On zoning laws in Eastside and Westside Los Angeles, see Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2005), 53-56; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 26. On racial restrictive covenants, see Clement Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 7; and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 36. Scholars that have discussed the increasing use of covenants in Los Angeles include Lawrence B. de Graaf, "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (August 1970): 346; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17; and Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 48-51.

Putting Blacks Back into Los Angeles's History

The history of the western United States and the origins of Los Angeles have been blurred in popular memory by ethnocentric tales of Indian warfare and white conquest, rugged overland trails and pioneer hardships, mining expeditions and the accumulation of wealth, all taking place on the uncharted and wild frontier. In an effort to assert white authority, Los Angeles's multiracial foundation, in the words of historian William Deverell, has been “whitewashed,” with many groups being excluded altogether from history.⁶ But historians have recently pointed out that the Spanish Empire sponsored a diverse mix of people of color to move into and take possession of California long before the region became part of the United States. In the late eighteenth century, Spain forged an effort to claim the territory along the Pacific Coast by sponsoring its subjects to put down roots, set up Franciscan missions, and convert the indigenous population to Roman Catholicism. In the 1780s, the Spanish governor of *el pueblo de nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles*, or simply the pueblo of Los Angeles, divided up and distributed the land to the growing number of settlers. By the 1840s, Spanish rancheros had established ranchos and taken over expansive parcels of land, relying on the labor of the indigenous population to cultivate crops, raise cattle, and produce goods. These early settlers, who boasted familial backgrounds from across the world, ultimately established a racially diverse population in the pueblo of Los Angeles.⁷

⁶ In *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), William Deverell finds that “Los Angeles was built upon, grew up with, and has been sustained by attitudes and behaviors that furthered the ethnic and racial conquest of the American Southwest” (p. 252).

⁷ Fogelson, *Fragmented*, 5-10; Jack D. Forbes, “The Early African Heritage of California,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 76-80; John

The racial composition of the pueblo showed little resemblance to the population in the first decades of statehood. Over half of the first settlers in the early 1780s claimed either African or part-African ancestry, according to historian Jack Forbes, while the others came from Chinese, Spanish, and Indian families. In its efforts to expand, the Spanish Empire gained much of its diverse population by acquiring subjects from regions across the world. From the 1200s onward, the empire enslaved large numbers of people from Africa, Europe, Russia, and the Americas, and over the subsequent centuries gave many of its subjects the opportunity to help settle distant territories. In the regions of the Spanish frontier, including parts of what became the western United States, people of color enjoyed the freedom to rise to leadership roles. The early African pioneers in California, all of whom “were free men and women,” most likely served the empire as “soldiers or civilian settlers.” Nevertheless, from the time of Spanish settlement of Los Angeles, interracial mixing between Indian, African, and Spanish settlers obscured the rich diversity of the pueblo’s early population. When the Mexican government signed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and ceded present-day California to the United States in 1848, census records indicated that few people of color resided in the region.⁸

Between the mid- and late nineteenth century, the United States Census showed Los Angeles as a strikingly homogeneous city, inhabited by an overwhelmingly white majority. In 1850, at the time California received statehood, the census recorded 1,598 residents, or 99.3 percent of the population of the city of Los Angeles, as white. Out of 1,610 city dwellers, the census found only twelve, or roughly 0.8 percent of the

Caughey and La Ree Caughey, *Los Angeles: Biography of a City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 74-76, 78-80.

⁸ Forbes, “The Early African Heritage,” 74-76, 78-80.

population, African American. In the 1880 census, the number of whites grew to 10,379, or 92.8 percent of the city's population, while the number of blacks slightly increased to 102, or 0.9 percent. Over the subsequent decades, as the census created more categories that distinguished various racial and ethnic groups, the number of "native whites" decreased (Table 1). San Francisco, the largest city in second half of the nineteenth century, in California, urbanized earlier than Los Angeles, in part due to the flood of migrants seeking to get rich in the Gold Rush. The number of blacks there climbed to 1,176, or 2.1 percent of the population in 1860, and then grew slightly to 1,628, or 0.7 percent, in 1880. Census records of the state of California tell a similar story. Compared to the overwhelming white population, the number of blacks remained minute. In 1850, the state claimed 91,632 whites, or 99 percent of the population, and 965 blacks, or 1.0 percent. In 1880, while the number of whites rose to 767,181, or 95.4 percent of the population, the number of blacks increased to 6,081, or 0.7 percent (Table 2).⁹

While the black population remained small, as opportunities in Los Angeles expanded and the prices of the transcontinental railroad dropped, growing numbers of

⁹ *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 970; *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, vol. 19, pt. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), 779; *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Characteristics of the Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 120. See also Lawrence B. de Graaf and Quintard Taylor, "Introduction: African Americans in California History, California in African American History," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 15. The black population for 1850 comprises of the county of Los Angeles, whereas the other statistics include the city of Los Angeles. On the history of San Francisco, see Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Doris Muscatine, *Old San Francisco: The Biography of a City from Early Days to the Earthquake* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975); and Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

African Americans from across the United States moved to the city. For years, boosters conjured up and spread stories of Los Angeles's unclaimed territory, abundant resources, and healthy climate in an attempt to populate and bring money to the city.¹⁰ The completion of the transcontinental railroad link to Los Angeles by the 1880s became a catalyst that brought thousands of migrants from across the country to the western city. Furthermore, competition between the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads made traveling even easier in the latter half of the 1880s, when the companies substantially lowered their prices. Between 1880 and 1890, in this celebrated economic boom, the total population of the city of Los Angeles more than quadrupled. African Americans contributed to the city's population boom by nearly doubling its share, from less than one percent in 1880 to two-and-a-half percent in 1890. The economic depression of the 1890s temporarily slowed the growth in the black proportion, but in the subsequent decades, the number steadily increased (Table 1). Alongside the population increase, the infrastructure improved and residents found more opportunities to move about the city. Roads, irrigation systems, and electric street lighting were slowly put in. Entrepreneurs laid tracks and built a street railway system from downtown outwards that stimulated the development of neighborhoods outside of the central business district. Once the streetcar

¹⁰ See Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); William Deverell and Douglas Flamming, "Race, Rhetoric, and Regional Identity: Boosting Los Angeles, 1880-1930," in *Power and Place in the North American West*, eds. Richard White and John M. Findlay (University of Washington Press, 1999), 117-143; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

was available, city dwellers enjoyed inexpensive transportation to work and leisure activities. Los Angeles was becoming a more accessible and attractive city to live in.¹¹

Eastside Los Angeles

According to historian Lawrence de Graaf, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Los Angeles, or the “Golden Era” for African Americans in the city, blacks “enjoyed a lessening of racial tension and a considerable degree of acceptance.” After California had entered the Union as a free state, it passed a number of laws that curbed racial discrimination. While the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 heightened intolerance and increased violence against Asian Americans, the end of black testimony restrictions in 1863, of segregation of African Americans in education by 1890, and of discrimination in public transportation in 1893 indicated a movement toward racial justice.¹² However, through the interwar years, racial discrimination intensified, and people of color found themselves relegated to the city’s Eastside. While zoning ordinances increasingly distinguished the Eastside industrial corridor from Westside single-family housing, white homeowners signed occupancy clauses that prohibited anyone from their neighborhoods not belonging to the white race. But African Americans made the most of their situation. Among an ethnically diverse population, especially along Central Avenue, blacks

¹¹ *Sixteenth Census*, vol. 1, 21; Fogelson, *Fragmented*, 66-67, 78, 85-107; Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of its People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 92-93; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 24-25; Wild, *Street*, 18. See also Glenn S. Dumke, *The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1944).

¹² de Graaf, “City of Black Angels,” 329 (quote); de Graaf and Taylor, “Introduction,” 13-14. See also Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle Against Discrimination in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

established a host of businesses and supported an array of cultural and artistic activities. They made the Central Avenue Eastside district the center of black culture and commerce in Los Angeles.

At the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans settled in neighborhoods scattered mostly around the city's central section. Many black, white working-class, and immigrant newcomers initially lived in the residential sections adjacent to the train station around First and Los Angeles Streets. After the 1880s, some African Americans headed northwest of downtown and settled in the Temple Street section on the Westside. Situated south of Beverly Boulevard, between Rampart and Reno Streets, the Temple Street section became one of the earliest black-occupied Westside communities until Anglos and Jews moved in and built up the area. Otherwise, residential discrimination pushed most blacks eastward to the unrestricted and inexpensive sections of the city. While some people of color settled in a scattering of street blocks, most joined the richly diverse communities of Little Tokyo, Boyle Heights, and Central Avenue. Little Tokyo became the center of Japanese cultural life in the city by the 1920s, yet Japanese Americans shared and negotiated the space around East First Street with a considerable number of whites, blacks, and Mexican Americans. Before Boyle Heights gained a reputation for its concentration of Jews in the interwar period, large numbers of Mexican, Japanese, and African Americans also were drawn to the area by its abundance of unrestricted, single-family housing. Even as the Jewish population grew, the many racial and ethnic groups continued to stay in the area.¹³

¹³ de Graaf, "City of Black Angels," 333-35; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 96-97; Wild, *Street*, 22-25, 27-31, 34; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 42; Mary Jane Hewitt, "The Long Black Line," *California History* 60.1 (Spring 1981): 12-13.

While African Americans settled in several sections, over the interwar period Central Avenue became known as the city's center of black cultural and commercial activity. From its northernmost point at First Street, blacks pushed southward along Central Avenue, settling on the major roadway and its adjacent blocks. Whites tried to contain blacks at nearly every intersection, but African Americans persisted and maximized their space by setting up a host of businesses and organizations. By 1920, the area between Eighth and Twentieth Streets, and especially the intersection of Twelfth Street, emerged as the center of black Los Angeles. Many black-owned landmarks, including the headquarters of the *California Eagle* newspaper, the Booker T. Washington building (which housed shops, offices, and apartments), the Angelus theater, and several churches, helped create a vibrant community. However, African Americans made up a small fraction of what encompassed the Seventy-fourth Assembly District. By 1920, according to Douglas Flaming, blacks constituted fewer than 20 percent of the population in the district. While blacks constantly fought for and negotiated space with whites, Asians, Mexicans, and Italians living in the district, they nevertheless boasted significant influence, exemplified in the district's election in 1918 of California's first black legislator, Frederick Roberts, to the State Assembly, where he served for sixteen years.¹⁴

In the late 1920s, as racial exclusion and segregation intensified, black commerce and culture on Central Avenue expanded and the center of black life shifted southward. While the intersection of Twelfth Avenue remained a hub of black enterprise, through the 1920s key black institutions, including the Colored YMCA and the Elks Hall, followed the

¹⁴ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 92-93, 97-98, 100-123, 393-394 (fn. 2).

trend of black migration and relocated southward. Meanwhile, black-owned apartments, real estate agencies, dry goods stores, dressmaking shops, beauty parlors, and furniture retailers lined the avenue. Then in 1928, when black dentist, entrepreneur, and a founder of the Los Angeles NAACP, John Alexander (J.A.) Somerville opened the Somerville Hotel (later renamed the Dunbar Hotel) in time to host the national NAACP convention, the center of black culture and commerce in Los Angeles shifted to the intersection of Central Avenue and Forty-first Street. In addition to its one hundred rooms, the four-story hotel included a beauty parlor, barbershop, drug store, flower shop, real estate office, tailor, and coffee shops. Immediately thereafter, a host of black-owned establishments, including Golden State Mutual, relocated to the area. The hotels and nightclubs became big attractions and helped give Central Avenue its nickname, the “Harlem of the West.” The Apex (later Club Alabam), the Downbeat Club, and Club Memo, among others, featured artists from Edward “Duke” Ellington and Louis Armstrong to Count Basie and Nat “King” Cole. As whites in New York City headed to Harlem, whites in Los Angeles flocked to Central Avenue in the evenings to escape the restrictions in their lives and check out the new sounds.¹⁵

¹⁵ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 252-253, 261-262, 291-293; Bette Yarbrough Cox, “The Evolution of Black Music in Los Angeles, 1890-1955,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 256-260. For further discussion on the Somerville Hotel, see J. Alexander Somerville, *Man of Color: An Autobiography of Dr. J. Alexander Somerville* (Los Angeles: Lorrin L. Morrison Printing and Publishing, 1949), 122-127; Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 32; Cecilia Rasmussen, *L.A. Unconventional: The Men and Women Who Did L.A. Their Way* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, 1998), 125; and “Along the Color Line,” *Crisis* 35.9 (September 1928): 309, 317-318. See also Douglas Flaming, “*The Star of Ethiopia* and the NAACP: Pageantry, Politics, and the Los Angeles African American Community,” in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, eds. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 145-160. The Somervilles lost their hotel in 1929 after the stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression (Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 32). For further discussion on the cultural activity of Central Avenue, see Cox, *Central Avenue*; R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance*

While Eastside residents settled in the many neighborhood blocks adjacent to Central Avenue, the Furlong Tract represented the rich diversity of the district. Several years before the center of black culture shifted southward to the intersection of Forty-first Street, African Americans began settling in the Furlong Tract, located east of Central Avenue, between Long Beach Avenue and Alameda, Fiftieth and Fifty-fifth Streets. In the early twentieth century, the Furlong Tract offered reasonably priced homes to a richly diverse population of working- and middle-class African, Mexican, Italian, and German Americans. In 1925, the year Golden State Mutual opened its first office near the first center of Central Avenue, Norman Houston, his wife Doris, and their three children lived in the neighborhood on East Fifty-fourth Street. Then in the late 1920s, when the insurance agency relocated to the new center of Central Avenue, the Houstons purchased their first house at East Forty-first Street, closer to the office's headquarters.¹⁶

Nevertheless, working-class whites clung to other Eastside communities with all of their might. Through the mid-twentieth century, as historian Becky Nicolaides points out, white working-class Eastside city dwellers increasingly defended their neighborhoods

(New York: PublicAffairs, 2006); and Clora Bryant and others, eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For works on Harlem in the 1920s, and the relationship between whites and blacks in the Harlem Renaissance, see David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

¹⁶ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 64; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 43-46; Wild, *Street*, 98-99; Ivan J. Houston, interview by Hopkins, 13-14, 20-21; "Norman O. Houston," *Who's Who*, 83. For records of the Houstons' home situated west of Central Avenue, at 950 East Forty-first Street, see "Los Angeles, Calif. Crisis Report—Los Angeles Branch – Sept. 1929"; "Membership Report Blank," 20 November 1930; "Membership Report Blank," 15 November 1931; "Membership Report Blank," 15 December 1933, in Los Angeles NAACP Branch Files, 1913-1939 (Hereafter cited as NAACP/LA), Microfilm Room, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles (Hereafter cited as UCLA/MR), Reel 2.

against black migration. Further south and east of Central Avenue, in the suburbs of the Alameda Corridor, which included Bell, South Gate, Lynwood, and Maywood, white working-class homeowners saw their property as a gateway to middle-class status. As they steadily lost independence in their industrial workplaces through the mid-twentieth century, Nicolaides argued, they guarded their neighborhoods and local schools more fervently against black migration and racial integration. During the interwar years, the area south of Slauson Avenue, between the Central Avenue district and the blue-collar community of Watts, also became a hotspot for white control. Housing contractors marketed their properties to local white workers, then encouraged white homeowners to maintain segregation by covering properties with racial restrictions. Consequently, African Americans skipped over the section, and continued their migration southward into Watts. By the 1920s, that unrestricted, working-class neighborhood boasted a diverse population comprised of whites, blacks, Asians, and Mexicans.¹⁷

For African Americans, living in Los Angeles in the interwar years had both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, the Eastside served as a space for black newcomers to get their bearings in the bustling metropolis, network with other people of color, and try their hand at the available opportunities. Alongside the steady influx of blacks to the city, African Americans entrepreneurs, such as Houston and his business partners, acquired more clients, grew their companies, and enjoyed some financial success. For the most part, Central Avenue also provided a safe and supportive space for black artists to experiment with their craft, engage with other artists, and acquire a broader audience. Nevertheless, racial discrimination remained a constant hindrance to black

¹⁷ Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 42-44; Wild, *Street*, 13. See also Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

advancement. Because most whites refused to provide any support, African Americans felt no other option but to establish their own businesses and organizations. Through the interwar years, as the metropolis expanded and racial discrimination intensified, African Americans also grew concentrated along Central Avenue, or what became the city's black belt. Nevertheless, blacks persistently sought to improve their quality of life and challenge the racial limits.

Golden State Mutual Goes into Business

In the face of increasing racial discrimination, Houston and his business partners, William Nickerson and George Beavers, set out to establish a company that would support and profit from the growing black population in the city. Across the country, white-owned insurance companies refused to cover blacks altogether, or overcharged them for policies that included minimal coverage. Some companies, such as Houston's first employer in Los Angeles, hired blacks to sell overpriced and limited policies to people of color. Some African American entrepreneurs offered alternative opportunities by setting up fraternal insurance organizations, but those often provided only short-term policies. By the 1920s, however, full-line black-owned insurance companies in other parts of the country had gained national reputations for their success. Atlanta Life Insurance Company and North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, for example, grew into highly lucrative enterprises that supported multiple branches and employees. But Golden State Mutual became the first of its kind in Los Angeles. From 1925, the opening year of the first office, Golden State Mutual steadily, developed into a fixture of black Los Angeles,

and saw increasing success throughout the subsequent decades. As business advanced, the founders used their resources to help improve the conditions of blacks in the city.¹⁸

While Houston and his business partner George Beavers helped found Golden State Mutual, William Nickerson initially put forth a plan to establish a full-line black-owned life insurance company on the West Coast. Raised by former slaves in Texas, Nickerson grew up acutely aware of racial inequality in the Jim Crow South. After he finished his education, he taught at a public school for a few years, got married, and then found work selling insurance to blacks in a Houston-based, white-owned agency. As he encountered racial discrimination in the company, however, he decided to start his own business, a fraternal organization that he called American Mutual Benefit Association. He continued to advocate for civil rights, helping initiate a voting rights campaign in Houston and pursuing a lawsuit against the Democratic all-white primary election, but his confrontations with local authorities and threats from the Ku Klux Klan tested his health and wellbeing. In the early 1920s, Nickerson relocated with his wife and eight children to California with the intention of expanding American Mutual in the West. In Los Angeles, he crossed paths with Houston, who was also working in insurance, and in conversation,

¹⁸ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 66, 253-254; de Graaf, "City of Black Angels," 328-29; Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 29; Lonnie G. Bunch III, "'The Greatest State for the Negro': Jefferson L. Edmonds, Black Propagandist of the California Dream," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 132-33. *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 3, *Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922); *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, vol. 2, pt. 1, *Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 629. For studies on black-owned insurance companies outside of Los Angeles, see Merah Steven Stuart, *An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes* (College Park, MD: McGrath Publishing Co., 1969); and Alexa Benson Henderson, *Atlanta Life Insurance Company: Guardian of Black Economic Dignity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

Nickerson presented his business plan. Houston jumped aboard as the first sales representative of American Mutual's California branch, and quickly rose to manager.¹⁹

George Beavers was first drawn into the company with a sales pitch. While a representative from American Mutual attempted to persuade Beavers to buy a policy, Beavers became intrigued with the company and asked for more information. Houston stepped in, recognized Beavers's astute business sense, and offered him a position as sales agent. Born in Atlanta in 1891 to working-class parents, when Beavers turned eleven years old he and his family moved to Los Angeles, "in quest for full citizenship rights and better living conditions."²⁰ Beavers worked his way through school in a number of blue-collar jobs, and after the First World War, he found work in sales, then set out to establish his own building maintenance company. Raised in a Christian household, Beavers cofounded the People's Independent Church of Christ, an offshoot of the First A.M.E. Church. Seeking to improve the conditions of blacks in Los Angeles, Beavers also got involved in several civil rights organizations. "Ever since I reached my maturity," he explained, he had been a member of the local branch of the NAACP, and throughout his career, he held leadership positions in that organization as well as the Urban League, the YMCA, Goodwill, the Los Angeles Housing Authority Commission, and a host of other local and national groups that sought to create a level playing field for blacks in the city.

¹⁹ Norman O. Houston, interview by Brown, 2-3, 6; Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 41-42, 61-62, 80; Beavers, interview by Brown, 1; "William Nickerson, Jr.,"*Who's Who in Colored Los Angeles—California* (published by *California Eagle*, 1930-31), SCL, 82; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 254; John N. Ingham and Lynne B. Feldman, *African-American Business Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pres, 1994), 58-61; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 71.

²⁰ Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 1 (quote); Norman O. Houston, interview by Brown, 3; "George A. Beavers, Jr.,"*Who's Who in Colored Los Angeles—California* (published by *California Eagle*, 1930-31), SCL, 82.

After Beavers accepted the agent position for American Mutual in the early 1920s, he worked his way up to field superintendent. But soon thereafter, American Mutual hit a major roadblock.²¹

Nickerson, Houston, and Beavers had ambitious plans for American Mutual. They wanted to transform the California branch into a full-line insurance company that offered life insurance as well as home and business loans to people of color. By expanding the company to provide more policies as well as more job opportunities, they believed, they could improve the conditions of blacks in the city. But the business partners in Texas refused to support their ideas and dropped plans to renew their license. Nevertheless, the three men saw the need for a black-owned insurance company in Los Angeles and pursued their goals. Los Angeles was already home to a number of major white-owned insurance agencies, but they sold no policies or very limited plans to African Americans in the city. “Some [insurance companies] thought that [blacks] were not insurable,” Beavers explained, “others thought that they were poor risks, and there was little opportunity for black Americans to get the full benefit of life insurance here or anywhere else.” The three men combined their resources, sought the advice of insurance specialists and attorneys, called on the local black community to get their first clients, and established what initially began as Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company.²²

After overcoming several bureaucratic and financial obstacles, in 1925 Nickerson, Houston, and Beavers received their license to run their company. They rented a one-

²¹ Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 6-8, 13, 27-30, 41-42, 169 (quote), 175-186; “George A. Beavers, Jr.,” *Who’s Who*, 82; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 226. See also Norman O. Houston, interview by Brown, 11.

²² Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 61-62; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 255-256.

room office at the intersection of Newton Street and Central Avenue, near the first center of black cultural and commercial activity in the city, and opened for business. Golden State Mutual quickly succeeded, within a few months, outgrowing the first office and moving into a larger space. Meanwhile, as Somerville began building his hotel at the intersection of Forty-first Street and Central Avenue, the founders of Golden State Mutual purchased a lot across the street and a hired black contractor to construct a larger office. In 1928, three years after they received their license, and the opening year of the Somerville Hotel, the founders relocated Golden State Mutual for the third time to a spacious two-story building at the new center of black life. Various shop owners leased the first floor, and Golden State Mutual occupied the second floor, where it stayed for the next two decades.²³

In the early 1930s, *Who's Who in Colored Los Angeles* fittingly dubbed Golden State Mutual "The Growing Giant of the West." Between 1927 and 1938, Golden State Mutual multiplied its staff from 54 to 214 employees. By 1928, services extended to the California cities of Bakersfield, El Centro, Fresno, Pasadena, Sacramento, and San Diego, and in 1938, the firm opened an office in Chicago. The company's overall income rose from \$34,000 in 1925 to \$392,000 in 1938, while its total assets jumped from \$19,000 in 1925 to \$341,000 in 1938.²⁴

²³ "Golden State Insurance Company," *Who's Who in Colored Los Angeles—California* (published by *California Eagle*, 1930-31), SCL, 99; Norman O. Houston, interview by Brown, 2-7, 8-9; Beavers, interview by Brown, 1-3; Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 50-52, 92; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 261-262, 292-293.

²⁴ "Golden State Insurance Company," *Who's Who*, 99; Fourteenth Annual Statement of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, December 31, 1938, NF/GSM, Box 2, Folder 4, SCL.

Golden State Mutual's success illustrated the possibilities Los Angeles held for African Americans. Southern blacks saw in the media and literary depictions of the West not only a gateway to escape segregation and racial violence, but also according to historian Douglas Flamming, "a singularly egalitarian place, where opportunity was open to all citizens, regardless of background, lineage, or wealth." As word spread within southern black communities about western towns and cities that were apparently racially tolerant and open-minded, African Americans through the interwar years packed up their belongings and headed west.²⁵ Between 1900 and 1920, the black population increased seven times its number, from 2,131, or 2.1 percent of the city's population, to 15,579, or 2.7 percent. In 1930, the number reached over three percent of the city's population, and in 1940, blacks made up over four percent (Table 1).²⁶ The majority of blacks settled along Central Avenue and took part in the cultural and entrepreneurial expression of the area. But as their numbers grew, and racial discrimination intensified, African Americans found themselves with little other option but to live on the Eastside.

California offered reasonably more opportunities for black advancement than the Jim Crow South, but racism remained widespread. Through the interwar years, urban expansion put additional pressures on the city, which inflamed white animosity against people of color. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the city in the 1920s exemplified the escalation of racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance. As the Klan infiltrated political

²⁵ Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 36-37.

²⁶ *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. I (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 451; *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900*, Population, pt. II (Washington, DC: United States Census Office, 1902), 324); *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 3, 120; *Sixteenth Census*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 629; *Sixteenth Census*, vol. 1, 120.

campaigns, persuaded city officials and institutions to join the organization, and attempted to obtain jurisdiction over certain neighborhoods, it helped embed racism into the institutions that ran the city.²⁷ Before long, every stratum of the metropolis, from the grassroots level to state administration, supported and employed practices of racial discrimination to keep people of color contained. Nevertheless, as African Americans faced increasing limitations, they joined forces, created a plan, and challenged those restrictions head on.

The First Black Westsiders: The West Jefferson District

As Los Angeles expanded, the Westside became a highly sought after and restricted area. Before the 1920s, some African Americans settled in a handful of mostly undeveloped sections of the Westside. Blacks shared the Temple Street district, as well as Pico Heights, Virgil and Madison Avenues, and Sawtelle, with Asians and Mexicans. In a scattering of undeveloped areas, including what became Beverly Hills and Bel Air, African Americans also ran small ranches and chicken farms. But as whites moved westward and blanketed the area with zoning ordinances and racial restrictive covenants, blacks became increasingly relegated to the Eastside. Settling west of Main Street became a perilous undertaking. In an effort to challenge the racial restrictions in the mid-1920s, African American physician and financier Wilbur C. Gordon raised funds and set out to construct a subdivision for middle- and upper-class blacks known as “Gordon Manor” on undeveloped land north of the city of Torrance on the Westside. In a yearlong battle, however, whites ultimately persuaded Los Angeles County officials to stop the construction, and turn the area into a park. Nevertheless, middle- and upper-class blacks

²⁷ Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 196, 200-211.

refused to submit to white pressure. In their effort to challenge racial restrictions on the Westside, they turned their focus to the West Jefferson district as the next site for integration.²⁸

The use of restrictive occupancy clauses appeared in early twentieth century Los Angeles, and as whites began to increasingly impose the practice in the 1910s and 1920s, local civil rights leaders joined forces and formulated a plan to combat discrimination. Much of their inspiration came from W.E.B. Du Bois, who traveled to Los Angeles in 1913 to promote the NAACP. Shortly after his visit, in the August 1913 issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois lauded the opportunities Los Angeles offered African Americans. “Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high.”²⁹ Nevertheless, local black leaders understood the increasing intolerance in the city and joined forces with concerned whites to establish a Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP. Several local talented and well-educated black attorneys, including Edward Burton Ceruti, played a major role in the establishment of the branch. A graduate of St. Lawrence University in New York in 1910, Ceruti moved to California and passed the state bar exam in 1912. Soon thereafter, he opened a law office in Los Angeles, helped found the local NAACP, and served as lead counsel for the branch. Together with the national NAACP, the legal team of the Los Angeles branch crafted a legal strategy aimed at bringing an end to restrictive covenants. The details of their strategy were laid out in a mid-twentieth century pamphlet for the American Council on Race Relations. First, black real estate agents set

²⁸ Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 29, 42; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 97, 239-242.

²⁹ See Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 11; Bunch, ““The Greatest State,”” 129.

out to purchase unrestricted property in desirable areas. After blacks moved in, they then searched for homes with “technical flaws” in the covenants that would make them unenforceable in a court battle. Finally, African Americans went after lots with “minor covenants,” which neighborhood associations with short membership rosters and a limited amount of resources defended. Essentially, local black leaders set out to chip away at racial restrictions one house at a time.³⁰

The Los Angeles district of West Jefferson served as an ideal locale to pursue the strategy against restrictive covenants. Situated west of Vermont Street and the University of Southern California (USC), in one of the older Westside areas, West Jefferson included a majority white population that covered part of the suburban community in restrictive covenants before the First World War. Through the interwar years, as the district became increasingly populated and white homeowners converted their houses to rental units, the high reputation of West Jefferson began to decline. Middle- and upper-class blacks, however, saw the area and its moderate-size, single-family homes as a gateway to the restricted Westside. Before the First World War, as white homeowners covered their properties in restrictive covenants, a small, long-standing black population managed to stay in a section of rundown and neglected subdivisions. Building on the established black community, local African American leaders took the next step in this strategy and purchased more desirable, single-family homes in the district. Purchasing property in the area, and fighting against restrictive covenants, required a significant amount of energy as

³⁰ Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 18-19, 50-51; Somerville, *Man of Color*, 81. See also J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 486-487; and Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Negro Universities Press, 1919), 192-194.

well as income. For this reason, in the 1920s, black professionals and community leaders with the financial resources set out to lead the migration into the district.³¹

As expected, white homeowners responded with surprise and shock when blacks managed to get around the restrictive covenants and move into these neighborhoods. In the first study of African Americans and housing in Los Angeles, a Ph.D. dissertation completed in 1936, sociologist J. Max Bond found that white homeowners in West Jefferson not only overlooked the expiration date of the covenants on their properties, but also underestimated blacks' capabilities to purchase property in the high-priced area. In an interview conducted for the study, one white resident revealed to Bond,

We white people had forgotten that the forty year deed restriction prohibiting Negroes from buying property in our community had expired. In truth, we thought that no Negro would be ambitious enough to move into our community, especially at the price we were asking for property. But one did move in, and he paid \$10,000 cash for his place. Besides that particular purchase, he bought all the property that he could lay his hands on.

Blacks initially operated under the radar of white residents, kept track of the restrictive covenants and their expiration dates, monitored properties that came on the market, and selected houses with care. But, as expected, they faced white resistance. In 1922, white residents near USC formed the Anti-African Housing Association (soon renamed the

³¹ Like most enclaves in Los Angeles, the boundaries defining West Jefferson vary by author. In "The Long Black Line," Mary Jane Hewitt describes the borders as Normandie and Western Avenues, Jefferson Boulevard, and Thirty-fifth Place (p. 12). Lawrence de Graaf, in "City of Black Angels" (p. 333), and Donald Bogle, in *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* ((New York: One World Books, 2005), 30-31), center the area around Jefferson Boulevard and between Normandie and Western Avenues. In *Bound for Freedom*, Douglas Flaming defines Vermont and Western Avenues, Jefferson and Exposition Boulevards, as the West Jefferson district. In any event, Flaming writes, "an address in the West Jefferson district meant high status in the black community" (p. 97). See also Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 57-59.

University District Property Owners Association) to lead a campaign against black migration. Yet blacks followed their strategy and continued to move into the district.³²

Like other black professionals, Houston understood that moving to West Jefferson would provide more opportunities to his family; at the same time, the increasing success of Golden State Mutual allowed Houston and his colleagues to fight for racial equality. In the mid-1930s, Norman and his wife Doris divorced. Doris stayed in a home near Central Avenue, while Norman followed the migration of professional blacks and purchased a house near USC at 1225 West Thirty-sixth Street in West Jefferson. While their children lived with their mother, the youngsters commuted daily to West Jefferson to attend John H. Francis Polytechnic High School. Houston “thought it best that we go to Poly High instead of Jefferson High [School],” in the Central Avenue district, his son Ivan explained. “I guess it was the feeling that you got a better education at Poly than you might at Jeff.”³³ By the 1930s, the area directly west of USC also became home to black entertainers. Among others, tap dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson and his wife Fannie purchased a home designed by black architect Paul Williams on Thirty-sixth Place and Catalina Street. Nevertheless, some of the most sought after homes remained further west, deeper into Los Angeles’s Westside, in the Crestmore tract of West Jefferson.³⁴

In the mid-1920s, as professional blacks migrated further westward into the sought-after Crestmore tract, whites responded with legal action. The area detailed by

³² J. Max Bond, “The Negro in Los Angeles” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 45; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 59-60.

³³ Ivan J. Houston, interview by Hopkins, 20-21. See also *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1938, 1939, and 1940.

³⁴ Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 164; “The House that Blodgett Built,” *California Eagle*, 10 November 1938, 1 (article includes photo of the Robinsons’ home).

Chester Himes as home to the affluent black characters the Harrisons in *If He Hollers*, the Crestmore tract saw a court battle in the mid-1920s when whites filed a lawsuit against black newcomers. In 1925, the all-white Crestmore Improvement Association signed a twenty-five-year renewal on their expiring racial restrictions. But a few months later, two white signers of the covenant sold their property to African American couple A.D. and Mattie Kinchlow. The transaction prompted a group of white homeowners to sue fifteen black families for violating the covenants. In response, the African American defendants formed the Equal Rights Protective Association, and recruited one of the city's foremost civil rights attorneys, Willis Oliver Tyler, to head the defense. Born in Bloomington, Indiana in 1880, Tyler graduated from Harvard University Law School in 1908, practiced law in Illinois until 1911, then moved to Los Angeles and opened a law firm with fellow Harvard Law graduate Hugh Ellsworth Macbeth in 1912. The case, known as *Wayt v. Patee*, persisted in the courts for the next several years. The tract was divided along Cimarron Street, and while blacks remained on the eastern side, the California Supreme Court in 1928 handed down a decision that permitted blacks to own property on the west side, and yet forbade them from occupying their homes. After this decision, neither a total success nor complete loss, blacks continued to press westward.³⁵

Throughout the 1930s, as black entertainers moved to the area, the Crestmore tract gained fame and distinction. Among others, actor Eddie Anderson made West Jefferson a tourist destination. Best known for his role as "Rochester," Jack Benny's

³⁵ W.B. Wayt, et al. v. George Patee, et al., 205 Cal. 46 (1928); "Right of Racial Ban Sustained: Property Restriction Upheld by State Supreme Court," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1928, A6; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 60-61. For works on Willis O. Tyler and Hugh Ellsworth Macbeth, see J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation*, 486-487; and Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 197. For more on Tyler, see Joseph Clement Bates, ed., *History of the Bench and Bar of California* (San Francisco: Bench and Bar Publishing Company, 1912), 536-537.

raspy-voiced, quick-witted valet and butler on *The Jack Benny Program*, Anderson and his first wife Mamie built a twenty-two-room mansion for roughly \$50,000 in the 1930s, between West Thirty-sixth and West Thirty-seventh Place, just east of Cimarron Street, and “as far [west] as he could go,” his second wife Eva explained. While Benny bought an estate in Beverly Hills, the trendy address for the white rich and famous, racial restrictions prohibited Anderson from moving near his Hollywood peers. In response, the actor purchased three lots near Arlington Avenue and constructed a mansion nearly identical to Benny’s Beverly Hills estate that “takes the whole dead-end” of the road of what has become Rochester Circle. “The house was just glamorous,” Eva gushed about the first time she saw the massive white colonial. “This was like a fairytale to me.” Eddie and Eva raised their three children on “the little cul-de-sac [that] was like [a] family.” The neighborhood children played together on the street and swam in the Andersons’ Olympic-sized pool. The family entertained illustrious guests such as Duke Ellington, Nat “King” Cole, Mantan Moreland, and Benny. Tourist buses also drove around the cul-de-sac to catch a glimpse of the house and try to spot some celebrities.³⁶

A number of other famous African Americans also heightened the reputation of the Crestmore tract. Actress Hattie McDaniel, just before she landed the role as “Mammy” in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), lived at 2177 West Thirty-first Street, and actress Louise Beavers, cousin of George Beavers, but best known for her role “Delilah Johnson” in *Imitation of Life* (1934), lived in a home at 2130 West Twenty-ninth Street.³⁷

³⁶ Eva Anderson, interview by author, July 31, 2006, Los Angeles, California; Anthony F. Nicholas, interview by author, July 19, 2007, Los Angeles, California; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 269-270, 273-274. Eddie Anderson married Eva in 1955 (see interview by author).

³⁷ See *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1938, 1939, 1940; Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 36.

In the 1940s, newlyweds Harold Nicholas, of the Nicholas Brothers tap dance duo, and actress Dorothy Dandridge moved into a modest two-bedroom home on Twenty-seventh Street, between Arlington Avenue and Cimarron Street. They spent their spare time redecorating and entertaining guests such as Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, and Herb Jeffries, as well as their neighbors, the Andersons.³⁸ Fayard Nicholas, the other half of the Nicholas Brothers, and his wife Geraldine bought a home on Thirty-seventh Place and Van Ness Avenue.³⁹ Actor and comedian Mantan Moreland, best known for his role of the chauffeur “Birmingham Brown” in the Charlie Chan films, and his wife Hazel also lived in the area.⁴⁰

Westside blacks seemed to express an air of superiority over low-income blacks on the Eastside. Bond observed that they were “representative of those families that had attempted to escape from the masses and attain a higher level of culture.” In a 1940 study of black communities in Los Angeles, Karl Holton, chairman of the Deteriorating Zone Committee of the Los Angeles Urban League, noted that the “importance” of black professionals in West Jefferson “lies in the fact that they are not only geographically but socially separated from the large population of their race in the original ‘Central Avenue’ area.” In fact, in order to combat residential discrimination and attain better opportunities for housing in the city, professional blacks felt that they needed to maintain their distance from their Eastside counterparts. Moreover, as Holton noted, Westside blacks felt responsibility to serve as role models and help advance the city’s larger black

³⁸ Donald Bogle, *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* (New York: Amistad Press, 1997), 202-204.

³⁹ Nicholas, interview by author.

⁴⁰ Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 204.

community. While Holton claimed West Jefferson as “the best district” of all the areas inhabited by sizeable black populations, he understood that “social programs in the large district [of Central Avenue] will have little chance for permanent success unless the aid of this element [of professional blacks] can be enlisted.”⁴¹

In an era when Hollywood typecast African Americans in one-dimensional roles as menial laborers, black entertainers found strength in unity and used their success to combat racial discrimination. In *Bright Boulevards*, a history of black Hollywood in the first half of the twentieth century, Donald Bogle found an incomparable and rare “communal cohesiveness” amongst black entertainers in Los Angeles as they bonded over their shared experiences, celebrated their successes, and commiserated their defeats. Their radio and onscreen characters of often agreeable or dim-witted maids, cooks, chauffeurs, and butlers differed starkly from their off-screen lives. In their homes and communities, they served as role models and leaders. They risked their lives navigating into intensely restricted areas of the city where whites fervently defended the racial exclusiveness of their neighborhoods with legal contracts, stalwart neighborhood associations, and violent action. Once professional blacks settled in, they sought not only to share their successes with others, but also to continue to work toward racial acceptance. They hosted parties, offered their spare bedrooms to out-of-town guests, and held meetings of local organizations in their living rooms. Most importantly, the migration of black leaders into West Jefferson opened the door for more blacks in the city. White-collar blacks, from mail carriers to police officers and teachers to civil servants, moved to the area. By 1931,

⁴¹ Bond, “Negro in Los Angeles,” 69; Karl Holton, “Notes on the Negro Districts in Los Angeles,” Deteriorating Zone Committee, January 1940, Los Angeles Urban League Records (Hereafter cited as LAUL), Box 1, Folder 14, UCLA/SC, pp. 1-2.

the African American population in the district had grown to 3,500, and by 1940, the number stood over 5,000.⁴²

Nevertheless, West Jefferson became just one step in the battle to attain full access to housing on the Westside. Shortly after moving into West Jefferson, black professionals turned their attention northward to the historically affluent community of West Adams Heights. West Jefferson offered good schools and public services, as well as ideal starter and mid-range homes with adequate garden space, but the modest-size dwellings, and repetitive gridiron street pattern on the flatlands of the city, did little to honor the achievements of professional African Americans. West Adams Heights, on the other hand, had a history of illustrious white residents who appeared regularly in the society pages of the late nineteenth century newspapers. The city's most successful and envied white pioneers and socialites founded the area on the elevated section of the city, leaving behind elaborately constructed estates with panoramic views overlooking the city. While elite blacks continued to combat housing segregation, they also wanted their homes and living spaces to reflect their hard work and achievements, and West Adams Heights provided that arena. But the process to move into the area took several years.

White West Adams

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few residential areas in Los Angeles compared to the wealthy settlements of the West Adams district.⁴³ The main

⁴² Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, xiv; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 58. For a more nuanced analysis of the roles of black entertainers, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

⁴³ In *The History of the Normandie Program Area* (Prepared for the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, 1 September 1969), Patricia Adler finds the streetcar was an

section, stretching from Figueroa Street to Western Avenue on the east and west, and Washington and Adams Boulevards on the north and south, became home to some of the most successful and prosperous whites through the turn of the twentieth century. Before Beverly Hills emerged to eminence in the 1920s as home to the white Hollywood elite, and the escapades of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford at “Pickfair” adverted the press to the homes of entertainers, West Adams was the center of white upper-crust society in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ Elite whites looking for distance from the center of the city migrated westward, along the line of the streetcar, in the late nineteenth century, and settled in the West Adams district. Recently arrived Eastern and Midwesterners who pioneered industries in the West, as well as doctors, lawyers, attorneys, and socialites, commissioned noted architects to design grand estates in Victorian, Italian Renaissance, colonial, and Tudor styles that topped each other and astonished passersby.

West Adams was not the first affluent area in Los Angeles, but it became one of the city’s earliest elite communities outside of the downtown center. By the late 1870s, Bunker Hill became a highly desirable white residential neighborhood. Located on a small hill in downtown Los Angeles, many successful, white entrepreneurs and professionals seeking some distance from the city center constructed elaborate mansions in the area. But with the installation of the streetcar system, West Adams offered wealthy whites greater detachment from the business district. The first houses were constructed along Adams Boulevard, between Main Street and Hoover Boulevard, but through the

important factor in the development of West Adams, which connected downtown to the area in 1891 (p. 9).

⁴⁴ Walter Wagner, *Beverly Hills: Inside the Golden Ghetto* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1976), 15; David Weddle, *Among the Mansions of Eden: Tales of Love, Lust, and Land in Beverly Hills* (New York: William Morrow, 2003), 38-39.

early twentieth century, elite neighborhoods cropped up as far west as Crenshaw Boulevard. Three of those communities became highly desirable.⁴⁵

Chester Place, the earliest renowned enclave in West Adams, anchored the east end of the district from Figueroa Street to Hoover Boulevard. Real estate developer and federal court judge Charles Silent bought a two-story farmhouse and the surrounding grounds, and in the 1880s and 1890s turned his property into a residential compound made up of twenty acres, which he sheltered with gates, trees, and shrubbery (Figure 1). Silent named the center square St. James Park, after his first son James, and the surrounding area Chester Place, after his youngest boy Chester.⁴⁶ Chester Place especially attained prominence when Edward L. Doheny and his family moved in. Born into a poor Irish family in Wisconsin, Doheny was swept up in the excitement of the Gold Rush, and as a teenager he prospected across the western territories. After years of hard work without reaping any reward, Doheny traveled to Los Angeles in hopes of striking it rich. After a difficult year, Doheny hit “black gold” hundreds of feet below the city. He amassed a fortune from his first oil well, and several others thereafter, and used his wealth to buy property in Chester Place. In the early 1900s, he purchased a 10,500-square-foot, three-

⁴⁵ Adler, *The History of the Normandie Program Area*, 8-9; Carey McWilliams, “The Evolution of Sugar Hill,” *Script* (March 1949): 24; Harry Anderson and Mary Wormley, *Historic West Adams: Now & Then: Remembering a Legacy* (Los Angeles: West Adams Heritage Association, 1987), 4. See also Pat Adler, “The Bunker Hill Story” (Glendale, CA: La Siesta Press, 1963).

⁴⁶ McWilliams, “Evolution,” 24; Michael Regan, *Mansions of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Regan Publishing Company, 1965), 21; Don Sloper, *Los Angeles’s Chester Place* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 9. Before moving to Los Angeles, Silent served as a federal judge in Arizona. He bought the property in West Adams from Nathan Vail, a New Jersey sea captain, and subdivided the surrounding area into Chester Place. After the land conveyance, Silent and Vail worked together investing in land development companies around southern California, including in Inglewood and Redondo Beach (Sloper, 9). The Central Library of the Los Angeles Public Library owns photos of the gates to Chester Place. See “Chester Place entrance,” no. 00026840; “Chester Place gate,” no. 00067264; and “Chester Place entrance,” no. 00026836.

story, Gothic revival mansion for \$125,000 (paid in cash) at 8 Chester Place (Figure 2).

According to Doheny's biographer, the Doheny family added to the over twenty-room estate a "private bowling alley, music room, and wildlife menagerie."⁴⁷

On the west end of West Adams stood Berkeley Square, another distinguished neighborhood initially inhabited by wealthy whites. The *Los Angeles Times* in 1909 called Berkeley Square "one of the show streets of the west..." and "marvels of the recent growth of Los Angeles."⁴⁸ Situated between Twenty-first and Twenty-second Streets, Gramercy Place and Western Avenue, Berkeley Square offered homes in a variety of prices and styles. Through the 1910s and 1920s, property values ranged upward from \$10,000. William G. McAdoo, railroad executive and former United States Secretary of Treasury under President Wilson, bought a fifteen-room estate surrounded by about one acre of land at 5 Berkeley Square for \$60,000. Lee Allen Phillips, vice-president of Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, bought a mansion at 4 Berkeley Square for \$80,000 and hired an architectural firm to renovate and enlarge the property. A. L. Cheney, president of Stimson Oil Company, and his wife built a Tudor-style home that included a reception hall, terrace, sunroom, library, dressing room, sewing room, and servants' quarters.⁴⁹ Like Chester Place, chided Carey McWilliams, a lawyer, journalist,

⁴⁷ Margaret Leslie Davis, *Dark Side of Fortune: Triumph and Scandal in the Life of Oil Tycoon Edward L. Doheny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8-9, 20-23, 26-27, 46-47. See also Regan, *Mansions*, 27.

⁴⁸ "Berkeley Square: Magnificent Mansions to Occupancy Sightly Lots in Fashionable Park Section," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1909.

⁴⁹ For prices of homes, see "City Attracts Home Builders," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 November 1908, V1; "Merchant's Home Magnificent: In Berkeley Square Is One of City's Finest," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1908, V1; "Home of Lee A. Phillips, Hunt & Burns, Architects: Will Be Show Place," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1913, VII. "McAdoo Buyer of Berkeley Square Home," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 April 1922, II1; "Home of Lee A. Phillips," VI1; Regan,

and civil rights advocate chided, Berkeley Square “was designed as an inner fortress to hold the line against the invading forces of mediocrity.” Stone entryways and gates kept the community separate from the city and its varied denizens.⁵⁰

In between Chester Place and Berkeley Square sat West Adams Heights. In the 1860s and 1870s, Charles Victor Hall, a college student working as a land surveyor, recorded a section of territory just south of what would become West Adams Heights, which he aptly named after himself, while Mary E. Hall, his sister and a schoolteacher, patented the adjacent territory on the north. Mary and her husband, William Moore, a surveyor and engineer, were among the first occupants in the tract. George Ira Cochran, attorney and insurance company executive, saw the tract’s potential and bought the title from the Moores. In 1902, he subdivided the elevated portion, specifically to sell to wealthy whites, and named the area West Adams Heights. Western Avenue, Washington Boulevard, Normandie Avenue, Twenty-second Street, La Salle Avenue, and Adams Boulevard bounded the Heights.

Elevation became a key element in Los Angeles that affluent city dwellers used to distinguish and distance themselves from the rest of the population. As the city expanded and migrants from across the country and the world arrived in the city, historian Robert Fishman writes, “The wealthy seized upon the hills as a sign of wealth and status.”⁵¹ This trend became more apparent through the twentieth century, especially with the

Mansions, 49; “Oil Man Plans Fine Mansion: Berkeley Square Home to Be of Early Tudor Type,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 1911, V24.

⁵⁰ McWilliams, “Evolution,” 24. The Central Library of the Los Angeles Public Library owns photos of the gates to Berkeley Square. See “Berkeley Square entrance,” no. 00067271; “Berkeley Square entrance,” no. 00067265.

⁵¹ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 167.

development of Beverly Hills, which Fishman calls the “archetypal hill suburb.” Affluent whites in the late nineteenth century who sought out homes in West Adams Heights had the same objectives. The sloping streets, private cul-de-sacs, and panoramic views overlooking the city gave residents of West Adams Heights privacy from city congestion, as well as attention from envious onlookers. Cochran and his business associate, Frederick Hastings Rindge, built the first mansions in the area.⁵²

Frederick Rindge and his family owned one of the most noted homes in the Heights. Around thirty years old, Rindge inherited three million dollars from his father, who had made his fortune as a woolen manufacturer in the Northeast. In the late 1880s, Rindge married Rhoda May Knight and moved to southern California. The couple is most remembered as the founders of Malibu, and for the war Rhoda May waged against squatters and the court to preserve her beachfront property after her husband’s death. They also owned land in Santa Monica. Their two-acre home at 2263 South Harvard Boulevard, dubbed “Castle Rindge,” became the centerpiece of the Heights (Figure 3). Castle Rindge included several parlors and thirteen fireplaces, all of which were made from imported Italian marble, as well as domed ceilings, a study, a chandelier suspended in the large dining room, an elaborate oak staircase, and a carriage house. The Rindge mansion and other estates in the Heights became symbols of the possibilities of Los

⁵² Adler, *The History of the Normandie Program Area*, 2; McWilliams, “Evolution,” 24-25. See also the tract map of West Adams Heights, housed at the County of Los Angeles Recorder-Registrar/County Clerk (Hereafter cited as RRCC), Book 2, pp. 53-54. Adams and Jefferson Boulevards, and Western and Normandie Avenues bounded the Charles Victor Hall tract. In 1906, Conservative Life Insurance Company merged with Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, and Cochran became Pacific Mutual’s first president (McWilliams, “Evolution,” 24).

Angeles. At the turn of the twentieth century, those opportunities stood at a far distance for people of color in the city.⁵³

But in the 1920s and 1930s, as many illustrious whites passed away, and the Great Depression drained the riches of some remaining residents, people of color sensed the vulnerability of the white community and seized the opportunity to move in. For years, affluent whites who moved into West Adams Heights placed racial restrictive covenants on their properties to prevent “non-whites” (a phrase frequently used in the documents) from purchasing property in the area. Of course, white homeowners added a clause in the covenants that permitted the service staff to live at the residence during time of employment.⁵⁴ But as the older generation of whites passed away, their children sold their homes and moved to newer Westside communities, such as Brentwood, Bel Air, and Beverly Hills. Furthermore, the stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing depression took a toll on the community. While some residents managed to hold onto their wealth, others faced difficulty maintaining their properties. Some long-time residents converted their homes into apartments, others filed for bankruptcy, and a few took their own lives. African Americans with the financial resources found an opening and began moving in.⁵⁵

⁵³ Anne S. Henshaw, “Frederick Hastings Rindge,” *American National Biography Online* (February 2000), <http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00865.html> (accessed 31 August 2007); Rasmussen, *L.A. Unconventional*, 117-118; McWilliams, “Evolution,” 25-26. The Central branch of the Los Angeles Public Library owns photos of the Rindges’ properties. See “Cattle on the Rindge Ranch,” no. 00032261; “Frederick H. Rindge’s ranch,” no. 00032260; “Rindge ranch, Malibu,” no. 00022941.

⁵⁴ For the racial restrictive covenant in West Adams Heights, see “Real Property Restrictions Agreement,” Book 15896, p. 1, RRCC.

⁵⁵ McWilliams, “Evolution,” 28.

Houston Moves In

After years of chipping away at housing discrimination, Houston and his second wife Edythe broke ground in 1938 by becoming the first African Americans to purchase a home in West Adams Heights. Yet they were not the first people of color to successfully defy the restrictions. The United States Census unfortunately collected no records of Los Angeles at the tract level until 1940. But reports indicate that, before the late 1930s, members of several ethnic groups managed to settle in the area. “For at least a decade before Mr. Houston purchased a home in the Heights,” McWilliams wrote, “a Korean merchant, a Chinese character actor, two Italian-American families, a Hungarian-American, and several Armenian-American families” moved to the community. Reports also show that in the 1920s, affluent Jews and Mexicans, including actors Ramon Navarro and Dolores del Rio, settled in the West Adams district. When the Houstons purchased their home, however, whites openly panicked and tried nearly everything in their power to deter them—and for that matter, all African Americans—from moving into the neighborhood.⁵⁶

When hearing the news of the Houstons’ purchase, the homeowners’ “improvement” association called a meeting with white residents of West Adams Heights to come up with a plan to block the couple from moving in. In Los Angeles, along with cities across the country, as people of color moved into white communities, whites

⁵⁶ McWilliams, “Evolution,” 28; Wild, *Street*, 34; Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 85; Max Vorspan and Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1970), 117-119; Grant Deed between Norman O. Houston, Edythe A. Houston, and Naomi Freeney, 1938, Book 16249, p. 36, RRCC. For reference of his marriage to Edythe, see Ivan J. Houston, interview by Hopkins, 28. For documentation of the Houstons’ address on South Hobart Boulevard, see also *Los Angeles City Directory*, 1942.

responded by mobilizing themselves into what they called homeowners' "improvement" associations. In an effort to maintain the white make-up of the community, these associations intimidated black newcomers; threatened real estate agents who might sell to people of color; administered restrictive covenants; raised funds to purchase property from recent black buyers, buy vacant lots, and pursue legal action; refused to patronize stores that sold to black shoppers; and lobbied city officials to pass and enforce zoning ordinances.⁵⁷ When the Houstons bought property in the area, the West Adams Heights Improvement Association (WAHIA) noticed that the covenants homes in the community had either expired or were near expiration, and it immediately encouraged whites to quickly reinstate the restrictions. Accordingly, over one hundred homeowners signed their names to four limitations. In the covenants, they agreed on the following terms.

1. That no portion of any of said lots, pieces, or parcels of land shall ever be occupied, as a residence or for residential purposes, by any person other than of the Caucasian, or White Race, during said term of years.
2. That no person whose blood is not entirely that of the White Race shall live upon any of said real property during said term...save and except in the capacity of a domestic servant of a White person residing on the self-same parcel.
3. That the foregoing covenants are made, and said limitations and restrictions raised, for the advantage of said parties and for the benefit of said parcels...
4. That appropriate legal or equitable action may be prosecuted for any threatened or actual breach of any of said agreements.

The white signers promised to adhere to the contract until December 31, 2035, almost a century from when it was recorded. Nevertheless, the Houstons managed to skirt the decree. By the time the WAHIA realized it had overlooked the expiration date on the covenants, the Houstons and their seller made the deal.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For more discussion on homeowners' "improvement" associations, see Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 35-36.

⁵⁸ "Real Property Restrictions Agreement," Book 15896, p. 1.

The spacious residence located at 2211 South Hobart Boulevard, near the corner of Twenty-second Street, seemed perfect for the Houstons' combined families. Norman had three children with his first wife, and Edythe had one child from her previous relationship. While the home needed some repairs, it also seemed like an ideal opening for the first blacks to move into the area. To pay the mortgage, the previous owner defied land-use laws by running a guesthouse from the property. The residence was also used as a private club for professional football players and a meeting place for community groups. But "as the first Negro to purchase a home in the Heights," McWilliams wrote in an article on the black struggle to live in the Heights, "Mr. Houston was a little hesitant about moving in." For at least a year, the Houstons rented their home to a white tenant. The WAHIA offered to purchase the Houstons' home, and under pressure, the couple gave the association a time frame in which to come up with the money. But the WAHIA fell short of a plan to pay for the house and sought another resolution to their crisis. Meanwhile, the WAHIA made a failed attempt to re-zone the area to forbid homeowners from renting to tenants. Finally, in late 1940, as the Houstons moved into their home, the WAHIA agreed in an emergency meeting "to take legal action to protect the exclusive character of the Heights." While the Houstons avoided a lawsuit by buying a home with expired restrictive covenants, many other blacks that moved in afterwards faced a legal battle.⁵⁹

By moving in, the Houstons inspired professional blacks across the city to do the same. After decades of exclusion from the coveted area, middle- and upper-class African Americans seized the opportunity to live in the Heights. While still expensive for the average city dweller, the price of many homes in the area cost considerably less than the

⁵⁹ McWilliams, "Evolution," 28-29; Ivan J. Houston, interview by Hopkins, 28.

amount the first owners had paid for them. The Depression sent prices plummeting, and economic loss forced white property owners to skimp on home repairs and improvements. But properties in the Heights continued to hold historical value and distinction from a bygone era of Los Angeles's white wealthy class. In 1944, reporter Malcolm Thurburn noticed, "There is an air of grandeur, even though some of the buildings are falling into disrepair."⁶⁰ But once the Houstons moved in, they motivated more affluent blacks to buy property in the area. The fame and success of these black newcomers, as well as their effort to renovate and modernize their properties, returned the Heights back to its splendor.

Black West Adams

As word spread in the black community of the Houstons' purchase, elite African Americans began to seek out property in the area. Some bought houses without restrictive covenants, but many purchased property covered by racial restrictions. Whites who felt property values would fall and feared living near blacks, rushed to sell their homes, in spite of the demands of their white neighbors.⁶¹ Alongside the growing black population, West Adams Heights acquired its hip nickname "Sugar Hill." But a group of whites that

⁶⁰ McWilliams, "Evolution," 25-26, 28; Malcolm Thurburn, "Restrictive Covenants: Homes Handsome Faultless," *Now*, Second half of December, 1944, 4, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 3, UCLA/SC.

⁶¹ McWilliams, "Evolution," 29. Isabel Cryer, spouse of former mayor of Los Angeles George E. Cryer, for example, signed a restrictive covenant after the Houstons purchased property in the area, and then in 1942, sold her home to African American actress Louise Beavers. See "Real Property Restrictions Agreement," Book 15896, p. 1, RRCC; Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between Louise Beavers and Isabel G. Cryer, 1942, Book 19161, p. 221, RRCC. Jennie V. Robinson, white homeowner of 2045 South Hobart Boulevard also signed a restrictive covenant to her property a few years before selling it to African American Syndetta Dones Smith. See "Real Property Restrictions Agreement," Book 15896, p. 2; Ane Marie Anderson, et al. v. Earl F. Auseth, et al., Complaint (for Declaratory Relief and Injunction), L.A. No. 484808, Filed 15 April 1943, p. 2, Los Angeles Superior Court Archives (Hereafter cited as LASC).

aimed to maintain an all-white neighborhood raised money, hired attorneys, and filed lawsuits against several black newcomers. Rather than suing white homeowners for violating the covenants and selling their properties to people of color, this group focused on the black newcomers. The black defendants had knowingly breached the legal contracts, the white plaintiffs claimed, and their residence in the community “is causing and will continue to cause these plaintiffs great and irreparable injury.”⁶² However, the professional blacks who moved into the area brought public attention back to the historical site, improved the quality of their homes, and ultimately helped broaden the possibilities for a better quality of life to more people of color.

Among the many black entertainers that settled in the area was Hattie McDaniel, who especially received attention. About one year after the Houstons moved into their home, newlyweds McDaniel and James Lloyd Crawford, a real estate broker, bought a two-story, seventeen-room, white stucco mansion at 2203 South Harvard Boulevard for \$7,000.⁶³ The changes in the area during the Great Depression had indeed lowered property values, but prices remained well above the city average.⁶⁴ By the early 1940s, McDaniel had achieved significant professional and personal success, celebrating her

⁶² Anderson v. Auseth, Complaint, L.A. No. 484808, Filed 15 April 1943, p. 9, LASC.

⁶³ Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between James Lloyd Crawford, Hattie McDaniel Crawford, and Marian Earle Stainback, 1941, Book 18984, pp. 319-320, RRCC.

⁶⁴ *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, vol. 3, *Housing Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1942) recorded the average monthly rent for dwellings in Los Angeles in 1940. (Unfortunately, the 1940 census does not include average property values). In the city of Los Angeles, the average monthly rent was \$34.11. In tract 208, which includes West Adams Heights as well as a small section of blocks outside the district, the average was \$38.24. (Tract 208 encompasses Washington and Adams Boulevards, and Arlington and Western Avenues.) But in block 13, the same area where McDaniel and Crawford lived, the average reached \$128.67. In block 12, where the Houstons lived, the average stood at \$81.62. See also McWilliams, “Evolution,” p. 31 for a discussion on property values.

triumph in 1939 as the first African American to win an Academy Award for her performance of “Mammy” in *Gone With the Wind*, and enjoying her recent marriage to Crawford. After the wedding, McDaniel moved out of her West Jefferson home and into a grand estate with her new husband. Newspapers around the country reported the wedding and their move into Sugar Hill, and McDaniel embraced the accolades that came with her accomplishments.⁶⁵

McDaniel grew up in meager conditions, but her natural talent and hard work helped her succeed. She was born the youngest of seven children in Wichita, Kansas in 1893; her parents struggled most of their lives to feed and clothe their offspring, who often went without the basic necessities. To escape menial labor and poverty, McDaniel’s brother urged his siblings to become entertainers. They worked in minstrel shows, carnivals, and plays, and McDaniel traveled the country singing the blues in front of an orchestra.⁶⁶ Then in the 1930s, she joined her sister Etta Goff in Los Angeles to seek out opportunities in show business. Goff had moved to Los Angeles in the 1920s and found a position as a live-in housekeeper for a wealthy, white family in the West Adams district (Figure 4). When McDaniel arrived, she rented an apartment near Central Avenue, but as she landed small roles in films, she earned enough money to buy a modest dwelling in

⁶⁵ “Hattie McDaniel Becomes Bride, ‘This Time Forever,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1941; “Earl J. Morris in Grand Town: Day and Night,” *California Eagle*, 29 January 1942; “The Trip,” *The Denver Star*, 20 June 1942, 1. Descriptions of McDaniel and Crawford’s house vary. *The Denver Star*, for example, describes the Sugar Hill mansion with seventeen rooms (p. 1), whereas Bogle, in *Bright Boulevards*, records thirteen rooms (p. 266).

⁶⁶ Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 17, 19, 28-29, 32-34, 56-57. See also Watts, *Hattie*, p. 292, fn. 40 for a discussion on McDaniel’s birth year.

West Jefferson. But she had higher goals, and in less than a decade from her arrival to the city, McDaniel bought a home in the same district where her sister had once labored.⁶⁷

McDaniel embraced her success as a professional actress. During the filming of *Gone With the Wind*, while she was earning a steady salary, she bought a green Packard automobile and cruised around the city with her head held high (Figure 5). En route to the studio, she stopped by the Dunbar Hotel on Central Avenue, in the city's center of black culture and commerce, to show off her prized possession. "I just couldn't help driving by the Dunbar that day... I felt mighty happy driving that Packard," she told a reporter. In her previous visit to the studio, she explained,

I remember to myself the last time I was there I only had bus fare one way. Yessir, I had to borrow a dime to get home on—and I didn't get the little bit of work I'd gone after. So I just had to show them all standing around there dressed up so big. I had to show 'em I done it.⁶⁸

Her purchase of a Sugar Hill mansion lifted her status to another level. Her home stood at the center of the neighborhood, on one of the best spots in the area overlooking the city. Trees, bushes, and flowers adorned the façade of the house, which featured a wrap-around porch and towering front doors. Each room boasted its own unique design. The drawing room was furnished in French period style; the lounge had rattan furniture; the dining room featured an ivory table and chairs; and the upstairs bedrooms matched each of their bathrooms. Around the home, McDaniel displayed her prized possessions, including her

⁶⁷ Watts, *Hattie*, 54, 77-80. See Watts, *Hattie*, pp. 283-86, for McDaniel's filmography. For documentation of McDaniel's residence at 2177 West Thirty-first Street, see *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1939, 1940. See also Carlton Jackson, *Hattie: The Life of Hattie McDaniel* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1990).

⁶⁸ Don Ryan, "A Personality Study," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 February 1940, 8.

Oscar, a white grand piano, and autograph portraits of famous entertainers.⁶⁹ But even as a well-paid actress, she devoted her free time to giving back to her race and country.

McDaniel's commitment to the community made her, according to Donald Bogle, the "grand matriarch of Sugar Hill." At her South Harvard Boulevard address, elite blacks gathered together to share ideas, honor their achievements, and escape from the confines of white-dominated society. Historian and biographer Jill Watts explained that McDaniel's home "was private and intimate, but it was also independent and unfettered, free of white interference." Prominent African Americans, including musician Cab Calloway, actress Louise Beavers, and scholar E. Franklin Frazier, spent time at her estate. At her parties, guests such as Duke Ellington, Ethel Waters, and Butterfly McQueen entertained the room. In the era of segregation, when blacks and whites in show business rarely interacted in social settings, McDaniel also welcomed into her home Hollywood's white elite, including Greg Belcher, Janet Blair, Joan Davis, Clark Gable, Agnes Moorehead, and Esther Williams (Figure 6).⁷⁰

McDaniel faced censure for yielding to Hollywood's superficial preconceptions of African Americans, but she refused to let that limit her goals. The NAACP argued that McDaniel perpetuated negative racial stereotypes, and it organized rallies across the country to boycott *Gone With the Wind*. NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White singled out McDaniel as an example of how African Americans were degraded in film. But McDaniel refused to denounce the film industry and sacrifice her career. Watts concluded that McDaniel indeed had a hand in maintaining racism in show business and

⁶⁹ "The Trip," *The Denver Star*, 1; Watts, *Hattie*, 210-211; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 266.

⁷⁰ Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 265; Watts, *Hattie*, 212; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 266-267; Harry Levette, "City Mourns Death of Hattie McDaniel," *California Eagle*, 30 October 1952, 14.

put up with discrimination on the set, but “in a harsh, unforgiving, and racist industry... [t]he only options were to comply or get out.” In response to the criticism, McDaniel famously chided, “I can be a maid for \$7 a week, or I can play a maid for \$700 a week.” Furthermore, Bogle explained in his central work on the representations of black entertainers, McDaniel “created rich, dazzling characterizations” of on-screen maids. “She emerged as the one servant of the era to speak her mind fully.” Indeed, McDaniel sought to make change and improve the conditions of blacks from the inside of a deeply racist business. Her acceptance speech at the Academy Awards revealed the duality of those goals. “I sincerely hope that I shall always be a credit to my race and the motion-picture industry,” she said.⁷¹

High-profile blacks that moved to Sugar Hill continued to redefine the area as respectable and fashionable. Several months before McDaniel and Crawford finalized their purchase, Lieutenant Leslie U. King, retired officer of the United States Army, and his wife Mamie King moved from West Jefferson to a home at 2215 South Harvard Boulevard, one block north from the McDaniel and Crawford residence.⁷² Horace and Vera Clark, owners of the Clark Hotel, one of the finest black-owned establishments on Central Avenue since the 1910s, which lodged out-of-town guests and provided a stage for

⁷¹ Watts, *Hattie*, 139, 164, 174; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes*, 80; Carlton Jackson, *Hattie*, 99-101.

⁷² Grant Deed between Leslie U. King, Mamie King, and Douglas S. Mueller, 1941, Book 18414, p. 342, RRCC. For reference to the Kings’ West Jefferson address, 2122 West 29th Street, see “Membership Report Blank,” NAACP/LA, December 1938, UCLA/MR, Reel 3.

black musicians, became neighbors of the Houstons when they moved from Central Avenue to 2205 South Hobart Boulevard.⁷³

In late 1941, singer and actress Ethel Waters also heightened the reputation of the area when she bought a three-story, ten-room mansion at 2127 South Hobart Boulevard. Waters faced a difficult upbringing and learned to rely on herself early in her life. In her autobiography, she began, “I never was a child. I never was coddled, or liked, or understood by my family. I never felt I belonged.” In her early years, she shifted between relatives, lived on the streets, mixed with prostitutes, stole food, got married and divorced, and worked as a maid. Her career as a recording artist took off in the 1920s, and she began to work in film in the 1930s. In her 1951 autobiography, *His Eye is on the Sparrow*, she remembered the day she moved into her home in Sugar Hill.

I shook with happiness that first evening when I walked into my house. During the day the moving men had brought my things, and when I saw that they had placed each chair and table exactly where I wanted it, I burst into tears. “My house,” I told myself. “The only place I’ve ever owned all by myself.”⁷⁴

Waters felt overcome with relief to own a house and settle down near her peers. Her long-time yearning for an established and secure residence throughout her turbulent childhood, and her demanding tour schedule as an adult, materialized in Sugar Hill. She could decorate her house in her own style, unwind in the privacy of her own home, and keep company with trusted friends. For Waters, homeownership signified self-sufficiency and security.

⁷³ Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between Horace P. Clark, Vera Clark, and Robert Elliott, 1941, Book 18766, pp. 381-382, RRCC; *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1938, 1939, 1942, 1943, 1945; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 80; Cox, *Central Avenue*, 30.

⁷⁴ Grant Deed between Ethel Burke Waters, Louis C. Venator, and Dorothy C. Venator, 1941, Book 18989, p. 115, RRCC; Ethel Waters with Charles Samuels, *His Eye is on the Sparrow* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1951), 1, 8, 15, 24, 259.

African Americans who relocated to the neighborhood in 1942 helped solidify Sugar Hill's new reputation as home to the city's black elite. McDaniel's close friend and colleague Louise Beavers moved from West Jefferson to 2219 South Hobart Boulevard, located next to the Houstons (the Clarks resided on the opposite side). She bought the home for \$6,500 from Isabel Cryer, spouse of former Los Angeles mayor George E. Cryer, who only a few years earlier had placed racial restrictions on the property.⁷⁵ Actor and comedian turned casting agent Ben Carter moved into 2133 South Harvard Boulevard, which, actress and local activist Frances Williams explained, "was so grand that it became a showplace, and when anyone came to town, if they could they wanted to see Ben Carter's house."⁷⁶ Juan Tizol, Puerto Rican-born trombonist for the Duke Ellington and Harry James bands, who faced the same housing restrictions as blacks, and his wife Rose Tizol bought a home for \$7,575 at 2150 South Hobart Boulevard. Dr. William E. Bailey and Edith B. Bailey moved to 2115 South Hobart Boulevard, and Dr. W. Clyde Allen and Aulette D. Allen bought a home on 2069 South Oxford Avenue.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between Louise Beavers and Isabel G. Cryer, 1942, Book 19161, p. 221, RRCC; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes*, 63; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 259, 262. The covenants for Cryer's home are located in "Real Property Restrictions Agreement," Book 15896, p. 1, RRCC. For references to Beavers's West Jefferson home, on West Twenty-ninth, see *Los Angeles City Directory*, 1939; Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 152.

⁷⁶ Bogle, *Bright Boulevards*, 260; "To Hell with Bandannas," Frances Williams, interview by Karen Anne Mason and Richard Cándida Smith (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1997), UCLA/SC, 177.

⁷⁷ Deed of Trust between Juan Tizol, Rose Tizol, and Inez L. Syminton, 1942, Book 19414, pp. 321-322, RRCC. Deed of Trust between William E. Bailey and Edith B. Bailey, 1942, Book 19608, pp. 299-300, RRCC; Deed of Trust (Purchase Money) with Assignment of Rents between William E. Bailey, Edith B. Bailey, and Winifred W. Coberly, 1942, Book 19652, pp. 261-262, RRCC. Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between W. Clyde Allen, Aulette D. Allen, and Daisy Rose Montgomery, 1942, Book 19693, pp. 303-304, RRCC.

Moving into Sugar Hill indeed remained one part of the larger goal of defeating racial inequality. Like many professional blacks, Drs. J.A. and Vada Somerville sought more than housing equality. Born and raised by two educators in Jamaica, according to his autobiography J.A. grew up experiencing no racial prejudice in his hometown. His first encounter with discrimination occurred at age nineteen, in his first days in California, when he was denied restaurant service, lodging, and employment. But Somerville decided to persevere. He wrote,

I made this resolution, that I would work at any job that I could find, no matter how menial, until I saved enough money to enter an institution of higher learning to prepare myself for a trade or profession. I wanted to earn a place where I would not have to ask any other fellow for a job.⁷⁸

As the first African American student enrolled at the USC College of Dentistry, he withstood threats from his white classmates who initially demanded his dismissal. In 1906, Somerville finished at the top of his class and earned distinction as the first black graduate of the university. Vada became the second black graduate.⁷⁹ J.A. helped establish the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP in 1913, and Vada served as director of the branch's junior division; both became prominent leaders in the community. In the 1920s, they built a twenty-six-unit residential high-rise for low-income blacks, called La Vada Apartments, and constructed Hotel Somerville (renamed the Dunbar Hotel) on Central Avenue to host the national NAACP convention and provide first-rate accommodations for blacks. In 1943, the Somervilles moved from their home on Jefferson Boulevard and bought an estate (sitting on two lots) at 2104 South Harvard

⁷⁸ Somerville, *Man of Color*, 21-23, 29-31, 33-34, 49-51, 54-55.

⁷⁹ Somerville, *Man of Color*, 26, 63-67, 71, 97; Rasmussen, *L.A. Unconventional*, 124; J. Alexander and Vada Somerville, interview by Lawrence B. de Graaf, 10 June 1967, p. 23, 26, COPH.

Boulevard in Sugar Hill for \$12,000, directly across the street from the Kings.⁸⁰ But their battle against racial inequality had just begun.

Through the mid-1940s, more black professionals filed into Sugar Hill. Real estate agent and future city council official Courtland G. Mitchell and community activist Rosa Lee Mitchell, bandleader Noble Sissle, schoolteacher Senola Maxwell Green, musician Russell Smith, and many other African Americans bought homes in the area.⁸¹ Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans also moved to the area and faced the same obstacles and confrontations as blacks. At the time the Houstons moved into their home, in 1940, the United States Census accounted for 5 units occupied by people of color, or less than 1 percent of all homes in Sugar Hill. At the beginning of the next decade, through the central years of the legal battle between the white homeowners and black

⁸⁰ Somerville, *Man of Color*, 81, 122-127; Rasmussen, *L.A. Unconventional*, 125; Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 32; Letter from Vada J. Somerville to Robert W. Bagnall, 12 April 1924, NAACP/LA, UCLA/MR, Reel 1; Letter from Director of Branches to Vada J. Somerville, 15 May 1924, NAACP/LA, UCLA/MR, Reel 1. For documentation of the Somervilles' address on Jefferson Boulevard, see *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1938, 1939, 1940, and 1942. For the property deed on their house in West Adams Heights, see Deed of Trust with Assignment of Rents between Vada J. Somerville and Anne B. Shine, 1943, Book 20128, pp. 335-336, RRCC. The contract shows that the Somervilles paid \$10,000 for their home in 1942. In 1967, J.A. Somerville told de Graaf they paid \$12,000 for the home (Somerville, interview by de Graaf, 32).

⁸¹ The names of black residents in Sugar Hill are located in a number of sources, many of which deal with the court case filed against them. Three good articles include "Celebrities in Spotlight as 'Sugar Hill' Trial Begins," *California Eagle*, 6 December 1945, 4; Willis O. Tyler, "Defense Attorney Analyzes Historic 'Sugar Hill' Decision," *California Eagle*, 13 December 1945, 1, 24; "Negro Property Owners Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 December 1945, A2. For documents on Courtland and Rosa Lee Mitchell, see Deed of Trust, Courtland G. Mitchell and Rosa Lee Mitchell, 1945, Book 21647, pp. 167-168, RRCC; *Los Angeles City Directories*, 1943, 1945. (Before they moved to Sugar Hill, the Mitchells lived at 1132 East Fifty-seventh Street.) For photos of Noble Sissle's home, see Thurburn, "Restrictive Covenants," 5.

newcomers, the number of units inhabited by people of color had grown to 175, or nearly 23 percent of the total (Table 3).⁸²

While white homeowners worried that black in-migration would hurt the reputation of the neighborhood, property values actually rose after African Americans moved in. The fame and reputation of the black newcomers revived Sugar Hill as a fashionable and desirable area, and their renovations increased property values. When African American oil producer Mitchel Miles bought his estate, according to reporter Malcolm Thurburn, “The place had been allowed to run down completely through neglect.” But Miles “immediately had it brought up to date both to interior decoration and landscape gardening” by spending \$12,000 on restoration.⁸³ Properties previously used as private clubs, or sectioned off into guesthouses and rental units, were transformed into charming single-family homes. In 1950, when the average value of property stood at \$11,925 in the city of Los Angeles, homes on McDaniel’s block averaged \$20,333, almost three times the amount she paid in 1941. The properties on the block where the Houstons, the Clarks, and Louise Beavers lived reached an average of \$21,000.⁸⁴ Clearly, the black residents of Sugar Hill had transformed the status and value of the area.

⁸² *Sixteenth Census, 1940*, vol. 3, *Housing Block Statistics; United States Census of Housing: 1950, Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California*, vol. 5, pt. 100 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952). To get the population in West Adams Heights, I added the figures from the blocks within Western Avenue, Washington Boulevard, Normandie Avenue, Twenty-third Street, La Salle Avenue, and Adams Boulevard, from census tract 208. The census of 1940 and 1950 classified residents as “white” or “nonwhite.” According to the instructions of the 1940 census, “‘Nonwhite’ comprises Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, or other nonwhite race, and persons of mixed white and nonwhite parentage” (p. 4). The census of 1950 uses the same definition. The five “nonwhites” listed in the 1940 census may include employees of white residents and/or residents of different ethnic backgrounds, noted by McWilliams.

⁸³ Thurburn, “Restrictive Covenants,” 4. (See also photo of Miles’s home on p. 4).

⁸⁴ *United States Census of Housing: 1950*, vol. 5, pt. 100. Property values in tract 208, which included West Adams Heights plus several blocks on the southeast corner, averaged \$13,111.

The Fight Continues

Before African Americans in Sugar Hill could live freely and unconditionally in their homes, however, they faced an uphill battle against racial restrictive covenants in a court system that had defended housing restrictions for decades. Throughout the 1940s, their purchases remained insecure, and at any moment, black residents faced the loss of their property. White homeowners pulled their resources together and prepared to kick out any resident that failed to fit into their criteria. Many whites living in the area continued to believe that the courts would confirm the restrictive covenants and return the neighborhood to its rightful status as a center of the white elite. But the new residents of Sugar Hill were determined to fight back. They hired a team comprised of the leading civil rights attorneys in the city, held meetings out of their homes, and presented a united front with the goals of holding onto their most hard-earned possessions and putting an end to residential discrimination.

McDaniel lived on block 13 of the tract, and Houston—as well as the Clarks and Beavers—lived on block 12.

CHAPTER 2

SUGAR HILL GOES ON TRIAL

On April 15, 1943, the attorney of eight white homeowners in Sugar Hill filed a complaint in the Los Angeles Superior Court against eleven black residents requesting both declaratory relief to sustain a racial restrictive covenant and an injunction to evict the defendants from their properties. The white homeowners directed their case against Sydnetta Dones Smith, an African American woman who had bought the house at 2045 South Hobart Boulevard a few years after the seller signed a covenant prohibiting the occupancy of the property by people of color (except as domestic servants). Sidney P. Dones, a local black leader who gained prominence as a real estate developer, insurance agent, filmmaker, and actor, stood out among the other defendants charged with residing at Smith's house. The white plaintiffs alleged, "The use and occupancy...by the said Negro defendants...makes the plaintiffs' property undesirable to them, and others of the Caucasian race...and greatly injures the rental and sale value of the premises," an argument commonly used by covenanters around the country to justify their use of these contracts. Little over a month later, the defendants responded to the lawsuit by arguing that restrictive covenants violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and Article I, Section I of the California State Constitution, which protects the "inalienable rights" of its citizens. The complaint against Smith launched a series of

lawsuits in Sugar Hill that foreshadowed the legal demise of racial restrictive covenants across the country.¹

Two years after the eight white homeowners filed the claim, more whites in Sugar Hill inundated the court with similar charges against people of color who recently moved to the area. The famous defendants of the lawsuits brought national attention to the struggle against restrictive covenants. In a series of complaints throughout the mid-1940s, whites summoned to court celebrated black entertainers, including Hattie McDaniel, Louise Beavers, and Ethel Waters, as well as local civil rights leaders and successful entrepreneurs, such as Vada Somerville, Horace and Vera Clark, and Dr. William and Edith Bailey. Within several months, in the eight cases that emerged in Sugar Hill, a total of nineteen white plaintiffs sued over one hundred African Americans as well as some Asian and Hispanic Americans. While the plaintiffs demanded the legal sanction of restrictive covenants, and the expulsion of people of color from the neighborhood, the defendants argued that the racial restrictions ultimately violated their basic constitutional rights. In early December 1945, as the eight proceedings, consolidated under *Anderson v. Auseth* (1946), and commonly referred to as the “Sugar

¹ Ane Marie Anderson, et al. v. Earl F. Auseth, et al., Complaint (for Declaratory Relief and Injunction), L.A. No. 484808, Filed 15 April 1943, pp. 2-4, 9, LASC; Ane Marie Anderson, et al. v. Earl F. Auseth, et al., Answer, L.A. No. 484808, Filed 25 May 1943, pp. 4-5, LASC. See also “Real Property Restrictions Agreement,” Book 15896, p. 2, RRCC. For works on Sidney P. Dones, see Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 120-122; Frank Lincoln Mather, ed., *Who’s Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Memento Edition, 1915), 93; and Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Negro Universities Press, 1919), 205.

Hill case,” went to trial in the Los Angeles Superior Court, the campaign against restrictive covenants found its spokespeople.²

The Sugar Hill case served as an example of hundreds of lawsuits that emerged in California and across the country throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Court rulings in proceedings on restrictive covenants varied by district and state, but in the earliest cases around the turn of the twentieth century, several courts prohibited the use of racial restrictions on the grounds of the Fourteenth Amendment, which required all states to provide its citizens with the equal protection of law. Nevertheless, whites learned from their losses, reworked the language in restrictive covenants, and made an argument that convinced courts to endorse their contracts for decades thereafter. Their effort culminated in the United States Supreme Court case *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926), which sanctioned the use of racial restrictive covenants across the nation.³ Consequently, through the middle of the twentieth century, housing developers, real estate agents, and homeowners alike took advantage of their right to control the racial composition of their communities. They instituted occupancy clauses individually in their property deeds, and collaborated with their neighborhoods using legal contracts to maintain the racial, ethnic,

² The complaints, answers, demurrers, cross-complaints, and judgment to the cases are located under Ane Marie Anderson, et al. v. Earl F. Auseth, et al., L.A. No. 484808, Filed 19 June 1948, LASC. The eight proceedings include Anderson v. Auseth (L.A. No. 484808); Francis L. Smith v. Omelia Craigen Crawford, et al. (L.A. No. 500054); Victor J. Maricq, et al. v. James Sumner Pickett, Jr., et al. (L.A. No. 500055); Leila Daniels v. Hallie D. Johnson, et al. (L.A. No. 500056); Josefa H. Tolhurst v. Nellie B. Venerable, et al. (L.A. No. 500057); Edna I. White v. Russell T. Smith, et al. (L.A. No. 500058); Elmer C. Weber, et al. v. Arthur Twyne, Sr., et al. (L.A. No. 503450); and Fred B. McComas v. Truman R. Lott, et al. (L.A. No. 503976).

³ Clement Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 2-13; Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 202-205; Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 9-10.

and religious make up of their neighborhoods. As a result, communities across the country grew increasingly and deeply segregated.

In the 1940s, as the Second World War created a climate that accelerated black activism, Los Angeles emerged as a hotbed in the struggle against residential discrimination. The campaign against Nazism and Fascism overseas and the mass mobilization on the United States home front gave African Americans greater opportunities and inspired many to demand racial equality. The “Double V” campaign, spearheaded by the widely circulated black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*, inspired African Americans to fight for victory over the Axis Powers abroad and racial discrimination at home. As the nation’s defense industry expanded and catapulted Los Angeles into one of the leading manufacturing centers in the country, tens of thousands of African Americans sought out the growing employment opportunities by relocating to the city. Between 1940 and 1950, through the second Great Migration, the percentage of blacks in the city’s population more than doubled, from 4.2 percent to 8.7 percent.⁴

Preeminent African American sociologist Horace R. Cayton took note of the racial advances in a 1947 article for the *Negro Digest*, when he named Los Angeles one of the top ten best livable cities for African Americans. Measuring cities by their public services, cultural activities, job openings, and overall treatment of African Americans, Cayton found Los Angeles filled with opportunities to acquire an education, find

⁴ Lawrence B. de Graaf and Quintard Taylor, “Introduction: African Americans in California History, California in African American History,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 27-30, 33 (for statistics); Lawrence B. de Graaf, “Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1962), 131. For a discussion on the effects of the Great Migration on Los Angeles, see Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chapter 2.

employment, and own a house. But as the population swelled and racial discrimination intensified, most African Americans found themselves relegated to an increasingly rundown and congested Eastside. Indeed, Cayton recognized parts of black Los Angeles as “overcrowded, tense, and tawdry.”⁵ The local black elite found even more reason to put an end to housing discrimination and open up more neighborhoods to people of color.

While courts across the country saw a growing number of lawsuits over restrictive covenants throughout the 1940s, the Sugar Hill case not only raised public awareness of the fight, but also took a major step toward a national legal victory in the long campaign against the racial contracts. As reporters from leading newspapers and journals across the country took notice of the Sugar Hill case, prominent African American entertainers, professionals, and community leaders stepped into the forefront of the legal campaign. The *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *Chicago Defender*, *Time* magazine, and the NAACP’s *Crisis*, as well as local black and white-owned newspapers, kept readers informed of the Los Angeles story.⁶ But more importantly, the judge’s surprising verdict in the case helped set the tone for subsequent proceedings and foreshadowed the legal demise of restrictive covenants. While courts across the country refused to acknowledge

⁵ Horace R. Cayton, “America’s 10 Best Cities for Negroes,” *Negro Digest* 5 (October 1947): 4-7, 9-10.

⁶ A number of newspapers in California reported the case, including the *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), *California Eagle* (Los Angeles), *Los Angeles Sentinel* (Los Angeles), and *People’s World* (San Francisco). For examples of articles in other national media outlets, see “U.N. Cited by Negroes in Appeal for Homes,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1946, 38; George Streators, “Negro Home Needs Rise as Coast Issue,” *New York Times*, 27 April 1947, 9; Lawrence Lamarr, “Film Stars Face Eviction from West Coast Homes,” *Chicago Defender*, 7 October 1944, 1; “Victory on Sugar Hill,” *Time*, 17 December 1945; Loren Miller, “Covenants in the Bear Flag State,” *Crisis* 53.5 (May 1946), 138-140, 155; “Negroes Cite U.N. to End Segregation,” *New York Herald*, ca. 1946, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5, The Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955 (Hereafter cited as Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5); Loren Miller, “Supreme Court Covenant Decision – An Analysis,” *Crisis* 55.9 (September 1948), 265-266, 285.

that restrictive covenants violated the Fourteenth Amendment, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Thurmond Clarke in the Sugar Hill case saw the contracts as an unequivocal infringement upon citizens' constitutional rights. Two years before the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) declared restrictive covenants legally unenforceable, Judge Clarke risked his reputation and took a stand against housing discrimination.

The Establishment of Legally Sanctioned Housing Discrimination

Residential segregation in the United States occurred by no accident. White southerners constructed a system backed by the United States Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that segregated blacks and whites in nearly every aspect of life, from water fountains and department store dressing rooms to public transportation and public education. The court-ordered authorization to create "separate but equal" facilities and institutions never developed into a fair system, and blacks in the South lived in a profoundly disproportionate society that continually hindered them from advancing beyond their means.⁷ While *Plessy* principally applied to southern society, white northerners and westerners also sought to separate themselves from those of a different race, ethnicity, religion, or class. As the North and West developed and expanded through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whites increasingly used the legal system to keep people of color at a distance, and housing served as a key component to ensure that separation. White policymakers, real estate developers, and homeowners

⁷ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

altered old techniques and formulated new methods to convince courts to endorse the measures that controlled the racial, ethnic, and class composition of neighborhoods.⁸

The earliest reported lawsuits in California on racial land restrictions protected the rights of all state residents. Two of the major cases—one on districting (later known as zoning) and the other on deed restrictions—illustrated the various legal tools used to segregate. In the late nineteenth century, policymakers in San Francisco passed a resolution that called for the removal of all Chinese inhabitants from “Chinatown,” located in the center of the city, to an isolated district “set aside for slaughterhouses, tallow factories, [and] hog factories,” as one scholar has explained. Any Chinese resident living or conducting work outside of the designated area, the ordinance stated, would face up to six months in prison. Before receiving approval from the courts, city officials began to implement the ordinance and arrest Chinese residents. But the federal circuit court intervened, and in the case *In re Lee Sing* (1890), denied San Francisco the right to carry out the ordinance on the grounds that it violated the Fourteenth Amendment.⁹ Another lawsuit arose in a Ventura County community when a white homeowner violated a deed restriction by leasing property to Chinese tenants. The restriction, which was placed on the property by the previous owner, forbade the sale or rental of land to anyone of Chinese descent. But in *Gandolfo v. Hartman* (1892), a federal circuit court judge ruled that the deed restriction violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In the opinion, the

⁸ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 2.

⁹ *In re Lee Sing*, 43 Fed. 359 C.C.N.D. Cal. (1890). See also Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1994), 224 (and all of chapter 9); C.W.Y. “Enforcement of Race Restrictive Covenants and the Constitution,” *Virginia Law Review* 34.3 (April 1948), 307; and Loren Miller, *The Petitioners: The Story of the Supreme Court of the United States and the Negro* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 246.

judge argued that “a very narrow construction of the constitutional amendment” might sanction deed restrictions, but “certainly not in a court of equity of the United States.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, as the courts defended the constitutional rights of state residents, whites found other ways to manipulate the legal system and prevent people of color from moving to their neighborhoods.

In the early twentieth century, use-based zoning laws became an increasingly popular legal measure to demarcate the urban landscape, and Los Angeles emerged at the forefront of the movement. Land-use laws grew out of the City Beautiful movement in the Progressive era when city planners sought to bring order and beauty to what they saw as chaotic and immoral urban environments. Attempting to market Los Angeles as an attractive city and lure homebuyers to the West Coast, the Los Angeles Realty Board (LARB) emerged as the driving force to clean up empty lots, limit building height, and implement land-use laws. In 1908, policymakers passed an unprecedented citywide zoning ordinance that established seven “industrial districts” for manufacturing centers and workers’ homes mainly along the Los Angeles River on the Eastside of the city, and the remaining area as “residence districts” for low-density housing, located largely on the Westside. While policymakers used zoning laws to secure land for specific purposes, they also had underlying motives to segregate the urban landscape by class and race.

W.L. Pollard, an attorney for LARB and the California Real Estate Association (CREA),

¹⁰ Gandolfo v. Hartman et al., 49 Fed. 181 C.C.S.D. Cal. (1892). See also Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 5-6; Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 217; Miller, *Petitioners*, 251; C.W.Y, “Enforcement of Race Restrictive Covenants,” 307-308; “Real Property, Restrictive Covenants, Prohibition against Use or Occupation by Racial Groups,” *Virginia Law Review* 33.5 (September 1947): 659; D. O. McGovney, “Racial Residential Segregation by State Court Enforcement of Restrictive Agreements, Covenants or Conditions in Deeds is Unconstitutional,” *California Law Review* 33.1 (March 1945): 7.

made clear that “racial hatred played no small part” in the decision to implement zoning laws. Land-use restrictions encouraged class and racial segregation by demarcating single-family communities that favored affluent white homebuyers, and low-income dwellings near the industrial workplace for the ethnically diverse working-class. Through the 1910s and 1920s, the California courts endorsed use-based zoning, and policymakers continued their efforts by expanding the laws and establishing the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission to regulate land-use and ensure suburban growth.¹¹

The NAACP sought to outlaw zoning laws, and while it achieved some success, land-use restrictions in the mid-1920s found judicial sanction in the United States Supreme Court. The Louisville, Kentucky case *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917) indeed found race-based zoning laws to be unconstitutional. Robert Buchanan, a white property owner, filed a claim against William Warley, president of the local NAACP and a black buyer, for refusing to fulfill their sales agreement and make payment on a lot covered by a Louisville zoning ordinance that prohibited blacks from residing in the white area. Representing Buchanan, in one of the first major legal victories for the national NAACP, the United States Supreme Court struck down the race-based zoning law on the grounds that it infringed upon the property rights of Buchanan under the due process clause of the

¹¹ Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 83-83 (quote), chapter 4; M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 94, 136, 142, 153, 181; Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 238-240, 263, 309; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 241-242; Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890: A History Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Institute of Planners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 76.

Fourteenth Amendment. Yet the judgment failed to stop the spread of use-oriented zoning laws across the country.¹² Nearly two decades after Los Angeles passed the first comprehensive land-use ordinance, the United States Supreme Court in *Euclid v. Ambler* (1926) put to rest the debate over the constitutionality of zoning and sanctioned the practice. The conflict arose when Euclid, Ohio passed a land-use ordinance, which restricted the Ambler Realty Company from completing its industrial development. In 1924, the federal district court invoked *Buchanan* and declared the ordinance unconstitutional. But two years later, in an appeal, the United States Supreme Court reversed the judgment, finding that zoning laws represented a valid use of municipal police power that protected “public welfare.” Within ten years after the decision, eighty-five percent of the nation’s cities demarcated their urban landscapes with zoning ordinances.¹³

In the early twentieth century, white covenanters also had to seek approval of a judicial system that initially barred the use of the racial contracts. As cities increasingly

¹² *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917). See also Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 79-83, 142-144; Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 187-188; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 3-4, 51-52; Miller, *The Petitioners*, 246-251; Martha A. Lees, “Preserving Property Values? Preserving Proper Homes? Preserving Privilege?: The Pre-Euclid Debate over Zoning for Exclusively Private Residential Areas, 1916-1926,” *University of Pittsburgh Law Review* 56 (Winter 1994): fn. 7; McGovney, “Racial Residential Segregation,” 30-33.

¹³ *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926). David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 81-87. For statistics on the increasing use of land-use zoning ordinances in cities, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass*, 242. One year before the *Euclid* decision, a portion of Los Angeles’s comprehensive zoning ordinance was put to test when George and Francis Miller tried to build a four-family apartment building in an area zoned for single- and two-family dwellings. But in *Miller v. Board of Public Works of the City of Los Angeles*, the California Supreme Court upheld the ordinance. See *Miller v. Board of Public Works of the City of Los Angeles*, 195 Cal. 477, 234 P. 381 (1925).

implemented use-based zoning laws, white real estate developers and homeowners bound themselves and their successors to racial restrictions that forbade people of color from occupying their properties, oftentimes for decades thereafter. But in one of the earliest cases heard in Los Angeles, the court prohibited the use of restrictive covenants. When Homer Garrott, an African American police officer, bought a home on West Fifty-seventh Street in a subdivision covered by racial restrictions, housing developers Title Guarantee and Trust Company filed a grievance with the Los Angeles Superior Court accusing Garrott of violating its restrictive covenant, which prohibited the right to “lease or sell” the property “to any person of African, Chinese or Japanese descent.” Without hearing the case before the bench, the Los Angeles Superior Court in *Title Guarantee & Trust Company v. Garrott* (1915) granted Garrott’s objection of the claim and declared the restrictive covenant invalid. The court found that the covenant infringed upon land conveyance rights protected under the California civil code. The plaintiffs appealed in 1919, and while local black attorney Willis O. Tyler represented the defendants, the California Supreme Court concurred with the judgment.¹⁴ But the fight against covenants had only begun. White housing developers and homeowners in California learned from the verdict and set out to reword restrictive covenants to make the documents legally permissible.

Over the course of the 1920s, white housing developers and homeowners mastered the language needed to attain judicial sanction of restrictive covenants. Five months after *Title Guarantee*, the California Supreme Court heard another appeals case

¹⁴ *Title Guarantee & Trust Co. v. Garrott*, 42 Cal. App. 152 (1919). The Los Angeles Superior Court cited Cal. Civil Code § 711 in the verdict. See also Willis O. Tyler, “Defense Attorney Analyzes Historic ‘Sugar Hill’ Decision,” *California Eagle*, 13 December 1945, 1, 24; and Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 153-155.

on racial restrictions. The Los Angeles Investment Company, real estate developers and covenanters, filed a complaint against Alfred Gary, an African American, for violating the covenant bound to the property that Gary recently purchased. The Los Angeles Superior Court granted Gary's objection to the claim by citing the California civil code's protection against alienation in land conveyance. But in the appeal, the California Supreme Court reversed the judgment. The court supported the original ruling on the first condition of the covenant, which stated, "The property shall not be sold, leased, or rented to any persons other than of the Caucasian race." Yet in the second condition, which specified, "No person or persons other than of the Caucasian race shall be permitted to *occupy* the property," the California Supreme Court found no grounds that restricted the real estate developers from deciding on the use of the land (italics added). In other words, the court asserted that while the Fourteenth Amendment provided citizens equal protection of the law in state actions, it included no stipulations against private actions. Therefore, in the appeals verdict of *Los Angeles Investment Company v. Gary* (1919), the appellate court granted Gary permission to own the property, but the defendant had no right to live in his home.¹⁵ Whites had succeeded in creating a legal loophole. Immediately following the decision, with the encouragement from realty boards, white homeowners added occupancy clauses to their restrictive covenants.¹⁶

Across Los Angeles in the 1920s, as whites increasingly covered their properties with covenants, blacks became more limited in their options to live in unrestricted

¹⁵ Los Angeles Investment Co. v. Gary, 181 Cal. 680 (1919). See also Flammng, *Bound for Freedom*, 155-156, 218-219; Miller, *The Petitioners*, 252; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 18; Tyler, "Defense Attorney," 1, 24; McGovney, "Racial Residential Segregation," 8-9.

¹⁶ Flammng, *Bound for Freedom*, 219-221; Tyler, "Defense Attorney," 1, 24.

neighborhoods. In 1926, two years before the California Supreme Court handed down its decision that forbade blacks from living west of Cimarron Street in the Crestmore tract of the West Jefferson district, white covenanters also tightened their grip in the Central Avenue district. In 1905, when white landowner Lulu Letteau set out to subdivide the Entwistle tract, a section of the Central Avenue district, she attached restrictive covenants on 180 lots situated on more than three blocks of land. For two decades, however, the covenants remained unenforced. By 1907, the first blacks settled in the area, and by the mid-1920s, African Americans made up roughly half of the community. That changed in 1924 when African American couple William and Eunice Long put a down payment on a small bungalow in the neighborhood. The Longs discovered the restrictive covenant on their property at the time of purchase, but since blacks had been living in the community for years, their attorney and Los Angeles NAACP head counsel Burton Ceruti advised the couple to make the purchase. Days later, however, the Letteau heirs filed a lawsuit against the Longs. The stress of the case took a toll on the defense team. Both William and Eunice Long checked themselves into a hospital. William never recovered and passed away. In a major setback for civil rights, the Los Angeles Superior Court in the 1926 *Letteau v. Long* case upheld restrictive covenants. Less than one year later, Ceruti also died unexpectedly of heart failure. While Eunice Long lost her home, the Letteau heirs pursued lawsuits against more black homeowners in the tract.¹⁷

Also in 1926, due to the determination of white covenanters in Washington, D.C., the United States Supreme Court gave its sanction to racial restrictive covenants. In the

¹⁷ Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 51; Flammng, *Bound for Freedom*, 221-225; George H. Letteau et al. v. Pauline Ellis, 122 Cal. App. 584 (1932).

early 1920s, about one year after Irene Corrigan and twenty-nine other white residents of a Washington, D.C. suburb agreed to cover their properties with a restrictive covenant that prohibited the sale, lease, rental, or occupancy of blacks in the neighborhood for twenty-one years, Corrigan entered into a contract to transfer her property to Helen Curtis, an African American woman, and her physician husband. Angered by the breach of contract, John Buckley, another white resident and covenanter in the neighborhood, requested an injunction from the trial court to stop the sale of the property, which the court authorized. With the help of their attorney James A. Cobb, a graduate of Howard Law School and head of the NAACP legal committee (who also served on the *Buchanan* case), Corrigan and Curtis petitioned the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals to reconsider the ruling of the trial court on the grounds of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. But again, in *Corrigan v. Buckley*, the court struck down their argument and ruled in favor of the plaintiff.¹⁸

Unwilling to give up after the judgment of the appellate court, Cobb turned for help to the attorneys in the national office of the NAACP. The national NAACP had been fighting against residential discrimination since the organization's formation in 1909, achieved its first major legal victory against race-based zoning in the 1917 *Buchanan* case, and continued to battle in the courts through the 1920s. But *Corrigan* became the first major attempt by the NAACP to end racial restrictive covenants in the United States Supreme Court. The NAACP's legal counsel, headed by Louis Marshall and Moorfield Storey, drafted an argument that stated the use of restrictive covenants

¹⁸ Corrigan et al. v. Buckley, 55 App. D.C. 30, 299 F. 899 (1924). See also Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 17-19; Mark Robert Schneider, "We Return Fighting": *The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 286-287; Miller, *The Petitioners*, 252-253; and McGovney, "Racial Residential Segregation," 34-36.

violated public policy under the Fifth (right to due process), Thirteenth (abolishment of slavery), and Fourteenth Amendments (equal protection of law) of the United States Constitution. But in 1926, the same year that the United States Supreme Court in *Euclid* sanctioned use-based zoning laws, the Court found that the NAACP lacked sufficient evidence to further defend its case against restrictive covenants. The Court perceived restrictive covenants as private contracts entered into by private citizens, rather than state measures that violated public policy. “None of these Amendments,” the Court claimed, “prohibit private individuals from entering into contracts...of their property.”¹⁹ The decision was a blow to the NAACP and the fight against housing discrimination around the country. In two major cases during the same year, the highest court in the country endorsed whites’ efforts to continue to segregate through use-based zoning laws and racial restrictive covenants.

Through the subsequent decades, federal housing programs exacerbated residential discrimination. The reforms made in the first years of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal paid little heed to the needs of African Americans, but the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) especially encouraged urban segregation. Created in 1933, HOLC became the first federal agency in the Great Depression aimed to improve the housing market. While it granted low-income mortgages to homeowners in need, the agency institutionalized “redlining,” a discriminatory ratings system based on four categories that ranked the risks

¹⁹ Corrigan et al. v. Buckley, 271 U.S. 323 (1926). See also Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 50-54; Schneider, “We Return,” 287-290; Miller, *The Petitioners*, 253-256; Klarman, *From Jim Crow*, 144-146; William B. Hixson, Jr., *Moorfield Storey and the Abolitionist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 142-144; and Gregg D. Crane, *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter 5.

of making loans. Areas on HOLC maps highlighted in the color red, the lowest rating, were mostly comprised of older communities with racially and ethnically diverse populations, and almost never got loans. The HOLC maps also had far-reaching effects as private lending institutions in the 1930s and 1940s used the same ratings system when making loans. In 1934, President Roosevelt also set up the FHA to stimulate residential construction by insuring loans from private lenders for home building and sales. The FHA took no part in construction, but the agency set guidelines on its insurance policies that privileged the building of single-family homes (rather than multiple-use dwellings), favored new properties (instead of modernizing rentals), and offered higher insurance policies to homes in financially secure areas. Moreover, the FHA's *Underwriting Manual* advised contractors to maintain the value of their homes by covering their properties with racial restrictive covenants.²⁰ Black-owned insurance companies and real estate agencies, such as Golden State Mutual, attempted to offset the FHA by providing African Americans with mortgage loans and insurance policies, but they lacked the power to end residential discrimination.²¹

For over two decades after *Euclid* and *Corrigan*, cities across the United States grew increasingly segregated, and most urban blacks found themselves relegated to

²⁰ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass*, 195-210; Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 51-55; Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation," *Journal of Urban History* 29.4 (May 2003): 402-407. See also Dan Immergluck, *Credit to the Community: Community Reinvestment and Fair Lending Policy in the United States* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 92-96. For the impact of the New Deal on African Americans, see Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²¹ Josh Sides, "A Simple Quest for Dignity: African American Los Angeles Since World War II," in *City of Promise: Race & Historical Change in Los Angeles*, eds. Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2006), 120-121; George A. Beavers, interview by R. Donald Brown, 15 October 1966, COPH, 11.

ghettos. African Americans continued to dispute the constitutionality of use-oriented zoning laws and racial restrictive covenants by moving into restricted areas and pursuing lawsuits against covenanters. In 1927, after the Los Angeles NAACP lost the *Letteau* case, local black attorney Willis O. Tyler insisted, “The fight against residential segregation has in fact just begun.”²² But for more than a decade thereafter, the country’s lower courts deferred to legal precedent in the *Euclid* and *Corrigan* verdicts, and the United States Supreme Court refused altogether to hear any case on restrictive covenants.²³ As northern and western cities continued to expand, and whites increasingly implemented discriminatory measures to segregate the urban landscape, people of color became isolated in increasingly overcrowded and rundown neighborhoods. In Los Angeles, the flourishing Central Avenue district of the 1910s and 1920s suffered an acute housing shortage in the 1940s. Urban blacks with the financial means and fortitude found no other option but to challenge restrictive covenants and move westward into white neighborhoods. Some people of color faced little resistance, but most risked their lives and contended with continual verbal threats and physical violence.²⁴ Yet they

²² Willis O. Tyler, “The N.A.A.C.P. and the Work for 1927,” *California Eagle*, 14 January 1927, NAACP/LA, UCLA/MR, Reel 3.

²³ For examples of more cases in California that upheld restrictive covenants see, Janss Investment Co. v. Walden, 196 Cal. 753, 239 Pac. 34 (1925); W. B. Wayt v. George Patee, 205 Cal. 46, 269 Pac. 660 (1928); and Shideler v. Roberts, 69 Cal. App 2nd 549, 160 P. 2nd 67 (1945). See C.W.Y., “Enforcement,” pp. 308-310, for more references to cases upholding restrictive covenants around the country.

²⁴ NAACP attorney Loren Miller explained that some of the devices blacks employed especially in the 1930s to invalidate restrictive covenants in court and move into neighborhoods of their choice. See Loren Miller, interview by Lawrence B. de Graaf, 29 April 1967, COPH, 25 (second side of tape). One of the most documented cases happened to Dr. Ossian Sweet and his family when they moved into an all-white, wealthy suburb of Detroit, Michigan in the mid-1920s. Sweet and ten other African Americans were acquitted of murder after they defended themselves against a mob that attacked the Sweets’ home. See Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice*.

pursued the fight in hopes that one day they would reap the rewards, enjoy their full right to property, and make available to other people of color the same opportunities.

Housing Crisis in the Second World War

With the federal administration's expansion of the defense industry in World War II, Los Angeles became one of the foremost industrial manufacturing hubs in the nation. California became a leading center in aircraft and shipbuilding, and Los Angeles alone received over \$11 billion worth of contracts for war production. African Americans benefited from the wartime exigencies, but only after they mobilized for equal protection. Pressured by A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, President Roosevelt passed Executive Order 8802 in 1941, which prohibited discrimination in national defense work. Tens of thousands of African Americans migrated to the city to seize the promises of the policy, find employment, and improve their incomes. By 1944, the defense industries in Los Angeles employed over 30,000 African Americans. No longer having to settle for domestic or janitorial work, blacks found skilled positions as riveters, welders, and machine-operators. Nevertheless, as the city expanded, new challenges arose for people of color. Compounded by the rise in population and legal sanction of housing discrimination, Los Angeles suffered an acute housing shortage that left thousands of African Americans living in squalid conditions.²⁵

²⁵ For works on Los Angeles as a wartime manufacturing center, see Josh Sides, "Battle on the Home Front: African American Shipyard Workers in World War II, *California History* (Fall 1996): 251; Sides, "A Simple Quest for Dignity," 111; and de Graaf and Taylor, "Introduction," 27. For a discussion on A. Philip Randolph and Executive Order 8802, see Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 47-50, 89-91. Randolph's threat serves as one of many examples of the efforts by blacks against racial discrimination in the 1940s. African Americans around the country won steps toward the desegregation of the armed forces. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded in 1942, used nonviolent direct action in protests. Membership in the NAACP and the

Despite the progress made toward more equal treatment in the defense industry, the few areas available to African Americans in Los Angeles became increasingly overcrowded. The population of Central Avenue, the city's foremost black area since the early twentieth century, grew from 45,000 in 1940 to more than 70,000 by 1946. As more blacks moved into the area, they challenged the racial boundaries of the district and found housing in the adjacent communities. Upon the 1942 federal order that enforced the removal of Japanese Americans on the West Coast to internment camps in the interior West, African Americans migrated into the largely Asian American enclave of Little Tokyo on the northern end of Central Avenue. As the population of this area jumped from 30,000 before internment to roughly 80,000 in mid-1944, African Americans established a host of businesses and churches in the area, turning Little Tokyo into "Bronzeville." The multiracial, blue-collar community of Watts on the southern end of Central Avenue also saw a migration of blacks to the area. Long before it incorporated into Los Angeles in 1926, the sleepy enclave offered affordable, unrestricted housing near the reliable mass transit system to a diverse population comprised of blacks, whites, Asians, and Hispanics. Alongside the influx of blacks through the war, the population of Watts jumped from 16,955 in 1940 to 25,799 in 1950. Still, African Americans remained

Urban League also rose throughout the decade. See Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 11-12. For works on the second Great Migration and its impact on Los Angeles, see de Graaf and Taylor, "Introduction," 27-30, 33 (for statistics); de Graaf, "Negro Migration," 131; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, chapter 2. Historian Marilyn S. Johnson also examines the impact of World War II and the second Great Migration on northern California. See Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

relegated to the Eastside, as discriminatory housing practices prohibited most blacks from moving away from the area.²⁶

Consequently, these overcrowded Eastside neighborhoods quickly fell into disrepair. Rather than taking responsibility to maintain or improve the quality of their properties, white property owners in fact exploited the critical need for housing in the city as well as the financial constraints of low-income blacks. Many white property owners on the Eastside partitioned their houses and apartments into even smaller living spaces, inflated rental fees, and fit as many tenants into their property as possible. In effect, tenants had to share rooms with extended family members, friends, or strangers. The small living spaces provided little space for themselves or their belongings, and roommates had to rotate turns sleeping in bed. As property owners continued to neglect their properties, apartments became increasingly dilapidated, unhygienic, and disease-ridden. Renters lived without adequate space, proper ventilation, or a functioning sanitation system. “In place after place,” the *Nation* reported on Bronzeville, “children lived in windowless rooms, amid peeling plaster, rats, and the flies that gathered thick around food.” Typhus, tuberculosis, meningitis, and other diseases thrived in these living environments. African Americans and other people of color who lacked the financial resources or good fortune to find housing had to make homes out of abandoned

²⁶ Lawrence de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path: The Impact of World War II on Discrimination against African Americans in the West,” *Journal of the West* 35.1 (January 1996): 29-30; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 42-44, 158-161; Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 199-203; Patricia Rae Adler, “Watts: From Suburb to Black Ghetto” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1977), chapter 10; Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2005), 13. See also Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

businesses, automobiles, garages, sheds, chicken coops, and other makeshift shelters.

Others slept in train stations or on the streets. “By such means,” the *Nation* forewarned in 1945, “We create protest, and hatred that strikes out blindly. We cause the desire for retaliation to mount until it finds release.”²⁷

By the 1940s, as the political climate of Los Angeles shifted toward a Democratic majority, African Americans gradually helped to elect more liberal-minded officials who sought to undo political corruption and end racial discrimination. Before 1932, Los Angeles was a largely Republican city in the primarily Republican state of California. African Americans had favored the Party of Lincoln because of its legacy of combating Confederate Democrats and passing the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. But from the 1920s, as the Republican Party supported big business, limited regulation, and lowered taxes on the rich, African Americans began to question their party affiliation. Then in 1932, as a result of the landslide election of Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt, according to one observer, the political climate of Los Angeles underwent a “dramatic change.” Through the 1930s, Democratic candidates in California won increasingly more seats in the State Assembly and Senate, and in 1936, achieved a majority in the State Assembly and chose the speaker. Los Angeles also voted more Democrats into office. In 1934, African American Democrat Augustus Hawkins defeated Republican Frederick Roberts in the election for the district that included Central Avenue. Midwest-born, reform-minded, white Democrat John Anson Ford also gained a seat as Los Angeles County Supervisor. His efforts to clean up local

²⁷ Dorothy W. Baruch, “Sleep Comes Hard,” *Nation*, 27 January 1945, 95-96; Charles B. Spaulding, “Housing Problems of Minority Groups in Los Angeles County,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 248 (November 1946): 221-222; de Graaf, “Significant Steps,” 30; de Graaf and Taylor, “Introduction,” 29-30.

government, improve education, advance the arts, end racial discrimination, and promote positive race relations, particularly through his Commission on Interracial Progress, which he established in 1944, made Ford a leading liberal figure throughout the subsequent decades.²⁸

The mayoral election of Fletcher Bowron in 1938 also reflected the shifting political climate. Bowron, a Democrat, came to office in a recall election against Mayor Frank Shaw, a centrist Republican who began his second term in office under a cloud of scandals and facing a well-organized reform movement determined to expose his transgressions. Bowron served as mayor during a transformative period of Los Angeles's history. Under his leadership from 1938 to 1953, historian Tom Sitton explained, Los Angeles evolved from a "regional center to a national powerhouse." Bowron facilitated this change by rooting out corruption from the Shaw administration and implementing reforms to improve the police department, public works, health department, and other civil service agencies. Before the Second World War, Bowron showed little concern for the racial issues plaguing the city. But in 1943, as the housing shortage swelled, the mayor took a stand and appealed to the federal government for financial assistance. Bowron argued that "deplorable" housing conditions were a federal problem, caused by the influx of migrants seeking employment in the defense industries, and, he asked

²⁸ Robert Walker Kenny, "My First Forty Years in California Politics, 1922-1962," interview by Doyce B. Nunis (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1964), UCLA/SC, 82 (quote); Douglas Flamming, "Becoming Democrats: Liberal Politics and the African American Community in Los Angeles, 1930-1965," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 279-290. Later, the Commission on Interracial Progress adopted the name the Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations, and then the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. See also John Anson Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1961).

President Roosevelt to send funds for the construction of homes for the city's growing population. The mayor implemented policies over his tenure that supported the construction of more affordable housing for people of color in the city.²⁹

In an attempt to alleviate the housing problem and ease racial tensions, Bowron also worked across racial lines with local civil rights activists and organizations. As race riots erupted across the country in early 1943, Bowron partnered with the increasingly influential Los Angeles Negro Victory Committee, a coalition of prominent, local black leaders formed in 1941 that set forth an ambitious agenda to fight against racial discrimination in housing, employment, and the armed forces, to obtain more black political representation, to end racial violence, and to attain better educational opportunities. Similar to the objectives of the Double "V" campaign, the local victory committee used its support of the war as leverage to pressure local authorities to meet its demands. Furthermore, when local Urban League director Floyd Covington stepped down from the board of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, Bowron appointed long-time community activist and cofounder of Golden State Mutual George Beavers to the position. Formed in the New Deal, initially backed by African American State Assemblyman Augustus Hawkins, and supported by local and federal funds, the city housing authority claimed slum areas through eminent domain and built affordable public housing on the sites for city dwellers who fell below the poverty line. Beavers served on the board as the sole black member between 1946 and 1962, rising to chair in his last nine years in the agency. While gang violence and drug trafficking marred public

²⁹ Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Bowron's Urban Reform Revival, 1938-1953* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), xv, chapter 1; 70; "President Asked by Mayor to Aid Negro Housing," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August 1943, A2; "Officials Move to Ease Acute House Shortage," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 1943, A3.

housing and its reputation, in the mid-twentieth century, Beavers found the projects an asset that “enabled” low-income city dwellers “to have decent housing.”³⁰

Despite local and federal efforts to appease the housing crisis, residential discrimination persisted, and the communities available to blacks remained limited. At the end of the war, as Japanese Americans returned from internment and moved back to Little Tokyo, African Americans had to readjust to the demographic shift. While rumors of an impending riot and allegations of the robbery of a Japanese American couple by an African American fueled conflicts between African and Japanese Americans, most residents of Little Tokyo/Bronzeville took the advice of local black leaders and remained respectful of one another. Nevertheless, as the Japanese reclaimed their properties and reestablished their leadership in the community, blacks and Japanese had to compete for housing, and many Japanese evicted black merchants and tenants from their properties.³¹

³⁰ Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed*, 69-70; Spaulding, “Housing Problems,” 222; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 135-144; Flammung, *Bound for Freedom*, 354-355; Beavers, interview by Brown, 17-32; George Beavers, “In Quest of Full Citizenship,” interview by Ranford B. Hopkins, (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1985), UCLA/SC, 140-153. For works on race riots that erupted in 1943, see Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, & Riot in Wartime L.A* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas, 1984); Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Abu-Lughod, *Race*; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Dominic J. Capeci, *The Harlem Riot of 1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in World War II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

³¹ Wesley Marx, “The Negro Community: ‘A Better Chance,’” *Los Angeles* 3 (March 1962): 39; R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), 29; Clora Bryant and others, eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 310; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 164-173; Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112-116.

On the southern end of Central Avenue, Watts faced its own set of issues. By the end of the 1940s, the previously diverse community had become solidly black and increasingly neglected. While the black population of Watts rose from around 31 percent in 1940 to 70 percent in 1950, defense industries closed down, joblessness increased, whites moved away from the area, blacks had no political representation, and racial discrimination endured.³²

Mayor Bowron failed to alleviate either the housing shortage or the racial and ethnic tensions in the city. He ardently supported the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, refused to help the internees make a smooth transition back to Los Angeles at the end of the war, and fueled interethnic tensions by helping spread rumors of an imminent riot in Little Tokyo upon Japanese return. Bowron showed the same disregard for Mexican Americans. When bands of soldiers and sailors raided Mexican American neighborhoods and attacked *pachucos*, or Mexican American youth dressed in Zoot Suits, in the summer of 1943, Bowron defended the actions of the police and sympathized with the rioters. The mayor's indifference to the victims of the riots indeed fueled the campaign against racial discrimination.³³ Affluent blacks may have suffered

³² Adler, "Watts," 310 (for statistics), chapter 5 (transition during World War II). See also Keith E. Collins, *Black Los Angeles: The Maturing of the Ghetto, 1940-1950* (Saratoga, CA: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980). Lawrence B. de Graaf, in "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," traces early patterns of the ghetto beginning in the late nineteenth century (See *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (August 1970): 323-352). Compton, located south of Watts, became predominantly black in the 1950s. But the area did not deteriorate into a ghetto until the late 1970s. Another set of factors including "white flight," deterioration of the business district, annexation politics, deindustrialization, loss of blue-collar jobs, and the emergence of street gangs gave rise to slum conditions. See Josh Sides, "Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and a Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb," *American Quarterly* 56.3 (2004): 583-605.

³³ Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed*, 71; Kevin Allen Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles: Racial Ideology and World War II* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 157, 159; Scott Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds*, 164-169. For works on the Mexican American experience in

less from the housing crisis than low-income blacks, but they also faced residential discrimination. While the Sugar Hill case dealt with one neighborhood, it represented a microcosm of the fight against residential segregation in Los Angeles and across the nation. Winning the case meant defeating restrictive covenants and opening up more neighborhoods to all residents, no matter their racial, ethnic, religious, or economic background.

“A Decision of Great Moment”

On December 5, 1945, after several years of fighting and preparing for trial, the Sugar Hill case convened in the Los Angeles Superior Court to settle arguments on the constitutionality of racial restrictive covenants. Black and white-run newspapers in Los Angeles and around the country reported the events as they unfolded. On the first day of the trial, roughly 250 litigants and spectators filed into the “packed courtroom,” according to one account, to observe the hearing and causes célèbres.³⁴ For two hours, the lawyers presented their preliminary arguments to the court. African American attorneys Willis O. Tyler and Loren Miller, both of who had been heading the fight against restrictive covenants in the local courts, represented the defendants. Leading the defense, Miller found that introduction of evidence or testimony in court remained futile because restrictive covenants not only defined racial identity on illogical and unscientific terms, but also and ultimately violated the Constitutions of California and the United

Los Angeles and the Zoot Suit riots, see Obregón Pagán, *Murder*; Mazón, *Zoot-Suit Riots*; and Escobar, *Race*.

³⁴ “Celebrities in Spotlight as ‘Sugar Hill’ Trial Begins,” *California Eagle*, 6 December 1945, 4. See also “Negro Property Owners Protest,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 December 1945, A2; and “Victory on Sugar Hill,” *Time*, 17 December 1945.

States. After hearing opening arguments, in a rare turn of events, Judge Thurmond Clarke adjourned the proceedings and went with the attorneys to investigate “and determine the present status” of Sugar Hill.³⁵ What happened in the next twenty-four hours foreshadowed the legal demise of racial restrictive covenants across the country.

While Willis O. Tyler had been fighting against restrictive covenants in the California courts since the 1910s, Loren Miller began his career as an attorney in Los Angeles a little over a decade before the Sugar Hill case. Born in 1903 to an interracial couple in the small town of Pender, Nebraska, Miller moved with his family to Kansas in the 1910s and pursued his education at the University of Kansas. He spent some time at Howard University, and in 1928 earned a law degree from Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, and passed the bar exam. For about one year, Miller practiced in the Midwest. Then in 1929, at the request to attend his sister’s funeral, he joined his mother and family in Los Angeles. His mother had moved to the city several years before, and because the California economy fared better than the Midwest at the onset of the Great Depression, Miller decided to stay. He also needed a reason to leave his profession. “I...wasn’t enamored with the law to put it mildly,” he explained. For the first five years in Los Angeles, Miller worked on two black-owned newspapers, the *California News* and the *California Eagle*, and helped his cousin Leon Washington, Jr. finance and set up the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. In the early 1930s, Miller also became increasingly active in leftist politics. He welcomed Langston Hughes into his Los Angeles home, and then accompanied the poet and other black artists and activists to the Soviet Union to make a

³⁵ “Celebrities in Spotlight,” 4; “Negro Owners Win Contest on Occupancy,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 7 December 1945, 1; Tyler, “Defense Attorney,” 24; “Victory on Sugar Hill.” See also letter from Loren Miller to Thurgood Marshall, 6 December 1945, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5.

film on race relations on the American South. The film never came to fruition, much to the delight of the western press, but the Soviet Union further emboldened Miller to the socialist cause. Echoing muckraker Lincoln Steffens, Miller felt, “I’ve seen the future and I believe that it worked.” He wrote for the New York-based, Marxist-driven publication the *New Masses* for a few months, took the bar exam in California in the mid-1930s, and returned to work as an attorney.³⁶

Miller possessed talent, courage, and the drive to openly fight against racism. He earned admiration from the Los Angeles black community for his bold journalism and passionate speeches, but his work as an attorney catapulted Miller into the national arena as an ardent and effective crusader for equal rights. In an interview, Miller humbly revealed that he returned to law practice “more in self defense than anything else.” The more friends questioned Miller on his law school background, the more he needed to prove to them his capabilities. But Miller had deeper motives for returning to the profession. Through his activism, he grew increasingly empowered, radical, and intolerant of racial inequality. But while he dabbled in the far-left and Marxist politics, Miller remained committed to democratic ideals. Since the early twentieth century, his attorney colleagues had demonstrated steadfast determination in their work against racial discrimination. Until 1878, the state of California prohibited African Americans from the bar. In the subsequent decades, particularly through the early twentieth century, African American attorneys in Los Angeles, such as Charles S. Darden, Burton Ceruti, Hugh E. Macbeth, and Willis O. Tyler, paved an unmarked path in the local courts toward racial

³⁶ Loren Miller, interview by Lawrence B. de Graaf, 3 March 1967 and 29 April 1967, COPH, 1-5, 8-10 (first side of tape); Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 302-303; Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, vol. 1: 1902-1941, I, Too, Sing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 236-251.

equality, and their efforts set an example for other future black attorneys. In the 1930s, Miller emerged as the next generation of attorneys to carry the torch for civil rights.³⁷

Miller developed his reputation by working on controversial lawsuits that championed unpopular organizations and ideas. As amicus curiae, he took on Los Angeles County administrators defending the Communist Party's desire to participate in the primary elections. He fought city officials at the regional planning commission against a zoning ordinance that prohibited an African American family from using part of their home for their electric business. He also submitted an amicus brief on behalf of black workers confronting inequitable auxiliary union fees from the shipyard.³⁸ Throughout his career, he got involved in numerous local and national groups, including the NAACP, National Urban League, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Negro Conference, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights. But he earned much of his esteemed reputation from his fight, starting in the late 1930s, against racial restrictive covenants.³⁹

His work against racial restrictions accelerated in the early 1940s, especially after teaming up with veteran black attorney Willis O. Tyler. Before Miller became involved in the legal campaign, Tyler led the battle against restrictive covenants in Los Angeles.

³⁷ Miller, interview by de Graaf, 8-9 (first side of tape), 8 (second side of tape). See also J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 485-489.

³⁸ Communist Party of the United States of America, et al. v. Paul Peek, et al., 20 Cal. 2d 536, 127 P. 2d 889 (1942); Effie L. O'Rourke et al. v. Roy Teeters et al., 63 Cal. App. 2d 349, 146 P. 2d 983 (1944); Joseph James v. Marinship Corporation et al., 25 Cal. 2d 721, 155 P. 2d 329 (1944). See also Miller, interview by de Graaf, 9 (second side of tape).

³⁹ Miller, interview by de Graaf, 8-9 (first side of tape), 8 (second side of tape). See also Charlotta A. Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: Charlotta A. Bass, 1960), 102.

He helped secure the appeal against Homer Garrott in the California Supreme Court in 1919, and he defended the residents of the Crestmore tract in West Jefferson in the late 1920s, but then achieved little success against racial contracts until the 1940s.⁴⁰ The first major victory for Miller and Tyler came in a lawsuit against an African American couple that had purchased a home in Pasadena. Hazel Fairchild and several other white homeowners tried to prohibit Ross and Helen Raines from residing in the home they had bought. The trial court and California Court of Appeals affirmed the plaintiffs' claim, but the California Supreme Court revered the decision. In the final opinion in *Fairchild v. Raines* (1944), the judge found that, counter to the trial court's records, since the adjacent, unrestricted blocks underwent a "change in the character" when blacks moved to the area, "it would be oppressive and inequitable to give the restriction effect" in the Raines's community. In other words, black migration to the nearby blocks ultimately negated the objective of the restrictive covenant.⁴¹ The decision represented a breakthrough for Miller and Tyler in the quest to end covenants, but they had further steps to take. The verdict made no reference to the Fourteenth Amendment, which the defense attorneys needed to proclaim all covenants unconstitutional.

Before achieving a victory in the Sugar Hill case, Miller continued to face setbacks. Months before the litigants of the Sugar Hill case met in the courtroom, Miller alone became involved in twenty cases over restrictive covenants. In early 1946, he defended seven lawsuits consolidated for trial in the Charles Victor Hall tract, a

⁴⁰ Title Guarantee & Trust Co. v. Garrott, 42 Cal. App. 152 (1919); W. B. Wayt v. George Patee, 205 Cal. 46 (1928).

⁴¹ Hazel Fairchild, et al. v. Ross H. Raines, et al., 24 Cal. 2d 818 (1944). See also David Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 164-167.

neighborhood located directly south of Sugar Hill, which white homeowners claimed had been covered under a racial restriction since the mid-1920s. As usual, the Los Angeles Superior Court handed down its decision in favor of the plaintiffs and endorsed the restrictive covenant. But only months thereafter, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Thurmond Clarke made a fundamentally different judgment that emboldened the campaign to further action.⁴²

Despite one reporter's prediction that "the trial seems destined to last more than a month," Judge Thurmond Clarke handed down his ruling in the Sugar Hill case one day after the opening proceedings.⁴³ The native Californian, who earned his law degree at USC in 1927 and climbed the ranks in the legal profession rather quickly from district attorney to city attorney, and then Los Angeles Municipal Court Judge to Superior Court Judge in the mid-1930s, made a groundbreaking decision that sent shock waves across the city.⁴⁴ Based on the attorneys' opening arguments, and Clarke's subsequent investigation of the neighborhood, the judge granted Miller's objections against the

⁴² Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 62. Miller appealed the lawsuits in the California Supreme Court. For the appeals' briefs, see Appellants' Opening Brief by Loren Miller, M.A. Hester and Blair Hill v. Carlos J. Barbe et al., L.A. Nos. 19589-19594, Filed 8 February 1946, pp. 2, 8-13, Los Angeles County Law Library (Hereafter cited as LACL). Before handing down the verdict, the California Supreme Court waited until the United States Supreme Court made its decision on *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948). For the decision made by the California Supreme Court, see Earl C. Cummings et al., v. Frank Hokr et al., 31 Cal. 2d 844 (1948). See also "Court Reviews Right of Negroes to Live in their Own Homes," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 June 1946, 1; "Move to Evict Japanese from Harvard Home Fought," *Los Angeles Tribune*, 26 October 1946, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 1, UCLA/SC.

⁴³ "Celebrities in Spotlight," 4.

⁴⁴ "Thurmond Clarke," *History of the Federal Judiciary*, Federal Judicial Center website, Washington, D.C., <http://www.fjc.gov/public/home.nsf/hisj> (accessed 12 January 2010). In 1955, President Dwight Eisenhower nominated Judge Clarke to the United States District Court, Southern District of California. He served as chief judge in the district until 1965, and then transferred to the United States District Court, Central District of California, where he stayed until his death in 1971.

introduction of evidence or testimony. The plaintiffs' complaints, Clarke ruled, presented insufficient cause of action under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to continue with the court proceedings. In a groundbreaking move, Clarke departed from precedent set by the United States Supreme Court decades earlier in the *Corrigan* case. Evoking the principles of the United States Constitution, he made clear, "It is time members of the Negro race are accorded without reservations and evasion the full rights guaranteed them under the 14th Amendment." Clarke's reading of constitutional law clearly set him apart from his colleagues. But he took his argument even further by bringing to light the underlying motives of racial discrimination in restrictive covenants. He scorned, "Judges have been avoiding the real issue for too long."⁴⁵

The international climate influenced Clarke to depart from legal precedent. For one, African American involvement in the Second World War greatly shaped Clarke's decision. "Certainly there was no discrimination against the Negro race when it came to calling upon its members to die on the battlefields in defense of this country in the war," the judge stressed. Over one million African Americans served the United States armed forces in segregated units, while others became riveters and welders in the defense industry, rationed food and gasoline, and planted victory gardens on the home front. The "Double V" campaign inspired African Americans to fight for victory against the Axis Powers abroad, and racial discrimination at home. Furthermore, the horrific goal of

⁴⁵ Judgment, Ane Marie Anderson et al. v. Earl F. Auseth et al. and others, L.A. No. 484808, Filed 18 December 1945, pp. 2-3, LASC. For Judge Clarke's remarks, see Appellants' Opening Brief, Ane Marie Anderson et al. v. Earl F. Auseth et al., L.A. No. 19759; Filed 1 July 1946, p. 5, LACL; Letter from Loren Miller to Thurgood Marshall, 12 December 1945, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5; and "The full text of his ruling," Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5.

Adolf Hitler, to exterminate Jews, Gypsies, Poles, homosexuals, and other “non-Aryans,” awakened many whites in the United States to its own racism.⁴⁶

The shifting legal climate in California also influenced Clarke’s decision. While Democrats increasingly won local and state seats in the 1930s and 1940s, and the party gained more supporters, legal scholars began to reevaluate the laws. University of California (UC) Berkeley Law Professor Dudley Odell (D.O.) McGovney helped lead the shift in legal views in California, and create a new intellectual environment, by coming out against restrictive covenants. After earning a law degree at Columbia University in 1907, McGovney built an impressive academic resume in teaching, administration, and scholarship. He served as professor and dean at both Tulane University and the University of Iowa, and taught at a host of colleges, including the University of Illinois and Yale University. McGovney also earned a reputation as an outspoken critic of legalized racism. In a 1923 article for the *Iowa Law Bulletin*, he insisted, “The racial discrimination in our naturalization law is entirely out of harmony with the tenor of our law.” By the 1940s, he focused his attention on constitutional law. As a law professor at UC Berkeley, McGovney published an article in a 1945 issue of the *California Law Review* arguing the unconstitutionality of restrictive covenants. Recognizing that racial restrictions hindered urban black expansion and created overcrowded, squalid ghettos, McGovney bluntly stated in his title, “Racial Residential Segregation by State Court Enforcement of Restrictive Agreements, Covenants or Conditions in Deeds is

⁴⁶ Appellants’ Opening Brief, *Anderson v. Auseth*, p. 5; Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers—The Unsung Heroes of World War II* (New York: One World, 2005), xiii. For discussions on the impact of the Second World War on the United States, see Bruce Zuckerman, et al., eds., *The Impact of the Holocaust in America* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

Unconstitutional.” His article would help support the defense not only in the California court, but also the United States Supreme Court.⁴⁷

On the grass roots level, the combination of the defendants’ dedication, hard work, and fame helped bring about a legal victory in the Sugar Hill case. Loren Miller had a reputation as a dynamic, meticulous, and intelligent force, and formed alliances in the community for several years before the case. But the defendants also contributed their own resources and energy to the campaign. Most of the defendants, including J.A. and Vada Somerville, Norman O. Houston, Horace and Vera Clark, and Hattie McDaniel, began fighting against racial discrimination decades before the Sugar Hill case went to trial. Black entrepreneurs established businesses, from insurance companies to doctors’ offices, and hotels to apartment buildings, aimed to improve the conditions of blacks in the city, while others gained entry into show business and attempted to challenge the racial stereotypes as best they could in their on-screen roles. Shortly after J.A. Somerville helped found the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP in 1913, many of the defendants joined the group, and they remained long-time members. They also joined forces with the Los Angeles Urban League and the ACLU of Southern California. Furthermore, as successful professionals, they had more financial resources and personal connections at hand to fight against restrictive covenants in the Sugar Hill case. Miller represented all of the defendants in trial, but some Sugar Hill residents, such as Hattie McDaniel and James Lloyd Crawford, hired their own attorneys to represent them.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Roger J. Traynor, “Dudley Odell McGovney,” *California Law Review* 35.3 (September 1947): 329. See also Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 68-71; and McGovney, “Racial Residential Segregation,” 5-39.

⁴⁸ Several of the defendants appeared on the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP membership rosters. At NAACP/LA, UCLA/MR, see “Membership Report Blank,” 20 November 1930, Reel

While the defendants vigorously mobilized together and prepared for court, Hattie McDaniel, Ethel Waters, and other famous entertainers emerged at the forefront of the fight. Criticized for conforming to black stereotypes in her roles in the entertainment industry, McDaniel refused to give into racial discrimination in her personal life. She censored herself at the studio, but risked her reputation by putting her name on the line to defend her and her neighbors' properties, and end restrictive covenants. To win the case, she collaborated with Miller, helped organize the defendants, and held meetings in her home. Miller knew that the defendants' fame would bring attention to and advance the campaign against restrictive covenants, and McDaniel and the other entertainers especially had that star quality that would help attract the press. Not surprisingly, references to McDaniel and Waters appeared in most of the newspaper reports on the case. One day after the trial began, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "film Academy Award winner" McDaniel and "blues songbird" Waters led the black property owners into the courtroom. After Clarke handed down his decision, *Time* magazine reported McDaniel's response. "Words cannot express my appreciation," she sighed. The names of entertainers alone raised public awareness and put pressure on the courts, but the defendants and attorneys clearly worked hard to win the lawsuit. When Judge Clarke

2; "Membership Report Blank," 15 November 1931, Reel 2; "Membership Report Blank," 15 December 1933, Reel 2; "Membership Report Blank," 8 April 1934, Reel 2; "Membership Report Blank #35," 13 December 1937, Reel 3; and "Membership Report Blank," December 1938, Reel 3. The law office of Pacht, Pelton, Warne, Ross & Bernhard represented McDaniel. See Demurrer of Defendants James Lloyd Crawford and Hattie McDaniel Crawford to Complaint, Josefa H. Tolhurst v. Nellie B. Venerable et al., L.A. No. 500057, Filed 16 May 1945, LASC. James Lloyd Crawford's name continued to appear on court documents, but in April 1945, months before the case went to trial, Crawford moved out of the house on Harvard Boulevard. McDaniel and Crawford went to court to finalize their divorce nearly two weeks after the verdict was handed down in the Sugar Hill case. See Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 236, 239-240.

dismissed the Sugar Hill case from court, African Americans received the judicial support to take their argument to the higher court.⁴⁹

The defense team celebrated the victory, yet braced for another fight ahead. Willis O. Tyler hailed Clarke's ruling as "a decision of great moment," but indicated a degree of uncertainty, explaining that "It is hoped that it will be the turning point in the efforts of the Negro people of this city" to freely exercise their right to property. The defense team, Tyler asserted, stood prepared to take the case to the California Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court. Loren Miller also regularly updated Thurgood Marshall, head of the national NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, on the progress of the Sugar Hill case. On the day of the decision, Miller wrote to Marshall with the good news that "The Court sustained our motion," yet warned, "We are certain that there will be an appeal," and asked for "any suggestions" as well as amicus briefs to strengthen the defense. "We hope that in the event of an adverse decision in the [state] Supreme Court," Miller continued, "the United States Supreme Court will grant a review." Less than one week later, noting the significance of the ruling and yet acknowledging the fight ahead, Marshall replied, "Congratulations on the victory so far." He assured Miller the case would have amicus briefs from the NAACP, National Bar Association, ACLU, and Lawyers' Guild, and promised to send either NAACP attorney William Hastie or himself to help represent the defense team in front of the state Supreme

⁴⁹ Watts, *Hattie*, 238-239; Cecilia Rasmussen, "L.A. Then and Now: A Life that Defied Racial Stereotypes," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 December 2000; "Celebrities in Spotlight," 4; "Negro Property Owners," A2; "Negro Owners Win Contest," 1; "Victory on Sugar Hill."

Court. “Maybe this is it,” Marshall hoped. “At any rate, you may be assured of our fullest cooperation.”⁵⁰

After he handed down his decision, Judge Clarke received an outpouring of letters that reflected the mixed reaction of whites in the city. Parents, ministers, and other supporters praised his decision as brave and bold. Mothers of sons that fought beside African Americans in the war felt Clarke made the right decision. Yet Clarke also received mail from detractors, some of whom warned him that he would lose his position as judge in the coming election and be forced to scrape by on meager earnings representing blacks on Central Avenue. While Clarke remained undeterred by the criticism and stood by his decision, the letters demonstrated whites’ deep-seated resistance toward the ruling and the lengths they would take to fight back.⁵¹

As the defense team anticipated, the plaintiffs appealed the case to the California Supreme Court. In the summer of 1946, on behalf of the appellants, their attorneys filed an opening brief maintaining *Corrigan* and its definition of restrictive covenants as private contracts. “Until the decision in this [Sugar Hill] case it had been uniformly held that the...Fourteenth Amendment was imposed solely upon the states and...did not apply to agreements between citizens.” Rather, they continued, “This is a question of law and not of social policy nor social privilege.” By prohibiting citizens to exercise their “right to choose their own associations, the right by private contract,” the attorneys contended,

⁵⁰ Tyler, “Defense Attorney,” 1, 24; Letter from Loren Miller to Thurgood Marshall, 6 December 1945, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5; Letter from Thurgood Marshall to Loren Miller, 11 December 1945, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5.

⁵¹ “‘Sugar Hill’ Judge Gets Threat Letters From White Bigots,” *Tri-County Bulletin*, 27 December 1945, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 3, UCLA/SC. The *Chicago Defender* printed a version of the article. See “Bouquets, Brickbats Swamp ‘Sugar Hill’ Judge in Los Angeles,” *Chicago Defender*, 29 December 1945, 3.

the court exercised “intolerance.” In the respondents’ brief, filed two months later, Miller found the appellants’ arguments “absurd” and “ingenious,” arguing “State action *is* involved in every step of the process of giving effect to a race restrictive covenant.” He compared restrictive covenants to use- and race-based zoning ordinances because “they determine where certain American citizens may live.” Furthermore, he blamed restrictive covenants and other practices of residential discrimination for creating an urban ghetto, and maintained that the ensuing consequences “redound...to the ultimate disadvantage of all Americans.”⁵²

The defense team received a significant boost when California Attorney General Robert Walker Kenny joined the lawsuit as *amicus curiae*. Born in Los Angeles in 1901, Kenny enjoyed a privileged childhood, studying at private schools and traveling overseas. He graduated from Stanford University in 1920, worked as a newspaper reporter, took courses at USC and Loyola College law schools, and passed the bar exam in 1926. He started as a deputy counsel for Los Angeles County in 1927, became a municipal judge in 1931, and joined the Superior Court in 1932. Meanwhile, Kenny became increasingly involved in liberal politics. A registered independent until 1937, he signed up as Democrat in his run for the state senate, and won the seat. While serving his term, he maintained his law practice and defended the head of the state’s Communist Party. Between 1943 and 1947, as California Attorney General, Kenny continued to take up liberal causes, leading a lawsuit that revoked the corporate charter of the Los Angeles Ku Klux Klan, and defending the Hollywood Ten in the House Un-American Activities

⁵² Appellants’ Opening Brief, Anderson, et al. v. Auseth, et al., pp. 6, 9, LACL (bold print and capitals removed); Respondents’ Brief, Anderson, et al. v. Auseth, et al., L.A. No. 19759, Filed 30 August 1946, pp. 16, 20, 47, 51, LACL (italics in original).

Committee (HUAC) hearings. But, he made clear, “The one single act of which I was most proud during my four years of service as Attorney General” was his amicus curiae brief for the Sugar Hill case. Written by Law Professor D.O. McGovney, and signed by Kenny, the brief took a stand on the unconstitutionality of restrictive covenants. Court-supported racial restrictions, the brief concluded, “would be in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” Kenny’s involvement in the case reflected the changing political and legal climate in Los Angeles, as liberal-minded Californians rose to high-ranking positions, and took a stand against racial discrimination.⁵³

While opponents continued to challenge Clarke’s ruling, the judgment in the Sugar Hill case emboldened blacks to action. In the mid-1940s, Miller served on one of the most publicized cases over restrictive covenants in the city. Henry and Anna Laws, an African American couple, bought a home in 1937 near Central Avenue covered by a restrictive covenant, and decided to defy the restriction in 1940 by moving in. A group of whites filed a lawsuit, and in 1944, both the trial and appellate courts found the racial restriction valid and ordered the Laws to vacate the property. Yet the Laws refused to leave. In mid-December 1945, only weeks after Clarke handed down his decision in the Sugar Hill case, a Los Angeles Superior Court Judge held the Laws in contempt of court and sentenced them to five days in prison. The story made headlines in the city’s major black newspapers. On the front page, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* proclaimed, “Laws Put in

⁵³ Kenny, interview by Nunis, 4, 9-11, 15-16, 19-38, 46, 67, 72, 83-84, 89, 137-138, 144, 273-274, 287-288; Brief of the Attorney General of the State of California, as Amicus Curiae, *Ane Marie Anderson et al. v. Earl F. Auseth et al.*, L.A. No. 19759, Dated 4 September 1946, Foreword, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 3, p. 26, UCLA/SC. See also Janet Stevenson, *The Undiminished Man: A Political Biography of Robert Walker Kenny* (Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp Publishers, 1980).

Jail for Living in Own House.” The *California Eagle* reported that at a “mass rally called by the NAACP,” activists “paid tribute to the courageous stand taken by the Laws family.” Demonstrators cried, “We are going to smash restrictive covenants!” Charlotta Bass, editor of the *Eagle*, raised two thousand dollars for the Laws. The California Supreme Court released the Laws from prison, but the courts would not resolve the use of restrictive covenants for another three years.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Miller continued to strengthen his collaboration with fellow attorneys and pursue cases against racial restrictions. While Miller became an expert in restrictive covenants, other attorneys in Los Angeles also fought against the contracts, and Miller drew on those individuals for consultation and support. Abraham Lincoln (A.L.) Wirin became one of the several lawyers who joined forces with esteemed attorney. Born to Jewish parents in Russia in 1901, Wirin and his family immigrated to Boston in 1909. After earning a law degree from Boston University in 1925, Wirin worked for the national ACLU in New York, then transferred to the Los Angeles branch in 1931. Throughout his career, he represented a host of labor and civil rights groups, including the ACLU of Southern California, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). Before the Sugar Hill case, Miller and Wirin served together on lawsuits that defended the Communist Party, black workers, and Hispanic students. After Miller won the Sugar Hill case in late 1945, Wirin convinced

⁵⁴ Dole M. Burkman et al., v. Henry Laws et al., 63 Cal. App. 2d 230 (1944); In re Laws, 31 Cal. 2d 846 (1948). See also “Laws Put in Jail for Living in Own House,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 20 December 1945, front page, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 3, UCLA/SC; “Citizens Push Battle Against Race Covenants,” *California Eagle*, 27 December 1945, 1; Jessie Mae Brown, “A True Leader – Charlotta A. Bass” (draft of biography of Bass), p. 2, Charlotta A. Bass Collection (Hereafter cited as CAB), Box 1, Folder 14, SCL; Lonnie G. Bunch, *Black Angelenos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum, 1988), 40-41.

the JACL to take part in a campaign against restrictive covenants in Los Angeles, and he collaborated with Miller on a lawsuit against racial restrictions in South Pasadena. Through the mid-1940s, Miller's cases continued to pile up. In 1948, when the United States Supreme Court ruled restrictive covenants legally unenforceable in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, Miller explained that he had "more than a hundred cases pending" over racial restrictions.⁵⁵

As Miller prepared the Sugar Hill case for the California Supreme Court, he wrote an article for the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine forecasting the months ahead. "There has to be a showdown, and soon," he demanded. The lawsuits against restrictive covenants accumulated around the country, and more and more courts had to confront the issue. Miller stood at the forefront of the fight and sensed a sea change ahead when he predicted, "There are signs of an awakening." In hindsight, Miller realized that Judge Clarke in the Sugar Hill case had "anticipated" the United States Supreme Court ruling against racial restrictions. "Two years later the court came around to the point where it agreed with him," Miller explained. While the prohibition of restrictive covenants seemed more in reach after December 1945, civil rights activists faced more work ahead. In 1946, the litigants of the Sugar Hill case met in the California Supreme Court, presented summations of their arguments, and added more evidence to their case. The defendants cited their rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution as well as the

⁵⁵ Greg Robinson and Tony Robinson, "Korematsu and Beyond: Japanese Americans and the Origins of Strict Scrutiny," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 68.2 (Spring 2005): 40-42; Brian Niiya, ed., *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 350-351; Miller, interview by de Graaf, 26 (second side of tape). For federal and state cases that both Loren Miller and W.L. Wirin served on, see Communist Party of the United States of America, et al. v. Paul Peek, 20 Cal. 2d 536, 127 P.2d 889 (1942); Joseph James v. Marinship Corporation, et al., 25 Cal. 2d 721, 155 P.2d 329 (1944); and Mendez, et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County, et al., 64 F. Supp. 544 (1946).

newly established Charter of the United Nations. Signed in 1945, the international treaty for global security and human rights exemplified the continuing shift in the political and legal climate toward racial equality. “The U.N. charter is a treaty which has the effect of law,” Miller argued. While newspapers predicted a decision stood on the horizon, the litigants had to wait nearly two more years for the Supreme Court to make its decision.⁵⁶

Racial Restrictive Covenants in the United States Supreme Court

For over a decade after the 1926 *Corrigan* decision upheld restrictive covenants, in spite of petitions to reconsider the constitutionality of the contracts, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear any cases on the matter. The 1940 proceedings in *Hansberry v. Lee*, however, marked a shift in the Court’s willingness to reassess the agreements. After African American Carl Hansberry purchased a house on a white neighborhood block in Chicago, several property owners filed a lawsuit, claiming Hansberry violated a covenant. The defense team based its argument on a previous case that found a restrictive covenant valid when 95 percent of homeowners signed the contract. Only 55 percent of property owners in Hansberry’s area signed the contract. While the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the plaintiffs’ argument, the United States Supreme Court reversed the decision. The Court found that the ruling in the previous

⁵⁶ Loren Miller, “Covenants in the Bear Flag State,” *Crisis* 53.5 (May 1946): 155; Miller, interview by de Graaf, 27 (second side of tape). For reports on the June 1946 hearing, see “Court Reviews Right of Negroes to Live in their Own Homes,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 June 1946, 1; “Covenants Case Goes to High Court,” *People’s World*, 8 June 1946, 1; “12 Housing Cases Face Test in Supreme Court Today: Appeals to be Heard in L.A.,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 13 June 1946, 1-2; and “Citizens Pack Court at Covenant Hearing,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 20 June 1946, 1-2. For reports on the October 1946 hearing, see “‘Sugar Hill’ Cases Slated for Hearing on Oct. 2; No Date on Laws’ Appeal,” *California Eagle*, 5 September 1946, 1, 19; “U.N. Cited by Negroes in Appeal for Homes,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1946, 38; “Race Zoning Case in Supreme Court,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1946, A3; and “Negroes Cite U.N. to End Segregation,” *New York Herald*, ca. 1946, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5.

case could not be applied to the *Hansberry* defendants, yet it refused to address the validity of racial contracts.⁵⁷

Throughout the interwar years, around the country, civil rights attorneys such as Willis O. Tyler and Loren Miller that ran private practices and affiliated themselves with local civil rights groups led battles against restrictive covenants in their communities. As those campaigns intensified, Thurgood Marshall seized the opportunity to bring together those attorneys in a series of conferences. In the summer of 1945, NAACP leaders, social scientists, and lawyers, including Miller and those in the *Hansberry* case, gathered to construct a strategy that focused on challenging the constitutionality of restrictive covenants and to determine which legal claims to take to the Supreme Court. Miller returned to Los Angeles seeking to develop lawsuits that fit the conference's objectives, and found an ideal model in the Sugar Hill case only months later.⁵⁸

In January 1947, NAACP attorneys gathered for a second conference at Howard University to choose lawsuits to submit for review in the Supreme Court. While Marshall erred on the side of caution and advised the group to delay submitting any petitions until it found lawsuits that had all of the ideal components, African American attorney George Vaughn saw an opportunity to bring his St. Louis, Missouri case to the Court. In the proceedings, a white couple Louis and Fern Kraemer sued black couple J.D. and Ethel Lee Shelley for violating a covenant and purchasing a house in the area.

⁵⁷ *Hansberry v Lee*, 311 U.S. 32 (1940). See also Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 87; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 55-56; Meyer, *As Long As They*, 56-57.

⁵⁸ Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights*, 88-89; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 57-64; Rev. Bernard J. Sheil and Loren Miller, *Racial Restrictive Covenants* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination, 1946), ACLU, Box 32, Folder 4, UCLA/SC.

While the trial court ruled in favor of the defendants, finding the covenant valid only when all of the homeowners in the community signed it, the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the decision. Rather than attending the second conference, Vaughn petitioned the Supreme Court to review the case. The NAACP believed Miller's Sugar Hill case was one of the more promising lawsuits to take to the high court, but the case had to wait for its trial in the California Supreme Court. The proceedings in Missouri, as well as cases in Michigan and Washington, D.C., were ready to pursue. One month after the conference, Miller wrote to Marshall, "I regret very much that their decisions came down before ours," but offered "to assist in whatever way I can." After Vaughn submitted his petition, Marshall also asked the Court to hear the Michigan and Washington, D.C. cases. Before the Court went to summer recess in 1947, the justices granted the petitions to review the cases from Missouri and Michigan. When the Court reconvened the following October, it also approved the cases in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, Marshall organized a third conference in New York to coordinate the effort. In 1948, the four cases, consolidated under the St. Louis lawsuit *Shelley v. Kraemer*, went to trial.⁵⁹

While the NAACP legal team sought to create a collaborative effort, the defense attorneys took over specific cases. Loren Miller and Thurgood Marshall crafted the argument for the Detroit case. They composed a 92-page statement that included the sociological and economic consequences of racial agreements. Drawing on official and published accounts, they argued that restrictive covenants created overcrowded ghettos,

⁵⁹ Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights*, 89-91; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, chapters 4, 5, and 6; Letter from Loren Miller to Thurgood Marshall, 29 January 1947, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5. See also Letter from Thurgood Marshall to Loren Miller, 5 February 1947, Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5. *McGhee v. Sipes* began in Detroit, Michigan, while *Hurd v. Hodge* and *Urciolo v. Hodge* began in Washington, D.C.

which forced rental prices up and housing standards down in Detroit and other cities across the nation. Furthermore, they argued, black settlement into white neighborhoods showed no harmful effects on property values. For the St. Louis case, the attorneys drew on sociological data, but centered their position on the unconstitutionality of restrictive covenants. The attorneys for the two Washington, D.C. lawsuits compiled a 149-page brief that presented an innovative and multifaceted analysis of the cases. First, they cited over 150 studies in sociology and economics to show the detrimental costs of restrictive covenants on the Washington, D.C. communities. But they also used examples of earlier court opinions, and relied on law review articles, especially from McGovney, to assert that the legal sanction of restrictive covenants constituted state action that inevitably infringed upon constitutional rights. While attorneys in previous cases argued that restrictive covenants violated the Constitution, the counsel in the Washington, D.C. cases backed its arguments with considerable evidence and incisive legal analysis that showed judicial sanction of covenants clearly obstructed civil rights.⁶⁰

The amici curiae for the defense team served as a significant source of support that helped lead to the legal victory over restrictive covenants. A host of racial, ethnic, religious, labor, and human rights organizations, including the CIO, ACLU, and JACL, submitted a total of eighteen briefs to the Court endorsing the defendants' case. In an important turn of events that also provided a major boost to the defense, the federal government announced its support for the fulfillment of racial equality. Responding to

⁶⁰ Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 158-160, 184-193. See also Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973); and William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970).

the reports of persistent racial discrimination and violence against black veterans after the Second World War, in late 1946, President Harry Truman appointed the fifteen-member Committee on Civil Rights to prepare a report with reforms aimed to end discrimination and advance equality. Issued in October 1947, *To Secure These Rights* proposed thirty-four recommendations that, among many others, condemned racial segregation and violence and urged the government to take the lead in civil rights reforms and get involved in pending lawsuits concerning racial equality. One day after the release of the report, the United States Attorney General Tom C. Clark announced his decision to file an amicus brief for the *Shelley* defendants. Echoing the appeal of the report, Clark argued, “The Federal Government has a special responsibility for the protection of the fundamental civil rights guaranteed to the people by the Constitution.” While *Corrigan* viewed racial agreements as private contracts that in no way infringed upon state laws, Clark found the Court failed to “deal with...the constitutional validity of judicial enforcement” of racial agreements. The “enforcement of racial restrictive covenants,” Clark concluded, “is contrary to the public policy of the United States.”⁶¹

On May 3, 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision that marked a major triumph in the civil rights struggle. The six participating justices reversed the judgment of the lower courts and unanimously ruled racial restrictive covenants unenforceable by a court of law. While honoring legal precedents, Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson clarified that the defense team presented a new angle to the argument that had never been heard before in the Supreme Court. As

⁶¹ Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 163-174, 191-199; Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights*, 91-92; Tom C. Clark and Philip B. Perlman, *Prejudice and Property: An Historic Brief Against Racial Covenants* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1948), 22, 66-68.

expected, the decision came down to the interpretation of state action under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court found that restrictive covenants “standing alone cannot be regarded as violative of any rights guaranteed to petitioners by the Fourteenth Amendment.” However, when the Court in *Corrigan* gave its judicial sanction of the agreements, Vinson argued, it infringed upon the rights protected under the Fourteenth Amendment. “The purposes of the agreements were secured only by judicial enforcement by state courts,” Vinson found. Therefore, “We hold that in granting judicial enforcement of the restrictive agreements...the States have denied petitioners the equal protection of the laws.” In his closing remarks, Vinson harkened back to “the historical context in which the Fourteenth Amendment became a part of the Constitution,” and underscored the framers’ fundamental objective of establishing “equality in the enjoyment of basic civil and political rights” as the goal of the Court.⁶²

Upon the news of the ruling, celebrations broke out across the country and some changes began to take place. The front-page of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, one of the foremost black-owned newspapers in Los Angeles, featured the headline “California Negroes Can Now Live Anywhere!” beside a photo of Hattie McDaniel’s home. The *New York Times* reported that racial, religious, and labor groups “hailed” the decision. Days after the verdict, *U.S. News & World Report* forewarned, “A mild revolution...is in sight.” Indeed, the judgment produced some immediate signs of progress. Courts around the country dismissed all of the pending lawsuits on restrictive covenants. “Upon the authority of *Shelley v. Kraemer*,” the California Supreme Court affirmed Judge Thurmond Clarke’s ruling in the Sugar Hill case, declaring restrictive covenants

⁶² *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948). Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 205-210; Miller, *The Petitioners*, 324-326.

unconstitutional.⁶³ As a result, the Sugar Hill defendants won the right to stay in their homes. One year before the decision, the FHA also began to phase out its endorsement of racial restrictive agreements when the agency removed its discussion of restrictive covenants from the *Underwriting Manual*. Moreover, from February 15, 1950, the federal agency no longer insured home construction loans for real estate developments that used racial covenants.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, detractors in Los Angeles responded to *Shelley* with defiance and forged an effort to circumvent the ruling. For a brief period after the Court handed down *Shelley*, with the backing of the state realty association CREA, the local real estate board LARB launched a bold, citywide campaign to pass an amendment to the United States Constitution that would give courts the power to enforce private agreements at their own discretion. Formed in the early twentieth century, the all-white LARB and CREA became known for their efforts to protect and elevate property values of white homeowners by persuading policymakers to pass the first citywide zoning ordinance, and continuing through the subsequent decades to strengthen zoning laws and defend the use

⁶³ “California Negroes Can Now Live Anywhere!” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 6 May 1948, front-page; “Ruling is Acclaimed Here,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1948, p. 2; “Real Estate: ‘Exclusive...Restricted’: Effect of Court Decision Upsetting Covenants,” *U.S. News & World Report* 24 (14 May 1948): 22. For the judgment in the California Supreme Court, see Appellate Court Decision, part of Ane Marie Anderson et al. v. Earl F. Auseth et al., L.A. No. 19759, Filed 18 May 1948, LACL. While the litigants of the Sugar Hill case had to wait for a decision to come from the United States Supreme Court, Miller explained that the delay “was not that long.” The litigants waited about a year after the Sugar Hill case reached the California Supreme Court for a decision from the United States Supreme Court. See Miller, interview by de Graaf, 27-28 (second side of tape).

⁶⁴ References to the changes made in the FHA are discussed in the following works. James Thomas Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles: The Biography of a Community Developer and Philanthropist* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 71; and Loren Miller, “Residential Segregation and Civil Rights,” Lawyers Guild Conference, Hollywood Athletic Club, California, 12 May 1956, pp. 5-6, ACLU, Box 30, Folder 1, UCLA/SC.

of racial restrictive covenants. Despite the *Shelley* ruling, the LARB insisted that restrictive covenants insured economic and social stability for middle-class and moderate-income homeowners. Covenants sustained property values, the LARB upheld, and staved off racial conflict by segregating whites from people of color. But the realty board's policies clearly favored white homeowners. While its effort to maintain racial segregation ensued through the twentieth century, the campaign to pass an amendment swiftly dissolved. The LARB and CREA failed to find supporters to sustain their campaign. Meanwhile, another attempt to save restrictive covenants gained momentum.⁶⁵

By the early 1950s, the battle over restrictive covenants returned to the United States Supreme Court. While the Court ruled covenants unenforceable by a court of law, *Shelley* left unaddressed homeowners' right to file damage claims against covenanters that breached their contracts. Olive Barrows and a group of white residents in Los Angeles tested this theory when they sued their former neighbor Leola Jackson for selling her property to an African American family. Although the property conveyance occurred after *Shelley*, the plaintiffs claimed that since Jackson violated a covenant, they deserved compensation for their losses. The trial and appeals court granted the defendants' objection, and the California Supreme Court refused to hear arguments altogether, but the United States Supreme Court decided to hear the case. Thanks to Loren Miller and Thurgood Marshall, who stepped back into the courtroom to head the defense team, *Barrows v. Jackson* (1953) reaffirmed the campaign against restrictive covenants. The Court held that covenants "standing alone cannot be regarded as violative of any rights,"

⁶⁵ Miller, interview by de Graaf, 30 (second side of tape); Miller, *The Petitioners*, 326; Adler, "Watts," 300; Meyer, *As Long As They*, 95.

but judicial approval of the damage suit indirectly supported the agreements, which infringed upon citizens' Fourteenth Amendment rights. The fight against restrictive covenants in the courtroom ended in victory. Nevertheless, the campaign against covenants and residential discrimination persisted long after *Shelley and Barrows*.⁶⁶

Golden State Mutual Moves In

One of the most significant and visible signs of the legal victory against restrictive covenants in Los Angeles materialized on August 23, 1949, the grand opening of Golden State Mutual's home office in Sugar Hill. After years of planning, Golden State Mutual left its office on Central Avenue, which had been a staple of the black community for over twenty years, and moved to the center of elite black Los Angeles. Located on the corner of Western and Adams Boulevards, at the southwest entrance to Sugar Hill, the new office stood as a showpiece of black achievement in Los Angeles's historically elite district. The move to Sugar Hill was daring and bold for the black-owned insurance agency. Central Avenue continued to serve as the hub of black culture and livelihood, and relocation to the Westside risked hurting the company's well-regarded reputation and losing its faithful clientele. But Golden State Mutual set its goals high. Nickerson, Houston, and Beavers established the insurance agency to improve the conditions of African Americans in the city. Moving away from the deteriorating Eastside, into a neighborhood known for its wealth and status gave the company more opportunities to expand, and lead black migration into the Westside.

⁶⁶ *Barrows v. Jackson*, 346 U.S. 249 (1953). See also Miller, *The Petitioners*, 326-329; and Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 232-246.

About a week before the grand opening, co-founder and Chairman of the Board George Beavers circulated a letter around the office informing his employees of the event. The last momentous occasion for Golden State Mutual, he recollected, occurred in 1925 when the company was founded. He took pride in the achievements of Golden State Mutual to date. The company had more clients and brought in more revenue than ever before. Total income rose from roughly \$392,000 in 1938 to over \$3.8 million in 1950. Total assets increased from more than \$341,000 in 1938 to over \$4.8 million in 1950. Moving into the West Adams district allowed Golden State Mutual to honor its achievements, provide more services and opportunities, grow its clientele, increase its staff, and continue to give back to the city's black population. Nickerson died suddenly, four years before the grand opening, and missed the realization of his dream, but his vision lived on in the co-founders and employees. Beavers articulated the purpose of the company's relocation in his letter to the staff. "Your new building has been acclaimed as truly a prideful achievement in the business development of your race and the nation."⁶⁷

The founders created Golden State Mutual to not only provide insurance to African Americans in Los Angeles, but also advance the social and economic conditions of black city dwellers. The grand building, centered in the heart of the West Adams district, served as a symbol of black triumph over residential segregation, and black migration into the sought-after Westside.⁶⁷

The new home office boasted the latest technological advances as well as more facilities to better serve the staff. Prominent African American architect Paul R.

⁶⁷ George A. Beavers, Jr., Letter addressed to co-workers at Golden State Mutual, 15 August 1949, NF/GSM, Box 2, Folder 6, SCL. "Fourteenth Annual Statement of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company," 31 December 1938, Box 2, Folder 4, NF/SCL; "35th Annual Report to Policymakers," 31 December 1959, Box 2, Folder 4, NF/SCL.

Williams designed the triangular-shaped marvel that towered over the community. A pamphlet written for employees and clients around the time of the grand opening explained that the new office included an “auditorium, cafeteria, research and information library, lounge, and elevator service.” The building had a modern intercom system that could play music throughout the workday, make office-wide announcements, and address the entire staff. Employees also had access to health care in the building’s medical facility, which was run by a medical director, assisted by a nurse, and equipped with “examination and recuperating rooms.” Overall, the new building represented, the pamphlet read, “a promise of greater future achievement.”⁶⁸

While the modern improvements represented the future, the building’s artwork commemorated California’s black past. During the month of the grand opening, the company unveiled in the lobby a two-panel mural that honored the struggles and contributions of African Americans throughout the history of California and Los Angeles. Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff, two well known Harlem Renaissance painters, illustrated in the mural African American pioneers of California, laborers rigging an oil drill and building the Golden Gate Bridge, protestors picketing for equal education and fair housing, and many other key leaders and moments. For the next several decades, the company continued to commission, collect, and display works by African American artists. Beavers explained that the artwork imparted “the spirit of our company’s tradition; the elements of vigor, social protest, and group consciousness.”⁶⁹ Golden State

⁶⁸ Pamphlet announcing the opening of Golden State Mutual’s new office, ca. 1949, NF/GSM, Box 2, Folder 6, SCL; Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*, with an introduction by David Gebhard (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1993), 122-123.

⁶⁹ Beavers, interview by Brown, 10. Golden State Mutual continues to operate out of its office at the intersection of Western and Adams Boulevards. The mural can be viewed on Golden State

Mutual had come a long way from the modest office on Central Avenue. The new building symbolized past black achievements as well as the possibilities for the future of African Americans in Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, Golden State Mutual's relocation into Sugar Hill made it a target of attack. The company faced criticisms for abandoning the city's black community by moving away from Central Avenue and the Eastside. Although an increasing number of blacks were moving to the Westside in the late 1940s, most of the area west of Western Avenue remained unavailable to people of color. Financial constraints and racial discrimination especially continued to limit working-class blacks to low-income housing on the Eastside. "I remember when...we built the Golden State Mutual home office at Western and Adams, some of the people complaining about the Golden State moving away from the Negroes," Beavers explained. "People sort of thought we were leaving the community when we moved here," Ivan Houston, son of Norman O. Houston, recalled. Despite the victories in *Shelley* and *Barrows*, after moving into Sugar Hill, Golden State Mutual also faced white intimidation. The Court gave blacks the right to choose their place of residence, but the ruling failed stop whites from bullying their black neighbors. In the first few years of operation in the West Adams district, Ivan Houston claimed, "we had a few bomb threats." But the company refused to let those threats drive it from the community.⁷⁰

Mutual Life Insurance Company's website, www.gsmlife.com, under the link "Historical Murals" (accessed 22 August 2010).

⁷⁰ Beavers, interview by Hopkins, 21; Ivan J. Houston, "Black Leadership in Los Angeles," interview by Ranford B. Hopkins (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1989), UCLA/SC, 181.

While African Americans gained the legal protection from *Shelley* and *Barrows* to move into any neighborhood of their liking, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, they continued to struggle to attain full access to good quality housing in the city. After 1948, white homeowners had no judicial support to enter into discriminatory private contracts, and after 1953, they had no legal support to sue their neighbors for damage claims for breaching racial agreements. The black struggle for racial equality also found some allies in the Truman administration, which called on an end to racial discrimination and violence. Yet white homeowners used other methods to control the racial composition of their neighborhoods. Use-based zoning ordinances continued to demarcate the urban landscape by single-family dwellings, multiple-use units, and industrial sectors (and inevitably class, race, and ethnicity). When no other legal methods worked, whites resorted to extralegal methods of intimidation and violence. As blacks in Los Angeles endured racial violence and migrated westward, whites finally exercised their most common act of resistance, selling their properties and moving out of the central city. Consequently, as more blacks gained access to Los Angeles's Westside, their battle shifted to maintaining racial integration and the value of their neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 3

DESEGREGATING THE CRENSHAW DISTRICT

"We discussed all this when we began house-hunting in this neighborhood. You wanted to live here because it's near the office, close to shopping centers, and an excellent school is close by. The house was priced right and it fit our dream. We knew we were to be the first Negroes in the area, and both of us expected enmities even to the point of cross-burnings on the front lawn. We're thankful it hasn't come to that! Put on your hard outer shell, honey, because we're here to stay." --*Jim Burton, calming the fears of his wife, Rose Burton in My Neighbor's Island* (1965) by Evelyn Allen Johnson.¹

Two weeks of hostility from her new neighbors left Rose Burton frustrated and ill at ease about her decision to move into a predominantly white, affluent neighborhood. Rose, a nurse, and her husband, Jim, an obstetrician, the fictional characters of African American writer Evelyn Allen Johnson's prize-winning novel *My Neighbor's Island*, represented upwardly mobile, professional blacks that first settled in desirable, white communities after the *Shelley and Barrows* decisions. While the United States Supreme Court declared racial restrictive covenants legally unenforceable, African Americans had to enforce the orders through their own determination in their daily actions at the local level. The fictional Burtons took pride in their home, honored their heritage by decorating the interior with keepsakes from Africa, and invited over their friends for social gatherings. But the protagonists had to fight a war waged by George and Sybil Armstrong, their intolerant, white neighbors who determinedly protested black migration into the

¹ Evelyn Allen Johnson, *My Neighbor's Island* (New York: Exposition Press, 1965), 21.

neighborhood. Throughout the book, Sybil antagonized the Burtons by glaring at them through her window, ignoring them outdoors, keeping her daughter away from theirs, and calling the police to break up their party. Yet the Burtons persevered, under Jim's advice, with a "hard outer shell." They saw their efforts within a larger struggle, wrote the author, "to aid all men in obtaining those rights essential to the pursuit of happiness."²

Johnson based *My Neighbor's Island* on her experiences as one of the first African Americans to move into Baldwin Hills Estates, a predominantly white, affluent community located on Los Angeles's Westside, north of where Stocker Street and La Brea Avenue meet, in the sought-after Crenshaw district. She and her husband Raymond purchased a four-bedroom, three-bathroom single-family house in the neighborhood in 1962, only a few years after African Americans began moving to the area. Like Ruth Burton, Johnson made a living as a registered nurse. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1929, she defied her grade school teacher's advice to become a maid and pursued academic degrees in nursing at Howard University and California State University, Los Angeles. She met her husband, a former Tuskegee airman, at Howard University, where he was pursuing a law degree. After relocating to Los Angeles, and saving for a down payment, the couple purchased a house that met the needs of their growing family and honored their achievements as successful professionals. Indeed, the family faced a rocky transition into the community. In an interview years later, Johnson recollected several incidents when her white neighbors prohibited their offspring from playing with the Johnson children. She also felt that local school officials questioned the academic abilities of her children because of their skin color. But the Johnsons refused to yield to

² Johnson, *My Neighbor's Island*, 31. Johnson won the Vassie D. Wright Award for *My Neighbor's Island*.

white intimidation. Raymond Johnson developed his reputation as an attorney, got involved in the local Democratic Party, served as an assistant to Mexican American Democratic Representative Edward Roybal, and became an active member of the Los Angeles NAACP. The couple hosted political fundraisers and social gatherings in their Baldwin Hills Estates home to guests as illustrious as Mayor Thomas (Tom) Bradley. While Evelyn Johnson worked as a nurse, raised the children, and dedicated herself to community service, she also wrote more books that grappled with class identity, interracial relations, and the struggle against racial discrimination. The family stayed in the neighborhood.³

Beginning in the 1940s, middle- and upper-class African Americans migrated further westward, across Arlington Avenue, and into the affluent, white neighborhoods of the Crenshaw district. Shaped by the rolling Baldwin Hills, which received its name from nineteenth-century land investor Elias Jackson “Lucky” Baldwin, the district largely bordered Arlington and Slauson Avenues, and Exposition and La Cienega Boulevards. The distinctly winding roads, rise above urban congestion, panoramic views of the city, spacious houses, high quality public facilities, and location in Westside proper provided major selling points for buyers. From the 1920s, when housing developers began carving out neighborhoods in the district, they insisted white property owners cover their homes in restrictive covenants. When the Court handed down *Shelley and Barrows*, however, whites lost their primary mechanism to restrict people of color from the district. In the 1940s, the middle-class suburb of Leimert Park, located on the eastern flatlands,

³ Evelyn Allen Johnson, interview by author, September 30, October 23, and October 24, 2006, by telephone. For more works by Evelyn Allen Johnson, see *Get the Show on the Road* (Los Angeles: Lynray Press, 1987) and *Pillar of Salt* (Los Angeles: Lynray Press, 2006).

immediately west of Arlington Avenue, became the main entry point for black migration into the district. Through the 1950s and 1960s, affluent blacks migrated further westward into View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills, the neighborhoods on the district's elevated southerly slope, as well as Baldwin Hills Estates and Baldwin Hills Vista, the communities on the hilly northern section. From doctors to attorneys, business owners to political leaders, and athletes to entertainers, professional blacks led the migration to the area. But they had to continue to assert their right to live where they pleased.⁴

Throughout United States history, after African Americans achieved major legal victories toward racial equality, they had to claim those rights in their daily actions. The passage of the Thirteenth (abolishment of slavery), Fourteenth (equal protection of law), and Fifteenth (male vote) Amendments after the Civil War marked milestone achievements that helped further racial equality. Yet in the years following Reconstruction, as the federal government withdrew its military occupation of the South, southern whites created a system that not only segregated blacks, but also suppressed their advancement. From the sharecropping system to poll taxes and literacy tests, black codes to Jim Crow laws, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to unbridled white violence, African Americans became disenfranchised and unprotected. Almost as quickly as blacks gained legal protections, they saw whites contest and resist those rights. Nevertheless, blacks continued to fight against inequality by establishing civil rights

⁴ Paul Weeks, "Negroes in L.A. Moving Out from Center of City," *Mirror-News*, 2 May 1956, 14-15, ACLU, Box 28, Folder 3, UCLA/SC; "Annual Report of the Committee on Human Relations," May 1955, ACLU, Box 28, Folder 4, UCLA/SC. In the 1870s and 1880s, Baldwin purchased the vast territory of more than 3,600 acres, spread across varied terrain from 100 to 440 feet above sea level. See Sandra Lee Snider, *Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin: California Visionary* (Los Angeles: Stairwell Group, 1987), 8-11. For a description of the topography, see Los Angeles Department of City Planning, *Proposed Environmental Impact Report for the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert District Plan* (Los Angeles: Department of City Planning, 1975), 12.

organizations, migrating out of the South, and agitating for racial equality. As in previous and subsequent court decisions and laws, *Shelley* and *Barrows* were essential in establishing the law that provided all citizens the right to choose their place of residence, but the enforcement of those rulings depended on countless individuals and organizations at the grass roots level willing to endure daily encounters of white intimidation and violence.⁵

In the decades following the Second World War, white homeowners continued to employ a variety of methods to stave off black migration into their communities. Whites formed more neighborhood “improvement” associations that sought to maintain the all-white composition of their communities. Association members placed racial restrictions on their homes, in spite of court orders, and raised money to purchase property that had been recently sold to blacks. Some white homeowners refused altogether to acknowledge their black neighbors, while others resorted to verbal threats and property destruction in an attempt to bully African Americans into selling their property and leaving the area. Whites also mobilized in public meetings, strikes, and boycotts to prevent black youngsters from enrolling in the public schools, playing on local sports teams, and joining community groups. Nevertheless, white intimidation and violence failed to deter blacks from exercising their civil rights. While many of the middle-class, cookie-cutter suburbs of the postwar era represented white consumerism, conformism, and escapism from the lurking dangers of the urban environment, the neighborhoods on Los Angeles’s Westside emerged as a site in the civil rights struggle where affluent blacks used their financial resources and resolve to assert their rights to high quality housing.

⁵ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Leimert Park, Point of Entry

The community of Leimert Park, located on the easternmost side of the Crenshaw district, served as the initial entry point of African American migration and settlement into the area. Roughly bordered by Van Ness and Vernon Avenues, and Exposition and Crenshaw Boulevards, Leimert Park emerged as not only one of the oldest communities in the district, but also one of the most varied, offering accommodations in a range of prices for a middle- and upwardly middle-class clientele. The charming single-family houses, lower priced apartment dwellings, high quality public schools, quaint business district (later known as Leimert Park Village), and park and fountain in the center square made Leimert Park a desirable and sought after community. *Life Magazine* and *Architectural Forum*, working in collaboration in the 1940s, deemed a house in Leimert Park one of eight noteworthy residences in the United States. The article showcased a two-bedroom dwelling built in California colonial style designed with a family friendly floor plan and an outdoor living space. But most importantly, the article touted, “Leimert Park was created in the belief that beautiful surroundings should not be the luxury of the wealthy few.” For the first two decades after its development, however, Leimert Park remained covered by restrictive covenants that prohibited people of color from living in the area. But in the postwar years, professional blacks fractured the community’s idyllic façade, endured white resistance, and claimed their right to live there.⁶

With its unique design, range of accommodations, and assortment of amenities, the developers Walter H. Leimert Company aimed to set Leimert Park apart from other

⁶ “Life Presents Your Home for Life in Leimert Park,” ca. 1940s, California Ephemera Collection, Box 221, Folder: Leimert Park, Calif., UCLA/SC.

Los Angeles communities. Walter Leimert began working as a land subdivider in the San Francisco area, moved to Los Angeles in the 1920s, and continued his career in land development in the burgeoning city. He bought a 230-acre lot comprised of bean fields from an heir of “Lucky” Baldwin in the mid-1920s, and subdivided the land for residential and commercial purposes. Leimert Boulevard, the main artery running diagonally below Santa Barbara Avenue (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard), gave the southern section of Leimert Park its distinct structure and allowed for more efficient traffic flow. The community’s three public schools were built in the first years of development. Forty-second Street Elementary School and Audubon Junior High School sat on each side of Leimert Boulevard, while Dublin Avenue Elementary School was built on the northeastern part of the community. Running north on Degnan Boulevard, and past Santa Barbara Avenue, roads fanned out to the main residential portion of the community. To provide privacy from traffic and create a more family-friendly and safe environment, the developers ended several roads with cul-de-sacs and added walkways behind lots. Seeking to build a more serene space, the Leimert Company also laid the utilities underground and placed street lighting and trees along the sidewalks. The developers also designed a park with a pedestal water fountain in the central square.⁷

The Leimert Company used land-use zoning restrictions to create order and consistency in the community. Multiple-use dwellings, including two, four, and six-unit residential structures, lined the main boulevards, while single-family homes remained

⁷ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 15-17; “Your Homesite Permanently in Leimert Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1927, E7; “Homes Demand Indicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 October 1927, E6; “Community Development: Park Sees New Building Mark,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1928, D4. See also *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South Central Los Angeles*, DVD, produced and directed by Jeanette Lindsay (Los Angeles: Foster Johnson Studios, 2008).

confined to the interior roads (Figures 7-8). The developers also set aside parcels of land around the southern end of Degnan Boulevard for commercial use. In late 1928, the Mesa Vernon Market made its grand opening in the business district. The butcher and produce shop, delicatessen, bakery, café, drug store, florist, and beauty parlor gave residents easy access to goods without leaving the area (Figure 9). Within a matter of years, more businesses opened in Leimert Park. Citizens National Bank set up a branch in 1930. The Leimert Theater, built by famed aviator and film producer Howard Hughes near the corner of West Forty-third Place and Degnan Boulevard in 1932, became the pride and joy of the community. Its art deco tower, which was visible from miles away, served as a landmark to the Leimert Park business district. The grand auditorium, encircled by a promenade that was decorated with a hand-painted mural, played the latest motion pictures (Figure 10).⁸

For roughly two decades after its initial development, the developers and homeowners alike used racial restrictive covenants to maintain a predominately white population in Leimert Park. While the Leimert Company aimed to sell affordable homes to middle-class buyers, the developers envisioned a community comprised only of white residents. In one of its earliest advertisements for the community in the *Los Angeles Times*, the company publicized in commonly used code words that the area upheld “PERMANENT protective restrictions” (capitals in original).⁹ Nevertheless, people of

⁸ Hise, *Magnetic*, 17; “Plaza and Business Unit Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 1928, E2. The Central branch of the Los Angeles Public Library houses many photographs of Leimert Park from the 1930s and 1960s. See, for example, “Marquee, Leimert Theater,” No. 00015010; “Lobby, Leimert Theater,” No. 00015030; “Mural, Leimert Theater,” No. 00015026; “Auditorium Interior, Leimert Theater,” No. 00015028; and “Circular Promenade, Leimert Theater,” No. 00015027.

⁹ “Your Homesite Permanently,” E7. See also Hise, *Magnetic*, 20, 26.

color managed to gradually move to the area. The 1940 United States Census reported that people of color (a broad definition that included all “nonwhites”) resided in 8 or 0.3 percent of the total occupied dwelling units. In 1950, the census recorded 51 African Americans living in Leimert Park, making up 0.4 percent of the population (Table 4).¹⁰

White residents attempted to stop black in-migration at every step. By early 1950, community members in Leimert Park formed Neighborly Endeavors, Incorporated to stave off the migration of blacks and other “non-Caucasians” into the area. In the minutes from a meeting held by a group in an adjacent area, a representative of Neighborly Endeavors by the name of Mr. Lund urged homeowners to sell their properties only to white buyers. Recognizing the *Shelley* and *Barrows* rulings, and the legal protections of the United States Constitution, Lund stated, “Negroes and the other non-Caucasians...have a right to live wherever they want to.” Yet he encouraged white homeowners to circumvent court orders and continue to prohibit people of color from the area. “The only way to protect yourselves,” he argued, “is to make certain that none of your neighbors sells to a non-Caucasian.” Lund accused white homeowners of behaving in a “selfish” manner by allowing blacks to purchase property in the area, and he advised residents to resist the inclination to “hurt” the community. “This experience has drawn

¹⁰ For 1940 census data, see census tract 207, in *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, vol. 3, *Housing Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1942). See chapter 1, footnote 82 for an explanation of racial characteristics in the 1940 census. For the census data in Table 4, see *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1990, General Population Characteristics, California* (Washington, DC: GPO: 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

us much closer together in Leimert Park,” he touted. “We had to buy up one piece of property and we’re going to sue the person who sold it to a Negro.” He urged the group to follow the same steps and purchase any properties that had been recently sold to African Americans. “We are going to be able to protect our community,” he urged the group, but “only through loving our [white] neighbors.” Since the courts lost the ability to enforce restrictive covenants, make a “moral agreement with your neighbors,” and sell only to whites. “The law doesn’t protect you so we will have to rely on each other.”¹¹

While whites in Leimert Park mobilized and pursued legal action against other white homeowners, they also employed extralegal methods to “protect” their neighborhood from black in-migration. On June 6, 1950, forty-two white residents filed a lawsuit against Oscar C. Reichow for violating a deed restriction and selling his home on 3913 Sixth Avenue to an African American family. Citizens United, Incorporated, the homeowners’ group that raised money against Reichow, alleged, “Such violations depreciates [*sic*] the value of other property, creates social unrest and exposes the District to conditions damaging to personal welfare and safety.” While the white homeowners requested roughly \$185,000 in damages, they had no basis to support their claims. Two weeks later, on June 21st, vandals targeted a home located on the same road at 3817 Sixth Avenue that had been recently placed in escrow to Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Hunter, an African American couple. Reports showed that vandals emptied the flowerpots outside of the

¹¹ “Report on Meeting of Normandie Avenue Protective Association Held at Southwest Arena, 5301 S. Western Avenue,” March 17, 1950, John Anson Ford Papers (Hereafter cited as JAF), Box 76/ee, Folder 15, Henry E. Huntington Library (Hereafter cited as HL). In this very rare remaining document that recorded the aims and attitudes of Neighborly Endeavors, the minutes identified the speaker from Leimert Park only as Mr. Lund. His first name was not provided. The main purpose of the meeting was to raise money to purchase “a second trust deed on a piece of property which the Negro owner, Mrs. Wright, is willing to resell” in the Normandie Avenue neighborhood.

premises and wedged a water hose inside an opening to the house made for milk bottles, which flooded the kitchen and basement and damaged the heating system. Neighbors also filed a lawsuit against the white sellers for \$45,000 in damages.¹²

But as the political climate of Los Angeles shifted toward the Democratic Party, and civil rights activism grew, black newcomers found increasing support from the community. Through the 1940s, as Los Angeles elected Democratic representatives to office, local civil rights organizations established a foothold in the city and provided liberal-minded residents with assistance to fight against hate crimes and inadequate police protection. In response to the incident of vandalism and flooding at the Hunter residence, a small group of religious leaders, doctors, attorneys, and homemakers known as the Sixty-third Assembly District Community Council gathered together to stop the violence. The group initially organized to elect political candidates to office, but as racial hostility erupted in Leimert Park, members redirected their goals and stood behind the black newcomers. Fifteen members gathered in June 1950 and decided to organize a mass meeting the following month to present, according to one newspaper, “a clear picture of the facts and the situation, as well as the legal, ethical, and spiritual issues involved.” Group members also insisted on more protection from the local police department and requested assistance from the Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations, the agency established by Democratic County Supervisor John Anson Ford in

¹² Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations, “Memorandum to Supervisor Raymond V. Darby,” June 30, 1950, JAF, Box 5/a/cc, Folder 5, HL; Newspaper article, ca. June 1950, ACLU, Box 32, Folder 1, UCLA/SC; Citizens United, Incorporated, “Property Owners Sued for Damages: Race Restrictions Violated!” (leaflet), ca. 1950, ACLU, Box 32, Folder 4, UCLA/SC.

1944 to end racial discrimination and improve race relations in the city.¹³ Furthermore, the Southern California branch of the ACLU offered support as well as a monetary reward for information on the vandals that flooded the Hunters' home. The executive director encouraged the Hunters to stay in the neighborhood and endure "such lawlessness on the part of Caucasians," in the name of attaining "a genuine democracy."¹⁴

Los Angeles police officer and future mayor Tom Bradley understood the importance of blacks moving westward into Leimert Park. Bradley was born and raised in Texas for the first five years of his life. His parents found themselves falling deeper into sharecropper debt. "The amount of money advanced to them [for their work] always seemed to amount to more than their income at the end of the year," Bradley recalled. In hopes of escaping poverty, six-year-old Tom and his family migrated to Arizona where they shared a residence with relatives. But the backbreaking work in the Arizona cotton fields left them worn out and with little money to spare. Consequently, in the mid-1920s, they moved to the booming metropolis of Los Angeles. Once more, Bradley's parents

¹³ Newspaper article, ca. June 1950, ACLU (quote); County Committee on Human Relations, "Memorandum to Supervisor Raymond V. Darby," June 30, 1950, JAF, Box 5/a/cc, Folder 5, HL. The County Committee on Human Relations was originally named the Commission for Interracial Progress. See also John Anson Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1961), a book by the committee's founder. Its name later changed again to the Los Angeles Commission on Human Relations.

¹⁴ Letter from A.A. Heist, Executive Director, ACLU, addressed to A.J. Hunter, July 11, 1950 (attached to a newspaper article, ca. June 1950), ACLU, Box 32, Folder 1, UCLA/SC. See also George L. Thomas, the Executive Director's report, "Los Angeles Conference on Community Relations: 7th Annual Report," ca. 1953, JAF, Box 68, Folder 2b, HL.

found few opportunities for financial relief. The family barely made ends meet as they worked in various odd jobs and moved frequently from one place to the next.¹⁵

In high school, however, Bradley started to carve out for himself a bright future. In an overwhelmingly white student body, he transcended the school's racial restrictions and assumptions about minority students. He broke records in track, became a football star, formed and served in student clubs, and made the honor society. At age eighteen, in his senior year, he began to date another displaced Texan, Ethel Mae Arnold. He received an athletic scholarship for college and attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), while Arnold opened and ran beauty salons around the city. Bradley left UCLA after his third year to join the Los Angeles Police Academy, an offer he received after earning top marks on the entrance exam. The chance to "earn enough money to marry and support a family" appealed to him. He confronted racial discrimination in the department at every step, spoke out against the striking inequalities, and, in spite of the objections of his colleagues, climbed the ranks from the juvenile to detective division.¹⁶

Then in the early 1950s, only a few years after his promotion to detective, Bradley and his family moved to Leimert Park. The couple had spent several years saving their earnings from the police department and beauty salons to purchase a home in the middle-class neighborhood. From the time they married in 1941, the Bradleys had lived next to

¹⁵ J. Gregory Payne and Scott C. Ratzan, *Tom Bradley: The Impossible Dream* (Santa Monica, CA: Roundtable Publishing Inc., 1986), 4-10; Thomas Bradley, "The Impossible Dream," interview by Bernard Galm (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1984), UCLA/SC, 1, 3 (quote), 4, 7-9.

¹⁶ Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 18-25, 27, 30-31, 34, 36-37, 39, 42; Bradley, "Impossible Dream," 26-31, 39-42 (quote on p. 41), 51-52, 55, 58-59, 64, 71.

Ethel's parents in a mostly black community on East Fifty-seventh Street. But they longed to raise their two daughters, Phyllis and Lorraine, in a neighborhood with good schools and high quality public services. Obtaining property in Leimert Park, however, required skill and ingenuity. Disguised in overalls designed to fool the residents, Bradley pretended to be a local worker employed in the neighborhood and selected a house to buy on Welland Avenue. A white couple acting as intermediaries purchased the property in December 1950 and immediately turned the residence over to the Bradleys.¹⁷

Yet the Bradleys' fight to live in the community had only begun. Their neighbors possessed no legal rights to remove the Bradleys from their home, but they attempted to scare the family into leaving. During the Bradleys' first days in the neighborhood, local children taunted and scorned the family. "Here come the niggers, here come the niggers," they barked. The Bradley children often felt the brunt of the abuse. Their seven-year-old daughter Lorraine got into a fistfight with a neighborhood boy who shouted racial epithets at her and demanded she move away. She ran home to her father with a bloody nose who said she had "two choices" to deal with the situation. Either return outside and play or "stay here in the house all the time, afraid to ever leave, which in essence means that this hatred has beaten you." Lorraine went back outside. "You

¹⁷ Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 49-50; Robert Scheer, "Notes 61st Birthday: Bradley Sees Today's Issues in His Past," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 1978, 24; Nancy Skelton, "'I'm a Prisoner Here...I'm Like a Bird in a Cage...' Mrs. Tom Bradley: Living the Life of a Political Wife," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 1983, 14, 16. Payne and Ratzan, in *Tom Bradley*, record the names of the white intermediaries as Mr. and Mrs. John McTernan (p. 50). But the property deed on the Bradleys' purchase of the home on Welland Avenue documented the white intermediaries as Stanley and Jeanne E. Friedman. See Deed of Trust between Stanley and Jeanne E. Friedman, and Alfred L. and Gertrude A. Buckman, 1951, Book 35318, p. 158, RRCC; and Grant Deed between Stanley and Jeanne E. Friedman, and Thomas and Ethel Mae Bradley, 1951, Book 35318, p. 163, RRCC.

win people over by demonstrating to them that you can be a good neighbor," Bradley believed.¹⁸

For months after the Bradleys moved in, incidents of racial violence continued to occur against other black newcomers in the community. In March 1951, the Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations reported that the day after Charles and Bertha Williams unloaded some of their belongings into their new home on 3775 Olmsted Avenue, they discovered "an oily substance which appeared to be crank case oil...spread over the walls, draperies and floors of every room of the house except the kitchen." The Williams contacted Bradley for help, who immediately spoke to the local police. The police, however, failed to unearth any leads. "No clues, other than a few smudgy finger prints [sic], were found," read the statement.¹⁹ Several months later, vandals terrorized John Caldwell and his family in their recently purchased home at 543 Sixth Avenue by burning a four-foot tall cross on their front lawn in the middle of the night.²⁰ But these scare tactics failed to stop blacks from exercising their civil rights and staying the neighborhood.

Despite white intimidation, the Bradleys slowly relaxed and made friends in the community. Tom Bradley aimed to "create a spirit of good neighborliness" by

¹⁸ Scheer, "Notes 61st Birthday," 23; Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 51.

¹⁹ Letter from Dale Gardner, Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations, addressed to Police Relations Committee, "Vandalism in the residence of Charles L. Williams," March 29, 1951, JAF, Box 5/a/cc, Folder 6, HL.

²⁰ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 102; Josh Sides, "A Simple Quest for Dignity: African American Los Angeles Since World War II," in *City of Promise: Race & Historical Change in Los Angeles*, eds. Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2006), 120.

befriending and helping neighbors with projects around their homes. He took pride in assisting the two elderly women that lived next door with home repairs, and he spent his time off from work making improvements on his own property. The Bradley children also made friends, attended the neighborhood schools, played on sports teams, and joined local social groups. Ethel Bradley raised the children, took care of the home, and tended her garden. Planting and pruning the flowers and plants provided her a diversion from the pressures and demands of her husband's political career.²¹

From the late 1940s, only a few years before he moved to Leimert Park, Bradley became increasingly active in the local Democratic Party. Following black political strategy of the 1940s, he initially sought to develop his personal connections and gain influence within the Democratic Party by working on the election campaigns of nonblack candidates Edmund "Pat" Brown and Edward Roybal. While Los Angeles voters helped build a liberal coalition to elect more Democrats to the state legislature, until the late 1940s, Assemblyman Augustus Hawkins served as the sole black representative in the state. Hawkins succeeded Frederick Roberts in 1934 to represent Central Avenue as the second African American ever elected to the legislature. Yet, for the next fifteen years, Hawkins spent most of his time thwarting the passage of racist legislation. Concerned about the possibility of remaining acutely underrepresented and attending to more powerful white liberals, black activists from the mid-1940s increasingly sought public office for themselves. While Charlotta Bass lost the Los Angeles city council election in 1945, William Byron Rumford won an assembly seat in northern California in 1948. From 1949, Hawkins and Rumford took turns introducing civil rights bills to the

²¹ Scheer, "Notes 61st Birthday," 24; Skelton, "'I'm a Prisoner,'" 14; Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 52.

assembly. “One year, I’d sponsor them; the next year, Rumford would sponsor them,” explained Hawkins.²²

In the early 1950s, Bradley stepped up his political activism. He became one of the founding members of the Democratic Minority Conference (DMC), an organization begun by black activists that pushed for affirmative action, increased voter registration, district reapportionment, and more black representation. Bradley and his DMC cohorts also joined the California Democratic Council (CDC), a largely white, liberal reformist group founded in the early 1950s to mobilize local Democrats. He continued to build a biracial coalition in 1953 by getting involved in the Crenshaw Democratic Club, a CDC affiliate, and helping organize and lead its spinoff group the Leimert Park Democratic Club. “Black and white members of the Leimert Park and other CDC clubs,” scholar Raphael Sonenshein wrote, “became Bradley’s most enduring loyalists and comprised the inner circle of his campaign organization.” Meanwhile, the election of white liberals Phillip Burton and Jesse Unruh to the state assembly, and Pat Brown as Governor in the late 1950s, helped make Democrats the leading party in California. Their victories set the stage for the passage of three civil rights bills in the 1959 landmark session of the state legislature. The fair employment act established a state Fair Employment Practice Commission (FEPC); the Unruh Civil Rights Act raised the minimum fine for discrimination in public places; and the Hawkins Act outlawed discrimination in public

²² Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 43-44; Bradley, “Impossible Dream,” 73; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 33-34, 154; Augustus F. Hawkins, “Oral History Interview with Augustus Hawkins,” interview by Carlos Vásquez (California State Archives: State Government Oral History Program, 1988), 75. See also Douglas Flamming, “Becoming Democrats: Liberal Politics and the African American Community in Los Angeles, 1930-1965,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 279-308.

housing. As Democrats achieved groundbreaking victories, and racial discrimination continued to thwart his ambitions in the police force, Bradley looked to politics as a career.²³

In 1963, when the city council position in the Tenth District became available, Bradley took a risk and ran for office. Located directly north and east of the Crenshaw district, according to Sonenshein, the Tenth District emerged as the “seedbed of the biracial alliance” in the 1960s. West Adams Heights and West Jefferson comprised a portion of the district, which the black elite had broken into two decades before, while the overwhelmingly white majority included a large Jewish population and the core of CDC liberals. Bradley campaigned for the improvement of public services and facilities, and he promised to serve as a more visible representative in a district that he felt became “largely...abandoned by the elected leadership.” His rags-to-riches story from a poor Texan boy to Los Angeles police lieutenant, involvement in the CDC, and ability to build a biracial alliance helped him garner votes. He won the election as well as an additional two terms in office. The early 1960s became noteworthy when blacks gained seats to three of the fifteen Los Angeles city council districts. Gilbert Lindsay became the first black member of the city council when he receive an appointment to the Ninth District in 1962, and Billy G. Mills won a seat to the Eighth District in 1963. As councilman, Bradley remained determined to improve race relations and the conditions of blacks in the city. He furthered the biracial coalition, collaborated with civil rights organizations,

²³ Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 44-46; Bradley, “Impossible Dream,” 74-75; Raphael J. Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 47, 60-61; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 154-156; Flaming, “Becoming Democrats,” 297-298.

and fought for better opportunities for blacks. In 1973, one decade after his election, he became Los Angeles's first African American mayor, where he served for five terms.²⁴

The arrival of African American entertainers to Leimert Park in the latter half of the 1950s brought more prestige to the neighborhood. Jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald purchased a two-story house at 3971 Hepburn Avenue in 1957. Born in Virginia and raised in New York in a struggling working-class home, Fitzgerald showed ambition at an early age to become an entertainer. She began singing and recording in the 1930s with the Chick Webb band, and over her career she sold millions of records, received numerous awards, and toured overseas. As she spent more time recording albums and performing her songs on the West Coast, she made the decision to relocate from New York City to Los Angeles. Leimert Park, the latest home of the black elite, served as an ideal locale for her relocation. Fitzgerald took pride in decorating her house on Hepburn Avenue, but she lived there for only part of the year. Her passion for music kept her on the road.²⁵

²⁴ Sonenshein, *Politics*, 40-46, 55-58; Payne and Ratzan, *Tom Bradley*, 57; Bradley, "Impossible Dream," 80-85, 112-113, 124 (quote on p. 85); Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 157. Raphael Sonenshein, in *Politics in Black and White*, provides a detailed map of the council districts from 1965, including the Tenth District, Bradley's constituency (see p. 15). Tom Bradley and his family lived in Leimert Park until the late 1970s. In 1978, after Bradley began his second term as mayor of Los Angeles, he and his family moved from Welland Avenue to the mayoral mansion, known as the Getty House, in Windsor Square (located east of Hancock Park). The "three-story, fourteen-room French colonial brick house... equipped with two large dining rooms, a library, and kitchen on the first floor, and private living quarters upstairs," according to Payne and Ratzan, paled in comparison to their Leimert Park home (Sonenshein, *Politics*, 206). But Ethel desperately missed her friends and her garden in Leimert Park (Skelton, "'I'm A Prisoner,'" 14).

²⁵ Stuart Nicholson, *Ella Fitzgerald: The Complete Biography* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4-6, 25-39, 168-169. The *Coloroto Magazine* of the *New York News* printed a photograph of Fitzgerald standing in front of her newly purchased house in Leimert Park. See May Okon, "She Still Gets Stage Fright: But Ella Fitzgerald Remains the First Lady of Song," *New York News, Coloroto Magazine*, 8 September 1957, 4.

One year after Fitzgerald purchased a house in Leimert Park, musician Ray Charles and his family moved into the neighborhood. The Robinsons (Charles's legal surname) bought a two-story stucco residence at 3910 Hepburn Avenue, located a couple of houses up the street from Fitzgerald. Recent arrivals from Texas, Ray Charles and his wife Della Robinson sought year-round warm weather and a larger home for their expanding family. She especially longed to move out of their rented house in Dallas and into a more permanent residence to raise the children. They paid over \$30,000 in cash for the house, which was well above the 1960 tract average of \$20,000 and 1960 city average of \$19,500.²⁶ The entrance of the Robinsons' home opened up into the kitchen, dining room, and living room, where Charles put his grand piano. They converted the cellar into a recreation room, and Charles used the upstairs bedroom as his office. His hectic touring schedule kept him away most of the time, but his wife and children lived in Leimert Park year-round.²⁷

While *Shelley* and *Barrows* declared restrictive covenants legally unenforceable, residential discrimination endured, and African Americans had to assert their right to live in Leimert Park. Through the 1960s, as more blacks moved to Leimert Park, fear and bigotry prompted whites to sell their properties and leave the area, and a battle to maintain racial integration in the community emerged. Nevertheless, black newcomers helped sustain the safe, family-oriented, middle-class character of the area. As an adult, African American Louise Smith, daughter of a dentist mother and attorney father,

²⁶ *United States Census of Housing: 1960*, vol. 3, *Census Tracts, Los Angeles, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1961). Ray Charles and his family lived in tract 2341 as defined by the United States Census of 1960.

²⁷ Michael Lydon, *Ray Charles: Man and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 146, 148, 173.

recalled her time growing up in Leimert Park in the 1960s as idyllic and “very happy.” In the increasingly black community, “everybody knew each other.” Children played on the street and walked to school and to the local establishments along Degnan Boulevard. African American Karen Ceasar, who moved to Leimert Park in the third grade, also developed fond memories growing up in the area. In their two-story, three-bedroom house on Edgehill Drive, or what Ceasar’s friends described as a “Norman Rockwell street,” the Ceasars gathered together around the dinner table every night. In an effort to help her mother with the daily errands, Ceasar also walked to the Leimert Park business district to do the shopping. But “you never walked just for your mom,” Ceasar insisted. She learned to fill the requests of her neighbors during her trip.²⁸

Settling on the Southerly Slope: View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills

The next major site of African American settlement, located directly southwest of Leimert Park on the southerly slope of the Crenshaw district, became home to residents in a higher income bracket than those of Leimert Park. The exclusively single-family communities of View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills shared much in common, including a hilly landscape, expansive views overlooking the city, spacious houses, high property values, and superior public schools. The developers initially made clear in all three of these enclaves that only whites had the right to purchase property and reside in the area. But from the 1950s onward, with the *Shelley* and *Barrows* rulings on their side, African Americans refused to let racial discrimination prohibit them from moving to the area. They faced white resistance and a significant white exodus from the area, but over

²⁸ Louise Smith, interview by author, March 5, 2007, by telephone; Karen Ceasar, interview by author, July 10, 2007, Los Angeles, California.

a short period of time, the communities' property values soared and their status grew. With the help of professional and renowned African Americans, View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills became some of the most envied and sought-after neighborhoods in Los Angeles.²⁹

In the late 1920s, real estate developers the Los Angeles Investment Company began to carve out two areas located on the opposite ends of the southerly slope as the residential enclaves of View Park and View Heights. Taking advantage of the rising demand for property on Westside Los Angeles, the developers subdivided a small section of land directly west of Leimert Park and across Crenshaw Boulevard, named the site View Park, and placed on the market several newly constructed houses. The developers dug gutters, installed underground utilities, paved sidewalks and streets, erected lampposts, planted trees, and designed parks to appeal to middle- and upper-middle-class buyers. In addition, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* assured, the new homes were "protected by restrictions." On the opposite end of the slope, between Overhill Drive and La Brea Avenue, the Los Angeles Investment Company also began to develop a small residential enclave named View Heights. But the developers had to briefly postpone construction on the site as the city of Los Angeles used the land for the living quarters of the athletes of the 1932 Summer Olympics.³⁰

²⁹ "New Unit of Tract to Be Put on Sale," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1927, E4; "Spanish Type Home Favored: This Style Declared Most Popular Here," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1929, D4; James Thomas Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles: The Biography of a Community Developer and Philanthropist* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 69-71; Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 135-136.

³⁰ "New Unit of Tract," E4; "Homes Demand Indicated," E6; "Spanish Type Home Favored," D4; "New Unit Will Open This Week," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1929, E4. In the early reports of the area, the *Los Angeles Times* used View Park and Viewpark interchangeably to identify the community.

In the early 1930s, the city worked out a deal with the administrators of the “Lucky” Baldwin estate to transform the space west of Crenshaw Boulevard and Vernon Avenue into the Olympic Village. While the female athletes stayed in the USC residence halls, the Olympic Village housed, fed, and entertained roughly 2,000 male athletes from around the world. The site had many advantages, including its location (a fifteen-minute bus ride from the stadiums, fields, and downtown Los Angeles) and temperature (generally ten degrees less than the city proper). Along five miles of newly paved roads, the city placed 550 portable, wood-framed, two-bedroom houses to lodge the athletes; an administration building that housed a bank, post office, commissary, and hospital unit; and an open-air amphitheater for the evening entertainment, which MGM studio executive Louis B. Mayer organized. In an effort to accommodate the various dietary needs of the athletes, the Olympic Village also provided private dining rooms and kitchens for each team. Nevertheless, as soon as the games concluded and the athletes returned to their home countries, the village was dismantled and the celebration of diversity came to an end.³¹

Land developers continued after the Summer Olympics to subdivide the territory into restricted, residential enclaves. Through the first years of development, the Los Angeles Investment Company encouraged independent contractors and property owners to finance the construction of their homes in View Park and View Heights with loans

³¹ “An Olympic Village for 1932,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 April 1931, H1; “A Village of All Nations,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 1931, D13; “Town Mapped for Olympiad,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1932, A1; “Village to House Athletes Springing up for Olympics,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1932, A1, 3; “Building of Olympic Houses Starts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1932, A2; Gardner Bradford, “Feeding Athletes in Forty Languages,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1932, I3. Some of the streets in View Park today, such as Olympiad Drive, Mount Vernon Drive, and Athenian Way, memorialize the site of the 1932 Olympic Village.

from the FHA, the federal housing program that endorsed the use of racial restrictive covenants. R.F. Ingold, president of the Los Angeles Investment Company, “offered every co-operation to property owners in Viewpark [sic] who were desirous of financing their new homes through the government housing program,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported. Furthermore, the developers held a contest that rewarded builders of the best designed, FHA-insured homes with a “\$5000 major award or...one of the nine other cash awards.” Throughout the 1930s, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, real estate sales in View Park and View Heights surpassed the expectations of the developers. Between 1935 and 1936, Ingold explained, homesite sales increased by 110 percent, but only whites were permitted to purchase homes.³²

In the late 1930s, on the portion of land between View Park and View Heights, real estate developers Marlow-Burns and Company carved out the residential enclave of Windsor Hills. Before teaming up to head the company, Fred H. Marlow and Fritz B. Burns boasted a long list of accomplishments. Colorado-born Marlow attended West Point, served overseas after the First World War, and studied engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When he arrived in Los Angeles in 1920, he began building a respectable reputation subdividing and selling tracts in the San Fernando Valley. Minnesota-born Burns discovered his passion for real estate as a child. His uncle’s firm hired young Fritz to distribute handbills on his bicycle around Minneapolis. As a teenager, he purchased his first two lots of land and sold his first piece of property.

³² “Sales Rise Evident in Two Tracts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 1933, 22; “April Ends with Gain in Homes Sales,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 May 1933, 19; “Plans for Many New Dwellings,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1935, D2; “Viewpark Area Sales Grow: Large Increase in Homesite Purchases,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1937, E6; “One Home a Day Rises in Viewpark: Gain of 34 Per Cent Over August Reported,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1939, E3.

In 1921, with the backing of his uncle's company, Burns set up a land development office in Los Angeles, which focused on selling tracts around the San Gabriel Valley. But his business suffered in the Great Depression, and as a result, Marlow and Burns joined forces and formed their own company.³³

In 1937, Marlow and Burns purchased their first piece of land together from the "Lucky" Baldwin holdings and began to carve out Windsor Hills. For the first time in their careers, they focused not only on selling vacant tracts of land, but also on building houses on those parcels. They took the risk of home construction knowing that the newly established FHA protected their investment, and adopted the advice in the *Underwriting Manual* to cover Windsor Hills with racial restrictive covenants. Marlow-Burns and Company targeted first-time buyers and middle-income professionals with houses designed in eighteen different floor plans ranging from \$5,150 to \$6,500. But only whites had the opportunity to purchase property and move to the area. In the Windsor Hills building restrictions code, composed around 1938, "Caucasian race only" topped the list. Number nine made clear, "Racial restrictions are perpetual and binding forever."³⁴

Marlow-Burns employed several promotional techniques to attract buyers to the area. The company took advantage of the press coverage from the abdication of Prince

³³ Keane, *Fritz B. Burns*, 29, 31, 34, 40, 65-66.

³⁴ Keane, *Fritz B. Burns*, 69-71; Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 135-136; "Windsor Hills. Summary of Building Restrictions," ca. 1938, Fritz B. Burns Papers (Hereafter cited as FBB), CSLA-2, Series 3, Box 2ov, Portfolio 1953, Loyola Marymount University, Charles Von der Ahe Library, Special Collections (Hereafter cited as LMU). The borders of Windsor Hills varied and changed overtime. But for the early maps of the area, see "New 'Overhill Unit.' The 'Gold Plate Tract' of Windsor Hills Development," 1938, FBB, Series 3, Box 2ov, Portfolio 1953, LMU; and Windsor Hills brochure, ca. 1938, FBB, CSLA-2, Series 3, Box 2ov, Portfolio 1953, LMU.

Edward as King of England, and named the community after the United Kingdom's House of Windsor to convey an air of nobility and wealth. The developers also used print advertisements to set the tone of the area. Newspaper advertisements made known the availability of FHA mortgages, which help the middle- and upper-middle-class take part in "the great American heritage" of homeownership. "Uncle Sam, with kindly benevolence, stands ready and willing to enable you and your family to enjoy the great American heritage, a brand new home of your own," read a newspaper advertisement, beside a picture of a waving flag and the oversized American icon holding up a single-family house. Meanwhile, brochures depicted the community's ideal homeowners as a cheerful, white family. One pamphlet featured a young, pale-skinned girl in a yellow dress standing on her toes reaching for the knocker to the front door of the house while her adoring mother and father looked on (Figure 11).³⁵

Despite white efforts to prohibit people of color from the area, beginning in the 1950s, a significant number of African Americans migrated further westward and settled in the communities on the southerly slope of the Crenshaw district. Compared to Leimert Park, integration in View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills came at a slower rate. The proportion of blacks rose slightly from 0.2 percent of the population in 1950, to 4.2 percent in 1960. The census showed that most African Americans initially lived on the eastern side of the region, mainly in the community of View Park. Out of the 512 blacks

³⁵ Keane, *Fritz B. Burns*, 68-70; Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 41 (quote, capitalization removed), 135-136; Windsor Hills brochure, ca. 1938, FBB, CSLA-2, Series 3, Box 2ov, Portfolio 1953, LMU.

in the entire southerly slope in 1960, 462 lived east of Valley Ridge Avenue, a clear illustration of the rather deliberate trend of black westward migration (Table 4).³⁶

Black migration into the all-white communities initially proved to be a difficult task. The first African American couple to purchase a home on Brynhurst Avenue in View Park experienced white resistance and white flight. Since 1956, the couple had been living in Leimert Park, but three years later, when they needed a larger home to meet the needs of their growing family, they purchased property in the more costly community of View Park. In an interview conducted years later, the homeowner recalled that the most vocal opposition came from their white doctor neighbor, who worried about the black children “interfering” with his offspring. The more than thirteen-year age difference between the children failed to calm his fears, and he promptly moved away.³⁷

Another African American family underwent a similar experience when they moved to the area that same year. View Park resident David K. Carlisle submitted a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* in the late 1980s recalling the time he and his family first relocated to the community. He recognized that, “Some of our immediate neighbors immediately put up ‘For Sale’ signs.” Carlisle also faced problems from parents when he attempted to register his oldest child in kindergarten at Windsor Hills Elementary School. “The well-intentioned but condescending attitude of some parents led me to enroll him instead at Fifty-fourth Street Elementary School,” another public school located on the easternmost side of Windsor Hills. Yet his impressions of the community quickly shifted

³⁶ U.S. *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28; U.S. *Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report. For 1960 and 1970 census data, see tracts 7031 and 7032.

³⁷ Anonymous, interview by author, May 24, 2007, by telephone.

as more residents embraced Carlisle and his family. “The genuinely welcoming and openly friendly responses of most neighbors and parents soon made us realize how wonderful this close-in community would be.”³⁸

While whites fought black in-migration, the esteemed reputation of View Park continued to develop, particularly when entertainers Ike and Tina Turner moved into the area. Born in segregated Mississippi, Ike Turner endured a turbulent childhood. Around age five, young Ike bore witness to his father’s death. A gang of whites broke into the Turner home, forced his father into a truck, and several hours later, returned him bruised and bloodied with “holes in his stomach.” After the white hospital refused to help, the health department intervened and set up a tent in the yard for his father to heal. He died a few years later. While his mother made a living as a seamstress, young Ike worked between school hours, collecting scrap metal, selling chickens, and delivering goods. But Turner’s passion for music led him to seek out bigger dreams. On his walk home from school one day, he was drawn to the sounds of Pinetop Perkins playing the piano from a house. “It excited me more than anything in the world,” Turner recalled. When he passed the third grade, his mother fulfilled her promise and bought her son a piano, and from then on, Turner honed his musical skills.³⁹

In the early 1950s, Turner began to receive recognition for his talent. Months after Turner and his band recorded “Rocket 88” at Sun Records in Memphis, the song topped the Billboard rhythm and blues chart. Success validated Turner’s musicianship,

³⁸ David K. Carlisle, “Racial Harmony in View Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1989, View Desk, 5.

³⁹ Ike Turner with Nigel Cawthorne, *Takin’ Back My Name: The Confessions of Ike Turner* (London: Virgin Books, 1999), 7-11, 24-27, 33-36, 40-42.

but he continued to crave respect. Each band member received only \$20 for the recording, and while Turner requested top billing for the song, singer Jackie Brenston received the honor. But Turner continued to work in the music business as a talent scout for a Los Angeles-based record label. The work led him out to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, when he first laid eyes on a house in View Park that he would later buy. “On the way to the airport,” to catch his return flight, Turner’s driver told him, ‘Ike, when you get some real money, this is the neighborhood you’ll stay in.’ Turner continued to explain,

And he drove me up to Mount Olympus. I saw this woman opening the garage. I’d never seen an electric garage-door-opener before. I said, “Man, did you see that?” Man, that was exciting to me. When a record company gave me \$20,000 for “A Fool in Love,” I went back up in them hills and I bought the exact same house where I’d seen the woman open the garage door – 4263 Olympiad Drive.

But in the early 1950s, the house would have to wait. Los Angeles felt too fast-paced for the southerner. Rather, Turner and his band moved to East St. Louis, Missouri where they played the nightclub circuit. There, he crossed paths with Anna Mae Bullock, the young Tina Turner.⁴⁰

From an early age, Bullock yearned to shed her rural upbringing. Born in Tennessee, young Anna Mae felt overlooked by her parents and spent much of her childhood moving from one household to the next. She found little comfort in the religion of her church, but flourished in the choir. “I knew I wanted to wear my hair differently—I hated those braids. And I had a feeling about the piano, too, and it had nothing to do with church songs. I wanted...glamour.” In the mid-1950s, at age sixteen, she followed her mother and sister Alline to St. Louis and absorbed the energy of the city. Alline introduced Anna Mae to the nightclub scene, and the two young women quickly

⁴⁰ Turner and Cawthorne, *Takin’ Back*, 46, 50-51, 55; Ernest Dunbar, “Ike and Tina: They’re Too Much, *Look* 34.18 (8 September 1970): 64. British English spelling changed in block quote.

became followers of the most popular band in town, Ike Turner and the Kings of Rhythm. During intermission one night, Bullock seized the opportunity to show off her natural musical talent. When the drummer began to tease Alline to sing, gutsy Anna Mae grabbed the microphone from his hand and began to accompany Turner as he played the organ. Stunned and amazed, Turner “ran down off that stage and he picked me right up!” He invited her to return to sing at the nightclub and join the band on the road.⁴¹

In the early 1960s, Turner found a reason to relocate to Los Angeles. The recording of “A Fool in Love,” with Bullock as lead vocalist, caught the attention of Sue Records head Henry “Juggy” Murray, who flew to St. Louis to convince Turner to sign a record deal with his label. Turner received a \$25,000 advance, released the song under Ike and Tina Turner, and in August 1960 the single reached number two on the Billboard rhythm and blues chart. Then in October, the same month Ike and Tina performed on Dick Clark’s *American Bandstand*, the song reached number twenty-seven on the pop chart. Turner had outgrown St. Louis. Between touring and recording, he returned to Los Angeles and purchased the one-story, three-bedroom ranch house at 4263 Olympiad Drive in View Park. Once they bought the property, the Turners moved their four children and the caretaker to Los Angeles. Ike Turner decorated the interior extravagantly with custom-made couches, red carpet, and a guitar-shaped coffee table. Press photos of the couple on the driveway in front of their sports cars and of Tina Turner cooking from a frying pan in the kitchen portrayed an idyllic picture of married, suburban

⁴¹ Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, *I, Tina* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 6-8, 18 (quote, ellipses in original), 37-39, 49-52.

life, yet this time, the couple was black. For decades, the Turners and their close friends hid from public view Ike Turner's excessive drug use and spousal abuse.⁴²

In 1963, roughly one year after the Turners moved to the neighborhood, Ray Charles further heightened the reputation of View Park when he bought three vacant lots only a few blocks away to build a home for his family. Taking the advice of his manager, he invested \$100,000 in Los Angeles property. Della and the children enjoyed living in Leimert Park, but they welcomed the idea of moving to a custom-built home with more space. After two years of construction, the Robinsons moved into their new home at 4863 Southridge Avenue. The 6,500 square foot structure, which symbolized Charles's wealth and success, stuck out among the moderately sized homes in the community. The white marble entryway, staircase, and fireplace as well as the white carpet and walls looked chic and regal, but Della felt that the design and color choice was unsuitable for raising children. She and the children spent most of their leisure time in the den and ate in the kitchen. The boys enjoyed swimming in the piano-shaped pool and playing basketball with the net they placed on the tennis court.⁴³

The arrival of the first affluent blacks to View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills opened the floodgates for more people of color to follow. Throughout the 1960s,

⁴² Joint Tenancy Grant Deed between Ike and Tina Turner, and Leavitt B. Glaze and Edith L. Glaze, 1962, Book D1675, p. 305, RRCC; Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 60-62, 67, 81, 125, 128-129; Jennifer Seder, "Tina Turner," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1978, J11; Buzzy Jackson, *A Bad Woman Feeling Good: Blues and the Women Who Sing Them* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 194, 233-234. For photos of Ike and Tina at their Olympiad house, see Dunbar, "Ike and Tina," 64; "Ike and Tina Turner," *Ebony*, May 1971, 89; and Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, after p. 104 and 160.

⁴³ Lydon, *Ray Charles*, 225, 233-234, 243, 250, 252, 258, 328. Ray Charles and Della Robinson divorced in 1977, and after splitting their assets in the settlement, Della stayed in the Southridge Avenue house.

the communities of the southerly slope witnessed their largest influx of African Americans; between 1960 and 1970, the black population grew from 4.2 percent to 62.6 percent (Table 4). Despite white fear of property deterioration, the status and value of the communities only grew. Median property values and annual income stood well above Leimert Park as well as the Los Angeles city average. The median property value of the entire area increased from more than \$27,000 in 1960 to over \$35,000 in 1970, while median annual income rose from \$11,000 in 1960 to \$14,000 in 1970 (Tables 5-6). The international reputation of African American entertainers like Ike and Tina Turner and Ray Charles, as well as the status of other successful black professional residents, elevated the communities' standing. Nevertheless, most whites refused to remain in an area populated by blacks, and increasingly sold their homes, and left the area. As a result, residents faced yet another challenge, and through the 1960s, they would fight to maintain racial integration in their communities.⁴⁴

Moving Up in Baldwin Hills: Baldwin Hills Estates and Baldwin Hills Vista

In the face of white intimidation and resistance through the 1960s, African American professionals and entertainers also moved into Baldwin Hills Estates and Baldwin Hills Vista, the communities located on the northern slope of the Crenshaw district. From the 1950s, the largely, single-family residential enclaves of Baldwin Hills Estates and Baldwin Hills Vista served a mostly middle- and upper-class clientele similar

⁴⁴ U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, *Census Tracts*, Final Report; United States Census of Population and Housing: 1970, *Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972); *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts, Final Report, Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif.* For 1960 and 1970 data, see census tracts 7031 and 7032.

to their counterparts that settled in the neighborhoods on the southerly slope of the district. The northern communities also enjoyed winding roads, expansive views of the Los Angeles basin, spacious new houses, high property values, and superior public schools. As blacks migrated into the area in the 1960s, whites fought back, first through intimidation and violence, and then by abandoning the area. But African Americans persevered, and as their numbers grew, they helped boost the reputation of Baldwin Hills Estates and Baldwin Hills Vista into renowned, highly sought-after communities.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, land investors subdivided a large, triangular-shaped section north of Stocker Street, east of La Brea Avenue, and south of Santa Barbara Avenue for clientele in a range of incomes. Whereas the neighborhoods on the southerly slope remained exclusively residential, the developers of the northern section intended to build a community that would meet the needs of city dwellers in a broader income bracket. They zoned the flat outer edges of the northern section for multiple-use housing units aimed toward the lower- to middle-income levels, and a portion of land on the corner of Santa Barbara Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard for commercial enterprise. The businesses of the Crenshaw Center, including the Broadway department store, Silverwoods clothiers, Von's grocery store, and Owl Rexall drugstore, offered a range of products at mid-level prices. Finally, the developers reserved the largest share of land, situated in the hilly interior southwest of Santo Tomas Drive, which they named Baldwin Hills Estates, as a middle- and upper-class residential enclave of single-family houses.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "These Are Multimillion-Dollar Developments," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 January 1949, G10; "Broadway's New Crenshaw Store to Open Today," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1947, A1; "Owl Rexall to Open New Drugstore," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1949, A2; "Silverwoods New Crenshaw Store Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 April 1949, A5; "Von's Crenshaw Rated World's Largest Grocery," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 August 1950, C16.

Baldwin Hills Estates featured unique characteristics that distinguished it from its contiguous communities. The developers marked the entrance to the development with stone columns. In an effort to avoid the cookie-cutter housing patterns of the postwar era and honor the individuality of each homeowner, the developers also constructed a range of custom-built residences designed in Early American, French Provincial, Farmhouse, Cape Cod, and Contemporary Modern styles. The developers also attempted to set Baldwin Hills Estates apart from the neighboring areas by heading each street name with “Don,” the Spanish title of respect for noblemen. Don Quixote Drive, Don Luis Drive, and Don Milagro Drive, among many others, set a tone of distinction and privilege, and “the Dons” became a commonly used nickname of the community (Figure 12).⁴⁶

Through the 1950s, as blacks began to purchase property in the area, whites in Baldwin Hills Estates initially tried to preserve the all-white racial composition of their neighborhood with zeal. During the first decade of the neighborhood’s existence, from 1950 to 1960, the proportion of African Americans living in Baldwin Hills Estates increased, from 0.02 percent to 3 percent of the population (Table 4).⁴⁷ Through the decade, white intimidation and hostility in fact drove some blacks away from the area. For instance, in 1955, the Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations

⁴⁶ “Baldwin Hills Plot Sold; Will Yield 1030 Sites,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1950, E1; “Dwellings Rise in New Tract,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1951, E2; “27 Dwellings With \$675,000 Value Rising at Development,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1952, F6; “Stone Columns to Stand at Entrance to Estate Tract,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 1952, E5; “19 Dwellings Are Rising in Newest Unit of Tract,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August 1953, E9.

⁴⁷ *United States Census of Housing: 1950, Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California*, vol. 5, pt. 100 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *United States Census of Housing: 1960*, vol. 3. Tract 365B, block 10, which included the newly-developed area south of Santa Barbara Avenue, provided the best data for Baldwin Hills Estates in the 1950 census. Tract 2364 of the 1960 census provided statistics around the borders of Baldwin Hills Estates.

reported an African American family that recently purchased a house on Don Diablo Drive, “sold, under pressure, its contract of purchase.” The incident, however, failed to dissuade other African Americans from settling in the area.⁴⁸

Compared to Baldwin Hills Estates, black migration into Baldwin Hills Vista occurred at a slower rate. Situated west of La Brea Avenue, east of La Cienega Boulevard, and south of Coliseum Street, Baldwin Hills Vista opened a few years after Baldwin Hills Estates. In 1954, the developers announced the sale of its “view sites” in a range of prices between roughly \$9,000 and \$16,000. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the area offered prospective buyers properties with “unobstructed” views of the city and “gracefully contoured streets with all utilities underground.” Beyond the southern boundary of the community stood an expansive open field, formerly used as a golf course, and recently portioned off for a water reservoir, which provided a quiet space apart from the bustling city. The area also remained within the borders of the Crenshaw district’s superior public schools.⁴⁹ But, as in the main thoroughfares of Arlington Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard, La Brea Avenue had become another roadblock for blacks seeking full access to the city. Consequently, blacks migrated across La Brea Avenue and into Baldwin Hills Vista at a markedly slower rate than into the other

⁴⁸ Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations, Ninth Annual Report, September 30, 1955, ACLU, Box 28, Folder 4, UCLA/SC.

⁴⁹ “Formal Opening of Homes Set at New Tract,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1954, E14; “Preview of View Sites Announced,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1954, E8.

communities of the Crenshaw district. In 1950 and 1960, blacks made up only 0.2 percent of the population in the tract (Table 4).⁵⁰

Through the 1960s, African Americans faced difficult battles against white intimidation and hostility to move into the areas in the northern section. One black couple, Gordon and Martha Lightner, refused to let financial hardship and racial discrimination stop them from improving their circumstances. After marrying in the mid-1940s, the couple rented an “apartment that had been cut” into two units near Central Avenue with “half a bath, and half a living room, and half a bedroom, and half a kitchen,” remembered Martha Lightner in an interview years later. “We had the tub, and the other half had the [sink] bowl.” The acute housing shortage of the Second World War gave apartment owners the justification to partition their rentals further into smaller, inadequate units, and to overcrowd the buildings. Then, in the early 1950s, the Lightners purchased an abandoned triplex near the Los Angeles Coliseum, and while they lived in one of the units and rented out the others, the couple renovated the property. By 1960, they began their search for a single-family house. While looking at homes on the Westside, Lightner recollects years later, whites in one area literally blocked the couple from entering the street. In Palos Verdes, Lightner heard that whites threatened to “throw the [seller’s] child off the bus into the ocean” if they sold to blacks. Finally, the couple found a vacant lot on Don Jose Drive in Baldwin Hills Estates.⁵¹

⁵⁰ U.S. *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28; U.S. *Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report. Tract 2363 in 1960 included Baldwin Hills Vista as well as a portion of the territory west of La Cienega Boulevard.

⁵¹ Martha Lightner, interview by author, November 8 and 15, 2006, by telephone.

As one of the first blacks to purchase land in the area, the Lightners faced much white hostility. The Middle Eastern family that had previously owned the property grew weary of white intimidation and sold the land, Martha Lightner remembered. But the Lightners' desire to live in a neighborhood with good public schools for their daughter overrode any trepidation. While roadblocks came at every step, the Lightners persevered against racial discrimination. Most lenders refused to grant the Lightners a loan to build a house on their lot, Martha Lightner recalled, but a builder working on the nearby apartments heard their story and offered his help. "Everybody that worked on the property was threatened," Martha Lightner explained, including the former owners, the builder, and the surveyor. White residents yelled racial epithets at the couple, and Martha Lightner heard that one of the white neighbors worried that Gordon Lightner "might rape her." But the resilient couple carried on. In two months, the builder completed a California bungalow and the Lightners moved in.⁵²

These communities provided blacks with an opportunity to advance and improve their quality of life. K.D. Patton understood the significance of moving into Baldwin Hills Estates. Born in Texas, Patton arrived in Los Angeles in early 1946, following his discharge from the army. With \$4,500 in his pocket, Patton bought a restaurant on Central Avenue and moved into a nearby apartment. He ran the business for a year-and-a-half, and then explored other options, attending business school, getting married, and working at the post office. Meanwhile, he discovered his passion for real estate. "Every time we got a couple thousand dollars," he recalled years later, "I bought a property." He purchased property in communities around Los Angeles, hired a crew to renovate, and

⁵² Lightner, interview by author.

then, with the help of realtors, sold them for profit. Through his work in real estate, Patton came across the unique offerings of Baldwin Hills Estates. Patton appreciated that no house “had the same floor plan” or “same exterior,” and he enjoyed the various “short streets [and] long streets” in the landscape. For Patton, Baldwin Hills Estates indeed marked his progress. “[I] wanted to do better,” Patton explained, “live in better places” and “improve my living” conditions. In early 1961, Patton and his family purchased a two-bedroom, two-bathroom split-level house for \$32,500 on Don Luis Drive. They resided among mostly “Jewish and white” neighbors for four years, and then relocated to a newly constructed, four-bedroom, four-bathroom house in View Park.⁵³

Drs. Lawrence and Gertrude Paxton moved to Baldwin Hills Estates with similar intentions. Born in North Carolina, young Gertrude grew up with the expectation of completing college. Her mother, who taught economics at Shaw University, was “very determined” to have all of her children earn degrees in higher education. As a student in the Teacher’s College at Howard University, Paxton changed her career plans and became a dentist. She faced male students who resented her for “taking up space that a man could have,” but Paxton worked hard and finished near the top of her class. While teaching at the dental school, she met her future husband, Lawrence Paxton. The couple married, relocated to New York, and then decided to move to Los Angeles. At first, in the early 1960s, they settled in a two-bedroom apartment on Forty-third Place in Leimert Park. “That was...*the* place to live then,” Gertrude Paxton recalled in an interview years later. Through the 1960s, as a growing number of black professionals settled in the area,

⁵³ K.D. Patton, interview by author, October 2 and 5, 2006, by telephone.

a residence in Leimert Park became a symbol of status and respectability in the black community.⁵⁴

Still, the upwardly mobile couple had larger aspirations. Within a few years, the Paxtons expanded into a family of five and outgrew their Leimert Park apartment. But also, according to Gertrude Paxton, “We wanted to take the next step up” and improve their conditions. Around 1963, they purchased a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house on Don Mariano Drive for \$40,000. Gertrude Paxton spent most of her time raising her three children and participating in local church and social groups. After working for another dentist, Lawrence Paxton established his own dental practice.⁵⁵

Throughout the 1960s, as blacks broke more racial barriers and migrated into the area, whites increasingly sold their homes and moved away. Between 1960 and 1970, the black population jumped from 3 percent to almost 75 percent in Baldwin Hills Estates, and from 1 percent to 34 percent in Baldwin Hills Vista. In the face of racial discrimination and white exodus, residents maintained the reputation and value of their communities. In Baldwin Hills Estates, the average property value jumped from more than \$25,000 in 1960 to \$44,200 in 1970, while the average annual income rose from \$11,873 in 1960 to \$14,907 in 1970. In Baldwin Hills Vista, the average property value increased from over \$25,000 in 1960 to \$37,200 in 1970, while the annual income grew from \$9,307 in 1960 to more than \$13,000 in 1970 (Tables 5-6). Nevertheless, during the rapid demographic shift toward a black majority, residents grew deeply concerned that their thriving, middle- and upper-class communities would deteriorate into dilapidated,

⁵⁴ Gertrude Paxton, interview by author, November 11, 2006, by telephone.

⁵⁵ Paxton, interview by author.

rundown ghettos. The decline of Central Avenue in the 1940s, as well as the destruction of Sugar Hill in the mid-1950s, gave proof to their concerns.⁵⁶

A Community Torn In Two

In the mid-1950s, the California Highway Commission announced its plans to construct the Olympic freeway (now the Santa Monica freeway or I-10) on an east-west path running along the center of the city. While the freeway promised a more efficient route between downtown Los Angeles and the Pacific Coast Highway, some city dwellers ignited in an uproar after hearing that the road would cut through and destroy many predominantly black communities, including Sugar Hill. By the time of the freeway's construction, several well-known African Americans, such as Hattie McDaniel, had left the historic area and migrated further into the Westside. Many long-time residents, however, including musician Juan Tizol, stayed and faced the repercussions when his community literally was split into two parts.⁵⁷ People of color gained the legal protection to live in desirable areas, but they could not end racism, prevent white flight, or persuade white policymakers to respect the value of their communities. The demise of Sugar Hill as a cohesive community alerted blacks in Los Angeles to the persistence of white contempt and control over black neighborhoods.

⁵⁶ U.S. Census of Population: 1950, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28; U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, *Census Tracts*, Final Report; United States Census of Population and Housing: 1970, *Census Tracts*, pt. 1. See tract 2364 in the 1960 and 1970 censuses.

⁵⁷ Hattie McDaniel sold her Sugar Hill home on South Harvard Boulevard around 1950, and moved about ten miles north to "a modest eight-room residence" on Country Club Drive near the mid-Wilshire area. See Harry Levette, "City Mourns Death of Hattie McDaniel," *California Eagle*, 30 October 1952, p. 14. The *Los Angeles City Telephone, L.A. Exchange*, June 1955, shows Juan Tizol at his 2150 South Hobart Boulevard address.

Throughout the 1950s, after the announcement of the freeway construction, the struggle to protect the integrity and value of Sugar Hill raged. Within a decade after *Shelley and Barrows*, as more and more blacks settled in the area, most whites sold their properties and moved away; from 1950 to 1960, the proportion of units occupied by people of color jumped from 23 percent to 79 percent. Despite white fears that property values in black neighborhoods would decline, the value of homes in Sugar Hill remained highly competitive. The 1950 census reported that the average property value of the entire tract had increased to \$13,111, while the city average stood at \$11,925.⁵⁸ While black residents cared for and invested in their properties, in the words of a reporter for the *California Eagle* on the construction of the freeway, city officials put “the most prosperous, best kept and most beautiful Negro-owned property in the country” in harm’s way. The reporter held out hope that, “Although the cards seemed heavily stacked against a reversal, there was an encouraging possibility that a victory might still be achieved.” Yet homeowners and advocates of Sugar Hill understood they had to confront yet another powerful group of white policymakers that showed little concern for the historic community.⁵⁹

Sugar Hill residents and civil rights activists gathered together to agree on a plan of action. They established a citizens committee and appointed three representatives to speak on behalf of the community. Executive Director of the Los Angeles Urban League Floyd Covington, attorney Bernard Jefferson, and real estate agent John Saito traveled to

⁵⁸ *United States Census of Housing: 1950*, vol. 5, pt. 100; *United States Census of Housing: 1960*, vol. 3. In the 1950 census, the area between Washington and Adams Boulevards, and Western and Normandie Avenues, comprised of tract 208. Sugar Hill made up roughly three-quarters of the tract.

⁵⁹ “Sugar Hill’s Fate to be Decided at Freeway Hearing,” *California Eagle*, 18 February 1954, 1.

the state capital of Sacramento in February 1954 to make a case against the placement of the freeway at a hearing of the California Highway Commission. They attempted to persuade the commission to redirect the path of the freeway to the north of Washington Boulevard, in a largely white area, by arguing that racial discrimination prevented black homeowners in Sugar Hill from moving to other comparably desirable neighborhoods. Despite the *Shelley* and *Barrows* rulings, Bernard Jefferson insisted, “We do not have equal opportunities to move elsewhere, a right which Caucasians enjoy.” They convinced the commission to delay the construction for a few months. But in May, “lightly dismissing the serious race problems involved,” the *California Eagle* reported, the commission “unanimously approved” the plan. City Councilman Charles Navarro, one of the few policymakers who opposed the freeway route, rebuked the commission, “All they care about is dollars and cents!”⁶⁰

The reasons for designing the freeway through the middle of Sugar Hill seemed rooted more in racism than economics. The population boom and economic expansion through the Second World War indeed accelerated the need for more efficient transportation routes around the city. Under the Eisenhower administration, Congress helped boost interstate construction with the passage of the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956. But the dubious placement of freeways in Los Angeles suggested an undertone of racial prejudice. Historian Eric Avila found that urban planners used highway construction as an opportunity to clear out some of the city’s predominately black, deteriorating communities. Essentially, policymakers aimed “to

⁶⁰ “Sugar Hill’s Fate to be Decided,” 1, 10; “Freeway Hearing: Sugar Hill’s Residents Plead to Cause,” *California Eagle*, 25 February 1954, 2; “Freeway Route Will Cut Swank Westside District: Owners Ask City Council to Save Homes,” *California Eagle*, 27 May 1954, 1, 4; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 124.

coordinate highway construction with slum clearance.” While Sugar Hill boasted high property values, its high esteem endured mainly in the eyes of blacks. Most whites saw little value in the community, however, and the largely black population of Sugar Hill, and its adjacent lower-income, black communities most likely gave the highway commission a reason to forge ahead with the plan. Freeways served as “a symbol of such middle-class ideals as physical mobility, individual freedom, and civic progress,” Avila maintained. Replacing Sugar Hill and its adjacent black communities with a freeway helped preserve those white, middle-class ideals.⁶¹

Indeed, the freeway demolished the properties of some of the most renowned and celebrated residents of Sugar Hill, literally tearing the neighborhood in half. The houses formerly owned by Hattie McDaniel, Norman O. Houston, Horace and Vera Clark, and Louise Beavers, located directly below Twenty-second Street, were spared from the bulldozer. Yet their privacy and expansive views of the city were overwhelmed with a swath of highways and the resulting vehicular traffic, congestion, and noise. The block of land that ran east and west between Twenty-second and Twenty-first Streets fell victim to the construction. The properties that J.A. and Vada Somerville, Ethel Waters, Juan and Rose Tizol, and many other prominent African Americans worked so hard to attain were reduced to rubble. The 1960 census reported that the \$19,000 average property value in the tract had fallen below the \$19,500 Los Angeles city average.⁶² A community once known for its famous and affluent residents, who determinedly set in motion the end of racial restrictive covenants, had become a passageway for commuters.

⁶¹ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 185, 195, 197, 206-207.

⁶² *United States Census of Housing: 1960*, vol. 3.

Despite the destruction caused by the freeway, many elite African Americans refused to give up on the area. Golden State Mutual's home office, built one year after the *Shelley* verdict on the corner of Western and Adams Boulevards, remained a staple of the community. The company continued to offer insurance policies, home mortgages, and employment opportunities to local residents. Additionally, founders Norman O. Houston and George A. Beavers continued to dedicate their time to civil rights causes. Houston served on the national board of the NAACP and the Urban League. Beavers worked with the Los Angeles Housing Authority Commission, the Los Angeles Urban League, Freedom Fund Campaign, Los Angeles NAACP, local YMCA, and United Negro College Fund, among other organizations. They also encouraged the Golden State Mutual staff to volunteer in the community. In a 1966 interview, Houston explained, "You'll find Golden State interwoven in practically every progressive movement that's going on in our city."⁶³

Ray Charles also invested a portion of his wealth in the community. In 1963, the same year he purchased property for his family in View Park, Charles also bought two lots of land for \$52,000 on the corner of Washington and Westmoreland Boulevards (directly north of the border of Sugar Hill) and built a state-of-the-art studio and office building for his company, Ray Charles Enterprises. Charles called the building RPM International, an acronym for the recording measurement revolutions per minute. The employees of RPM carried out the recording, publishing, and management duties of Charles's three companies, Tangerine Records, Tangerine Music, and Racer Personal

⁶³ Norman O. Houston, interview by R. Donald Brown, 27 October 1966, COPH, 18-19; George Beavers, "In Quest of Full Citizenship," interview by Ranford B. Hopkins, (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1985), UCLA/SC, see biographical summary. Golden State Mutual maintains operations today.

Management. His biographer explained that RPM International became Charles's "castle, his fortress, his faraway island; the place where he could work and play and live and love and be by himself whenever he pleased." He enjoyed the freedom of recording music on his own time without the pressure of a major studio, and running the operations of his companies.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The African American residents of the Crenshaw district aimed not only to improve their quality of life, but also to surmount housing inequality and gain equal access to the city. They faced white intimidation and racism at all levels, from daily threats from their neighbors to legal restrictions endorsed by the federal government. They remained determined to enjoy the best opportunities that Los Angeles had to offer, yet throughout the 1960s, as the racial composition in the Crenshaw district shifted toward a black majority, middle- and upper-class African Americans faced another protracted struggle. Once blacks began purchasing property and moving to the area, a wave of white families sold their homes and moved away. "We saw the neighborhood change very drastically," Gertrude Paxton observed, from mostly white to mostly black. Real estate agents took advantage of these changing neighborhoods, and accelerated the demographic shift further, by scaring whites into selling their homes. But in collaboration with many open-minded white homeowners who refused to accept racism, blacks mobilized in a campaign to sustain the integrity and diversity of their district.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Lydon, *Ray Charles*, 233-234, 243, 250-251. RPM International remains a staple of the West Adams district today.

⁶⁵ Paxton, interview by author.

CHAPTER 4

A CAMPAIGN TO BUILD “A BALANCED COMMUNITY”

Beginning in the spring of 1961, in homes around the Crenshaw district, a small, multiracial group of local mothers, calling themselves United Neighbors (UN), convened for monthly meetings to talk about the growing race-related conflicts in their community. They initially gathered in concern over their children and “some serious racial problems” at Susan M. Dorsey High School, the local public high school, explained Windsor Hills homeowner and one of the white founders Jean Gregg (later Jean Gregg Milgram). The classes, extracurricular activities, and social cliques at Dorsey High School became separated according to race and fights between students increasingly broke out. Those discussions led into a host of issues over property values, neighborhood deterioration, racial stereotypes, and interracial dating. “It was a very exciting time for me personally,” explained Joan Suter, Baldwin Hills Vista homeowner and one of the original black members. As the women revealed their fears and assumptions, they discovered similarities amongst each other and developed meaningful friendships across racial lines.¹

¹ Jean Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots” in *Transcripts, Depositions, Consultants’ Reports, and Selected Documents of the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*, vol. 7 (Los Angeles: Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1966), 4, 6, 9; “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” in *Transcripts, Depositions, Consultants’ Reports, and Selected Documents of the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*, vol. 7 (Los Angeles: Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1966), 4-6; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006, by telephone; Joan A. Suter, interview by author, July 28, 2008, by telephone; Juliet Saltman, *A Fragile Movement: The Struggle for Neighborhood Stabilization* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 282; Ann Post, interview by author, September 24, 2006, by telephone; Ellen Shulte, “Good Neighbor Policy for a Troubled

As word spread in the Crenshaw district about the meetings, more residents joined the group. One year after the initial gathering, UN began to schedule evening meetings to give community members with daytime work hours an opportunity to get involved. Attendance steadily grew from mainly twenty stay-at-home mothers to over one hundred male and female residents. An integrated group of neighbors crowded into living rooms, let down their defenses, listened to divergent views, and formed connections with one another. In effect, the meetings created what Gregg called “a large nucleus of people who had genuinely overcome the fears of each other.” Neighbors worked across racial lines in an attempt to resolve the racial tensions in their community. Several UN members teamed up with other community groups to create programs aimed to improve race relations and give all residents in the Crenshaw district equal respect and understanding. Despite the camaraderie that developed, however, the racial problems in the district worsened. UN knew it had a larger and more complicated task at hand.²

Regardless of the *Shelley* and *Barrows* verdicts, housing discrimination persisted and took on different forms in neighborhoods across the country. “Blockbusting” or panic selling, a practice used by real estate agents to make profit by inducing white out-migration and selling to blacks, infiltrated the Crenshaw district through the 1960s and accelerated the demographic shift. This real estate scheme, used as far back as the early

Neighborhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1967, 9. Gregg was the surname of Jean Gregg Milgram’s first husband, Paul Gregg. In 1970, Jean Gregg married fair housing advocate Morris Milgram and added Milgram to her last name. At that time, she moved to Philadelphia with Morris Milgram and fought for fair housing on a national level.

² Saltman, *Fragile*, 282; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 4; United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges in the Crenshaw Area of Los Angeles, A Racially Mixed Community,” ca. 1963, p. 4, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection). Special thanks to Joan A. Suter for providing me with this document as well as other materials from her personal collection.

twentieth century, yet coined and popularized in the 1950s, set in motion residential resegregation patterns. Real estate agents went door-to-door, circulated flyers, and made telephone calls to spread the news and put fear in white homeowners of black encroachment. Yielding to their anxieties of racial mixing, neighborhood deterioration, and a decline in property values, whites hastily sold their homes and left the area. Concerned that their integrated community would quickly become all black and deteriorate into a ghetto, UN decided to strike back in a more cohesive manner.³

Three years after the first meeting, the informal, ad hoc group established a full-fledged, nonprofit community organization. In July 1964, after collecting membership fees from one hundred residents in the Crenshaw district, the leaders of UN obtained a charter and adopted a new name, Crenshaw Neighbors, Incorporated (CN). Shortly thereafter, CN rented an office, hired a fair housing broker, purchased a real estate license, and set out to counteract blockbusting and maintain integration in the district. The real estate office focused its sales within the borders of the Crenshaw district, mainly in the communities of Leimert Park, View Park, View Heights, Windsor Hills, Baldwin Hills Estates, and Baldwin Hills Vista. Within a few years, as CN expanded its efforts by collaborating with the local public school system, organizing community watch groups, teaming up with neighborhood associations outside of the district, and publishing a newsletter and journal, the group earned an influential and highly regarded reputation.

³ For descriptions of blockbusting and its history, see Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 151; and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 37-38. See also W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

CN ultimately forged an effort across the racial divide, in the words of their slogan, “dedicated to building a balanced community.”⁴

The Public Schools Take Center Stage

As early as the 1940s, while entrenched in litigation against racial restrictive covenants, Loren Miller spoke out against the costs of housing inequality for the entire community structure. He argued that residential discrimination led to racial segregation in public schools, parks, libraries, and swimming pools as well as neighborhood clubs, organizations, businesses, and religious institutions. Local facilities, Miller repeated in an article from the 1960s, “take on the color, or lack of it, of the communities in which they function.” Indeed, the black effort to gain equal access to housing on Westside Los Angeles became part of a broader agenda to fully integrate the urban environment. As African Americans settled in the Crenshaw district, they forged an effort with their more liberal-minded white neighbors to combat racial discrimination in public facilities. The growing racial tensions in the public education system emerged as a particular source of anxiety for local homeowners. The high academic standards and solid reputation of the public schools remained a major attraction that brought homebuyers to the area. But as blacks increasingly moved to the area, and the public school student population grew more diverse, violence between youngsters broke out. UN formed in response to the turmoil and initially made the public education system its priority.⁵

⁴ “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 6-8; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 2, 4-5; “A Story of Balance,” 1; Shulte, “Good Neighbor Policy,” 9.

⁵ Loren Miller, “Loren Miller Says...Long, Long Ago,” *California Eagle*, 27 September 1962, 1; Gene Sherman, “The Negro’s Role: Housing Is Key to Aspirations,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1962, 10; Loren Miller, “The Protest Against Housing Segregation,” *The Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* 357 (January 1965): 76.

The age-old institution of the neighborhood school became an increasingly contentious issue in mid-twentieth century United States. The practice, which dated back to the common school movement of the eighteenth century, based pupil assignments on proximity to their place of residence. Nevertheless, Jim Crow laws in the South and racial prejudice across the nation also dictated student placement and forced African American youngsters to study in significantly underfunded, substandard schools usually further away from their homes. The 1954 United States Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared separate schools under Jim Crow laws unconstitutional, brought to the forefront the nationwide educational inequalities and helped spark the modern civil rights movement. Through the 1950s and 1960s, as civil rights activists came out in the thousands demanding racial equality, white supremacists relentlessly refused integration. In the metropolis, the Los Angeles Board of Education contributed to racial segregation in its public schools by adjusting the neighborhood concept to meet its needs. Administrators had a reputation for racial gerrymandering of school zones, and arbitrarily authorizing or rejecting transfer requests of pupils seeking to attend schools outside of their designated district. In an effort to enroll their children at their preferred schools, rather than the schools closest to their homes, white parents also evaded the neighborhood concept by lying about their home address.⁶

⁶ “Prepared Statement by Dr. Burton Henry. Report of the Education Committee of the Community Relations Conference of Southern California,” in *Hearings Held in Los Angeles and San Francisco, 25-28 January 1960* (Washington, DC, GPO: 1960), 76-78; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 159-160. See also Meyer Weinberg, *Race and Place: A Legal History of the Neighborhood School* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1967); and Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

Despite the *Brown* ruling, white parents and school administrators in the Crenshaw district attempted to stop integration at every step. In 1959, white parents pressured African American View Park resident David Carlisle into enrolling his child in kindergarten at the racially mixed Fifty-fourth Street Elementary School, located on the easternmost side of Windsor Hills, rather than the majority white Windsor Hills Elementary School, situated on the western half of the community. Compounded with the difficulties the Lightner family endured to build their house on a vacant lot in Baldwin Hills Estates in 1960, Martha Lightner recalled, Audubon Junior High School, the district's only middle school at the time, prohibited her daughter from enrolling altogether. In order to prove the Lightners lived in the area, Martha Lightner fumed in an interview years later, "We had to take our electric bill, and our gas bill, and our telephone bill to the school before they allowed her to enter the class."⁷

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the local NAACP began pressuring the Los Angeles Board of Education to acknowledge school segregation and take steps toward correcting the inequalities. But as expected, school authorities denied that racial inequality in the system existed and paid no heed to the warnings of civil rights leaders. Despite Miller's frequent calls for change, he doubted administrators "either knew or cared about" racial segregation in the city's public school population. Since the Los Angeles Board collected no statistical data on the racial or ethnic background of its

⁷ David K. Carlisle, "Racial Harmony in View Park," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1989, View Desk, 5; Martha Lightner, interview by author, November 8 and 15, 2006, by telephone.

students, civil rights groups had little documentation to support their case. The Pasadena Board of Education, however, had been collecting such data on its students since 1946.⁸

As in Los Angeles, school administrators and parents in Pasadena, the mostly white community situated northeast of Los Angeles, perpetuated school segregation. The Pasadena Board adopted a policy that promoted fair zoning practices and denounced racial segregation, yet the figures proved that throughout the 1950s, as more people of color moved to the community, the student population of the public schools became increasingly separated by race and ethnicity. Some schools remained solidly white, while others had become heavily black, Asian, and Hispanic. The local NAACP fired back in 1953 with a lawsuit after the Pasadena Board approved a measure to build more classrooms at an all-white school when another local school comprised mostly of students of color had additional space. After the *Brown* decision, the Pasadena Board felt it had little basis to defend its actions against the NAACP. School administrators suspended their plans and promised to modify their policies toward racial inclusion. Nevertheless, the board continued to perpetuate segregation in the school system.⁹

In the early 1960s, the battle between the local NAACP and the Pasadena Board landed in court. Seeking to attend a school closer to his home, Jay Jackson, a thirteen-year-old, African American student in Pasadena, filed a request with the school district to transfer from his mostly black junior high school to a white institution. The school district denied his application, and although Jackson filed a complaint with the Los Angeles Superior Court, the judge upheld the decision. Backed by Loren Miller and the

⁸ “Prepared Statement by Dr. Burton Henry,” 77-78; Miller, “Loren Miller Says,” 1; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 159-160.

⁹ “Prepared Statement by Dr. Burton Henry,” 77-78.

NAACP, Jackson took his grievances to the California Supreme Court. The 1963 case *Jackson v. Pasadena City School District* ultimately revealed the school district's practices of racial gerrymandering. Evidence became clear that in 1961 the Pasadena Board responded to the protestations of white parents and redrew its school zones to allow white youngsters to attend the mostly white junior high school. Basing its ruling on *Brown*, the California Supreme Court called on "school boards" to "take steps, insofar as reasonably feasible, to alleviate racial imbalance" in the school district, mainly by allowing transfers to take place. While Jackson won his case, the Court set neither a deadline for racial desegregation, nor proposed any methods to achieve integration.¹⁰

Despite the *Brown* and *Jackson* verdicts, and years of pressure from civil rights organizations, the Los Angeles Board continued to postpone any efforts toward desegregation. At a meeting in June 1962, representatives from the local ACLU, NAACP, and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) joined forces to push for school desegregation. They urged school administrators to set up a committee that aimed to create equal educational opportunities for all pupils in Los Angeles and begin desegregating the schools in the 1962-1963 school year. While the Los Angeles Board agreed to form a committee, school authorities spent the summer months organizing the delegates, soliciting advisors, and planning the schedule of meetings, rather than beginning to desegregate the school district.¹¹

¹⁰ Jay R. Jackson, Jr. v. Pasadena City School District et al., 59 Cal. 2d 876 (1963); Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 160. See also Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

¹¹ John Caughey and LaRee Caughey, *School Segregation on Our Doorstep: The Los Angeles Story* (Los Angeles: Quail Books, 1966), 5-7; John Caughey and LaRee Caughey, *To Kill a Child's Spirit: The Tragedy of School Segregation in Los Angeles* (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1973), 15-18.

In September 1962, the ad hoc committee on equal educational opportunities finally gathered for the first of a series of meetings spread over the subsequent months. Civil rights groups had anxiously waited throughout the summer for board officials to begin taking steps toward school desegregation. At the first hearing, however, they learned that the committee planned six hearings, several weeks apart, over half of the school year extending between September and January. The first meeting confirmed to civil rights groups that the Los Angeles Board resisted any genuine action. School officials spent the meeting defending the neighborhood school concept and arguing against the recommendations for desegregation. The committee rejected the ACLU's suggestions to document the racial distribution of schools in the district and make integration "a positive determinant" in pupil placement. Representatives of the NAACP threatened a boycott unless officials adjusted enrollment before the school year. Since the Board refused to act, the Los Angeles NAACP took matters into their own hands.¹²

Days before the start of the 1962 school year, Baldwin Hills Elementary School, which sat on the western side of the Baldwin Hills Vista community, became a hotbed in the fight for school desegregation in Los Angeles. Principal Elizabeth (Betty) Metz turned away sixteen African American children and four Japanese American youngsters from registering for class. Metz argued that the twenty students and their parents resided in a different district and therefore had to enroll at Marvin Avenue Elementary School, another public school located north of Jefferson Boulevard. The *California Eagle* reported that the students had come from the majority black and "seriously overcrowded"

¹² Caughey and Caughey, *School Segregation*, 7, 10; Dick Turpin, "Education Board Urged to Press Integration: Groups Ask that Race, Creed, Color Be Factors in Making School Boundaries," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1962, 15.

Cienega Elementary School, also located north of Jefferson Boulevard. While Cienega Elementary attempted to deal with its large enrollment by placing “at least half of the pupils on half-day sessions,” parents sought a better solution by enrolling their children in Baldwin Hills Elementary. Two of the children that attempted to enroll at the school, six-year-old Todd Garr and five-year-old Randall Garr, lived closest to Cienega School, but nearly the same distance of one mile from Marvin Avenue Elementary and Baldwin Hills Elementary. While school authorities directed the students to Marvin Avenue Elementary, parents wanted to provide the best educational opportunities for their children by taking them to the more highly regarded school.¹³

While Metz sought to follow the guidelines established by the Los Angeles Board, the incident brought public attention to the striking differences in the racial composition of the schools. Baldwin Hills Elementary served residents in one of the least integrated communities in the Crenshaw district. Until the 1960s, Baldwin Hills Elementary reflected the racial composition of Baldwin Hills Vista and was comprised of a solidly white student body. Cienega and Marvin Avenue Elementary Schools, on the other hand, mirrored the racial makeup of its surrounding communities and had majority black enrollments. In 1968, for example, blacks made up 95 percent of the student body at Cienega Avenue Elementary and 94 percent at Marvin Avenue Elementary. Metz defended the district lines that the Los Angeles Board demarcated in 1948 when,

¹³ “Baldwin Hills School Rejects 20 Pupils; Picketing Planned,” *California Eagle*, 13 September 1962, 1; “Negroes Try to Place 15 in School: Fail in Effort to Change District in Baldwin Hills,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1962, A1, 2; Loren Miller, “NAACP Calls Off Boycott as Negroes Enter ‘White’ School,” *California Eagle*, 20 September 1962, 1. The local newspapers show a discrepancy in the number of students that attempted to register at Baldwin Hills Elementary School. The *California Eagle* reported twenty students, while the *Los Angeles Times* reported fifteen.

according to the *Los Angeles Times*, “all residents in the area were white.” She also proudly noted that two black teachers worked at Baldwin Hills Elementary, and that the previous year the school graduated one black student. At the time, the school indeed reflected the small number of blacks that lived within the district borders. However, as African Americans asserted their civil rights and moved into the area, school authorities increasingly had trouble covering up their racially driven intentions.¹⁴

The Los Angeles NAACP stepped in to defend the twenty students and put pressure on school authorities to impose desegregation. Theodore Wright, representative of the local chapter and father of one of the students that Principal Metz refused to enroll at Baldwin Hills Elementary, pointed out that eight years after *Brown*, children in Los Angeles continued to study in racially segregated schools. “The situation is even more impermissible...” the *California Eagle* reported on Wright’s response, “since children who live six or seven blocks from Baldwin Hills [Elementary] must go twice that far—14 or 15 blocks to Marvin Avenue [Elementary].” Indeed, the behaviors of the Jim Crow South made their way into the public education system in Los Angeles. While civil rights activists demanded the desegregation of public facilities in the South, the Los Angeles NAACP planned to picket outside both Baldwin Hills Elementary and Marvin Avenue Elementary on the first day of school.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Baldwin Hills School Rejects 20 Pupils,” 1; “Negroes Try to Place 15 in School,” A1, 2; “NAACP Meets Rebuff on School Enrollment: Out-of-District Negro Students Turned Down at Two Predominately White Units,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 1962, 24; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles City Schools, “Racial and Ethnic Survey,” Fall 1968, Los Angeles School Monitoring Committee Records (Hereafter cited as LASMC), Box 139, UCLA/SC.

¹⁵ “Baldwin Hills School Rejects 20 Pupils,” 1; “Negroes Try to Place 15 in School,” A1, 2.

Before the NAACP carried out the protest, however, the Los Angeles Board intervened. After “a lengthy meeting with Board of Education officials,” Loren Miller reported, the school authorities and the Los Angeles NAACP came to a resolution. The Superintendent mandated Baldwin Hills Elementary to grant transfer requests of fifty students from Cienega Elementary, and the NAACP agreed to withdraw its plans for the protest. The *California Eagle* printed a photo on the front page of five-year-old Randal and six-year-old Todd Garr, the first African American youngsters transferred to Baldwin Hills Elementary. The two brothers began their respective kindergarten and first grade classes at the beginning of the 1962 school year. The NAACP felt “satisfied” with the results, according to Miller, politely conceding that the “school system is attempting to arrive at solutions equitable to all.” Miller understood school integration represented a pivotal point in the process toward full racial equality, yet he remained unimpressed by the sluggish pace of the school board’s actions. The “issue...should have been looked into a decade ago.”¹⁶

Throughout the 1962-1963 school year, the ad hoc committee on equal educational opportunities continued to attend to racial inequality and segregation in the public school system. The hearings held between September and January addressed a host of issues related to race and inequality, such as student placement, transfer policies, district zones, teacher assignments, curriculum standards, counseling needs, discipline guidelines, and dropout rates. Attendance by nearly all seven board members at every meeting, as well as the participation of civil rights groups and community organizations from across the city, demonstrated a willingness to work together and reform the system.

¹⁶ Miller, “NAACP Calls Off Boycott,” 1; Miller, “Loren Miller Says,” 1.

Among the many presenters, UN gave a statement that focused on a topic most troublesome to the Crenshaw district residents. The group brought attention to Dorsey High School and the rumors circulating in the community of hostile students and apathetic teachers. Because the school zones for Dorsey High School extended beyond the borders of the Crenshaw district, into low-income and primarily black areas of the city, the school enrolled students from a range of racial, economic, and educational backgrounds. The mixture of teenagers created an explosive setting. UN urged the committee to improve communication between school officials and parents, clarify misconceptions, and work with the community to resolve the social and educational gaps in the student body.¹⁷

Although UN characterized itself as a “study, or communications, group,” aimed at facilitating the exchange of ideas and improving relations in the district, its involvement and influence in the community increasingly grew. In its first years, explained steering committee member and Los Angeles Urban League affiliate John Davies, UN remained a loosely based organization with “no formal membership, no constitution or by-laws, no officers, not even a regular meeting schedule.” Yet the group continued to expand in size and influence in the Crenshaw district and across the city. Rescheduling meetings to an evening hour, and moving the locations from living rooms into public places, brought more than one hundred participants into the group. UN established a steering committee that met “several times a month” to outline the agenda for the larger discussions and work on building a partnership with other local institutions.

¹⁷ Caughey and Caughey, *School Segregation*, 7, 10-14; Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 18; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 9-10; United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges,” 2-3; John Davies, “One (Hopefully) Integrated Community,” ca. 1964, pp. 21-22, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

Representatives met privately with school administrators and pushed for resolutions to student hostility and educational inequalities in the public school system. The group invited school officials and local leaders to speak at the larger discussions and participated in panel discussions sponsored by other local groups.¹⁸

UN members also assumed leadership roles in other local organizations.

Beginning in 1963, the Crenshaw Coordinating Council, a group established by the Los Angeles County government to prevent juvenile delinquency in the Crenshaw district, carried out “the most concrete and specific achievement so far in the Crenshaw area,” UN members explained in a report. The Coordinating Council’s education committee created a six-week summer reading improvement course to raise the reading levels of low-achieving grade school students. Joan Suter, architect of the program and one of the first black members of UN, worked within the broader effort to resolve the tensions in the school system and ensure educational equality for all students in the district. Born in New York City, Suter “came from a very integrated background,” attended a “highly academic” high school, and then enrolled at Hunter College. But in the early 1960s, she suspended her studies and moved with her husband to Los Angeles. The couple first lived with family in View Park, who introduced Suter to UN, and soon thereafter bought a house in Baldwin Hills Vista. While her husband taught art at Beverly Hills High School, Suter focused on raising the children and became a local activist. The Los Angeles Board of Education approved the reading program, a UCLA professor of education advised the staff, and a team made up entirely of volunteer community members and teachers ran the course at the nearby Jewish synagogue, B’nai Israel

¹⁸ United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges,” 4; Saltman, *Fragile*, 282-283; Davies, “One (Hopefully),” 21-22.

Congregation. The success of the first summer, which had an enrollment of sixty-six children, encouraged the Coordinating Council to continue running the program and create educational programs for secondary students.¹⁹

In an effort to “preserve the interracial character of the Crenshaw community,” UN explained in a report from the early 1960s, community activists also formed the Greater Crenshaw Town Council. “The Town Council began with a meeting,” in the summer of 1963, “between a local Episcopalian priest and several members of the Board of the Crenshaw Chamber of Commerce.” At the second meeting, several other community leaders, including representatives from UN, joined the group. Within a few months, the group agreed on a set of bylaws, elected officers, and initially established five “action committees,” each of which focused on education, housing, crime and safety, publicity, and community activities. One-hundred-and-fifty community members, from school administrators and real estate agents to city officials and business owners, attended the Town Council’s first public forum. The group also distributed a brochure, printed a newsletter, presented a film “on property values and race,” and urged realtors to practice fair mindedness and racial tolerance in their work.²⁰

Nevertheless, UN understood that it faced an uphill battle to improve race relations in the Crenshaw district. Racial tensions in the schools continued to grow, and while the group teamed up with school officials and helped improve the lines of

¹⁹ United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges,” 5-6; Suter, interview by author; “Co-Council Sets Reading Instruction for Children,” *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 9 June 1963, 1, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

²⁰ United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges,” 5-6; Davies, “One (Hopefully),” 21-22; Greater Crenshaw Town Council, “Where and What is the Crenshaw Area?” brochure, ca. early 1960s, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

communication, the Los Angeles Board of Education remained largely resistant to major change. Furthermore, UN quickly discovered another growing problem in the Crenshaw district. White and black real estate agents became an aggressive and manipulative force. Using a number of real estate blockbusting techniques, including going door-to-door, circulating flyers, and making telephone calls, real estate agents touched on the deep-seated fears of white homeowners and spread rumors of black encroachment and imminent neighborhood deterioration. In an attempt to profit from what they saw as an inevitable demographic shift to a black majority, real estate agents urged white homeowners to immediately sell their properties, oftentimes at overly high prices to black buyers. As real estate agents urged whites to leave the area, UN felt it had no other choice but to take action.

Blockbusting in the Crenshaw District

While *Shelley* and *Barrows* helped stop the widespread use of racial restrictive covenants, discriminatory housing practices persisted across the country throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Whites used intimidation and violence as a direct strategy to avert black migration to their neighborhoods, yet African Americans persevered in the face of danger. Consequently, through the 1960s, alongside the rise of real estate blockbusting, many whites in the Crenshaw district succumbed to their fears and felt no other option but to sell their properties and move away from the area.

Blockbusting emerged as one of the most selfish methods used by real estate agents to profit from what they saw as “transitional” communities. Once the first blacks moved to a block, both black and white real estate agents tapped into the fears of white homeowners and spread rumors that the area would quickly become all black, lose its

value, and deteriorate into a ghetto. Whites in the Crenshaw district took heed of the warnings, and increasingly moved out of the area.²¹

By the first half of the 1960s, blockbusting had permeated the Crenshaw district. “Brokers appeared to be everywhere, ringing doorbells, telephoning, sending letters and circulars urging home owners to sell,” worried Ann Post, Baldwin Hills Vista resident and one of the white founders of UN. While real estate agents targeted their claims at white homeowners, black newcomers also became caught in the crossfire. In an interview years later, an African American homeowner explained that he and his wife received two or three phone calls a week from realtors warning them of black encroachment. Realtors also mistook a light-skinned black homeowner for a white resident and warned him “Colored people are moving in!” By 1964, even though whites still comprised a large proportion of the population, protested Jean Gregg, one of the white founders of UN, “The brokers really felt that this was a Negro community.” Realtors foresaw the district as part of Los Angeles’s expanding black belt, and as a result, they took liberties pressuring whites to sell their homes to blacks. Many argued that before the district became all black and property values dropped, white homeowners needed to take advantage of the high demand and sell their homes above-market value. A 1962 *Los Angeles Times* article reported that in Leimert Park, one white seller “asked \$18,500 from whites, \$19,500 from Orientals and \$21,500 from Negroes.”²²

²¹ For a discussion of blockbusting occurring in middle-class neighborhoods across the country, see Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 38-39.

²² Ann Post, “Stabilizing an Integrated Neighborhood,” *The Integrator* 1.3 (Fall 1968): 9, SCL; Donald Cotterell with Perlita D. Clarke, interview by author, August 2, 2006, Los Angeles, California; Phenella D. Perez and Gisele Perez, interview by author, October 19, 2006, by telephone; “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 17-18; Gene Sherman, “The Negro’s Role: Housing Is Key to Aspirations,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1962, 10.

Black realtors as well as white realtors accelerated the demographic shift. In the 1950s and 1960s, only a small number of African American realtors sold homes in the Crenshaw district, yet their presence in the community and their blockbusting tactics impelled whites to move. In Leimert Park, as early as 1952, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations received reports of an African American real estate agent distributing “postal cards” to residents with the words, “Sell your homes now, Negroes are moving in.” The commission also heard rumors that white residents organized a meeting to protest this method of panic selling, and while the police investigation uncovered no racial tensions in the community, increasing numbers of white homeowners moved out of the area.²³

Real estate agent Deloy Edwards played a significant role in changing the racial makeup of the district. With ambition, hard work, and foresight, he rose, in his words, “from a country boy to a multi-millionaire.” Racism and inequality affected Edwards’s experiences growing up in segregated Phoenix, Arizona. He lived two blocks from a local school, but had to travel several miles downtown to attend Phoenix Colored High School. Just before the United States entered World War II, he moved north to Los Angeles and found employment in the booming economy. “I always had three jobs,” he recalled. Among his many positions, he worked as a ship fitter at the Long Beach shipyard, supervisor at a lock company, and in the post office. He earned a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration at UCLA, and found his niche in real estate. He first worked in the property management division at the Veteran’s Administration, and then

²³ Dale Gardner, L.A. County Commission on Human Relations, “Inter-Office Memo,” January 10, 1952, JAF, Box 5/a/cc, Folder 7, HL. Gregg attributed the movement “largely to the real estate brokers, both Negro and Caucasian.” See “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 17.

transferred in 1953 to W.A. Robinson Realty Company, a black-owned agency in Los Angeles, where he rose in the ranks to broker-manager. Three years later, with three sales agents and his sight set on the communities of the Crenshaw district, Edwards opened his own office at 4034 Buckingham Road, a few blocks north of Baldwin Hills Estates (Figure 13).²⁴

Edwards quickly developed a reputation in the Crenshaw district as an ambitious and well-connected realtor. Unlike white realtors working in the area, Edwards reached a broader base of homebuyers with the financial resources to pay high prices for their desired property. Black physicians, attorneys, city officials, teachers, entertainers, athletes, and other professionals found in Edwards a skillful and charming mediator who possessed the ability to access a mostly white district. His early sales in the Crenshaw district came from Ike and Tina Turner for the house on Olympiad Drive, and Ray (Charles) and Della Robinson for the three lots on Southridge Avenue. Others came from singer Dionne Warwick, politician Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, and local leader Bernard C. Parks. In order to convince whites to sell their property, especially to the first blacks that wanted to move to the area, Edwards used patience and remained persistent.²⁵

Although *Shelley* and *Barrows* prohibited the courts from enforcing restrictive covenants, white homeowners continued to try to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods. Whites made private agreements with their neighbors, inserted racial restrictions into their housing contracts, and outright refused to sell to people of color. Once the first

²⁴ Deloy Edwards, interview by author, June 23, 2007, Los Angeles, California; “Deloy Edwards: 50 Years of Service,” booklet from 50th Anniversary Gala Celebration, July 30, 2005, in author’s personal collection, pp. 3, 5; Deloy Edwards’s resume, ca. 1980s, in author’s personal collection. Special thanks to Deloy Edwards for providing me with the documents.

²⁵ Edwards, interview by author.

blacks bought property in the neighborhood, whites attempted to scare the newcomers into leaving with verbal threats and violence. Edwards's first years working in the district proved risky and difficult. As he made his rounds, white homeowners "slammed the door" in his face and ordered him to leave. At properties that Edwards helped acquire, vandals burned crosses on the front lawns and filled a swimming pool with sand. But the self-proclaimed "fighter" sensed a community on the verge of change that blacks had long desired to live in, and he felt compelled to create that opportunity.²⁶

Edwards helped open up the district to blacks one house at a time. In an effort to persuade whites to sell their houses, he banked on the wealth of his black clients and promised high returns to white homeowners. As more blacks settled in the area, and more whites wanted to sell their properties, Edwards's business expanded and his relationship with the community became more complex and multifaceted. In fact, his reputation for getting high returns enticed many white homeowners to hire Edwards as their realtor. "White brokers couldn't get what I did," he boasted, and white homeowners knew that "I was the only one that could get more money for the house."²⁷

For black buyers without the financial means, Edwards found the funds to help his clients purchase property in the area. The discriminatory policies of federal government agencies, such as the FHA, as well as private lenders, independent real estate appraisers, and brokers, kept most blacks hemmed into ghettos and out of middle-class neighborhoods. Black-owned lending institutions, including Golden State Mutual and Broadway Federal Savings and Loan, increased homeownership opportunities by

²⁶ Edwards, interview by author.

²⁷ Edwards, interview by author.

providing loans to thousands of African Americans in Los Angeles. Edwards also used his personal connections and wealth to help blacks move into the affluent district. He nurtured his relationship with the vice-president of white-owned California Federal Savings and Loan, who provided Edwards and his clients with home mortgages. Whenever he needed a loan, the vice-president told Edwards, “Just come to the office and sign your name and the money is yours.” When his clients needed help with a down payment, Edwards also loaned money out of his own pocket. In effect, one of his long-time employees described Edwards as “the Thurgood Marshall of real estate.”²⁸

Like other realtors who resorted to blockbusting for profit, Edwards was willing to capitalize on white fear and black demand for property. He initially chose to work in real estate, he made clear, “because I knew I could make a lot of money.” Throughout the 1960s, in the Crenshaw district, “I was buying and selling like crazy.” He found homes for blacks, purchased several properties for personal use, and rented and sold many of his holdings for profit. As his real estate business succeeded, Edwards expanded the size of his staff, supporting more than fifty employees on his payroll at a time, and moved into a larger office in the Crenshaw Center business district. Ultimately, his real estate business made him a millionaire. “I made more than the president of the United States,” he boasted in an interview years later. “There’s nothing I said I wanted that I couldn’t get.” Edwards spent his earnings on luxury cars, a boat, land in and outside of

²⁸ Edwards, interview by author; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 195-210; Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 51-55; Amy E. Hillier, “Redlining and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Journal of Urban History* 29.4 (May 2003): 414-415.

Los Angeles, and private school tuition for his children. In the late 1960s, he also donated property in View Park valued at \$100,000 to the Methodist Church.²⁹

But as more blacks moved into the Crenshaw district, UN became determined to driven to stop blockbusting and convince whites to stay. The first African Americans to move to the area had opened the floodgates to black in-migration. But by the mid-1960s, Edwards found that African Americans had become “the only people buying in the area.” He explained that, “Every house I got, I sold it to blacks because whites wouldn’t buy it.” Edwards wanted African Americans to have the opportunity to enjoy good quality housing, yet as a business owner, he also wanted to succeed and earn money. UN, however, argued that real estate agents, such as Edwards, restricted their sales to African Americans. The racially integrated group accused realtors of lacking the determination to prevent resegregation and what they feared as the expansion of the ghetto into the district. Enraged at predatory realtors and fueled by their concern over resegregation, the racially integrated UN organized a more formal organization and real estate agency aimed at maintaining integration in the Crenshaw district.³⁰

Crenshaw Neighbors and its Effort to Maintain Integration

“When Caucasians were thrashing out of Baldwin Hills like grunion from the ocean,” wrote *Los Angeles Times* reporter Art Seidenbaum, with a vivid analogy to the small California fish, UN acted with urgency to establish a full-fledged organization aimed to maintain a racially balanced population in the Crenshaw district before the black

²⁹ Edwards, interview by author; “Deloy Edwards: 50 Years of Service,” 3, 14-15; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 6-7.

³⁰ Edwards, interview by author; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 1.

population would become the majority. Shortly after UN began holding meetings, the group discovered that the conflicts at the high school represented one symptom of the deeply rooted, racist practices that had persisted in all strata of society throughout United States history. Running a discussion-oriented group alone would not solve the complex and interconnected race-related problems of the district. As real estate agents pandering to white fear and black demand relentlessly transformed each neighborhood block from majority white to black, the racially diverse and liberal-minded leaders of UN formed an incorporated, nonprofit organization and real estate agency that sought to maintain integration in the area.³¹

After two years of growing participation and increasing influence in the district, UN faced a major turning point. “In the spring of 1963, Dorsey High School erupted in a way that no one could misinterpret,” Gregg explained. “Serious fights involving real injury, even hospitalization, occurred with alarming frequency.” While more white parents either requested the Los Angeles Board to transfer their students to another school, or sold their homes and moved away from the area altogether, the interracial group of UN members sought out a resolution at the high school. They relied on their relationship with school officials and “frantically appealed” to the Los Angeles Board for help. School officials responded with concern and replaced the principal at the high school. That same year, according to a UN report, administrators also added “additional

³¹ Art Seidenbaum, “Spectator, ’67: Neighbors Stand for Integration,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 November 1967, D1; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 5-6; Shulte, “Good Neighbor Policy,” 9.

staff, and additional counseling and library hours” at the high school. Nevertheless, tensions between school officials and the community continued to grow.³²

In May, after an entire school year of deliberations, the ad hoc committee on equal educational opportunities finally drew up a resolution toward educational equality. The Los Angeles Board agreed in a policy statement to nurture an educational system that provided “pupils an opportunity for interaction with persons of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.” Board officials resolved to create a staff position that aimed to support equal educational opportunities, offer programs that taught racial understanding, and begin taking a racial survey of the student population in the entire school district. Yet the small steps continued to frustrate integrationists.³³

Resentment against the Los Angeles Board culminated during the following months in a series of demonstrations for school desegregation. Soon after Martin Luther King, Jr. traveled to Los Angeles to spread the message of the black freedom struggle, some seventy-six civil rights groups in the city, including the NAACP, ACLU, and CORE, combined their efforts to form the more militant United Civil Rights Council (UCRC). UCRC took its cue from the southern civil rights movement and waged a series of nonviolent protests against school authorities. On June 24, 1963, the group organized a march of one thousand protestors from the First African Methodist Episcopal Church through downtown Los Angeles to the Board of Education headquarters. For over ten days in September, several members of CORE engaged in a hunger strike at the Los

³² Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 10; United Neighbors, “Problems and Challenges,” 5. In “Problems and Challenges,” United Neighbors explained that around 1963, the principal of Audubon Junior High also transferred to another position (see p. 5).

³³ Caughey and Caughey, *School Segregation*, 12-16.

Angeles Board headquarters. The following month, around three hundred and fifty demonstrators held a study-in (Figures 14-16).³⁴

As the protests against the Los Angeles Board swelled, UN sensed a turning point or “change in attitude” in the Crenshaw district. While the district was comprised of a mostly white population at the time, Gregg lamented, “There was a shift from a feeling that this was an inter-racial community to a feeling that it was going to be an all-Negro community.” Real estate agents particularly perpetuated the notion that, in a matter of years, the district would be all black. UN especially became upset after learning that by the early 1960s realtors had altogether discouraged whites from purchasing property in the area. Interested white buyers came to UN meetings to share their experiences of realtors giving advice to look elsewhere and refusing to help whites acquire property in the district. “It was this one discovery, more than any other, that precipitated the formation of Crenshaw Neighbors,” Gregg stated.³⁵

Accordingly, out of their “discussion group,” Gregg explained, UN launched a more formal and structured “action group.” The group mailed letters to homes across the Crenshaw district, asking residents to join for ten dollars a newly forming local organization that aimed to stop blockbusting and maintain integration in the community.

³⁴ Caughey and Caughey, *School Segregation*, 16-23; Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 20-23. The Central branch of the Los Angeles Public Library houses several photos on the 1963 demonstrations against the Los Angeles Board of Education. See, for example, “Civil Rights Demonstrators,” No. 00041625; “Integrationists Pause Near City Hall,” No. 00033920; “Anti-Integrationists,” No. 00021862; “School Board Hunger Strike,” No. 00041619; “Last 3 Hunger Strikers,” No. 00041618; “Board of Education Sit-in,” No. 00041612; and “CORE Study-ins,” No. 00041633.

³⁵ “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 8-9, 17; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 6-7; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006; Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Neighborhood Stabilization, Los Angeles County: Report of an Informal Discussion,” March 23, 1965, JSP, Box 4, Folder 3, SCL, p. 1.

Their proposal received considerable support, especially from residents living in the single-family neighborhoods of Baldwin Hills Estates, View Park, and Windsor Hills. In July 1964, after receiving one hundred memberships, the group secured its charter as Crenshaw Neighbors, Incorporated. UN continued to pursue its goal as a communications group by gathering for discussions, while CN built a formal organization made up of bylaws, officers, a Board of Directors, and individual committees. Nevertheless, the members of both groups overlapped.³⁶

CN became part of a larger movement that emerged in communities across the country after the *Shelley* decision in the late 1940s. The neighborhood stabilization movement, what sociologist Juliet Saltman called “a fragile movement,” grew out of an effort to slow the speed of white exodus and black influx into neighborhoods, and maintain a racially balanced population. The first known group, the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, formed in Chicago in 1949 to maintain integration in the affluent community abutting Lake Michigan and the University of Chicago. Throughout the following two decades, neighborhood stabilization groups cropped up in places such as Denver; Hartford; Indianapolis; Milwaukee; Nashville; Rochester; and Oak Park, Illinois. Despite the efforts, Saltman found, integration became “easier to attain...than to maintain.” These groups faced unrelenting, “massive institutional forces” working against their goals.³⁷

³⁶ “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 4, 7-8; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 4-5.

³⁷ Saltman, *Fragile*, xi, 3, 10, 21, 22, 28 (fn. 13). See entire book for case studies of several neighborhood stabilization organizations. For another reference to the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, see Morris Milgram, *Good Neighborhood: The Challenge of Open Housing* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 138.

Two months after it incorporated, CN gathered for a meeting to sort out the details of the organization. The group elected officers and a Board of Directors, and adopted bylaws. While the initial one hundred members was one-third black and two-thirds white, CN aimed to represent the diversity of residents in the district. When setting up the officers, Jean Gregg recalled, CN “conscientiously made sure it was half black and half white.” While public school administrator Ted Kimbrough and fair housing real estate broker John Laing, both African Americans, served as first and second vice president, Gregg and Ann Post, two of UN’s original white members, took the lead as Executive Director and President. Born in Chicago, Gregg earned a Master’s degree in Psychology at Columbia University and relocated to Los Angeles in the late 1940s. While her husband went to school, she pursued a Ph.D. in Psychology at UCLA. She passed her qualifying exams, but family matters interfered with her completion of a degree. In the mid-1950s, Gregg and her husband moved into a home in Windsor Hills to fit their growing family. As she became active in the liberal-leaning Los Angeles League of Women Voters, serving on the board and as area director, Gregg got to know the community and joined forces with another volunteer, Ann Post. At age twenty, after Post got married, she left her birthplace of Minnesota, and eventually moved to Los Angeles. She and her husband settled in Baldwin Hills Vista in the late 1940s. As Post focused on raising her children, she also got involved in the community.³⁸

³⁸ “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 5; “The Crenshaw Neighbors Story,” *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 1, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection); “Announcements,” *Crenshaw Notes* 9 (October 1965): 7, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006 and August 18, 2008; Post, interview by author, September 24, 2006. In an August 18, 2008 interview, Milgram vaguely recollected Kimbrough as the first person to serve as first vice-president. For the earliest record from library holdings that printed the name of the first vice-president, which was Kimbrough, see “Crenshaw Notes,” *Crenshaw Notes* (November 1965): 3, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL.

On the first order of business, CN set out to encourage whites to resist selling their homes and remain in the Crenshaw district. The group discovered from the UN discussions that real estate blockbusting and deep-seated fear drove white residents away, and if whites were given “the assurance that they were not alone” in their concerns over the changing environment, an article explained in one of CN’s first newsletters, they were more likely to stay in the community. Therefore, CN launched “an educational campaign” to “show Crenshaw in its true light: beautiful homes, convenient location, fine schools, various races, and dynamic residents.”³⁹

CN also appointed a real estate committee to stop the predatory practices of realtors. After months of deliberation, following the advice of the committee, CN resolved to obtain a real estate license and establish an agency to carry out property conveyances on their own terms. This decision set CN apart from other stabilization groups around the country, but it also put the organization in a controversial position. In an attempt to counteract realtors that CN felt sold homes only to blacks, the group’s real estate agency primarily aimed to seek out white buyers to purchase property in the area. Using the money from membership fees, the organization purchased a corporate real estate license, hired John Laing as the broker, rented a “little hole in the wall” office, and in February 1965, opened for business.⁴⁰

³⁹ “The Crenshaw Neighbors Story,” 1 (original emphasis).

⁴⁰ Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 5-6; “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 9, 19-20; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006; Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Neighborhood Stabilization,” 1. The earliest document from library holdings indicated CN’s first office was located at 4034 Buckingham Road, in the same locale as Deloy Edwards’s first office. See *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 1, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

CN understood that focusing its sales on whites appeared to undermine its fundamental goals of inclusion and integration. Especially since in the mid-1960s, CN's own racial census showed that whites made up the majority of the population and blacks had only recently gained access to homes in the district. For that reason, CN attempted to clarify its aims. An article in the May 1965 edition of its monthly newsletter, *Crenshaw Notes*, explained

CN's policy of encouraging white buyers for our area may seem discriminatory to some. The explanation is simple. Minorities know they can buy here, whereas whites have doubts that this area is for them. Therefore, CN will concentrate on the latter, while at the same time always making sure that every home is available to anyone who wishes to purchase it.

CN's vision to create "a balanced community" in the district remained loosely defined, yet the group understood the direction it wanted to avoid. The opening article in the October 1965 edition of *Crenshaw Notes*, explained, from the inception,

We didn't really have any precise concept of balance. Instead, we had a very definite picture of imbalance, and we knew we didn't want that. An unbalanced community, we felt, was one in which only one kind of people lived. We knew that in Crenshaw we had people of all races, all ages, and through a wide economic range. We felt this was good, and we wanted to keep it.

While CN refused to set a quota to define its goal of a "balanced" community, the group understood that a majority black population would end any chance of maintaining integration. If the Crenshaw district's population became "substantially more than 50 per cent non-white," Gregg believed, CN's campaign "would pretty much be a lost battle."⁴¹

⁴¹ For the results of CN's racial census, see "A Story of Balance," *Crenshaw Notes* (October 1965): 2, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL. See "The Crenshaw Neighbors Story," 1; and "Testimony of Jean Gregg," 41-42 (quotes). For a discussion on the tipping point hypothesis, an assumption Crenshaw Neighbors generally feared would come true in their communities, see Micheal W. Giles, Everett F. Cataldo, and Douglas S. Gatlin, "White Flight and Percent Black: The Tipping Point Reexamined," *Social Science Quarterly* 56.1 (1975): 85-92; and John R. Ottensmann, "Requiem for the Tipping-Point Hypothesis," *Journal of Planning Literature* 10.2 (November 1995): 131-141.

CN worked hard, using forethought and creativity, to broaden the visibility of its real estate agency around greater Los Angeles. Believing that it had a better chance of attracting white, educated liberals, who more often demonstrated an open-mindedness and compassion toward people of color and integration than white conservatives, the CN real estate committee deliberately chose specific publications in which to advertise the agency and the properties on the market. University magazines, such as UCLA's *The Daily Bruin*, art and architecture journals, including a Beverly Hills's publication *FM and Fine Arts Guide*, as well as playbills of local theater shows, fair housing bulletins, and other selected suburban newspapers and newsletters ran advertisements.⁴²

Within its first few months, CN launched a monthly newsletter and carried out a major letter writing campaign to bring more members into the organization. The newsletter, *Crenshaw Notes*, published speeches of the officers, featured news briefs of local events, posted updates, reprinted relevant articles from local newspapers, included a recurring column by a Dorsey High School student, and publicized upcoming events. Residents from around the district also received letters from the group. CN encouraged thousands of apartment tenants to support the effort, stay in the district, and when ready, use CN's real estate agency to purchase property in the area. The group urged nearly one hundred white homeowners who placed their property on the market to either suspend their decision or use the CN real estate agency to help make the transaction. CN also mailed copies of *Crenshaw Notes* to over four thousand homes around Los Angeles, accompanied with a letter that encouraged readers to join the group. Furthermore, the

⁴² Post, "Stabilizing an Integrated Neighborhood," 9; "Testimony of Jean Gregg," 9; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006.

membership committee planned an orientation meeting made up of a panel of CN board members to present “the CN story” and answer questions about the organization.⁴³

CN also attempted to clarify the racial composition of the community by conducting its own census. While the 1960 United States Census found most neighborhoods in the district comprised of a majority white population, the influx of blacks concerned white residents. “We were told that we were too late, that the area was already unbalanced,” an article in *Crenshaw Notes* explained. “We were told that Baldwin Hills Estates was so predominantly Negro that there was no hope for it. We were told that same thing about View Park.” Therefore, CN set out to present “a rather accurate picture” of the area. From late spring to early summer in 1965, a research committee headed by Joyce Jacobson collected data and compiled a report on the racial composition of residents living in the single-family houses of Baldwin Hills Estates, Baldwin Hills Vista, View Park, and Windsor Hills, those communities in the district “believed to have changed the most since the 1960 U.S. Census” and with “the most Crenshaw Neighbors members to whom we could turn for help.” The CN census results reassured whites that blacks remained the minority population. Out of 4,453 single-family houses covered in the survey, 2,823 included white families, 1,257 were comprised of black occupants, 275 consisted of Asian residents, and 37 had mixed-race families.⁴⁴

⁴³ “We Send Letters” and “Come and See,” *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 3, 7, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

⁴⁴ Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 3-4; “Survey Starts,” *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 6, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection); “A Story of Balance,” 1-2.

In June 1965, CN also began one of its most inventive endeavors by hosting the first annual home tour. The home tour committee gave prospective buyers the opportunity to meet the district's residents, walk through some of their homes, and get a better sense of the community. For the first three hours, guests had an open invitation to visit a variety of houses, including "a Spanish stucco," "a western farm-house," and a "remodeled do-it-yourself" home, and then convene for cocktail hour. CN hoped the tour would also debunk some of the myths and misconceptions associated with its diverse neighborhood, and bring homebuyers to the area. At the second annual tour, which included eight homes and ended with a cocktail party, CN sold 494 tickets and made \$800 in profit.⁴⁵

Some of the earliest opposition against CN came from local white and black real estate agents. Realtors working in the Crenshaw district, according to CN real estate broker and second vice-president John Laing, responded to the organization's agency with "mixed" reactions and "some hostility." Some brokers felt that the group's nonprofit status created unfair business competition, and Gregg explained, "at least two brokers have categorically refused to cooperate with us on any sale." In response, CN adjusted its approach by removing the term "nonprofit" from advertisements. Real estate broker and African American Laing also became increasingly uncomfortable with the CN plan to deliberately seek out whites to buy homes in the area. Laing initially made a deal

⁴⁵ "Crenshaw Home Tour," *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 6, author's personal collection; "Crenshaw Neighbors to Sponsor Home Tour," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 May 1966, C5; "Home Tour Slated in Baldwin Hills," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1966, D7; "Home Tour Proves Major Success," *Crenshaw Notes* (July-August 1966): 4, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection). See also Shulte, "Good Neighbor Policy," E1; and Evelyn DeWolfe, "Home Tour Sunday: Neighbors Join Hands for Integration," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1968, E1.

with CN to sell properties on increasingly black blocks to white buyers, if he could also sell in white areas to black buyers. But, “We had such a hard time convincing him that what we wanted to do was sell houses to white people. He wanted to sell them to black people,” Gregg pointed out. “We had some early problems with him, and then finally they got worse.” By October 1965, Laing resigned from his position as broker.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, within one year of receiving its charter, as the membership roll and budget markedly increased, CN gained more influence in the Crenshaw district. Between membership fees, private contributions, bank loans, and real estate commissions, CN had little difficulty acquiring the funds to run the agency. “There seemed to be plenty of money,” Gregg recalled in an interview years later. White and black residents “were willing to put money behind this because their property was at stake.” The growth in membership from 100 in July 1964 to 400 in March 1965 illustrated the growing interest in the group. Most of the money went toward staff salaries, office rent, a telephone and answering service, office supplies, and print advertisements. CN paid one-full time and two part-time employees, including a secretary and real estate broker, and moved into a larger office on Crenshaw Boulevard. In the first six months in operation, in the words of Ann Post, CN drew into the district seven “non-Negro families.” Yet after a full year in operation, CN faced additional strains on its goal as Los Angeles broke out in riot.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Neighborhood Stabilization,” 1; Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 8; “Announcements,” *Crenshaw Notes* (October 1965): 7, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006.

⁴⁷ Gregg, “Statement to the Governor’s Commission,” 5; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006; “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 6; Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Neighborhood Stabilization,” 1; Ann Post, “Crenshaw Neighbors—A Lesson in Integration,” *The California Voter* (November 1968), in author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

The Watts Riot: Six Days of Reckoning

What began as a drunk driving arrest of a twenty-one-year-old African American on a hot summer evening in the neighborhood of Watts sparked a six-day long conflagration of violence and looting throughout the central city. On August 11, 1965, near the Watts border at 116th Street and Avalon Boulevard, Lee Minikus, a white California highway patrol officer on a motorcycle, pulled over Marquette Frye in his mother's 1955 Buick automobile. After Frye failed a sobriety test, the officer arrested him for driving under the influence. Frye's stepbrother then stepped out of the vehicle, Minikus's partner arrived with a car to bring Frye to jail, and Frye's mother came from her home two blocks away. Meanwhile, a small group of onlookers outside in the summer heat swelled to a large crowd. As the mob grew angry and aggressive, the officers detained all three members of the Frye family and hauled them off to the police station. Rumors of police abuse of power subsequently spread throughout greater Los Angeles, which sparked a nearly weeklong wave of violence, known as the Watts Riot.⁴⁸

Once a thriving, multiracial, blue-collar community, Watts had plummeted into a bleak, dilapidated black ghetto. Incorporated first as a self-governing city in 1907 and then part of Los Angeles after 1926, Watts developed alongside the construction of two major rail lines. Mexican laborers mostly working on the railroad at the turn of the

⁴⁸ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 203-208. See also Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy, *Burn, Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles Race Riot, August 1965* (New York: Dutton, 1966); Robert E. Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967); Gerald Horne, *Fire this Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); and Gerald Horne, "Black Fire: 'Riot' and 'Revolt' in Los Angeles, 1965 and 1992," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 377-404.

century initially settled around the tracks, followed by a small number of African Americans in a section of the city known as Mudtown. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Watts grew into a working-class enclave with affordable housing, a reliable mass transit system, and a multiracial population made up of blacks, whites, Asians, and Hispanics. World War II brought employment opportunities and an influx of African Americans to the city, but the subsequent years wreaked havoc on the quaint community. Watts became part of Los Angeles's increasingly neglected and isolated “black belt.” High unemployment rates, the decline of labor unions, the loss of public transportation, persistent housing discrimination, deteriorating public facilities, the rise of street gangs, and unapologetic police brutality set the stage for the 1965 unrest.⁴⁹

In the early 1960s, while African Americans won more seats to the state legislature and California Democrats continued to pass landmark civil rights legislation, the liberal coalition also reached its peak and then began to unravel. Black representation received a major boost in the early 1960s with the election of Mervyn M. Dymally and F. Douglas Ferrell to the state assembly, and Gilbert Lindsey, Tom Bradley, and Billy Mills to the Los Angeles city council. Their political victories culminated in 1963 with the passage of the California Fair Housing Act. Commonly known as the Rumford Act, which African American Assemblymen Augustus Hawkins attempted to pass two years earlier and William Byron Rumford reintroduced in 1963, the measure prohibited racial discrimination in the sale or rental of public and private housing that included more than four units. The newly established state Fair Employment Practices Commission was given the authority to enforce the act. The rise of black representation and passage of

⁴⁹ Abu-Lughod, *Race*, 199-203. See also Patricia Rae Adler, “Watts: From Suburb to Black Ghetto” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1977); and Horne, “Black Fire.”

civil rights legislation, historian Douglas Flamming argued, put black Californians “in their best political situation ever.” Then, abruptly and rapidly, the liberal coalition fell apart.⁵⁰

Immediately following the passage of the Rumford Act, opponents across California began organizing a campaign not merely to repeal the bill, but permanently to overturn the act with an amendment to the state Constitution. The Committee for Home Protection (CHP), established by the state realty association CREA, which developed its reputation by fighting for land-use zoning laws and racial restrictive covenants, as well as the California Apartment Owners’ Association, led an aggressive statewide campaign to prohibit the enactment of fair housing measures in the state. Rather than seeking a referendum that allowed registered voters to reach a decision on the Rumford Act, explained Rumford, the CHP “went the initiative route, initiating a new constitutional provision in our Constitution which says a person shall have the right to discriminate.” The measure, which became known as Proposition 14, gave property owners the right “to decline to sell, lease or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses.” The battle appeared in many manifestations, from the platforms of political candidates to bumper stickers on Californians’ cars. In the November 1964 election, over sixty-five percent of voters in California approved the amendment, and the

⁵⁰ Douglas Flamming, “Becoming Democrats: Liberal Politics and the African American Community in Los Angeles, 1930-1965,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 298-299; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 157-158. See also Thomas W. Casstevens, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations: California’s Rumford Act and Proposition 14* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of Governmental Studies, 1967).

CHP declared victory. The state added Proposition 14 as Article 1, Section 26 to the California state Constitution.⁵¹

The passage of Proposition 14 added to the discrimination, neglect, and isolation that many African Americans felt and responded to in the 1965 riot. The days following the August 11th police confrontation illustrated the negligence and mismanagement of city officials as they attempted to deal with the riot. For more than forty-eight hours, as violence escalated, parts of Los Angeles went up in flames, and bloodshed resulted, city officials kept their previous engagements and deflected their responsibilities to quell the riot onto each other. Finally, on the third night, once Governor Brown returned from a trip to Greece, he deployed the California National Guard onto the streets of Los Angeles and declared an 8:00 p.m. curfew in a 46.5 square mile area of the central city. The curfew zone stretched west to Crenshaw Boulevard, cutting into the Crenshaw district and putting Leimert Park under surveillance. On the sixth day, the city lifted the curfew, and the riot ended with thirty-four dead, 1,000 injured, and 4,000 arrested. Property damage within the curfew zone was estimated at \$200 million. The California Supreme Court overturned Proposition 14 in 1966, ruling the decree unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment. But by that time, the damage had permeated to the fabric of Los Angeles.⁵²

⁵¹ Casstevens, *Politics*, 41, 48-70, 81, 96-97 (Appendix B); William Byron Rumford, “Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing and Public Health: Oral History Transcript,” interview by Joyce A. Henderson, Amelia R. Fry, and Edward France (Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1973), 44.

⁵² Abu-Lughod, *Race*, 208-214 (see map on p. 212 for areas of violence and curfew zone); Horne, “Black Fire,” 377. For another map of the curfew area, see Nathan Cohen, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: A Socio-Psychological Study* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 126.

Watts Shakes Up the Crenshaw District

The Watts riot prompted CN to step up its effort to persuade white residents to stay in the district, maintain a racially “balanced,” integrated population, and improve race relations. As more whites reacted to the turmoil and put their homes up for sale, the group acted quickly to create more programs and expand its reach. CN teamed up with community organizations outside of the district, fought city contractors to limit development in the area, collaborated with apartment managers, planned more local gatherings, organized community watch campaigns, sought the development of a public park, created additional educational programs for local children, and published a nationally distributed journal. Amid the upsurge of activities, in the second half of the 1960s, CN reached its peak. By the end of the decade, an alliance of CN members and other neighborhood stabilization groups launched a national agency that aimed to thwart residential discrimination and support integrated neighborhoods across the country.

Several months before the riot erupted, CN seized an opportunity to ally with other neighborhood organizations in southern California. In the early 1960s, nearby communities also suffering from real estate blockbusting and white exodus, such as Inglewood, Compton, Altadena, and Long Beach, formed their own groups that aimed to maintain integration and improve race relations. Seeing an opportunity to strengthen its effort, in the spring of 1965, CN asked the County Commission on Human Relations to assemble these organizations together. After several informal meetings, delegates from eight neighborhood groups in southern California decided to form a loose umbrella organization. In September, they approved a steering committee and adopted the Council of Integrated Neighborhoods (COIN) as their name. A ninth group joined shortly

thereafter. Raymond Weil, president of Inglewood's Morningside Park Neighbors, became the chairman, and Jean Gregg served as vice-chairwoman.⁵³

COIN quickly got to work promoting racial integration. The group pressured the state legislature to ensure that community colleges offered educational programs that attracted students "from all ethnic groups" and every high school in the Los Angeles school district. It pressured planning agencies in Los Angeles to promote and build integrated neighborhoods; wrote a proposal to fund documentary films on fair housing; and filed incident reports to the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. In addition, at its monthly meetings, COIN hosted speakers from the school district, nonprofit organizations, and real estate associations committed to racial equality and integration.⁵⁴

In October 1965, Gregg received an "unexpected call" to speak on the Crenshaw district as well as CN before the California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots. Commonly known as the McCone Commission, after former director of the Central Intelligence Agency and chair of the commission John A. McCone, the hearings investigated the causes of the Watts riot and proposed recommendations to heal and

⁵³ Gregg, "Statement to the Governor's Commission," 15; Jack Jones, "Fight to Stabilize Integrated Parts of City Showing Gain," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1966, A1, 8; Los Angeles Commission on Human Relations, "Council of Integrated Neighborhoods, 'COIN,' Los Angeles County," n.d., JSP, Box 5, Folder 3, pp. 1-3; Raymond Weil, "The Integrated Neighborhood – Unheralded Example and Bypassed Opportunity," October 26, 1966, JSP, Box 5, Folder 3, SCL, pp. 1-3; "Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations: A 25 Year History, 1944-1969 & Biennial Report 1967-1969," Kenneth Hahn Collection (Hereafter cited as KH), Box 1.25.1-1.25.4, Folder 1970 (#1), HL. The nine original organizations of COIN included Altadena Neighbors, Alta-Pasa Human Relations Committee, Compton Council on Human Relations, Crenshaw Neighbors, Inc., Hollypark Information and Education Committee, Morningside Park Neighbors, Inc., Neighbors Unlimited, Inc., Westside Homeowners of Long Beach, and West Imperial Neighbors.

⁵⁴ Weil, "Integrated Neighborhood," 4; Los Angeles Commission on Human Relations, "Council of Integrated Neighborhoods," 3.

improve conditions in the city. With only a forty-eight hour notice, using United States Census records as well as her experience as a Windsor Hills resident and CN executive director, Gregg hurriedly prepared a statement for the commission on population trends in the district, concerns of the residents particularly over the schools and real estate agents, and the origin, goals, and work of CN. She also included as an addendum the results from CN's 1965 racial census. At the foot of "a huge T-shaped table," representing the district and her organization, Gregg fielded questions from the panel "about housing and schools and attitudes in Crenshaw." She praised the diverse residents of the Crenshaw district for defending their community in the face of the riot and stressed the importance of achieving residential integration.⁵⁵

The Watts riot indeed worsened the public image of black neighborhoods in the city, but the media took notice of CN's work toward integration. While the group invested a large portion of its donations and revenue on flyers, advertisements, and newsletters to improve its reputation, CN received what its October 1965 bulletin called "that most wonderful brand of publicity – the free kind." Newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television news channels from across the world saw an opportunity to report on the positive contributions of mid-city Los Angelenos. From local stations to news outlets in Germany, CN felt delighted to "show a better side of this shocked and somewhat mangled city." Several members also responded to the often shortsighted and erroneous depictions of the district and its residents by writing letters and submitting

⁵⁵ "We Testify," *Crenshaw Notes* (November 1965): 3; Gregg, "Statement to the Governor's Commission," entire document; "Testimony of Jean Gregg," 16, 20-21.

editorials to newspapers. They extolled CN's achievements while admitting that they "still have a long way to go."⁵⁶

In an effort to maintain the integrity and value of the Crenshaw district, CN fought a projected plan to construct a freeway through its community. Barry Siegel, chair of the standards committee, led the fight against the city's plans to extend the Slauson Freeway (Route-90) through the southern half of the Crenshaw district. The entire proposed freeway system "would essentially make the Los Angeles basin a large interchange for auto crossing," and "decrease greatly [the] residential and commercial desirability" of the Crenshaw district. Rather, Siegel suggested "a rethinking and reshaping of our present transportation plans" that included the construction of a rapid transit system.⁵⁷

Apartment management became another area of reform. When the CN housing committee undertook an investigation of the apartments in the district, it discovered that once African Americans moved in, most apartment owners and managers revised the occupancy rules and screening procedures. In one apartment building, after the first blacks moved in, the management sought to accommodate the new tenants by reversing its no-children rule. While the policy broadened the opportunities for more blacks to move to the area, it thwarted CN's objective to maintain a racially balanced population, and impelled many "white and responsible Negro tenants" to move, explained Ann Post.

⁵⁶ *Crenshaw Notes* 9 (October 1965): 3, 4. For an example of an editorial in *The Los Angeles Times*, see Karen A. Freidson, "Integrated Housing Works in Crenshaw," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1971, A4. Freidson served as executive director of CN in the early 1970s.

⁵⁷ *Crenshaw Notes* 9 (October 1965): 5-6; *Crenshaw Notes* 10 (November 1965): 5, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL; Barry Siegel, "'Rethinking in Order': Foes of Freeways Tell Stand," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 May 1966, B4.

In response, CN helped organize a series of seminars that aimed to equip apartment owners and managers with the tools to maintain integration in their properties. The seminars led to the establishment of an apartment referral service, the Apartment Owners Association, which Post explained, “screens tenants, maintains standards, and provides a healthy integrated environment.”⁵⁸

Throughout the second half of the 1960s, in an effort to build community relationships across racial lines, CN organized a number of social activities. The group hosted dinners at local restaurants, cocktail parties, coffee fellowships, and public lectures. It helped organize block clubs around the district as well as neighborhood watch programs and clean-up campaigns. In the “Shop Crenshaw” drive, CN encouraged residents to support local establishments within the district. Members volunteered at the Foundation for the Junior Blind in Windsor Hills, serving as drivers, teaching classes, offering their clerical services, and attending social gatherings. CN waged a nearly two-decade battle to develop Jim Gilliam Park and improve the local business district.⁵⁹

CN also carried on its work organizing and sponsoring educational programs with the Crenshaw Coordinating Council. The Coordinating Council continued to offer the summer reading improvement project for four years, and in that time, an increasing number of students registered for the course. Additionally, in 1965, Joan Suter and Barbara Tenan founded the Baldwin Hills Cultural Enrichment Center, a summer

⁵⁸ Post, “Stabilizing an Integrated Neighborhood,” 9, 15; “National Scene of Integrated Housing,” *The Integrator* 1.1 (Winter 1967-1968): 7, SCL; Post, “Crenshaw Neighbors.”

⁵⁹ “R.S.V.P. An Invitation to Dinner,” *Crenshaw Notes* (October 1965): 8; “Calendar of Events,” *Crenshaw Notes* (December 1967): 3, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL; “Foundation for the Junior Blind,” *Crenshaw Notes* (December 1967): 3; Saltman, *Fragile*, 284; Post, “Crenshaw Neighbors.”

program financed by parents and held at Baldwin Hills Elementary School for students in the primary and secondary grades. Youngsters had the opportunity to take courses in art, drama, cinematography, creative writing, ethnomusicology, dance, science, and logic, led by volunteer grade school teachers and college professors, and go on field trips to places such as the Griffith Park Observatory. Lyle Suter, Beverly Hills High School art teacher, husband of Joan Suter, and African American, served as director of the program. The cultural enrichment center became so successful that the organizers had to put the overflow of applicants on a waiting list. In 1968, as a reflection of the center's widespread appeal, it changed its name to the Los Angeles Cultural Arts Center for Youth.⁶⁰

The Watts riot also prompted another CN member to organize outreach programs for low-income blacks outside of the Crenshaw district. Othelia "Fifi" Boger, a View Park homeowner and one of the black founders of UN, helped launch the countywide youth program Teen Post. Born in "a little rural stop" in North Carolina, Boger moved with her first husband to Los Angeles in the early 1940s, and remarried and moved to View Park with dentist Tom Boger in the mid-1950s, where she became a local activist. At a League of Women Voters meeting, she befriended Ann Post and Jean Gregg, who

⁶⁰ "Summer Education Sessions Conclude," *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 1 August 1965, 1, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection); *Crenshaw Notes* (May 1965): 7; "Center for Enrichment," *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 5 May 1966, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection); "Editor's Notes," *Crenshaw Notes* (July-August 1966): 3; "3 Professors Lecture to Kids About Science," *University of Southern California Trojan*, 29 July 1966, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection); "The Third Session of the Baldwin Hills Cultural Enrichment Center," brochure, 1968, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection); "Mrs. Suter Tackles L.A. Education," *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 23 February 1969, author's personal collection (from Joan A. Suter's personal collection). Lyle Suter retired as the Art Department Chair at Beverly Hills High School.

encouraged Boger to invite local blacks to the group. While some came, Gregg recalled, “they were much more interested in race problems...than in water policies.” But, as fights at Dorsey High School erupted, the women proposed forming UN to discuss their concerns. The Teen Post initiative, which began as a three-week program in August 1965, initially set up 120 safe places for teenagers between the ages thirteen and twenty to learn, make friends, and let down their defenses. Activities at each Teen Post varied, with classes in cooking and auto mechanics, games of table tennis and checkers, and with dances, movies, and day trips. “The main [goal] was to keep the kids off the street,” Boger explained. After some 12,000 youngsters participated in the program, Boger convinced financial backers to continue their support. Teen Post ran into many obstacles, including vandalism and violence from street ruffians, police apathy, and financial cutbacks and mismanagement. But Boger defended the program, stressing, “We said we wanted to reach the hard-to-reach kids and we feel we have achieved that.” Over her career as an activist, Boger also got involved in the local NAACP and Urban League.⁶¹

The riot also inspired other affluent blacks residents in the Crenshaw district that were unaffiliated with CN to help bring aid to low-income blacks in Watts. “The Negro middle class has been concerned with trying to get up itself...” explained Leimert Park homeowner and African American Barbara Dyce in a *Los Angeles Times* 1966 article,

⁶¹ Othelia W. Boger, interview by author, November 3, 2006, by telephone; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006; Eric Malnic, “Youths Given Healthy Outlet for Energies,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1965, G1; George Garrigues and Lee Austin, “Busy Youths Free of Tensions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1965, SF B1; Ernest Schonberger, “Extension of Poverty War Teen Posts OKd,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1965; Jack Jones, “Teen Post Sponsors Worried About Fiscal Cuts in Program,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1966, 3; Jack Jones, “Irate Mexican-American Units Demand Poverty War Equality,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 September 1966; Peyton Canary and Bert Mann, “Sunset Strip Spectacle Sparks Study on Curfew,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1966, SG B1.

“But there is concern now for those in the ghetto. Don’t forget, the majority of us came down from field Negroes, too.” By the mid-1960s, once affluent African Americans gained entry into the desirable Westside communities, they could redirect their energy and effort to assist their low-income black counterparts that lived on the Eastside. The Watts riot particularly reminded Dyce of the black struggle against poverty and racism. Consequently, out of a conversation at a cocktail party in 1966, Dyce and several other women in Leimert Park came up with the idea to form a philanthropic group called The Feminine Touch, Incorporated that aimed to bring financial aid to Watts. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the proceeds from their benefit events in 1966 and 1967 went to Operation Bootstrap, Parents Improvement Council, Los Angeles Urban League, Los Angeles NAACP, and other local groups working in the riot-torn area.⁶²

Meanwhile, another African American homeowner in Leimert Park got involved in the establishment of the Watts Health Center. Dentist Helen Guenveur Smith and her husband, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Sherman W. Smith, were long-time civil rights activists. Among their many accomplishments, in 1960, they founded the New Frontier Democratic Club, a black political group that supported John F. Kennedy in his presidential campaign. After a motel on Santa Barbara Avenue denied the Smiths lodging, the couple opened the Palm Vue Motel to provide blacks with affordable accommodations in the same location. “My parents were just completely involved in the fabric of black L.A. on all different levels,” their daughter Louise Smith explained. Sherman Smith boasted a distinguished career as an attorney and judge known for fighting racial discrimination in hotels and jury selection, while Helen Smith practiced

⁶² Jack Jones, “Women Organize in Leimert Park to Assist Watts Area,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1966, 3, 32; “Show Set for Negro Women Unit,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 May 1967, G6.

dentistry and became one of the founding members of the Watts Health Center.

Conceived after the riot in 1965, and opened in 1967, the Watts Health Center provided residents of Watts with free medical care as well as training and employment positions as medical and dental assistants, dieticians, and secretaries.⁶³

CN also headed one of its most innovative and popular programs aimed at school desegregation. Speaking before the Los Angeles Board of Education in November 1965, Jean Gregg called for a collaborative effort between CN and school officials “to find a feasible, realistic way” to restore the “racial balance” especially in the district’s public secondary schools. She blamed school officials for increasing de facto school segregation, perpetuating the deteriorating image of the schools, and deflecting white families from the area. Yet, Gregg explained, “We see an opportunity in this community to try some new approaches.” CN formed an education research committee to stop the increasing racial imbalance in the school district and “attract Caucasian students” to Dorsey High School, as well as Crenshaw High School, the newly designed school planned to open in 1968. CN called on the Los Angeles Board to work with the group on creating “exciting and bold” programs to “maintain integration.”⁶⁴

After two years of negotiations and groundwork, CN’s school initiative came to fruition. An advisory committee made up of CN representatives, community members,

⁶³ Louise Smith, interview by author, March 5, 2007, by telephone; Jon Thurber, “Sherman Smith, Sr., 81; Judge Worked to Make Juries Representative,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 2003, B14; John Kay Adams, “Watts Health Center: A Monument to Communication,” *Opportunity* 1.4 (June 1971): 2, 6-7. The Smiths moved to Baldwin Hills Estates in 1969. See Smith, interview by author.

⁶⁴ Jean Gregg, “Statement to L.A. Board of Education by CN, Inc., on November 10, 1965,” *Crenshaw Notes* 10 (November 1965): 1-2, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL; Suter, interview by author.

and school officials created an exchange program between five senior high schools and eight junior high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that allowed students to take courses outside of their home institution. Under Project APEX (Area Program for Enrichment Exchange), participating schools served as special subject centers, offering aeronautics, anthropology, business education, ceramics, Chinese, computer math, constitutional law, data processing, Hebrew, jazz, play production, Portuguese, and Russian, among other classes. Students that enrolled in APEX schools took the bus to their selected APEX program, attended a course for two class periods, and then returned to their home institution. “You had black kids taking Hebrew at Fairfax High School,” Joan Suter, the program’s founder and executive director, extolled. “It was really a life-altering experience.” In 1967, financed by the federal government under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the San Francisco-based nonprofit Rosenberg Foundation, the program began.⁶⁵

Project APEX saw immediate success. In the 1967-1968 academic year, the first year in operation, 1,500 students voluntarily enrolled in the program. Racially mixed Dorsey High School and Crenshaw High School, mostly black Manual Arts High School, and majority white Fairfax High School and Hamilton High School, became special

⁶⁵ Suter, interview by author; Jean Gregg, “Apex Loves,” *The Integrator* 1.1 (Winter 1967-1968): 8-12, SCL; Post, “Stabilizing an Integrated Neighborhood,” 15, SCL; “APEX,” brochure, April 1968, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection); “APEX Advisor Council: Mrs. Suter Elected to the Chair,” *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 25 December 1969, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection); Saltman, *Fragile*, 284; Jack P. Crowther, et al., “APEX Los Angeles City Schools. Division of Secondary Education – Area ‘D.’ A Special Informatory Report to the Board of Education,” 10 July 1969, Helene V. Smookler Collection (Hereafter cited as HVS), Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA/SC, pp. 1-2; Office of Measurement and Evaluation, Los Angeles City Unified School District, “Mid-City Secondary Education Project. Area Program for Enrichment Exchange. APEX. Evaluation Reports,” September 1969, HVS, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA/SC, pp. 21-22; Shulte, “Good Neighbor Policy,” 9; “Community APEX Funded for a Third Time,” *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, 2 October 1969, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection).

subject centers for senior high school students. Dorsey High School alone brought in over two hundred pupils a year to its school. Members and employees of local institutions also got involved. Academics at USC gave informational lectures, helped improve facilities, and encouraged students to join the program. Local museums, hospitals, and community councils donated their time. “The change of atmosphere, a variety of courses and being able to meet a wider range of people stimulated both student interest and achievement,” raved Dorsey High School Principal Clifford L. Davis, Jr. and APEX English coordinator Karen Kaub. By creating a racially mixed student body, APEX “gives us the chance to clear up any misconceptions of backgrounds different from our own,” Dorsey High School student Diedra Wilson explained.⁶⁶

The Project APEX student advisory committee, made up of student representatives, also organized extracurricular activities designed to further advance racial tolerance. The weekend retreats to the mountains in Idyllwild and Camarillo, California, Joan Suter recalled, remained “one of the highlights of my life.” Students joined sensitivity workshops, engaged in lively discussions, and forged relationships across racial and economic lines that challenged their point of view. Beverly Hills High School students, feeling isolated in their own community and inspired by the civil rights struggle, got the chance to join the extracurricular events. With the help of Joan and Lyle Suter, several Beverly Hills High School students sat on the student advisory committee, attended the weekend retreats, and participated in other extracurricular activities. Writing in the school newspaper, after an inspiring retreat in Idyllwild, one Beverly Hills High School pupil charged, “Wake up, Beverly students!” While Beverly Hills High School

⁶⁶ Suter, interview by author; Crowther, et al., “APEX Los Angeles City Schools,” 7, 22, 25-26, 37, 40; Caughey, *To Kill*, 33-34; Saltman, *Fragile*, 284.

invested millions of dollars into parking spaces, a cafeteria, and a planetarium, “our ghetto brothers have no books; many can’t even read.” Another student found, “Going up to Idyllwild, the white kids stuck with the white kids, and the blacks with blacks.” But “we left Idyllwild, brothers and sisters, and members of the Human Race.”⁶⁷

At the end of 1967, CN proudly released the first issue of its nationally distributed, quarterly journal *The Integrator*. As the title suggested, *The Integrator* aimed to advance racial integration. Despite persistent white resistance against the civil rights struggle and the growing black separatist movement, CN insisted integration remained the answer to society’s racial tensions. The introductory page of the journal explained,

This journal is dedicated to integration, recognizing it as an idea attacked from all sides. Blacks have lost faith that it can come to pass in America. Many white people see it as a sinister plot of Communism or at the very least a mongrelization of the white race. Integration is looked upon here as the hope, and the only answer, for America’s racial problem. Only by really living with people of a different race can we overcome the fear of previously taught differences. This is our commitment.

Members of CN and writers from around the country contributed articles on civil rights, fair housing, public schools, intermarriage, and parenting. The journal included a suggested reading list with books on race, fair housing, black history, and urbanism. A regularly featured piece, “The National Integration Scene,” summarized the efforts made at the local, state, and federal levels toward fair housing and residential integration. *The Integrator* reprinted scholarly articles, highlighted works by black artists, and featured cartoons.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Suter, interview by author; “APEX Campers View Trip, tell Normans to ‘Wake Up!’” and “Beverly and APEX Students Make Excursion to Idyllwild Together as Brothers and Sisters in a Beautiful Adventure,” *Highlights*, 25 April 1969, author’s personal collection (from Joan A. Suter’s personal collection) (original emphasis).

⁶⁸ For examples of *The Integrator*, see the editions (Winter 1967-1968; Summer 1968; Fall 1968; and Spring 1969) housed at the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. See

Despite its name and agenda, *The Integrator* also explored the complexities of black power. The writings of Olive Walker, one of the first black members of UN, a View Park resident, and the journal's editor, expressed the virtues of both integration and black radicalism. In her opening salvo, she summoned, "We middle-class Americans must transcend the color barrier and live together in friendship and neighborliness." Yet in "Call Me Nigger," one of the most discussed articles amongst the readership, which attempted to deconstruct and disable the potency of the ugly word, Walker made no apologies for black assertiveness. Beside a reproduction of African American artist Vertis Hayes's "Protest," Walker proclaimed,

The American nigger is American all the way—aggressive, violent, determined to take his place in the sun. He now stands on his two legs with his head held high—proud to be black, brown, yellow, or white, but nigger all the way—unafraid to be called any name, even able to assume the worst name.

Once whites accept the history of "the mixing of different people" in the United States, she exclaimed, they will value their diverse heritage, honor their black ancestors, and embrace integration.⁶⁹

Whites in particular became the center of discussion and critique. In "The '9 to 5' Liberal," Lyle Suter highlighted the contradictory beliefs of white liberals. The cartoon depicted the main character, a white liberal named Charlie White, embracing blacks and touting his accomplishments for improving race relations in the workplace, and then

introductory page on any of the editions for quote. For background on the making of *The Integrator*, see Seidenbaum, "Spectator, '67," D1; and "New Horizons for CN," *Crenshaw Notes* (December 1967): 5.

⁶⁹ Olive Walker, *The Integrator* 1.1 (Winter 1967-1968): 2; Olive Walker, "Call Me Nigger," *The Integrator* 1.2 (Summer 1968): 5-6. For references to responses on "Call Me Nigger," see Ray Tuttle, "Letters to the Editor," *The Integrator* 1.3 (Fall 1968): 3; Anne Anderson, "Don't Call Me 'Whitey' – I Can't Take It... Yet," *The Integrator* 2.1 (Spring 1969): 24. For information on Olive Walker, including her involvement in UN as a steering committee member and her home address in the early 1960s, see United Neighbors "Problems and Challenges," 4.

returning to his white suburban neighborhood in the evenings surrounded by his white friends and hired black help (Figure 17). Assistant editor of *The Integrator* Anne Anderson also criticized whites for failing to admit their racism and commit wholeheartedly to full equality. In response to Walker's insistence to "Call Me Nigger," Anderson believed that in order to mollify the pejorative "whitey," whites had to own up to their racist past, admit to their current prejudiced attitudes, and "become *truly* indignant" against discrimination.⁷⁰

At the end of the 1960s, with the help of the CN leadership, neighborhood stabilization groups around the country joined forces to organize a national agency committed to integration. The idea to set up a national agency originated over a decade earlier, but when Jean Gregg teamed up with fair housing advocate Morris Milgram in 1968, they set out to fulfill their goal. "Born into poverty" in New York City to "an immigrant Russian peddler," explained a *New York Times* article, Milgram had built a national reputation constructing and managing open-occupancy communities across the nation and founding nonprofit organizations to buttress racial integration. After they received funding for their proposal, Milgram and Gregg set out to plan a conference aimed to bring together integrated groups from around the country. In an effort to create a setting that reflected their objectives, they asked twelve groups to select an active black and white member as representatives to attend an all-expense paid trip to Carleton College in Minnesota. At the conference, which convened in March 1969, participants voted unanimously to set up the agency. They adopted the name National Neighbors, outlined their mission, and elected African American attorney Joseph Hairston as

⁷⁰ Lyle Suter, "The '9 to 5' Liberal," *The Integrator* 1.2 (Summer 1968): 18; Anderson, "Don't Call Me 'Whitey,'" 24-25 (original emphasis).

president. Gregg became National Neighbors's first executive director. She relocated from Los Angeles to Philadelphia at the end of 1969, married Milgram in 1970 (changing her last name), and turned her focus to the national effort.⁷¹

National Neighbors indeed embarked on an ambitious plan. The goals that the participants agreed on at Carleton College illustrated their boldness and determination for progress toward residential integration. National Neighbors set out to improve communication between local groups, provide consulting services, create a national directory and data bank, support conferences, conduct research, publish literature, lead action programs against racial discrimination in the real estate industry, advocate for the passage of legislation, develop national public relations, and spread the message of integration. With Jean Gregg Milgram as "the hub around which the organization functioned," Juliet Saltman wrote, the group quickly began to tackle its goals. Except for the data bank, National Neighbors launched all of its plans. One of its most noteworthy projects, "Shoppers' Sunday," encouraged local groups around the country to audit and file claims against discriminatory real estate brokers throughout the 1970s. With a team

⁷¹ Lawrence Van Gelder, "Morris Milgram, 81; Built Interracial Housing," *New York Times*, 26 June 1997; Gwen Shaffer, "Philadelphia's First Integrated Housing Development Turns 50," *Philadelphia Weekly*, 26 July 2006; Saltman, *Fragile*, 313-314, 317; Morris Milgram, *Good Neighborhood*, 11, 54-59, 62, 138-140; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006. Among his many projects and organizations, in the mid-1960s, Morris Milgram founded the National Committee on Tithing in Investment (NCTI), a nonprofit group of 25,000 that sponsored housing integration, and Mutual Real Estate Investment Trust (M-REIT), a company that sought to purchase apartment buildings in all-white areas and maintain them with ethnically diverse tenants. NCTI eventually changed its name to Sponsors of Open Housing Investment (SOHI). In 1975, Milgram with civil rights leader James Farmer also founded the Fund for an OPEN Society, a nonprofit organization that initially granted low-cost mortgages to integrate neighborhoods, and then worked to stabilize integrated communities. See Saltman, *Fragile*, 28-29, fn 15.

of attorneys from the Justice Department, National Neighbors provided legal aid at no cost to take action against realtors.⁷²

In less than a decade, the interracial mix of middle- and upper-class women of the Crenshaw district went from a rather informal, grassroots group that met in their living rooms, to a national movement that worked with the federal government to achieve widespread residential integration. Concerned with the state of the public schools and the status of the community, UN convinced its neighbors to donate money and volunteer time. It tried to persuade local business owners and public officials to stop white exodus and work toward a racially balanced and integrated district. CN ultimately broadened the scope of its influence as a nonprofit organization from its immediate locality to communities around the country. Stabilizing the district's racial composition and maintaining integration, nevertheless, remained an elusive, uphill battle that required a full-scale, collaborative commitment from all strata of society. Confronted with the enormity of forces working against racial integration, from individual fear and bigotry to institutional racism, the defiant but disappointed members of CN bore witness to the resegregation of its district.

Conclusion

One year after the Watts riot, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Jean Gregg conveyed a sense of confidence in CN's ability to accomplish its goals. "It will be another three years before you can say the battle's won," she believed. "But I'm sure it will be won." For all of its effort, however, CN left behind a mixed legacy of trials and

⁷² Saltman, *Fragile*, 322, 336-339, 357-358; Morris Milgram, *Good Neighborhood*, 139-140; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006.

errors, successes and failures. Thanks to its dedication and drive toward racial integration, particularly throughout the 1960s, CN achieved noteworthy growth and expansion in its membership roll, committee work, local programs, and national outreach. In an interview years later, Gregg explained that the members of UN and CN felt part of the modern civil rights movement, striving to fulfill the goals of integration proclaimed by Martin Luther King, Jr. Maintaining a racially balanced community, however, proved too difficult to achieve. Around the same time as the assassination of King, and the outbreak of urban riots across the country, the Crenshaw district underwent a dramatic shift in the racial composition of its population, and the racially balanced community swiftly became disproportionately black.⁷³

CN put forth an admirable effort to maintain integration in the Crenshaw district. Membership more than doubled from 400 in March 1965 to 850 in June 1967. Moreover, the CN real estate agency attracted several white homebuyers to the area. “After four years of operation,” wrote Ann Post, who succeeded Gregg as CN’s Executive Director, “our latest survey indicated that the racial change in 1967 was reduced to one percent.” While white liberals, such as Gregg and Post, initially took the lead positions, both whites and blacks created programs, met with local officials, compiled mailings, and worked across racial lines in an interracial group that they wished to see in the district. Nevertheless, United States Census reports clearly indicated that by the end of the decade resegregation had overpowered CN’s efforts. In 1970, black residents far exceeded white residents in the main single-family residential areas of Crenshaw district. The black proportion in Leimert Park rose from 30 percent in 1960 to more than 69 percent in 1970.

⁷³ Jack Jones, “Fight to Stabilize Integrated Parts of City Showing Gain,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1966, 8; Jean Gregg Milgram, interview by author, November 11, 2006.

The proportion of blacks in View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills increased from roughly 4 percent in 1960 to more than 62 percent in 1970. The share of African Americans in Baldwin Hills Estates also grew, from 3 percent in 1960 to nearly 75 percent in 1970. Census reports also showed Baldwin Hills Vista heading toward the same direction (Table 4). The struggle to maintain a “balanced community,” in the words of Gregg, became “a lost battle.”⁷⁴

While the Los Angeles Board of Education finally began to carry out a racial census of its schools in 1966, the data showed that throughout the following decades school segregation continued. Between 1966 and 1970, the black population in every public school in the Crenshaw district substantially increased. Eight years after the NAACP threatened to picket Baldwin Hills Elementary School, the proportion of African American students at the school rose to 56 percent. The black proportion in the other elementary schools grew to more than 80 percent in 1970, with Hillcrest Elementary School topping the list at 95 percent. By 1966, African Americans at Audubon Junior High School, which had turned away one of the first black families to move to Baldwin Hills Estates, made up the majority of students. Finally, at Dorsey High School in 1966, blacks outnumbered whites 7 to 1 (Table 7). The summer reading improvement course, the Baldwin Hills Cultural Enrichment Center, and Project APEX brought together a diversity of youngsters and helped transcend racial lines, but the programs lacked the resources to permanently desegregate the public school system. Nevertheless, the high quality of the schools endured. The *Los Angeles Times* took notice when the Windsor

⁷⁴ Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Neighborhood Stabilization,” 1; Shulte, “Good Neighbor Policy,” 9; Post, “Stabilizing an Integrated Neighborhood,” 9; “Testimony of Jean Gregg,” 42.

Hills Elementary School sixth grade class scored the highest average out of the 435 elementary schools in LAUSD, “including the high-achieving predominately white schools,” on the 1968 intelligence quotient (IQ) test. Moreover, through the early 1970s, *Newsweek* reported, Windsor Hills Elementary School “ranks among the top 5 percent of the city’s schools in standard reading tests.”⁷⁵

Regardless of the shift to a majority black population by 1970, the single-family communities of the Crenshaw district remained highly regarded, prosperous, and valuable. With the exception of Leimert Park, which remained close to the Los Angeles city average, median property values and median annual family income in View Park, View Heights, Windsor Hills, Baldwin Hills Estates, and Baldwin Hills Vista stood well above the city average. Compared to the other single-family communities in the district in 1970, Baldwin Hills Estates boasted the highest median property value at \$44,200 and the highest median annual family income at \$14,907. The other communities trailed close behind (Tables 5-6). The warnings of federal agencies, such as the FHA, as well as private mortgage lenders and white homeowners that black settlement in white communities caused neighborhood deterioration, fell far short from the truth. The communities of the Crenshaw district withstood racial discrimination and violence,

⁷⁵ Table 7 provides data from the following sources. Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles City Schools, “Racial and Ethnic Survey,” Fall 1966, LASMC, Box 138, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles City Schools, “Racial and Ethnic Survey,” Fall 1970, LASMC, Box 139, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles Unified School District, “Racial and Ethnic Survey,” Fall 1975, HVS, Box 10, Folder 4, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles Unified School District, “Racial and Ethnic Survey,” Fall 1980, LASMC, Box 139, UCLA/SC. Many thanks to Dr. Cynthia Lim at the Los Angeles Unified School District for helping me obtain these statistics. For articles on academic excellence in Windsor Hills Elementary School, see Jack McCurdy, “Black School Highest in IQ—Is Affluence the Reason?” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1969, B1; “Black Schools that Work,” *Newsweek*, 1 January 1973, 57.

school clashes, real estate blockbusting, and a significant shift in their racial composition, while remaining highly reputable, affluent, and desirable places to live.

CHAPTER 5

BROCKMAN GALLERY AND THE ART OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Driving in a Volkswagen bug on their cross-country road trip in the summer of 1966, brothers Alonzo and Dale Davis discussed the idea of opening an art gallery centered on African American works in their hometown of Los Angeles. Twenty-four-year-old Manual Arts High School art teacher Alonzo Joseph Davis, Jr. and twenty-year-old USC art student Dale Brockman Davis had embarked on a journey to explore their southern roots and connect with other black artists around the United States. Born to middle-class parents in Tuskegee, Alabama, and residents of Los Angeles since the mid-1950s, the Davis brothers grew increasingly inspired by the political and social climate. They wore their hair long, protested against the Vietnam War, and picketed for civil rights. Sleeping mostly in Alonzo's vehicle, they drove from Los Angeles through the South, into the eye of the civil rights movement. Less than one year after they returned home, they rented a storefront in the commercial district of their mother's home in Leimert Park, spruced up the interior, recruited artists, sent out mailings, decided on a name that honored their family heritage, and opened Brockman Gallery.¹

¹ Alonzo Davis, *African-American Artists of Los Angeles: Alonzo Davis*, interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1994), UCLA/SC, 72-75, 107, 138, 145; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author, March 15, 2008, Los Angeles, California.

The population of Leimert Park in the 1960s underwent a dramatic shift not only in the residential portions of the community, but also in the commercial district. Designed in the 1920s by the Leimert Company, the commercial district (later known as Leimert Park Village) became an important part of the community's subsistence and livelihood. The food vendors, clothiers, beauty salon, barbershop, and theater functioned as community meeting places for residents to gather together and exchange gossip. Black in-migration and real estate blockbusting, however, caused local white merchants and white homeowners to sell their property and move away. In late 1966, after the Davis brothers returned home from their road trip, they noticed the shift taking place in the population of their community. "The small merchants were beginning to make a move, and eventually the big ones left too," Alonzo Davis recalled. Seeing an opportunity in the increasingly affluent black area, they rented a vacant storefront at 4334 Degnan Boulevard and pioneered their black-run art gallery, dedicated to exhibiting the works of African American artists.²

Brockman Gallery emerged within a broad-based, nationwide movement of the black arts that took place from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s. African American artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers in urban centers around the United States insisted on their value and importance in the European-biased, primarily white art world. Deeply affected by the civil rights and black power movements, black artists rejected European influences, took a stand against colonialism, and used their artwork to pay

² Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 143-144; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14-15, 17; Steven L. Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 218-219. See chapter 3 for population trends in Leimert Park.

homage to their African ancestry, promote Pan-African unity, spotlight the African American past, demand racial equality, and celebrate black culture and self-determination. Most organizations and activities of the Black Arts movement in southern California, historian Daniel Widener explained, emerged from and organized in the working-class black communities of the Eastside, what became known as South Central Los Angeles (and then renamed South Los Angeles). However, the Davis brothers expanded the movement westward into Leimert Park.³

From its opening in 1967, Brockman Gallery sought to engage African Americans across Los Angeles to embrace their black heritage and stand up for racial equality. While Crenshaw Neighbors drew on the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. to maintain racial integration and amicable race relations in the Crenshaw district, Brockman Gallery took its inspiration from the black power movement and sought to honor black identity and culture. Despite their different approaches, local activists in the Crenshaw district ultimately sought the same goals of racial equality and equal opportunity. Brockman Gallery became a central meeting place where black artists not only displayed and sold their work, but also planned outreach programs and social events around the city. From

³ On the Black Arts movement in Los Angeles, see Daniel L. Widener, “‘Way Out West’: Expressive Art, Music, and Culture in Black LA,” *Emergences* 9.2 (1999): 271-289; Daniel Widener, “Something Else: Creative Community and Black Liberation in Postwar Los Angeles” (PhD diss., New York University, 2003); and Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). For other important monographs on the movement around the country, see James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Cheryl Clarke, ‘After Mecca’: Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford, *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and Lorenzo Thomas, *Don’t Deny My Name: Words and Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008).

1973, after securing federal and state grants, the Davis brothers established Brockman Gallery Productions (renamed Brockman Productions), a nonprofit division of the gallery. With Alonzo Davis at the helm, Brockman Productions organized and sponsored a myriad of activities and programs, from street fairs and music performances to film festivals and citywide mural projects. The Davis brothers focused on enriching city dwellers with African American heritage and culture, but in the spirit of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, the gallery also embraced the works of Caribbean, Hispanic, Japanese American, and European artists. Brockman Gallery aimed to create a more inclusive, equitable city where all of its residents had a fair share in realizing their full potential.⁴

From Tuskegee to Los Angeles and Back Again

The obstacles and the advantages that Alonzo and Dale Davis encountered as youngsters inspired the brothers to create a platform for African American artists to exhibit their work and to bring art to low-income, working-class blacks in Los Angeles. Growing up in segregated Tuskegee, Alabama, at the historically black Tuskegee Institute, the Davis brothers thrived in the security and self-sufficiency of campus life. Raised by well-educated, scholarly parents, and in an environment driven by highly ambitious and competitive academics, the young boys developed a strong work ethic as well as the confidence in their ability to carve out their own future. When they moved to Los Angeles as preteens after their parents divorced in the mid-1950s, the Davis brothers

⁴ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 257-258; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; John W. Outterbridge, “African American Artists of Los Angeles: John W. Outterbridge,” interview by Richard Cándida Smith (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1993), UCLA/SC, 248, 289-290; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 218-219; *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South Central Los Angeles*, DVD, produced and directed by Jeanette Lindsay (Los Angeles: Foster Johnson Studios, 2008).

discovered bigotry and inequality in the fabric of the multiracial city. Nevertheless, they flourished in their new environment. As high school and college students in the 1950s and 1960s, the brothers grew increasingly active in the civil rights struggle.

Founded in 1881 as the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in postbellum Tuskegee, Alabama, the school built up by the first president, Booker T. Washington, aimed to instill black self-reliance in the southern economy by teaching practical skills in the agricultural and manual trades. The school changed its emphasis from vocational instruction to academic higher education in the 1920s, and adopted the name Tuskegee Institute in 1937. Alonzo Joseph Davis, Sr., father of Alonzo and Dale, saw the rewards of his hard work materialize at Tuskegee. Born in Washington, D.C., the elder Davis became the first college graduate in his family, earning a Bachelor's and Master's degree at Howard University and a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. He arrived at the Tuskegee Institute to teach courses in psychology and education, joined a group of faculty that pushed for black voter registration, and eventually rose to Dean of Education. Agnes Moses Davis, the mother of Alonzo and Dale, came from a large family in Alabama, attended an all-black girls private school, taught grade school, and then worked at Tuskegee as a librarian.⁵

Amid deep-seated racism, Alonzo Davis explained, the Tuskegee Institute campus felt like an unfettered, "little family town." The Davis parents worked hard to shield their

⁵ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 19, 21-22, 28; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 38-41. See also Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: Authoritative Text, Contexts, and Composition History, Criticism*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Norton, 2006); Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up From Slavery 100 Years Later* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

sons from racial discrimination and segregation, and as a result, according to Alonzo, “Everything centered around this college.” The black-owned and operated businesses around the campus, including the grocery stores, dry cleaners, and gasoline stations, brought a sense of pride and freedom to the black community. The Davis brothers enjoyed access to the campus facilities and events. They swam in the swimming pool, played on the tennis courts, and cheered on Tuskegee at the basketball tournaments. “We were somewhat privileged for people in the South at that time,” Alonzo recognized. They understood the advantages they had over their low-income black counterparts.⁶

But raised by ambitious, intellectual parents in the competitive environment of the Tuskegee Institute, the Davis brothers felt pressure to become upright, contributing members of society. Although they remained safeguarded from racial segregation on the campus, Dale Davis explained, “We knew the conditions that were surrounding us,” which made a deep impression on the young boys. “We were aware of the signs” separating the races on water fountains, in buses, and other public facilities. Surrounded by accomplished African American doctors, lawyers, teachers, and business owners, however, the brothers developed a sense of self-worth and an awareness of their responsibility to shape their own future. The Tuskegee Institute instilled in the young boys the need to become not only self-sufficient, but also valued citizens. “We grew up feeling like we have to make a difference,” Alonzo explained. Yet he understood, as African Americans, “We have to be twice as good to be equal.”⁷

⁶ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 24-26, 38; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

⁷ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 26-28; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Kay Lindsey, “Brockman Gallery,” *Art Papers* (July/August 1990): 23.

When their parents divorced in the mid-1950s, their mother uprooted her sons to start anew in Los Angeles. She refused to accept the contempt and disapproval of divorce in her middle-class, black community. While their father stayed in Tuskegee, their mother contacted some friends living in Los Angeles who helped her make a smoother transition and find housing in the city. She moved her sons into a one-bedroom rental house in a primarily working-class black area near Second Avenue and Exposition Boulevard, and the family quickly settled into their school and work routines.⁸

Los Angeles presented its own set of challenges, but the Davis brothers possessed the knowledge and skills to maneuver their way through the city. “We were immediately... schooled that just because everything looks cute out here—don’t be innocent, don’t be fooled,” Dale explained. Los Angeles had “the same issues, practiced a different way.” Raised in an academic family, they also understood that, “No matter what... we had to go to school.” As Alonzo settled into Foshay Junior High School, and Dale attended Sixth Avenue Elementary School, their mother enrolled in USC with the intention of earning a Master’s degree in library science. A few years later, they moved into a three-bedroom rental house across the street with their mother’s sister.⁹

In the second half of the 1950s, as Alonzo attended high school, the racial landscape of his surroundings noticeably shifted. The Davis residence, which was located on the outskirts of Leimert Park, fell within the same zone in the Los Angeles Unified School District as the Crenshaw district. As a result, Alonzo and many middle-

⁸ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 45-48, 52-53; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

⁹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 52-63; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author. In separate interviews, Alonzo and Dale Davis gave two different locations of their first home in Los Angeles. Alonzo cited the first home near Fourth Avenue and Exposition Boulevard, while Dale said the house was located near Second Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.

and upper-class adolescents came together at Dorsey High School. But as affluent blacks purchased property in the Crenshaw district, and whites moved out, Dorsey High School grew increasingly black. Although he lived outside of the Crenshaw district, Alonzo understood, “There was a lot of tension among adults during that time,” and those events affected his point of view.¹⁰

As racial tensions rose to the surface, Alonzo picked up a part-time job at the far-left, black-owned newspaper the *Los Angeles Tribune*. In the 1940s and 1950s, Almena Lomax and her husband Lucius Lomax, Jr., son of Dunbar Hotel owner Lucius Lomax, Sr., had transformed the *Tribune* into a militant black newspaper that reported on racial injustice and the civil rights struggle. In the mid-1950s, Almena Lomax traveled to Montgomery, Alabama to report on the bus boycott, one of the first demonstrations that launched the modern civil rights movement, and there she began a long-lasting friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr. Almena Lomax returned to the South throughout the 1960s to cover King’s organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the events of the civil rights movement for her newspaper. While Alonzo made coffee and ran errands at the *Tribune*, he developed an increasingly militant stance on racial issues. Almena Lomax, Alonzo explained, “broke me into sort of a radical, left way of thinking, questioning authority.”¹¹

¹⁰ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 56.

¹¹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 59-61; M.L. Lomax, “Journey to the Beginning,” Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, contributed on July 27, 2007, <http://nmaahc.si.edu/memory/view/15> (accessed 31 July 2010). See also Almena Lomax, “Mother’s Day in Montgomery,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 263-267; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Dear Almena Lomax,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 313; and Almena Lomax, “In the Faraway County of Montgomery, Alabama,” *Harper’s Magazine* (September 1968): 51-63.

While his political leanings developed, Alonzo also became more passionate about his artwork. As children in Tuskegee, both of the Davis brothers enjoyed experimenting in the visual arts. Alonzo took up drawing, and Dale showed an interest in constructing three-dimensional pieces. The Los Angeles Unified School District offered art courses that helped further their artistic skills. Mostly to please his parents, who expressed concern over their eldest son's future, Alonzo took a more practical path by choosing science as his major. But his enthusiasm for the visual arts remained strong, and he continued to take elective and summer school art courses.¹²

In the early 1960s, around the time Alonzo was attending college and Dale was completing his junior year at Dorsey High School, the Davis family moved to middle-class Leimert Park. Their mother and two aunts pooled their money together to make a down payment on a Spanish Mediterranean style, two-story house on Edgehill Drive, one block east of Degnan Boulevard, and a few blocks north of Leimert Park Village. Living in Leimert Park allowed Dale to stay at Dorsey High School.¹³

Through the early 1960s, as the Davis brothers continued their education, they joined the civil rights struggle. Alonzo began his studies at Los Angeles City College, a local community college, then transferred to Pepperdine College (now Pepperdine University). At the 1960 Democratic National Convention, he "picketed for a stronger civil rights platform." In the summer of 1963, he joined hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in Washington, D.C. at the March on Washington. He continued to pursue his passion for art in college, but appeased his parents and chose a more stable career

¹² Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 58, 75; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

¹³ Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

path by taking courses in education. After graduating from Pepperdine in 1964, Alonzo began a Master's program in education at USC, but before he completed his degree, he found a job teaching art at Manual Arts High School, a predominantly black school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, located south of USC.¹⁴ Dale also tried to balance his interest in art with a more practical career. After graduating from Dorsey High School in the early 1960s, he earned an Associate's degree at Los Angeles City College, and then transferred to USC for their art program. In an effort to please his parents, however, Alonzo took courses in English. But the social and political milieu also affected his decisions and inspired his growing activism. Similar to his older brother, Dale demonstrated for civil rights and protested against the Vietnam War.¹⁵

Then in August 1965, as Watts broke out in riot, attention turned to South Los Angeles. Alonzo traveled to Europe earlier that summer feeling "really naïve to the energy that was happening in the Watts area and its problems." When he returned, Dale informed his older brother that the United States National Guard, bearing machine guns, was blocking off Leimert Park, preventing residents from going home, and enforcing the curfew on the community. Alonzo initially felt stunned that city officials included affluent, reputable Leimert Park in the riot zone. But, he soon realized, the riot forced him and the black middle-class community of the Crenshaw district to pay more attention and give more support to the low-income black population of Watts. "The whole black

¹⁴ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 67-68, 71-75, 106.

¹⁵ Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author. See also a brief biography of Dale Davis in Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy, eds., *Black Artists on Art*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts, Inc., 1971), 125.

community was shut down, which meant that middle-class people and affluent people couldn't get away from it, and they had to deal with it," he explained.¹⁶

The riot emboldened local black activists to action. One year after the rebellion, Maulana Karenga, Booker Griffin, Tommy Jacquette, and Stan Sanders joined forces to promote black cultural nationalism, commemorate the thirty-four dead from the riot, and diffuse youth militancy in South Los Angeles by planning the Watts Summer Festival. Karenga emerged as a prominent leader in the Black Power movement. Born Ronald Everett, the UCLA graduate student changed his name after the riot to Maulana (meaning "master teacher" in Swahili) Karenga and formed the US organization. Believing that African Americans must rid themselves of white dominance and reclaim their African identity to attain any political or social advancements, Karenga urged US members to learn Swahili, study African history, adopt African names, wear traditional West African garments, and observe a host of rituals and holidays, including Kwanzaa (or "first fruit" in Swahili). Karenga teamed up with *Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist Booker Griffin, local civil rights activist Tommy Jacquette, and attorney Stan Sanders to make the Watts Summer Festival a celebration of African and African American culture and identity.

The event convened annually from August 1966 through the 1980s (Figures 18-19).¹⁷

In 1966, however, Alonzo and Dale Davis remained on the "fringe" of the civil rights movement. "I was just trying to get it together...just finished college, trying to

¹⁶ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 108-110.

¹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), 217-218; Gerald Horne, *Fire this Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 202-204; Bruce M. Tyler, "The Rise and Decline of the Watts Summer Festival, 1965 to 1986," *American Studies* 3 (1990): 62-66. See entire Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

teach,” Alonzo explained. But that summer, as the Davis brothers set out on a cross-country road trip to reconnect with their southern heritage and connect with African American artists, they found their purpose. From Los Angeles, they drove southeast to Arizona, first to meet artist Eugene Grigsby in Phoenix, and then artist Paolo Soleri in Scottsdale. They continued their drive southeastward to find John Thomas Biggers in Texas and connect with the art department at the historically black Jackson State College (later renamed Jackson State University) in Mississippi, where they found themselves at the center of the civil rights struggle.¹⁸

On June 5, 1966, civil rights activist James Meredith, known for integrating the University of Mississippi, embarked on a one-man march to urge blacks to vote. On the second day after he set out alone on a 225-mile route from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi, Meredith was shot and wounded by a white supremacist. As SCLC leader Martin Luther King, Jr., CORE director Floyd McKissick, and SNCC head Stokely Carmichael, visited Meredith in the hospital, they decided to continue his march. By that time, both CORE and SNCC had shifted their approach toward civil rights from nonviolence and integration to black power and separatism. While McKissick and Carmichael compromised with King to lead an interracial, nonviolent march, the CORE and SNCC leaders asserted their new views throughout the June demonstration. Their clear declaration of black power came in mid-June, after police arrested and imprisoned Carmichael for defying an order and erecting a tent on school property. At a rally that evening, Carmichael insisted, “This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested—and I ain’t going to jail no more!” Then, he began shouting “Black Power!” while the

¹⁸ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 107-109, 111; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

audience repeated his call. On June 26, two days after Meredith rejoined the march, thousands of protestors, including Alonzo and Dale, descended on Jackson's state capitol for the final rally. The Meredith March not only became a defining shift in the civil rights struggle, but also inspired the Davis brothers to bring the ideas of black power to their Los Angeles community.¹⁹

After Jackson, the Davis brothers carried on their road trip heading toward the East Coast. They stopped at Tougaloo College in Mississippi; reconnected with their childhood friends in Tuskegee, Alabama; visited their mother's side of the family in Birmingham, Alabama; and saw their father in Durham, North Carolina. In New York City, they formed valuable relationships with African American artists Romare Bearden, Charles H. Alston, Hale Woodruff, and Norman Lewis. These contacts would help the Davis brothers build the reputation of Brockman Gallery in the late 1960s.²⁰

While the idea of establishing an art gallery initially seemed too difficult for the Davis brothers to accomplish, given their young ages and their demanding work and school schedules, they were determined to carry out their plan. In their discussion during the long car rides, the Davis brothers knew that they wanted to center their art gallery on the works of African American artists. They had grown up learning about black

¹⁹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 112; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 194-200; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 209-211. See also James Meredith, *Three Years in Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); and John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

²⁰ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 58, 68, 113-118; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

accomplishments at the Tuskegee Institute and studying artists of color on their own, but they often encountered teachers in Los Angeles that knew nothing about the topic. Local museums and art galleries excluded the works of African American artists from their collections, and art schools limited the number of African American students into their programs to a bare minimum. The Davis brothers understood the dearth of opportunities for artists of color to showcase and sell their work, and felt an urgency to fill that void and create an inclusive art gallery on their own. Shortly, after returning home to Los Angeles, Alonzo and Dale seized the moment and established their business.²¹

The Black Arts Movement Takes Root in South Los Angeles

The Davis brothers' approach to opening an art gallery indeed seemed quite spontaneous and unsystematic. Before they had discussed a strategy or laid out a business plan, they signed a lease and invested their hard-earned savings in the space. Dale acknowledged in retrospect that he and his older brother were acting on youthful impulses, that overrode any major concerns and compelled them to action. By the mid-1960s, the Black Arts movement had emerged in major urban centers across the United States, from New York to Nashville, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The conditions and values of each region shaped individual artistic expression; nonetheless, African American artists, musicians, and writers worked within the current climate of racial unrest, and their artwork served as an expression and “cultural wing” of the Black Power movement. The Black Arts movement in Los Angeles, according to historian Daniel Widener, took root in the black working-class communities of the Eastside. Local artists and musicians began establishing a foundation of support by the early 1960s, but after the

²¹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 105, 134, 138; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

Watts riot erupted, South Los Angeles grew into a center of black artistic expression and activism.²²

Throughout the mid-1960s, as civil rights activists grew frustrated at the slow results toward racial equality, the philosophies of black power and black nationalism gained increasing support in urban centers across the country. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked milestone achievements, but persistent white violence and resistant political leaders made activists ever more doubtful that the United States could truly realize racial equality. The Watts rebellion was only the first of a succession of riots that erupted in urban centers across the nation from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s. Meanwhile, various strands of black power and black nationalism emerged and grew in popularity. The assassination of Malcolm X brought more attention to the Nation of Islam and black separatism in 1965, while SNCC chair Stokely Carmichael at the June 1966 Meredith March began to publicly advocate for black power. Also in 1966, as the black cultural nationalist vision of Maulana Karenga materialized in the Watts Summer Festival, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense introduced its ten-point program in northern California.²³

As the black power movement gained momentum, African American artists and their supporters also began to push for representation in the art world. In the early 1960s, black visual artists had few opportunities in Los Angeles to display and sell their work.

²² Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 144-146; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 14-16. See also Widener, “Something Else;” and Widener, “Way Out West.”

²³ Carson, *In Struggle*, 209-210; Joseph, *Waiting*, 141-142, 176-177. See also Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992); William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights—Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

The Ankrum Gallery and the Heritage Gallery, both of which opened in the early 1960s on La Cienega Boulevard and both owned by Jewish entrepreneurs, began selling works of local African American and Latino artists. The Heritage Gallery in particular represented Chicago-born and trained, African American artist Charles White, who had won accolades for his social realist paintings and prints of black history and racial oppression before moving to Los Angeles in the mid-1950s. But the majority of local galleries, including roughly thirty on and around La Cienega Boulevard, as well as art schools and museums, discounted altogether the growing number of black visual artists. Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles's leading art school, admitted very few black students and faced accusations of racism. Aiming to advance its reputation in the art world, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which moved to Exposition Park near USC in the mid-1960s, chose to exhibit established artists over unknown local practitioners.²⁴

Shortly before the 1965 uprising, a group of artists and activists began setting up programs to enrich and empower the underprivileged and underrepresented low-income residents of the black community of Watts to speak forthrightly on their racial identity. Accountant and art enthusiast James Woods gathered together a group of friends and community leaders to brainstorm ideas for a multiracial art collective to provide a space

²⁴ Cecil Fergerson, "African American Artists of Los Angeles: Cecil Fergerson," interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1996), UCLA/SC, 239-240; Outerbridge, interview by Cândida Smith, 238-239; Peter Selz, *Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 145-146; Widener, "Something Else," 154-155, 203-205. See also Benjamin Horowitz, foreword to *Images of Dignity: The Drawings of Charles White* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1967), 7-28; Robert Perine, *Chouinard, An Art Vision Betrayed: The Story of the Chouinard Art Institute, 1921-1972* (Encinitas, CA: Artra Publishing, 1985); and Nancy Moure, "The Struggle for a Los Angeles Art Museum, 1890-1940," *Southern California Quarterly* 74.3 (Fall 1992): 247-275.

for community members to cultivate and advance their talents. Following the advice of civil rights activist and poet Jayne Cortez, in 1964, Woods established Studio Watts Workshop in a former furniture outlet in the Watts commercial center at Grandee Avenue and 104th Street. Studio Watts Workshop held classes in art, drama, writing, and dance, and hosted public exhibits, theater performances, poetry readings, and musical shows. With Woods as director, and Cortez leading the writing and acting classes, the collective brought in hundreds of students and supporters from around the city.²⁵

Los Angeles's own virtuoso avant-garde jazz musician Horace Tapscott also played an early role in forging community ties to Studio Watts Workshop. Born in Houston, Texas in 1934, and a resident of Los Angeles from 1943, in his formative years, Tapscott honed his craft and learned to compose music from jazz greats on Central Avenue. His mother set aside money for her son to attend Juilliard School in New York City, but Tapscott insisted he could get the best education at "SWU, 'sidewalk university,'" on the streets of Los Angeles. After high school, he took courses at Los Angeles City College, served in the United States Air Force, and then joined Lionel Hampton's orchestra on tour. After less than two years with the band, Tapscott grew disillusioned by the commercially driven music business and its exploitation of black artists, and in early 1961, he walked away from the industry.²⁶

²⁵ Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 298-299; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 75-76; Nancy Adler, "Arts Center Born after Watts Riot," *New York Times*, 19 March 1967; Widener, "Something Else," 113-114.

²⁶ Horace Tapscott, "Central Avenue Sounds: Horace Tapscott," interview by Steven L. Isoardi (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1993), UCLA/SC, 10-11, 48-53, 65-67, 205-211; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 1-2, 49; Widener, "Something Else," 110-111. See also Horace Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Horace Tapscott in *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles*, eds. Clora Bryant and others (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 282-303.

Tapscott returned home, gathered together an eclectic group of musicians and artists, and set out to preserve and perform African American music in Los Angeles. His band, the Underground Musicians Association (UGMA), soon became a mainstay on the Eastside, rehearsing daily at cofounder Linda Hill's home on Central Avenue, leading music classes at Studio Watts Workshop, performing at local schools and in South Park, and playing at SNCC and Black Panther Party meetings. By the early 1970s, the band changed its name to the Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA) to reflect the expanding membership roll of musicians, poets, dancers, actors, students, and political activists. Performances included music, poetry readings, and dance pieces. UGMAA became a nonprofit organization in the mid-1970s, turned its headquarters into a community center, appointed a board of directors, and received federal funding to support a staff and sponsor programs. Out of this umbrella organization, Tapscott also formed and conducted an avant-garde band, named the Pan Afrikan Peoples' Arkestra, mainly to use for small ensembles and performances at political events.²⁷

After the Watts rebellion, more local activists joined the effort to rebuild South Los Angeles. In October 1965, activists converted an abandoned furniture store at 1802 East 103rd Street, about one mile away from Studio Watts Workshop, into the Watts Happening Coffee House. Federal antipoverty programs and private groups funded food banks, poetry readings, and musical and theatrical performances at the space. Tapscott and his band used the center to rehearse, lead workshops, and entertain audiences. In addition, novelist and Academy Award winning screenwriter Budd Schulberg formed the Watts Writers Workshop in 1965. Within two years after its formation, the workshop

²⁷ Tapscott, interview by Isoardi, 298-299, 302-308; Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 297-298; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 49-52, 62-64, 113, 181-187; Widener, "Something Else," 111-115.

moved into the space at the Watts Happening Coffee House. Schulberg and the Watts Writers Workshop, historian Daniel Widener noted, boasted a list of accomplishments. Schulberg formed satellite groups around southern California. Television networks aired stories on the workshop, magazines published essays by its writers, and Schulberg compiled two anthologies of the writers' works. The workshop also brought together three poets, Father Amde (formerly Anthony Hamilton), Richard Dedeaux, and Otis O'Solomon, who began a long-term partnership as the Watts Prophets.²⁸

Moreover, Studio Watts Workshop and the Watts Happening Coffee House yielded several other noteworthy and interconnected grassroots organizations. The Mafundi Institute, a community group established by US founder Maluana Karenga, Watts Summer Festival planner Tommy Jacquette, and UCLA Medical School psychology professor J. Alfred Cannon, initially opened its headquarters in the Watts Happening Coffee House. Unlike the multiracial Studio Watts Workshop, the Mafundi Institute organized as an all black association allied to local black nationalist groups, including the Sons of Watts and the US organization. Meaning "artisans," "creative people," or "craftsmen" in Swahili, Mafundi doubled as a community art space and job training center that offered a range of classes from art, dance, filmmaking, music, and theater, to history, literature, political theory, and self-improvement. Due to internal disagreements, Jayne Cortez broke with Studio Watts Workshop in 1967 and formed the

²⁸ Tapscott, interview by Isoardi, 303-304; Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 303-311; Daniel Widener, "Writing Watts: Budd Schulberg, Black Poetry, and the Cultural War on Poverty," *Journal of Urban History* 34.4 (May 2008): 665-666, 668- 671; Widener, "Something Else," 197, 208-243; Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung*, 105-108; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 75-87; Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 149-151. See also Budd Schulberg, ed., *From the Ashes: Voices of Watts* (New York: New American Library, 1967).

Watts Repertory Theater Company. Cortez, along with musician and poet Stanley Crouch, continued leading theater workshops and performances under the new name.²⁹

When the survival of the Watts Towers became at risk, local activists also rallied behind its value and preservation. Between 1921 and 1954, at his East 107th Street home in Watts, Italian immigrant Sabato Rodia had constructed several triangular spires of steel pipes and rods over one hundred feet tall, which he then adorned with pieces of tile, glass, shells, and other found objects around the community. The towers, located about two miles south of the Watts Happening Coffee House and visible for miles, became a symbol of local creativity, ingenuity, and self-expression (Figure 20). After Rodia left the area in the mid-1950s and the site became vulnerable to demolition, a group of concerned citizens organized as the Committee to Save Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts to safeguard the piece. In 1964, the committee also hired local African American artist Noah Purifoy to establish an art center adjacent to the Watts Towers. At the time Purifoy arrived, committee members had been running rudimentary art classes, but they wanted Purifoy to launch a more sophisticated program.³⁰

During his two brief years as director, Purifoy established the Watts Towers and adjacent Watts Towers Arts Center into a vibrant community outlet of expression. Born

²⁹ Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 299; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 75, 86-87; Widener, "Something Else," 212, 286.

³⁰ Noah Purifoy, "African American Artists of Los Angeles: Noah Purifoy," interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1992), 38, 58-61; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 76-79; Richard Cándida Smith, "Reverencing the Mortal: Assemblage Art as Prophetic Protest in Post-World War II California," in *Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment*, ed. Karen Chassin Goldbaum (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2006), 40; Sarah Schrank, "Picturing the Watts Towers: The Art and Politics of an Urban Landmark," in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, eds. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 373-380.

to sharecroppers in Alabama in 1917, he had earned a Bachelor's degree in education and a Master's degree in social work. Upon his arrival to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, he found employment at the Los Angeles County Hospital, but after growing disenchanted with social work, he enrolled as one of the few African Americans at Chouinard Art Institute. His educational background in social service and art helped him get the job at the Watts Towers, but according to Purifoy, the Watts rebellion "made me an artist." In the wake of the uprising, Purifoy, Judson Powell, John Riddle, and other fellow artists scavenged the wreckage to use as material for their artwork. Out of more than three tons of found objects, Purifoy and seven other artists collaborated on *66 Signs of Neon*, a collection of sixty-six assemblages that explored the causes, meanings, images, and views of South Los Angeles and the Watts riot. First exhibited at nearby Markham Junior High School in April 1966, and then four months later at the first annual Watts Summer Festival before traveling around the country, *66 Signs* catapulted Purifoy into an esteemed, well-known artist.³¹

Purifoy used the Watts Towers Arts Center as a means to raise the self-worth and confidence of the local African American youth. He believed that by providing enjoyable experiences, the center gave students a better chance of making more positive decisions in their own lives. But his unconventional approach to education, such as leading children on "junk hunts" around South Los Angeles to collect found objects for collages, generated criticism from the board. The committee wanted Purifoy to create a more traditional art program that would attract and cultivate artists from beyond Watts. Consequently, after two years as director of the center, he was pushed out of the position.

³¹ Purifoy, interview by Mason, 28-29, 38, 42, 70; Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 2, 138; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 74; Smethurst, *Black Arts*, 305-306; Tyler, "Rise and Decline," 64.

Nevertheless, Purifoy went on to have a successful career as an artist. When black artist John Outterbridge took over as director of the Watts Towers Arts Center in the mid-1970s, he carried on Purifoy's vision by organizing activities around the needs of the community. His collaboration with Alonzo, and the events that they organized in Watts, helped bridge South Los Angeles to Brockman Gallery and African Americans on the Westside.³²

Brockman Gallery Brings Black Art to Leimert Park

Upon the Davis brothers' return home from their road trip, Alonzo set out to find an ideal neighborhood to open his business. While he explored several areas around Los Angeles, he quickly saw the potential of opening an African American art gallery in Leimert Park Village. As residents since the early 1960s, Alonzo and his brother witnessed a steady influx of affluent African American homeowners with disposable incomes moving into the Crenshaw district, and sensed that they would make the ideal clients for the gallery. "We felt like there was a market," Alonzo explained. "We moved into what was the wealthiest black neighborhood in the city of Los Angeles."

Meanwhile, as the Davis brothers opened their gallery, the Blacks Arts Movement in Los Angeles gained momentum. African American artists and activists established their own galleries and organizations, and carried out their own projects. They joined forces, supporting each other's projects and aiding black artists toward the common goal of creating a racially inclusive art world. The Davis brothers joined the movement in the second half of the 1960s, and expanded the exposure of black art to the Westside.³³

³² Purifoy, interview by Mason, 59-60, 62-63, 68-69; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 77-78.

³³ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 143-144, 148; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

After looking at several vacant businesses in Leimert Park Village, Alonzo found the perfect place for the art gallery. The quaint storefront situated at 4334 Degnan Boulevard, formerly used as a photography studio, needed little renovation. The small loft, which hung over part of the room, provided a unique space for exhibitions or a private office. After Alonzo made his decision, he returned to his mother's home on Edgehill Drive, told her about the discussion he and his brother had on their road trip, and announced his plan to open a gallery. He sought out the proprietor of the storefront, a Jewish man whose family had also owned several of the adjacent properties in the commercial district. He used his earnings from his teaching position, signed his name to the lease, and began renting the property in January 1967.³⁴

Between January and March, the Davis brothers set up the space and sketched out a business plan. They installed lighting, laid down new carpet, and put a fresh coat of paint on the walls. They also chose a name for the gallery that paid tribute to their familial heritage, recognized their slave roots, and gave power to the African American past. The gallery assumed the surname of Alonzo and Dale's maternal grandmother, Della Brockman, or what Alonzo explained as the family's "first slave name." On March 1, 1967, after they recruited artists for their first show and mailed out invitations, Alonzo and Dale opened Brockman Gallery.³⁵

³⁴ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 143-145; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Lindsey, "Brockman Gallery," 23. In the article "Brockman Gallery," author Kay Lindsey explained that before Brockman Gallery, 4334 Degnan Boulevard functioned as a frame shop. But in my interview, Dale Davis said the storefront was formerly used as a photography studio. See Lindsey, "Brockman Gallery," 23; and Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

³⁵ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 21, 144-146; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Lindsey, "Brockman Gallery," 23.

While the Davis brothers eventually took the lead in the Black Arts movement in Los Angeles, several visual artists initially paved a path toward more inclusion. In the early 1960s, Ruth G. Waddy set out to increase the exposure of African American artists by founding the seminal Art West Associated, Incorporated (AWA) in Los Angeles. Born in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1909, Waddy joined the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago during the Great Depression, and then moved to Los Angeles in the Second World War to work as a riveter in the aircraft industry, before discovering her passion for the visual arts. Using her connections, she gathered together a group of black artists in an attempt to set up a juried art show at the Los Angeles county museum. She recruited the help of artist Charles White and Golden State Mutual cofounder Norman O. Houston, but faced too many obstacles by the museum to carry out the show. Nevertheless, in 1962, black artists decided to continue their collaboration and form AWA. With Waddy as president, the group met weekly, staged exhibits, ran AWA Negro History Week at the Los Angeles City Hall, published literature, including *Prints by American Negro Artists*, and teamed up with black artists across the country. In the meantime, Waddy also advanced her artistic skills at the Famous Artists Home Study Course, Los Angeles City College, and Los Angeles County Otis Art Institute. She developed a reputation not only for her leadership in AWA, but also her paintings and prints (Figure 21).³⁶

³⁶ Ruth G. Waddy, "African American Artists of Los Angeles: Ruth G. Waddy," interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1993), UCLA/SC, 1, 20-31, 35-38, 49-52, 55-61; Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy, eds., *Black Artists on Art*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers, 1969), 116-118, 131; Samella S. Lewis, *African American Art and Artists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 252-253; Delores Jackson Radney, "Ruth (G.) Waddy," in *St. James Guide to Black Artists* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), 543-544; Kellie Jones, "To/From Los Angeles with Betye Saar," in *Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment*, ed. Karen Chassin Goldbaum (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2006), 34; Widener, "Something Else," 155-157. See

Meanwhile, Evangeline Juliet (E.J.) Montgomery took the lead on the northern California scene by mobilizing and encouraging black artists to pursue their work. New-York-City-born Montgomery studied at Los Angeles City College and Los Angeles State College (later renamed California State University, Los Angeles), moved to Nigeria for a brief time, and then returned to northern California in the 1960s, and continued her education at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Her work in several aesthetics, including jewelry design, printmaking, sculpture, and photography, earned her public recognition and prestigious awards. By 1967, following Waddy's example, Montgomery founded Art-West Associated North, Incorporated (AWAN) in San Francisco. Both AWA and AWAN became pivotal in helping black artists gain exposure of their work, and generating public attention to black art. Over one hundred artists, including Alonzo, received support and supported the organizations.³⁷

Shortly before Brockman Gallery opened its doors, black artist and scholar Samella S. Lewis had also emerged as a leading figure in the development of the local Black Arts movement. Before moving to Los Angeles in the 1960s, New Orleans born Lewis excelled in school and her career. She began her academic training studying under renowned African American artist Elizabeth Catlett at Dillard University in Louisiana,

also T.V. Roelof-Lanner, James A. Porter, and Ruth G. Waddy, *Prints by American Negro Artists* (Los Angeles: Cultural Exchange Center, 1967).

³⁷ Waddy, interview by Mason, 61, 128-131; Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 1, 86, 128; Lewis, *African American Art*, 238; Nkiru Nzegwu, "Evangeline (Juliet) Montgomery," in *St. James Guide to Black Artists* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), 361-363; Art-West Associated North, Inc., *New Perspectives in Black Art* (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum Art Division, October 5-26, 1968), 3, 24; Jones, "To/From Los Angeles," 34; Raymond Lark, "Drawings and Paintings by an Afro-American Artist," *Leonardo* 15.1 (Winter 1982): 7-8; Widener, "Something Else," 155-157. See also Floyd W. Coleman, "E.J. Montgomery: Up Front and Behind the Scenes," *International Review of African American Art* 1.18 (2001): 46.

and then transferred to Hampton Institute (now University) in Virginia to complete her Bachelor's degree. Lewis continued her studies at Ohio State University, where she earned a doctorate in art history and cultural anthropology in 1953. She pursued a career in the academy, teaching at Morgan State University, chairing the art department at Florida A&M University, and transferring to the State University of New York. In the 1960s, she moved to Los Angeles and found a position as education coordinator for LACMA, but clashes with the administration led her to seek employment elsewhere, and she began a professorship at Scripps College.³⁸

Lewis's contributions to the Black Arts movement remained vast and far-reaching. By the late 1960s, art galleries across the country were adding her paintings to their permanent collections, and the Ankrum Gallery in Los Angeles represented her work. At a time when literature on black art remained scarce, Lewis took on the task of documenting the subject. She made her first film in 1966 on the history of black art, called *The Black Artists*, and then produced several pieces on individual black practitioners. In 1969 and 1971, using her own press Contemporary Crafts, she collaborated with Waddy and published a two-volume collection entitled *Black Artists on Art*. The success of her publications led Lewis to found the journal *Black Art: An International Quarterly* (later renamed *International Review of African-American Art*) in

³⁸ Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 1, 113-115, 127; Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 143-144; Jeanne Zeidler, "Samella (Sanders) Lewis," in *St. James Guide to Black Artists* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), 326-328; Floyd Coleman, foreword to *African American Art and Artists*, by Samella Lewis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xi-xii. See also Samella S. Lewis, "African American Artists of Los Angeles: Samella Lewis," interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1995), Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (Hereafter cited as UCB).

1975. She also wrote the textbook, *Art: African American* (1978), on the history of African American art since slavery, which has been reissued several times and renamed *African American Art and Artists*. With Bernie Casey, Lewis also opened Contemporary Crafts Gallery in the mid-Wilshire area in 1970, and founded the Museum of African American Art in Los Angeles in 1976.³⁹

One year after Brockman Gallery opened, Cecil Fergerson and Claude Booker also set out to bring more visibility to African American artists. Born in Oklahoma, Fergerson spent his formative years in Watts, graduated from Jordan High School, and then found work in 1948 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. In over three decades, he advanced from custodian to one of the few black curatorial assistants at the museum. While painting galleries, installing exhibits, and cataloguing the collections, Fergerson gained insight into the money-driven, European-biased politics of the museum. In the early 1960s, as the board of directors built LACMA on Wilshire Boulevard, the museum began hiring more black personnel. Korean War veteran and former police officer Claude Booker found work as a shipping clerk, and Fergerson transferred to the modern art department.⁴⁰

As riots erupted across the country, and the black power movement gained momentum, Fergerson took note of the irony of his place of employment. While

³⁹ Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 1, 127; Farrington, *Creating*, 143-144; Zeidler, “Samella (Sanders) Lewis,” 326-328; Waddy, interview by Mason, 122-125; Jane H. Carpenter with Betye Saar, *Betye Saar* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2003), 26. For a selection of works by Lewis, see Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 1; Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 2; Samella S. Lewis, *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett* (Claremont, CA: Hancraft Studios, 1984); and Lewis, *African American Art*.

⁴⁰ Fergerson, interview by Mason, 89, 111, 115-119, 130-131; Outerbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 276-277; Widener, “Something Else,” 161-162.

recuperating for nearly a year from acute injuries after a car accident, his family and friends brought him news of the riots in Watts and other urban centers around the country. As he read books on Malcolm X and decolonization, and began attending meetings of the Black Muslims, Fergerson came to realize that, even after working at the museum for almost two decades, he knew no African American artists. “Up until that point, I just looked at art as a nightclub for the rich,” Fergerson contended. “It was the white people’s museum. A large number of black people worked there, black people's taxes paid for it, but they never had no sense of using it.” Over lunch one day, Fergerson and Booker decided to form a group that pressured LACMA to become more inclusive to blacks.⁴¹

Beginning in 1968, Fergerson and Booker brought more exposure and opportunities to black artists in Los Angeles when they established the Black Arts Council (BAC). In their first weekly meetings, which oftentimes comprised of only the two of them, Fergerson and Booker began to plot out their ideas. Stan Sanders, key organizer of the Watts Summer Festival and attorney, helped Fergerson and Booker establish bylaws and a charter. Gradually Alonzo Davis, John Outterbridge, John Riddle, Ruth Waddy, and many others joined the group. The BAC implemented numerous successful projects. The group put together a series of lectures and exhibits of black artists at LACMA, and pressured the museum’s board of directors to establish an African American art department and hire a black curator. The BAC also presented black art to local public schools; brought students to black art shows around California; organized exhibits at the Watts Summer Festival; displayed the works of black artists in banks,

⁴¹ Fergerson, interview by Mason, 133-140, 153, 159.

colleges, and other public spaces; held fundraisers; and pushed for the establishment of the California African American Museum.⁴²

Two years after Brockman Gallery opened, Suzanne Jackson set up her own art gallery near downtown Los Angeles on the Eastside of the city aimed at showcasing African American works. Born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1944, and raised in Alaska, Jackson moved to California in the 1960s, earned a Bachelor of Arts at San Francisco State College (now University), and then studied under Charles White at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. As in many of her black contemporaries; her artwork grappled with her search for identity. “What I paint,” she recognized, “attempts to express the conflicts within the mind... ‘freeing’ oneself toward some continuous cycle of rediscovering who, in fact, I really might be.” In addition to exhibiting her work and publishing poetry, in 1969, she also opened Gallery 32. In its nearly two-year duration, Gallery 32 put on some groundbreaking exhibitions, including *Sapphire (You've Come a Long Way, Baby)*, a show of female black artists. The gallery also became a meeting place for black artists. Although located on opposite sides of the city, Gallery 32 and Brockman Gallery exhibited many of the same artists and partook in similar programs.⁴³

⁴² Fergerson, interview by Mason, 160-226; Outerbridge, interview by Cândida Smith, 244, 261, 275-277, 293-294, 326-332; Selz, *Art of Engagement*, 145; Widener, “Something Else,” 162-165.

⁴³ Samella S. Lewis, *Art: African American* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 161; Lewis and Waddy, *Black Artists*, vol. 2, 91-92, 137; Carpenter with Saar, *Betye Saar*, 26, 57; Crystal Britton, “Suzanne (Fitzallen) Jackson,” in *St. James Guide to Black Artists* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), 269-270; Fergerson, interview by Mason, 172-173, 221; Outerbridge, interview by Cândida Smith, 268-270; Jones, “To/From Los Angeles,” 34. See also Suzanne Jackson, “African-American Artists of Los Angeles: Suzanne Jackson,” interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1998), UCB; Suzanne Jackson, *What I Love: Paintings, Poetry, and a Drawing* (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts, 1972); and Suzanne Jackson, *Animal* (Los Angeles: Continuity Transcript and Features, 1978).

Brockman Gallery thrived as a result of the loyalty and dedication of the artists and activists of the Black Arts movement. While black art devotees Fergerson and Booker initially formed the BAC to demand the inclusion of black artists at the major county art museum LACMA, local black artists that supported Brockman Gallery established an informal group called the Black Artists Association to present themselves as a distinct and noteworthy school of art. “In the beginning,” Alonzo explained, “we really did try to have it as a movement” similar to “the cubists and impressionists” that came before them. The artists of the Black Artists Association used their craft to wrestle with similar questions of “civil rights and nationalism and African heritage and living in America.” David Hammons, Suzanne Jackson, John Outterbridge, Ruth Waddy, and many other African American artists met regularly at Brockman Gallery. The gallery functioned as “a work-think tank,” Outterbridge explained, where artists posed questions, debated over the answers, and experimented with ideas.⁴⁴

Members of the Black Artists Association overlapped with other groups and galleries of the Black Arts movement. Those that associated with AWA, AWAN, and BAC, also joined the Black Artists Association. Local African American artists exhibited their works at Brockman Gallery as well as Ankrum Gallery, Heritage Gallery, Contemporary Crafts, and Gallery 32.⁴⁵ But the artists of the Black Artists Association felt like they had a particular stake in the survival of Brockman Gallery. They committed themselves to the exhibit calendar and attempted to produce marketable work to sustain the gallery. Outterbridge understood, “You made sure that you did works that had the

⁴⁴ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 154; Outterbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 248, 289-291, 327; Waddy, interview by Mason, 124.

⁴⁵ “New Horizons for C.N.,” *Crenshaw Notes* 33 (December 1967): 5, JSP, Box 5, Folder 4, SCL.

potential to sell along with works that you wanted no strings attached.” For each sale, artists received around seventy percent and Brockman Gallery took thirty percent, and those commissions helped the gallery stay open. The Davis brothers provided artists with the freedom to create original work and carry out their ideas. They “made sure that some doors stayed open for us to go in and build whatever foundations we felt that we needed,” Outterbridge explained. Yet Alonzo and Dale also steered the direction of the gallery toward their primary goal of the inclusion of black artists in the predominantly Eurocentric art world.⁴⁶

While the Davis brothers juggled other commitments and sacrificed their free time to run the gallery, their commitment and teamwork helped Brockman Gallery flourish. Still a student at USC during Brockman Gallery’s first years, Dale enrolled in morning classes, then opened the gallery at noon. Around four o’clock in the afternoon, after teaching at the high school all day, Alonzo took over the responsibilities. The same year that Brockman Gallery opened, Alonzo transferred from Manual Arts High School to Crenshaw High School, remaining committed to teaching in secondary education through the end of the decade. When Dale graduated from college in the late 1960s, he found a full-time position as an art teacher at his alma mater, Dorsey High School. Thereafter, he taught during the day, pursued a teaching credential, and worked part-time at the gallery. Both Alonzo and Dale also managed to continue producing their own artwork.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Outterbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 248, 290, 292-293.

⁴⁷ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 141-142, 159; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

As Brockman Gallery gained increasing attention, it acquired a broad list of patrons. While Alonzo believed that opening the gallery in Leimert Park would bring in local affluent African Americans as clientele, the business took a rather unexpected turn. “During the civil rights period, I noticed...somewhat of a pattern, that we had a lot of white clients.” Rather than attracting local blacks, the increasing interest in civil rights and African American culture helped draw in a distinctly white patronage. “We would have probably been more successful” in attracting local middle- and upper-class residents, Alonzo claimed, “if we had moved to La Cienega [Boulevard], because it was just a greater attraction to go somewhere else to buy.” Brockman Gallery never fully developed its relations with the affluent black residents in the Crenshaw district. Nevertheless, throughout its years in business, Outerbridge explained, Brockman Gallery “grew into the kind-of social event that brought people to Leimert Park from all over the city of Los Angeles.” Luminaries, such as actor and comedian Bill Cosby became regular customers, purchasing art from the gallery and attending its social functions.⁴⁸

Taking Art to the Streets

Throughout the 1970s, with the help of federal and state funding, Brockman Gallery extended its work across the city. Activists used Brockman Gallery as a springboard to carry out a host of artistic and philanthropic enterprises geared toward increasing the visibility of artists of color, empowering low-income blacks, advancing Pan-Africanism, and attaining racial equality. In 1973, after the Davis brothers secured a federal grant, they founded a nonprofit wing of the gallery named Brockman Gallery

⁴⁸ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 148-150; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village*.

Productions (later Brockman Productions) and set out to bring art to the streets of Los Angeles. In addition to hosting exhibitions, Brockman Productions sponsored a myriad of activities from street fairs and music performances to film festivals and citywide mural projects. As many of the first organizations and galleries of the Black Arts movement disbanded in the mid-1970s, Brockman Gallery expanded its influence beyond the borders of the Crenshaw district and into greater Los Angeles.

By 1970, the demands of the gallery and their full-time teaching positions left the Davis brothers with little time to rest. Alonzo became so busy juggling his work responsibilities, art projects, and social life that he found himself in the hospital on the verge of a physical breakdown. Consequently, in 1970, he scaled back his schedule by resigning from his post at Crenshaw High School, and picked up a position as a college lecturer. Throughout the 1970s, he taught courses at local community colleges and four-year universities, including Pasadena City College, Mount San Antonio College, UCLA, California State University, Northridge, and Otis Art Institute. Dale continued teaching at Dorsey High School while working at the gallery in his spare time.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, as its status and reputation grew, Brockman Gallery began to represent established African American artists. When the gallery first opened, the Davis brothers had mainly organized exhibits for up-and-coming local black artists, such as David Hammons, Suzanne Jackson, John Outterbridge, John Riddle, and Betye Saar, many of whom went on to have successful careers. But once Brockman Gallery gained a foothold in the art world, Alonzo and Dale also began representing well-known artists, including Romare Bearden, John Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, Jacob Lawrence, Noah

⁴⁹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 159-160; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

Purifoy, and Charles White. African American art remained the central focus of the gallery, but in the spirit of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, the Davis brothers also showed the works of Caribbean, Hispanic, Japanese American, and European artists. The gallery aimed to create a “multicultural setting,” Alonzo explained, where artists from a diversity of backgrounds had the opportunity to share their work and exchange ideas.⁵⁰

From its inception, Brockman Gallery also organized community activities that helped increase the exposure of artists of color in the city. In 1969, for instance, in collaboration with Inglewood Neighbors, a local organization similar to CN, Brockman Gallery and its cohorts from the Black Artists Association organized a show at the Inglewood Public Library that included the works of ten black artists and a panel discussion. The Davis brothers often faced “financial management problems,” Alonzo explained, from pursuing their social agenda despite financial limitations. But after following the advice of California State Assemblywoman (later Congresswoman) Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who urged them to apply for federal funding, the Davis brothers received a major boost toward their goals. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), under the Expansion Arts Program, approved their grant application, and in 1973, Alonzo and Dale formed the nonprofit group Brockman Productions.⁵¹

Meanwhile, as Brockman Gallery found its niche in the art world, several of the early groups and galleries of the Black Arts movement in Los Angeles were forced to

⁵⁰ Lindsey, “Brockman Gallery,” 23; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 218; Brockman Gallery, “News Release – Brockman Art Gallery,” ca. 1981, author’s personal collection (from Dale Brockman Davis’s personal collection); Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 143-144.

⁵¹ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 257-258; Adelaide Kerr, “A Record-Breaking Exhibit (Library) by a Group of Artists (Black),” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 43.8 (April 1969): 756-759; Lindsey, “Brockman Gallery,” 23; Outerbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 494, 501, 503-505.

disband. Internal disagreements and insufficient funds to finance their headquarters led to the break up of Ruth Waddy's group AWA in 1974. The full-time commitment that Fergerson and Booker made to the BAC put strains on their marriages and families. They attempted to scale back their involvement and transfer their responsibilities onto other members in the early 1970s, but the absence of their leadership hurt the group. In the mid-1970s, shortly before Booker passed away, the BAC dissolved. After a few years in business, Jackson also closed the doors of Gallery 32. Many of the pioneering art collectives in Watts also disbanded in the mid-1970s, including the Watts Writers Workshop, the Watts Happening Coffee House, and the Mafundi Institute. But Brockman Gallery had several elements that helped its staying power, including the dedication of its supporters, its central location, and the leadership and vision of the Davis brothers.⁵²

With the support of the NEA grant, Brockman Gallery bumped up its efforts and organized outreach programs on a larger scale. Under Alonzo's direction, Brockman Productions sponsored public installations of artists that the gallery had no space to accommodate at the Degnan Boulevard site. In an effort to acquaint city dwellers across Los Angeles with the black art scene and strengthen community relations, Brockman Productions also organized outdoor music festivals and street fairs, starting in Leimert Park, and then expanding into Watts.⁵³

⁵² Waddy, interview by Mason, 119-120; Fergerson, interview by Mason, 221-223; Widener, "Writing Watts," 681; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 87.

⁵³ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 257-258; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 218-219; Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung*, 174.

When Brockman Productions affiliate John Outterbridge took over the position as director of the Watts Towers Arts Center in 1975, he helped bring Brockman Gallery into South Los Angeles. Born in North Carolina, and educated at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the American Academy of Art in Chicago, Outterbridge and his spouse moved to Los Angeles in 1963 to make a fresh start. Soon after settling in, he befriended then director of the Watts Towers Arts Center Curtis Tann, joined the local black art scene, and quickly became a leading figure in the movement (Figure 22).⁵⁴

As director of the Watts Towers Arts Center, Outterbridge collaborated with Alonzo Davis and local musician Greg Bryant to bring a successful and long standing series of annual jazz festivals to Watts. Inspired by the Watts Summer Festival and other outdoor concerts, the Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival aimed to commemorate and celebrate African American musical heritage. The considerable turnout at the first concert, which took place on July 9, 1977, motivated the planners to continue holding the event. The second annual jazz festival met on the first day at the Watts Towers, and the next day in Leimert Park. Over the years, a wealth of musicians from Horace Tapscott and Eric Dolphy to Don Cherry and Etta James helped honor jazz, rhythm and blues, gospel, and other musical forms in the black tradition. While the festivals centered on black contributions, other musicians of color made their mark on the events. The Asian American band Hiroshima, known for its fusion of Japanese and world music, received its start playing in Leimert Park. Brockman Productions sponsored the annual jazz

⁵⁴ Outterbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 161, 168-169.

festival for the first three years, and then turned over the responsibilities to the staff of the Watts Towers Arts Center.⁵⁵

As Brockman Productions celebrated African American creativity, the organization also promoted Pan-Africanism in its programs. Beginning in 1974, one year after its formation, Brockman Productions put together an annual international film festival that showcased the works of independent and student African American filmmakers as well as those from the developing nations of Africa, Asia, Central America, and South America. By the fourth year, which featured over forty national and international films, Brockman Productions received funding from the NEA and the California Arts Council to host the event. The fifth annual festival spanned over five days and focused on African and Caribbean films, while the sixth gathering showed Argentinean films. Brockman Productions also organized cultural tours to Haiti, Ghana, and Brazil.⁵⁶

In the second half of the 1970s, Alonzo also began to use public spaces as a canvas for artistic and self-expression. He initially proposed the idea of painting murals as a teacher at Crenshaw High School, to engage his students and to provide graffiti artists with guidance and direction, but public school officials and city administrators denied his many requests for a permit. At Brockman Gallery, he saw art collectors and

⁵⁵ Outerbridge, interview by Cândida Smith, 316, 455-458, 479; Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 258-259; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 187-188; Purifoy, interview by Mason, 142-144; “Watts Towers Jazz Festival,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 May 1980, H4; Lindsey, “Brockman Gallery,” 24.

⁵⁶ Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 257-258; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; “Brockman Gallery Film Festival to Feature 40 Titles May 12-15,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1977, G19; “Brockman Gallery’s 4th International Film Fest,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 1977, G12; “Film Festival to Focus on Africa and Caribbean,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 1978, J26; “Two Argentine Films Offered at Sixth Brockman Gallery Festival,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 May 1979, C10; Audrey Edwards, “Essence Men,” February 1978, 42.

patrons from the affluent Crenshaw district frequent the exhibits, but the working- and middle-class city dwellers that he primarily wanted to reach “weren’t coming in the doors.” Receiving no support from city officials, in the early 1970s, Alonzo disregarded legal requisites and proceeded with his plan. He sketched a design, gathered together several artist friends and former students, and headed out during “church time” on an early Sunday morning to paint the wall along Crenshaw Boulevard and 50th Street, on the eastern border of View Park. Despite police intervention, Alonzo and his cohorts not only completed their initial plan, but also reworked the mural with a different theme every two years. Over the years, the Crenshaw wall, as it came to be known, paid tribute to civil rights leaders and black dignitaries, honored Africa, and conveyed messages of black nationalism and pride.⁵⁷

Once Brockman Productions secured more financial support, the organization expanded its mural projects into greater Los Angeles. With funding from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), a federal initiative passed in 1973 to provide grants for jobs and job training programs in public service, Brockman Productions established its own Professional Artist Employment Program. Created with similar intentions as the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s, Brockman Productions commissioned unemployed artists to create murals at Otis Art Institute, the Inner City Cultural Center, and other places around Los Angeles. Artists contributed to the many components of producing a mural, including seeking out potential public sites, appraising the costs, collaborating with colleagues, and then painting the piece. In

⁵⁷ Lee Curtis Hampton, “Street Art,” *Neworld* (Spring 1975): 24-29 (single quotes removed); Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 267-269; Robin J. Dunitz and James Prigoff, *Painting the Towns: Murals of California* (Los Angeles: RJD Enterprises, 1997), 13.

addition, Brockman Productions used CETA funding to hold quarterly seminars aimed to give artists the tools to apply for grants, network with galleries and museums, market their work, and ultimately achieve financial independence. Through the late 1970s, as Brockman Productions secured over \$100,000 dollars in CETA grants, Alonzo quit his position as a college lecturer to lead the organization nearly full time. The additional funding enabled Brockman Productions to create sculptures for public spaces, establish a graphic arts program, and employ musicians.⁵⁸

As a key player of the California mural movement, Alonzo continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s to bring art to the streets of Los Angeles. Among his many achievements, in 1980, he completed “Homage to John Outterbridge,” an abstract painting in honor of the community activist, artist, and long-time director of the Watts Towers Arts Center on the exterior walls of the facility. Alonzo also helped produce a series of abstract panels along the freeways for the 1984 Olympic games. He initially proposed extending the murals from downtown Los Angeles southward along Central Avenue, but after finding no financial backers, Alonzo along with nine other muralists painted on the downtown freeways (Figure 23).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Brockman Gallery Productions, Press Release, August 15, 1977, author’s personal collection (from Dale Brockman Davis’s personal collection); Edwards, “Essence Men,” 42; Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 260-269; Lindsey, “Brockman Gallery,” 23; Outterbridge, interview by Cândida Smith, 479. See also Grace A. Franklin, *CETA: Politics and Policy, 1973-1982* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

⁵⁹ James Prigoff and Robin J. Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 35, 165, 167; Dunitz and Prigoff, *Painting the Towns*, 162; Robin J. Dunitz, *Street Gallery: Guide to 1000 Los Angeles Murals* (Los Angeles: RJD Enterprises, 1993), 41-42, 205, 208, 211, 230; Cheryl McKay Dixon, “Alonzo Davis,” *International Review of African American Art* 6.3 (1986): 17, 20, 28, 32.

By the late 1970s, as artists set up their studios in the storefronts adjacent to Brockman Gallery, they transformed Leimert Park Village into a hub of black expression. Brockman Gallery and Brockman Productions-sponsored mime and yoga classes gathered in the nearby park with the pedestal fountain. Local artists led seminars and workshops in the visual arts, and musicians engaged in jam sessions and performances in front of the gallery doors. Brockman Gallery marked milestones, including its tenth anniversary, with evening galas, and held fundraisers for dignitaries such as Black Panther leader Angela Davis. While Alonzo and Dale steered the direction of the gallery and raised the funds to pursue their agenda toward racial inclusion in the art world, the artists and activists affiliated with Brockman Productions proposed and implemented many of the programs and activities on their own. “We all participated in being board members from time to time or formulating and influencing policy,” explained Outerbridge. “It was a place where we got an opportunity to practice civic responsibility.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

Brockman Gallery carried out a form of civic responsibility that aimed to teach city dwellers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to come together and celebrate their differences. As the music performances, street fairs, film festivals, citywide mural projects, classes, and workshops sought to empower low-income blacks in Los Angeles to take pride in their history, strive beyond their circumstances, and stand up for racial

⁶⁰ Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 218-219; Invitation to the 10th Anniversary Celebration, November 18, 1977, author’s personal collection (from Dale Brockman Davis’s personal collection); Alonzo Davis, interview by Mason, 153; Outerbridge, interview by Cándida Smith, 315-316.

equality, the Brockman Gallery and Brockman Productions programs also intended to teach all city dwellers to practice racial tolerance and understanding. In a city suffering from racial conflict and yearning for reconciliation after the Watts rebellion, Brockman Gallery provided an outlet to heal wounds, overcome inequality, and work toward a more just society. As secondary and postsecondary educators, Alonzo and Dale employed their skills and background to bring the classroom to the streets of Los Angeles. “We’re teachers,” Dale simply put, “that’s what we do.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author.

CHAPTER 6

INTEGRATION IN LADERA HEIGHTS, RESEGREGATION IN ITS SCHOOLS

If there were more places like Ladera Heights, the old *Saturday Evening Post* might still be publishing. It's a community right out of a middle-class dream: comfortable, appliance-packed homes with tiny, meticulously manicured lawns; Little League and Brownies flourishing; and backyard barbecues still in vogue.

— From “*If This Be Our Camelot, How Come Nobody’s Heard of It?*” by Michael Creedman in Los Angeles Magazine, September 1972.

One month after the United States Census Bureau released its 1970 population figures, which revealed Ladera Heights to be the highest-ranking median family income in all of Los Angeles County, *Los Angeles Magazine* contributor Michael Creedman suggested as a nickname for the understated, sleepy suburb, the idyllic and glamorous Camelot. At more than \$25,000, Ladera Heights virtually doubled the median family income of its adjacent Crenshaw district neighborhoods and surpassed famous Beverly Hills by \$5,000. Situated immediately south of the Baldwin Hills, west of La Brea Avenue, east of Culver City, and north of Inglewood, the majority white upper-class community boasted large homes equipped with many of the modern comforts. “The Cadillacs and Mercedes and other conspicuous signs of money runneth over,” extolled Creedman. “Almost everyone has a gardener and there’s hardly a kid without either a ten-speed bicycle or an ear-shattering trail bike.” But in the 1970s, as black migration

advanced westward, across yet another racial divide of La Brea Avenue, whites in Ladera Heights grew concerned over the value and reputation of their neighborhood.¹

Real estate agents seeking to multiply their profits urged white homeowners to sell their properties before, they argued, black-in migration inundated the area and drew down the market. White homeowners in Ladera Heights especially feared the speed in which blacks might settle into the neighborhood. At a community meeting, Creedman witnessed residents contemplating “how to keep the neighborhood from turning all-black overnight.” African Americans certainly had to claim their right to live in Ladera Heights. Reports of racial intimidation and violence made the local newspapers and circulated by word-of-mouth throughout the community. But unlike the affluent enclaves of the Crenshaw district, which shifted to nearly 83 percent black population in 1980, black influx and white exodus in Ladera Heights came at a slower pace. Between 1970 and 1980, the black population climbed from less than one percent to slightly below 40 percent (Table 8). High annual family incomes as well as property values, which received the census’s highest figure of \$50,000 and more in 1970, most likely slowed black in-migration and maintained white settlement in the area (Tables 9-10). But most

¹ Michael Creedman, “If This Be Our Camelot, How Come Nobody’s Heard of It?” *Los Angeles Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 9 (September 1972): 41, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.2, HL; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts, Final Report, Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif.*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972). As a disclaimer, Creedman explained that Ladera Heights boasted the highest median family income in the communities of Los Angeles County comprised of a population more than 2,500. He also explained that the upper-class areas of Brentwood and Bel Air sat outside the county lines, and therefore were excluded from the data. Moreover, the Beverly Hills census tract included some “low rent areas,” which brought down its median annual income (pp. 41-42). Nevertheless, for the first time in the decennial census, Ladera Heights unequivocally topped the list for median annual income. On another note, the 1970 census tract with Ladera Heights (tract 7030), which assumed Fairfax Avenue as its eastern border, excluded the easternmost portion of the community, in the area around Ladera Park. (The census included that section in the View Park/View Heights/Windsor Hills tract.)

importantly, compared to the Crenshaw district, white homeowners in Ladera Heights seemed to show more tolerance of black in-migration. On the whole, Creedman found, “Ladera Heights residents, in varying degrees, claim to be either willing or eager to have black neighbors.”²

Nevertheless, while Ladera Heights maintained integration as well as its value and reputation through the 1970s, the community struggled to stave off resegregation in its public school system. Unlike its Crenshaw district neighbors, who fell within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) borders, Ladera Heights shared its public schools with the communities to the south in the largely industrial, working-class city of Inglewood. In the decades following the Second World War, as Inglewood became an extension of the Los Angeles International Airport complex and Long Beach harbor, industrial plants and factories moved in and property values declined. Consequently, throughout the 1960s, as black migration expanded westward, and white exodus increased, the Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD) became resegregated. Schools situated east of Prairie Avenue grew heavily black, while schools on the west side stayed majority white. Local civil rights activists and neighborhood stabilization groups took a

² Creedman, “If This Be,” 42; “Southland: Negro Leader’s Home Fire Bombed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1969, E2; Deborah L. Woods and Ronald L. Woods, interview by author, April 21, 2007, by telephone; *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); *United States Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif.*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); *1980 Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce *1990 Census of Population: General Population Characteristics: California*, sec. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

stand, urging school officials to correct the imbalance and filing a lawsuit against the Inglewood school district for aiding educational inequality.³

The school desegregation struggle in IUSD became part of the nationwide battle over educational equality. In the late 1960s, the NAACP on behalf of six-year-old James Swann and nine other African American families won a lawsuit against the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education in North Carolina, which set in motion the movement to use busing as a means to redistribute the student population in the public school district and impose school desegregation. By the time the United States Supreme Court confirmed the verdict in 1971, school boards across the country were adopting their own busing plans.⁴ One year before the high tribunal validated the *Swann* decision, in the California Superior Court case *Janel Johnson v. Inglewood Unified School District* (1970), Judge Max F. Deutz ordered IUSD to create and carry out a desegregation plan by the start of the 1971-1972 school year. Amid heated debate in the community, Inglewood Board members paired elementary schools, redrew secondary school lines, and put into effect a busing program aimed to redistribute the district's students into racially diverse classes.⁵

³ Edna Bonacich and Robert F. Goodman, *Deadlock in School Desegregation: A Case Study of Inglewood, California* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 15-18, 29-32.

⁴ *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1 (1971). See also Bernard Schwartz, *Swann's Way: The School Busing Case and the Supreme Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Gary Orfield, *Must We Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1978); David J. Armor, *Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Paul R. Dimond, *Beyond Busing: Inside the Challenge to Urban Segregation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

⁵ *Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District*, L.A. No. 948036, Filed 22 July 1970, LASC. Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 95-96.

The school desegregation effort, however, proved no match to the city's long-standing migration patterns and discriminatory practices. Despite the attempt of local groups to fulfill the promise of *Brown*, the busing experiment in IUSD unequivocally failed. Within five years of the *Johnson* ruling, students of color comprised the majority of most IUSD schools on both the east and west sides of the district. Consequently, busing became a futile method of achieving racial integration. Resentful that IUSD transported their offspring to an equally segregated school located further from their home, parents and school officials filed several appeals with the Los Angeles Superior Court to review the case. When affluent, open-minded Ladera Heights turned against the plan, school desegregation in IUSD was doomed. In 1975, five years after he handed down his initial decision, Judge Deutz overturned his order for desegregation and called for the return of the neighborhood school policy. By the end of the decade, the public school district had reverted back to its segregated state, only this time with a heavily black population. While middle- and upper-class blacks worked hard to gain equal opportunity by fighting residential discrimination, the resegregation of IUSD showed that racism and fear remained deeply entwined in the multiple layers that made up a community.⁶

Ladera Heights: Toward an Integrated Community

The early trajectory of Ladera Heights virtually mirrored that in the affluent communities in the Crenshaw district. The Los Angeles Investment Company began carving out its holdings immediately west of La Brea Avenue several years before the start of the Second World War and continued to develop the upper and lower portions to

⁶ Creedman, "If This Be," 42-43.

the west in the postwar years. Eager for profit, the developers likewise followed FHA recommendations and urged homeowners to cover their properties with racial restrictive covenants. By the 1960s, several years after the *Shelley* and *Barrows* rulings, as a small number of African Americans began migrating into the area, incidents of white resistance and racial violence surfaced. But blacks remained determined to stay, and throughout the subsequent decades, their numbers increased. Nevertheless, in comparison to the rapid population shift from majority white to black in the Crenshaw district, black entrance and white exodus in Ladera Heights were restrained. Throughout the 1970s, Ladera Heights prided itself on maintaining a racially balanced and integrated community.

The Los Angeles Investment Company set out with the intentions of constructing Ladera Heights into a postwar oasis made up of valuable and highly sought-after houses. The same developers of View Park and View Heights expanded west of La Brea Avenue and south of Slauson Avenue to build another subdivision. In the mid-1930s, the Los Angeles Investment Company leased some of its land to oil companies and laid down streets, sewers, and water lines on the remaining portion. The primary landmark, a sixteen-acre recreational area named Ladera Park, flanked the eastern side of the community. Development accelerated after the Second World War when independent contractors purchased property and constructed single-family dwellings. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, as units sold fast and waiting lists for property filled up, construction extended across La Tijera Boulevard and into the upper and lower portions of the community. Then in the mid-1960s, developers added a small commercial hub on

the northwest corner of Centinela Avenue and La Cienega Boulevard, known as the Ladera Center.⁷

Until the *Shelley* and *Barrows* rulings, racial restrictive covenants set the tone and character of the affluent community. In an interview in the early 1970s, R. F. Ingold, president of the Los Angeles Investment Company and resident of Ladera Heights, shamelessly credited racial restrictions for initially helping the community attract a “better class of people.” His approach toward residential development remained rather customary in the mid-twentieth century, and while African Americans persevered in broadening their access to housing in the city, black migration into Ladera Heights came at a rather slow pace. The proportion of African Americans stood at 0.2 percent of the population in 1950 and 1960. While most of the affluent communities of the Crenshaw district shifted toward a black majority throughout the 1960s, the black population in Ladera Heights grew only slightly to 0.7 percent in 1970 (Table 8).⁸

Black newcomers to Ladera Heights, as elsewhere, faced white resistance. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in 1969 a firebombing at 6002 Ladera Park Avenue, the house of African American couple Walter and Bertha Bremond, located on the eastern border of Ladera Heights. Walter Bremond, whom black power leader Elaine Brown once described as “a rather mild-mannered, middle-class man,” emerged as a prominent

⁷ Creedman, “If This Be,” 43; “Real Estate: Sites Readied for Dwellings,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 1947, A3; “78% of Ladera Heights Lots Reported Sold in Four Weeks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 1951, E9; “New Dwelling Group Rising,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 1951, E3; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 190-191.

⁸ Creedman, “If This Be,” 43. For records to Table 8, see *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, vol. 3, *Housing Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1942); *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28; *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts, Final Report, Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif.*, pt. 1.

figure in the local civil rights struggle. He headed the Los Angeles-based Social Action Training Center, which sought to cultivate community organization and development, then in 1967, co-founded the short-lived albeit influential umbrella group, the Black Congress. Made up of over twenty black organizations and businesses, from the NAACP and CORE, the Underground Musicians Association and the Watts Happening Coffee House, to the Black Panther Party and US, the Black Congress mobilized a concerted effort toward achieving racial equality. Separated into committees, called councils, Black Congress activists tackled a range of initiatives, including education, security, legal rights, and housing. But in January 1969, when internal conflict culminated in a shooting at UCLA between members of the Black Panther Party and US, Bremond resigned from office and the Black Congress disbanded.⁹

In October 1969, roughly ten months after losing his organization, four firebombs set ablaze the Bremond home. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “One bomb came through their bedroom window, one through a garage window, and two struck the side of the house.” Before the fire department arrived on the scene, Bremond used a garden hose and put out the majority of the fire. While Bremond reported no injuries, police officials estimated \$4,600 in damages. Records failed to indicate if the firebombing had any connection to the conflict between the civil rights groups of the Black Congress, but the incident showed that racial aggression remained a reality for people of color. However, even in the face of violence, more African Americans moved to the area.¹⁰

⁹ “Southland: Negro Leader’s Home Fire Bombed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1969, E2; Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 106-107, 112-116; Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 82-87, 91-99.

¹⁰ “Southland,” E2.

Ladera Heights saw its first large influx of African Americans in the 1970s. At the end of the decade, the census reported a considerable shift to a nearly 40 percent black population. Many well-known and accomplished African Americans settled in the area, including political officials Yvonne Brathwaite Burke and Nate Holden, and professional athletes Lawrence McCutcheon, Ken Norton, and Frank Robinson. Their names as well as their pocketbooks helped give Ladera Heights a reputation of fame and illustriousness. But the community's ability to sustain a racially balance population especially distinguished Ladera Heights from other parts of the city.¹¹

As Crenshaw Neighbors sought to maintain integration in the Crenshaw district, the Ladera Heights Civic Association (LHCA) played a significant role in sustaining high standards and positive community relations in Ladera Heights. From its establishment in 1955, the local homeowners association undertook a host of tasks, from instituting road safety measures to preventing commercial development. Members pressured the city to institute traffic regulations, urged the Sheriff's Department to crack down on speeding, and worked with the Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation to maintain the quality of Ladera Park. LHCA also rallied against commercial developers. The association blocked the development of a state college, bus maintenance yards, a power plant, and a freeway.¹²

¹¹ "Ladera: Integrated With Pride," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 March 1978, CS1; Anonymous, interview by author, May 5, 2007, by telephone; Ronald A. Rosenfeld, interview by author, February 27, 2009, by telephone.

¹² Pamphlet, "Notice of Annual Meeting. All Residents Welcome. The Annual Meeting of the Ladera Heights Civic Association will take place on: September 13, 1973, 7:30 p.m.," KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; Ronni S. Cooper, interview by author, March 28, 2007, by telephone; "Ladera Group to Oppose New Campus Site," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 March 1963, 25; Letter from Kenneth Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor, to Barry Gold, President of the Ladera Heights Civic Association, September 5, 1974, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL;

Roughly every ten years, including in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, LHCA also had to make a case to maintain Ladera Heights as unincorporated and independent from city control. Although Ladera Heights sat within the borders of Los Angeles County, the enclave remained outside “the sphere of influence” of its neighboring municipalities Los Angeles, Inglewood, and Culver City. But about every decade, Los Angeles County reviewed the issue, gave the three municipalities an opportunity to argue for the control of Ladera Heights, and forced LHCA to reconsider its position. In the mid-1970s, most residents in Ladera Heights found Culver City best suited to assume legal jurisdiction over the area. “We use their banks, library, we shop in Culver City, many work there and we find much in common with them,” wrote LHCA then-president Barry Gold. But, above all, residents preferred independence from any city administration. Most residents believed that independence contributed to the high reputation of Ladera Heights and the high values of its property, which far surpassed that in any of the three municipalities. “We want to be able to say what happens to the beautiful community we live in,” Gold insisted. Each time the issue resurfaced, LHCA convinced the Los Angeles County commission of its ability to sustain a prosperous and diverse community without city control.¹³

Letter from Barry Gold, President of the Ladera Heights Civic Association, to the Sheriff's Department, May 14, 1974, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; Letter from Barry Gold, President of the Ladera Heights Civic Association, to Seymour Greben, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, September 6, 1974, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; “Ladera Group to Oppose New Campus Site,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 March 1963, 25; Creedman, “If This Be,” 43; “Hahn Joins Laderans in Freeway Protest: Public Hearing Scheduled Wednesday in Culver City on Portion of Route,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1967, WS6.

¹³ Letter from Barry Gold, President of the Ladera Heights Civic Association, to Kenneth Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor, August 22, 1974, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; Cooper, interview by author; Letter from Kenneth Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor, to Don Hellwig, President of Ladera Heights Civic Association, October 26, 1984, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder: 3.3.2.3.3, HL.

In addition to its many efforts to protect the reputation of its community, LHCA joined the battle against residential discrimination. As its president from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Ronald Rosenfeld led LHCA in the “impossible” task of stopping real estate blockbusting from transforming the community. Born in New Jersey in 1938, Rosenfeld moved to Los Angeles following the Second World War, earned a Bachelor’s degree in engineering from UCLA, then a law degree from USC. Shortly after he and his wife purchased a house on Morley Avenue in 1966, while juggling his first years as partner in a law firm, the budding white attorney rose to a local leadership role. Ladera Heights was undergoing a critical transition, but as Rosenfeld explained in a recent interview, “Any community that has an active homeowners association has a fighting chance.” He envisioned a racially integrated community where “the selection of housing would be based on economics,” rather than the racial make-up of the population. In the 1972 *Los Angeles Magazine* article, Rosenfeld assured Creedman that residents showed no apparent signs of panic from the influx of African Americans. “Whites still come in and buy houses after blacks move in or compete with blacks for the same house,” he maintained. Nevertheless, real estate agents remained determined to exploit the changing environment, and Rosenfeld stood at the head of the fight in Ladera Heights to thwart their predatory practices.¹⁴

By the early 1970s, LHCA had established a real estate committee to monitor and regulate local realty practices in accordance with state law. Besides his duties as president, Rosenfeld used his legal training and took on the difficult task of chairing the committee. Under Rosenfeld’s brief leadership, the committee set out to establish a

¹⁴ Rosenfeld, interview by author; Email correspondence from Ronald Rosenfeld to author, March 2, 2009.

public relations program and publish a newsletter that encouraged better communication among residents. According to a notice from LHCA in 1973, the real estate committee also “filed numerous complaints” with the California Department of Real Estate against real estate agents in Ladera Heights “who engaged in practices which directly or indirectly violated the California Real Estate Act.” In an attempt to fend off blockbusting, the real estate committee likewise sought out the Los Angeles County Sheriff to enforce a city ordinance that prohibited the placement of real estate “for sale” signs on local public streets.¹⁵

LHCA also tactfully and proactively collaborated with its elected representative Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Hahn joined the emerging coalition of liberal-minded white Democrats in local government, serving first on the Los Angeles City Council in 1947, then winning an election to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 1952, which he maintained through the subsequent forty years. Representing the vast and diverse Second District, or what Hahn once described as a “mini-United States,” required an ability to navigate through and relate to diverse groups. “We’ve got the rich in Ladera Heights and the poor in Watts” and most of the communities in between. At a directors’ meeting in 1973, Rosenfeld and other LHCA officers added to their agenda a list of vital questions to discuss with Hahn. The association pressed Hahn on a range of issues from safeguarding the vacant houses in the area to counteracting “real estate practices designed to encourage panic selling.”

¹⁵ Pamphlet, “Notice of Annual Meeting. All Residents Welcome. The Annual Meeting of the Ladera Heights Civic Association will take place on: September 13, 1973, 7:30 p.m.,” KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; Lawrence B. de Graaf, “African American Suburbanization in California, 1960 through 1990,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 412-413.

Hahn furthermore energized residents at the association meetings to get involved in local affairs.¹⁶

Ronni Cooper, another white resident and LHCA representative, purposefully moved to Ladera Heights in the early 1970s for its racially diverse population. Raised in Santa Monica, California, Cooper developed early on “a sense of fairness” that motivated her as a student at the University of California, Berkeley to stand up for civil rights. With more than one thousand other activists, as Mario Savio climbed atop a police car in protest against university policies, Cooper took part in a sit-in that ushered in the free speech movement. As white exodus plagued the neighboring communities, Cooper and her husband moved into a triplex in the oldest part of Ladera Heights in 1971, then purchased a house north of Slauson Avenue in 1974. Soon thereafter, she joined LHCA and became its long-standing president. While she fought for civil rights and racial integration, Cooper discovered that class played a larger role than race in maintaining integration. “I’ve learned the hard way that racial integration is not going to take place by being forced. It’s an economic situation,” she explained in a recent interview. Racial integration succeeded in Ladera Heights because, no matter their racial background, residents shared a similar economic status, education level, and educational goals for their children. “When you put people of the same economic background in a community, like ours, it works,” she concluded. Cooper remained a local activist, fighting to maintain

¹⁶ Letter from Ronald Rosenfeld, President of the Ladera Heights Civic Association, to Harry Marlow, Chief Deputy for Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, August 30, 1973, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3.1, HL; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 153; David Shaw, “Maverick Reformer Kenny Hahn Goes it Alone—Loudly,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1974, B1, 5-6; Letter from Ronald Rosenfeld, to Kenneth Hahn, September 14, 1973, KH, Box 272 (8a), Folder 3.3.2.3, HL.

the quality of the public school system, as well as the value and reputation of the diverse community.¹⁷

As Ladera Heights took pride in its integrated community, another battle erupted over segregation and racial inequality in the Inglewood public school district. By the late 1960s, before black migration advanced across yet another racial divide of Prairie Avenue, the student population of the Inglewood Unified School District began to resegregate. Student enrollment in public schools east of Prairie Avenue grew heavily black, while public schools on the west side remained majority white. Local civil rights activists and neighborhood stabilization organizations urged the Inglewood Board of Education to take steps toward correcting the imbalance, but a group of outraged Inglewood residents made the biggest impact by taking IUSD to court. One particular case in North Carolina inspired residents in the Inglewood school district and communities across the country to demand immediate action toward school desegregation.

The “Reasonable” Plan

The use of busing to create school integration indeed grew out of the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The epochal words of United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1954, declaring segregation in education “inherently unequal,” ushered in an era defined by massive resistance and significant social change. Civil rights activists challenged a century of legal orders and social customs that both

¹⁷ Cooper, interview by author. See also W.J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War, the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Robert Cohen and Reginald E. Zelnik, eds., *Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

segregated blacks and benefited whites. One year following the ruling, however, the effort toward educational equality faced yet another roadblock. The United States Supreme Court in *Brown II* gave local officials the authority to carry out desegregation “with all deliberate speed,” and no mandated deadline. The indistinct, indefinite timetable prolonged the nationwide battle over school desegregation throughout the subsequent decades. In the 1970s, that battle reignited across the country when the high tribunal found busing as a “reasonable” method to promote school desegregation.

While civil rights activists found in *Brown* an impetus to take the lead in dismantling the Jim Crow South, the effort toward school desegregation remained mired in white resistance. In the months following the landmark ruling, several hundred school districts in the southern Border States, as well as the northern and western states, which had segregated their schools using local option laws, began to desegregate. Yet most southern states refused altogether to follow court orders. When the high tribunal handed down *Brown II* in 1955, school boards gained the legal toehold to further delay compliance of the *Brown* ruling. As local authorities looked on, black children and their parents who attempted to challenge segregation faced unbridled white resistance and violence. School officials across the South instituted two particular measures to prevent desegregation from taking place. While pupil placement statutes promised to assign students to schools on a non-racial basis, and “freedom of choice” policies claimed to give students the right to attend any school of their liking, both procedures served as covers for the inaction of school boards. White students refused to attend black schools, and school officials repeatedly denied black students’ transfer requests to white schools.

These policies, which placed the burden of school desegregation on African Americans, ultimately left southern schools operating under the same dual system as before *Brown*.¹⁸

Thanks to the courage and fortitude of several black students, educational equality in the South made some advancement. When local white parents and leaders in Little Rock, Arkansas blocked nine black students from integrating Central High School in 1957, the federal authorities eventually intervened. After a white mob attacked the students, and Governor Orval Faubus deployed the state national guard to block the school entrance, a local federal court ordered the Little Rock school board to carry out desegregation, and a reluctant President Eisenhower summoned armed federal troops to escort the Little Rock Nine to their classes throughout the academic year. The school board persisted, and in early 1958, petitioned a local federal court to postpone the plan. *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) soon landed in the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of *Brown* and school desegregation. James Meredith also carved out a place in higher education as the first African American to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962, and then graduate in 1963. These events inspired the sit-in movement of 1960, Freedom Rides of 1961, the March on Washington of 1963, and Freedom Summer of 1964, among many other demonstrations for racial equality. But through the early 1960s, most school officials either postponed desegregation or closed schools altogether.¹⁹

¹⁸ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993): 23-28; J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 80-87, 108-111. See also Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Sitkoff, *Struggle*, 28-31, 34-36; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 88-95; Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44. For more works on the Little Rock Nine, see Tony A. Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial: Cooper v. Aaron and School Desegregation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); John

Ten years after *Brown*, the landmark passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced school boards to rethink their actions or face repercussions. While the Little Rock Nine and James Meredith garnered public attention and pressured federal authorities to back school desegregation, through the early 1960s, southern schools remained deeply segregated. By 1963, only a little over one percent of African American youngsters in the South had enrolled in desegregated schools. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 invalidated Jim Crow laws, two sections had particular significance for public school education. Among its several directives, Title IV mandated the Commissioner of Education of the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to assist in the desegregation plans of individual public schools, and to create and fund special training programs designed to help school personnel effectively implement desegregation. Moreover, Title IV appointed the United States Attorney General to file and defend lawsuits against public institutions allegedly engaging in discriminatory actions. School administrations around the country also felt the warnings of Title VI, which threatened to refuse or revoke federal funds going to any public institution that denied students equal protection of the law. This part of the act had particular importance through the 1970s, as public school boards across the country continually attempted to evade desegregation.²⁰

A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central Rock Crisis* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007); and Melba Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994). See chapter 5 for a discussion on James Meredith. See also Austin Sarat, ed., *Race, Law, and Culture: Reflections on Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁰ James R. Dunn, "Title VI, The Guidelines and School Desegregation in the South," *Virginia Law Review* 53.1 (January 1967): 42; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 102-108; Armor, *Forced*, 25-26. See also Robert D. Loevy, ed., *The Civil Rights Act of 1964: The Passage of the Law that Ended Racial Segregation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

Soon thereafter, the United States Supreme Court reentered the debate with an order that signaled another step closer to educational equality. In 1965, under the threat of a lawsuit and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the New Kent County school board in rural eastern Virginia adopted a freedom of choice policy, which claimed to give students the option of attending the school of their preference. But two years into the plan, the district's only two schools, both of which comprised grades kindergarten through twelve, remained largely segregated. While 115 blacks enrolled in the white school, no whites transferred, and 85 percent of black students in the county attended the same school. As the federal judiciary grew increasingly intolerant of southern school boards' sheer disregard for *Brown*, New Kent became an example for correcting these practices.²¹

Over a decade after the ambiguous judgment of *Brown II*, the United States Supreme Court finally refined its decision. In *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), the Supreme Court justices found the freedom of choice option an insufficient and ineffective tool to promote school desegregation. While the policy did not infringe on an individual's constitutional rights, the Court asserted that the Kent County school board used freedom of choice to deliberately evade school desegregation. The administration must "formulate a new plan" comprised of "steps which promise realistically to convert promptly to a system without a 'white' school and a 'Negro' school, but just schools," the Court ruled. *Green* finally shifted the burden of school

²¹ Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 115; Armor, *Forced*, 28; Schwartz, *Swaan's*, 58-59; Gaillard, *Dream*, 44.

desegregation away from black students and their parents, and ordered the school board to create and carry out a plan without further delay.²²

The next battleground emerged in the North Carolina county school district of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In 1965, the NAACP filed a lawsuit on behalf of ten black families, with a total of twenty-five children, against Charlotte-Mecklenburg County for failing to put in place an effective and fair desegregation plan. When the school board announced its plan to close several predominantly black schools, and yet continued to prevent black youngsters from attending white schools, the NAACP decided to act. Six-year-old James Swann, the son of a university theology professor whom the civil rights group used to lead the case, lived near a mostly white school that denied him enrollment. Both the district and appeals courts, in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, initially supported the school board's geographic zoning plan and freedom of choice transfer option as a means to carry out desegregation. But in the subsequent years, school enrollment in the district remained significantly segregated. The *Green* ruling in 1968 gave the NAACP fuel to advance the case further.²³

In 1969, one year after *Green*, a federal district judge handed down an unprecedeted decision that sent shockwaves throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Civil rights activists found in North Carolina-born Judge James McMillan an unlikely proponent of school integration. Only a few years earlier, McMillan delivered a speech expressing his opposition to transporting students "far away from their natural habitat" in

²² Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 115-118; Armor, *Forced*, 27-29; Schwartz, *Swaan's*, 59-62; Gaillard, *Dream*, 44.

²³ *Green, et al. v. County School Board of New Kent County, et al.* 391 U.S. 430 (1968). See also Schwartz, *Swaan's*, 10-11; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 137; Armor, *Forced*, 29; and Gaillard, *Dream*, 32-35.

order to create racial balance in the school system. But after hearing the evidence, and in light of *Green*, McMillan ruled on the side of integration. Following the verdict, the school board presented to McMillan several desegregation proposals. But after those failed to meet his criteria, the judge appointed a consultant to devise a more feasible resolution. Rhode Island College Professor of Education John Finger, who also served as an expert witness in the case, submitted an ambitious and controversial program that essentially paired black and white schools and redistributed students across the county through busing. In 1970, amid massive protest against busing, which also called into question McMillan's active role as a case manager and policymaker, the Finger plan went into effect.²⁴

The *Swann* ruling immediately incited antibusing protests across Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Crowds descended on the courthouse, in front of McMillan's house, at the post office, and the headquarters of the *Charlotte Observer*. Local leaders and groups publicly denounced the order. The newly formed Concerned Parents Association collected signatures on antibusing petitions, spoke at rallies, called for a boycott of the schools, mobilized neighboring communities to take action, and flew to the nation's capital to pressure President Richard Nixon to stop busing. Car bumpers paraded "No Forced Busing" stickers. Civil rights attorney Julius Chambers especially suffered the burden of representing the plaintiffs in the case. Shortly after he brought the school district to court, his home and car were dynamited. After McMillan issued the verdict, arsonists firebombed Chambers's law office. McMillan and his wife also faced

²⁴ Schwartz, *Swaan's*, 3-4, 11-19; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 134-138; Armor, *Forced*, 29-30.

threatening phone calls and hired a security guard to protect their home. Racial violence ensued at the schools where students fought each other at knife and gunpoint.²⁵

The antibusing campaign put pressure on the United States Supreme Court to evaluate the order. *Swann* first went to the district court of appeals, where the appellate judges in 1970 confirmed part of the Finger plan. They found busing “reasonable” in the junior and senior high schools, but an unreasonable burden to place on youngsters in the elementary grades. Then one month later, before the school administration had a chance to put the plan into effect, the Supreme Court approved the plaintiffs’ request for review. Oral arguments began on the first day of the term in October 1970, and the high tribunal announced its decision in April 1971. “On the facts of this case,” Chief Justice Warren E. Burger charged, “we are unable to conclude that the order of the District Court is not reasonable, feasible and workable.” Finding no fault in the Finger plan, the Court affirmed the initial opinion issued by McMillan, thereby endorsing the use of busing as a reasonable strategy in creating an equitable education system.²⁶

Swann ignited a nationwide trend of public school busing that had its roots in a long-standing battle over the promise of equal opportunity. Soon after Chief Justice Burger handed down the decision, school boards across the country returned to court to receive revised judgments on their desegregation plans, most of which included compulsory busing. The principal school segregation cases, from *Brown* to *Swann*, involved southern school districts that perpetuated state-sanctioned, *de jure* segregation in

²⁵ Schwartz, *Swaan’s*, 21; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 138-139; Gaillard, *Dream*, 35-36, 54-65, 76-77, 81-84.

²⁶ *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1 (1971). See also Schwartz, *Swaan’s*, 21-24, 91-92, 94; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 139, 147-148; and Armor, *Forced*, 30-34.

the public school system. Nevertheless, northern and western school districts remained culpable for facilitating and furthering school segregation. In other words, what took root in the South, manifested in the modern civil rights movement, forced northerners and westerners to examine the state of race in their communities and local public school systems. Civil rights activists around the country pressured school boards to accept responsibility for school segregation and take steps toward correcting the imbalance. As in many other major cities, Los Angeles thought it found its answer in busing.²⁷

Integrationists, Anti-Integrationists, and the Inglewood Board of Education

In the early 1970s, busing became a widespread technique for creating racial balance in the southern California public education system. After years of demands from civil rights groups, LAUSD conceded to pressure in the mid-1960s, and began conducting an annual racial census of the district. The data showing a deeply segregated system provided evidence for civil rights activists to take their grievances to court. Meanwhile, as IUSD became resegregated, the Inglewood Board of Education faced similar problems of its own. While local civil rights activists pressured the board to correct racial imbalance and implement a desegregation plan, school authorities continued to take a moderate and gradualist approach. The board acknowledged segregation in the school district, conducted staff training workshops, and adopted a policy statement, yet avoided any plans to redistribute the student population. Through the second half of the 1960s, divisions in the community intensified, and residents aligned themselves in pro- and anti-integrationist factions.

²⁷ Armor, *Forced*, 31-32, 34-46; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, chapter 8.

Throughout the early 1960s, in the face of the protests of civil rights groups, LAUSD refused to take any major steps toward school desegregation. In 1963, as the ad hoc committee on equal educational opportunities convened, and the California Supreme Court in *Jackson* found the Pasadena school board responsible for perpetuating segregation, the ACLU prepared to take LAUSD to court. On behalf of Mary Ellen Crawford and several other African American and Hispanic students of Jordan High School, who volunteered as plaintiffs for the class-action lawsuit, the ACLU insisted LAUSD redraw its attendance area to create a racially balanced student population between Jordan High School and nearby, largely white South Gate High School. The lawsuit added another stress to the anticipation of the ad hoc committee's report. When the resolution failed to include a desegregation plan for the district, civil rights groups from across the city organized as the United Civil Rights Council carried out a series of demonstrations throughout the summer, and activists prepared to take LAUSD to court. But the plaintiffs had to wait another several years before the hearing.²⁸

In the late 1960s, after a number of deferrals by both the judge and the litigants, the Los Angeles Superior Court finally heard the case. From the time *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles* convened in October 1968, until Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Alfred Gitelson handed down his decision in February 1970, the school board refused to implement a desegregation plan. But the judge's scathing criticism of LAUSD forced the board to take immediate action. Gitelson confirmed the

²⁸ Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 291-304, 396 (fn. 67); John Caughey and LaRee Caughey, *To Kill a Child's Spirit: The Tragedy of School Segregation in Los Angeles* (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1973), 52-54; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived: Los Angeles School Desegregation* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977), 7.

existence of segregation, acknowledged its harm on students, and charged LAUSD with deliberately producing and perpetuating a dual school system. The board had “knowingly, affirmatively and in bad faith...by and through its affirmative policies...and practices...segregated, *de jure*, its students.” Among its many inequitable practices, the board supported the “construction of schools in such locations...that...inevitably led such schools to be heavily segregated upon opening,” and implemented an “open transfer policy” knowing “that such a policy would exacerbate school segregation.” Honoring the plaintiffs’ requests, Gitelson mandated the board to formulate a feasible solution within a specific timetable. The board had to present the judge with a districtwide plan for desegregation by July 1970, begin the program in September 1970, and ensure its success no later than the 1971-1972 school year. The decision marked the most important milestone toward educational equality in Los Angeles since *Jackson*. Nevertheless, in the words of John Caughey and LaRee Caughey, both of whom served as witnesses to the plaintiffs in *Crawford*, “the board threw itself in front of the buses” and appealed the case.²⁹

Meanwhile, as black migration continued westward, white exodus also plagued the city of Inglewood. The self-governing city, situated directly south of Ladera Heights, took root in the nineteenth century, functioned as a retail and business center until the Great Depression, and then became an industrial hub in the mid-twentieth century. Three main business enterprises, the Inglewood Cemetery, the Inglewood Forum, and the Hollywood Park Race Track, contributed to the city’s economy. Yet as industries from

²⁹ Mary Ellen Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles, L.A. No. 822854, Filed 11 February 1970. Nicolaides, *My Blue*, 305-306; Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 62-70, 134-140, 145-149; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 8-9.

the expanding Los Angeles International Airport complex and the Long Beach harbor arrived in the area, property values in Inglewood slowly declined. In 1960, the \$18,800 median property value in Inglewood stood slightly above the \$17,300 average in Los Angeles. In 1970, the \$25,000 median property value fell below the \$26,700 Los Angeles average (Table 10). Lower property values eventually gave lower-middle- and working-class city dwellers the opportunity to move to the area. But at first, in the 1960s, mostly middle-class blacks settled in Inglewood, particularly around Crenshaw Boulevard, in the easternmost, solidly middle-class enclaves of Morningside Park and Morningside Heights. Between 1960 and 1970, the black population rose from 0.1 percent to 11.2 percent of the total. Consequently, as in the adjacent communities, Inglewood increasingly had to endure blockbusting, white exodus, and other racial-related stresses.³⁰

Shortly before the Watts riot, in an effort to sustain racial integration, an interracial group of Inglewood residents followed the example of their Crenshaw district counterparts and formed Morningside Park Neighbors. Similar to Crenshaw Neighbors in many respects, Morningside Park Neighbors (later renamed Inglewood Neighbors) spearheaded an effort to combat real estate blockbusting, integrate the public school system, and improve communication across racial lines in Inglewood. Former president Raymond Weil put it plainly, “We met, we published, we broadcast.” The group pressured real estate brokers, city officials, local organizations, religious leaders, “and of course, again and again,” school administrators to help improve race relations and maintain integration in the community. While Crenshaw Neighbors established a real

³⁰ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 15-19, 21-23.

estate agency to draw white homeowners to the area, Inglewood Neighbors launched a campaign called “Project Fifty Families” to bring in fifty white families by September 1967. The housing committee compiled a list of available accommodations; sought out local associations and businesses for possible white homeowners; referred buyers to realtors and landlords; and provided assistance to families moving in. When the debate over school desegregation rose to the surface, Inglewood Neighbors also became an outspoken advocate of busing.³¹

Over the course of the 1960s, as blacks moved into the eastern portion of Inglewood and whites remained on the western side, the racial distribution of the student population began to resemble that of the Jim Crow South. An overwhelming majority of black elementary students enrolled at only three out of the thirteen elementary schools in the district. Moreover, those three, Daniel Freeman, Warren Lane, and Clyde Woodworth elementary schools, were all located on the eastern side of Inglewood. Out of the two junior high schools in the district, nearly all blacks attended the east side Albert Monroe Junior High School. Most African American high school students also enrolled at Morningside High School, the only one on the eastern section. The black population at Morningside High School jumped from nearly 7 percent in the 1965-1966 school year, to 31 percent in the 1969-1970 school year (Table 11).³²

³¹ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 23-26, 47-50; Raymond Weil, “The Integrated Neighborhood Unheralded Example and Bypassed Opportunity,” *The Integrator* 1.1 (Winter 1967-1968): 3-5, SCL.

³² Memorandum of Points and Authorities in Support of Petition for Peremptory Writ of Mandate, Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 19 March 1970, pp. 14-15, LASC. The data on the IUSD racial composition in the court documents showed some differentiation compared to the numbers provided in Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock in School Desegregation* (see p. 30). For instance, court documents found the black population at Morningside High School at 17 percent in the 1968-1969 school year, while Bonacich and

In response to increasing pressure from Inglewood Neighbors, the IUSD Board of Education took moderate measures that recognized the growing segregation patterns in its schools. The five-member board, which included a cross-section of residents that were elected to four-year terms, represented the range of positions on school desegregation. “Between 1965 and 1969,” when the community began to more seriously address school segregation, in the words of sociologist Edna Bonacich and political scientist Robert Goodman, “the board had one outspoken liberal and one outspoken conservative.” A local police lieutenant and then city planner spoke for the conservative stance and opposed busing, while a Jewish attorney in Ladera Heights represented “the most liberal image” and supported busing. “The other three members were moderate to conservative in their leanings.” The board initially sought to recognize the demands of Inglewood Neighbors without upsetting the moderates or the increasing opposition to desegregation. In December 1965, the superintendent established a fifteen-member Human Relations Committee, which over the following two years compiled a bibliography on human relations; put together a study of the local issues; carried out a two-week summer workshop for the school district staff; and implemented a policy statement that endorsed in a general sense educational equality. While the measures called attention to the increasing problem of segregation in the district, they remained rather symbolic and safe from controversy.³³

Goodman placed the number at 23 percent. This table deferred to court documents for its information.

³³ Memorandum of Points and Authorities, Johnson v. Inglewood Unified, pp. 16-19; Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 66-68.

Then in July 1968, after the Bureau of Intergroup Relations of the State Department of Education released its study of the school district, divisions in the community intensified. As part of its moderate approach toward school segregation, the Inglewood Board invited the federal agency to conduct a study and propose a plan to help solve the racial problems in the district. Before the release of the report, a church pastor in Morningside Park held a weeklong prayer vigil, and teamed up with the Inglewood Neighbors president to urge the school board to support desegregation. But when the Bureau suggested a redistribution of the student population at the beginning of the 1968-1969 school year, more residents aligned themselves into factions. Inglewood Neighbors and local civil rights activists took the opportunity to further push for desegregation. More than 200 supporters of desegregation signed a petition, which was presented to the board. At first, the board welcomed the report and asked the school district personnel to put together a feasibility study. But by mid-July, anti-integrationists began to mobilize, picket outside the board, and pressure the community to resist making any changes.³⁴

From the second half of the 1960s, IUSD busing proponents mobilized into three distinguishable groups. The interracial neighborhood stabilization group, Inglewood Neighbors, emerged as the most prominent and organized. The group saw school integration as a moral imperative for providing a quality education for all children, but especially African Americans. While they attempted to convince their critics of the need for desegregation, members mainly focused their efforts on pressuring the school board and the courts to impose a plan. At the urging of an African American IUSD official, another group known as Parents Interested in Education formed in 1968 to represent the

³⁴ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 68-71.

views and concerns of black parents. Mostly made up of black men, the loosely based organization operating under no formal structure gained citywide attention after presenting a list of fourteen demands to the school board that by and large called for a racially inclusive district. A third group, the Citizens for the Rs, which consisted of a large number of members from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) based in the increasing black communities east of Prairie Avenue, sought to bring together liberals and conservatives by setting a moderate tone in their approach toward desegregation.³⁵

The antibusing movement, however, saw school desegregation as a serious impediment to the quality of the school system and the value of the community. Several local conservative organizations voiced stern opposition to busing. In mid-July 1968, after the school board acknowledged the Bureau's report and called for a feasibility study, the Neighborhood Schools Committee emerged as the most visible and vocal opposition. Many antibusing advocates placed high value on tradition, hard work, and individual responsibility, and felt manipulated by social scientists and educators arguing for the good of the whole, especially as school districts across the country, including their own, erupted in upheaval. Integrated schools, they argued, provided no better of an education than one-race institutions. Accordingly, IUSD antibusing advocates called for the return of the neighborhood school policy.³⁶ The release of the feasibility report in August 1968 added more fuel to the growing divisions in the community. While the

³⁵ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 47-53, 73.

³⁶ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 58-64. Another antibusing group emerged in IUSD at the time. In *Deadlock in School Desegregation*, Bonacich and Goodman found that anti-integrationists adopted a new name for their group, called the Save Our Schools Committee (SOS), but seemed to have kept their leadership, tactics, and goals the same as the Neighborhood Schools Committee. See Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 58.

study recognized “that de facto segregation is inconsistent with equal educational opportunity,” it argued that “it should not pursue any plan to adjust racial imbalance” in the school district. The Bureau’s proposals, the study found, would cause overcrowding in the schools. Under increasing pressure, the Inglewood Board adopted the study. For the moment, anti-integrationists triumphed.³⁷

In response, desegregation activists threatened the Inglewood Board with a lawsuit. In December 1968, a few months after the board adopted the feasibility study, attorneys at the Western Center on Law and Poverty warned the superintendent that unless the district established a schedule for desegregation, the center planned to pursue litigation. Seeking to mollify the pro-integrationists without upsetting the anti-integrationists, the superintendent announced plans to reorganize the Human Relations Committee and establish a Citizens Advisory Committee. In early 1969, the school board also adopted a revised policy statement that spelled out its endorsement of not only educational equality, but also desegregation. “The board of education,” the statement read, “now reaffirms its determination...to use all reasonable means to reduce racial/ethnic segregation in the schools of the district.” The newly formed advisory committee organized into discussion groups and made desegregation its priority. But when the committee urged an immediate course of action to redistribute the IUSD student population, the board yet again dropped its support.³⁸

Unable to resolve school segregation by working with the Inglewood school board, integrationists followed through with their threat, hired attorneys, and pursued

³⁷ Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 71-72. (Qtd. in Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 71.)

³⁸ Memorandum of Points and Authorities, Johnson v. Inglewood Unified, pp. 21-23; Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 72-80, 95. Qtd. in Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 74.

legal action. In 1969, the Western Center on Law and Poverty filed a lawsuit against IUSD with the Los Angeles Superior Court on behalf of a group of African American children and their parents who lived in Inglewood. The lawsuit called for the immediate desegregation of the IUSD schools. Once again, as in other cities across the country, the judge gave the school board another year to resolve the issue and implement a desegregation plan on its own. As it had done in the past, the IUSD school board failed to agree on a plan, but in early 1970, a local judge intervened.

“The Point of Absurdity”

After several years of fighting, integrationists triumphed when a Los Angeles Superior Court judge ordered the Inglewood Board to carry out a desegregation plan at the start of the 1970-1971 school year. IUSD served as an example of the nationwide struggle over school desegregation. When the Nixon administration came out against busing in the late 1960s and challenged the *Swann* ruling, a storm of hostility erupted in cities around the country, each movement fueling another to fight further for its beliefs. The attempt to desegregate IUSD ultimately wreaked havoc on the schools and the communities. By the early 1970s, the overall student population in IUSD shifted from heavily white to black, and the battle over school desegregation reached an impasse. Ladera Heights worked hard to maintain its reputation and promote racial integration, but when the public schools greatly deteriorated, the affluent community dropped its support of the public school district, and the desegregation plan failed.

In the late 1960s, while the school board maintained its position of gradualism, the Western Center on Law and Poverty followed through with its threat and took the Inglewood school district to court. In May 1969, some three months after the plaintiffs

filed a petition against IUSD, and while school authorities continued negotiations over a desegregation plan, the court convened on the case. But as usual, the judge's decision prolonged litigation for yet another year. Upon the request of the defendants, Judge Richard Schauer allowed school officials additional time to put together a desegregation plan. However, the judge maintained jurisdiction over the district, and if the board failed to begin a desegregation plan in the 1969-1970 school year, he threatened to reverse the decision. In response, the school administration embarked on another planning effort in June and submitted a desegregation plan to the Inglewood school board in October. The five-year plan paired elementary schools, and changed feeder patterns in the secondary schools. But the proposal reignited divisions in the community, and in December, the board overwhelmingly voted against the resolution.³⁹

As desegregation plans languished in debate throughout the 1969-1970 academic year, the legal advocacy group took further action. In March 1970, the Western Center on Law and Poverty filed a second petition on behalf of nine African American families. Janel Johnson, an eight-year-old student at Warren Lane Elementary School, headed the case, while eighteen other youngsters, ranging from age five to sixteen, also volunteered their names. Out of the nine families, all but one lived in the largely middle-class Morningside Park or Morningside Heights communities. Seventeen of the nineteen students attended schools comprised of a largely black student population in the eastern section of the school district. The counsel for the plaintiffs petitioned the court for what had become a rather routine appeal. The attorneys called attention to the striking

³⁹ Judgment, Janel Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 948036, Filed 22 September 1969, pp. 1-2, LASC; Memorandum of Points and Authorities, Johnson v. Inglewood Unified, pp. 21-24; Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 77, 79-80, 95.

segregation patterns in the school district, and called on the court to order IUSD “to devise a plan to prevent and eliminate substantial racial imbalance in the district schools which...will alleviate racial imbalance in district schools by September 1970.”⁴⁰

The routine plea, however, had an uncustomary outcome. On July 22, 1970, in *Janel Johnson v. Inglewood Unified School District*, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Max F. Deutz confirmed the growing trend of segregation in the district, ordered the Inglewood School Board to formulate a master plan for desegregation, and implement the program beginning in the 1970-1971 school year. The judge recognized viable desegregation plans around the country, but allowed the school board to design its own resolution. After more debate and pressure from anti-integrationists, board members voted against an appeal, and instructed a task force to put together a plan. In early August 1970, the board adopted a program that paired elementary schools, redrew the boundaries of the secondary schools, and bused students to schools across the district. One year before the United States Supreme Court handed down *Swann*, the Los Angeles Superior Court approved the IUSD resolution. The plan took effect in September 1970.⁴¹

Meanwhile, as IUSD underwent an experiment with uncertain ramifications on the community, the federal administration added fuel to the fire by taking a stand against busing. From his first presidential campaign, Richard Nixon voiced his opposition to court-ordered desegregation. He supported freedom-of-choice policies, solicited the

⁴⁰ Petition for Peremptory Writ of Mandate, *Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District*, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 19 March 1970, pp. 1-3, 8 (quote, capitalization altered), LASC; Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 95.

⁴¹ Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 170-171; Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock*, 95-96; Robert Kistler and Robert J. Allan, “Inglewood to End Mandatory Busing: Neighborhood School Concept to be Restored,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 1972, A1, 26.

judiciary for extensions on desegregation plans, and came out against local court desegregation orders around the country, including Judge Gitelson's ruling in the LAUSD case *Crawford*. In his campaign for a second term in office, Nixon employed what critics dubbed as his "southern strategy" and sought to win the votes of conservative southern whites by amplifying his antibusing stance. The president rebuked the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Swann*, and went on national television in March 1972 to deliver a speech that not only denounced busing, but also urged Congress to pass a moratorium preventing federal courts from supporting the method altogether. While the bill helped Nixon win reelection, it died on the Senate floor. Before the vote took place, however, cities across the United States erupted over the issue.⁴²

Charlotte-Mecklenburg was just one of many communities in the country that fought over judicial orders. In 1971, at court hearings in light of *Swann*, 1,500 parents descended on Nashville, Tennessee to demonstrate against busing. From the first day of the Nashville plan, protestors picketed schools, fights broke out between students, and parents pulled their children out of the district. Shortly after a federal district court in 1972 ordered busing in Detroit, Michigan, parents in one suburb kept 40 percent of their children home from school in a boycott; Senator Robert Griffin proposed a constitutional amendment that banned busing; and busing opponent George Wallace swept the primary election. Concerned that busing would fuel white exodus, black mayor Coleman Young

⁴² Dean J. Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 18, 38-40, 43; Steven F. Lawson, *Civil Rights Crossroads: Nation, Community, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 155-157; Wilkinson, *From Brown*, 119; Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 156-158, 212-216.

also urged the NAACP to stay out of the fight.⁴³ Boston, Massachusetts made some of the biggest waves when a federal district court judge ordered a desegregation plan in 1974 that included 40 percent of the city's schools and extensive crosstown busing. When the plan paired inner city, black Roxbury High School with working-class, Irish South Boston High School, South Boston erupted in violence. Whites hurled rocks and racial epithets at buses filled with black youngsters. Blacks made newspaper headlines as perpetrators of beatings and stabbings. Police officers were dispatched to South Boston High School, the court took over responsibility of the school, and officials implemented a weapons policy and installed metal detectors at the entrances of the building.⁴⁴

While less inflammatory than Boston, racial unrest also plagued the residents in the Inglewood Unified School District. From personal exchanges to full-fledged fights, most incidents were dealt with privately and went unreported by newspapers. But oral histories of residents have shown that conflicts indeed occurred. Like many other white parents of Ladera Heights, Sam and Doris Engelman initially made a conscious effort to support busing. The Jewish couple understood intolerance and worked hard to achieve middle-class comfort. When they moved to Ladera Heights in 1959, they joined a tight-knit group of parents that shared carpool responsibility and volunteered at nearby Parent Elementary School, "the core" of the community, where the principal "knew every child by name." At first, the Engelmans remained receptive to desegregation. They attended

⁴³ Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodard, *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 70-74, 77-80, chapters 5 and 7; Orfield, *Must We*, 148, 336-337; Lawson, *Civil Rights*, 157-158.

⁴⁴ Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), chapters 2-4 and 9; Orfield, *Must We*, 144-146. See also Ione Malloy, *Southie Won't Go: The Desegregation of South Boston High School* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); and J.L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The Influence of Local Leaders* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

school meetings, weighed the arguments, and decided to keep their son and daughter in the system. But after an altercation led a group of African American boys to singe their child's hair with a cigarette lighter, the Engelmans felt no other option but to pull their children out of the school.⁴⁵

The uproar over school desegregation accelerated white exodus in the communities of IUSD, but many white families in Ladera Heights refused to leave their beloved neighborhood. "If the race question is a problem in Ladera Heights," Creedman explained in his 1972 article, "it is more a question of how it affects the schools rather than the neighborhoods." Residents in Ladera Heights coped with the situation by removing their offspring from the school district. "Several Ladera mothers admitted privately," Creedman wrote, "that they were taking their children out of the Inglewood schools and were enrolling them in private schools." Ronni Cooper also acknowledged the trend among white families to enroll their youngsters in private schools. "The majority of whites who stayed [in the community] just simply stopped using the public schools." Many of those unaffiliated with the Catholic Church, including Jewish-raised Cooper, enrolled their children in the private institution St. Bernard High School. Cooper worked diligently to improve IUSD as PTA president, and kept her children in the public schools for as long as she felt possible. She became part of a group that helped extend the enrollment of Parent Elementary School from grade six to grade eight. But when her children entered high school, Cooper registered them at the private school.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Doris Engelman and Sam Engelman, interview by author, June 23, 2007, Los Angeles, California. For further reference to racial unrest in IUSD, see Cooper, interview by author.

⁴⁶ Creedman, "If This Be," 42-43; Cooper, interview by author; Engelman and Engelman, interview by author.

While some parents opted for private institutions, others lied about their permanent address to enroll their children in public schools outside of IUSD. After the incident with their son, the Engelmans rented an apartment within LAUSD borders, and enrolled their youngsters at University High School in West Los Angeles. Their daughter, who also attended Inglewood High School at the time, questioned her parents' integrity for lying about their primary address. After all, they had taught their children to be honest no matter the situation. But the Engelmans felt that they had exhausted all of their resources. They remained in their home in Ladera Heights, and paid for an apartment for three years in order for their children to attend University High School.⁴⁷

Many African American parents also evaded the public school system and enrolled their offspring in private schools. In communities around the country, blacks found desegregation plans, and busing in particular, a problematic method of achieving educational equality. On the whole, black youngsters endured longer bus rides to schools miles from their home to face white resistance. Many black parents refused to put their children through the hardship. Moreover, some African Americans felt that busing exacerbated racial tensions, further provoked white flight, and ultimately damaged the reputation of the public education system. As did their white counterparts, many middle- and upper-class blacks moved to a neighborhood for its public schools, and hated to see the reputation of those institutions decline as a result of busing.⁴⁸ At a meeting of the

⁴⁷ Engelman and Engelman, interview by author.

⁴⁸ Pride and Woodard, *Burden*, chapter 9; Orfield, *Must We*, 115-116; Lawson, *Civil Rights*, 156. For discussions on some black families that opted for private schools in the Crenshaw district, see Louise Smith, interview by author, March 5, 2007, by telephone; Phenella D. Perez and Gisele Perez, interview by author, October 19, 2006, by telephone; and Thelma Houston, interview by author, July 20, 2007, Los Angeles, California.

Ladera Heights neighborhood association in 1972, Creedman watched as residents voiced their frustration toward what they saw as an ineffective step toward school desegregation. One African American resident lamented to the group, “I moved into this neighborhood and I find my children are being bused out of the neighborhood.” But “what makes it even worse is that they weren’t even bused to an integrated school.” His comments prompted a resounding applause and “many knowing smiles.”⁴⁹

Through the early 1970s, as IUSD carried out its desegregation plan, the school board continued to pressure the court to overturn the verdict. In 1972, “before a crowd of 200 vocal citizens,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported, the school board voted 4-0 to eliminate busing and return to the neighborhood school model by January 1973. In order to convince Judge Deutz to support their appeal, school officials promised to establish an open enrollment policy as well as magnet schools, which allowed students the opportunity to attend their school of preference, as long as those institutions had openings. One year later, after Judge Deutz refused to renegotiate, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, the “disenchanted” school board pressed the matter again. But this time, the board gained support from one of the most influential groups in the district.⁵⁰

By early 1973, the Ladera Heights Civic Association came out in favor of the school board’s revised plan. After the board opted to replace the busing plan with an open enrollment policy, the LHCA board of directors overwhelmingly voted to do the

⁴⁹ Creedman, “If This Be,” 43 (spelling corrected).

⁵⁰ Kistler and Allan, “Inglewood to End,” A1; Noel Greenwood, “Inglewood to Ask Court OK to Abandon Busing: School Board Hopes to Return Soon to Neighborhood Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1972, A3; Jack McCurdy, “Inglewood Board Disenchanted, Seeks an Alternative to Busing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 August 1973, E1 (ellipses in original). See also Creedman, “If This Be,” 43; and Caughey and Caughey, *To Kill*, 221-222.

same. The *Los Angeles Times* heralded the news in its January 1973 article, “Open Enrollment Decision Hailed by Civic Board.” Less than three years into the desegregation plan, busing as a means to create racial integration in IUSD lost the approval of Ladera Heights. LHCA President Ronald Rosenfeld continued throughout the year to pressure local officials to withdraw the busing plan from IUSD. In a letter to Harry Marlow, the chief deputy for Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, in August 1973, Rosenfeld articulated the views of the LHCA board of directors when he wrote, “Busing continues to the point of absurdity.” As a result of the population shift from majority white to black, Rosenfeld found, busing made no difference in creating a racially balanced school system.⁵¹

Despite the increasing protests against busing, through the first half of the 1970s, Judge Deutz refused to overturn his decision. But the argument for the desegregation plan increasingly lost its validity, and the number of busing proponents declined. The Inglewood Board had to wait only a few more years before the judge changed his mind. Black in-migration and white out-migration in the residential communities of the school district dramatically altered the student population of the schools. By the end of the decade, Ladera Heights remained slightly majority white, but in the city of Inglewood, blacks made up more than half of the population. As a result, the racial composition of public school enrollment shifted toward majority black. Through public pressure and legal precedent, school desegregation advocates succeeded in convincing the local courts to redraw district lines, pair schools, and enforce busing. Yet they lacked the ability to persuade white residents to stay in the district.

⁵¹ “Open Enrollment Decision Hailed by Civic Board,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1973, CS1; Letter from Rosenfeld to Marlow, August 30, 1973 (spelling corrected); Rosenfeld, interview by author.

The Failure of School Desegregation

Over the second half of the twentieth century, migration patterns proved too powerful for grassroots, civil rights activists to control. The battle over school desegregation, and the controversial program of busing, intensified the divisions in the Inglewood school district and increased white exodus. Five years after first handing down his ruling in *Johnson*, Judge Deutz returned to court to reevaluate his decision in light of the population shift toward a black majority. By that time, the bickering between pro- and anti-integrationist groups damaged the reputation of IUSD to the point that the public school system no longer served as a draw for prospective homebuyers. Opponents of the desegregation plan gradually gained more followers, and convinced the court to overturn the order. Nevertheless, the battle left no victors, only an acutely damaged, resegregated public education system.

In May 1975, nearly five years after the original order, several appeals, and an impassioned battle that deeply divided the community, Judge Deutz felt no other option in the majority black IUSD but to end the desegregation plan. “As a practical matter,” the judge noted, “we are now busing black children from predominately black schools to other predominantly black schools.” As a whole, students of color in IUSD rose from 31 percent in the 1969-1970 school year, to 91 percent in the 1976-1977 year. The black enrollment of schools west of Prairie Avenue grew increasingly closer to the overwhelmingly black enrollment in the east side schools. By the 1976-1977 academic year, the black population of all east side elementary schools had risen above 80 percent, and all but one school on the west side reached at least half of the total percentage (Table 12). The desegregation plan made little difference in adjusting the racial composition of

the schools. While black influx and white exodus created racial integration in IUSD by the mid-1970s, the trend pointed in the direction of a majority black population.⁵²

Judge Deutz overturned most of his 1970 order, but he held out hope for some semblance of racial balance in certain schools by maintaining a small portion of the plan. Following the recommendations of the school board, the judge called for the reestablishment of the neighborhood school policy as defined by “the pre-1970 boundaries” at the beginning of the 1975-1976 school year. While he eliminated the pairing of all schools, Deutz kept the busing program between two schools that he believed showed some potential to maintain racial balance, west side La Tijera Elementary School and east side Freeman Elementary School. In an attempt to improve racial balance, the judge also called on IUSD to establish magnet programs “with open enrollment” at west side Parent Elementary School and east side Warren Lane Elementary School. He ordered IUSD to provide additional classroom space and transportation for students attending those institutions, and insisted that Parent Elementary School give “priority to minority students until minority enrollment is achieved of not more than plus or minus 15 percent of the district average.”⁵³

⁵² Order Granting Respondent’s Motion for Modification of Judgment, Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 3 June 1975, LASC. See also Jack McCurdy, “Court Terminates School Busing Plan in Inglewood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1975, A1, 21. The data for Table 12 was compiled in Bonacich and Goodman, *Deadlock in School Desegregation* (see p. 30); and “Ethnic Survey by Individual Schools, School Year 1976-77,” from Informational Material, Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 2 March 1977, LASC. The court document, “Ethnic Survey,” excluded from its 1976-1977 data the west side institution, W. Claude Hudnall Elementary School. To create consistency, I followed the example made by Bonacich and Goodman and combined the data of Andrew Bennett (grades K-3) and James Kew (grades 4-6) Elementary Schools.

⁵³ Order, Johnson v. Inglewood Unified; McCurdy, “Court Terminates School Busing,” A1, 21.

Two years following the decision, however, IUSD returned to court to receive yet another revised ruling. In March 1977, in light of the continual population shift toward a black majority, Judge Deutz “rescinded” the remaining desegregation plan from his 1975 order. No public school in IUSD, including the four institutions the judge set apart in his 1975 decision, showed any ability to maintain a racially balanced student body. When paired, in 1977, students of color made up 90 percent of the student body at Freeman Elementary School and 94 percent at La Tijera Elementary School. Without pairing, students of color comprised of 98 percent at Freeman Elementary and 73 percent at La Tijera Elementary. While the court found the Warren Lane Elementary School magnet program “successful in its objectives,” mainly because the program had “no guidelines...regarding racial balance,” Judge Deutz predicted students of color at Parent Elementary School would fall “within 15% of the district-wide average” by September 1977. Consequently, the judge declared, “The Inglewood Unified School District is relieved from the further jurisdiction of this Court.” He dismissed IUSD from any further desegregation orders, and left the effort toward school desegregation in Inglewood an episode of the past.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In 1978, the *Los Angeles Times* took note of Ladera Heights as a community of rare distinction. Unlike the population of other Los Angeles neighborhoods that shifted from majority white to black by the end of the decade, the article extolled, Ladera

⁵⁴ Judgment, Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 13 March 1977, LASC; Informational Material, Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 2 March 1977, p. 1-3; “Last Inglewood School Integration Orders Lifted,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1977, B23.

Heights had “integrated with pride.” The first African Americans to move to the affluent enclave incited many white homeowners to panic and sell their homes. But throughout the 1970s, black influx and white exodus moved at a slower rate. “Ladera Heights has not become an all-black neighborhood,” the *Los Angeles Times* insisted. While the school desegregation tore the communities of IUSD apart, Ladera Heights managed to remain a pleasant, prosperous, and integrated community. In 1980, as the black population rose to 57 percent in Inglewood, African Americans remained under 40 percent of the total population in Ladera Heights. The median annual family income and the median property value soared to more than twice the median of the city of Los Angeles (Tables 9-10). According to two local brokers, the *Los Angeles Times* article explained, real estate listings remained down, “a good indication that the days of white flight are over.”⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the fight over school desegregation caused significant long-term damage to the quality and reputation of the public education system. For more than a decade, the battle expended the resources, integrity, and energy of both the school board and the districts’ residents. Over concern for thousands of students and the quality of the education system, pro- and anti-integrationists managed to keep the issue of school segregation relevant and in court. But the staggering inability of the Inglewood Board of Education to take a leadership role, make a clear-cut and unambiguous decision, and implement a plan to suitably correct racial segregation in the school district increased the divisions in the community, fueled white flight, and ultimately hurt the schools. By the time Judge Deutz handed down his initial ruling to desegregate IUSD in 1970, the

⁵⁵ “Ladera: Integrated With Pride,” CS1.

community had become deeply fractured and the quality of the school system had declined. When Judge Deutz withdrew his order five years later, white flight wreaked havoc on the reputation and value of the district. Throughout the turmoil, Ladera Heights remarkably maintained its reputation as the most esteemed, valued, and racially integrated community in the district. But its withdrawal of support for an integrated public school system, which IUSD especially needed to help improve its reputation, showed that the proponents of integration remained no match to the deeply rooted external forces.

CONCLUSION

By the mid-1970s, newspapers began to compare the majority black, affluent communities of the Crenshaw district to the mostly white, well-heeled, highly esteemed, celebrity haven Beverly Hills. In his 1975 editorial, *Los Angeles Times* writer and editor J.K. Obatala sought to challenge the criticisms “especially by whites, and unfortunately, younger generations of blacks,” of middle- and upper-class African Americans as materialistic and arrogant snobs, unconcerned with their low-income counterparts or the civil rights struggle. Rather, Obatala defended the affluent black residents of the Crenshaw district as “models of success” who worked hard to realize their professional goals and attain a comfortable standard of living, as southern black schoolteachers and business owners had done in the sharecropper South, and help improve conditions for other people of color. “Some of them are even interested in making life better for *every* Afro-American.” Baldwin Hills, a broad term used to describe the prosperous communities of the Crenshaw district, Obatala extolled, “is to blacks what Beverly Hills is to whites.” Underneath the resentments of the black middle-class, “Buried somewhere in the minds of most Afro-Americans...are the ruins of a secret utopia, a fossilized dreamland that, if unearthed, would probably look very much like Baldwin Hills.”¹

Then from the 1980s, in a host of local and national publications, reporting on a range of stories, journalists began to refer to the prosperous Crenshaw district

¹ J.K. Obatala, “The Blacks of Baldwin Hills: Worthy Models for Youth?” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1975, C7 (italics in original).

neighborhoods as well as affluent Ladera Heights by their increasingly popular nickname the “black Beverly Hills.” Surveying black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1983 mentioned the residents of the Baldwin Hills, or “the black Beverly Hills,” as a possible political bloc supporting Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign. When a fire destroyed several homes on Don Carlos Drive in Baldwin Hills Estates in 1985, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a number of reports on the story, some of which referred to the area by its popular nickname. A 1985 *Los Angeles Times* article explained that African American actress and choreographer Debbie Allen described her Baldwin Hills Estates residence “proudly as ‘the black Beverly Hills.’” *Ebony* magazine printed an article in 1995 on some of the celebrities living in the “black Beverly Hills,” and in 2005, *L.A. Weekly* published a story based on an interview with a local rapper that was conducted in Ladera Heights, “the black Beverly Hills.” The nickname had become widespread and accepted.²

Using Beverly Hills to describe another affluent enclave comprised mostly of people of color was not unique, and other prosperous communities around southern California claimed a similar moniker. In the second half of the twentieth century, geographer Wei Li identified the emergence of a distinct nationwide residential trend toward what she called ethnic suburbs or “ethnoburbs.” Unlike the low-income, overcrowded, inner city ethnic enclaves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

² For a range of articles that referred to the affluent Crenshaw district communities and Ladera Heights as the “black Beverly Hills,” see Marshall Ingwerson, “Jesse Jackson Tugs at Traditional Political Loyalty of L.A. Blacks,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 November 1983, 3; Penelope McMillan, “Baldwin Hills on ‘Day After’: Grim Contrasts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1985; Penelope McMillan, “Assistance Center Opens for Baldwin Hills Victims,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1985, 3; Nancy Mills, “Allen’s Claim to ‘Fame’ is Making Right Moves,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1985, F1; Aldore Collier, “Black Celebrities Have Become the Powerbrokers in the Boardroom and on the Glitzy Social Circuit,” *Ebony*, September 1995, 55; and Ben Quinones, “Brother Man,” *L.A. Weekly*, 24 June 2005, 102.

suburban “ethnoburbs” were comprised of a multiethnic population, but with a concentration of one particular ethnic group, from a wide range of socioeconomic levels. Li focused her study on Monterey Park, a suburban bedroom community located east of downtown Los Angeles. In the mid-1950s, Monterey Park acquired its nickname the “Mexican Beverly Hills” to reflect its large Hispanic population. By the 1980s, as an influx of Chinese immigrants moved into the area, the community became known as the “Chinese Beverly Hills.”³ The comparison to Beverly Hills can misrepresent, demoting these communities to second-rate status, below the authentic, original, and mostly white Beverly Hills. Nevertheless, the nickname remains a useful tool for emphasizing the valued, respected, and renowned reputation of an area.

By the 1980s, the affluent enclaves of the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights indeed matched the expectations of their nickname. Between 1950 and 1980, the racial composition of affluent Crenshaw district underwent a striking population shift to an overwhelming black majority. The 1950 United States Census reported that the aggregate population of Leimert Park, View Park, View Heights, Windsor Hills, Baldwin Hills Estates, and Baldwin Hills Vista consisted of less than 0.3 percent blacks, and 99.7 percent whites. Thirty years later, in 1980, the proportion of blacks had risen to almost 83 percent of the population, and the proportion of whites dropped to roughly 9 percent. By the twenty-first century, Ladera Heights also comprised of a black majority; its population swung from 0.2 percent black and 99.8 percent white in 1950, to 70.8 percent black and 20.1 percent white in 2000. The prosperous communities of Westside proper

³ Wei Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), introduction, 85, 89-90. See also Timothy P. Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), chapter 1.

echoed the population shift in West Jefferson and West Adams Heights (Sugar Hill), two of the first affluent Westside neighborhoods where middle- and upper-class African Americans settled. As in other communities across the country, when blacks moved into a community, whites packed their belongings and moved out. But the black struggle to initially gain access to desirable neighborhoods came with significant hardships.⁴

Through the mid-twentieth century, middle- and upper-class African Americans faced an uphill battle to move into Westside Los Angeles. They outwitted deeply entrenched and federally endorsed racial restrictive covenants, endured relentless white intimidation and violence, mobilized into community action groups, teamed up with civil rights attorneys, fought lawsuits, and became a vital part of a nationwide campaign that ended the legal enforcement of restrictive covenants. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, despite the United States Supreme Court rulings in *Shelley and Barrows*, whites continued their attempt at confining black city dwellers to the Eastside and staving off black westward migration. When use-oriented zoning laws, restrictive covenants, intimidation, and violence failed to stop black in-migration, whites retaliated by selling their properties and leaving the area. Real estate agents exacerbated white fear of black in-migration by encouraging whites to quickly sell their homes before, realtors alleged,

⁴ U.S. Census of Population: 1950, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *United States Census of Housing: 1950, Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California*, vol. 5, pt. 100 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *United States Census of Housing: 1960, vol. 3, Census Tracts, Los Angeles, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1961); U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, *Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif.*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1990, General Population Characteristics, California* (Washington, DC: GPO: 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

black residents brought down housing values and caused the community to turn into a ghetto. In response, middle- and upper-class African Americans worked across racial lines and formed grassroots organizations, such as Crenshaw Neighbors and Inglewood Neighbors, aimed at ending residential discrimination and promoting racial integration in their communities.

The campaign toward racial integration had significant achievements. The growth in membership of Crenshaw Neighbors through the 1960s illustrated an increasing interest in the group and its goals of racial integration. Through its annual home tours and print advertisements, the Crenshaw Neighbors' real estate agency brought more exposure to the effort and convinced some whites to move to the Crenshaw district. The regular meetings, social gatherings, community outreach campaigns, and educational programs for local children brought together white and black neighbors that might have never met, opened the lines of communication in the community, and broke down racial barriers. The nationwide distribution of Crenshaw Neighbors' publications drew in more supporters to the cause. After activists spent years pressuring local school boards to put in place policies to create racial integration in their public school districts, under court orders, school officials reluctantly, albeit eventually, carried out desegregation plans. The partnerships with other neighborhood stabilization groups across southern California helped strengthen the movement. As a result of the increasing momentum and influence of Crenshaw Neighbors and other neighborhood stabilization organizations around the country, some of its foremost leaders established the national agency, National Neighbors, to further advance the movement toward residential integration.

While middle- and upper-class blacks forged an effort to maintain multiracial communities, they also enriched their surroundings by opening local businesses that buttressed African American history and culture. Under the direction of brothers Alonzo and Dale Davis, Brockman Gallery brought black art to Leimert Park and expanded the Black Arts Movement to the Westside. Through the late 1960s and 1970s, Brockman Gallery became a central meeting place where up-and-coming and established African American artists not only exhibited and sold their works, but also planned local outreach programs and social events. The Davis brothers formed the nonprofit, public-funded Brockman Gallery Productions, and in collaboration with other artists, organized and sponsored a host of programs. From street fairs and music performances to film festivals and citywide mural projects, the activities of Brockman Gallery Productions celebrated and honored African American identity, supported people of color across Los Angeles, and fostered a more inclusive city. By the late 1970s, local artists set up their own studios in the storefronts adjacent to Brockman Gallery, and transformed the Leimert Park business district into a hub of black expression.

In the late 1980s, while black activism and engagement in Leimert Park Village waned, and the Davis brothers relinquished control of their business, the spirit of Brockman Gallery endured. Through the 1990s, another generation of African American artists and activists took over Degnan Boulevard and its adjacent streets, opened art enterprises and Afrocentric shops, and led Leimert Park Village in a resurgence of African American artistic expression and social activism. The Los Angeles riot of 1992 especially revived the community activism. When a jury found four Los Angeles Police Department officers “not guilty” for the beating of African American motorist Rodney

King, in spite of videotaped evidence of the episode, thousands of city dwellers erupted in an uprising across South Los Angeles. Almost thirty years after the Watts rebellion, the 1992 rioters sought to make clear that racial inequality and police brutality persisted in the city. Amid the chaos and turmoil, black city dwellers found in Leimert Park Village a space to take control of the streets, come together on common ground, engage in dialogue, and express themselves. One reporter writing in 1997 for *Black Enterprise* explained, “The success that the Brockman Gallery enjoyed during the ‘70s and early ‘80s planted the seeds for the bustling commercial district of today.”⁵

The abundance of black-owned businesses helped elevate Leimert Park Village to a bustling place of black expression. A few days before the 1992 uprising, recovering alcoholic and formerly homeless Richard Fulton opened 5th Street Dick’s Coffee Company, which quickly became a local fixture where city dwellers conversed and listened to jazz. Because of the riots, Fulton explained, “We all became a community right then and there.” Other businesses that opened before the 1992 uprising received greater attention in the aftermath. Artist Ramsess, who first rented his studio from the Davis brothers in 1982, was a major presence in the community. Ben Caldwell’s Video 3333/KAOS Network carried out educational programs, lectures, and performances in the digital arts. Actress Marla Gibbs’s Vision Theater and Crossroads Arts Academy ran

⁵ Alonzo Davis, *African-American Artists of Los Angeles: Alonzo Davis*, interview by Karen Anne Mason (University of California Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1994), UCLA/SC, 310-312; Dale Brockman Davis, interview by author, March 15, 2008, Los Angeles, California; Gil Robertson, “Inside Leimert Park,” *Black Enterprise* 27.11 (June 1997): 336. For history and analysis of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, see Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Lou Cannon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999); and Ronald N. Jacobs, *Race, Media and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

drama classes, staged theatrical performances, and hosted music concerts. Brian Breye displayed his extensive collection of West African art pieces and American racist, slave-era artifacts at the Museum in Black. At World Stage, cofounded by jazz poet Kamau Daáood and drummer Billy Higgins, jazz and spoken word artists rehearsed, performed, and honed their craft. Following the footsteps of Brockman Gallery, Laura Hendrix's Gallery Plus displayed and sold works of local artists.⁶

In the years following the 1992 riot, countless more businesses opened, and Leimert Park Village saw increasing patronage. Choreographers Pat Taylor and Lady Helena Walquer Vereen opened Dance Collective, which held workshops and performances in African American and West African dance. Laura Mae Gross moved her long-standing blues club, Babe's and Ricky's Inn, which she opened on Central Avenue in the early 1960s, to Leimert Park Village in 1997. Boutiques, eateries, and bookstores, many of which specialized in Afrocentric products, also lined Degnan Boulevard. Vocalist Dwight Trible recalled, "All of a sudden things started happening here. The next thing you know, I went around to Richard [Fulton]'s place one day and the whole street was just full." Through the mid-1990s, according to historian Steven Isoardi, "At night there were as many as four or five spaces within one and a half blocks

⁶ Edward J. Boyer, "A Heartbeat in Search of a Heart," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 1990, Metro section, 1; "Marla Gibbs' Arts Group Buys Leimert Theater," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1990, Metro section, 2; Don Shirley, "Ambitious Plans for Marla Gibbs' Crossroads Facility Theater," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1990, Calendar section, 4; Don Snowden, "Cultural Spring in Crenshaw District: Arts Transform Degnan Boulevard," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1992, Calendar section, 1; P.J. Harris, "Leimert Park Village," *American Visions* 7.3 (June/July 1992): 26; Michel Marriott, "Soul Central," *New York Times*, 5 December 1993; Robertson, "Inside Leimert Park," 336; *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South Central Los Angeles*, DVD, produced and directed by Jeanette Lindsay (Los Angeles: Foster Johnson Studios, 2008). See also Steven L. Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 218-221, 226-229; and Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 283-287.

offering live music. Peaceful, crowded sidewalks gave rise to continuous conversations with friends, acquaintances, and, just as often, strangers.” The community brought together well-established performers, from drummer Max Roach to Nina Simone, with struggling new artists. As it had been in the 1960s and 1970s, Leimert Park Village became a center for festivals and music performances, with Horace Tapscott and the Pan Afrikan People’s Arkestra headlining shows regularly again. In the documentary, *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village*, which captured the vitality of the community in the 1990s, one man said simply, “It is a place that demands honesty from you.”⁷

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, despite white fears of property deterioration, property in the mostly black communities of the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights remained valuable. By 1980, while Leimert Park sustained its middle-income status, View Park, View Heights, Windsor Hills, Baldwin Hills Estates, and Baldwin Hills Vista boasted median property values and annual family income in the middle- to upper income bracket. While median property values and family income in majority white Beverly Hills surpassed those in Ladera Heights in the last two decades of the twentieth century, Ladera Heights remained a highly desirable and valued community. In 1990, Ladera Heights’s median property value of \$433,100 trailed behind Beverly Hills’s median of some \$500,000, and by 2000, while the median property value of Beverly Hills soared to \$1,000,000, Ladera Heights stagnated at \$442,000. Nevertheless, the median property value in 2000 of Ladera Heights nearly doubled the Los Angeles city median of \$221,600 and more than tripled the national median of \$119,600. Indeed, African American entertainers, professional athletes, politicians, and

⁷ Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 226-229 (quote from Trible on p. 227); Widener, *Black Arts West*, 283-287; *Leimert Park: The Story of a Village*.

other professionals continued to move to these enclaves and help maintain their esteemed reputation.⁸

But probably the most notable achievement in the long campaign against housing discrimination was black settlement across the greater Los Angeles area. Once confined to the Eastside, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of African Americans moved into the middle- and working-class communities of Los Angeles proper. By 1970, nearly all of the census tracts situated between Alameda Street (roughly two blocks east of Central Avenue) on the east and the Crenshaw district on the west, Washington Boulevard on the north and Artesia Boulevard on the south, were comprised of at least 75 percent black populations. According to the 1980 census, African Americans began to take up residence beyond those borders and migrate further west of the Crenshaw district into Culver City.⁹

As blacks moved westward and crossed the city's unofficial and arbitrary racial borders, the perimeters of Eastside and Westside Los Angeles also shifted. The "Eastside" became more expansive, covering an increasingly larger portion of Los Angeles proper, while the "Westside" shifted northward, especially north of the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10). As the Eastside spread westward, more and more publications included the affluent communities of the Crenshaw district in their descriptions of "South Central" Los Angeles. For the middle- and upper-class residents of the Crenshaw

⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Characteristics of the Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics: California, 1980*, sec. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983). For 1990 and 2000 census figures, see American FactFinder at the United States Census Bureau website www.census.gov (accessed 6 June 2010).

⁹ See census maps in Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 213-216.

district, who had worked tirelessly to maintain their community's esteemed reputation, the designation "South Central" felt like an insult. South Central Los Angeles, a name initially used to describe the communities south of Central Avenue, connoted a majority black area devastated by poverty and violence. In an effort to diffuse the negative connotations, in a unanimous vote in 2003, the Los Angeles city council changed the name to "South Los Angeles." Although critics doubted that the modification would resolve the deep-seated problems of drug use and gang violence in the area, the measure illustrated the continual struggle over racism in the city.¹⁰

The campaign against racial discrimination could not overcome underlying white racism and fear. While blacks surmounted racial barriers and moved into the racially restricted enclaves of Los Angeles, as the census figures indicated, whites packed their belongings and moved away from the central city. As historian Daniel Widener pointed out in his discussion of Leimert Park, the racial shift toward a black majority remained "symptomatic of larger problems."¹¹ The history of government-supported, court-endorsed housing discrimination served as a key element in helping maintain residential segregation. But many other factors, from the perpetuation of black stereotypes in American culture to the failures of the public education system, inflamed the city's racial divisions. White exodus had far-reaching consequences on the urban landscape. Residential areas as well as their surrounding public facilities resegregated. The student

¹⁰ Paul Feldman, "Neighborhoods in L.A. It's All in a Name," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 1989, 1; Matea Gold and Greg Braxton, "Considering South-Central by Another Name," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 2003, B3; Lynell George, "What It Is. (And What It Was)," *Los Angeles Times, West Magazine*, 8 October 2006, 14; "Editorial: What's in a Name? South Los Angeles Will Still Be South Central," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 11 April 2003, N14; "A Spin By Any Other Name," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April 2003, E13.

¹¹ Widener, *Black Arts West*, 286.

populations of the local public schools shifted from mostly white to majority black. Moreover, while the communities of the Crenshaw district and Ladera Heights remained highly esteemed, many of the adjacent enclaves deteriorated. Through the second half of the twentieth century, the formerly desirable communities of Inglewood and Culver City, for instance, gained reputations as rundown and dangerous.

In that same period, as blacks settled in Los Angeles proper, whites migrated outward from the central city. Some moved northward, into areas such as Pasadena, the San Fernando Valley, and Ventura County. Others relocated eastward into San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, or southward into Orange County, and still others migrated further westward, near the sandy white beaches of the Pacific Ocean. Overall, they aimed to escape urban congestion, live near public schools that remained unscathed by busing, and build what scholars have dubbed another “white spot” in greater Los Angeles.¹² In an interview conducted in 1982, George A. Beavers, Jr., Golden State Mutual cofounder and long-time Los Angeles resident, recollected the triumphs over the city’s arbitrary racial borders. “There was a time when there were no Negroes west of Central Avenue. Well, they moved over to San Pedro [Street]. They moved the line over to San Pedro, then to Figueroa [Street], then to Vermont [Avenue]. Now, let’s see, then they got—Then they got to Crenshaw [Boulevard].” But as blacks surmounted the racial borders, whites perpetuated housing segregation by creating new limitations. While

¹² See census maps in Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 213-214. For works on the “white spot,” see Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2005), ch. 2; and Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), ch. 2.

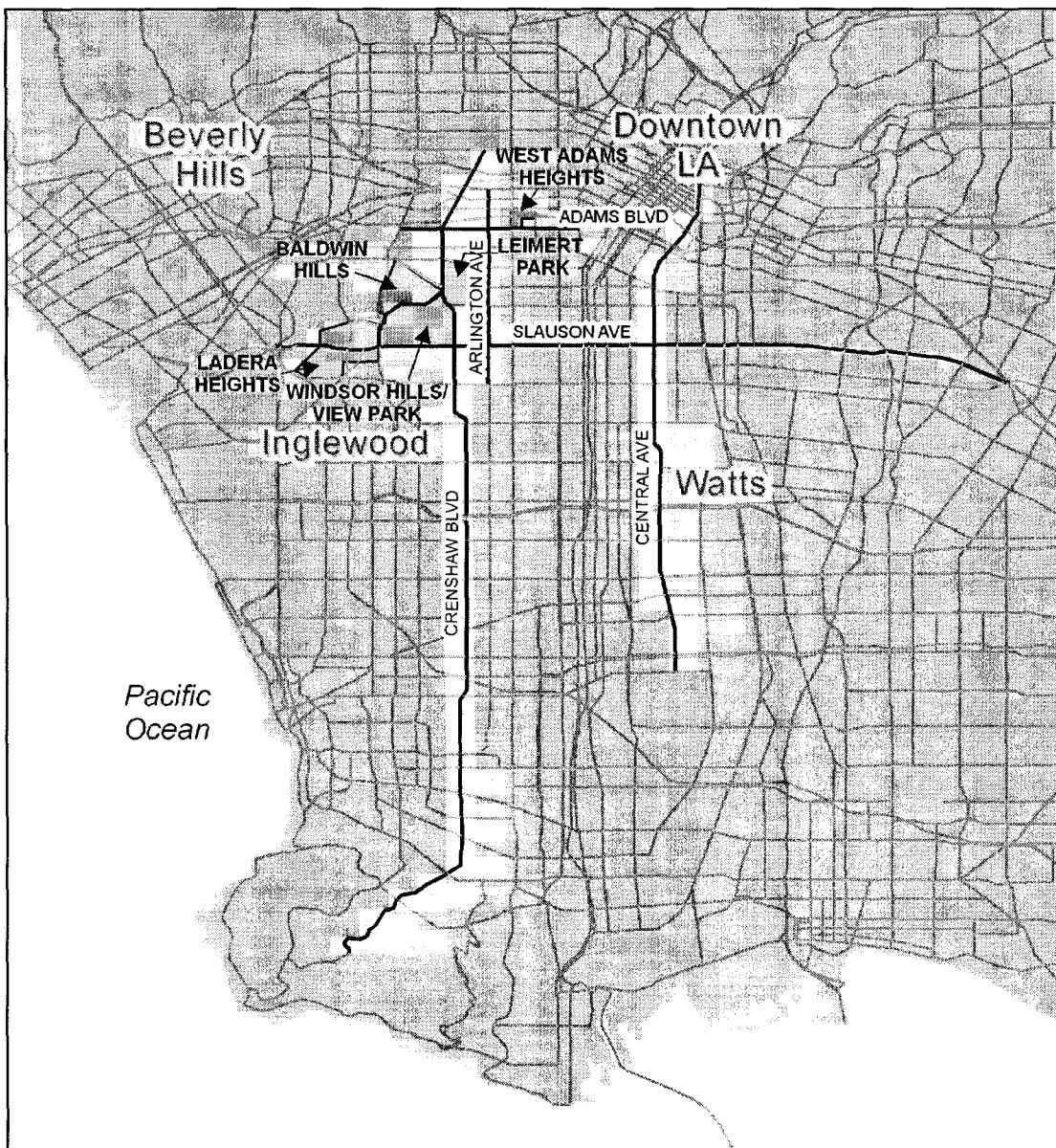
Beavers astutely quipped, “They can’t live in the ocean,” whites tried their best to live as far apart from people of color.¹³

¹³ George Beavers, “In Quest of Full Citizenship,” interview by Ranford B. Hopkins, (University of California, Los Angeles: Oral History Program, 1985), UCLA/SC, 20-21.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MAP

NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE “BLACK BEVERLY HILLS”



Created by Fay Rubin, Complex Systems Research Center, University of New Hampshire.

APPENDIX B: TABLES

Table 1
Number and Proportion of Blacks and Whites in the City of Los Angeles, 1850-1970

Year	Total Population	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Blacks	Number of Whites	Percentage of Whites
1850	1,610	12	0.8	1,598	99.3
1880	11,183	102	0.9	10,379	92.8
1890	50,395	1,258	2.5	47,205	93.7
1900	102,479	2,131	2.1	98,082	95.7
1910	319,198	7,599	2.4	305,307	95.7
1920	576,673	15,579	2.7	434,807	75.4
1930	1,238,048	38,894	3.1	937,826	75.8
1940	1,504,277	63,774	4.2	1,191,182	79.2
1950	1,970,358	171,209	8.7	1,511,719	76.7
1960	2,479,015	334,916	13.5	2,061,808	83.2
1970	2,816,061	503,606	17.9	2,173,600	77.2

Based on data from the *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853); *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, vol. 19, pt. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887); *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Characteristics of the Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942); Lawrence B. de Graaf and Quintard Taylor, “Introduction: African Americans in California History, California in African American History,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 15. Data on the black population for 1850 consists of the county of Los Angeles, whereas the other figures include the city of Los Angeles.

Table 2
Number and Proportion of Blacks and Whites in the State of California, 1850-1970

Year	Total Population	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Blacks	Number of Whites	Percentage of Whites
1850	92,597	965	1.0	91,632	99.0
1880	864,694	6,018	0.7	767,181	95.4
1890	1,213,398	11,322	0.9	1,111,833	91.6
1900	1,485,053	11,045	0.7	1,402,727	94.5
1910	2,377,549	21,645	0.9	2,259,672	95.0
1920	3,426,861	38,763	1.1	3,264,711	92.3
1930	5,677,251	81,048	1.4	5,040,247	88.8
1940	6,907,387	124,306	1.8	6,596,763	95.5
1950	10,586,223	462,172	4.4	9,915,173	93.7
1960	15,717,204	883,861	5.6	14,455,230	92.0
1970	19,953,134	1,397,138	7.0	16,343,611	81.9

Based on data from the *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853); *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, vol. 19, pt. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887); *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Characteristics of the Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942); Lawrence B. de Graaf and Quintard Taylor, “Introduction: African Americans in California History, California in African American History,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, eds. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 15. Data on the black population for 1850 consists of the county of Los Angeles, whereas the other figures include the city of Los Angeles.

Table 3
Racial Composition of Housing Units in West Adams Heights, 1940-1960

Year	Total Occupied Units	Units Occupied by People of Color	Percentage of Units Occupied by People of Color
1940	599	5	0.8
1950	763	175	22.9
1960	750	595	79.3

Based on data from *Sixteenth Census, 1940*, vol. 3, *Housing Block Statistics; United States Census of Housing: 1950, Block Statistics, Los Angeles, California*, vol. 5, pt. 100 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952). To get the population in West Adams Heights, I added the figures from the blocks within Western Avenue, Washington Boulevard, Normandie Avenue, Twenty-third Street, La Salle Avenue, and Adams Boulevard, from census tract 208. The census of 1940 and 1950 classified residents as “white” or “nonwhite.” According to the instructions of the 1940 census, “‘Nonwhite’ comprises Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, or other nonwhite race, and persons of mixed white and nonwhite parentage” (p. 4). The 1950 census used the same definition.

Table 4
Black and White Population of the Affluent Communities of the Crenshaw District,
1950-1980

Locale	Date	Total Population	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Blacks	Number of Whites	Percentage of Whites
Leimert Park	1950	13,280	51	0.4	13,218	99.5
	1960	12,981	3,897	30.0	6,717	51.8
	1970	13,520	9,351	69.2	1,746	12.9
	1980	11,973	9,779	81.7	690	5.8
View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills	1950	10,555	25	0.2	10,520	99.7
	1960	12,206	512	4.2	11,543	94.6
	1970	12,268	7,678	62.6	4,112	33.5
	1980	12,101	10,031	82.9	1,556	12.9
Baldwin Hills Estates	1950	4,364	1	0.02	4,356	99.8
	1960	3,693	110	3.0	3,523	95.4
	1970	4,365	3,263	74.8	823	18.9
	1980	4,303	3,865	89.8	266	6.2
Baldwin Hills Vista	1950	2,655	2	0.1	2,651	99.9
	1960	4,424	6	1.0	4,390	99.2
	1970	4,392	1,502	34.2	2,310	52.6
	1980	3,337	2,531	75.9	474	14.2

Based on data from *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983).

Table 5
Median Property Values in Los Angeles and the Affluent Communities of the Crenshaw District,
1950-1980

	1950	1960	Rate of Increase from 1950 to 1960	1970	Rate of Increase from 1960 to 1970	1980	Rate of Increase from 1970 to 1980
<i>City of Los Angeles</i>	\$10,804	\$17,300	60.1%	\$26,700	54.3%	\$96,100	259.9%
	\$14,158 and to	\$15,000		\$20,600 to		\$55,100 to	167.4 to 179.3%
Leimert Park	\$15,689	\$22,300	5.9 to 42.1%	\$29,000	30.0 to 37.3%	\$81,000	
View Park,		over		over			
View Heights, and Windsor Hills	\$19,280	\$27,000	40.0%	\$35,000	29.6%	\$111,500	218.5%
Baldwin Hills Estates	\$15,179	\$25,000+	64.7%	\$44,200	76.8%	\$135,200	205.8%
Baldwin Hills Vista	\$14,993	\$25,000+	66.7%	\$37,200	48.8%	\$115,900	211.5%

Based on data from U.S. *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); U.S. *Census of Population and Housing: 1960*, *Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970*, *Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980*, *Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983).

Table 6
Median Annual Family Income in Los Angeles and the Affluent Communities of the Crenshaw District,
1950-1980

	1950	1960	1950 to 1960	Rate of Increase from		1960 to 1970	1980	Rate of Increase from 1970 to 1980
				1970	1960 to 1970			
<i>City of Los Angeles</i>	\$2,879	\$6,896	139.5%	\$10,535	52.7%	\$15,735	49.3%	
	\$4,224 and to	\$6,316		\$10,111 to		\$12,982 to		
Leimert Park	\$4,677	\$9,185	49.5 to 96.3%	\$12,625	37.4 to 60.0%	\$19,830	28.3 to 57.0%	
View Park, View Heights, and Windsor Hills	\$5,962	\$11,000	84.5%	\$14,000	27.2%	\$23,980	71.2%	
Baldwin Hills Estates	---	\$11,873	---	\$14,907	25.5%	\$21,432	43.7%	
Baldwin Hills Vista	---	\$9,307	---	\$13,000	39.6%	\$28,274	117.4%	

Based on data from U.S. *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); U.S. *Census of Population and Housing: 1960*, *Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970*, *Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980*, *Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983).

Table 7
Percentage of Racial and Ethnic Composition of Public Schools in the Crenshaw District,
1966-1980

Schools	Year	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	White
Baldwin Hills Elementary School	1966	18.0	16.1	5.2	---	60.7
	1970	16.8	56.7	4.9	---	20.9
	1975	3.8	93.0	1.2	---	2.0
	1980	1.5	65.9	3.8	---	28.8
Hillcrest Elementary School	1966	5.3	47.3	4.5	---	42.1
	1970	1.3	95.8	1.1	---	1.9
	1975	0.7	95.8	2.5	0.1	0.8
	1980	3.1	78.8	5.0	---	13.1
42nd Street Elementary School	1966	12.3	83.4	1.2	---	3.2
	1970	5.6	91.6	1.5	0.1	0.9
	1975	3.2	95.9	0.3	0.2	0.5
	1980	1.7	94.2	3.4	---	0.7
54th Street Elementary School	1966	6.4	64.3	5.8	---	22.1
	1970	4.8	88.0	3.2	0.1	3.7
	1975	1.6	95.7	0.6	---	2.1
	1980	6.8	62.9	12.9	0.3	17.1
Windsor Hills Elementary School	1966	6.4	74.3	1.1	---	18.3
	1970	2.3	89.2	0.3	---	7.9
	1975	0.4	97.8	0.3	---	1.5
	1980	3.6	54.4	7.5	0.3	34.2
Audubon Junior High School	1966	20.5	58.6	3.2	0.04	17.3
	1970	21.1	75.4	1.5	---	1.6
	1975	9.5	89.4	0.5	0.4	0.3
	1980	2.4	93.9	1.5	2.1	0.1
Dorsey High School	1966	19.7	68.8	1.9	0.03	9.5
	1970	20.7	76.2	1.7	0.2	0.4
	1975	8.4	89.2	0.8	1.2	0.4
	1980	3.3	92.9	3.7	0.05	0.1
Crenshaw High School (opened 1968)	1970	1.9	96.2	1.4	---	0.4
	1975	0.4	99.1	0.4	---	0.1
	1980	0.2	98.6	1.1	---	0.1

Based on data from Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles City Schools, "Racial and Ethnic Survey," Fall 1966, LASMC, Box 138, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles City Schools, "Racial and Ethnic Survey," Fall 1970, LASMC, Box 139, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles Unified School District, "Racial and Ethnic Survey," Fall 1975, HVS, Box 10, Folder 4, UCLA/SC; Research and Evaluation Branch, Los Angeles Unified School District, "Racial and Ethnic Survey," Fall 1980, LASMC, Box 139, UCLA/SC.

Table 8
Black and White Population of Ladera Heights and Inglewood, 1950-2000

Locale	Date	Total Population	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Blacks	Number of Whites	Percentage of Whites
Ladera Heights	1950	1,097	2	0.2	1,095	99.8
	1960	5,064	11	0.2	5,036	99.5
	1970	6,079	40	0.7	5,898	97.0
	1980	6,634	2,625	39.6	3,600	54.3
	1990	6,316	3,634	57.5	2,326	36.8
	2000	6,568	4,647	70.8	1,318	20.1
City of Inglewood	1950	46,185	35	0.1	46,025	99.7
	1960	63,390	29	0.1	62,862	99.2
	1970	89,985	10,066	11.2	77,331	85.9
	1980	94,245	54,010	57.3	27,711	29.4
	1990	109,602	56,861	51.9	19,073	17.4
	2000	112,262	52,842	47.1	21,451	19.1

Based on data from *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1990, General Population Characteristics: California*, sec. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

Table 9
Median Property Values in Inglewood and Ladera Heights, 1950-2000

City of Inglewood	1950	\$8,013 to \$14,466	Ladera Heights	1950	---
	1960	\$18,800		1960	\$35,000+
Rate of Increase, 1950-1960	---		Rate of Increase, 1950-1960	---	
	1970	\$25,000		1970	\$50,000+
Rate of Increase, 1960-1970	40.2%		Rate of Increase, 1960-1970	93.9%	
	1980	\$73,500		1980	\$188,100
Rate of Increase, 1970-1980	37.8%		Rate of Increase, 1970-1980	47.6%	
	1990	\$170,400		1990	\$433,100
Rate of Increase, 1980-1990	131.8%		Rate of Increase, 1980-1990	130.2%	
	2000	\$175,000		2000	\$442,000
Rate of Increase, 1990-2000	2.6%		Rate of Increase, 1990-2000	2.0%	

Based on data from *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1990, General Population Characteristics: California*, sec. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

Table 10
Median Annual Family Income in Inglewood and Ladera Heights, 1950-2000

City of Inglewood		\$2,896 to \$4,704	Ladera Heights	1950	---
	1950				
	1960	\$7,764		1960	\$13,128
	Rate of Increase, 1950-1960	---		Rate of Increase, 1950-1960	---
	1970	\$10,892		1970	\$25,461
	Rate of Increase, 1960-1970	32.9%		Rate of Increase, 1960-1970	42.8%
	1980	\$15,016		1980	\$37,592
	Rate of Increase, 1970-1980	194.0%		Rate of Increase, 1970-1980	276.2%
	1990	\$32,077		1990	\$72,894
	Rate of Increase, 1980-1990	113.6%		Rate of Increase, 1980-1990	93.9%
	2000	\$36,439		2000	\$103,174
	Rate of Increase, 1990-2000	13.5%		Rate of Increase, 1990-2000	41.5%

Based on data from *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 3, *Census Tract Statistics*, ch. 28 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952); *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970, Census Tracts*, Final Report, *Los Angeles-Long Beach-Calif*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1980, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1990, General Population Characteristics: California*, sec. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

Table 11
African American Enrollment in Select IUSD Schools, 1965-1970

	1965-66	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69	1969-70
Total Number of Black Elementary Enrollment	380	570	841	1,122	1,421
Total Black Enrollment at Freeman, Warren Lane, and Woodworth Elementary Schools	380	556	790	1,050	1,305
<i>Total Percentage of Black Elementary Enrollment</i>	<i>7.0</i>	<i>8.2</i>	<i>11.8</i>	<i>15.6</i>	<i>19.7</i>
Daniel Freeman Elementary School	44.4	56.6	68.1	78.5	84.7
Warren Lane Elementary School	27.4	38.3	52.7	62.8	73.8
Clyde Woodworth Elementary School	7.1	12.6	19.4	31.4	40.2
Total Number of Black Secondary Enrollment	208	319	538	656	1,060
Total Black Enrollment at Monroe Junior High and Morningside Senior High Schools	208	315	533	644	1,038
<i>Total Black Secondary Enrollment</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>5.0</i>	<i>8.4</i>	<i>10.4</i>	<i>17.3</i>
Albert Monroe Junior High School	7.6	13.4	20.5	32.4	47.5
Morningside Senior High School	6.8	9.5	17.0	17.0	31.0

Based on data from Memorandum of Points and Authorities in Support of Petition for Peremptory Writ of Mandate, *Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District*, L.A. No. 973669, Filed 19 March 1970, pp. 14-15, LASC.

Table 12
Percentage of African American Enrollment in Select IUSD Elementary Schools,
1968-1969 and 1976-1977

West side Elementary Schools	1968-1969		1976-1977		East side Elementary Schools	1968-1969	1976-1977
	1968-1969	1976-1977	1968-1969	1976-1977			
Beulah Payne	0.0	54.1			Center Park	0.1	81.9
Centinela	2.1	68.6			Clyde Woodworth	31.4	95.4
Frank D. Parent	0.6	65.8			Daniel Freeman	78.2	82.7
Highland	0.0	70.6			James Kew-Andrew Bennett	6.9	92.6
La Tijera	2.0	88.8			Warren Lane	62.5	96.8
Oak Street	0.9	24.6					
William H. Kelso	0.6	77.4					

Based on the table from Edna Bonacich and Robert F. Goodman, *Deadlock in School Desegregation: A Case Study of Inglewood, California* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 30; and the table from “Ethnic Survey by Individual Schools, School Year 1976-77,” from International Material, *Janel E. Johnson, et al. v. Inglewood Unified School District, L.A. No. 973669*, Filed 2 March 1977, LASC. The court document, “Ethnic Survey,” excluded from its 1976-1977 data the west side institution, W. Claude Hudnall Elementary School. To create consistency, I followed the example made by Bonacich and Goodman and combined the data of Andrew Bennett (grades K-3) and James Kew (grades 4-6) Elementary Schools.

APPENDIX C: FIGURES



Figure 1. Front view of the two-story estate of Judge Charles Silent, situated around 23rd and Figueroa Streets, in the center of Chester Place, no date. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

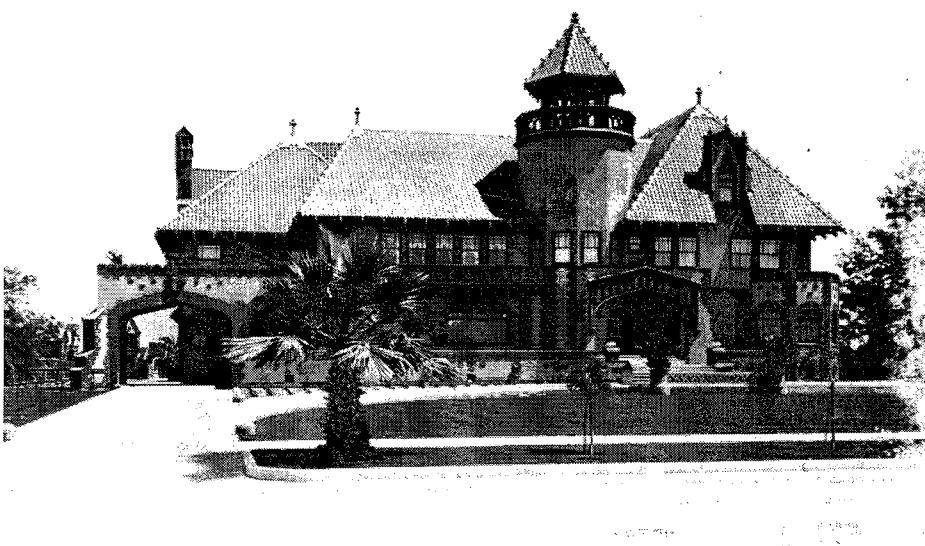


Figure 2. The 10,500-square-foot, three-story, Gothic revival mansion of Edward L. Doheny, located at 8 Chester Place, no date. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

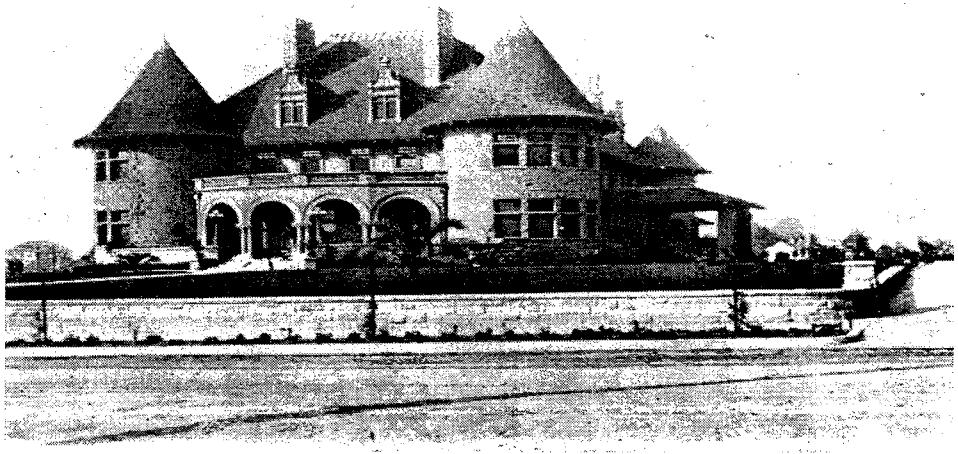


Figure 3. The two-acre residence of Frederick Hasting Rindle, or “Castle Rindle,” located at 2263 South Harvard Boulevard, became the centerpiece of West Adams Heights, ca. 1902. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4. Etta Goff, sister of Hattie McDaniel, at work as a housekeeper in the backyard of a West Adams estate, ca. 1926. Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hattie McDaniel Collection. Used by permission of Kim Goff-Crews.

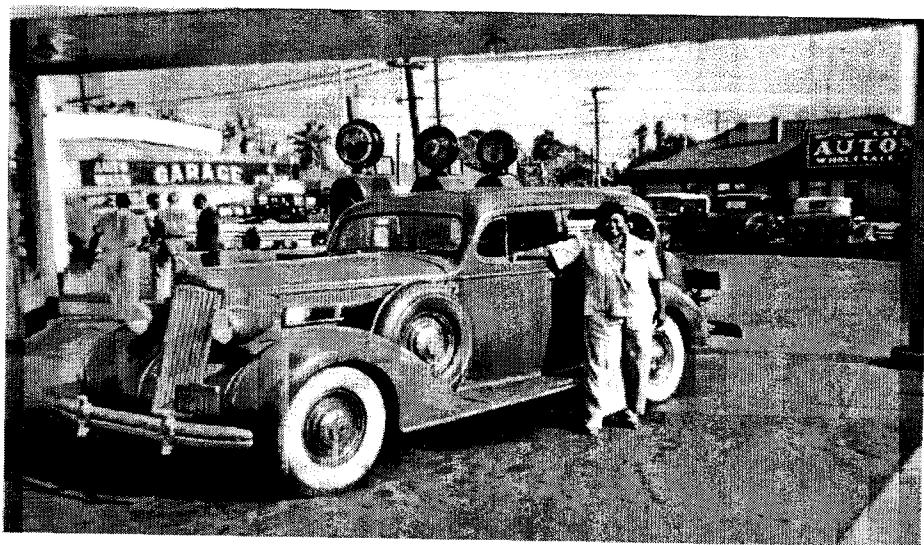


Figure 5. Hattie McDaniel, standing in front of her green Packard automobile, Los Angeles, ca. 1940. Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hattie McDaniel Collection. Used by permission of Kim Goff-Crews.



Figure 6. Gathering at the South Harvard Boulevard residence of Hattie McDaniel, in West Adams Heights, with (top row, right to left) McDaniel, Louise Beavers, a neighbor, (bottom row, right to left) Esther Williams, Greg Belcher, and Janet Blair, 1948. Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hattie McDaniel Collection. Used by permission of Kim Goff-Crews.



Figure 7. Spanish-inspired apartments, looking northward on Eighth Avenue, near Vernon Avenue in Leimert Park, 1929. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

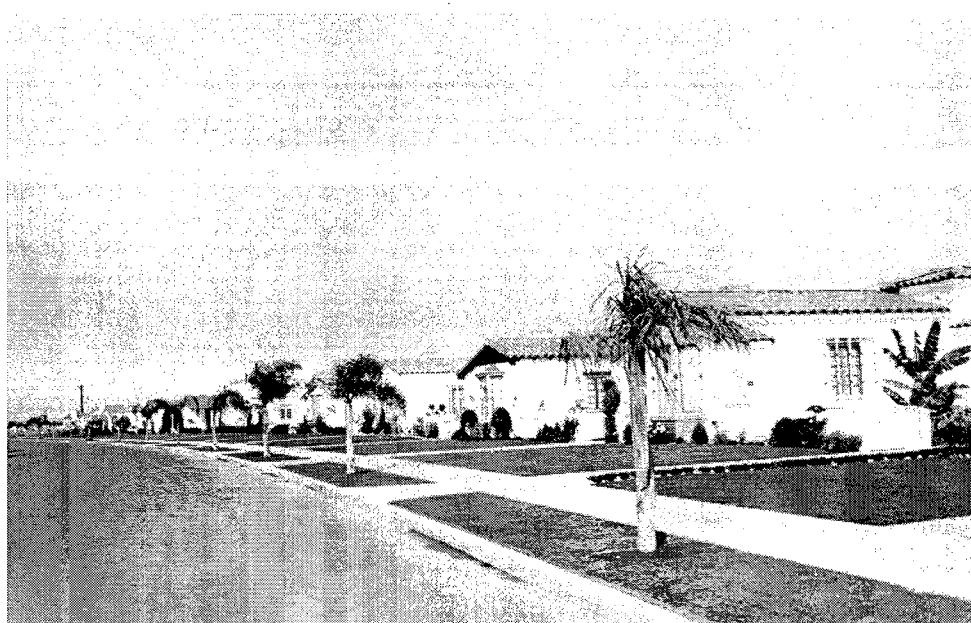


Figure 8. Spanish colonial style, single-family homes in Leimert Park, 1940. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

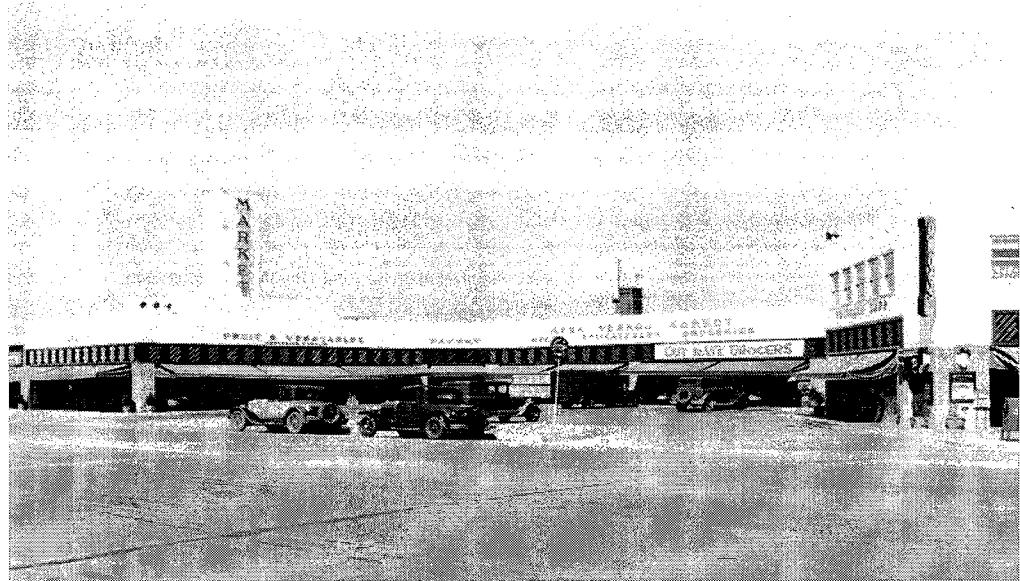


Figure 9. Mesa Vernon Market, Leimert Park, 1931. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

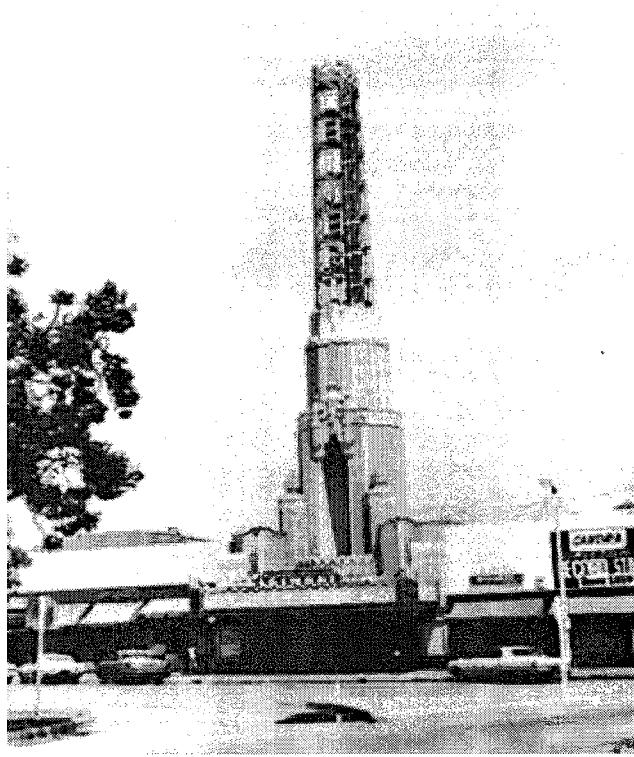


Figure 10.
Leimert Theater, Leimert Park, 1968.
Courtesy of Los Angeles Public
Library Photo Collection.

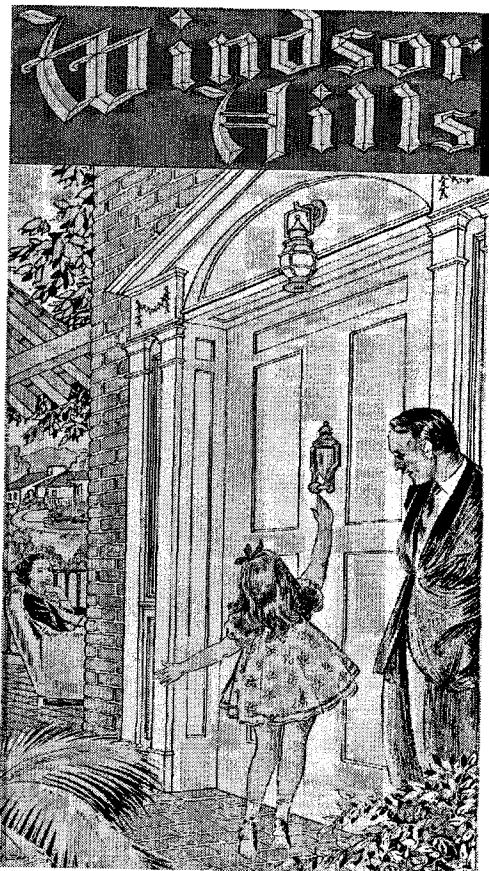


Figure 11.
Front cover of brochure for Windsor Hills, ca. 1938.
Courtesy of Fritz B. Burns Papers,
Charles Von der Ahe Library, Special Collections,
Loyola Marymount University.



Figure 12. Baldwin Hills, ca. 1940s. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 13. Deloy Edwards (second from left), realty office on Buckingham Road, located a few blocks north of Baldwin Hills Estates, ca. late 1950s. Used by permission of Deloy Edwards.



Figure 14. United Civil Rights Council (UCRC) march to headquarters of the Los Angeles Board of Education, June 24, 1963. Courtesy of Los Angeles *Herald Examiner* Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 15. Tenth day of the hunger strike for school integration, led by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the Los Angeles Board of Education headquarters, September 23, 1963. Courtesy of Los Angeles *Herald Examiner* Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

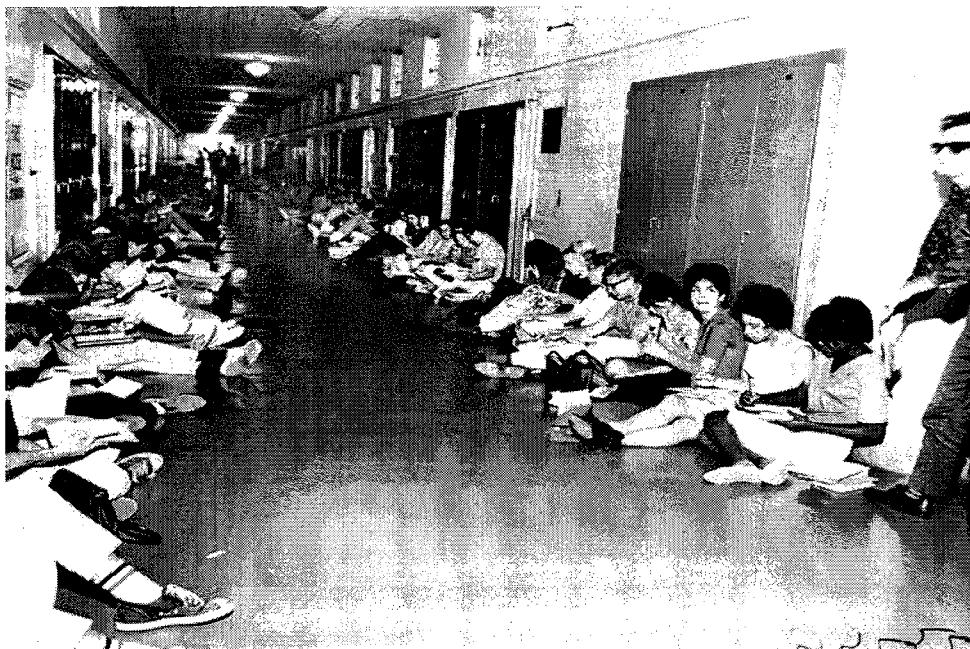


Figure 16. Sit-in for school integration in the hallway of the Los Angeles Board of Education headquarters, October 24, 1963. Courtesy of Los Angeles *Herald Examiner* Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 17. “The ‘9 to 5’ Liberal,” by Beverly Hills High School art teacher, Baldwin Hills Vista homeowner, and African American Lyle Suter. Printed in the 1968 summer edition of Crenshaw Neighbors’s quarterly journal *The Integrator*. Courtesy of Southern California Library.



Figure 18. Second annual Watts Summer Festival, August 5, 1967. Courtesy of Los Angeles *Herald Examiner* Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 19. Parade float sponsored by the Watts Writers Workshop at Watts Summer Festival, 1968. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

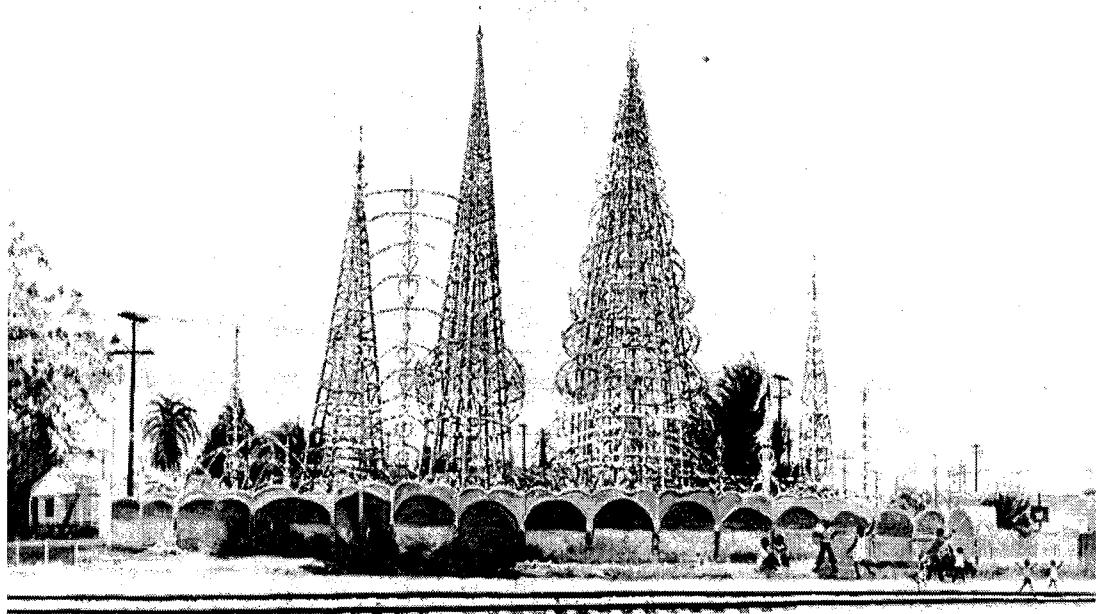


Figure 20. Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, date unknown. Courtesy of Los Angeles Herald Examiner Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection



Figure 21. Ruth Waddy displaying her artwork, 1966. Courtesy of *Los Angeles Times* Photographic Archive, University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections.



Figure 22. John Outterbridge at Watts Towers, 1977. Courtesy of *Los Angeles Times* Photographic Archive, University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections.

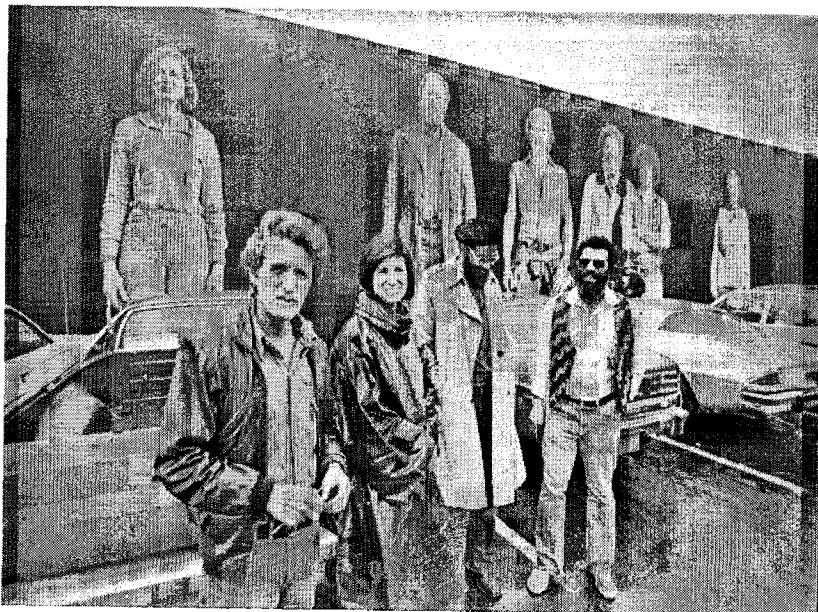


Figure 23. Muralists (from left) Kent Twitchell, Marta Chaffee-Stang, Alonzo Davis, and Oliver Nowlin standing in front of Twitchell's "Six Los Angeles Artists," 1980. Courtesy of *Los Angeles Times* Photographic Archive, University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections.

University of New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564

May 18, 2006

Mandel, Jennifer
History, Horton SSC
241 S. Main Street, Apt. A
Newmarket, NH 03857

IRB #: 3710

Study: "Black Beverly Hills:" The Rise of Los Angeles' Elite Black Neighborhoods, 1930s-1970s

Approval Date: 5/18/2006

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period, you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Harvard Sitkoff

APPENDIX E: LIST OF ACRONYMS

In Text

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
AWA	Art West Associated, Incorporated
AWAN	Art-West Associated North, Incorporated
BAC	Black Arts Council
CDC	California Democratic Council
CETA	Comprehensive Employment and Training Act
CHP	Committee for Home Protection
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CN	Crenshaw Neighbors, Incorporated
COIN	Council of Integrated Neighborhoods
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CREA	California Real Estate Association
DMC	Democratic Minority Conference
FEPC	Fair Employment Practice Commission
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
HOLC	Home Owners' Loan Corporation
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
IUSD	Inglewood Unified School District
JACL	Japanese American Citizens League
LACMA	Los Angeles County Museum of Art
LARB	Los Angeles Realty Board
LAUSD	Los Angeles Unified School District
LHCA	Ladera Heights Civic Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
UC Berkeley	University of California, Berkeley
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
UCRC	United Civil Rights Council
UGMA	Underground Musicians Association
UGMAA	Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension
UN	United Neighbors
USC	University of Southern California
WAHIA	West Adams Heights Improvement Association

In Footnotes

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California Records
CAB	Charlotta A. Bass Collection
COPH	Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton
FBB	Fritz B. Burns Papers
HL	Henry E. Huntington Library
HVS	Helene V. Smookler Collection
JAF	John Anson Ford Papers
KH	Kenneth Hahn Collection
LACL	Los Angeles County Law Library
LASC	Los Angeles Superior Court Archives
LASMC	Los Angeles School Monitoring Committee Records
LAUL	Los Angeles Urban League Records
LMU	Loyola Marymount University, Charles Von der Ahe Library, Special Collections
NAACP/LA	Los Angeles NAACP Branch Files, 1913-1939
NF/GSM	Nickerson Family, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company Papers
Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5	Papers of the NAACP, pt. 5, The Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955
RRCC	County of Los Angeles Recorder-Registrar/County Clerk
SCL	Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
UCB	Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
UCLA/MR	Microfilm Room, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles
UCLA/SC	Special Collections, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles

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