Underdevelopment in Sacramento:
The Processes of the Depression of Wealth Accumulation for Black Urban Communities in the Post-War United States, and a Prospectus for Further Research on Sacramento’s West End Neighborhood

Jonathan L. Brimer
History 281
December 19, 2021
Prof. R. Mulholland
The development of the United States middle-class is a point of pride for many Americans as it marks the rise of the nation’s economic prosperity after WWII. Increases in industrial production due to the war, a host of social spending from New Deal programs, and millions of veterans with access to GI Bill benefits, expanded the wealth and quality of life in the US at a rate that surpassed the rest of the Western world. While a majority of the population directly benefited from the economic expansion, many were systemically excluded from the middle-class as it was emerging in the post-war era. African American’s and other persons of color were disqualified from programs, occupations, and neighborhoods based on explicitly racist grounds. Government and private institutions enacted regulations that ensured that relatively few Black Americans would be able to reach the middle-class compared to the white population. As a result, African Americans have disproportionately experienced poverty, incarceration, and a lack of opportunity to improve their social standing. Black Americans statistically earn less, are less educated, and have less household wealth than the average white family. Systemic racism has not halted the socioeconomic development of all African Americans, there are many stories of success in Black communities around the country, but it has severely depressed the growth of the overall population. The African American population has therefore been forced into a state of underdevelopment by political, social, and economic structurers within the United States.

Underdevelopment is a concept typically applied to populations in the former colonies of the developing world. The theory of underdevelopment asserts that wealthy industrial nations are dependent on the exploitation of developing nations natural resources to maintain their wealth. The same theory applies to the minority populations of the US, but in place of natural resources, they are exploited for cheap labor. As Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton write, “Perhaps the
most vicious result of colonialism- in Africa and this country- was that it purposefully, maliciously and with reckless abandon relegated the black man to a subordinated, inferior status in the society. The individual was considered and treated as a lowly animal, not to be housed properly, or given adequate medical services, and by no means a decent education.\textsuperscript{1} 

The African American population has experienced centuries of underdevelopment that have disproportionately left them in poverty, underpaid, and without access to many of the same opportunities of a white people in similar socioeconomic positions.

This paper will outline the processes and impacts of underdevelopment in the United States. I will develop a background on American underdevelopment using scholarship on poverty, migration patterns, and housing segregation. These factors intersect to create an environment of underdevelopment. This paper also offers a prospectus for further research into the subject as it applies to Sacramento. Underdevelopment is present in every urban community in the United States. Understanding its processes and consequences offers a lens for the analysis of the disparities in socioeconomic development throughout the country. The lasting impacts of intentional process to underdevelop the African American population remain painfully visible today. As demands for solutions to social and economic inequality grow in America, the need for research into their causes and impacts is becoming increasingly prevalent today.

**Historiography**

A persistent rate of poverty is one of the most significant consequences of the underdevelopment in the US African American population. Understanding the nature of poverty and the culture that surrounds it is necessary to comprehend the impact of underdevelopment on

the family and the individual. Michael Harrington’s 1962 study on poverty, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, is a foundational text in field of American economic inequality.

Using qualitative data collected from years of field research, Harrington examines the processes that contribute to poverty, the various ways in which it impacts the security of those who experience it and how public and private institutions conceal it from the view of the middle and upper-classes of society. Poverty is a constant threat to the survival of those living at the margins of society and consumes every aspect of the lives of those who suffer under its conditions.

Harrington writes:

> In short, being poor is not one aspect of a person’s life in this country; it is his life. Taken as a whole, poverty is a culture. Taken on a family level, it has the same quality. These are people who lack education and skill, who have bad health, poor housing, low levels of aspiration, and high levels of mental distress. They are, in the language of sociology, “multiproblem” families. Each disability is the more intense because it exists within a web of disabilities. And if one problem is solved, and others are left constant, there is little to gain. ²

The legion of oppressions that the most vulnerable members of society suffer intersect to produce the state of poverty. It is a psychologically brutal condition that destroys any sense of hope in the individual because all their energy is focused on surviving each day. Once one falls into its poverties grasp, it becomes nearly impossible to escape. Poverty is often a hereditary condition, passed from one generation to the next, thus establishing a culture of poverty that expands and persists with time. Harrington’s analysis of the conditions of poverty provides a vivid window into the individual experiences of the poor communities of America. To further reinforce the saliency of his work, many of Harrington’s case studies remain tragically accurate fifty years after his book was first published.

Harrington’s analysis of poverty and its specific impacts on African American communities is particularly poignant. He explains that “There has never been a disability in

American society to equal racial prejudice. It is the most effective single instrument for keeping people down that has ever been found.”

Racism compounds the impacts of poverty because it is deeply engrained in nearly every public and private institutions in the country. In organizations designed to provide supportive services to women, the elderly, or the disabled, the color of one’s skin still results in restrictions to access or quality of service. Furthermore, even when a person of color is able to experience a gain in their socioeconomic standing, the opportunities for future growth become increasingly scarce. Many of the same problems found in poor white families are also present in Black families, but the intersections of race and class create additional obstacles that ensure the financial growth is severely limited for people of color.

One of the most significant factors contributing to poverty and underdevelopment in African American communities of America is restricted access to adequate and affordable housing. A home is one of the greatest investments that the average American will make, providing benefits far greater than the security of having stable residence. The financial equity gained from homeownership is used by Americans as collateral for further investments. Home equity provides the financial backing for middle-class small business investments, student loans, vacations, and home improvements, all of which result in a further increase equity and income for homeowners and their families. Black American’s, however, were systemically excluded from homeownership and its benefits. Through government regulations, community ordinance, and racism in the banking and real-estate industries, Black Americans were denied access to the credit to purchase property or denied the ability to purchase a home if they had secured a loan. Those able to become homeowners often had to go through extraordinary lengths to do so, such as concealing identities or building homes on empty lots. For many Black American’s,

---

3 Harrington, *The Other America*, 148.
4 Harrington, *The Other America*, 76.
barriers to homeownership prevented them from moving out of cramped poverty-stricken segregated neighborhoods.

Richard Rothstein’s 2017 book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* provides a comprehensive study of the processes used to prevent African Americans from entering real estate markets, and consequently, the middle-class. Real estate developers, banks, and homeowners’ associations coordinated with local, state, and federal agencies to participate in the *de jure* segregation of neighborhoods across the country. Richard Rothstein’s research shows that it was an intentional strategy by the government and real-estate industry to keep neighborhoods racially segregated. Although the Fourteenth Amendment had implicitly made segregation in housing unconstitutional, as did multiple Supreme Court decisions that followed, federal agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Federal Housing Agency worked with real estate developers to prevent Black families from purchasing homes in white neighborhoods through contractual negotiations and the zoning of neighborhoods based on racial diversity. Rothstein writes that, “the plans reviewed by the FHA included the approved construction materials, the design specifications, the proposed sale price, the neighborhood’s zoning restrictions…, and a commitment to not sell to African Americans.” Because regulations that supported segregation were inserted into loan contracts and titles that were required to start the process of purchasing a home, many African America families did not even attempt to apply for loans, knowing that they would be denied immediately. Housing discrimination, like poverty, created a feeling of hopelessness in the ability for many African Americans to improve their socioeconomic status.

---

The negative repercussions of housing segregation resulted in mass disparity in the accumulation of wealth between Black and white families in the United States. African Americans were excluded from a boom in wealth expansion in the 1950s and 1960s that secured a family’s position in the middle-class for generations. The result was a net gain in wealth accumulation for white families at a rate ninety-percent greater than that of Black families.\textsuperscript{7}

Further increasing the economic oppression, housing in neighborhoods zoned for Black residents became increasingly scarce, raising rents and taxes to higher rates than those in similar white neighborhoods. African American equity was further impacted by infrastructure projects throughout the United States. Federally funded interstate expansion projects were implemented to benefit all Americans, making it easier to travel to work, schools, and for leisure. Yet these programs avoided connecting predominantly Black neighborhoods to the interstate system, and in many cases, demolished racially segregated communities in the process.\textsuperscript{8}

The freeways that Americans use and rely on every day caused the internal displacement of thousands of Black Americans. As the economic standing of white America was expanding at an incredible rate, African American communities were cut-off from the ability to participate, and many were evicted from some of the only neighborhoods they were permitted to live in.

The conditions of endemic poverty and suppressed financial equity for the African American population is directly connected to migration patterns. Until recently, most scholarship on the African American urban history did not extend in scope beyond WWII or outside of migratory destinations in the urban North. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter provide an expansive volume of post-WWII African American urban scholarship in their 2009 collection of edited essays, \textit{African American Urban History Since WWII}. The essays span a broad range of

\\textsuperscript{7} Rothstein, \textit{The Color of Law}, 184-185.
\textsuperscript{8} Rothstein, \textit{The Color of Law}, 189.
topics, from Black and Latin relations in post-War Phoenix, to tourism and consumerism in post-industrial urban environments. James N. Gregory’s essay, “The Second Great Migration: A Historical Overview,” analyzes a second migration of Black Americans out of the South from between the 1940s and 1980s. Beginning in the 1940s, more than five-million African Americans moved away from the South. They moved to the traditional industrial-belt cities in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions, but they also moved to the West, rapidly expanding the African American populations in cities that had seen only a small increase during the Great Migration. The second wave of migrants that moved to cities like San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle experienced increases in earnings and education, especially for women, compared to those in who remained in Southern cities, though their incomes still remained a fraction of their white counterparts.

Increases in earnings as a product of the post-war migrations resulted in an expansion of the Black urban middle-class. However, as Eric S. Brown explains in his essay “The Black Professional Middle Class and the Black Community: Racialized Class Formation in Oakland and the East Bay,” entrenched segregation and proximity to poverty meant that the Black middle-class was not equal to the white middle-class. Racial and class segregation intersected in distinct ways in the destination cities of the post-war migration. In the San Francisco Bay area, racial segregation confined African Americans to only a few parts of the region. To compound segregation issues, Black middle-class migration into integrated middle-class neighborhoods resulted in a white flight from the area. Brown writes, “Many, but not all, of these neighborhoods

---


are “transitional.” That is, when blacks move into a neighborhood, whites often move out.”¹² As African American families experienced increased social mobility, systemic residential segregation continued to impact their prospects for growth.

The intersections of poverty, housing segregation, and limited access to investment for African American families has developed into a state of underdevelopment in the United States. Underdevelopment is often used to define economic growth in the formerly colonized nations of the world, but Manning Marable applies the process to the African American population in How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society. Underdevelopment does not constitute an absence in economic growth, but in disproportionate economic expansion between the metropole and the satellite. In this case, the metropole is white America, and the satellite is the African American population. Marable writes, “Blacks are an integral and necessary part of an imperialistic and powerful society, yet they exist in terms of actual socioeconomic power as a kind of Third World nation.”¹³ Capitalism is dependent on cheap labor, disproportionately found in the African American working-class population of America. The Black population, due to its statistical minority is, conversely, dependent on white Americans for labor and political representation. African Americans have been forced into a state of underdevelopment because they have been denied the ability to gain the capital required to fight against American capitalism and lack the political representation to seek legislative remedies to their oppression.

The evidence of underdevelopment is most visible in the socioeconomic status of African Americans. Wages have not increased for Black Americans at parity with those of white Americans. Marable writes:

“One way of viewing Black income mobility is by comparing Black median incomes between 1970 and 1977 in current dollars and in constant 1977 dollars. The median Black family income in 1970 was $6,279. Seven years later, Black family median income was $9,563, an increase of $3,284. In constant 1977 dollars, however, $6,279 was worth $9,799. Thus, the median Black family income actually declined- 2.4 percent in the period between 1970 and 1977.”14

This resulted in 21.3 percent Black families living in poverty while only 5.9 percent of white families share the same conditions.15 The lack of income parity with inflation has ensured that Black families would not gain the same economic advantages as white families, and, in many cases, became poorer as time passed. Underdevelopment is also visible in the African American middle-class. Black owned businesses have been largely concentrated in the service industries that produce lower profits for owners, and lower incomes for employees. Furthermore, large capitalist corporations actively seek to exploit the Black consumer market, drawing the core patronage away from African American businesses.16 American industry is dependent on a poor working class to ensure profits are not impacted by high labor costs. Governments and industries have worked in concert to ensure that Black Americans comprise a significant proportion of that demographic.

Prospectus on Research of Underdevelopment in the West End

The consequences of the underdevelopment of America’s Black population can be seen in every urban center in the country. The city of Sacramento’s West End neighborhood provides a distinct opportunity to study the consequences underdevelopment in one of the most racially diverse regions of California. The West End neighborhood sits directly west of the Capital grounds, extending eight blocks to the Sacramento River, where it terminates into the cities iconic Tower Bridge. Until the 1950s, the neighborhood boasted a diverse population of

14 Marable, How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America, 57.
15 Marable, How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America, 56.
16 Marable, How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America 153, 159.
residents, many of them migrating to the city to work in the agricultural industry. As a result, the neighborhood was redlined. As Sacramento developed in the post-war economy, the West End lacked the same capital investment and growth in income from its residence that white neighborhoods and suburbs gained. As the result, the neighborhood gained a reputation as the “skid row” of Sacramento, described as a “blight” by locals and politicians visiting the state capital. Although the neighborhood was underdeveloped, it was still a vibrant community. Restaurants, churches, retail, night clubs, and community organizations supported the West Ends residents.

The processes of underdevelopment in Sacramento had been in motion for decades, but they increased exponentially in the mid-twentieth century. Massive federal infrastructure funding drastically altered the landscape of Sacramento in the 1950s. The construction of the I-5 freeway displaced many residents along its route, including parts of the West End, and the city’s historic Japan Town, just as its residence were reestablishing themselves following their internment in concentration camps during the war. The freeway only impacted about three city blocks of the West End. The city and state governments demolished the rest for further redevelopment, using the neighborhoods “blight” as an excuse. The homes, businesses, and community institutions of the Black downtown residents were replaced with post-modern office buildings, a Macy’s, and a long, wide driveway leading directly to the capital building from the freeway. The residents were evicted and relocated to other redlined neighborhoods in Sacramento, or out of the area entirely. The West End was not just underdeveloped, it was erased to make room for the expansion of the white population of Sacramento. This did not only impact the displaced residents; the redevelopment of the West End also caused income to further decrease and housing to become even more scarce for the African American residents throughout Sacramento.
The underdevelopment and redevelopment of the West End is a critical part of the history of Sacramento’s population. Further research into the impacts of the destruction of the neighborhood will increase the collective understanding of how Sacramento has developed since WWII, and has been impacted by the city’s economic growth. Census reports and FHA records held in the national archives provide a wealth of quantitative data to track incomes, home value, populations trends, and more. These records offer statistics for the comparative analysis of the city’s demographics before and after the redevelopment of downtown occurred. The University of Maryland’s T-Races project contains the largest collection of redlining maps in the country, including Sacramento. University of California Riverside’s California Digital Newspaper Collection hosts digital copies of major newspapers from around the state. They provide a variety of newspaper reports on the West End, including opinions from residents and visitors to the neighborhood, as well as events, and advertisements for the neighborhood’s businesses and institutions. The State of California Archives has a plethora of sources and ephemera from the West End, including pictures, planning commission reports, and an extensive oral history collection of the politicians, bureaucrats, and others who planned and executed the redevelopment of the downtown area. Using these resources, research can be conducted on the West End with any number of focuses.

The West End’s history is especially important to Sacramento. The neighborhood was one of the cities first Black neighborhoods, but because of its proximity to the state capital, it has been erased from the city’s memory. Black residents have been pushed out of downtown to clear the way for redevelopment of the downtown area for white residents and businesses. The former residents of the West End experienced this redevelopment through eviction and relocation to densely populated neighborhoods that were miles away from the communities they worked in.
The West End is now home to high-rise luxury apartments, high-end restaurants and hotels, and the state-of-the-art basketball stadium, the Golden 1 Center. These buildings have become symbols of pride for the city, used to attract tourism and further investment. All of this was made possible due to the forced eviction of the most vulnerable community in the downtown area.
Bibliography


Sacramento Public Schools: Desegregation Efforts in a National Context

Susan Diohep

History 281C

Dr. Rebekkah Mulholland
The Supreme Court decision *Brown v Board of Education* banned segregation in public schools. However, for many schools in the United States segregation was a matter of practice but not law. De facto segregation, in which segregation was a reality in current conditions but not enforced by law was immune to the demands of the *Brown* decision. *Brown* forced a confrontation between local enforcement and national law in de jure segregation, or segregation imposed by law. On black and white televisions throughout the North and West Americans watched the battles to bring black students into southern white schools. For many of these viewers, their children also attended segregated schools although no local laws enforced this. The schools were segregated because of where students and their families lived.

Throughout the US in the 1920s racially restrictive covenants created neighborhoods for white people and barred ownership of homes in these neighborhoods to people of color. The 1924 National Real Estate Board Code of Ethics advised its members:

“A Realtor should never be instrumental in introduction into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality or individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood” (1924).

This policy shaped developing American neighborhoods as automobiles made suburbs more desirable. The National Real Estate Board policy was extremely influential, in only four years half of homes of white Americans had such racially restrictive covenants written into their deed of ownership (Fruend p.94). If neighborhoods were all white, there was no need to legally restrict people of color from the schools; students who did not live in these neighborhoods did not attend the schools. The National Real Estate Board’s guidelines were codified by the Federal Government by neighborhood maps which labeled neighborhoods by color using criteria that included the nationalities of the people living in these neighborhoods. These maps were critical because homes in Red-lined neighborhoods—those considered least desirable-- would not be
eligible for Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans which were low interest loans for home
buyers (color lines). These neighborhoods then received less tax income to invest in repair and
maintenance and thereby a continued spiral of neglect began. In Sacramento, favored “white”
neighborhoods included Curtis Park, River Park, East Sacramento and Land Park (color lines).
The neighborhoods of Oak Park and Highland Park received the lowest rating of Red. The reason
given is “Danger of subversive racial infiltration.” Schools were not explicitly segregated as in
the South, however, they became segregated not by an accident but by deliberate legal exclusion
of people of color from “whites only” neighborhoods. There was no need to segregate the
schools if the neighborhoods were already segregated.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 ended racial restrictions in housing; however, it did not change the
reality of the already established segregation in neighborhoods. The 1971 Supreme Court
decision *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* established that busing was an
appropriate method to ameliorate de facto segregation in schools (Swann). Sacramento, like
school districts around the country would enforce busing to desegregate schools in which de
facto segregation had created racial imbalances.

A 1971 study of desegregation busing conducted by University of California, Riverside
evaluated four school districts including Sacramento. This study concluded “eliminating racial
isolation has been shown to have no detrimental effect on majority students” (Siggers, p. 2).
Sacramento’s implementation of desegregation preceded the Swann decision. The policy began
because of the destruction of a junior high school by fire and a Court Order on how the district
must proceed. The school was not to be built in the same location and “a plan to end racial
imbalance at the school must be in effect by September of 1964” (Siggers, p. 2). The study done
seven years after the inception of the plan deems Sacramento’s school integration a success. The
key findings include: “parents and schools staff members stated that there were numerous
‘positive effects resulting from the reassignment of minority pupils’” (Siggers. p. 3). Discipline
decreased with each year of desegregation (Siggers, p. 3). Also, “[m]inority students reassigned to
integrated schools tended ‘to perform better academically then do peers in… segregated
schools’” (Siggers p. 3). Finally, “majority students” were still able to succeed: they
“experienced no adverse affects in their academic accomplishments” (Siggers, p. 3). The study
further reported that “Black integrated pupils achieved significantly higher gains…in reading and
arithmetic…than did non-integrated black pupils” (Siggers, p. 4). The study commends
Sacramento for improving academic achievement for students through integration. The success is
attributed to Sacramento’s thorough implementation.

First, they made a commitment. Second, they had a plan. Third, they evaluated what was
actually occurring each year, and they revised and improved their plan as they went along. They
called upon and received community support. They provided busing and free lunches to children
who needed these. They provided training programs for teachers. They hired and trained teacher
aides, community aides, special resource people, parents, and auxiliary support staff. They
worked hard to make their program work (Siggers, p. 4).

Of the four school districts studied, Sacramento is noted as a successful district. “Success,
however, seems to be a result of the determination of a school community to reach new heights
in serving the needs of its people” (Siggers, p. 4).

Although research reported that Sacramento was a success, attacks on integration of schools
began with the inception of the process and continued throughout. Was it it working?— an
elusive question to answer. In a 1974 article published in The Journal of Negro Education by
Harrell R. Rodgers Jr. and Charles S. Bullock III stated, “arguments that school integration
should be terminated are premature and unjustified by available research…these arguments are
usually narrowly oriented toward the academic impact of integration” (Rodgers p.13). Rodgers
and Bullock continued, “The impact of racial mixing in the public school on racial tolerance is
difficult to evaluate because schools have often been desegregated under very tense and negative conditions” (Rodgers p. 9). Rodgers and Bullock’s research determined positive outcome for black students who attended integrated schools: “Blacks who attend integrated schools are more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to attend college, and to attend a better college and more likely to obtain a better job and receive a higher income” (Rodgers p. 10). In fact, “[t]he life opportunities for Blacks is so improved that for this point alone integration would seem justified” (Rodgers p. 10). Busing was achieving its desired outcome; it created educational opportunity for those who had been historically denied the opportunity of a quality education. Only three years after the Supreme Court decision ruled that busing was an appropriate means to integrate schools, advocates were on the defensive to prove its effectiveness.

University of Southern California sociologist Muriel Carrison argued “We, the people, have created our ghetto schools, sanctioned them with our prejudices, and perpetuated them by our legislation” (Carrison). She considered the whole picture of how American schools became segregated and urged a continuation of integration programs. Carrison recognized that the schools did not become segregated in isolation but were part of a larger, more insidious, means of exclusion of people of color. Carrison noted public outcries when she said “Busing is a panic word today. However, it is not a desegregation plan per se but merely a technological tool for implementing educational services” (Carrison). Carrison attempted to take the charge out of busing. “Compulsory transportation was a necessary outgrowth of compulsory education legislation. If people do not object to forced education, then why do they object to forced busing?” (Carrison). Carrison returned to the original Court decision that supported busing, “The US Supreme Court pointed out in the 1971 Charlotte-Mecklenberg decision that over 18 million children were bused to school every day. School boards regularly vote funds for
transporting all of the children in their districts, yet vigorously opposed busing for purposes of desegregation” (Carrison). Carrison was part of a group of academics and leaders supporting busing. She and others focused on the goal of creating a society in which people were not fearful of each other and respected each other. “An integrated school is central to the success of an integrated society” (Carrison). The pendulum politics of the American system did not have the patience to let busing continue long enough to achieve its goals.

Public outcry against busing continued and it was represented in polling booths. David Frum expressed the views of many, “Busing was truly a revolution imposed from above, and as expected, it met with violent resistance from below. The antiwar demonstrations of the 1960s were a handful of pickets compared to the mass, spontaneous outbursts sparked by the busing plans of the 1970s” (Frum p. 253). The demand to end busing shook small towns and large cities.

Ten years after the Swann decision an abrupt policy change was made. In California and therefore Sacramento, the integration efforts ended in May, 1981 when the “California Supreme Court upheld a constitutional amendment that forbid busing unless segregation has proven to be by design” (Lindsey). Throughout the country, school districts abandoned desegregation busing.

Today’s Sacramento is one of the most integrated cities in the country both citywide and throughout neighborhoods (natesilver538). However, in its schools Sacramento approaches the same level of segregation as when desegregation busing was implemented in 1970. Reporting by ABC News 10 found “Schools in the Sacramento region have become more segregated in recent decades, and when it comes to black and white students are now almost as segregated as schools were in the early 1970s” (Kreutz). Sacramento is consistent with national trends.
The Center for Education and Civil Rights investigated racial integration throughout the country and presented the results in its report “Harming Our Common Future: America’s Segregated Schools 65 Years after Brown.” The report finds that “intense levels of segregation…are on the rise again” (Frankenberg). The report notes the abandonment of desegregation efforts: “In the 1990s, a series of Supreme Court decisions lead to the end of hundreds of desegregation orders and plans across the nation” (Frankenberg). “This report shows that the racial and economic segregation that began then has now continued unchecked for nearly three decades, placing the promise of Brown at grave risk” (Frankenberg). The Center for Education and Civil Rights recommendations so the consequences of avoiding the issue of school segregation. “It is clear that desegregation and lasting diversity seldom happen by accident and that they need plans and support to remain stably diverse among students and faculties” (Frankenberg). The study concludes with recommendations: “School desegregation involves creating and supporting diverse educational institutions inside polarized communities” (Frankenberg).

In Sacramento the problem continues and so does the struggle for equity. In 2007 a meeting of parents concerned about their black students in Sacramento schools led to the formation of the Black Parallel School Board (Lambert). The organization serves as a resource for parents with concerns about their students as well as an advocacy group. Recently, the Black Parallel School Board won a lawsuit on behalf of its constituents “that disciplinary practices in schools throughout the state are biased against Black and Latino students” (Lambert). Sacramento and the nation has yet to solve its on going struggle to serve the needs of all of its students.
Bibliography


Refurbishing Jim Crow:
Racial Housing Segregation in Sacramento

Matt Griffith
History 281C Final
December 17, 2021
Historiography

The five books presented in the following pages each present different emphases on the causes and effects of racial zoning in the United States. The authors may focus on different populations, regions, or periods of time, but they all acknowledge that racial zoning, or something akin to racial zoning, continues into the twenty-first century. This historiography will be followed by how the racial zoning presented by these authors has been applied historically within the city of Sacramento, California.


Bishop argues that the issue of racial zoning is not racialized but is instead a matter of politics and livelihood. Bishop skillfully evades the issue of race throughout *The Big Sort* by ignoring racial divisions and racialized political differences by referring to differences as “ways of life” and “like-mindedness.” It is a comprehensively right-of-center publication that contends that since the 1976 presidential election between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, US citizens have willingly but unintentionally migrated to county-wide enclaves of shared interests and political persuasions. He argues that the “Big Sort isn’t primarily a political phenomenon. It is the way Americans have chosen to live, an unconscious decision to cluster in communities of like-mindedness.” However, his argument is not without merit.

He provides compelling data to show that the US has, indeed, become more politically polarized, at least geographically during the three-decade period between his major data points (1976-2008). His data relies on county voting in US Presidential elections and separates counties as polarized by votes for >80% turnouts for a single candidate. Bishop shows that during this
period the number of polarized counties in the US has more than doubled. Though this is entirely valid the fact that racial issues are consistently side-stepped throughout the book decimates the authors credibility and perpetuates the idea that centrism and its obliviousness to racial issues is the path to rationality. Like the “state’s rights” not slavery trope as the cause of the US Civil War, Bishop ignores that political issues are predominantly racial issues. They are far from independent.

Besides Bishop’s valuable data, his best points are about the divisiveness of contemporary politics and the inability of the two major parties and their supporters to peacefully co-exist. Both sides feel as though they have an ethical imperative to alienate the opposing side in today’s political climate. Because polarization begets tribalism and further polarization, the atmosphere has exponentially worsened in the US in the last three decades. If you are a centrist who values ignoring racism but is curious about racial zoning this is the book for you. If not, continue looking.


Colored Property gets right to the heart of the racial zoning matter. He opens with a story about an organized neighborhood-wide assault on a Black family who just moved into a White Detroit neighborhood in 1925. Colored Property is firstly an examination of how local politics played a role in the racial zoning policies and practices in Detroit Michigan between 1925 and 1970. It also assesses how federal politics has locked racial zoning in place systematically across the US between 1910 and 1970 and how these ideas together, have reinforced the idea of White privilege.
Freund shows how federal and local laws together have strengthened and codified the segregation of the US population throughout the twentieth century. Local sellers and realtors were pressured into not selling to Black families in White neighborhoods through intimidation. Local politicians were elected based on their willingness to uphold racist policies. Federal laws used loopholes to circumvent allowing Black families access to federal services from the New Deal and beyond and when federal officials were criticized for exercising what was, on-paper, unamerican policies they cited free market enterprise and other forms of right-wing signaling.

The author shows how this signaling as well as the generational, racial income gaps caused by racist housing policies have led White citizens to the understanding that their economic superiority entitles them to a better standard of living. That racial difference is the cause of racial inequity rather than the other way around. *Colored Property* became, in 2009, a formative example of comprehensive treatment of the idea of modern racial zoning.


Rothstein’s focus for The Color of Law is within the constitutionality of racial zoning and the US government’s responsibility in acknowledging righting its wrongs. Like other author’s he recognizes both the federal and local roles in racial zoning but argues that local governments have drawn strength and justification for racist policies from federal judgements and policies. Rothstein details how racial zoning is unconstitutional not only after the advancements of civil rights laws in the mid-twentieth century but dating back to the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments after the US Civil War. He describes how individual policies are uniquely unconstitutional and cites supreme court cases and federal law to back up his thesis.
He also shows how the federal government has covered it tracks because there is, as he argues, “no judicial remedy” for the multi-generational impacts of racial zoning. He writes, “Although most African Americans have suffered under this de jure system, they cannot identify, with the specificity a court case requires, the particular point at which they were victimized.” In short, the federal government has created a de jure structure under which de facto segregation could prosper and has for well over a century, that eliminates the federal governments culpability for the consequences because of its seemingly vague and local acts of enforcement that include White flight, violence, city planning, mortgage lending and housing covenants. He also flatly denies the idea that de jure racism was a vestige of the Southern US while de facto racism was a product of the Northern US. According to Rothstein, “Racial segregation in housing was not merely a project of southerners in the former slaveholding Confederacy. It was a nation-wide project of the federal government in the twentieth century, designed and implemented by its most liberal leaders.” Like other recent authors that have written on racial zoning, Rothstein emphasizes the exponential economic effects caused by racist policies. Though The Color of Law may not have the scope of other books on racial zoning, Rothstein does not require it to prove his thesis.


Tatum’s book is not primarily on racial zoning. However, *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* is examining the effects of institutionalized segregation and resource inequity in all forms, much of which stems from racial zoning. Tatum is an experienced psychologist and educator that has dedicated her life to improving racial tensions, specifically
between White and Black students and faculty in an academic setting. Her work has focused around educating White people about what racism is and the effects it has on Black youth and mitigating the damage it inevitably does to the psyche of Black youth when it occurs.

In dealing with racial zoning the author has noted several factors. She details similar issues that other authors have raised when examining this issue: federal laws have allowed local laws centered around racist loaning, zoning, and violence and intimidation to flourish. As recently as 2006 realtors across the US have been encouraged to steer buyers into neighborhoods segregated buy the color of their skin. Again, she noted the multi-generational racial income gap as other authors have. Her most revealing data on the issue showed the extent that White Americans are ignorant to these factors. According to Tatum, “More than half (59 percent) of White Americans believe that the United States has made the necessary changes to give Blacks equal rights with Whites.” She also shows that, “(54 percent) of White Americans perceive low levels of racial inequity, “believing that racial minorities today have equal opportunities as Whites.” This book is more valuable resource for gauging the divisiveness and tribalistic separation of racial demographics racist policies, housing and otherwise, has caused young Black Americans, but Tatum’s evaluation of racial zoning is valuable on its own, too.


Trounstine shows how Segregation by Design philosophically differs from other, though predominantly older, books on racial zoning. She acknowledges that ideas of White de-urbanization, White flight, and racial zoning policies do not make her book unique. However, contrary to many other scholars, Trounstine emphasizes the role of local over state and federal
politics as being the major determining factor in neighborhood and later city-wide efforts to segregate. She outlines the immense power local governments possess that allows them to exert power and keep White neighborhoods White by institutionalizing racism at the local level.

Trounstine argues against authors that have implied that diversity, not segregation, has contributed to inequality. Earlier works on the subject have inferred that racially integrated neighborhoods have suffered economic declines without acknowledging the White backlash that comes from the convergence of White and Black communities. She illustrates how the largest correlation, historically, between income inequity among White and Black residents has been the aggressiveness of local government’s efforts to racially zone neighborhoods and cities. As the suburbs have grown and local government zoning has further separated White from Non-White residents, resource allocation has proportionately dwindled in urban and non-White suburban areas, especially predominantly Black neighborhoods which receive the least funding. As a result, predominantly Black neighborhoods have the lowest performing schools and healthcare services, which drives down Black citizen’s success rates and reinforces racist tropes aimed at justifying racist policies and perpetuating systemic segregation. Black Americans also have significantly lower rates of home ownership, home ownership, and family income which negatively impacts familial and generational wealth. Lastly, Trounstine argues that the participation of White families in gentrification, local politics, or buying in to White neighborhoods, is not indicative of racist intentions, which is often assumed because the outcome of these practices falls under the umbrella of covert racism.

Trounstine verifies that contrary to what many scholars have argued, segregation has not been alleviated, in fact, in many ways has only become more intrenched in American neighborhoods. Segregated areas have evolved from inner city blocks, to neighborhoods, to
entire cities by the late-twentieth century. Entire metropolis regions are now hyper-segregated to consolidate White wealth, property values, and citizenry in an unconscious effort to monopolize capital and resources. She also demonstrates how this local form of segregation is not limited to any geographical region. Racial inequity is ubiquitous across US cities and counties. The idea that segregation is a Southern phenomenon is ahistorical. Trounstine acknowledges that, unfortunately, centralization of public goods is socialist in nature, and therefore politically provocative. Though *Segregation by Design* is far from the only offering within this historiography, Trounstine’s use of statistics, visual aids, sociology, psychology, and a thorough list of studies may make it the most comprehensive book on racial zoning in the US.

**Introduction**

Sacramento is, by the census numbers and by public perception, one of the least segregated cities in the United States. It is a city which serves as an example of ethnic diversity that other US cities should strive to follow. However, if Sacramento purports to serve as a beacon of inclusion for the US, it only demonstrates that Jim Crow is alive and well. Redlining and severely racialized income discrepancies are inaccurately portrayed as relics of the Southern US, especially within Northern and Western US White communities. This paper will show that diversity and geography does not equate to inclusion or equity, especially for Black communities. Sacramento’s history of racist redlining practices runs deep. Overtly racist, predatory loan practices, gentrification, and physical walls are only some of the methods that have been used and continue to be used to keep Sacramento neighborhoods segregated and stratified for the benefit of wealthy White residents. This paper will utilize the tireless work of UC Davis Lecturer Jesus Hernandez and his research on segregation in Sacramento, Sacramento
census data, and other online sources to single out information on individual neighborhoods, their histories of redlining and other racist methods of segregation, and larger Sacramento policies that have facilitated racial inequity and racial zoning. This paper will not seek to disprove that Sacramento is one of the least segregated cities in the US. Rather, by using Sacramento as an example of what is considered inclusive and by showing the various ways that it falls decidedly short, we can show that the common American’s concept of what constitutes segregation and more importantly, what does not, is itself egregiously racist.

A theme common throughout studies that deal with modern racial zoning and its natural counterpart; socioeconomic inequity, such as the five books covered in the historiography, is that they have not improved in the US in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, they have only become more entrenched. According to sociologists Jonathan T. Rothwell and Douglas S. Massey in a 2010 study, “Socioeconomic segregation rose substantially in U.S. cities during the final decades of the 20th century, and we argue that zoning regulations are an important cause of this increase.”¹ The study argues that at best, current income equality mirrors that of the 1920’s when racism and racial segregation was overt and rampant, industrialization had created entire cities of urbanized economic slave laborers living in hovels, and the market was obliterated by oversaturation and greed by the top 1%.² Clearly identified by the census numbers, Sacramento is a metropolis area that has not been any less affected by this resegregation than the rest of the US despite its reputation as an “integrated” city.³

When examining income disparities from census data in Sacramento neighborhoods it is impossible to ignore the correlation with each neighborhood’s racial demographics.

² Rothwell and Massey, 1023.
Predominantly White neighborhoods like Land Park, Citrus Park, East Sacramento, and River Park that surround the Oak Park area. Most strikingly, according to census data from Statisticsatlas.com, the two most segregated neighborhoods when filtering strictly for Black and White resident population data with a White bias, are River Park and Land Park. Sacramento’s most segregated neighborhood, River Park, with a White population of 87% and a Black population of .5% boasts an average household income of $102k. Land Park has a 75% White population with a 1.4% Black population and a household income of $108k, both income figures well above the Sacramento average of $53k. Conversely, the two most populace Black neighborhoods in Sacramento, Richards and Dos Rios, have an average household income well below the average at $12k each. These examples are not outliers. Throughout Sacramento and across the nation there is a very strong correlation between Black/White relative density and income. This is a stark difference in income equality in the nation’s most integrated city in terms of racial diversity.

This income discrepancy is no different in Sacramento’s Oak Park area. Though not as profound a separation of African American population and income deficiency as seen in the Richards and Dos Rios neighborhoods, the three neighborhoods in Oak Park, Central Oak Park, for example, is 26% Black, which is nearly double the Sacramento average, 18% White, which is well under half the Sacramento average, and households earn an average of $31k annually, which is nearly half of the average Sacramento household. True, there is a revitalization effort underway in Oak Park and has been for over a decade. However, historically revitalization has been code for gentrification. Developers are buying cheap homes in large quantities, raising the

---

5 Statisticsatlas.com.
6 Statisticsatlas.com.
7 Statisticsatlas.com.
rents of African Americans all over the neighborhoods that are still reeling, generationally, from the racist loan practices and intimidation that occurred in Sacramento in the mid-twentieth century that gives the city its current racial housing distribution, and is selling to White families that can buy-in to a neighborhood where the prices are on a steep incline. “According to the local housing agency, from August 2007 through July 2008, investors purchased 25 to 50 percent of foreclosed properties in Sacramento’s low-income areas. This confirmed the troubling shift from resident-to-investor-owned properties in these neighborhoods,” wrote Jesus Hernandez in his research paper about disturbing and racist housing trends in Sacramento. This phenomenon that is happening today is just like what happened in Sacramento’s West End downtown neighborhood in the 1950’s-60’s. The progress we think we see in the erasure or decline of racial zoning is a façade.

In The Color of Law, Richard Rothstein explains how Americans have created euphemisms to ignore disguise racial zoning in the US. He argues that when we say that we are looking for diversity rather than racial integration, or we refer to primarily Black neighborhoods as inner cities instead of saying ghetto, though we are still comfortable using the term for the neighborhoods were zoned into during World War II. This is often a similar principle with revitalization like what is happening in Oak Park. Changing the vocabulary around an issue that has not been solved and only arguably been improved makes unaffected Americans feel better about themselves and their country. It misinforms us that segregation is in the past. It allows us

---

9 Pyke, Alan. “The long, painful history of the Sacramento neighborhood where Stephon Clark was killed.” Thinkprogress.org.
to accept and normalize the inequities that we see right in front of us every day in Sacramento and across the US.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps Sacramento is an integrated city. There is a much higher number of major non-White groups than the rest of the US. Income equity is higher than the US average. It is certainly more integrated than most, if not all US metropolis regions. However, if policies that lead only to less racial zoning, income equality, quality of life, access to resources, and education for Black and other Non-White Americans is our definition of integration, this indicates a severe deficiency in not only our vernacular, but in the entire governing, economic, and social value system of the United States.
Bibliography


Pyke, Alan. “The long, painful history of the Sacramento neighborhood where Stephon Clark was killed.” *Thinkprogress.org*.


The Effects of Adopting Militant Ideology for Social Justice

A Look at The Black Panther Party for Self Defense

Justin Honeycutt
History 281C
Dr, Rebekkah Mulholland
CSU Sacramento
12/17/2021
The Black Panther Party for Self Defense: A Historiography

This historiography is largely based on the discussions of five core monographs, with other sources interwoven throughout. Each source is incorporated into the dialogue as their particular focus becomes relevant. Beginning with a chronological look at the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, or BPP, from the origins of the Black Power Movement, the establishment of the party, to their eventual collapse. For this purpose, I have adopted Paul Alkebulan’s chronology of the BPP, as it divides the party activities within its political paradigms and iterations. Within this chronology are key themes, which are expanded upon in some detail, and the various authorships discussed.

Following the historiography is an argumentative essay written through a Hoplologist lens, which focuses on the method and nature of human aggression. Hoplology is an interdisciplinary study that combines aspects of anthropology, sociology, military history and psychology. While the existing scholarly work often refers to the militant nature of the BPP and other assertive Social Justice or Black Power organizations, few have engaged with the necessity or effect of such policies.

The topic of the argumentative portion of this paper addresses an understudied utility of militancy to BPP, which has come to embody the application of militancy for the purpose of affecting Social Justice in the public mind. I assert that the threat of violence, particularly in the sense of defensive or retributive violence, was essential at driving engagement with the BPP and legitimating their efforts on the public stage. It is hoped that by the conclusion, the presence of a militant aspect will not be unduly conflated with hostility, but with an assertion of self and autonomy that all persons are entitled to in the preservation of their lives and wellbeing.
From Black Power, to Black Militancy

The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s found its footing at colleges and universities as well as in aggrieved urban communities. In Peniel E. Joseph’s book, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, he comments on the debated origins of the Black Power movement. This he asserts began with the Watts riots in L.A, August 1965, as this had come to signify the end of the civil rights era, punctuated by Dr. Martin Luther King being heckled by inner-city residents because of his pleas for nonviolence. Second, King's efforts in Chicago, where his advocacy of open housing and slum clearance produced limited results, were interpreted as a harbinger of both the coming wave of black militancy and the purported shift to the north of the Civil Rights struggle. Finally, Stokely Carmichael’s election as The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, chairman, barely a month before his signature moment during the Meredith march, came to be regarded as the unofficial prelude to Black Power's national rise. As Joseph argues, these three events have come to constitute the genesis of the Black Power era.

The BPP was officially founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, during their time at Merritt College in Oakland. Yet movements of this sort do not emerge fully formed from the ether, nor without deep reasons. A confluence of factors contributed to the creation of the Black Panther Party, or the BPP. These emerged from combining new intellectual ideas and a rejection of the previous eras' attempts to navigate the politics of respectability with the Civil Rights Movements. The Black Power Movement emerged from the Civil Rights Movement as a direct response to direct police and military repression of the Civil Rights Movement. The BPP

---

emerged shortly thereafter as a response to violent activities against the Black community and
the high incidence of systematic police brutality. As Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar in *Black Power* notes,
The savage acts of terrorists who dynamited black churches, such as in the Birmingham tragedy
in 1963, produced a strong distrust of nonviolence among some Blacks.

Yet while other Black Power groups managed to assert their own ideological differences
and reject the Black Elite, it was the Black Panthers who became the face of Black militancy.
Some of this is attributable to their ideological emphasis of Black self-determination and
self-defense, while more can be argued to have resulted from the Panthers 1967 armed protest at
the California state house that cemented this militant image in the public memory. What is more
clear is that the BPP emerged from other movements, a series of efforts in other parts of the
country, either in support or in response to a multitude of different political and social strategies.

Derived in large part from Black Power ideology, which itself was a counterpoint to the
peaceful protest-response to White oppression by the Black elite. Those who abandoned the
peaceful protests of the Civil Rights movements saw the passive resistance as being too slow or
ineffectual in creating change. Moreover, Donna Jean Murch, in her book *Living for the city*,
reveals that many held King responsible for the deaths resulting from his peaceful protests.

Ogbar likewise notes how the visibility of White supremacist violence fomented militancy from
Black activists and sympathy from many Whites. This would establish a pushing away from
non-violence, and a pulling into militancy with the Black community.

---

8 Murch. *Living for the City.* 82.
In breaking from the nonviolent, integrational efforts of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. King, the Black Power movements took shape in a number of different ways. While the writings of Malcolm X would provide an alternative framework to view the struggle for Black liberation and racial equality, it can be asserted that it was the influence of student led organizations like CORE and SNCC, and in specific; firebrands like Stokely Carmichael, with his rallying cry of “Black Power” that shaped destiny of the BPP. Other political groups, such as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an independent Black political party in Alabama, inspired the iconic black panther name and imagery. The emergence of this icon seems almost accidental, as political parties were required to have a logo to participate. Curtis J. Austin establishes that the choice was not an arbitrary one, chosen for its imagery and cultural knowledge of wild cats to attack only when provoked. Each played a role in the inspiration and formation of what would become the BPP.

It can be argued that the Civil Rights Movement, in failing to accomplish the longstanding goals of the Black community, necessitated a shift in tactics by a younger and more revolutionary generation. Once the shortcomings of nonviolent tactics could be seen, particularly when used against racist state violence by members of urban Black communities, it would guarantee a more radical shift in focus. It was evident to the newer generation that integration and equality with Whites was impossible, with partisans like Carmichael calling for Black

14 Founded by Stokely Carmichael.
15 Rhodes. Framing the Black Panthers. 87.
16 This was designed to assist the illiterate in knowing what party to vote for.
17 Austin. Up against the Wall. 39.
Americans “to redefine themselves, embrace their history, reject integration and assimilation, and question the basic values and institutions of society”\(^{19}\)

Despite being the face of Black militancy, the BPP did not originate that concept, and was at the time of their founding but one of many Black Power groups. Instead, the militancy was adopted from African American activist Robert Williams book, *Negroes with Guns*,\(^{20}\) written as a response to KKK aggression. In addition to the calls for Black self actualization from Carmichael, it has been long established that Newton and Seale were drawn to Malcolm X’s harsh criticisms of the overly cautious Civil Rights leaders unwillingness to retaliate and dependence on White support. More than being limited to the emerging ideology of Black Power, the BPP also incorporated other teachings, like the communist views of Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevara,\(^{21}\) and Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon’s book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which focused on an anti-colonialist perspective.\(^{22}\) Though in regards to Communism, the association was built less upon the economic ideals and more on the class and race equity it purports. Because of this, the BPP represents a distillate of ideologies and methods of revolutionaries that came before.

Paul Alkebulan, in his book *Survival Pending Revolution*, identifies the three core eras of the BPP, as it corresponds to shifts in membership and focus. These eras are from 1966 to 1971, 1971 to 1974, and 1974 to 1982.\(^{23}\) Though this is by no means a comprehensive historiography, as it is primarily focused on events that give context to the argument, which largely center on the

---


\(^{20}\) Rhodes. *Framing the Black Panthers*. 85,86.


\(^{22}\) “The Black Panther Party.” National Archives and Records Administration.

\(^{23}\) Alkebulan. *Survival Pending Revolution*. xii.
first era and the activities within. Some commentary on the following eras will be present in the argument.


Oakland community organizer Bobby Seale and ex-con turned law student Huey Newton formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.\(^{24}\) Once the BPP was founded, the two founders explored their community for information about the kinds of issues that were of particular importance to them. After collecting the responses, they established a Ten Point Platform and Program that served as the foundation for the party ideals. The Ten Point Platform and Program then became their founding document. It reads as follows:

> We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community. We want full employment for our people. We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalists of our Black Community. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.\(^{25}\)

Like other young African Americans of the day, Newton and Seale were searching for answers to racial problems. While initially unable to express their ideas for how to fix the racial inequity, they had already determined that the Black Elite had nothing more to offer the Black Poor. Likewise, nonviolent resistance had seen the limit of its effectiveness in establishing Social

\(^{24}\) Murch, *Living for the City*, 119.

Justice. They were attracted, however, to Malcolm X’s call for attaining freedom “by any means necessary.”[26] In their minds, this quickly became a legitimation of militancy as a means of bringing power to the people.[27]

So it was that from 1966 to 1971, as Alkebulan reckons it, the BPP were self-proclaimed revolutionaries advocating political autonomy for Black America. Their means of empowerment would come through expressing their second amendment rights, and embracing socialism, though this is largely for the class and race equity it purported. Newton and Seal started out by trying to put an end to police brutality locally, where both men began armed patrols to monitor the police in the black community of Oakland. Carrying law books and shotguns, the Panthers would stand ten feet away from the police as they made stops or arrests, so as not to be accused of interfering. While the police worked, the Panthers would inform Blacks of their legal rights, and sought to prevent police misconduct by their armed presence. As Alkebulan quite reasonably notes, the police naturally objected to this.[28]

This would lead to a number of conflicts with the law, and ultimately to the writing of the Mulford Act. An eponymous bill written by Don Mulford,[29] which would eventually be passed into law, restricted the carrying of loaded firearms in public. As many saw it, this was a direct countermeasure to the armed patrols of the BPP, though the Panthers were not the only militant groups affected. This act would have larger implications not only for racial relations, but for the nature of California politics in decades to come. While this topic is beyond the scope of this essay, it should be noted that during this time Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California, and the party in control was Republican.

[29] Murch. _Living for the City_. 146.
Issues of Self Defense; the Contentious Subject of Gun Rights and the NRA

The Mulford Act has been the source of contentious debate since its inception, with activists calling it a racist policy, which ostensibly it is. Though there is a debate that the Mulford Act was not racially motivated, it seems a disingenuous argument at best. This is because while the law targeted not only the BPP patrols, it was noted that suburban Whites in California had been forming their own groups, and were likewise affected. However, the reasons these White militias formed were due to fears of Black violence against them. While the police were frustrated after attempting to discourage both from manifesting armed patrols, the core of the issue remains racially charged.

While Mulford himself would defend his bill through the claim that it was intended to protect law enforcement from all such groups, it remains clear the primary targets were the BPP patrols.30 Newton himself observes in his book *War against the Panthers*, that it was an obvious enough connection that numerous media reports tagged it as the "Panther Bill."31 Another indication of the clear racial aspect to this law, was that the NRA helped to craft it. The law itself goes against everything that the NRA has stood for, especially during that time. A day before the BPP marched on the Capitol, the NRA published an editorial in their magazine *American Rifleman* titled “Who Guard’s[sic] America’s Homes?”32 Among concerns about what might happen if the National Guard was called into action abroad during a time of social unrest, while also expressing fears about an emerging police state. Furthermore, as this article was coupled

with examples of gun laws that would make ownership harder, it becomes especially difficult to defend the anti-racial argument of the Mulford Act.

The NRA, an organization that is fixated on the second amendment to the point of absurdity, had been helping to create a law restricting the carrying of loaded firearms in California. In the resulting aftermath, both of the Panther’s march and response to their article, the NRA published a press release stating:

The NRA does not approve or support any group activities that properly belong to the national defense or police. The NRA does not approve or support any group that by force, violence, or subversion seeks to overthrow the Government and take the law into its hands, or that endorses or espouses doctrines of operation in an extralegal manner.33

Though it should be noted that the wink is implied. There are some who argue that the NRA at this time was more invested in the use of guns for sport, home defense, and ensuring gun owners were properly trained in their handling and safety.34 Yet this does not adequately contend with the state of gun ownership in decades prior and following the NRA’s support of the Mulford Act. As the bill was brought up, the BPP organized a now famous march on the state Capitol, which would vault their organization into global importance.

The March on the Capitol: May 2, 1967

This event begins in Oakland, where roughly thirty members of the Black Panther Party, armed with rifles, pistols and shotguns and donning their now iconic leather jackets and black berets, marched to the California State Capitol. This show of force was deemed necessary by the BPP, as they were committed to the politics of armed self-defense. Their decision to arrive armed

is largely an extension of the policy of their patrols, and in hindsight was as much a hindrance as it was a boon. In protesting a legislative bill restricting citizens from carrying loaded weapons within the confines of the city limits, by carrying said weapons to protest; the Panthers only hastened the passing of the policy to restrict their rights to openly bear arms.

Yet the silver lining would be, as Jane Rhodes notes in her book, *Framing the Black Panthers*, that the shift in popular memory regarding the BPP shifted from being one dimensional, to being a fully entrenched component of mass culture. The events in the state house were tense, with the Panthers gaining entry with their weapons under the provision they remained peaceful. The presence of armed protestors however, caused the gathered politicians to panic, and after some ultimately nonviolent altercations the Panthers were escorted out. The presence of journalists had been high during this event, with at least one accompanying the BPP on their way from Oakland who recorded the event. Now on the steps of the state building, with a mass of reporters waiting, the Panthers elected to read their “Executive Mandate 1” which they had attempted to do in the capitol building.

This would begin a strange and often strained relationship between the BPP and the media. Indeed, more scholarship has been focused, perhaps fixated on the issues of representation of the BPP in the media than perhaps any other topic relating to them. Edward P. Morgan claims the media ideologically defined the Panthers largely by their appearance and rhetoric as a violent, largely criminal, paramilitary group. Though this was not an absolute, as

---

35 Alicia Denise Harris, *Mediated memory: the case of the “Oak Park Four.”* California State University, Sacramento, 2003. 3.
36 Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers.* 284.
38 Austin. *Up against the Wall.* 14.
there was heavy politicizing both in favor and in opposition to the BPP. As Joseph observes, the “Sacramento incident would produce two compelling mythologies.”\textsuperscript{40} He goes on to say that the Left viewed the march on the capitol as a positive, where the Panthers were compared to Cuban revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{41} This also affected the Black community, not just locally but across the country, causing a spike in membership. The BPP’s message of self defense and the right to bear arms resonated with many, even if the larger scope of their “Executive Mandate number 1” was lost on them.\textsuperscript{42}

However, the mainstream, and therefore White media, could not see past the threat of armed Blacks, and as a result, the media offered a prevailing image of the Black Panther Party that was all but entirely negative. This framed Black Power through journalistic narratives that fixated on the iconography of militancy, violence, and dangerous sex appeal, and downplayed or otherwise ignored the movements more quiet efforts to transform America.

The BPP swiftly emerged as the foremost and most popular revolutionary organization of the period.\textsuperscript{43} The influx of new members, the opening of local chapters in different cities was a direct response to the expressed militancy of the BPP on the day of the march on the capital. So too was the response by government and law enforcement agencies. In Oakland, the showdown at the state capitol made the group a target for police surveillance, with officers being a list of Panther vehicles and license plates.

As Amanda Davis Gatchet, and Dana L Cloud note in their article “David, Goliath, and the Black Panthers: The Paradox of the Oppressed Militant in the Rhetoric of Self-Defense,” direct confrontation with the police, and a willingness to retaliate against White violence was an

\textsuperscript{40} Joseph, \textit{Waiting til the Midnight Hour}, 210.
\textsuperscript{41} Joseph, \textit{Waiting til the Midnight Hour}, 210.
\textsuperscript{42} Jarrett, \textit{Black Panther Capitol March}, Forgotten History.
\textsuperscript{43} Ogbar, \textit{Black Power}. 193.
early rallying point and recruitment tool for the Oakland Panthers. The situation in Oakland was not unique to that city, and with a society wide lens placed upon the actions of the Panthers, the cause would be taken up across the country by those it resonated with. The group's insistence on the right to self-defense, particularly armed self-defense, became a central feature of their identity creation.

Yet as Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin in *Black against Empire* would note, the BPP found itself in an ironic situation after Sacramento. Their tactic of policing the police had gotten them this far, but with the Mulford act, the base effectiveness of that strategy had been taken from them. The question of how they would continue to mobilize the “brothers on the block” without the legal option of arms emerged.

In the aftermath of this precipitous growth, the BPP found the original situation flipped back upon them. Instead of patrolling in search of police abuses, which had been effective enough that police would often leave when they spotted the Panthers on the scene, the law began to search for them. Both Joseph and Alkebulan agree that the latter years of the first era of the BPP were punctuated by withering media criticism, devastating clashes with police and, occasionally, rival black power organizations. Though this was the least of the problems emerging for the BPP.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had previously begun a counterintelligence program in 1967, known as Cointelpro, to eliminate Black radicals and negate their influence. According to Alkebulan, they were also mindful of the risk that a single leader could rise to unify all the Black militant groups. Austin adequately relates the FBI’s perspective of this scenario, in endeavoring

---

to “prevent the rise of a messiah who might unify and electrify the black movement.” The possible candidates before the ascendency of the BPP had ranged from Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Stokley Carmichael, in order of greatest to least risk.47

The FBI also said it wanted to stop violence by militants and discredit the groups and their leaders.48 While the BPP were not initially considered as a target, their march on the capitol put them in the government's focus. The campaigns of Cointelpro against the BPP would result in the deaths of several members and the arrest of hundreds, diminishing the group's resources and sending some fleeing the country.49 The pressure on the group intensified, and landed founding member Huey Newton in jail for killing a policeman. Newton's time in prison changed his perspective on militant resistance, and the group soon began to shift their methodologies towards community improvement. This situation continued into the second phase of the BPP, which lasted from 1971 to 1974.

Second Era of the BPP, Moving Away From Militancy: 1971 to 1974

The following two eras of the BPP are not specifically germaine to the argument of its militancy. Therefore, the rest of the historiography is to be more of a synopsis of the years following the first era. Newton, now free from prison, openly eschewed his earlier militancy and fully committed to community programs and organizing the Black community. While the programs were popular in general, some within the BPP felt that it not only detracted from, but was a betrayal of the original aims of their militant platform. Which, ostensibly it was, but not without suitable cause. This stage also included, as Murch and others note, a well-organized,

47 Austin. *Up against the Wall*. 148.
although unsuccessful campaign to elect Bobby Seale as the mayor of Oakland, and a continuation of the community services they had begun in 1969.

The abandonment of violence by Newton encouraged a factional split, and while the prevailing party remained in his control, as Alkebulan notes, their first ideological era ended in 1971 with a disengagement from armed confrontation with the government. Curtis J. Austin’s *Up against the Wall* examines the BPP's use of violence as a rhetorical and political strategy, arguing that violence was the central element driving the group's decisions. Austin goes on to elaborate that the “macho tactics and posturing created obstacles for the Panthers they never surmounted,” which other authors like Joseph, Gatchet, Cloud and even Alkebulan seem to be in agreement with. According to them, their deployment of violence and militant rhetoric in essence doomed the organization.

While Joseph is correct in his own assertion of this point, that violence remains the Black Power eras most controversial legacy, he is still limited by the sentiment that affects those within academic settings. Divorced from the events that necessitated the inclusion of violence as a rallying element, and safely ensconced in ivory towers, the common academic has no method for successfully interpreting the role of violence. Unless that is their lived experience or their academic focus. Likewise, Alkebulan discusses the personal violence of Newton, returning to assert his control over the BPP and being held on trial for the death of a prostitute and the assault of a tailor, in the same terms as the defensive violence expressed by the BPP as a whole. These are not the same, and it is a mistake to conflate the two.

---

50 Murch. *Living for the City*. 163, 164.
52 Austin. *Up against the Wall*. 88.
In similar ways, it is folly to interpret the internal violence between members of the BPP, whether over scisms or for punishment of transgressions as being the same as the militancy that called them to join. Following and during the political defeat of Seale, who was running for office in Oakland, Newton and his inner circle were engaged in drug use and physical violence against party members and the community. By definition, this is not defensive violence, but blatant criminality. In 1974, issues arose that forced Newton to flee to Cuba, among those was the embezzling of funds from the organization and the murder of a prostitute. This shifted the party into its third phase or era, when leadership fell to Elaine Brown in Newton’s absence. Brown tried to improve the party’s image by involvement in city government through the Panther’s Oakland community school and membership on various city commissions.\textsuperscript{55}

**Third Era of the BPP: The Beginning of the End 1974 to 1982**

To Brown’s credit, this era of the BPP lasted the longest, yet this was not to imply that the organization was run ably or well. As the third and final era of the BPP came to a close, it did so with no small amount of chagrin. Largely reduced in number following the failures of the earlier eras, the BPP shrunk from a global enterprise to a local Oakland based operation. Members were overworked, and the leadership was authoritarian in nature. Likewise, rampant drug use, graft, and corruption resulted in numerous ethical and legal entanglements.\textsuperscript{56} Many party members became disillusioned when the community registered disapproval of the BPP’s negative activities. Negative publicity regarding internal violence and financial misdeeds had a detrimental effect on the public despite the community programs.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Alkebulan. *Survival Pending Revolution*. xv.
\textsuperscript{57} Alkebulan. *Survival Pending Revolution*. 121.
The final days culminated with a series of disgraceful events that brought ruin by degrees to the organization. Starting with the return of Newton, who further muddied his reputation, and by extension the party’s, when he tried and failed to murder a witness to his previous murder charge. Eventually, Newton wrested control of the party in a coup, sending Brown into flight, only to run the party into the ground and be charged with embezzling 600,000 dollars from the Oakland community school. The party was dissolved, along with all of its promise to affect social change.

**The Effects of Adopting Militant Ideology for Social Justice**

Militancy is often conflated with violent action. This violence can be implicit, or explicit, but it is the threat of violence which gives credibility to the resolve of a movement. It might seem paradoxical, but this implied threat of militancy is an essential mechanism for establishing peaceful change. Nearly all effective efforts at establishing social change have emerged with this theme of violence, whether it is directed against a government, a group, property or oneself. Militancy is therefore a prop by which a group adorns themselves with intention, and reveals to the outside as well as their own membership the unspoken resolve to see change affected by the pen, or the sword.

The existing body of scholarly work on the BPP largely only focuses on whether public perception of the BPP was exaggerated or flawed. Oftentimes referring to, or deflecting to, the community programs the BPP ran; as though the two activities were mutually exclusive. A few scholars address the issue of violence in more nuanced terms, but none have engaged with the necessity or effect of militant policies for creating and sustaining a movement or community. The emergence of militant rhetoric coincides with a natural need for survival within the Black
community. The BPP represents a reaction to a system where African Americans are
disenfranchised and oppressed. In nearly all movements, it has historically been this threat of
consequence, if not violence, which represents a retributive force in response to oppression, as
the mainstay of all political activism.

Racial issues produce racial responses, so Black thought has guided Black people’s
struggle for freedom. It is a natural progression from the Civil Rights movement to that of Black
Power. Civil Rights, which seeks to gain liberty through the auspices of the established White
authority, could only achieve so much before running its course. In the ascendancy of the Black
Power methodology, it expressed a means to gain liberty through its own efforts, independent of
the established hegemony. What can be given to you by others, can be taken away. What you
assert for yourself, is yours.

So the goals are in essence the same, though what remains fundamentally distinct
between these two movements is their approach in seeking their goals. Civil Rights works within
the framework of the existing power structure, that of a White Christian hegemonic society. This
is not to suggest that the actions of Civil Rights protests were always legal or accepted, but that
the mechanisms of abuse and control were utilized against the abuser. Ogbar observes that this
was effective, because King developed a belief in nonviolence that understood the power of
violence and hoped to manipulate it for social and political justice,58 which would come to be
known as “Political Jiu Jitsu.” Black Power by contrast seeks to attain its autonomy through
external means, by which it is meant that they are outside of the scope of societal norms or
controls.

Violence and the threat of violence, far from being meaningful only in international
politics, are underlying, tacit, recognized, and omnipresent facts of domestic life, in the shadow

58 Ogbar. Black Power. 42.
of which democratic politics are carried on. They instill dynamism into the structure and growth of the law, the settlement of disputes, the processes of accommodating interests, and they induce general respect for the verdict of the polls. Even in regards to the political jiu jitsu of Martin Luther King jr., while pacifist in nature, requires a willingness to disrupt an established order and contend with the belligerence of their aggressors to affect change.

If in the course of that struggle it is perceived necessary to assert consequences for a racialized oppressor, it is not an act of deviancy, but a natural response to a threat. The integration of militant iconography and modes, not to mention arms, is an expression of a new and transformative identity. In this regard, identity represents the act of self definition both within one’s community and to the greater external world. By the act of self declaring its own values and aesthetics, the group asserts its autonomy and determines a means to empower themselves against their aggressors. Gatchet and Cloud comment on this legitimation of violence as being material and performative, or symbolic. They come closest to the understanding of the necessity of violence by echoing Trotsky’s distinctions between the aggressive violence of the powerful and the resistant violence of the oppressed, which he asserts the latter has a greater claim of legitimacy.\footnote{Gatchet and Cloud. “David, Goliath, and the Black Panthers” \textit{The Journal of Communication Inquiry} 37 (1): 5–25.}

Yet in the attempt to assert autonomy and agency, the BPP inflamed sentiment against them by their proximity to ideological extremes considered untenable by the US. Namely, Communism. The evidence for this is implicit in the shift in focus that the FBI demonstrated towards the BPP, prioritizing them over other more established Black Power groups. Their existence as a localized paramilitary group advocating armed resistance of the police state merely moved the state to counteract their second amendment rights. The combining of militancy
while espousing the revolutionary ideologies of Black nationalism and Socialism,\(^{60}\) ensured that the BPP had placed a target on their own backs with which the American hegemony would invariably attempt to strike.

Therefore, the strategic error inherent in the BPP was not its utility of militarism, nor its willingness to defend themselves through violence. These were legitimating factors, and powerful elements useful in drawing loyal, effective members as well as keeping them disciplined and organized. The errors of the BPP are three fold. The first begins with the extension of their authority outside of their base. The patrols had been effective deterrents for police violence, as Ogbar established, contrary to the belief that escalating interracial violence would result from the organizing of black armed defense groups, attacks from racists declined.\(^{61}\) Yet instead of turning inward, as they did in later years, they pushed out before they were properly ready. Effectively outpacing their sphere of control, they became a national organization overnight. It would be an understatement to assert that the BPP lacked the infrastructure for such a transformation.

The secondary issue was the inclusion of Communism in their ideology, a subject which they did not truly understand or attempt to fully implement, but embraced because it had the effect of “sticking it to the man” or otherwise thumbing their nose at the US government. The BPP had never had a clear or coherent ideology beyond the ending of systemic racism and violence through recourse to force, and it shows especially here.

Lastly, the abandonment of militarism with the forced disarmament imposed by the Mulford Act. Militarism is not only effective in the use of arms, but in many aspects of maintaining authority, cohesion, and encouraging action. The militarism espoused by the BPP, as

\(^{60}\)“The Black Panther Party.” National Archives and Records Administration.  
Bloom and Martin note, despite its romantic support of guerilla groups abroad, or the Party’s advocacy militancy, the Party never directly organized guerilla warfare.62

While it would be disingenuous to suggest that the militarism practiced by the BPP was akin to playing dress up, as many lost lives by participating in their militant policy, the situations abroad were vastly different than those within the US. Even without recourse to open carry weapons, the cloak or mantle of militarism could have been preserved, and with it the legitimacy of their efforts to advance the Black causes they originally founded the party to realize.

---

Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


401671&context=L&vid=01CALS_USL:01CALS_USL&lang=en&search_scope=MyInstitution&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=LibraryCatalog&query=any,contains
,Sacramento%20%20Black%20Panther&offset=0.


Cultivating Equality – Black Americans and Voting Trends in the Late Twentieth Century

Although black men were granted the right to vote in 1870 upon the ratification of the fifteenth amendment, black Americans have struggled for inclusion in the US political system ever since. Ronald W. Walters argues in *Freedom Is Not Enough: Black Voters, Black Candidates, and American Presidential Politics* that it is not enough for black Americans to be allowed to vote; they must have strong voter turnout in order to manifest the power of the vote in the US political system. In *Voting Rights under Fire: The Continuing Struggle for People of Color* Donathan L. Brown and Michael Clemons argue that there is a link between legislative attempts to restrict access to voting and efforts to assert white supremacy. In *Inside Black America: Message of the Black Vote in the 1984 Elections* Thomas E. Cavanaugh presents significant data on black voting in the 1984 presidential election. His data leads to many arguments, including that specific events such as the candidacy of black civil rights leader Jesse Jackson increase not only black turnout, but their further incorporation into the US political system. This essay examines the relationship between black voters and the US political system, including voter turnout and prevailing political opinions among black Americans. The beginning of the historiography is organized chronologically while the second half is organized thematically. Throughout the historiography, I use examples from Sacramento, California to localize the topic.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s¹ was a determined fight for equal treatment for black Americans in every corner of society, including the American political system. Activists and black community leaders during the 1960s pressed for black incorporation in the political

---
¹ Many historians and activists have argued that the Civil Rights Movement expanded beyond the 1960s.
system through voter registration drives and the consistent efforts of black Americans to exercise their right to vote. The Tennessee leagues were formed in 1959 with the explicit purpose of registering black Americans to vote. When the Democratic party purposely removed these voters from the voter rolls, the Tennessee leagues were able to sue and win. According to Walters, the judicial win validated the right of black Americans to exercise their right to vote.\(^2\) There were continued voter registration projects between 1962 and 1964. Registration pushes resulted in the largest yet recorded turnout of black voters – 58.5% in the election of November 1964.\(^3\)

Like other parts of the nation, black activists in Mississippi organized in the early 1960s to help black Americans vote. In 1963 a group of black activists, of whom all were registered to vote, were unable to do so because election officials prevented them from doing so. Hindrance from voting, a right and not a privilege, is an insult alone. Black activists were especially troubled, however, because this was a primary election and they wanted their votes to impact who would be chosen as Democratic candidates. In response, activists created the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, who formed their own delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1964. While they ultimately were prohibited from representing Mississippi as delegates, the turmoil created by their protest was nationally televised.\(^4\) While on the surface, black Mississippi Democrats failed at gaining inclusion in the political realm in 1964, arguably they made progress by continuing to draw attention to the issue and organize effectively.

After the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965 southern states saw significant registration jumps in voter registration among black Americans. Walters cites a table from the US Commission on Civil Rights, which shows that from 1964 to 1967, black voter registration more


\(^{3}\) Walters, 14.

\(^{4}\) Walters, 31.
than doubled in Alabama and almost doubled in Georgia and Louisiana. Most notably, black voter registration in Mississippi during this same time frame went from 6.7% to 58.8%.

After 1965 there were still many obstacles to fair representation in the nation’s democratic institutions. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *White v. Register* that at-large voting “diluted the Black vote.” In 1982 the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was amended to codify the standard set forth by the Supreme Court, effectively prohibiting at-large districts. In California, at-large districts were the product of progressive era reforms enacted in the early twentieth century with the intention to minimize corruption. Many California local jurisdictions are just beginning to comply with the 1973 ruling and 1982 amendment to the VRA, however.

As I write, the city of Folsom in Sacramento County is undergoing the process to change their city elections from at-large to by-district. While the city council approved the resolution to undergo this process unanimously, the resolution was adopted in direct response to a lawsuit citing the California VRA. Folsom City Councilmember Kerri Howell voiced concerns with the move to by-district representation, stating one representative of each area will not “be able to solve all the problems in your neighborhood.”

2019 US Census data estimates Folsom’s “white alone” population to be 61.8%, Latino population to be 12.2%, “Asian alone” population to be 17.2%, and “black or African American alone” population to be 3.4%. The city of Folsom is arguably divided economically by East Bidwell Street, the main corridor. East of Bidwell and the side containing Vista Del Lago High School is more expensive, while West of Bidwell and the

---

5 Walters, 18.
6 Walters, 22.
7 Walters, 22.
side containing Folsom High School is less expensive. Most of the city council members live on the east side of East Bidwell Street. This data alone does not provide causation between the overwhelmingly white population of Folsom and the reluctance of the city council to transition to at-district voting, but could be the topic of more in-depth research.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act provided better access to the polls for black voters. Cavanaugh argues that in order for black voters to fully be incorporated in the political system, however, they must turnout in large numbers. Historically there are major events or movements that motivate voter turnout. For black Democrats, Jesse Jackson’s presidential candidacy in 1984 generated significant attention. Writing in 1985, Cavanaugh cites Jackson’s 1984 campaign as “the most successful such campaign ever run by a black candidate. While he concludes that “blacks had only a marginal impact on the outcome of the presidential election,” it is noteworthy that in the two years preceding the 1984 election, voter registration for black Americans increased and black Americans elected to local office “increased substantially.”

The 1984 presidential election provides insight into the differences between the general Democratic voting bloc and black Democrats. Cavanaugh cites a Gallup poll of black Democrats, which reveals that 59% of black Democrats supported Jackson in the 1984 presidential primary while only 34% supported Walter Mondale. The study found that Jackson received the most support from black Americans who were younger, poorer, or from the South. Jackson also fund support among organized labor, largely because the number of black Americans who belonged to organized labor had increased in previous years. Yet, Mondale became the Democratic nominee for president in 1984, largely because the Jackson campaign

12 Cavanaugh, 29-30.
13 Walters, 42.
was poorly received by the Democratic establishment. Because Jackson was the more progressive candidate, we can reasonably conclude that black democrats, especially those who represent the aforementioned democrats that supported Jackson, were more liberal than Democrats on average in 1984.

During the years of the Reagan presidency, there was also a significant difference between political opinions of black and white Republicans. While Republicans considered Reagan an incredible president and largely supported his agenda, 73% of black Republicans disapproved of Reagan’s performance. Black Americans regardless of party affiliation disapproved of Reagan at a margin of 82% to 8%. Disapproval of Reagan did not prevent black Americans from aligning themselves with the Republican party, however. Many regarded Reagan as an exception and did not expect party values to align themselves with Reagan’s. Black Americans disapproved of Reagan because they felt he was “harmful to blacks” and there was “a feeling, even among those favoring such [economic] cutbacks, that the specific form of the changes made by the administration had been unfair to blacks and the poor.”

This feeling Cavanaugh alludes to was not miraculous, however. Both overt and covert examples of racism were linked with the Republican party and epitomized by the infamous television advertisement *Revolving Door*. The ad, sponsored by the George H. W. Bush campaign in 1988, features a line of prisoners who walk in one side of a door and walk out the other. While all of the prisoners keep their heads down a black man meant to look like Willie Horton looks up and stares into the camera lens. While incarcerated in a Massachusetts prison

---

14 Cavanaugh, 5.
15 Cavanaugh, 38.
16 Cavanaugh, 5.
for murder, Horton was temporarily released through a weekend furlough program. Horton did not return from furlough and instead went on a crime spree that included assault, robbery, and rape. The Horton ad is considered by political scientists to be an example of implicit racial messaging because while the ad never verbalizes race or the offense of Horton, the cinematography draws the audience to the man who looks like Horton.\textsuperscript{18} The use of the ad in the 1988 H.W. Bush campaign brings to life the feeling of exclusion and othering felt by black Americans during the Reagan presidency.

Racist policies were not specific to the new age Republican party, however. In his 1992 campaign for president, Bill Clinton admonished black activist Sister Souljah. Clinton’s campaign operative Paul Begala urged the repudiation of Sister Souljah because he wanted to maintain Clinton’s appeal to the “white Reagan Democrats.”\textsuperscript{19} Just two years before, Republican Pete Wilson became Governor of California. Wilson went on to support Proposition 187, which sought to limit illegal immigration on the southern California border. Prop 187 required most public officials, including law enforcement and teachers, to validate the immigration status of an individual before further engaging with them. According to Monogan and Doctor in \textit{Immigration Politics and Partisan Realignment}, support for Proposition 187 “shows evidence that racial threat served as a factor in voters’ behavior, with the white-Hispanic bifurcation resembling the white-black bifurcation of the pre-Civil Rights era South.”\textsuperscript{20} Racists trends continued to pervade politics in both political parties, both nationwide and in California specifically.


\textsuperscript{19} Walters, 54.

The Clinton years represented a lull in black voter turnout. Between 1988 and 1992 black voter registration dropped by 4%.21 Unlike during the Reagan and H.W. Bush years when black Americans felt that their rights were threatened by each administration, the Clinton years represented comparative reassurance. Walters cites the absence of a “stimulus” like Jesse Jackson to explain decreased black voter turnout during the Clinton presidency.22 Owing to the argument of stimuli, black voter turnout again increased in 1998 after conservatives introduced the “Republican Contract with America.”23 This plan included fiscally conservative policies that black voters historically opposed. Thus between 1994 and 1998 black voter turnout increased from 9% to 11%. Even more dramatically, black support for Democratic candidates increased from 81% to 88%.24

In *Voting Rights Under Fire* Brown and Clemons argue that there is no evidence of mass cases of voter fraud, and thus conservative-led efforts to limit access to voting are intended to disenfranchise minority voters. They cite the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which was signed into law by President George W. Bush.25 HAVA was intended to secure the voting process by replacing punch cards with electronic voting machines. HAVA also required first time voters to present a form of government-issued identification in order to receive a ballot at a polling place. Between 2011 and 2013, fourteen states adopted voter ID laws. The authors criticize the adoption of these laws, arguing that claims of voter fraud rely heavily on the “presence of words like “might,” “probably,” and “perhaps,” all indicating the infectious hypothetical nature of these claims.”26 They argue that voter identification laws are an example

---

21 Walters, 57.
22 Walters, 58.
23 Walters, 62.
24 Walters, 62.
26 Brown and Clemons, xii.
of society trying to push back against the political inclusion of black Americans, as their inclusion “have typically been followed by systematic legal and extralegal efforts to erode such progress and reassert white supremacy.”

In the 1998 primary election, the Sacramento County statement of the vote shows a seemingly even split between Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gray Davis and Republican candidate Dan Lungren, each garnering 37.3% and 37.5% of the vote, respectively. We also see, however, that the next two candidates that garnered the third and fourth amount of votes in Sacramento County was Democrat Jane Harman and Democrat Al Checchi, with 10.4% and 9.8% of the vote, respectively. While it is difficult to find specific demographic statistics, we know that in 1997, 19% of births in Sacramento County were marked as “mixed race/ethnicity” and 27% of mothers were not born in the US. Further, “those under 18 years of age were nearly twice as likely to be of mixed race than their adult counterparts.” Sacramento County was also cited as not as “highly segregated” as Los Angeles. As Sacramento became more diverse, the voting trends leaned heavily Democratic. A chart provided by the City of Citrus Heights shows

27 Brown and Clemons, 147.
29 Tafoya, 8.
30 Tafoya, 1.
that in 1999, median incomes of Sacramento County neighborhoods did not vary widely.\(^{31}\) Note that Roseville is located in Placer County. Median Household Incomes did not vary more than $20,000, the difference between North Highlands and Fair Oaks. Unfortunately this chart did not contain information on the City of Sacramento or other Sacramento County cities, such as Elk Grove or Galt.

The 2010 census found that in Sacramento County, 62.8% of people were “white alone,” 23.6% were Latino, 17% were “Asian alone,” and 10.9% of people were “black or African American alone.” The median household income was $67,151 and the percentage of people in poverty was 12.5%.\(^{32}\) Election results from the November 2010 general election show that in Sacramento County, 56% voted for Democrat Jerry Brown while 38% voted for Republican Meg Whitman.\(^{33}\) Whitman’s 38% mirrors the 37.5% received by Dan Lungren in the 1998 primary election. Despite likely demographic changes, Sacramento County’s support for Republican gubernatorial candidates remained almost stagnant. Interestingly, the 2010 race for Sacramento County Sheriff was much closer. While the race was technically non-partisan, which does effect voting selection, we know from future political races that Scott Jones is a Republican and Jim Cooper is a Democrat. It is also worth noting that Scott Jones is a white man from Fair Oaks while Jim Cooper is a black man from Elk Grove. Scott Jones narrowly won


181,614 votes, ahead of Jim Cooper’s 177,954 votes. Thus it appears the more competitive race had closer margins between Republicans and Democrats.

Further research on how voter trends in Sacramento County are affected by demographic changes can be done through further cross-referencing of voter statistics and census data. For a more in-depth analysis, I suggest requesting or finding census data that breaks down demographics by precinct number. These precinct numbers should correspond to the numbers used in the statement of the vote documents, which break down election outcomes by precinct. By looking at precincts that have higher populations of black Americans, we can develop a better understanding of how black Americans in Sacramento County voted in each race. The website for the Sacramento County Office of Elections only dates back to 1998, but through an open records act request or through the State Library, we should be able to obtain earlier records, which can be cross-referenced in the same manner. This paper discussed how events or movements motivated black voter turnout, using examples such as Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign. These factors should continue to be kept in mind when examining other voting records.

Voting trends help tell the story of the inclusion of black Americans in the US political system – and how complete inclusion remains an ongoing process. While we saw significant jumps in voter registration in the South after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the authors used in this essay all contend, to varying degrees, that registration must result in the act of voting in order for the black community to fully harness the power of the vote. The term power is interesting, since voting is not a privilege – it is a right of every citizen in a democratic state. Thus in order to be a full citizen, a community must have full access to the vote. This issue

---

continues to be of significant importance. Sacramento County is a Voter’s Choice Act County, so future data will show how changes in voting process effect turnout and outcomes. Sheriff Scott Jones recently announced his retirement, and it is likely that Jim Cooper will give up his seat in the California State Assembly to run for Sheriff again.
Bibliography


Oak Park and Transportation Transformation.

Outside of Cool in El Dorado County, California, is a plantation-style building known as the Bailey House, initially built in the middle of the nineteenth century, built as a hotel for travelers along the Southern Pacific Railway. However, as it happened with many places across the West, the railroad was routed along an easier route, and the vital connection to the outside world dried up, and the business languished in disrepair. Eventually, Highway 49 construction along what was supposed to be the railroad tracks, but the dreams of the luxurious hotel were already gone. Long abandoned buildings and towns dot the California landscape and demonstrate the change brought by transportation systems. As the state grew, roads realigned, surface street highways gave way to multilane interstates, and the businesses that fed off the lifelines of travelers and transportation to and from jobs transformed communities. Oak Park, which became part of Sacramento in 1911, is an example of how the transformation of the state capital's economy and demographic changes shaped and reshaped a community.

Much of the story of the United States could hide in plain sight around the countless transportation methods and critical locations in the countries movement West. Because of the profound consequence of transport pathways and infrastructure, the history of transportation highlights the government's need for lands and rights. Transportation revolutions profoundly shape the history of the world, from the oceangoing vessels to Roman roads to the highways of horse-driven trade, the railroads, finally, the interstate highway system all reveal a history of civilization. However, it seldom examines such things outside the lens of a progressive victory for civilization. In reality, race and economic status play central roles in capturing lands for the right of way and displaces the people who are often the least capable of mounting political
As cities expanded and more people moved into the inner-city and suburban areas around them, transportation made new lifestyles possible. It spurred the development of new residential communities and housing projects near transportation corridors, all too often trapped by the infrastructure.

Sacramento began life as Sutter's Fort. Following the discovery of gold in neighboring eastern El Dorado County, the city expanded rapidly. By the end of the 1850s, it was the second-most populous city in the state—San Francisco to the West and Placerville to the east occupying the adjacent ranks. Following the Gold Rush, the area became the terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad and served as a waypoint between the Comstock Lode silver fields and San Francisco. The city has long been a transportation hub with its centralized position making it a prime candidate for the capital. Sacramento enjoys the blessing of access to natural resources and transportation methods. The city became a uniquely situated medium between the urban industrialized push of the nation and the rich farmlands and abundant mountain resources. The Sacramento Valley seemingly had everything needed to become an economic and politically influential place. During the 1950s, boosters for development in the area, specifically, areas like Orangevale, Carmichael, and the local suburbs outside of Oak Park, coined the Sacramento "The Land the Lord Remembered."²

Sacramento began to grow outward and embrace more modern urban living standards in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Influential members of Sacramento business groups and surrounding towns began expanding convenient nearby living spaces. The Sacramento

---


Colonization Company was formed as a development booster group seeking to attract outsiders looking to capitalize on real estate and industrial development.³ City developers can use development to boost the local economy and business, creating jobs and growing the local economies. The Sacramento Valley developers undertook this strategy to build the Sacramento economy and population.

Originally a ranch, the area now Oak Park began like much of the land around Sacramento as a combination of grain fields and fruit orchards. Known as William Doyle Ranch, the land, bought by Local Sacramento real estate broker and investor Edwin Alsip. Alsip was also the owner of the local streetcar company that would connect Oak Park to the separate City of Sacramento.⁴ Alsip subdivided the land and began advertising it as a development haven from city taxes. However, many of the lots looked like a bust investment when the nation took a hard economic downturn in the early 1890s. However, Sacramento continued to improve its situation, adding more power supplies from the Northern California rivers.⁵ While the local papers praised it as a robust long-term move, it also became a chance to attract more business to take advantage of the abundant electricity and multiple generation sources. It is no surprise that the horse-drawn streetcars gave way to electric cars and investment from Pacific Gas and Electric in the early years of the twentieth century. The same streetcar network and proximity to the Southern Pacific railyards made Oak Park a viable and vibrant working-class neighborhood. In comparison, Oak Park was, for a time, a freestanding city with its Police and Fire departments. Mounting pressures


to extend city services and support from real estate owners who held lands on the edges of the city limits saw a contentious special election on the Annexation of Oak Park into the City of Sacramento.⁶

The successful annexation by the city and saw the Sacramento population grow by some 7,000 residents.⁷ Oak Park takes its name from the large grove of oak trees at its center. The area was the terminus of the railway trolley cars after 1903, and once the company took possession of the land, it began to build a roller coaster, carousel, and baseball park. The Sacramento Electric Gas & Railway Company made the park an attraction for electrical power and boosted ridership on the streetcar lines. The amusement park, known as Joyland, helped the growing community attract more working-class families to the area. Several other large companies in the area helped forward the growth of Oak Park, chief among them Standard Oil and the Southern Pacific Railroad, both needing workers, especially the Southern Pacific Railroad.⁸ Stable jobs and opportunities in Oak Park created an ongoing boom and a central role in industrialization. Affordable areas for development led to more houses and more businesses. The neighborhoods of modest houses and family-oriented services grew and matured steadily because of the stability of the railroad service yards and access to jobs with the Southern Pacific.

Due to the growth and vibrance of Oak Park, the California State Fairgrounds formed off Stockton Boulevard adjacent to the Joyland Area. The fair helped bring additional capital and development to the area and positioned Oak Park as a premier location in Sacramento. Additionally, a look at the newspapers from the early decades of the twentieth century reveals a

---

vibrant entertainment industry throughout the area that featured frequent baseball games with admission fees also covering streetcar rides in and out of the Oak Park neighborhood. The park became a central attraction and featured a giant wooden rollercoaster and food and entertainment at modest prices.  

Joyland suffered a tragic loss when a fire broke out and burned down part of the amusement park in 1920. In addition to losing a booming tourist attraction, the Oak Park pool succumbed to fire alongside the roller coaster. While the park began to rebuild, Joyland never returned to its heyday state, and by 1927, the amusement park finally shut down for good. Pacific Gas and Electric, title holders to the land Joyland sat on, sold the property to a wealthy local McClatchy family. Once acquired, the family gifted the land back to the city for development into James McClatchy Park, grandfather and original editor of *The Sacramento Bee*.  

A few short years after the fire, property values began to take a turn down even before the Great Depression struck the United States. Sacramento remained in better shape than most cities, thanks to access to resources and stable employers, but suffered greatly during the economic downturn. The Great Depression continued to loom over the entire state of California until the outbreak of hostilities with Japan in 1941. World War II created a *Second Gold Rush* in the state, as massive defense spending for weapons manufacturing increased rail transportation needs significantly. Workers poured in faster than during the depression, and excellent pay met with

---


12 Ibid.
abundant lands primed for development. While the war ended the depression nationwide, it signaled a transformative time in its demographic patterns. Whereas people had needed to live close to the manufacturing center of the cities, the rise of the automobile fed the creation of suburban lifestyles. During the 1930s, an anti-trust law made dual ownership of streetcar companies and electric companies have a lasting effect on streetcar service.

Cars were already rising to the point that they were the preeminent form of transportation, and as time went on, railroads gave way to trucking on the highway system. Cars also began to dominate city streets, parking, and road space with unobstructed travel became necessities to avoiding gridlock and citywide mayhem. Since its development, transportation to and from Oak Park revolved around the trolley system. By the late 1940s, there was a decreasing need for trolley cars in Sacramento as the rise of the middle class also meant fewer working-class individuals dependent on the trolley system to get to work. Sacramento's expanding bus system kept mass transit moving at the speed of cars and maneuvering around construction, slower vehicles, and people allowed for traffic alleviation. In 1947, manufacturing began to move out of Sacramento following the war and combined with cars, and the trolley stopped serving South Sacramento. Just as the residents had been with the annexation movement, Oak Park Residents are chief among the main issues with the new bus routes because the busses did not provide the

same level of service as the busses. As time went on, traffic increased and would need more
treatment than busses and the removal of tracks by the city.

Sacramento began undertaking urban renewal projects in the downtown area to create the
Capitol Mall area. The area that is now the capital mall had been poor neighborhoods with
majority-minority communities that were displaced. Oak Park was one area that lacked racial
covenants, so redlining by the government pushed minorities into specific areas. That area of
Sacramento has a history of forcing its minority residents out. Japantown came from the same
areas before WWII, and internment plus capital building projects wiped them from the city.
Oak Park began to take on poorer residents while the age of its infrastructure left the area at a
disadvantage moving forwards.

Sacramento stood at the intersection of primary transportation lines branching out to the
rest of the state and east over the Sierra Nevadas. Several highways ran concurrently through
South Sacramento and met with the Lincoln Highway that stretched across the continent. US 40,
US 50, and US 99 (now Ca 99) came through the area. Highway 99 came straight through Oak
Park and brought a great deal of traffic past local shops, stores, and parks. The highway worked
on surface streets for a long time. However, masses of commercial, commuter, and private traffic
often clogged the intersections of the roads that were inadequate for the volume of cars now on
them. In 1955 Sacramento began looking at necessary infrastructure expansion to carry cars and
soon realized that the city funds could not account for the capital. In response, the city asked the

---

16 The Sacramento Bee [Volume 179, No. 29,031]. (Sacramento Ca). 12 October 1946.
https://sacbee.newspapers.com/image/624091024/.
https://sacbee.newspapers.com/image/624042022/
https://sierra2.org/the-color-lines-that-divided-us/.
19 Wildie, Kevin. Sacramento’s Historic Japantown : Legacy of a Lost Neighborhood / Kevin Wildie. Charleston,
California Division of Highways advisory board to realize the capital cities issues. The wild west approach of utilizing surface streets in various municipalities throughout the state became a logistical issue that could not adapt as fast as it needed to changing conditions.

The state knew that it would need to build a more extensive, more direct means of transporting goods in and out of Sacramento. As a result of the need to consolidate, the state would begin buying up the property and space for the right of way. The state pursued the new lands speedily, explicitly opening offices in the downtown area as Oak Park residents' education points. For a time, the city and the state highways considered re-routing the new South Sacramento Freeway, later known as Highway 99, to the East of Highway 50. The state weighed the possibilities of bypassing South Sacramento, but the move required the purchase and seizure of new lands to route the freeway to the panned bridge. Rather than routing the freeway through the Arden Arcade area and bypassing Oak Park, the decision to proceed with the route the state was already acquiring and allowed US 50 to intersect in the city got adopted. Highway 99 cut Oak Park off from the rest of South Sacramento to the West and from much of the City center to the North. Local transportation officials explained that the congestion and pollution took place because most traffic through the city had to also stop in it.

The following decades were not kind to Oak Park. Despite a rich, vibrant group of businesses and local culture, the area fell further into poverty due to the freeways that serviced the middle-class outlying area but isolated the neighborhood from the rest of the city. In the late

---


22 Ibid, 8.

23 *The Sacramento Bee.* [Volume 192. No. 31,069].16 April 1953. [https://sacbee.newspapers.com/image/617582657/1,8](https://sacbee.newspapers.com/image/617582657/1,8).
1950s, the freeways removed traffic from Oak Park surface streets and moved the traffic to the raised interstate. Less traffic meant more manageable transportation on city streets. At the same time, it also amounted to less business and people coming through the area.\textsuperscript{24} The area saw rising crime rates and sinking poverty levels throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Besides urban renewal and white flight to the suburbs, increasing policing and isolation made the community feel fed up. By 1968-9, tensions between the community, the Black Panthers, and Sacramento law enforcement were beginning to come to a head. They were a militant opposition group to police brutality and injustice for the poor. Oak Park's chapter played an instrumental role in the May 2\textsuperscript{nd} protest against the outlawing of open carrying firearms at the state capitol protest. The protest led to armed men dressed in leather jackets, dark glasses, and berets standing in the halls of the legislature carrying weapons of all types. Ronald Reagan, then freshmen governor of the state, was giving a speech to eighth-graders on the capitol's steps when it started. The California Highway Patrol disarmed the men, but the law regarding the open carry of firearms, in no small part a response to the Black Panther tactic of patrolling and observing arrests. At the same time, armed on city streets throughout the state passed and became California law. Newspaper headlines read "Capitol is Invaded" in a tone that implies a foreign body, not residents and nearby activists, demonstrated against the law.\textsuperscript{25}

By 1969, the Sacramento Sheriff described his departments as having "underreacted for a long time" to the spiking crime rates in Oak Park, often ignoring all but the most critical calls,


even then waiting for multiple units escort.\textsuperscript{26} Both sides accused the other of firing first in the 1969 Oak Park riot that saw several hours of gunfire exchanged between the Black Panthers and the Sacramento Police. Black Panthers accused the police of taking money and weapons from their headquarters following the shootout.\textsuperscript{27} While nobody died, and the violence calmed after the event, local businesses were frustrated with the violence and damage to the community. Some closed their doors and never reopened. The following year, four Black Panthers faced charges over the killing of a police officer. While eventually acquitted, the rift between the community and the police force widened, and violence increased in the neighborhood throughout the crime wave of the 1980s and 90s. Frequent urban renewal projects erased more and more of the area's cultural heritage and identity, but the neighborhood survived and continued to be a diverse center for Sacramento's cultural background.

The story of transportation is not dissimilar from that of colonization. Initial boom areas lay abandoned all over the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. As the gold ran out, so did the people and the money. Over time technologies change, and new undertakings provide for the state. Roads help tell this story, just as railroads did before cars; roads picked the winners and losers of modernization in a way that colonization efforts and settlers have been doing since the discovery of North America. Just as the natives had been displaced and systematically eliminated after discovering gold, the poor and working-class became disposed of their cultural centers, connections to the outside world, and jobs by transportation transformations in the Sacramento Valley. A future historical investigation should examine the efforts made to keep transportation in Oak Park and why the final routing of the freeways found its way to the edges of African


American centers. Perhaps the effects of redlining and lower property values aided the state in acquiring the land for the freeway cheap, and perhaps it was a practical consequence of the existing route or something more deliberate. Oak Park remains a critical part of Sacramento's history, one that deserves further investigation of government actions, be they practical or malicious, to understand the real social and economic impact on the once growing wealthy community to prevent inequitable gentrification urban renewal projects. The lens of transportation and public works gives researchers a glimpse into the ideas and mindset of city leaders regarding their motivation and decision-making.

Historians seeking to write more comprehensive works on the history of the impact of the interstate highway system should consider digging deeper into the local decision processes. Archives of popular media such as newspaper and magazine pieces can provide a wealth of primary resources. Additionally, they should yield a step-by-step guide to finding local committees, supervisory boards, and impact reports. A thorough examination should give a more intimate picture of how the particular routes became established, adapted, and often bypassed in favor of more direct pathways in and out of cities. Public records requests should be from various counties. The California Department of Transportation, the state, and the federal government will likely also get at the broader metanarrative of highway construction and the weight given to considerations over displacement. Funding sources to consider are the various organizations for the historical preservation of Oak Park, the Sacramento Historical Society, California State Archives, most importantly, the state government who funded the displacement of people from the once well connected and vibrant majority community as it transformed into a minority-majority suburb of the city. Special attention to the effects of redlining and the overall money-saving mechanisms of the state.


The Civil Rights Movement is one of the most pivotal movements for African Americans in the United States as it dismantled segregation, racism, and disenfranchisement across the nation. The heart of the movement can be traced through the Southern states, but racism and disenfranchisement went beyond state boundaries. As a nation that has been and continues to be built and fueled by racism, it is essential to understand the depths in which racism has been engrained within the nation’s history as well as its impacts on regions that have not been recognized in the historiography. Many of the works that are dedicated to dissecting the civil rights movement do not examine the impacts on states outside the southern region and what the racial climate was like in states like California. As California has been recognized as one of the most racially diverse states in America, it is essential to understand the roles they played in the larger movement. By examining works that reiterate the overall breadth of the civil rights movement, and then narrowing in on movement in California and Oak Park to highlight the similarities and differences.

The broader historical narrative places the civil rights movement between the years 1954 through 1968, but African American’s dedication to establishing racial equality extends beyond this timeline. Much of this is due to the history surrounding the civil rights movement is consumed by figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X, who respectably deserve the praise they receive, but their contributions distort the historical timeline and overshadow the African Americans that were advocating long before their participation and after. Therefore, once the bigger figures within history are removed, and the narrative is driven by regular people and organizations, the timeline of the civil rights movement extends as far back as the late 1930s and continues through 1980s and is often regarded as the long civil rights movement my scholars today. But it is also important to note that the sentiment that surrounds the civil rights movement
is primarily concerned with the issues that are happening in the south, as the bulk of Jim Crow laws, segregation, and disenfranchisement were the most prevalent in this region. Yet before the wave of activism involving sit-ins, nonviolent protests and marches, and freedom rides, African Americans were organizing at a local level through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

While African Americans have been consistently organizing to be recognized as citizens as far back as the abolition movement, by the 1930s Black men and women began to reconsider their approach to the matter of civil rights. The 1933 Amenia Conference, a private NAACP conference attended by black men and women who were born at the emergence of segregation laws and have come of age refuting the nature of Jim Crow laws. The individuals who attended the conference vocalized their ideas in shifting the direction of the civil rights movement that would garner success. Many emphasized the importance of economic rights, posing ideas of an interracial movement that incorporated economic justice as they implicated diminishing economic factors that separated races. While these were great ideas, many members of the NAACP did not want to deter away from their own goals of racially equality and dismantling segregation. Although this was not the first Amenia conference, or even the NAACP conference that was envisioning a larger movement dedicated to civil rights, it was one of the few instances where these early efforts could be traced throughout the movement and the individuals at this conference could marvel at the success African Americans have made within twenty years.

Early African American activism in the twentieth century was not as loud as it would get in the coming years. As individuals and organizations began to come together in the late 30s and

---

the 40s, they slowly began to mobilize and act against institutionalized racism and social injustice. Much of this stemmed the United States participation in World War II. As the nation recruited men and women regardless of race to join and participate in the war effort, it not only brought new opportunities, but it also reinforced segregation. African Americans were limited to some of the most unattractive jobs in the industry, working on shipyards, being janitors on military bases and warehouses, and being limited to serve in the roles they maintained within military branches. ³ As a result of this apparent discrimination the NAACP sponsored protest meetings and would organize to protest discrimination in the defense industry and throughout the military. ⁴ This is significant because this it prompted Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 that promoted nondiscriminatory policies within the defense industry, and this was incredibly important as it was the first presidential order since 1875 that supported civil rights. ⁵ Although this obviously did not end discrimination in the workforce or even within the defense industry, it was a step in the right direction for African Americans and Black organizations as their movement to segregation was now receiving recognition from the government. As a result, there was a growth in NAACP membership throughout the south with organizing backed by revolutionary civil rights activist and humanitarian Ella Baker, who helped shaped the predominantly southern civil rights movement.

As the numbers of NAACP continued to rise across the southern region, African Americans began to exercise the rights they had while continuously mobilizing for change and ending discrimination in employment and housing sectors. African Americans went on to achieve small victories throughout the south in the 1940s to end segregation, and establish black

---

⁵ Ibid., 35.
safe spaces to organize, such as churches to further the progress of the movement to a national scale. As the movement moves into the 1950s, bus boycotts emerge across the south and inspired the sit-ins, freedom rides, protests and marches that transpired in the 1960s. The 1950s is also the decade in which the landmark supreme court case of Brown v. Board of Education, that determined that racial segregation of schools was unconstitutional and legally ended segregation within public schools. But of course, not all schools adhered to this, and many African American children were threatened with violence when attempting to integrate into white schools. This decision was one of many that would lead to the intense fight for civil rights in the south that erupted in the 1960s as more organizations and people of all backgrounds began to rally for civil rights. As the height of the civil rights movement takes place in the 1960s, organizations such as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), emerges garnering support from the youth, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from the late 1950s led by Martin Luther King Jr., Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the NAACP that assisted African Americans in organizing and nonviolent tactics to end segregation of all facilities in the United States. In the 1960s student and youth activism dictated the participation of the movement. In the late 1950s and through the 60s there was a rise in student activism who orchestrated the famous sit-ins in various southern restaurants to that they too deserved equal treatment in white facilities, as well as the freedom rides that demonstrated that they should not be restricted to only the back of the bus based on their skin. Yet these nonviolent strategies were met with a plethora of violence from white southerners who wanted to maintain white superiority and institutionalized racism, as they genuinely believed that black individuals were not and could never be seen as equals. Yet this notion would be disrupted in 1964 as President Lydon B. Johnson administration passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, or
national origin and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which outlawed discriminatory voting laws that were implemented across the nation to prevent specifically African Americans, but also people of other racial backgrounds from voting. While these acts marked the end of the fight for racial and social justice within many history textbooks and people’s general knowledge of the civil rights movement, African Americans continued to be activists. Shortly after the wider civil rights movement came to an end, the Black Panther Party emerged.

The Black Panther Party emerged at the very end of the civil rights movement and is often not given enough acknowledgement or consideration to the larger civil rights movement, as members of the Black Panther Party were villainized by white press and media. In 1966 in Oakland, California community college students declared a revolution against American imperialism. ⁶ While the motives of the civil rights movement and the Black Panther Party differ, there is a direct connection in their rejection of the current systems in place at that time and their desire to dismantle them completely and be freed from the reins of oppression. The Black Panther party posed a threat to the United States and the Federal Bureau of Investigation as they had seen any organization take up a revolutionary struggle since the Civil War. ⁷ As the Black Panther party wanted to stop being policed by law enforcement and the government, their tactics warranted further infiltration from government officials as they feared their ideologies spreading into the community. ⁸ Yet when looking back on the efforts of the Black Panther Party now, they primarily focused on social issues within the black community, such as providing free breakfast for the youth and other programs to help those who could not afford food, establishing

---

⁷ Bloom and Martin, *Black Against the Empire*, 3.
⁸ Ibid., 6
community health clinics to educate and assist health issues that were prevalent in the black community such as sickle cell anemia, HIV, and AIDS. But what stands out about the Black Panther Party in the dominant historical narrative is that they were armed black men patrolling the streets, yet they were utilizing the open-carry gun laws in the state that protected them, but due to the racist nature of the time and law enforcement they were constantly being challenged and considered a threat to society.

The history of the Black Panther Party is essential to understanding African American history, because it demonstrates the lengths in which African Americans could push the system to invoke change and how liberation movements struggle in America. While the civil rights movement had several life changing victories in the south, little changed in the North and the West, finding ways to “fix” issues within the Black community, yet they were essentially just isolating their community and its issues, making it difficult to climb the social, political, and economic ladders within society. 9 As the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement is often depicted as militant movement, it sought to bridge the gaps the civil rights movement could not fully address. As Robert Weisbrot argues in his book Freedom Bound: A History of America’s Civil Rights Movement, the movement itself was self-limiting as it was able to end legal segregation and discrimination, but it kept intact the systems that created it.10 Not that this was their intention, but Blacks were already severely limited when it came to politics, is why the Black Panther Party was a crucial political innovation for the 1960s and a major influence for movements today by narrowing in on the issues within their communities and taking direct action to improve and protect them.11 While the party had a deep impact across the nation, it ties

9 Ibid., 11-12
11 Bloom and Martin, Black Against the Empire, 13.
to California are significant. As much of the sentiment of civil rights and a racial justice are centered in the south, these issues can be identified in northern states, the west, and specifically California.

As the nation witnessed and felt the impacts of racial justice, it is important to examine the climates of California and more specifically Oak Park and the ways in which racism, segregation, and disenfranchisement impacted this region and their communities. When dissecting the civil rights movement outside of the predominant south, it is essential to establish the differences of the region that would render different results. For instance, California remains the most racially diverse state in the nation, and that has proven to not be any different during the twentieth century. As the southern sentiment of the race problem has focused on the issues surrounding African Americans, California’s race problem incorporates the issues faced by an array of races such as Indigenous, Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, and Filipino, due to the influx of immigrants during the twentieth century. With there not only being Blacks in California because of the great migration, and the rising Jim Crow laws in the south, but the dynamic in California was also inherently unique. It is also essential to establish the differences between northern and southern California as Los Angeles and the surrounding Area was a hub for rising stars at the time and the Black middle class, whereas moving north in the Bay Area and the Sacramento Area were more working-class people. This is essential because while the citizens of the state, regardless of location, advocated for civil rights, their influences and experiences can be connected in relation to the states position on civil rights.

Part of the reason why the civil rights movement in California is not recognized throughout history is due to the lack of prominent civil rights activists leading the movement as they did in the south. For instance, as mentioned earlier, men like Martin Luther King Jr, Phillip Randolph, and Roy Wilkins had a direct impact of the direction of the movement, whereas in the West and California specifically, organizations and the communities helped amplify their concerns. A few organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, had direct-action campaigns to get the black community involved and advocate for equal access to education, and better employment opportunities for the black community in California. Much of the movement in California followed the pace of the larger movement in the South, but it drastically fell off after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Despite the victories, Black activists continued to push for racial diversity within predominately white colleges and universities, as the number of enrolled black students remained significantly low. ¹³ This also aided the emergence of Black Panther Party in Oakland and throughout the nation, as mentioned earlier, as issues within the black community still presided despite the nationwide effort to dismantle the strictures that kept African Americans down. The Black Panther Party had a presence in Oak Park as well. As a city within the States capitol, there was a growing Black Power sentiment, and influence of the Black Panther Party within the community. As members of the Party travelled to Sacramento to advocate for pardons and paroles for its members, and organizing marches to protect their rights as citizens, as the state began to actively change the gun rights that the party actively used.

Despite the diverse demographic in California, there were still structural and institutional inequalities for Blacks that fueled the notion that Blacks were inferior and allowed for Blacks to

be racially profiled by police in the streets to continue to promote the perception that African Americans are criminals and bad for society. 14 While it would not be until the 1960s where African Americans were protected by law from discrimination and could practice their rights as citizens at the ballot boxes, California chapters of the NAACP and the Los Angeles branch of the Civil Works Administration have worked diligently to establish since the early twentieth century to ensure that Black workers were not discriminated against. 15 But as the Black population continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, it was clear that the color line followed them and carried the same discrimination in terms of housing, employment, police misconduct, and education. 16 For instance, Oak Park was Sacramento’s first suburb and was one of the most established black neighborhoods in Sacramento, but as the black population continued to grow, Oak Park realtors and homeowners refused to sell to Black buyers. 17 As some of the first people to settle in Oak Park, all new Black migrants were pushed to the Oak Park area, in effort to isolate the black community as white residents decided to flee as the racist ideologies fueled the perceptions of African Americans and ultimately did not want to be a part of that environment. 18 This is similar to the sentiment that could be found in the south as a result of Jim Crow segregation and housing discrimination through redlining. While United States history has not actively portrayed California as a region that discriminated against Blacks, its active discrimination against other races aided the discrimination to the African American community.

While racism in California is not actively depicted California’s history has demonstrated that discrimination laws were not a new phenomenon, the state has instituted several laws and statutes to limit immigration to the region and severely limit the mobility of people of color, confining them to certain districts and certain work. This was apparent especially in Oak Park as the black population continued to grow and was pushed into black communities as a result of whites refusing to sell land and homes to Black individuals, jobs that were once available to them disappeared, and vices such as crime, drugs, and prostitution grew within these confines as a direct result of isolating their community to a certain region of the city and not providing any type of support due to racist perceptions and ideologies. 19 The experiences of the African American community in the height of the civil rights movement demonstrates the consistency of segregation ideologies. While California is not known for its segregation laws, it had numerous racial restrictions for people of color throughout the state, such as miscegenation laws, school segregation statutes, and discrimination-based statutes imposed on not only Blacks, but also Asians, Mexicans, and Indigenous that protected white residents and but people of color at higher risk from incrimination. Schools were segregated, facilities had the right to refuse service, and interracial relationships between a list of races was prohibited. The activism off the civil rights movement appealed these statutes and laws, but the engrained notions of racism and discrimination persisted in Black and ethnic communities.

The discrimination faced by African Americans in Oak Park during the years of the long civil rights movement, aided its transition to a predominantly black neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century. As mentioned, as the black population grew in Oak Park, that became the

---

starting point for new black residents to find a home. As realtors and homeowners refused to sell
African Americans in other areas of the Sacramento region, they began embraced the
community they were provided with. Although the civil rights movement was not as prominent
in Oak Park in particular, the issues the movement addressed were felt throughout the city. As a
result of segregation, and lack of integration, Oak Park blossomed into full functioning black
neighborhood. Black businesses, black lawyers, Women’s Civic Improvement Clubs, Black
Student Unions, Black churches, Black Panther Party Chapter office, community libraries, parks
and various other facilities that emerged throughout the century. This allowed for African
Americans to embrace their community and the resources it provided for the black community to
provide a hopeful future for the youth and to establish a respectable presence within Sacramento.

With the Black Panther Party setting up an office in Oak Park, it brought a lot of attention and
surveillance to the city. Not only was there a clear housing discrimination in Oak Park, but the
Black community was heavily surveillance due white fear that Blacks would take over not just
their communities, but also obtain political power. As this can be recognized across the nation,
the Black community in Oak Park was subjected to heavy policing by the local police
department in effort to regulate African Americans. As the Black Panther Party consistently
utilized the open-carry laws in California in the late 1960s, law enforcement saw this as an
opportunity to not only stir up violence, but also condemn African Americans for the violence
they insighted. In Oak Park in particular, members of the Black Panther Party renamed James
McCclatchy Park, Brotherhood Park, which prompted a fight between Black and white residents
that resulted in the cops being called. As a result, forty people were arrested and over a

---

20 Datel, Central Oak Park, 5.
hundred shots had been fired, and the Black Panther Party office was ransacked and destroyed.  
This demonstrated that the presence of the Party was a threat to the white residents despite their 
immediate priority being to support the black community and serve as their own police force that 
would not falsely incriminate them based on their skin color.

Oak Park remains a historically Black neighborhood that has lacked proper attention from 
the government to build up the community. As a result of the racial tensions and discrimination 
in Oak Park majority of the remaining white businesses moved and allowed for black to emerge 
and thrive. But in 1973, “the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency established the 
Oak Park Redevelopment Area and began buying up property in the neighborhood.”  
This project relocated public service buildings and businesses in effort to build affordable housing to 
diversify its demographic and provide more white-collar jobs. While Oak Park remains a 
predominantly black neighborhood its history is rapidly diminishing. As most parts of the 
neighborhood have been run down and do not receive proper maintenance, and being riddled 
with crime, it remains and integral piece of African American history in Sacramento. As 
historians and redevelopment programs have attempted to preserve the historical significance of 
Oak Park as it pertains to Northern California, and California as a whole, it has been subjected to 
gentrification in the last twenty years as a result, a rise in housing costs, and forcing many 
African Americans to relocate. As its residents and community has demonstrated through its 
history, the African American community has been staunch advocates for their rights as people 
and have protected their place and stance within society and their community, and that will only 
continue to flourish as society continues to change.

22 “Oak Park – Black Panthers,” Video. 
23 Datel, Central Oak Park, 5. 
24 Ibid., 5.
The Civil Rights Movement remains one of the most pivotal movements for African Americans as it ended legal segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. While the historical narrative has focused on the movement’s efforts in the south, its impact was felt across the nation and the world, as it provided a new perspective on race relations. While the southern civil rights movement is taught in classrooms, focusing on its impacts on small communities like Oak Park makes a difference in the historiography. Through examining the depths in which racism and segregation impacted small neighborhoods in the nation’s most diverse state speaks volumes to the engrained notions of institutionalized racism. As the field of African American history continues to grow, local histories across the nation will help piece together the Black narrative and reinsert the varied lived experiences of African Americans throughout United States history. While this paper only covers the broader civil rights movement and the emergence of the Black Panther party, it reveals the treatment of African Americans in California and how they too contributed to the widespread determination to end segregation, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and to ultimately be recognized as individuals beyond the racist notions white people have prescribed to them based on their skin. As this paper briefly uncovers the movements connection to the growing Black population in Oak Park, it relays the way in which its overall sentiment of the movement stretched beyond the southern borders and influenced Black communities across the nation.
Bibliography


Regional and Community-based African American and the Landscape of Cultural History in Sacramento

Elvy Seyman

December 16, 2021.

Abstract: The historiographical literature on regional and community African American performing arts organizations is limited. Sacramento is the cultural and economic center of the Californian Central Valley and has been home to a vibrant Black performing arts community since the mid-1970s. The contributions of Black performing artists has been a tremendous yet woefully undocumented part of Sacramento’s cultural heritage. I begin in 1976, when Celebration Dance Company opened in Oak Park Park Methodist Church. The first efforts of the organization were to offer free dance classes for underserved individuals and communities of all ages, particularly the African American Community in Oak Park. By the mid-1980s Celebration Dance Company had expanded its goals to produce and promote Black history, culture, and performing artists throughout Sacramento; it has been a leading organization ever since. This paper explores the history and impact of Black performing arts and artists in Sacramento, with emphasis on the experiences of Black performers in the early years of Celebration Arts and audience/critical reception from local news media. Founder James Wheatley, a Black actor/choreographer/dancer hailing from Los Angeles, conceived Celebration Dance Company because in the 1970s he noticed a marked absence African Americans in dance and theatre programs in the area. A careful examination of the experiences of Black performing artists (like Wheatley) over the last fifty years offers a powerful lens with which to examine changes of the social and cultural landscape in Sacramento while celebrating a remarkable Sacramento organization.
I. Regional and Community-based African American Performance and the Landscape of Cultural History in Sacramento

Scholarship on African American professional, regional, and community theatres and dance companies have often focused on “familiar urban regions,” already imagined in popular consciousness as thriving artistic destinations. Yet outside of the largest metropolitan centers, (New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, etc.) regional non-profit arts organizations produce vibrant, community based-performance projects each year that are integral components of regional cultural histories across America.¹ The cultural critic and playwright Larry Neal (a leading member of the 1960s Black Arts movement) argued that theatre, as the most social of all the art forms, exists in direct relationship to the audience it claims to serve, and that theatre produced by Black artists was a radical departure and alternative to the sterile nature of mainstream American theatre.² This relationship between community-based Black and multicultural performance, audience, and the larger community has yet to be explored on a regional level in California outside of San Francisco and Los Angeles. I use the term “community-based performance” rather than African American or multicultural theatre to expand the definition of theatrical performance practice to include various music and dance organizations within the scope of this study. Community-based art (and performance) emerges from a particular community to expand and celebrate the social and cultural voice of that community and in doing so becomes a significant and specific part of a city’s cultural heritage.

More inquiry is needed to recognize not just the important role community-based African American and multi-cultural performing arts organizations in have played in places like


Sacramento, but the revolutionary nature of Black and multi-cultural arts organizations disrupting the white artistic hegemony of said regions. Currently, no repository of Sacramento based African American performance art exists. The creation of an archive devoted solely to community-based performance by Black Sacramento artists would fill a gap in regional and community theatre scholarship by providing the perspectives of Black performers from both the theatrical/media archives and in their own words. This project would highlight and preserve the cultural impact of Black performance as community-oriented revolutionary art in Sacramento.

II. **African American Community-Based Performance in Sacramento: A Digital Archive of the City’s Cultural History**

**Methodology**

This project aims to create a digital archive of African American community-based performance in Sacramento from the founding of Celebration Dance Company in 1976 to the present day. Performance archives seek to preserve and celebrate some tangible record of a live art form that is by nature impermanent in its transmission. The proposed methodology for this project is to combine and utilize oral histories, material objects from past performances, and Sacramento news and culture publications to create an online archive that educates and celebrates the rich history of Black community-based performance art in Sacramento.

**A Digital Archive in Three Parts**

The proposed digital archive will comprise of three separate but interrelated components. Each component can be carried out by a separate researcher. The proposed components for the digital archive are as follows:

1). A scanned digital repository of playbill material, production photography, and critic reviews of all available performances by Celebration Arts and other African American and multicultural performance organizations since the mid-1970s.
2). A collection of oral histories obtained by CSUS history students through interviews of prominent Black performance artists in Sacramento. Artists to consider as potential interview subjects for oral histories: James Wheatley, Melinda Wilson-Ramey, Vorees Franklin, Linda Goodrich, James Ellison II, Tory Scroggins, Bonnie Bane, and Linda White. Reviews of past productions from Celebration Arts in the Sacramento Bee and Sacramento News & Review archives can be used to provide further suggestions for Black artists active in Sacramento community and regional theatre.

3). A digital booklet/timeline with historiographical analysis of fifty years of African American performance culture in Sacramento. The analysis will include discussions regarding equity challenges faced by Black performing arts organizations in Sacramento, the relationship of Black performance organizations to the African American Community in Sacramento, and an artistic biography/statement from as many Black performers, dancers, directors, and designers from Sacramento as possible. Additionally, the researcher should consider an analysis of Sacramento media theatre/performance criticism through the years that utilizes critical race theory as its underlying method of inquiry; comparing the language and coverage of performance by African American arts organizations and those considered more “mainstream” by the press.

Sources

The preliminary bibliography for this project is organized into several sections that are by no means comprehensive. The first section consists of a sampling of scholarship and secondary sources related to twentieth century African American history and African American studies.
consulted for the historiography at the end of this prospectus. The second section provides a list of sources consulted in readily available online archives and through the CSUS Library database. The third section contains a list of possible sources and archives desired for this project with the author’s assessment of their availability.

**Accessible online and through CSU Sacramento Library databases:**

1. Sacramento News & Review Issue Archive (available online). The online SN&R issue archive has over 100 short and long form reviews of Celebration Arts shows from 2001-2020. A curated sampling of long form reviews is included in the bibliography for this project under “Sacramento News & Review Sources.”

2. The Sacramento Bee archives are available in the NewsBank, inc. database through the CSU Sacramento Library. There are over 350 articles that either mention or feature Celebration Arts or James Wheatley from 1984-2021. A curated sampling of these articles is included in the bibliography under “Sacramento Bee Sources.”

3. Viera Whye’s Thesis (San Jose State University) and Angela-Dee Alforque’s dissertation (St. Mary’s College of California) each provided valuable information that significantly contributed to the historiography of this project. These sources are available in ProQuest and are listed in the bibliography.

**Planned Sources:**

1. Celebration Arts production archive. In coordination with the Sacramento Historic Preservation Team, this project seeks to acquire past production materials for digitization from the archives of Celebration Arts, including playbill materials, ticket stubs, programs, production photos, and production notes. The archives are located at 2727 B.
St., Sacramento 95816. To contact theatre staff about access to archival materials email CelebrationArtsActs@gmail.com.

2. Oral history interviews. The names on this list are all Black performers associated with Celebration Arts and can be potentially contacted through the theater company. Potential interviewees include, but are not limited to:

- James Wheatley (founder of Celebration Arts/actor/director/choreographer/playwright)
- Dr. Melinda Wilson-Ramey (Associate Dean of Students and Personnel-Sacramento State College of Arts & Letters/director)
- Dr. Linda Goodrich (Professor Emerita, Department of Theater and Dance, Sacramento State University/founder Black Art of Dance)
- James Ellison II (performer/teacher)
- Vorees Franklin (Celebration Arts Board Secretary/author/actor)
- Dr. Halifu Osumare (Professor Emerita, African American Studies, UC Davis/choreographer)
- Tory Scroggins (actor)
- Bonnie Bane (actor/singer)
- BJ Nash (actor)
- Khimberly Marshall (director)
- Marcus Crowder (Sacramento Bee theater critic/playwright)
- Angela-Dee Alforque (California Arts Council Director of Program Services)
- Charles Cooper (music director)
- Brooklynn Solomon (actor)

III. Research Funding

- The City of Sacramento’s Historic Preservation Team has received a $50,000 grant through the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund dedicated to protecting and preserving Black History in Sacramento. This project will use funding through this grant
allocated to Sacramento State history students attached to the City’s preservation project.

Additional Funding

- The California Arts Council streamlined their grant funding process in 2021. Grant priorities include an increase of general operating support for arts organizations. The Cultural Pathways Grant provides two years of operating support and a host of technical assistance, professional development tools, resources, and training for arts organizations rooted in communities of color that would be invaluable to this project. Applications open in early 2022.


Staff Contact: Natalie Peeples (she/her), natalie.peeples@arts.ca.gov.

The preliminary research for this project is indebted to the research published in 2012 by Angela-Dee Alforque, which explored Sacramento’s James Wheatley (founder of Celebration Arts) as a teaching artist and the healing power of creative work in communities of color. Her findings in that research, namely that the study, teaching, and performance of dance, music, and theatre serve as an extension of both community service and artistic excellence specific to the needs of African American and other ethnic minority artists that are marginalized by mainstream arts organizations is a valuable guide for future inquiry into African American and multicultural performance in Sacramento.

---


IV. Historiography

Twentieth Century African American History—An Interdisciplinary Field Discussed Thematically

Scholarship on Black history in the twentieth century United States is largely carried out in an interdisciplinary field of study that engages with methods and theories from Black diaspora studies, queer studies, sociology, anthropology, literature, and legal scholarship, among others. Multiple thematic links exist between various sub-disciplines, regardless of the research background of the authors. This historiography examines five works from scholars of the African American experience working in English, African American Studies, law, and theatre departments in Universities across the United States. Saidiya Hartman, Regina N. Bradley, Sharon Patricia Holland, and James F. Wilson are all professors of English with specializations in African American studies, literature, or drama—while Michelle Alexander is an associate professor of law and the former director of the ACLU’s Racial Justice Project in Northern California.

These five scholars all engage with questions typical in African American historical scholarship, including the problem of alienation by color-line, Black resistance to structural racism and white hegemony, and the assertion of Black identities. This paper explores and compare arguments and interpretations regarding Black resistance and assertion of identity in

---

6 The problem of the color line remains a core tension and space of inquiry in the body of literature on African American studies/history since W.E.B. Du Bois’s use of the term in the forethought to “The Souls of Black Folk,” in 1903.
five monographs by the authors listed above, which range in topic from Black sexuality studies, to Black performance and cultural circuits, to mass incarceration. Hartman, Wilson, and Bradley focus their studies on specific regions/cities during specific eras in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Alexander and Holland’s monographs engage with the structural and everyday acts of racism across within the academy and political architecture of the United States.

Regina N. Bradley investigates projections of identity through Black performers and performance spaces, moving forward in time to the post-civil rights generation and hip-hop. Bradley identifies southern hip-hop, literature, and film as the cultural production sites of southern identity for the post-civil rights generation. In *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South* she interrogates cultural expressions of contemporary concerns using a critical race lens through the music of OutKast, and the southern hip-hop aesthetics in cultural texts such Kiese Laymon’s novel *Long Division* and Quentin Tarantino’s film *Django Unchained*. Bradley challenges historical and linear descriptions of southernness in the post-civil rights era as racially rigid and fixed on a traumatic past. In her analysis, hip-hop artists like OutKast work as a reclamation of southern black identity and centers on the agency of African Americans in the South. Bradley argues to literally move past “the past” in a contemporary landscape of white public history that remains marked by antebellum Jim Crow, and civil rights era South (with the prevalence of plantation tours and Civil War reenactments), southern hip-hop must be situated as a contemporary counterpoint to a fixed popular historical narrative of the “tragic” south.

Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* also takes the idea of a forgotten, traumatic past and presents a narrative of radicalism and revolution instead. It is a lush portrait of the intimate lives of young Black women in the often hostile, but also liberating New York City and
Philadelphia neighborhoods labeled “ghettos” and “slums” in the last decade of the nineteenth century to the mid-1930s. Hartman’s research required much reading against the grain of the archives where she searched, in the journals of sociologists, housing reformers, probation officers, social workers, vice investigators, slum photographs, all determined to erase and silence these women from view. Hartman boldly interprets the traditional archival materials, reading between the lines and listening to the silences in the archives, where she discovers the voices of Black women forgotten by history at the turn of the twentieth century. Hartman states of her own methodology that she pressed at the limits of the case file and the document, speculated about what might have been to recognize what she deems are the revolutionary intimate lives of ordinary Black women and girls at the turn of the twentieth century (xiv, xv). The result is a work that blends the lines of historical imagination and hard archival evidence in a masterclass of how to find and engage with perspectives left out of the archives. Hartman’s research demands of its audience to consider how to challenge the limits of the archive to reconstruct the identities and lives of those who the archive would silence. Where laws, law enforcement, and proto respectability politics deemed these young Black women ungovernable and unrespectable, Hartman instead views them as sexual modernists, radicals, and free lovers, not minor figures relegated to the sidelines of history but an important part of a social revolution. Her book She considers the physical movement of bodies through space, the space of the ghetto, the space of the bedroom, space that is policed, space considered both private and subject to scrutiny from laws upheld through white supremacy.

James F. Wilson also considers space in the formation of identity (including gay and lesbian identity) through an examination of the “public space” of theatre throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race and Sexuality in*
the Harlem Renaissance Wilson explores topics relevant to both Black sexuality studies and American theatre history through a thorough mapping of performance, race, sexuality and identity during the 1920s and 1930s. Wilson, like Hartman, is concerned with identity formation but considers it through the lens of performance and performance spaces. Wilson examines performers that in the 1920s refashioned representations of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation from the popular Florence Mills to the lesser remembered blueswoman Gladys Bentley. Wilson’s first chapter investigates the Harlem rent party as a space of artistic and sexual experimentation, similar to Hartman’s investigation of the “private” spaces of apartment buildings in Wayward Lives. Both works situate the urban landscape of black neighborhoods as being distinct from those across the color line, both as a destination site for white tourists and the white (male) gaze and as a sovereign place of identity assertion for their subjects through performance and through the expression of desire.

Desire and erotic space as vectors for the insidious ordinariness of racism is a theme multiple authors visit, none so forwardly as Sharon Patricia Holland. In The Erotic Life of Racism Holland makes the strongest case for interdisciplinary approaches to the study of racism in the United States. Holland’s assertion of the quotidian racism of the everyday guides constructions of race in the US. She argues that queer theory and critical race theory must come back together to solve key issues relating to the overlap of erotic life and racist practice. In Holland’s exploring typical, repeated instances of racism that would not qualify as the “spectacular” variety (the kind everyone in and outside of the academy can agree on as no good), arguing that racism in fact orders some of the most intimate and mundane practices of everyday life (20). Using approaches from critical race theory, queer theory, and feminist theory, Holland demonstrates the hold that racialized thought and prejudice has in a society that wants nothing
more than to move beyond discussion of race and racism, which Michelle Alexander also
explores when discussing the mass incarceration of black and brown men in the late twentieth
and early twenty-first century.

The monograph that is the biggest outlier from the rest of this historiography is Michelle
Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Alexander’s
2010 work was timely in the early years of the Obama administration, countering the narrative
that the United States had entered into an era of true “color-blindness,” with the election of a
Black president by meticulously demonstrating the active role the criminal justice system plays
in creating and perpetuating racial hierarchy, in her words, a redesigned and labeled form of Jim
Crow. Alexander’s work insists readers confront the ugly truth that American racism has
repeatedly shown itself to be highly adaptable and meticulously traces the parallels between Jim
Crow laws and mass incarceration in maintaining a racial caste system that favors a white
hegemony.

The five authors sampled in this historiography represent a small number of thematic
approaches and recent problems in African American historical scholarship. Taken together, the
monographs of Alexander, Bradley, Hartman, Holland and Wilson challenge readers to be
critical observers of racial history that largely remains obscured by colorblind language and
white supremacist institutions.
Bibliography-Historiography


Bibliography: Celebration Arts in Sacramento in Sacramento News & Review, 2002-2020 (Online SN&R archive)


Bibliography: Celebration Arts in the Sacramento Bee, 1992-2017. (All Sacramento Bee articles are available through CSU Sacramento’s access to the database NewsBank, Inc.)


PhuaBee, Chelsea. “Listen to the stores we could tell-Former foster child puts her experiences on paper, then on stage to debunk stereotypes about kids in the system.” Sacramento Bee, March 3, 2007.


Historiographical Essay

Until recently, the history of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) has been overlooked and obscured due to old prejudices. Referencing five historical texts, this historiographical essay aims to remedy some of that obscurity by focusing on the origins of the BPP and the community programs that they initiated. Two of the monographs used for this essay are memoirs written by the Black Panther Party’s two co-founders, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. The other three monographs focus on the history, programs, and growth of the Black Panther Party. All five monographs document the legacy of the Black Panther Party that has been long overshadowed by the attempts to discredit them.

*Revolutionary Suicide* was written by co-founder Huey Newton seven years after the Black Panther Party was founded. It is a book that humanizes the revolutionary leader and provides insight into his upbringing and educational background which became the foundation of the BPP. In 1945, the Newton family moved to Oakland, California from Monroe, Louisiana. They joined Newton’s father Walter, who had found work in the wartime industries in California’s Bay Area. Newton recalls the poverty they faced in Oakland but credits his father as being a great protector and provider for their family. He describes his father as a proud man who had a keen interest in politics, even though he could not vote in Louisiana. He also recalls that his father “never let a white man humiliate him or any member of his family,” a trait that was imparted onto Huey and applied to BPP ideology. Newton also credits his father and his religious sermons as foundational to his strong desire to help those in need, which was incorporated into the BPP ethos.

Although Newton calls his K-12 education a farce, it was during his years at Oakland City College, now Merritt College, that fueled his political awakening. His classes in psychology and philosophy inspired him as a future academic and revolutionary. It was also at Merritt College that Newton met future Black Panther Party co-founder, Bobby Seale. Both students were involved with African American student organizations in the East Bay that ultimately pushed the revolutionaries to work together. To them these student organizations were all talk and little action. They recognized the rising Black consciousness across the nation and the Bay Area and realized that something must be done.
Newton wrote, “One must relate the history of one’s community and to its future. Everything we had seen convinced us that our time had come.”¹ Thus, Newton and Seale created the Black Panther Party inspired by Malcolm X and based on the works of Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, the four volumes of Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara’s *Guerilla Warfare*, and Robert Williams’ *Negroes with Guns*.

Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale adds to the understanding of the party’s origins and actions in his 1970 book, *Seize the Time*. Unlike Newton’s stylized and eloquently written memoir in *Revolutionary Suicide*, Seale’s book is a transcribed oral history of several of his interviews. As an oral history transcription, Seale’s “street speak” adds to its authenticity and provides more vivid details about the origins, actions, and reactions of the BPP.

Seale and Newton had similar backgrounds. Like the Newtons, the Seale family moved to Berkeley, California from Port Arthur, Texas during the WWII leg of the Great Migration to the West. They lived in Cordonices Village, a Berkeley housing project, where he realized that his family lived in semi-poverty. It was not until he became a student at Merritt College that Seale had his political awakening. He was studying to become an engineer and became interested in “American Black History.” It was also at Merritt College that Bobby met Huey during a protest condemning the Cuban blockade. Seale describes Newton as an academic leader who understood his community. When reflecting on the creation of the Blank Panther Party’s 10-Points Program, Seale writes, “Huey understood that you answer the momentary desires and needs of the people, that you try to instruct them and politically educate them, that these are their basic political desires and needs, and from the people themselves will rage a revolution to make sure that they have these basic desires and needs fulfilled.”²

It was the Black Panther Party’s 10-Program and activism that attracted many people the party. David Hillard, a former Chief of Staff of the BPP, writes extensively about the services that the party provided in his book *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*. Hillard explains in the

---

introduction that contrary to misleading stories and misinterpretations, the Black Panther Party was not created as an armed and violent response to police brutality. He writes, “Rather, from the outset in 1966, when Huey P. Newton and other early party members began their historic patrols of the Oakland Police Department armed with law books to explain to members of the community their basic constitutional rights, the Black Panther Party has attempted to provide an example to the community of what is possible and to raise the people’s political consciousness so that we can all step forward with dignity and courage.”3 This was the foundation for the Black Panther Party motto, “All Power to the People,” which included the community “survival” programs that the party initiated to empower and protect Black Americans and oppressed communities.

In Part I of Hillard’s book, he explains in detail the services the party provided in the nearly two dozen community BPP programs. The most famous of these programs is the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program, which was later adopted by the U.S. Government. The party’s Intercommunal Youth Institute was established as a response to the inadequate public school education that Black and poor children were given. The institute covered regular academic curriculum but with a focus on developing students’ critical thinking skills. The Community Learning Center (CLC) was a multipurpose people’s institution that provided progressive educational, cultural, and social activities, such as extracurricular activities in music, dance and drama, women’s self-defense classes, and adult education programs. The Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (SAFE), was created at the request of a group of senior citizens who wanted to prevent muggings and attacks against the elderly and were denied help from the Oakland Police Department. Other programs included the People’s Free Medical Research Health Clinics, the People’s Free Ambulance Service, and the Child Health Care Program. The party also established the Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation, which informs and seeks a cure for the deadly blood disease that primarily affects African Americans. These are only a few of the many services and programs that the Black Panther Party provided the community. Hillard lists and details more in his book.

The book *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, written by historians Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, goes more into depth into the party’s history. This tome examines the events that led to the party’s creation, the growth of the party across the country and internationally, the key party members and leaders, and the party’s downfall. Also featured in this book are the party’s allies, e.g., the Red Guard, the Young Lords, and the Third World Liberation Front. Through details such as these, *Black Against Empire* sets up the political and cultural atmosphere that the Black Panthers entered. The postwar era was an one marked by decolonization, existentialism, and an ideological war between the West versus Communism. These sixties were marked by these events as seen in the rise of counterculture and protests against the Vietnam War, in which the party fully participated.

What *Black Against Empire* does very well is present the complexities of the Black Panther Party. While the book highlights the party’s many achievements, it also examines its flaws. They explain, “The Party’s capacity to sustain an insurgent challenge depended on its ability to stay largely within the law despite the armed resistance mounted by members.”4 The BPP’s militancy was “incompatible” with most of the party’s activities in community care. It was also this militancy that the media focused on, which overshadowed the party’s altruistic programs. By the 1970s, due to the murders of BPP leaders and members, diverging ideologies, the defection of Eldridge Cleaver, party misbehavior, and a growing mistrust within in the party instigated by FBI infiltration, the Black Panther Party unraveled. As a result, Huey Newton closed the national chapters of the party and called members back to Oakland. Ultimately, Newton officially disbanded the last and first Black Panther Party in Oakland, California in 1982.

When examining the history of the Black Panther Party, particularly its origins, the question of “Why in Oakland?” may come up. The book *Living for The City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* by historian Donna Murch provides answers. As mentioned in the memoirs of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, their families participated in the Great Migration from the violently racist South. It is a “migrant” history that Murch argues has been vastly

---

overlooked. She writes, “The tendency to understand Black Power as northern, urban, and violent in contrast to a southern movement of peaceful civil disobedience has rendered the political significance of California’s migrant diaspora invisible.”\textsuperscript{5} She posits that examining the histories of these Bay Area migrant communities is integral to the local and national history of Black Power and Black radicalism. This history includes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an African American labor union that had its West Coast headquarters in Oakland. This history also involves the impact World War II had on new African American migrants who moved West to work in Bay Area navy shipyards.

In Part II of her book, Murch identifies the unique and important impact that California’s higher education system had on the Black Panther Party. As a result of postwar policies, e.g., the G.I. Bill, the State of California developed and expanded their Master Plan for Higher Education, which codified the tripartite system of junior (community) colleges, state universities, and elite “multiversities” (the UC system). By the sixties, the migrant children had come of age and were enrolling into local colleges and universities, as exemplified by Newton and Seale at Merritt College. Postwar counterculture, decolonization, and the civil rights were widely discussed on campuses and led to the creation of many student activist groups, which Newton and Seale participated. Universities were not only spaces for students to discuss current events and organize. They were also venues that prominent civil rights leaders came to speak. Both Newton and Seale, and many other Bay Area Panthers, all witnessed Malcolm X speak at UC Berkeley in 1963. It was a pivotal event for these young revolutionaries.

In investigating the origins and activism of the Black Panther Party through these books it is apparent that both California and its higher education system had major impacts on the party’s creation and growth. More specifically, the City of Oakland provided these young revolutionaries with the environment and circumstances to build BPP ideology in community care and protection. When reflecting on the creation of the party the question often asked is “Why Oakland?” These monographs respond with the answer, “Of course, Oakland.”

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was founded in Northern Californian city of Oakland, on October 15, 1966, by two young African American revolutionaries, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Their revolutionary party became the most iconic Black international organization that defined the Black Power movement in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The party’s 10-Point Program, which demanded food justice, fair housing, equal employment opportunities, better education, and an end to police brutality, inspired people nationally and internationally. Their activism in providing community resources and care through their survival programs, which included safety, food, education, and medical services, attracted many people to participate, support, and join the Black Panther Party. As a result, Black Panther Party chapters arose across the nation and world, notably in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Auckland, and Algiers.

One of the many national chapters of the Black Panther Party was in California’s capital city of Sacramento, just over an hour’s drive north from Oakland. Although the Sacramento had strategic and historic significance for the Black Panther Party, especially in their armed demonstration at the capitol building on May 2, 1967, the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party is not included in mainstream Black Panther Party historiography. Rather than focusing a research question asking why Sacramento has not been included in mainstream BPP historiography, the question that begs to be addressed is “When?”

This paper aimed to investigate the origins and activities of the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party that was once located in Sacramento’s predominantly Black neighborhood of Oak Park. However, even in local Sacramento historiography, the history of the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party is sparse. This is not surprising, since
Sacramento’s Black History has largely been overlooked and under researched. It became apparent that the historiography of Sacramento’s BPP chapter still needs to be researched and written, and that the best sources for this are the oral histories from former Sacramento Black Panthers and the people they served.

It was through the investigation into this missing history that a new sense of urgency appeared. On April 13, 2020, Esutosin Omowale Osunkoya, founder of the Sacramento Black Panther Party chapter, whose colonial name was Charles Brunson, died at age of seventy-six due to complications from COVID-19. And, just this year, on June 6, 2021, the community lost lifelong Oak Park resident and Sacramento Black Lives Matter co-organizer, Victor Brazelton, who at an Oak Park Neighborhood Association meeting in 2016 stood up and spoke out against the neighborhood’s gentrification and shared his childhood memories of Sacramento’s Black Panther Party. He passionately commented, “It’s the fact that our history about who lived here continues to be erased year, after year, after year, after year. And we have to come to meetings to say ‘Hey, you know, we live here.’” To readdress the research question of “When?,” the answer is “Now.”

There are existing local Sacramento history books that do contain informative yet brief passages on the history of Sacramento’s Black Panther Party. In understanding the events that led to the transformation of Oak Park into a well-known Black community and Sacramento civil rights organizations, David Covin’s book *Black Politics after the Civil Rights Movement: Activity and Beliefs in Sacramento, 1970-2000*, is a great place to start. As mentioned in historiographies

---


on the Great Migration to the West, World War II created new military industries in California. Two, new airbases, McClellan and Mather, were established in the Sacramento region, which brought thousands of Black workers, mostly from the South to Sacramento. Government funding for urban renewal, the answer to the city’s “blight issues,” also meant that Black residents were pushed from their homes in downtown Sacramento and redlined areas to certain areas, such as Oak Park.

In his book, Covin identifies two important events of Black Panther Party interaction with Sacramento that ultimately led to the creation of the Sacramento chapter of the party. The first of these events was the well-documented armed demonstration of the party at California’s capitol building on May 2, 1967. Two dozen Panthers came to Sacramento to demonstrate against the bill proposed by Oakland assemblyman Don Mulford to repeal the law that allowed the carrying of loaded guns in California. It was a bill specifically targeting the Black Panther’s armed patrol of Oakland neighborhoods. Republicans, Democrats, and even the NRA supported the bill that became the Mulford Act. Although the Black Panthers were unable to prevent the bill from passing, their actions at the capitol building gained the party national and local attention. Covin writes that “Black youth from throughout California flocked to Oakland,” and this included Black Sacramentans who wanted to participate in the party’s vision of “All Power to the People.”

Other Black Sacramentans, like many Black Americans in the country who were inspired by the Panthers’ action at the state capitol, sought the permission of the party to start a chapter in Sacramento

The other event that Covin identified as important to the creation of Sacramento’s chapter of the Black Panther Party was BPP co-leader Eldridge Cleaver’s campus visit to California State

---

University, Sacramento, also known as Sac State, in 1968. Cleaver encouraged Sac State’s Black students to create a Black Student Union (BSU) on their campus. At that time students of color at California’s northern public colleges and universities, especially in the Bay Area, had organized themselves into a coalition called the Third World Liberation Front, which demanded the creation of Ethnic Studies and affirmative action.

Covin writes that the Panthers saw “central city colleges (as well as the streets) as fertile recruiting grounds.” Covin, who seems to have some prejudice against community colleges and the Black Panthers, explains that “central city community colleges were prime grounds because there one was likely to find both idealistic students and thugs on the same campus.” Sacramento City College (SCC) is the city’s most central and urban campus. Panthers supposedly came to SCC’s campus and harassed its Black students with an ultimatum of the joining BSU or the BPP.

Sacramento Historian William Burg offers a different and more detailed account on the creation of the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party in his book Sacramento Renaissance: Art, Music and Activism in California’s Capital City. He writes that the Sacramento chapter was founded in 1968 by Charles Brunson and its offices were located at 2941 35th Street in Oak Park. Brunson recruited members from BSUs at the local high schools, colleges, and universities. Many of the chapter’s members were students and many were Vietnam War veterans. The chapter required “a six-week training program in political education, military tactics and training, with an extensive reading list.” Like the flagship chapter in Oakland, the Sacramento Panthers provided tutoring and legal aid to the community. They also

---

9 Covin, Black Politics, 26.
10 Covin, Black Politics, 26.
had their own free breakfast for schoolchildren, which served over 150 students per day. The breakfast program was located at Oak Park’s United Church of Christ. The chapter also hosted their own literacy program and Black history classes, before they were offered at the local colleges. Community outreach extended to collaborations with other local activist groups, including the Peace and Freedom Party, the Brown Berets and Native American groups.\textsuperscript{12}

While Burg’s book offers more details about the Sacramento Black Panther Party chapter, his notes were gleaned from previously referenced books listed in this paper. Those sources include Bobby Seale’s memoir, \textit{Seize the Time}, and Covin’s \textit{Black Politics After the Civil Rights Movement: Activities and Beliefs in Sacramento}. Also referenced in his sources is the Black Panther online archive, www.itsabouttimebpp.com, run by Billy X, formerly Billy Jennings, a former Black Panther who now resides in Sacramento.

Like Covin, Burg writes about the violent police shoot out that occurred on the night of June 16, 1969 in Oak Park, which is now referred to as the Father’s Day Riot. It began with a report that gunfire was heard in the park near Black Panthers’ offices. They offices were actually empty. The Sacramento police fired in the direction of the park where the gunshots were supposedly heard. This led to confusion and a shootout by unknown parties at the police. According to Black Panther accounts, Charles Brunson unlocked the office during the crossfire to provide shelter for those caught in the crossfire.\textsuperscript{13} The police then shot tear gas into the office, which was promptly vacated. The police then raided the empty offices and left it in disarray. According to Covin, typewriters, the telephone and the refrigerator were smashed, and the food for the party’s breakfast program was trashed.\textsuperscript{14} The shooting and fighting lasted until 3:00 a.m.,

\textsuperscript{12} Burg, \textit{Sacramento Renaissance}, 63.
\textsuperscript{13} Burg, \textit{Sacramento Renaissance}, 64.
\textsuperscript{14} Covin, \textit{Black Politics}, 41.
and fortunately no one was killed. Burg reports that fifteen to twenty people were injured, twelve of whom were police officers.

In Covin’s book, he frames the Father’s Day Riot as a part of the national war to end the Black Panther Party. These sting operations were the brainchild of J. Edgar Hoover who claimed that the Black Panther Party “without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.” Covin frames the Sacramento Police Department’s actions as a part of the FBI’s counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO). This is supported by reports that the SPD continued to harass the Black residents of Oak Park.

On May 2, 1970, the police approached a group of young people listening to amplified music in McClatchy Park and chased them out of the park with their guns drawn. Later that evening, Officer Bernard Bennet who was on patrol in the same area was shot in the head and died from his injury four days later. The shooter was never found, but seven young Black men were arrested as suspects. Three of these men were released and the remaining four men were named the Oak Park 4.

The trial of the Oak Park 4 was an eight-month ordeal. Charges were dismissed when no evidence was found, and the case had no solid witnesses. Instead, what was found as a scandal by the police and DA. Former prosecution witness Joseph Ramsey stated that he was threatened at gunpoint by the police, and then bribed with a $5000, if he cooperated with them on the stand. 15 Former prosecution witness Kenneth Diagre also recanted his testimony, claiming that he was told if he remained silent, he would be arrested for conspiracy. 16 Burg claims that the Oak Park 4 case was a turning point for Oak Park. While the residents wanted justice for the slain Officer Bennet, their lived experience of police brutality and the revelation of police and

15 Burg, Sacramento Renaissance, 64.
16 Burg, Sacramento Renaissance, 64.
DA corruption in the case created great distrust in the SPD for Sacramento’s Black residents. Furthermore, despite the many shocks that could have been sensationalized by the press that came out of the Oak Park 4 trial, no mainstream media outlets reported on the case. This lack of coverage, and interest, sheds light on why it is hard to find source material on the origins and activism of Sacramento’s Black Panther Party chapter.

Both of Covin and Burg’s books were written in the 2000s. Covin’s book, which served as one of the three sources that Burg gleaned his research from, was published in 2009. Burg’s book was published four years later. A decade has passed since the first book’s publishing, and, still there are no other comparative written sources to add to the historiography of the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party. The lack of written sources also provides an answer to why Sacramento has been left out of mainstream Black Panther historiography. This missing history may also be the result of the lack of interest by the mainstream media in the 1960s and 1970s in the stories of Black Sacramento and the distrust of the Black community after the Oak Park 4 case.

The question now is, if Sacramento historians have already tried their hand at researching history of Sacramento’s chapter of the Black Panther Party, are there no other written sources to use? If that is the case, then the most obvious solution is to gather and compile oral histories from former party members of the Sacramento Black Panthers and the people they served. It is research that is urgent and must be done. To echo the words of the late Victor Brazelton: “It’s the fact that our history about who lived here continues to be erased year, after year, after year, after year.”

Works Cited


“Preventing Gentrification” (working title)

For decades, policies of redlining and de facto segregation have pushed minorities into areas that were considered undesirable. Now, developers look upon these neighborhoods and see opportunity in rundown housing that can be purchased on the cheap, and flipped for a profit. In addition, often well-intentioned urban improvement measures have the unintended consequences of raising property taxes and rent. The combination of these forces results in long-term residents being pushed out of homes they can no longer afford. Using Oak Park as a case study, this paper intends to research the causes and effects of gentrification on historically under resourced neighborhoods with an eye to understanding how urban planning can improve neglected neighborhoods without pushing out existing residents. It is to be hoped that the findings can be used as guidelines for implementing policy in neglected neighborhoods that will result in improvements that serve the existing residents and ensure that they will not be forced out of their homes.

Jon C. Teaford researched the history of twelve northeastern American cities from the 1940s through 1985 to track the cycle of gentrification. As industrial plants were relocating to spaces with room for expansion, and middle-class whites fled the overcrowded cities for the sprawling ranch homes and backyards of suburbia, cities faced a financial crisis. What increase of population they were receiving were largely limited to Blacks migrating from the South, whites coming in from the Appalachians, and Puerto Ricans. The one unifying factor of these groups was that they were mostly poor. The loss of income sent cities into a dither to recover their lost revenue. They combined a frantic effort to revitalize cities and lure back the middle-class masses, with construction of office buildings, hotels and convention centers for white collar commuters. Revitalization meant expanding highways, public transit, and green spaces. The
“ultimate dream of (city planners) was the eradication of the slums,” so they used eminent domain to acquire rundown properties for redevelopment by private investment companies.¹ Many felt that “urban renewal was simply Negro removal.”² Teaford shows that many of the projects of revitalization hastened the city’s decline, as expanded water and sewer lines, reduced pollution, and more extensive highway systems all benefited the suburbs and expanded the city hub, thus contributing to the decentralization that was drawing revenues out of the city center.

In response to the fiscal crisis, mayors balanced budgets by cutting social programs and reducing the city workforce, over the strident protests of labor unions. Cities acted with little regard for their most vulnerable residents. In New York, Mayor Edward Koch closed a city hospital he considered “redundant” despite protests from Black residents. Labor leader Victor Gutbaum attacked Koch for his lack of concern for the city’s poor, but Koch’s tough fiscal policy won him support from voters—both Democrats and Republicans.³ A boom in office workers saw a concurrent building boom in office construction, which garnered these strong mayors great publicity, despite the numerous small businesses and neighborhoods that were bulldozed to make way for the shiny glass palaces of business. Yet Teaford argues that these new buildings often failed to translate to an increase in workers—rather many siphoned off tenants from existing office buildings, thus fattening developers bank accounts but doing little to justify their expense.⁴

Teaford’s interest in the politics of urban development is clear. He examines the decay of strong party politics and how this opened opportunity for political activism within communities.

---
² Teaford, *Renaissance*, 158.
³ Teaford, *Renaissance*, 265.
as well as what Teaford calls “messiah mayors” who crossed political lines and thrilled voters with exciting agendas that created dynamic neighborhoods for white collar workers and attractions to draw tourists. These schemes often succeeded in creating revenue for the cities, but the concurrent shift to low wage service sector jobs and rising home prices left the urban working class behind. The “messiah mayors”, were bent on attracting tourist dollars to their cities, as well as business to their convention centers. They saw the future of America’s cities in the service industry, rather than factories, and spent lavishly to support that vision. As good union factory jobs left, “the hospitality industry employed large numbers of unskilled workers,” as opposed to the skilled, largely union jobs of manufacturing. The urban renaissance in city after city left the working class behind as housing prices rose and wages fell.

David J. Goodwin examines the argument that artists cause gentrification through an investigation of the 111 1st Street warehouse in Jersey City, its takeover by an artist’s collective, and their contentious relationship with the city and building owner. Goodwin argues that artists act as “pioneers” of neighborhood gentrification; by opening cafes and galleries they change the climate of neighborhoods, often pushing out residents. But these pioneers in turn get pushed out by the forces of gentrification as there efforts make neighborhoods appear desirable and the get eaten up by “the machinations of developers.” On the one hand, they contribute to gentrification by making a neglected neighborhood trendy and adding to its value, in the other hand they become victims of gentrification as they get pushed out by the value they were instrumental in creating. Artists tend to be poor and have little influence—a trait they share with the working class. But like the middle class, they also tend to be educated and have an appreciation of culture.

Add to this their tendency to be politically and socially radically, and it becomes easy to see why artists tend to exist in a liminal space, not fitting in well with any of the available categories, but nonetheless strangely attractive.

Residents of the Powerhouse Art’s District described the space as an “urban homestead,” with everyone bringing different skills and creating a space that suited their needs and desires.\(^8\) There was a thriving community of people supporting each other. The artists of 111 1\(^{st}\) Street contributed enormously to the renewal of the neighborhood. But as the artists raised the value of the space, the warehouse owner, Lloyd Goldman, ceased to grant annual leases, insisting instead on month-to-month agreements, an arrangement which greatly benefits owners at the expense of tenants.\(^9\) Goldman wanted the artists out so he could take advantage of the increased value they had brought to his building. The artists fought back, but ultimately the political voice of a group of impoverished artists does not carry the weight that wealthy developers do. On the one hand, artists contribute to gentrification by making a neglected neighborhood trendy and adding to the value, on the other they become victims of gentrification as they get pushed out by the value they were instrumental in creating.

Sean Parsons is a political scientist who used his work with Food Not Bombs to fashion theories around homelessness and gentrification. Food Not Bombs is an organization dedicated to reducing food waste and bringing awareness to the violence of poverty. Parsons demonstrates that the way we frame homelessness changes our approach to it. By framing homelessness as a mental health issue, cities can take a paternalistic approach that strips the homeless of agency.\(^{10}\)

\(^{8}\) Goodwin, 40.
\(^{9}\) Goodwin, 44.
Food Not Bombs, in attempting to politicize the homeless issue and make it visible, ran against the interests of the city of San Francisco. Mayor Frank Jordan, who won election in part because of his “tough on homelessness” policy felt that “the visual presence (of the homeless) harms business and deters tourists.” San Francisco’s leadership was unwilling to address the structural causes of homelessness—decreasing wages coupled with soaring housing prices and the destruction of low-income housing. They argued instead that the homeless were drawn to San Francisco because of attractive social services which must be reduced in order to deter them, a policy which pushed many of the homeless into neighboring Berkeley and Oakland, but did not in any way help them. Revanchist movements of “middle-class white city residents” determined to reclaim the lost territory of their cities that has been taken over by “minorities, gays and lesbians, immigrant groups, and the homeless” back city officials in making their city into a pro-business, pro-tourist environment, which means making the undesirable elements voiceless and invisible.

In *Barrio Dreams*, Arlene Davila focuses on the neighborhood goals of East Harlem’s Latino and Puerto Rican populations, a group striving to maintain the ethnic flavor of their neighborhood against the “entrepreneurial-based urban developments” that ignore the needs and desires of the communities existing residents. These forces deny agency and strips the residents of power. In a neighborhood where almost no one owns their home, it is easy for the desires of the communities’ residents to be ignored. Davila shows the process by which home ownership was actively discouraged. In the 1970s, slumlords in East Harlem abandoned buildings, leaving them in possession of them city, which “disposed of them by the thousands” to “private and

---

12 Parson, 72-73.
nonprofit developers.”14 The government overinvested in Section 8 housing in East Harlem, residents required it, and leaving college-educated, upwardly mobile residents with no option but to leave. The city assumed Latinos were poor and did not think it necessary to provide for a middle-class within their neighborhoods. This is a unique case of an educated, middle-class being displaced by housing built specifically and exclusively for the poor and special needs. For this neighborhood, the city did not provide any home ownership programs as it had done elsewhere. Residents felt El Barrio had become “a dumping ground for special needs housing.”15 By the mid-90s, rent was so low in El Barrio, that no one bothered with home ownership, something that some residents feel was done intentionally as “part of a master plan to keep Latinos from buying property.”16 In the late 90s and early 2000s, an infusion of federal and state dollars to build “affordable housing” effectively contributed to gentrification in the neighborhood, Davila argues. The new homes required a minimum income of between $26,600-42,500 to purchase, “entirely out of reach” for a neighborhood where the median household income was less than $15,000. A lot sold to a private developer for $15 was constructed into homes whose income eligibility requirements, rather than providing for locals, works as a “subsid(y) for young professionals to conquer a quickly refurbished ghetto.”17 Davila provides a narrative of the city initially deflating property values to push out middle class people of color, discouraging working class home ownership through artificially low rents, then selling to developers who renovate with home ownership programs that were inaccessible, raising property values and pushing out poor people of color. Residents of El Barrio feel their neighborhood is a Latino neighborhood, and they want to see it maintain that identity. But this identity is

---

14 Davila, Barrio Dreams, 35-36.
15 Davila, 38.
16 Davila, 42.
17 Davila, 47.
Davila is particularly interested in the discursive construction of the El Barrio in East Harlem, its significance to the Puerto Rican and Latino community, and the processes of gentrification that threaten its identity as a Latino stronghold in New York. She identifies how city planners, non profit organizations, and real estate developers have together undermined the ability of a Puerto Rican middle-class to get a foothold in El Barrio, while both upwardly mobile Blacks and white professionals encroach upon the traditionally Puerto Rican neighborhood. While the Latino and Puerto Rican residents strive to maintain prominence, Davila argues the “intersection of class, culture, and history in the making and maintenance of social marginality” will continue to stand in the way of these groups standing against gentrification.18

An analysis of these books shows a trend toward the privatization of public resources and demonstrates the need to identify the needs of communities and avoid giving the largest piece of the pie to speculators when considering plans to revitalize neighborhoods. My research has shown me there is a lot of ground for historians to cover in the area of gentrification. As a result, I have dipped into the realm of anthropology, political science, urban studies and ethnic studies, reaching across fields to construct a picture of the causes and effects of gentrification—the ways cities promote it, business interests profit from it, and nonprofits contribute to it. Oak Park is a diverse neighborhood with a large population of low-income households; roughly 22% of Oak Park households are at or near the poverty line.19 Sacramento has seen a surge in redevelopment projects, among these are a new UC Davis facility in the Oak Park neighborhood which has

---

18 Davila, 211.
sparked protests from residents and a lawsuit. This development highlights some of the difficulties the neighborhood is experiencing. The new facility is slated to attract an additional 7,000 residents, but its plans only provide for an additional 1,100 housing units. The lawsuit argues that this will place undue strain upon an already burdened housing crisis and push out the neighborhoods existing residents. Oak Park benefits from having a very active neighborhood association. They have worked to make resident voices heard on a variety of subjects, including starting a community garden, opposing redistricting, and opening a weekly farmer’s market. This active community is a boon for Oak Park when it comes to preventing gentrification, but by itself it is not enough. Some long-term Oak Park residents find themselves conflicts over gentrification. Those who have secured good jobs and find themselves moving into the middle-class want to protect their neighbors from the impacts of gentrification, but also recognize the benefit of improved services and raised property values for themselves. When talking about the “positive personal impact…of gentrification” but fear losing the diversity of Oak Park.

The scent of gentrification attracts developers like blood draws sharks, but while some residents feel the fight for Oak Park has already been lost, others “have taken to the streets and city council meetings to voice their frustrations” and fight for their beloved neighborhood. Through “artivism” local Black artists bring attention to the crisis facing Oak Park. As Goodwin demonstrated, artists are often intimately tangled up with gentrification, but these artists are finding ways to push back, “and preserve and enhance its rich artistic and cultural wealth.”

---

24 Hope, “Artist,” 64.
danger is that by raising the artistic cred of Oak Park, they will unwittingly contribute to its further gentrification. Puerto Rican artists flocked to El Barrio as a political project (dedicated to rescuing and asserting the community,“ there is always the pressure to produce a marketable product, and art inevitably attracts investors looking to profit.\textsuperscript{25} Many Oak Park residents are unconcerned with gentrification, either because they feel it is inevitable or, conversely, because they feel protected from it. Some residents believe the large number of subsidized housing units will act as a shield against the worst effects of gentrification, but as Davila shows, public housing can in fact serve as “catalysts to gentrification” as deregulation changes qualifications and opens the neighborhood to higher housing prices.\textsuperscript{26}

Further research is needed to ascertain the percentage of renter versus owner occupied homes, as well as determining the needs of the residents and the future plans the city has for the neighborhood. Sacramento Investment Without Displacement, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and the National Recreation and Park Association—which has a commitment to creating green spaces without contributing to gentrification, all have potential as sources of funding for further research. Oak Park is seeking recognition as a historical neighborhood, an important step in recognizing its long history and contribution to Sacramento’s past, but it should be noted that designation as a historical district does not necessarily protect from gentrification. Through my research I have found there is a simple solution to the problem of communities being destroyed and residents pushed out by gentrification—ownership. As Davila demonstrated, “purchase of place is presented as the only alternative for lasting power.”\textsuperscript{27} In neighborhoods where the majority of occupants own their homes, gentrification is often welcomed as it brings

\textsuperscript{25} Davila, 86.
\textsuperscript{26} Eghigian, 58-59. Davila, 42.
\textsuperscript{27} Davila, 28.
needed services and raises property values. But the higher the percentage of renters, the more harm gentrification has the potential to cause. Therefore, Americans must push for policies that make the common American dream of home ownership truly possible for everyone and work to push back against real estate speculators who benefit from leaving properties vacant, contributing to the housing shortage, and artificially inflating housing prices for their own gains. Homes should be owned by people, not corporations. This is not a question of whether landlords, as individuals, are good people, but rather whether the whole institution of owning property for profit is good for communities. Speculators considering the value of a vacant piece of land are thinking in terms of how to maximize their profits, not what is best for the community. They are unlikely to build low-income housing units, community centers, and public gardens, as this will not generate the profits which are demanded. Rather, they will build single family units for mid-to upper-middle class families, many of which will remain vacant tax write offs as families in need of housing find them priced out of reach. This is considered good business. But it is bad for communities.

Amber Verdugo
California State University, Sacramento
Bibliography


Further Research


Introduction

What if there were armed, militant activists living in your state's capitol city, who could (at least in theory) storm government buildings again at any moment? Wouldn't you want to know what these activists were doing, and what their motives were? The way that the image of armed Black Panthers protesting in the California State Assembly Building has been exploited, both to fearmonger and to legitimize the claim that the Black Panthers were too dangerous to warrant support, makes both the city of Sacramento and abundant historical context essential to any thorough study of the Black Panthers. Yet few studies of the Party examine the Sacramento chapter of the Black Panthers itself, or discuss Sacramento in any other context than the 1967 "attack" on the capitol. This event was a watershed moment in Black Panther history, and it deserves the attention it gets. But it also makes these opening questions all the more perplexing.

In light of how many conservatives feared a repeat of the march on Sacramento, or something like this, why didn't the Sacramento chapter of the Black Panthers get more attention? And if these Panthers couldn’t steal the show while they were active, what might make us care about them and their past activities now?

This paper will first focus on putting the Black Panther Party in context, and will then examine motives and opportunities for examining the Sacramento chapter of the Black Panthers in detail. Possible information sources and research suggestions are provided. Answers to the questions posed here may be found by advancing that preliminary research.
Many works on the Black Panther Party start off by (or are solely devoted to) countering the negative myths and popular hyperboles that surround Black Panther history. The Party made many powerful enemies, and its members have endured innumerable attempts to villainize them and to defile their reputations. The damage done by this propaganda war against the Party is the main reason why popular impressions of the Black Panthers do not match up well with reality. For example, many mistakenly believe the Black Panthers were a hypermasculine and militant Black Nationalist group with separatist intentions;¹ alleged Panther aggression is thus contrasted against a “feminine” Civil Rights Movement that now seems passive and demure because its members endured rather than exploited violence. Worse still, the Party was besieged by more than its fair share of salacious scandals, feuds, and blame games, which did nothing to enhance its image. Constantly refuting this negativity is necessary, though the sheer number of pages that have been devoted to this purpose is depressing, and not always helpful from the standpoint of creating non-reactionary narratives. Perhaps a feeling of always being somebody else’s punching bag or talking point is why many Panthers felt compelled to tell their own story, especially through art, memoirs/autobiographies, and texts that explain what the Black Panthers actually stood for. Certainly, Huey P. Newton’s *Revolutionary Suicide*, a product of his penchant for writing, and his sudden death by gunshot inspired Panthers to capture their revolution someway

somehow while they still could. This trend serves to humanize the Black Panthers, and has produced works of indescribable historical value. But these works are not guaranteed to capture the “big picture” aspect of history well, nor is it easy to convince readers that writings by the Black Panthers are unbiased and objective (as if the writings of the Party’s enemies are). Other works that seek to counter the villainization of the Party focus on its hugely successful and ambitious Survival Programs. After all, it’s hard (though perhaps not impossible) to be mad at people who feed, clothe, and educate children in dire need of assistance. Some authors even suggest these programs were as much a campaign to shame government officials who willfully failed the poor as they were a defense of Black survival and subsistence in a hostile world. Regardless of possible political motives, the scale and accomplishment of these programs is noteworthy; almost two dozen programs were developed to address a wide variety of socio-economic and medical needs, with the intention being that these programs would help Blacks survive until revolutionary change disrupted the norms that kept them poor. Works that focus on these achievements thus go a long way to convincing readers that the Black Panthers have been widely misjudged. But again, they can leave out necessary historical context beyond the immediate factors producing a need for programs on this scale.

Greater emphasis on how California’s unique socio-politics and how the international politics of the Cold War shaped the Black Panther Party is perhaps warranted. Though there are works written about the Black Panthers or by former Panthers themselves which specifically

---

address this topic, not all do so in a thorough fashion. These may not be the hardest dots for historians to connect, but they should still be explicitly connected and addressed within Black Panther scholarship. Let us address this historical context now, so we can better understand the nature and making of the Black Panthers and their political worldview.

Californian activists agitating for change during the 60s and 70s would have been directly impacted by the legacy of the 40s and 50s. During that time, California was hit particularly hard by events that drew direct attention to race relations within the state. The mass incarceration of Japanese-Americans impacted California more than any other state, California’s World War II veterans of colour returned home to find that their service essentially meant nothing to racists, and the Los Angeles Zoot Suit Riots drew direct attention to the relationship between youths of colour and police/civil authorities.\(^5\) The Cold War was in full swing, and would directly impact California’s activism, politics, and pop culture until 1989. During the 60s, California was both a conflux of diverse activists who had seen enough of the status quo to hate it passionately, and a place where activists clashed with regimes of power intentionally designed to inhibit progress. Black civil rights groups shared space and staff/members with other anti-racist organizations, with the Women's and Gay Liberation movements, and with anti-Vietnam War campaigns. Though this overlap between movements was (and still is) present all across the U.S., it was (and still is) particularly noticeable in California due to the state’s remarkable demographic diversity. That is what helped set Black activism in California, and especially the Black Panther Party, apart from the start before the 60s even began.

\(^5\) Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), pg. 182 (see especially Chapter 5)
Perhaps more than any other Black-focused organization or movement during this time, the Black Panther Party sought to build activist coalitions across racial and national boundaries. Initially a product of Oakland, the Black Panther Party developed in a very different way from groups like the NAACP or the broader Civil Rights Movement in the South. In California, Blacks were not the sole or dominant racial "other", were more exposed to the cultures and experiences of other minority groups, could see how classism and exploitation cut across racial and national boundaries, and were forced to build activist coalitions to gain strength in numbers.\(^6\) Especially in the South, Blacks were often the only racial "other" in their local area, were not heavily exposed to the experiences and cultures of other minorities, and were not necessarily reliant upon alliances that transcended Black issues.\(^7\) With the reward for coalition activism so much higher in a state with so many different groups to bring together, the Black Panther Party became determined to both reap that reward in full and to fulfil the mutual responsibilities that powerful alliances came with.

The Black Panther Party had important connections with the international communist, socialist, and Pan-African movements of the 60s and 70s. Pan-African leanings were especially common among Black leaders and activist groups at this time, but not all civil rights groups had ties that explicitly reflected an anti-racist and anti-colonial revision to the Marxist worldview. This worldview informed/justified Black Panther resistance to the Vietnam War and the draft, while heavily bolstering the status, image, and popularity of the Black Panther Party in Asia.\(^8\) Perhaps readers will find it interesting that, although they left the rural South for California when

---


\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), pg. 1-2 & 7
they were very young, both Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale had familial and geographic roots that may have led them to later align more with Maoism than with other forms of Communism.9 However, there were also alliances much closer to home that the Black Panther Party maintained. Groups like the Nation of Islam, Brown Berets, Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres, and even the United Farm Worker’s Movement had a variety of official, sympathetic, and pragmatic ties with the Black Panthers that reshaped California’s political landscape.10 Out of all these connections, the bond between the UFWM and Black Panthers is perhaps the most interesting.

Under Bobby Seale's leadership, the Black Panther Party became one of the UFWM's strongest allies, and did more to help the UFWM than any other Black-focused organization.11 The official Black Panther newspaper regularly called attention to the UFWM's struggle as it fought for a better deal, and Party members leant heavy support to the UFWM’s critical boycotts and pressure campaigns.12 Black Panther and UFWM leadership stayed in close personal contact throughout some of the most trying times in their organizations’ histories, and their movements survived partly because they could lean on each other in the midst of crisis.13 The UFWM marched from Delano to Sacramento in 1966, and the Black Panthers marched on the California State Assembly Building in Sacramento on April 5th, 1967. The UFWM marched peacefully and solely to draw attention to their movement, but the Black Panthers showed up armed in protest against a gun control law (AB 1591, the ”Mulford Act”) that would have made their entire politics of self-defense illegal and defunct.14 Though the 30 Panthers who arrived at the capitol

---

10 Ibid, Introduction.
11 Ibid, Chapter 3
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), pgs. 57-58
followed all current gun laws, most of them were arrested, and the ensuing media frenzy had three main effects. First, it all but guaranteed the passing of AB 1591; second, it put a deep fear into conservative hearts that this could happen again, and that the Black Panthers would become even more dangerous if they were not stopped; third, it was copious free publicity, and boosted the growth of the Party exponentially. These two marches by the UFWM and Black Panthers are perhaps the two biggest reasons why Sacramento’s name shows up in mainstream activist histories, and they clearly demonstrate how differently the Black Panthers were treated because of their refusal to unconditionally commit to non-violence.

This added historical context tells us much about the Black Panthers, and about their Sacramento chapter by extension. First, Sacramento was acknowledged by activists as a place of deep symbolic and political importance, and the Black Panthers by no means had a blind spot where central California should have been in the way that some historical texts do. Second, perhaps most importantly of all, it shows that being part of the Black Panther Party meant being part of a grand vision for solidarity-based, coalition-driven, reciprocal activism on the national, international, and local levels. Faced with systemic oppression that made it impossible for individuals to guarantee their own and their families’ and well-being, the Black Panthers turned to each other, and to their web of sincere alliances, to fight against oppression. The existence of an official newspaper is a sign that the Black Panther Party’s leadership intended for all of the Party’s members to be educated, fully politically engaged, and fully exposed to an activist worldview in which “the struggle” was both on your doorstep and unfolding all across the world. Third, the issues that the Black Panthers dealt with were numerous, and many of them are as

15 Ibid, pgs. 58-62
16 Ibid.
relevant today as they were back in the 60s and 70s. The tactics and expansive worldview of the Black Panther Partys were fundamental to the Party’s success, and it should be noted that many activist groups use similar solidarity and coalition tactics today.

The Sacramento chapter of the Black Panthers would have been just as caught up in this moment and way of thinking as any other Black Panther chapter, and its members would not have been content to do nothing. Their lives and actions need to be further investigated. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Oak Park’s Black Panthers were directly impacted by the same negative relationships with police and judicial violence that the Black Panther Party was originally founded to oppose. Many high-profile Black Panthers were targeted by the police and other law enforcement groups, were involved in violent conflicts with officers and authorities, were involved in the tense courtroom fights for freedom that are still familiar to us today, or all of the above. The Free Huey! campaign is only the most famous example of this. Panthers were at times even killed by police officers, so it’s no surprise that this issue looms large in Black Panther Party scholarship. Such attention to this issue is absolutely warranted, and further scholarship on Black Panthers’ experiences with the police and other authorities would not be unwelcome in a post-George Floyd world where understanding the history of police violence against Blacks will be essential to (hopefully) resolving this issue permanently.
Research Prospectus

Why the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panthers Deserves (and Needs) Further Study:
Most studies of the Black Panthers only address the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and the major cities outside of California that the Black Panthers also operated in. They thus risk not only losing sight of how important the Black Panther Party’s Californian roots are, but also neglect “lesser” locations at the risk of overlooking potentially highly relevant history. Sacramento is one such “lesser” place that needs to be written into the Black Panther story more thoroughly and frequently. Although writings on the Black Panthers may discuss Sacramento in connection with the 1967 march on the California State Assembly Building, this alone is not sufficient if we want to understand how Black Panthers in Sacramento contributed to the Party and to California’s changing socio-politics. And in the same way that broad knowledge of the Black Panther Party is necessary to understand any of its chapters, knowing its chapters may help us make more informed conclusions about the Party itself.

The ways in which Oak Park Black Panthers fought for better policing and access to justice are without a doubt directly relevant to our moment in time and to the wider history of the Black Panther Party. Two incidents seem especially important based on the listed preliminary sources and research provided: the story of the Oak Park Four, and the Father’s Day Incident or Oak Park Riot of 1969. The Oak Park Four, two Sacramento Panthers and two Sacramento supporters of the Black Panthers, were charged with killing Police Officer Bernard Bennett. Despite major flaws with the reliability and integrity of the only witness, the case went to trial, and the witness’s ability to testify was further debated. After almost a year of confinement and waiting when there was no evidence they did anything wrong, the charges against them were dropped and they were released. The 1969 Father’s Day incident, which I believe is also called
the Oak Park Riot, was yet another police raid on yet another Black Panther base of operations that (to nobody’s surprise) turned violent. These events have direct parallels with the police attacks and harassment many Panthers across the U.S. faced on a regular basis, and with the experiences of other Black Panthers who were charged with crimes only to be released once their reputations were sullied as a result.

These events also have indirect parallels in many of the issues and controversies we are dealing with in our own times. The case of the Central Park/Exonerated Five, the numerous cases of unarmed Black men being needlessly killed in the past ten years, and constant reports of the unwarranted harassment of Blacks by police and civilians alike all compel us to look closer at this overarching issue and how it (hasn’t) changed over time. We are dealing with similar events and the same exact stigmas that the Black Panthers worked so hard to try and weed out, so it behooves us to understand how the Black Panthers responded to these sorts of incidents. Learning more about the scale of this issue and how Black Panthers attempted to resolve it in the past will better inform our own current strategies for reducing anti-Black violence.

Further research into the Oak Park Four and Father’s Day Incident seems timely, do-able, and potentially significant. Such research openly invites us to connect Oak Park history to the wider history of the Black Panthers, and even to events happening across the U.S. today. However, the memories needed to support these connections will be lost and will disappear if they are not preserved in an urgent fashion. Especially in the case of events and experiences that have not been heavily discussed by historians, first person interviews and oral narratives can become incredibly important. But obtaining these interviews and narratives absolutely means racing against time, since many former Panthers do not have many years left to tell us their tales or share what insider information they may still recall.
Databases, Organizations, and Archives:


The importance of this site to any study of the Black Panthers goes without saying. These three links are particularly interesting, and are about half of what this site has on its Sacramento chapter. Most other chapter histories on this site have a much more robust number of links. This implies that there is still a need to add to the story of the Sacramento Black Panthers.

- A PDF written about the history of the Sacramento chapter by an unspecified author. Both the Oak Park Riots and Oak Park Four are mentioned: http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/chapter_history/pdf/sacramento/sacramento_chapter_of_the_black_panther.pdf
- Visuals pertaining to the Sacramento Black Panthers, including the Oak Park Four: http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/Sacramento_Chapter_1.html
- A (very old) news article about the Father’s Day Incident and police brutality: http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/Chapter_History/pdf/Sacramento/Sacramento_Chapter_No3.pdf

California Revealed hosts:

- Archival news footage of the “Father’s Day Incident”: https://californiarevealed.org/islandora/object/cavpp%3A78308. Also hosted at the backup links below.
  https://calisphere.org/item/0e29166744d094adfbb9220a56cde9f6/
  https://archive.org/details/casacsh_000617
- The same site also has recorded audio of a conversation held at CSU Sacramento in 1968 about the issue of separatism within groups like the Black Panthers. The speaker is Harry Edwards. This strongly implies that even those who weren’t part of the Sacramento Black Panthers were still talking and forming opinions about the Black Panthers. Those talks/ideas may well have directly impacted how Oak Park’s Black Panthers were seen and treated by others. https://californiarevealed.org/islandora/object/cavpp%3A18545

Many of the contributors to Californian Revealed are CSU campuses, other colleges within the Sacramento area, or places like the California State Archives or Sacramento Center for History. Such organizations, in addition to the Black Panther Party and California Revealed, might be willing to heavily aid or fund even “niche” research. They especially might be willing to fund professional research done by scholars who could add to their own content in a new or unique way. Whether that would involve actively hunting down more raw data and information, or involve further analyzing and processing information that has already been collected by a particular organization, would obviously need to be discussed. However, it seems like a given fact that such organizations would be willing to work with scholars on the production of new historical writings to at least a basic extent.
News and Dissertations:

CSU Sacramento has two dissertations about the Oak Park Four, and two about Oak Park itself:

- “Mediated Memory: The Case of the Oak Park Four”, by Alicia Denice Harris: https://csu-csus.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery?vid=01CALS_USL:ResearchRepository&repId=12232542400001671#13232666610001671
- “Reasonable Doubt : The "Oak Park Four" and African American/Police relations in 1970” by Matthew Charles Miller is available on campus.
- “From Survival to Thriving: Creating New Counter-Stories about South Oak Park, Sacramento” by Jocelyn Yee https://www.proquest.com/docview/2544526631?parentSessionId=Qmqq48Jbe4dlcsc0ACqWpOyCZsTjwWAsel9v3C6qrY%3D&accountid=10358
- “Community Activism in Oak Park: Competing Agendas for Change in a Gentrifying Neighborhood” by Rose Garcia: https://csu-csus.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery?vid=01CALS_USL:ResearchRepository&repId=12232452980001671#13232711820001671

News Articles pertaining to Sacramento and the Black Panthers:

The Sacramento Observer has published articles that specifically address Oak Park and the Black Panthers, and that help link the Black Panthers to modern Black activism in Oak Park. Below are links to three of them.

- https://www.proquest.com/docview/2063304928?accountid=10358&parentSessionId=%2BB4Cm1za7NX9k4plk%2FQ1VeWmuZKkOjpyjelCCr%2BBBY%3D&pq-origsite=primo

This article from ABC 10 News, about the death of the Sacramento chapter’s co-founder due to the Corona Virus, is a sobering reminder that we do not have much time left to start digging deeper into this history.

- https://www.abc10.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-victim-sacramento/103-edd65705-ef04-43e9-9c0a-db0a70ee3950

The Sacramento News and Review has an article on Oak Park history that briefly touches on the Father’s Day Incident, calling it the Oak Park Riot. The American Party of Labor has a similar article that focuses on gentrification.

- https://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/content/the-many-faces-of-oak-park/21211139/
The Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research has a digital copy of a brief 1970 news article on the Oak Park Four:

- https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=UCD19700528.2.6&e=-------en--20--1--txt-txIN--------1

That news articles and even dissertations/theses continue to discuss Oak Park and its Black Panthers is a telling sign that there is an audience for further research on this topic. It is also a telling sign that more needs to be written on this part of Sacramento’s history, as few if any secondary sources on the Black Panther Party highlight Oak Park’s Black Panthers in spite of this lingering historical interest in them. The possible identification of two specific events within Oak Park Black Panther history to investigate only makes it more tempting to follow up and pursue that interest.

There are likely many relevant news articles out there which could be used to build a comprehensive picture of what Sacramento’s Black Panthers went through and how their reputation has changed over the years. Many of those articles may be old, and very hard to track down today, or be so brief that making use of them could prove difficult. But putting off further investigation will only make this task more difficult.


California boasts a diverse history that epitomizes the spirit of the American West. The expansion of Euro-American settlers into the West allowed them the opportunity to create new societies separate from the East. However, many of the settlers brought the same ideas about race and ethnicity that persisted in the East with them to California. During the nineteenth century, California was a hostile place for non-white immigrants. De jure and de facto discrimination and racism was a built-in facet of American California society. This paper will focus on how Californians and California society discriminated against African Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. I will explore the ways that African Americans experienced racism and discrimination in California. In the process, I aim to reveal the ways in which African Americans in California formed communities and resisted the discriminatory nature of California’s early statehood.

I will begin with a historiography that analyzes how historians have covered different aspects of African Americans’ experiences in early California in five monographs. Then, I will apply some of the themes covered by other historians to the history of African Americans in Sacramento in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will take a particular focus on the African American community in Oak Park, a neighborhood within Sacramento. The goal of this paper is to critically analyze how the historical themes of racial oppression and resistance of African Americans in California are relevant to the experiences of African American in Sacramento and Oak Park.

*Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, edited by Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kelvin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, is a collection of essays that cover a chronological overview of different areas of African American history. They emphasize the
themes of community, occupation, the pursuit of civil rights, and the overall change in attitude towards African Americans between the Spanish and American periods. It begins in Spanish California and focuses on the idea that Africans and mixed-race people were in California during the Spanish period and were not uniformly forced into slavery. Despite their presence, the author asserts that there was no African American community in California prior to the Gold Rush. Instead, they blended into Californio society in the late-Mexican period and only became a distinct “other” community when the Americans arrived.

They focus on African American women, the California Dream, and boosterism in agricultural communities. The essay covering women emphasizes the Spanish *mulata* identity that was common in some pueblos, showing how there was no distinct African community for women. As African Americans arrived in California, they mostly settled in cities initially. In 1850, the African American female population was just nine percent of the total African American population. They developed benevolent societies to create a sense of community and uplift. Despite their limited opportunities, African American women had the highest proportion of the population working outside the home. Their struggles resembled black women in the East, but California offered a slate to create a distinct community.

The following essay covers black propagandist Jefferson L. Edmonds, a proponent of the California Dream at the turn of the twentieth century. Edmonds boasted about the California Dream, the idealized notion that the west, California in particular, was a land of economic opportunity, homeownership, and individual freedom. They also cover boosterism in the agricultural communities of Allensworth and Little Liberia. The essays continue to analyze the four main themes into the late twentieth century. As these monographs suggest, the California Dream proved elusive for many African Americans in the state. These towns became places where occupational opportunity and community-building were possible, but they ultimately failed for environmental and economic issues. The author of the essay argues
that the agrarian settlements were not conducive to success in the modernizing capitalist California economy of the early twentieth century. This book provides an essential overview of some of the most important themes in African American history in California.

An important monograph that contextualizes the racism experienced by African Americans in California is *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination Under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920* by Robert F. Heizer and Alan J. Almquist. Heizer, a historian based out of UC Berkeley, conducted foundational research on Early California, particularly Native American relations and Almquist is currently a Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Cal State East Bay. In this book, the authors compare the social and legal racism in California against Mexicans, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants, as well as Native Americans and African Americans. They connect the systematic racism experienced by different racial and ethnic groups to a larger picture of statewide white supremacy.

Regarding African Americans, the authors pay particular attention to how the debate during the California Constitutional Convention in 1849 reflected antiblack racism in the state. Delegates from across the state gathered in Monterey to decide California laws and define their society. In 1850, chattel slavery was near its peak, so naturally, the desire to expand slavery to the state persisted. Generally, the delegates disapproved of chattel slavery, but they still had reservations about African American eligibility for California citizenship. They engaged in debate to explicitly determine who were and were not considered white, determining who had voting and citizenship rights. The authors argue that although the delegates rejected the importation of chattel slavery, they did so because they felt it would "degrade" white labor in the state, and they feared that Congress would not ratify their constitution if slavery were allowed. Ultimately, Heizer and Almquist’s exploration of the debate over African American rights during the Constitutional Convention reinforces the idea
in *Seeking El Dorado* that the transition to American statehood fundamentally racialized California society.

*Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* by Darnell Hunt and Ann-Christina Ramon focuses on the experiences of African Americans in Los Angeles, particularly the Baldwin Hills neighborhood, from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first. The authors focus on the idea of the American Dream, the California Dream, and how life in Los Angeles at times contradicted the optimism of those dreams for African Americans. They begin with an overview of the nineteenth history of African Americans and people of African descent in Los Angeles. They focus on the Leimert Park and Oakwood neighborhood to show how the African American communities in nineteenth-century Los Angeles dealt with racism and built their communities. The rest of the book focuses on the culture, music, and film of Black Los Angeles in the twentieth century. They cover topics such as gangs, incarceration, LGBTQ rights, and art. It concludes with a chapter on social justice movements in Los Angeles, like Womanists, environmentalists, black labor unionization, and educational reformers. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the common theme of community and the formation of a community in the face of the racialized contradictions of the California Dream.

*Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Spaces in the Jim Crow Era* by independent historian Allison R. Jefferson covers how African Americans developed public leisure spaces and how that reflects their views on work, recreation, and the growth of black communities across California. Jefferson frames leisure within the contradictions of the California Dream, arguing that the ability to choose what to do for relaxation and leisure was a form of resistance and self-definition. She looks at Bruce’s Beach, a popular Southern California African American beach resort subsumed by eminent domain in the 1920s and has only recently been recognized as a place of resistance to segregated beaches in California.
Jefferson covers the neighborhood of Ocean Park in Santa Monica, where black residents developed their own distinct “beach culture” despite racially restrictive real estate markets and lax civil rights law enforcement. She also covers black Californians’ leisure experiences at black resorts and spas at Lake Elsinore and white resistance to integration at the Parkridge Country Club in Corona. Before concluding, the author covers Eureka Villa, a black resort town that symbolized the ability of leisure spaces to create community zones. Ultimately, she argues that African Americans in California, particularly Southern California, used segregated leisure spaces as places for community, identity formation, and resistance to white harassment and degradation. This book also complements the theme of work and occupational opportunity because it directly parallels the growth and strengthening of community identity through leisure and recreation.

In the monograph *West of Jim Crow: The Fight Against California's Color Line* by Lynn M. Hudson, the author examines the ways that African Americans resisted Jim Crow segregation and discrimination in California before the 1960s. Hudson, an associate professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago, focuses on how African Americans found ways to individually and collectively resist oppression and fight against segregation and prejudice despite the economic and social discrimination in California. Hudson also focuses on the mythologized dream of the west as a land of opportunity, but it too had black codes and systemic segregation. She argues that black resistance to segregation and discrimination in California was one of the earliest precursors to the civil rights movements that grew in the first half of the twentieth century and culminated during the “classical era” of civil rights in the 1960s.

Hudson’s monograph covers challenges to the racial status quo of the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Black men and women made significant efforts to challenge segregation in public places, like parades, bars, gambling and dance halls, schools,
and streetcars during the late nineteenth century. The author uses the example of the Panama
Pacific International Exposition to show how “scientific” understandings of race precipitated
antiblack racism and how African Americans in the state worked to advocate for racial uplift
within the context of a eugenic society. She also covers the development of Allensworth,
contextualizing the experiment of a black agricultural town as a reaction to the Jim Crow
realities of life in California. Hudson also covers lynching and the prevalence of the Ku Klux
Klan in California to contextualize the threats African Americans faced because of their
resistance to a racist state. After discussing the fight over segregated public swimming pools
in Southern California, the author concludes by urging readers to understand that California
was not outside the realm of Jim Crow segregation, racism, and discrimination. Historians
must look at instances of black resistance with a similar lens that they might for the South or
the East Coast in order to fully understand the ways that California attempted to control and
confine people of color during the twentieth century.

A brief historiographical review of African American history in California highlights
the themes of community-building, work, and resistance to oppression. African Americans in
California were met with certain contradictions to the idea of a California Dream but
negotiated with those contradictions to form their own communities and identities. I aim to
connect these themes to the experiences of African Americans in Sacramento and Oak Park
to explore how black Sacramentoans formed a community and resisted racism and
discrimination.

The article “The Historical Demographics of Sacramento’s black community,
1848-1900” by Clarence Caesar provides an important survey of the growth of Sacramento’s
African American communities from the Gold Rush to 1900. Caesar discusses the presence
of Californios of African descent prior to statehood before transitioning to black gold mining
along the Feather and American Rivers. After the rush of miners in 1848-50, Sacramento was
transitioning from a waystation for immigrants to California to a bustling city. Work was central to the black community in early Sacramento. African Americans in Sacramento were cooks, miners, barbers, and washermen, and several owned eateries, coffee houses, and boarding houses. In the nineteenth century, a majority of the African Americans in the city were concentrated in the westernmost wards of the city along the Sacramento River. Despite the gender disparity caused by the Gold Rush in California, the migration of African Americans to Sacramento was largely family-oriented. Churches, clubs, fraternal organizations, charities, and benevolent societies were crucial to building a sense of community in Sacramento’s African American neighborhoods. Despite black emigration to other mineral rushes in Nevada and British Columbia, the black population of Sacramento gradually grew in the late nineteenth century. The growth slowed down towards the turn of the twentieth century primarily due to exclusion from white union membership. More efficient infrastructure facilitated the migration from Sacramento and other California cities down to Los Angeles, which saw some of California’s most significant African American population booms in the early twentieth century. Caesar’s article reflects the notion that while the African American community in Sacramento was small, they had educational, vocational, and social opportunities to form a community amid a society built on antiblack racism.

Another article, “Knowledge is Power: Sacramento Black and the Public Schools, 1854-1860,” by Susan Bragg, takes a more specific approach to the early history of African Americans in Sacramento by examining the development of black public schools in the 1850s. In 1852, the state legislature outlined the creation of a public school system, but it was reserved for white students only. In response, the family-oriented African American community in Sacramento created their own “colored schools” for black students. Black education advocates and educators contended with the Sacramento City Council to secure public funding for colored schools. The council reluctantly began allocating funds for
individual teachers and schoolhouses before more general funding became available in the 1860s. Bragg argues that the funding of colored schools in Sacramento was the result of white fear that underfunded colored schools would close, leading to the integration of Sacramento schools. This piece reveals the importance of education, especially among the family-oriented African American community in Sacramento, and like other organizations, schools were a fixture of their community. It also reflects how black Sacamentans made their voices heard in order to combat the racial disparity in the state.

A useful article for Sacramento’s black history comes from The Metropole, the official blog of the Urban History Association. The article by William Burg, titled “From The Civil War To Civil Rights: Black Sacramento In The Late 19th And Early 20th Century,” covers African American immigration to Sacramento, as well as education, journalism, entertainment, and political activity during the late 1800s and early 1900s in Sacramento. Burg begins with an overview of African Americans in Sacramento, citing Clarence Ceasar in his assessment that the African American community began very small and grew in the 1870s as it extended solidarity across racial lines. He covers the Sacramento Zouaves, a black militia group that kept the peace and encouraged civic participation. African Americans participated in theater performances in Sacramento, but they often played stereotypical minstrel-type characters. He discusses the segregated schools in Sacramento before making an example of Sarah Mildred Jones, an African American educator who became principal of an integrated elementary school in 1894, despite outcry from local parents. The Zouaves, participation in theater, and education are all examples of the diversity of the small but growing African American Community in Sacramento during the nineteenth century.

Burg continues into the twentieth century, covering the topics of journalism, resistance to racism, and political participation. The Sacramento Forum newspaper was Sacramento’s first black-owned newspaper, which began in 1906. Longer-lasting black
newspapers arose in the following years, with the *Sacramento Enterprise* in 1910 and the *Western Review* in 1915. Burg argues that these newspapers gave a voice to Sacramento’s relatively small African American community. He shifts his focus to community resistance to racism and prejudice. In 1908 and 1910, African Americans protested the showing of a vitriolic and racist play titled “The Clansmen.” Although they were ignored then, when “The Clansmen” returned to Sacramento as a motion picture in 1915, protests by the Sacramento African Americans led to the theater playing a version of the film with controversial and overtly racist scenes cut out. He concludes with the story of Reverend Thomas Allen Harvey, the first black candidate for political office from California. He ran as a Black Progressive in the City Commissioner race and finished fifth out of seven candidates. The topics addressed in this article reflect the centrality of African American institutions, like churches and schools in Sacramento. They also show how despite its small size, the African American community in Sacramento used newspapers, civic participation, and public activism to assert their influence.

In terms of the Oak Park neighborhood, in particular, several web pages have provided valuable insight into the African American community in Oak Park. An online PDF-Brochure from the Central Oak Park Walking Tour provides a detailed history of the neighborhood. Oak Park was created in 1887 when Edwin Doyle purchased the William Doyle Farm property and subdivided it for a neighborhood. By 1880, there was an electric streetcar from Oak Park to Downtown Sacramento and a small “downtown” district developed within Oak Park, boasting an array of thriving businesses. The City of Sacramento annexed Oak Park in 1911, implementing new sewer systems and other city services. The neighborhood was home to many blue-collar workers who worked in the area, but racial covenants prohibited African Americans from buying or renting homes in various neighborhoods for many years. After World War II, many white workers and their families
left Oak Park for newer, modern neighborhoods, making room for black families to move into the neighborhood. The tour showed visitors some of the important community buildings, businesses, and locations in Oak Park and were venues for community-building, like the Seabron Reality building, McClatchy Park, the former Oak Park School of Afro-American Thought, and the Women’s Civic Improvement Club building.

The Oak Park Historic Development Plan also provided important historical information about the African American community in Oak Park. They emphasize the importance of the streetcar in early Oak Park. The plan mentions Joyland, an amusement park with a roller rink, an outdoor theater, and a dance floor, built by the Central Street Railway Company in order to attract visitors to the neighborhood. After the depression and World War II, middle-class African Americans were being forced out of their homes to make room for developments on the western edge of town and decided to move to Oak Park. In 1946, the streetcar stopped running, and the construction of Highway 50 in the 1950s separated Oak Park from the rest of Sacramento and exacerbated some of the social and economic problems of the neighborhood. The Black Panther Party was present in Oak Park during the 1960s, where they operated a free breakfast program for neighborhood children. Tensions boiled over during a confrontation between police and members of the Black Panther Party in 1969 and 1970. Overall, the history of the African American Community in Oak Park reflects the history of the early African American settlers in California.

While the African American community in Oak Park grew in the mid to late twentieth century and is generally outside of the scope of my historiography, some of the same trends and historical themes defined black history in Sacramento and California as a whole. African American communities in California and Sacramento grew slowly through the nineteenth century and expanded mostly after World War II as seen with Oak Park. One of the most prescient themes is community. Despite their small number, African Americans in California,
Sacramento, and Oak Park had to reckon with their lack of political power. They did this by forming strong communities based around organizations and businesses. Businesses and occupation were also extremely important to African American communities, and they served as the backbone for supplying economic power to African American communities. Although they made efforts to self-guide their community, African Americans were legally, institutionally, economically, and socially disadvantaged and discriminated against by the state of California and its citizens. The California Dream was a concept that attracted African Americans to the state, but the contradictions they found forced them to grapple with the inequalities of California society. However, a common theme across different locations and periods of African American history in California is the resistance to oppression and the mobilization for the pursuit of civil rights. Hopefully, this foundation of research can help provide a base on which more historians can build to continue to analyze the themes and trends of African American history in California.
Bibliography:


