

SAN FRANCISCO AFRICAN AMERICAN CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT: 1579-2014



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Foreword by Dr. Albert S. Broussard

African Americans have had a long, rich, exciting, and complex history with San Francisco. Counted among its earliest settlers to the region, people of African descent arrived in the West during the 15th century with the first Spanish explorers. Esteban de Dorantes, an African slave, sailed west with Spanish Conquistadores through the Gulf of Mexico before local Indians captured him near Galveston Island. Numerous others followed Esteban, including West Indian-born William Leidesdorff, of Danish-African ancestry. A well-to-do merchant and ship captain, Leidesdorff sailed his schooner Julia Ann on voyages between California, Mexico, and Hawaii. In the process, Leidesdorff accumulated large landholdings in California, became a successful merchant, and served as one of San Francisco's early political leaders. He helped to establish the city's first school system, served on its first school board, and participated in the growth of early San Francisco. Today, a street in San Francisco's Financial district bears his name.

African American women such as Charlotte Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant were equally important to San Francisco's history. Although Pleasant worked as a domestic when she first arrived in San Francisco, over time she engaged in mining stock and precious metals speculation, ran a boarding house, and owned three laundries. She also contributed to numerous causes in San Francisco's politically active, though small, black community, and supported the local black press. Through her employment in the homes of wealthy white San Franciscans such as Selim and Lisette Woodworth, Pleasant learned the intricacies of San Francisco's business community.

African Americans made their presence felt on San Francisco as the city grew during the early decades of the 20th century. Although the 1906 Earthquake and Fire displaced many African Americans, as well as whites who lived in the downtown region of the city or along the waterfront, African American neighborhoods and community institutions began to spring up in the Western Addition. Organizations such as the Booker T. Washington Community Center and the Madame C. J. Walker Home served an expanding black community and provided important social services. In addition, African Americans began to increasingly build small businesses, open professional offices, purchase homes, and integrate into the fabric of the city. On the eve of World War II, nearly five thousand African Americans called San Francisco home, and an even larger number resided across the bay in Oakland.

World War II changed San Francisco profoundly, as it changed much of the nation. Tens of thousands of African American migrants streamed into San Francisco in search of defense industry employment. These sojourners also competed with local residents for housing, which was especially scarce during the war, and public space. The sheer number of black migrants arriving in such a short space of time transformed the city. Some of these residents crowded into the Western Addition, while others lived in temporary war worker housing in Bayview-Hunters Point. Wherever they resided, African Americans brought their southern culture with them, as they opened new soul food or barbeque restaurants in established neighborhoods such as the Fillmore District, took over the Buchanan YMCA following the internment of Japanese-Americans, and started an array of jazz and blues clubs. By the 1950s, few older black residents would recognize the city that they had grown up in prior to World War II.

The 1960s and 1970s would result in still other profound changes for black San Franciscans, and perhaps the most destructive to the cohesiveness of the community was redevelopment. The San Francisco Redevelopment Commission voted to condemn hundreds of homes and apartments occupied by African American and Japanese residents, scattering not only long-standing residents, but also dozens of established black businesses. In the process, many businesses closed or were forced to move, and the

black community, which had taken decades to build, was in disarray. San Francisco, like many American cities, also faced competition from competing suburban communities, which offered the opportunity for middle class residents to buy homes, send their children to better schools, and had much lower rates of crime. The impact of these developments on black San Franciscans, however, was even more severe, as the city's black population declined dramatically between 1980 and 2000. Today, fewer than half as many African Americans reside in San Francisco as in 1970.

Yet as the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement reveals, numbers alone do not reflect the important role that African Americans have played in the city's history. Black political and civic leaders such as Terry Francois, James Stratten, Robert B. Flippin, Carlton Goodlett, and Willie L. Brown, Jr., San Francisco's colorful two-term mayor, have each shaped the city and its rich history in important ways. This Historic Context Statement reveals part of that important story.

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Acknowledgement

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Summary Statement

In 2013, the Historic Preservation Fund Committee awarded the San Francisco Planning Department (City) a grant for the preparation of a historic context statement (herein referred to as the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement, or Historic Context Statement) to assist the City identify and evaluate individual properties and other historic resources associated with San Francisco's African American community. Though San Francisco has a longstanding historic preservation program dating back to 1967, the contributions of the city's African American residents, as well as other minority communities, have long remained under-examined. Traditionally, historic preservation efforts have targeted architecturally significant properties and mainly ignored those with cultural associations, especially those linked to marginalized communities.

African Americans have lived in this city as long as there has been a San Francisco, though they only began to comprise a significant percentage of the population during World War II, when shipyards and other defense industries began recruiting large numbers of workers from the American South. Most of these newcomers settled in existing African American communities, particularly in the Western Addition, and later in the Bayview-Hunters Point district. During the 1950s and 1960s, San Francisco's African American community expanded beyond the core areas of settlement into other neighborhoods, including the Oceanview/Merced Heights/Ingleside district. Since the 1970s, San Francisco's African American population has declined in numbers and the city's remaining Black enclaves are in danger of disappearing altogether. This Historic Context Statement has been written to acknowledge the many significant contributions that African Americans have made in San Francisco's economic and cultural sectors, as well as to its built environment, taking pains to recognize individual properties and districts associated with important individuals and groups.

The completion of the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is a logical step in the realization of San Francisco's historic preservation goals. In a city that has historically given short shrift to communities of color, this document will assist City staff and commissioners, property owners, business owners, residents, and other stakeholders gain a better understanding of the development and evolution of San Francisco's African American communities. It identifies properties and types of properties that may have important associations with Black San Francisco, as well as providing integrity thresholds that a property should retain for it to be eligible for designation as a landmark at the local, state, or national level. This document lays the groundwork for these activities, including the identification of longtime African American residential enclaves; Black-owned businesses; properties associated with prominent African Americans; as well as important religious, cultural, political, and labor organizations that have played important roles in the making of Black San Francisco.

B. Purpose and Use of this Document

The African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is not meant to be a comprehensive history of San Francisco's African American community. This history has already been well-documented over the last 25 years in books, articles, and socio-economic studies – most of which were prepared by African American scholars. Rather, the focus of this document is the identification of important themes in the development of San Francisco's African American community from the Spanish and Mexican colonial era onward, and more important, how these themes helped to determine the shape of the built environment. Key historical themes discussed in this document include the following:

- Patterns of Migration and Settlement
- Employment Trends
- Education
- Development of Residential Enclaves and Housing Patterns
- Formation of Religious, Fraternal, Social Organizations
- Commercial Development
- Civil Rights
- Impacts of Redevelopment
- Artistic and Cultural Contributions

This document provides a framework for evaluating properties associated with these themes and for determining their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register), the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register), and Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code, which regulates local Landmarks and Landmark Districts. It also provides information on integrity thresholds that a property (resource) must retain in order for it to be listed in the above-mentioned inventories. Finally, the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is intended to help City staff and other decision-makers, property owners, and members of the general public of all backgrounds to understand what types of properties are important to protect and enhance the character of San Francisco and its diverse communities.

C. Definition of Geographical Area

The geographical area examined in the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is coterminous with the boundaries of the City and County of San Francisco (**Figure 1**). This document attempts to cover all parts of the city, not just traditional African American strongholds such as Bayview-Hunters Point or the Western Addition. During the post-World War II era, important concentrations of Black settlement developed in the Oceanview/Merced Heights/Ingleside (OMI) district, Visitacion Valley, the South of Market Area, Potrero Hill, Hayes Valley, Duboce Triangle, the Haight-Ashbury District, and Glen Park/Diamond Heights. However, this study also looks beyond these areas because many of San Francisco's most influential African American residents lived in majority-White neighborhoods, such as Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr., who lived in Westwood Highlands; or Willie Mays, who lived in Sherwood Forest. Finally, this Historic Context Statement documents several no-longer-extant enclaves, including Stone Street in Chinatown and Tehama Street in the South of Market Area.



Figure 1. Map of San Francisco showing neighborhood boundaries

Source: Paragon Real Estate Group

D. Methodology

The African American Citywide Historic Context Statement was prepared by Christopher VerPlanck of VerPlanck Historic Preservation Consulting, with input from Tim Kelley of Tim Kelley Consulting and Al Williams, president of the Alfred Williams Consultancy and the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society. Mr. VerPlanck and Mr. Kelley both meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications for Architectural History and History. Research assistance was provided by Stacy Farr, an architectural historian, as well as Jonique K. Green and Nicole V. Jones, interns with the San Francisco Planning Department. Dr. Albert Broussard, Professor of African American History in the Department of History at Texas A&M University, served as the principal advisor on this project, reviewing drafts for thoroughness and accuracy. Additional reviewers included Dr. Robert Cherny, a retired History professor at San Francisco State University and a member of the Historic Preservation Fund Committee, as well as members off the Community Advisory Group (CAG). Members of the CAG include:

- Mr. Carson Anderson, ICF International
- Mr. Mike Buhler, San Francisco Architectural Heritage

- Mr. Lance Burton, Planet Fillmore Communications/African American Chamber of Commerce
- Mr. Bob Cherny, San Francisco State University
- Mr. Daniel Landry, attorney
- Mr. Rick Moss, Oakland Public Library
- Ms. Alise Vincent, Vincent Alise Consulting

This document was prepared in compliance with federal and state guidelines for historic context statements. The following sources were consulted to organize the document and evaluate the significance of potential historical resources:

- U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 15: "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation"*
- U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 16A: "How to Complete the National Register Registration Form"*
- U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 16B: "How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form"*
- U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 24: "Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning"*
- State of California, Office of Historic Preservation, *"Instructions for Recording Historical Resources"*
- State of California, Office of Historic Preservation, *"OHP Preferred Format for Historic Context Statements"*

The Historic Context Statement makes extensive use of three important sources dealing with the subject of African Americans in San Francisco: *Pioneer Urbanites*, by Douglas H. Daniels (1990); *Black San Francisco*, by Albert S. Broussard (1993); and *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights*, by Paul T. Miller (2010). These three sources cover the history of San Francisco's African American community from the Spanish and Mexican periods to the mid-1970s. Additional secondary sources consulted include: *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, by Delilah L. Beasley (1918), and *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, by Rudolph Lapp (1977). Together, these five sources heavily informed the narrative history presented in this document. Additional secondary sources consulted include several local newspapers, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Call*, *San Francisco Bulletin*, *San Francisco News*, and several African American newspapers, especially the *Sun-Reporter*.

Important primary sources consulted in the preparation of this document include the U.S. Census, especially aggregate data for San Francisco City and County, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps from 1886-93, 1899-1900, 1913-15, and 1948-50; San Francisco city directories; San Francisco block books; building permit data from the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection; and property ownership information from the San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder. This Historic Context Statement also makes use of historic photographs from the following repositories: San Francisco Public Library (San Francisco History Center and the Historical Photograph Collection), California Historical Society, the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, Society of California Pioneers, and the Sutro Library.

Government reports provided useful statistical information. For information on recent demographic trends we consulted *The Unfinished Agenda: The Economic Status of African Americans in San Francisco, 1964-1990*, a report prepared by the San Francisco Human Rights Committee to address the phenomenon of "Black flight" from San Francisco.

The project team also solicited oral histories from representative members of San Francisco's African American community. Planning Department interns Jonique K. Green and Nicole V. Jones conducted the interviews with the following people:

- Mr. Jon Kevin Green, owner of Esquire Barber Shop, established in 1968
- Mrs. Mable Jordan, long-time resident of Visitacion Valley and an active International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) member
- Dr. Espanola Jackson, Bayview-Hunters Point community activist
- Rev. Roland Gordon, pastor of Ingleside Presbyterian Church

E. Nomenclature

It is important at this stage to discuss the nomenclature used in the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement. For the most part, the contemporary term *African American* is used throughout the document. *Black* is used interchangeably with *African American* to add variety and improve the flow of the text. Often used in writing and informal speech, the term *Black* (capitalized) is rarely considered offensive. Older terms, including *Colored* and *Negro*, which are generally considered to be offensive today, are only used as quotations from older sources or to refer to organizations that used the term, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹

This Historic Context Statement uses several names to refer to African American neighborhoods, though not interchangeably. Taken in the strictest sense, the term *Western Addition* refers to a much larger area of the city that was platted in 1855-6. This area encompasses a vast swath of San Francisco between Duboce Avenue and San Francisco Bay and Larkin Street and Arguello Boulevard, including Pacific Heights, Presidio Heights, Hayes Valley, North of Panhandle, and other areas. The term *Fillmore*, *Fillmore district*, or simply, *The Fillmore* refers to a section of the Western Addition that was the core of African American San Francisco between World War II and the 1980s. More of a state of mind than a concrete geographical area, the boundaries of the Fillmore are imprecise, though the core of the district runs along Fillmore Street from approximately Page Street to Pine Street. Its eastern boundary is approximately Franklin Street and its western boundary is roughly Divisadero Street. As the African American population of the Fillmore district has declined the term has been gradually going out of use, or turned on its head: "Fill-no-more." As the entire Western Addition has gentrified over the last 30 years, new names have been developed by realtors and newcomers to refer to various parts of what was the Fillmore, including *NoPa* and *Lower Pacific Heights*. These more recent terms are not used in this document. This Historic Context Statement uses the term *Fillmore* to refer to the core of the African American Western Addition throughout the period in which the term was widely used. Otherwise, the term *Western Addition* is used.

The term *Bayview-Hunters Point* refers to a vast swath of southeastern San Francisco bounded by San Francisco Bay to the east, the San Mateo County line to the south, the Bayshore Freeway (U.S. 101) to the west, and Islais Creek Channel to the north. It encompasses many smaller neighborhoods, including the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, Hunters Ridge and Hunters View housing projects, Bayview, Silver Terrace, Bret Harte, India Basin, Double Rock, Bayview Heights, as well as several housing projects, micro-neighborhoods, and industrial areas. When *Hunters Point* is used alone it refers mainly to the public housing projects on Hunters Point Ridge. When *Bayview* is used alone it refers to the mixed industrial and residential area bounded by San Francisco Bay to the east, Oakdale Avenue to the north, Yosemite Avenue to the south, and Third Street to the west.

¹ "African American versus black." Grammarist.com <http://grammarist.com/usage/African-American-black/>; accessed December 16, 2014.

II. EXISTING STUDIES AND DESIGNATIONS

Presently, there are not many properties in San Francisco associated with African Americans that have any formal historical status. Though several historical resource surveys have been completed in San Francisco over the last 45 years, few have specifically addressed African American history beyond a cursory level. Fortunately in recent years the focus has shifted toward documenting and registering properties associated with various ethnic and cultural groups, including African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and LGBT communities. In addition, several neighborhood-based historic context statements prepared in recent years have included content on African American history, including: Bayview-Hunters Point, Japantown, India Basin, and the OMI. Though there are no local historic districts with an African American focus there is a handful of local landmarks registered for their associations with notable African Americans or the African American community at large. They include:

- Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, 2135 Sutter Street (Landmark No. 202)
- Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, 2066 Pine Street (Landmark No. 211)
- Joseph Leonard/Cecil F. Poole House, 90 Cedro Avenue (Landmark No. 214)
- Sam Jordan's Bar, 4004-6 Third Street (Landmark No. 263)
- Marcus Books/Jimbo's Bop City, 1712-16 Fillmore Street (Landmark No. 266)

Several other local landmarks have known associations with African American history. They include:

- South San Francisco Opera House, 1601 Newcomb Avenue (Landmark No. 8)
- Palace Hotel and Garden Court, 2 New Montgomery Street (Landmark No. 18)
- Don Lee Building, 1000 Van Ness Avenue (Landmark No. 152)

Though there are several properties in the National Register that have associations with African American history and/or culture, there are none that are specifically designated because of these associations.

One of the main purposes of the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is to identify additional properties that should be designated as city landmarks or listed in the National Register. Among our recommendations (See Chapter V) is that existing National Register nominations and city landmark designation reports be amended to include information on their importance to African American history and culture, such as the Palace Hotel, the Don Lee Building, and the South San Francisco Opera House.

III. NARRATIVE HISTORY OF SAN FRANCISCO'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

A. *Pioneers of African Descent in Alta California: 1579-1848*

This section explores the earliest period of African and African American settlement in what is now California, beginning with the Sir Francis Drake expedition and then encompassing the Spanish and Mexican periods. It concludes with the American conquest of California and the Gold Rush.

Settlement of Persons of African Descent in Mexico and Alta California: 1579-1823

The first known persons of African descent to come to what is now California arrived with the English seafarer Sir Francis Drake in 1579. This contingent included three men and a woman who had been captured from either Spanish or Portuguese vessels sailing in the Caribbean.² Around the same time, Spanish colonial authorities in New Spain (Mexico) began importing African slave laborers to work in the silver mines and on the haciendas of local grandes. Throughout a period of around 200 years, approximately 200,000 enslaved Africans were forcibly relocated to Mexico. Over time, most were absorbed into Mexico's mixed indigenous and Spanish population, creating an important component of the nation's *mestizo* majority. When the Spanish first settled Baja California in the seventeenth century, it was estimated that at least 20 percent of the settlers had some African ancestry.³

It took nearly three centuries from the initial Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1521 for settlement to reach what is now the American state of California, a remote frontier region that both the Spanish and Mexicans called *Alta California*, or "Upper California," to distinguish it from *Baja California*. People of partial African ancestry were known to have accompanied both the Portolá and De Anza expeditions in the late eighteenth century, and people of mixed African and Spanish ancestry were among the first settlers of *El Pueblo de Los Angeles* in 1781. One authority surmised that at least half the original *pobladores* had some African ancestry, including members of the prominent Tapía and Pico families. However, like most Mexicans of this era, these families did not often allude to their African heritage, preferring to embrace a pan-Mexican identity.⁴

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Spain's New World empire was starting to disintegrate. While Spain was occupied by France during the Napoleonic wars, an emergent class of native-born *Criollos* revolted, winning independence for most of Spain's Latin American colonies by the mid-1820s. Mexico, the jewel in Spain's New World crown, declared independence in 1810, though it did not finish expelling the last Spanish forces until 1822. After a short stint as an empire, the Republic of Mexico was founded in 1823. Alta California, which Mexico inherited from Spain, became the northernmost territory of the new nation. However, wracked by internal revolutions and civil discord, Mexican authorities could do little to protect the nation's sparsely populated northern frontier, especially Alta California, which began to attract the interest of Russia, France, England, and increasingly the United States.

² Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 2.

³ Lapp, 2.

⁴ Lapp, 2.

First African Americans Arrive in California: 1823-1848

Anxious to improve its hold on Alta California, Mexican authorities abolished the Franciscan missions and opened the territory to foreign traders. During the 1820s and 1830s, an increasing number of American seafarers arrived in Alta California, mostly aboard whaling ships and merchant vessels engaged in the fur and hide-and-tallow trades. Many liked what they saw and jumped ship, including some African American sailors. Slaves in particular had a significant incentive to remain in Alta California because slavery was forbidden in Mexico's 1823 Constitution. The first African American known to have settled in Alta California was a slave who jumped ship in Santa Barbara in 1819. John Christopher, or Juan Cristobál, was baptized at *Misión Santa Barbara* and subsequently became a Mexican citizen.⁵ During the next three decades, dozens of African Americans – both slaves and free persons – jumped ship in Alta California to begin a new life far from the strictures of slavery and institutional racism in the United States. For unlike the United States, the newly independent nation of Mexico eliminated the legal notion of separate races, as well as slavery itself.

During the 1840s, the number of Americans traveling overland to Alta California increased markedly. Previously deterred by expansive deserts and steep, snowbound mountain ranges, overland travel took off after several trails were blazed over the Sierras by fur trappers and explorers, including Jedediah Smith and John C. Frémont. African American mountain men were part of this group; one of the best-known was James Beckwourth, a mountain man who guided overland migrants over a pass that he discovered from the Nevada desert – over the Sierras – into the upper Sacramento Valley (**Figure 2**).⁶

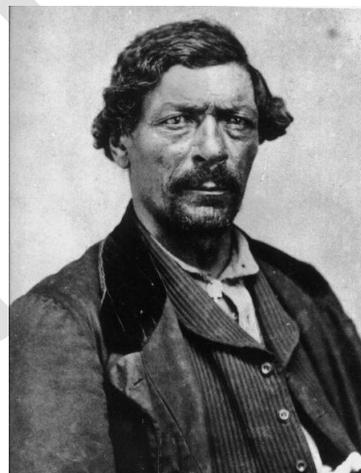


Figure 2. James Beckwourth,
Source: Wikimedia Commons

San Francisco was originally called the *Pueblo de Yerba Buena* when it was founded by the Mexican government around 1835. The remote settlement on the northerly tip of the San Francisco peninsula attracted a polyglot population of Mexican *rancheros*, Yankee merchants, Kanaka sailors, and a mixture of European and Latin American residents engaged in trade with visiting merchant ships and whalers.⁷ By 1847, one year before the American annexation of California, Yerba Buena contained 459 residents, including 10 people of African descent (nine men and one woman). Not much is known about these early Black residents, though all were evidently free.⁸

⁵ Lapp, 3.

⁶ Lapp, 6.

⁷ "Kanaka" was a common name for natives of the Hawaiian islands during the nineteenth century.

⁸ *Californian* (August 28, 1847).

William A. Leidesdorff: 1841-1848

By far the most prominent resident of African descent in Yerba Buena was William Alexander Leidesdorff (**Figure 3**). Born in the Danish Virgin Islands to a Danish sugar planter father and a native-born woman of mixed African and Carib ancestry, Leidesdorff left the Virgin Islands for New Orleans as a teenager to engage in maritime trade. As his fortunes increased he became a ship captain, regularly sailing between New Orleans and New York. In the wake of a broken engagement, Leidesdorff decided to try his luck in Yerba Buena. After selling his personal property, Leidesdorff purchased a 106-ton schooner called the *Julia Ann* and sailed around Cape Horn. Upon arriving in 1841, Leidesdorff began trading between Yerba Buena and Honolulu.⁹ He also pioneered steamship service to San Francisco Bay with the introduction of the *Sitka*. Among other business ventures, Leidesdorff built the first hotel in San Francisco, the City Hotel, at the corner of Clay and Kearny streets (building no longer extant). He also built a warehouse at the corner of California and Leidesdorff streets (building no longer extant). In 1844, William Leidesdorff became a Mexican citizen and obtained a grant of 35,500 acres along the American River, near what is now Folsom.¹⁰



Figure 3. William Leidesdorff
Source: Wikimedia

Leidesdorff was known to sympathize with American interests and in 1845 he was appointed by President James K. Polk to serve as the U.S. vice-consul to Mexico. It is supposed that President Polk, a Tennessee-born slaveholder, probably did not know of Leidesdorff's African ancestry.¹¹ In 1846, immediately before the American conquest of California, Leidesdorff gave assistance to John C. Frémont and the participants in the Bear Flag Revolt. After the American conquest in 1846, Leidesdorff was elected to the *ayuntamiento*, the pueblo's town council. He later became the town treasurer and sat on the board of San Francisco's first school (Yerba Buena was renamed San Francisco in 1847). As the owner of Yerba Buena's largest and best-appointed house, Leidesdorff also hosted most visiting dignitaries. William Leidesdorff died of a fever in 1848 at the age of 38. After an elaborate state funeral, he was buried at Mission Dolores.¹² His obituary in the *California Star* announced:

One of the largest and most respectable assemblages ever witnessed in this place, followed the deceased from his late residence to the place of interment, and everything was done on the part of the community to evince its deep feeling for the loss it has sustained. All places of business and public entertainment were closed, the flags of the garrison and the shipping were flying at half-mast, and minute guns were discharged from the barracks and the shipping as the procession moved from town...It is no injustice to the living, or unmeaning praise for the dead to say that the town has lost its most valuable resident....¹³

It had not been generally known in San Francisco that William Leidesdorff was of partial African descent. Following his death, General Joseph Libby Folsom maneuvered to buy Leidesdorff's *Rancho Rio de los Americanos*. Folsom's lawyer traveled to the Danish Virgin Islands to negotiate with Leidesdorff's family, and while there he learned the truth of his mixed-race heritage. Though there were doubtlessly some who may have changed their opinion of Leidesdorff upon hearing the news, most San Franciscans were

⁹ Lapp, 10.

¹⁰ Lapp, 10.

¹¹ Lapp, 10.

¹² Sue B. Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco: Acme Publishing Co., 1952).

¹³ *California Star* (May 20, 1848).

unconcerned. Leidesdorff's reputation was so sterling that a committee of San Franciscans gathered to posthumously name one of the city's chief streets after him. However, in the end he only got Leidesdorff Street, a narrow three-block alley in what is now the Financial District.¹⁴

American Conquest of California: 1846-1848

Long-held American plans to seize California gained momentum with the election of President James K. Polk in 1844. Polk, an adherent of Manifest Destiny, occupied Mexican territory south of the Nueces River (then the boundary between Texas and Mexico), provoking Mexico into fighting. Using Mexico's resistance as a pretext, Polk convinced Congress to declare war on May 11, 1846. Over the next two years, American forces seized more than half of Mexico. By the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848, the United States annexed 1.2 million square miles of territory, including all of California and Nevada, as well as parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

African American Cultural Contributions: 1579-1848

William Leidesdorff aside, very little is known about San Francisco's early African American residents and their cultural contributions to the young city. Most were probably maritime workers, traders, or manual laborers. Though various individuals may have been accomplished artists, performers, or artisans, their contributions are lost to time.

B. African Americans in Nineteenth-century San Francisco: 1848-1900

The American conquest of California was followed shortly thereafter by the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills east of Sacramento. The ensuing Gold Rush of 1848-52 lured thousands of people to San Francisco from all over the world, including small groups of African Americans and people of African descent from the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Though they faced prejudice in California, as they would anywhere else in the United States, African Americans in San Francisco defied both racist assumptions and attempts to introduce slavery and repression to California. Though their numbers were small, various African American entrepreneurs and community leaders, including Mary Ellen Pleasant, Peter Lester, and others, distinguished themselves among the wider community as businesspeople and resisters against institutional racism.

Influx of African Americans into California during the Gold Rush Era: 1848-1852

Several dozen African Americans arrived in California with the American occupation. Though some were household servants of American military officers, others were slaves brought by settlers from the American South. Not much is known about these individuals, though there are some interesting anecdotes concerning slaves who successfully obtained their freedom after arriving in California. One such person, known only in court records as "Mary," successfully petitioned local courts for her freedom from her owner. She argued that the United States had agreed under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo to uphold Mexican law until a new state constitution was adopted. Because slavery was forbidden in the Mexican Constitution, she argued, it remained illegal in California.¹⁵ This argument was widely seen in legal circles to be valid and was often used prior to the adoption of California's first constitution.

Gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill on January 24, 1848. Because of its huge harbor San Francisco was the logical disembarkation point for most prospective gold seekers arriving by sea. Most outfitted in San Francisco and quickly moved on to the Sierra Nevada goldfields. Those who struck it rich had few places

¹⁴ Lapp, 11.

¹⁵ Lapp, 9.

to spend their fortunes outside San Francisco, and the city soon became home to hundreds of returning miners. Their business supported innumerable gambling parlors, houses of prostitution, saloons, and a full range of businesses designed to fleece the “Forty-niners.” In contrast to the settled communities of Europe or “Back East,” society in San Francisco was fluid. People of humble origins often became rich overnight because gold prospecting was a low-cost undertaking that required only physical stamina, sense, and a bit of luck. In this nearly all-male and relatively egalitarian society, several African American gold miners became quite wealthy (**Figure 4**). In San Francisco at least, gold was the great leveler and many African Americans successfully resisted the racist assumptions of their White countrymen. Rudolph Lapp describes one such incident in *Blacks in Gold Rush California*:

On a September day in 1848 a black man was walking near the San Francisco docks, when a white man who had just disembarked from a ship called to him to carry his luggage. The black cast him an indignant glance and walked away. After he had gone a few steps, he turned around and, drawing a small bag from his bosom, he said, “Do you think I’ll lug trunks when I can get that much in one day?” The sack of gold dust that he displayed was estimated by the white man to be worth more than one hundred dollars.¹⁶

Word soon got out in the free Black communities of the Northeast United States about the opportunities awaiting African Americans in California. Individuals who struck it rich encouraged their friends and family to try their luck. In 1850, the anti-slavery publication, the *Liberator*, published a letter signed by 37 Black men in San Francisco. These men, stating that they earned between \$100 and \$300 a month, had formed a mutual aid society to assist newcomers who wished to come to California. Many of the signatories were from free Black communities in New York and Massachusetts (especially New Bedford, Massachusetts). At least one all-Black mining company was founded in New York City to undertake the expensive and arduous trip to San Francisco.¹⁷

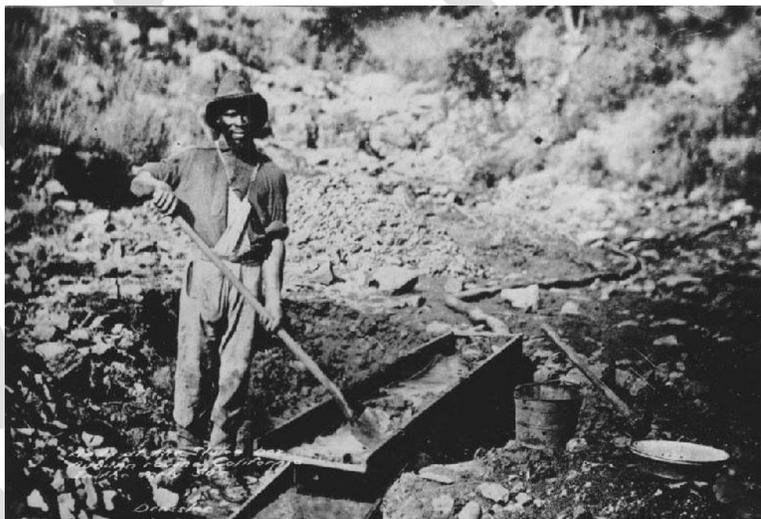


Figure 4. African American miner at Auburn Ravine, 1852
Source: Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Despite the enthusiasm for “emigration” to California in the free Black communities of the Northeast, some worried about California potentially becoming a slave state. Though still a territory during the first two years of the Gold Rush, California’s dramatic population growth quickly led to statehood in 1850. Although Mexican law remained in effect until a new constitution was adopted, White migrants from the Deep South, Texas, Kentucky, Missouri, and other slaveholding states openly advocated for California to be admitted to the Union as a slave state. This possibility alarmed abolitionists – both White and Black – who stood strongly in favor of California remaining free. Fortunately, Northerners outnumbered Southerners in the Constitutional Convention and California was declared to be a free

¹⁶Lapp, 12.

¹⁷Lapp, 13.

state in its new Constitution, which was adopted in October 1849.¹⁸ A year later, on September 9, 1850, California was admitted to the union as a free state.¹⁹

The admission of California as a free state was highly contentious because it upset the balance of power in the United States. Under the terms of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, states had been admitted in pairs – one slave and one free. The purpose of this agreement was to maintain an equal number of slave and free states and therefore equal representation in the Senate, but there was no slave state admitted in 1850. The Compromise of 1850, by which California was admitted to the union, resulted in the passage of the federal Fugitive Slave Act. This much-despised act – the carrot handed to the South in exchange for California’s admission – enacted significant penalties for those who “harbored” escaped slaves. Suddenly, all African Americans, including those living as free men and women in non-slave states, worried with good cause that they might be kidnapped and sold into slavery in the South. Consequently, many African Americans who might have migrated to California headed instead to Canada, which as a British dominion had outlawed slavery in 1833. California lost more of its appeal as a sanctuary with the passage of the California Fugitive Slave Act of 1852. This law, passed with the support of White Southerners in the California Senate, was viewed by many as a back-door legalization of slavery in the state. Among its more odious provisions, the law compelled California’s Black residents to prove that they had lived in the state before statehood. Free Blacks who were unable to present such proof were at risk of being sold into slavery.²⁰

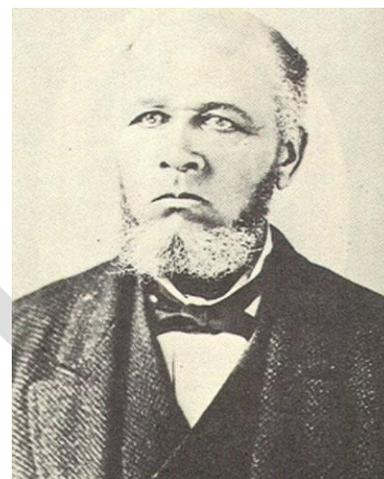


Figure 5. Peter Lester, ca. 1850
Source: blackpast.org

Because slavery was legal in the United States, slave owners assumed that they could bring their slaves to California to help them dig for gold. Nevertheless, several slaves brought to California under these circumstances successfully challenged their status in court, arguing that as residents of a free state, they too were free. In San Francisco they were encouraged by local abolitionists, including the African American businessman and abolitionist, Peter Lester (**Figure 5**). Lester, a native of Philadelphia, who moved to San Francisco with his family in 1850 to open what would become a very successful boot and shoemaking business, would invite slaves to his house to inform them of their legal rights. A German immigrant described Lester’s methods:

The wealthy California Negroes have become especially talented in such stealing. The negroes exhibit a great deal of energy and intelligence in saving their brothers.²¹

¹⁸ Lapp, 14.

¹⁹ Lapp, 130. There was at first the possibility that California would be divided into two states at the 35th parallel (aligning with the Missouri Compromise line), with Northern California admitted as a free state and Southern California as a slave state. Though the Wilmot Proviso essentially outlawed slavery in any of the newly conquered Mexican territories, there were nonetheless many Southerners who hoped to eventually expand slavery westward into New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California. Luckily the climate and terrain of the Southwest did not lend itself to cotton cultivation, reducing the incentive to import slavery.

²⁰ Lapp, 140-7.

²¹ Ruth F. Axe, ed., *Bound for Sacramento* (Claremont, CA: 1938), 144.

Population Characteristics of San Francisco's Pioneer African American Community: 1852-1860

The population of California ballooned during the Gold Rush. Between 1846 and 1852, when the state completed its first census, the population grew from approximately 100,000 Native Americans and 8,000 Mexicans, Americans, Europeans, and *Californios* (native-born Hispanic Californians of mixed Spanish, Mexican, and Indian origin) to an estimated 90,000 Native Americans and 260,949 non-Native people. The diversity of the state's population was astounding, with people representing nearly every country in Europe and South America, every state in the union, China, Turkey, Hawaii, Malaysia, India, and Australia.²² The Census of 1852 records San Francisco's population at 34,776. Of that figure, African Americans comprised some 464 persons, slightly over one percent of the city's population. By 1860, the number of African Americans in San Francisco had jumped to 1,176, slightly over two percent of the city's total population of 56,776.²³

San Francisco's pioneer Black population was wildly diverse. Though most of San Francisco's African Americans were from the Northeastern United States – mainly New York, Philadelphia, and New Bedford – many others were foreign-born, with Black residents claiming origins from several islands in the West Indies, Canada, Central America, South America, the Cape Verde Islands, the African continent, and several European countries, including Portugal, Spain, France, and England.²⁴ Certainly early censuses lacked the nuanced language necessary to draw an accurate racial portrait of a city like San Francisco, and complex combinations of ethnicities and racial mixtures likely led to vagaries and recording errors.²⁵ However, much like other arrivals to the city, early African American settlers in San Francisco were characterized by certain self-selected traits: they were adventurous; they were opportunistic; and they were also largely unburdened by the extreme poverty that would prohibit such a significant relocation in another time or place. They were also largely single, young, and eager to work.

Civic Institutions of San Francisco's Pioneer African American Community: 1848-1900

Though many African Americans who came to San Francisco during the Gold Rush went straight to work in the goldfields, others tried their luck in the cities, of which only San Francisco and Sacramento warranted the description as such. The newcomers became part of an almost entirely male, frontier society with few rules and many vices. As mentioned previously, the unstable environment led to the founding of mutual aid societies, including the Mutual Benefit and Relief Society, founded by 37 African Americans from New Bedford, Massachusetts. This organization was dedicated to helping Black newcomers find jobs and housing, as well assisting members during hard times.²⁶ Nothing is known about the subsequent activities of this organization, as well as many other pioneer social service and religious organizations founded in San Francisco during the Gold Rush era. Society was extremely transitory, a characteristic unfavorable to institutional longevity. However, there were a few organizations and cultural institutions founded during this period that remain in existence today.

The Athenaeum

Members of San Francisco's Black community convened in July 1853 at a house located at 273 Washington Street (building no longer extant) to found the city's first social club/gathering place for African Americans. Called The Athenaeum, the institute housed the Athenaeum Saloon on the first floor and the Athenaeum Institute on the second floor. Here, African Americans would meet and socialize

²² 1852 California Census.

²³ 1852 California Census.

²⁴ Douglas H. Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 18.

²⁵ Daniels, 82.

²⁶ Lapp, 95.

over drinks and games in the saloon, which was managed by Monroe Taylor and James Riker (with financial backing from Mary Ellen Pleasant), and reconvene upstairs for lectures, debates, and other intellectual activities. The Athenaeum Institute's first director was a businessman named Jacob Francis and its secretary was William H. Newby, a well-known daguerreotypist from New York City.²⁷ Its founders included several prominent businessmen and abolitionists, including J.H. Townsend, Mifflin W. Gibbs, James R. Starkey, W.H. Harper, and E.R. Johnson. Within a year of its founding, the organization had 85 dues-paying members, \$2,000 in funds, and 800 books in its collection.²⁸

Over the following decades the Athenaeum Institute hosted debates, meetings, and published reports describing the activities of San Francisco's African American community. In 1854, it published a directory of businesses and institutions founded by members of San Francisco's Black community, including two joint-stock companies, four boot and shoemakers, four clothing stores, eight express and livery wagon companies, two furniture shops, 12 public houses, two restaurants, two billiard saloons, 16 barber shops, two bathhouses, one reading room and library, one Masonic lodge, and one brass band. The directory also tallied the rough numbers of African Americans employed in various occupations in San Francisco, including 100 mechanics, 20 draymen, 100 porters, 150 stewards, 300 waiters, and 200 cooks.²⁹ Today's African American Historical and Cultural Society is descended from The Athenaeum.

Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Freemasons

In 1855, Charles C. Woods founded a Masonic lodge for African American men called the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Freemasons. Woods lived with his West Indian-born wife Ann C. Woods at their boardinghouse at 1006 Washington Street (building no longer extant). The lodge, which exists today as the Hannibal Lodge No. 1 at 2804 Bush Street, was initially based in what is now Chinatown.³⁰

The African American Press

Almost immediately upon settling in San Francisco African Americans began to organize and advocate for civil rights which, while routinely denied in Eastern states, they had hope might be available to them in this emerging western city. In addition to subscribing to Eastern abolitionist papers, most notably Frederick Douglass' weekly *North Star* (later changed to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*), Black San Franciscans published newspapers and journals locally to educate people about local and national issues. The first African American newspaper on the West Coast, *The Mirror of the Times*, was established in San Francisco in 1856 by William H. Newby and Jonas Holland Townsend.³¹ It was followed by several others, including the *San Francisco Pacific Appeal*, the *Elevator*, the *San Francisco Vindicator*, and the *San Francisco Sentinel*.³² Most of these newspapers were located along Washington and Jackson streets, near Chinatown. None were in any buildings that exist today.

African American Churches

By the time African Americans first started arriving in California they had already built a thriving religious tradition apart from mainline White Protestant Christianity. Two groups that splintered off from the Methodist Church in the early nineteenth century included the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Bethel Church, from Philadelphia; and the A.M.E. Zion Church, from New York. By the 1850s, Black Baptists and Presbyterians had also founded separate churches catering to African Americans in San

²⁷ San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco during the Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: 1974), 3-4.

²⁸ Lapp, 101.

²⁹ *Alta California* (April 7, 1854).

³⁰ San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1.

³¹ San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 3-4.

³² Daniels, 217.

Francisco. At these churches African Americans could worship in their own space and according to their own traditions. The churches also served as important community gathering places, where news was exchanged, friendships formed and reinforced, and business discussed.

San Francisco's earliest documented African American church was founded in 1852 by the Reverend John Jamison Moore. This church, First A.M.E. Zion, was originally located on Stockton Street, between Broadway and Vallejo Street, at the northern end of Chinatown (building no longer extant). By 1856, the congregation had moved nearby to a new \$4,000 brick building (building no longer extant) that was large enough to house a Sabbath school for 50 students, as well as a library.³³ In 1864, the congregation purchased the former First Unitarian Church on Stockton Street, at Pacific Avenue (building no longer extant). This church, the most elaborate one yet, was home to the congregation until 1906, when it was destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. A blurry image from a newspaper article depicts the two-story, hipped-roof church with a two-story portico (Figure 6).



Figure 6. A.M.E. Zion Church
Source: First A.M.E. Zion Church

In 1854, the Reverend Barney Fletcher traveled to San Francisco from Sacramento to found another A.M.E. church – this one called St. Cyprian. It was located on Jackson Street, between Stockton and Powell streets, also in Chinatown (building no longer extant). Run by the Reverend T.M.D. Ward, St. Cyprian operated with a school in the basement. In 1857, Reverend Jeremiah Sanderson, a native of New Bedford, Massachusetts, opened a third A.M.E. church called the Little Pilgrim Church. It was located on Scott Street, between Pacific Avenue and Broadway (building no longer extant).³⁴

Another important early African American church in San Francisco was the Third Baptist Church. In contrast to the A.M.E. churches, which mainly attracted people from the Northeast, the Third Baptist Church appealed largely to Black Southerners. Because San Francisco's pioneer African American community was dominated by New Englanders and New Yorkers, the Third Baptist Church, which was located on Dupont Street (now Grant Avenue), near Union Street (building no longer extant), remained very small. It remained without a permanent pastor until 1857, when Reverend Charles Satchell, an ardent abolitionist from New Orleans, took over.³⁵ By 1863, the three A.M.E. churches had a combined membership of nearly 100, with the Third Baptist Church reporting 74 members.³⁶ Though there were a handful of Black Catholics in San Francisco, there were no predominantly African American Catholic parishes in the city until World War II.

³³ Lapp, 160.

³⁴ Lapp, 160.

³⁵ Lapp, 161.

³⁶ Lapp, 162.

The church buildings themselves demonstrated much about Black ambitions in nineteenth-century San Francisco. Congregations vied with one another to build and furnish the most impressive church possible. After Reverend T.M.D. Ward became pastor of St. Cyprian Church, he moved this A.M.E. congregation to the former Little Pilgrim Church on Scott Street in 1856. Then, in 1862, he purchased an existing church building on Powell Street (building no longer extant). Known as “Grace Church,” this “stately” building with its “gothic piers and handsome gilding” symbolized the growing wealth and ambition of the congregation. Costing \$5,500 to purchase, the congregation paid off the loan in 1864. Between 1865 and 1868, the congregation raised another \$6,600 to remodel the church, adding bells, a belfry, and an organ.³⁷

African American Schools

Schooling for any child was hard to come by in pioneer San Francisco, much less for African American children. It was not until 1851 that the California legislature even allowed local municipalities to establish and fund their own schools. In 1852, funds were made available for schools for White children, but no provisions were made for people of color, especially African Americans and Chinese. Essentially locked out of the White schools, pioneer African Americans lobbied for funds to establish their own. Until such funding was forthcoming, education of Black children was handled by the churches. In San Francisco, St. Cyprian Church operated a school from 1854 until 1864.³⁸ In June 1857, city authorities in San Francisco designated St. Cyprian’s school as San Francisco’s “Negro Children’s School” and began providing a salary to its staff. At that time the school educated 114 children and young adults.³⁹ The school was located on Jackson Street, at Virginia Street (now James Place), at the northern end of Chinatown (building no longer extant). Another private school was the Livingston Institute. Founded in 1860 by the Reverend Barney Fletcher and the Reverend John J. Moore, the school – the first secondary school for Black children in the West – operated out of A.M.E. Zion.⁴⁰

African American children were not customarily allowed to attend neighborhood public schools, though some did, especially light-skinned children who could “pass” as White. This policy was challenged in 1858 after a 15-year-old girl named Sarah Lester was threatened with expulsion from the city’s high school despite receiving extremely high marks in the admissions tests. Sarah Lester was the daughter of the prominent African American abolitionist Peter Lester, owner of the boot-making firm of Lester & Gibbs. After vociferous lobbying from the pro-slavery *San Francisco Herald*, the school board seemed to be on the verge of expelling Miss Lester – this in spite of threats by her White classmates to withdraw from the school if she was forced to leave. Lester’s parents, disgusted by the actions of the school board, resolved the standoff by emigrating to Canada.⁴¹

The dank, crowded basement of St. Cyprian was never adequate for a school, and in 1864, the school board finally built a dedicated public school for the city’s African American children. This school, called the Negro Children’s School, was located on Broadway, near Powell Street, also on the northern edge of Chinatown (building no longer extant).⁴² Though located in an area that housed most of the city’s African American residents, some Black residents did not live within walking distance of the Negro Children’s School, forcing them to seek other options. In 1870, the school moved to Russian Hill, to a site on Vallejo Street, near Taylor Street (building no longer extant).

³⁷ Daniels, 118-9.

³⁸ Lapp, 167.

³⁹ Lapp, 169.

⁴⁰ San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 7.

⁴¹ Lapp, 170.

⁴² Lapp, 174.

In 1872, parents of 12-year-old Mary Frances Ward challenged San Francisco's segregationist school policy by applying for a spot at the all-white Broadway Grammar School. Following the denial of their application by Superintendent Noah Flood, the Ward family sued. Represented by attorney John W. Dwinelle, the Wards argued that they had the right to send their children to their local school on the basis of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution.⁴³ Though the California Supreme Court later decided that race-segregated schools were constitutional, in 1875, the San Francisco Board of Education concluded that providing a separate school for the city's African American population was too expensive and it therefore permitted African American children to be admitted to any of the city's schools. The city's Chinese students, who were more numerous and more geographically concentrated than African Americans, remained in segregated schools. San Francisco's largest Black newspaper, *The Appeal*, greeted the decision with the following statement: "Both white and colored citizens should rejoice that this last relic of slavery has at last disappeared from our great Metropolitan City of the Pacific Coast."⁴⁴

Occupational Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Community: 1852-1860

Despite the overall live-and-let-live atmosphere that characterized San Francisco during the Gold Rush era, racial prejudice prohibited most African Americans from attaining professional jobs in the emerging merchant city. Indeed, most African Americans who arrived in San Francisco during this period were either self-employed or employed in maritime occupations. Many worked on the merchant ships that navigated the inland waterways to Sacramento and Stockton. Still others operated ship-to-shore launches, carrying new arrivals and their luggage to the beach and piers in Yerba Buena Cove. Some transferred skills they had learned on ships to mainland occupations, with recorded instances of ships' cooks starting restaurants, waiters opening dining halls, and porters establishing boarding houses.⁴⁵

Some African Americans were employed in the local whaling industry. Whaling had historically been centered in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the hometown of many of the city's early Black residents. In New Bedford, many crewmembers were Black or mulatto – mostly natives of the West Indies or Portugal's African colony of Cabo Verde (the Cape Verde Islands). This tradition of employing African American crewmen continued after the American whaling industry relocated to San Francisco in the 1870s. William T. Shorey, an African American whaler, eventually rose to the rank of captain, something unheard of on the East Coast (**Figure 7**). Shorey was born in Barbados, the son of a Scottish sugar planter and a local woman of mixed African and Amerindian ancestry. Whaling brought him to San Francisco in the 1870s, and in 1886 he became a captain. Known as the "Black Ahab," Shorey married the daughter of a prominent African American family and prospered in his



Figure 7. William T. Shorey, ca. 1905

Source: Oakland Public Library

⁴³ The Thirteenth Amendment forbade slavery in 1865. The Fourteenth defined U.S. citizenship in 1868 and most important, specified that "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

⁴⁴ *California Reports* (1874), 48.

⁴⁵ Daniels, 77.

new life, remaining in the business until 1908 when steamships took the place of sailing vessels.⁴⁶

For most of the nineteenth century African Americans not employed in maritime occupations were heavily represented in the culinary trades. One of San Francisco's earliest restaurants, and long one of its most lucrative, was the Battery House. Though established by a pair of White New Yorkers, the cooking and day-to-day operations were handled by two African American men who came west with the restaurant's owners. This story was repeated elsewhere in San Francisco. According to the 1852 Census, of the city's 464 Black residents, 67 (14 percent) were employed as cooks in restaurants, cafés, and hotels and boardinghouses.⁴⁷

Other common occupational categories among San Francisco's pioneer African American population included barbers, stewards, and shoe-shiners and boot-blackers. Though boot-blackening was considered to be a menial job by most people, it could often be quite lucrative, with individuals stationed in front of popular gambling houses and hotels earning upwards of 15 dollars a day (the equivalent in today's purchasing power of more than \$400).⁴⁸ Employment as a steward could also be extremely remunerative. During the Gold Rush, Black stewards could reportedly earn upwards of \$150 a day!⁴⁹ Several prosperous stewards invested their savings in real estate or stocks. In 1870, an African American stewardess named Salina Williams who was employed on a Sacramento steamer owned \$12,000 in real estate, putting her among the top-ten wealthiest Black San Franciscans.⁵⁰ Other common occupational categories included white-washers, porters, fishermen, and general laborers.⁵¹

Several African Americans operated successful entertainment venues, including The Iron Clad, at 420 Pacific Avenue, and The Lincoln Exchange, on Washington Street (buildings no longer extant).⁵² These venues employed African Americans at all levels, including entertainers, chefs, waitresses, and doormen. As early as 1850, there was at least one African American-owned and operated boarding house on Kearny Street. Though it is not known what it was called, it was probably the Harper & West Hotel, owned by William H. Harper (building no longer extant).⁵³ Not far from this business was a used goods store owned by John Ross. Called Ross' Exchange, this business was located on Pacific Avenue (building no longer extant). One of the most important African American entrepreneurs in Gold Rush-era San Francisco was a New Bedford native named James P. Dyer. In 1851, he founded one of San Francisco's earliest soap factories. Another important early entrepreneur was of course Peter Lester. Mentioned twice previously, Mr. Lester was a skilled boot-maker who got his start as a boot-blacker. In the early 1850s, Lester established the Pioneer Boot and Shoe Emporium.⁵⁴ George Washington Dennis, a former slave who purchased his own freedom, made a small fortune from gambling and invested the proceeds in real estate. He then opened the Cosmopolitan Coal and Wood Yard, at 340 Broadway (building no longer extant). By 1889, he was one of San Francisco's wealthiest Black residents, with a fortune estimated at \$50,000.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Shorey, 98.

⁴⁷ Lapp, 96.

⁴⁸ Lapp, 97.

⁴⁹ Oscar Lewis, *This was San Francisco* (New York: 1962), 180-1.

⁵⁰ Lewis, 180-1.

⁵¹ Lapp, 99.

⁵² Daniels, 80.

⁵³ Lapp, 98.

⁵⁴ Lapp, 98.

⁵⁵ Daniels, 30.

Residential Patterns of San Francisco's African American Community: 1852-1900

During the nineteenth century, African American San Franciscans were little different from other communities in that the primary determinant in choosing a place to live was its proximity to employment. In the days before mass transit, one generally had to live within walking distance of their workplace. As a community heavily represented in maritime and hospitality businesses, the Gold Rush era saw many African Americans living near Yerba Buena Cove. Long since filled, this crescent-shaped harbor once extended from Rincon Point to Clark's Point, at the foot of Telegraph Hill.⁵⁶ Some of the city's single Black men lived in a multi-ethnic neighborhood called "Chili Hill," named thusly because many Latin-American immigrants from Chile and Peru lived there.⁵⁷ This neighborhood was located on the southern slope of Telegraph Hill in what is now North Beach.

Unlike the Chinese, who were legally restricted to living in Chinatown, in theory there were no legal limitations on where African Americans could live in nineteenth-century San Francisco.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, most Black San Franciscans lived along the northern edge of Chinatown, a low-prestige, multi-ethnic area that was close to the waterfront and other centers of employment. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, one-third of the city's Black population lived in a six-block area bounded by Stockton Street, Kearney Street, Washington Street, and Broadway. They lived among Chinese, Europeans, and American-born Whites.⁵⁹ The area with the highest concentration of African Americans was a narrow alley in Chinatown called Stone Street (Figure 8). Branching off the north side of Washington Street, between Stockton and Powell streets, this narrow lane was lined by boardinghouses that housed 34 African Americans out of a total of 53 residents –the only African American-majority enclave in San Francisco at that time.⁶⁰ None of these boardinghouses are still extant.

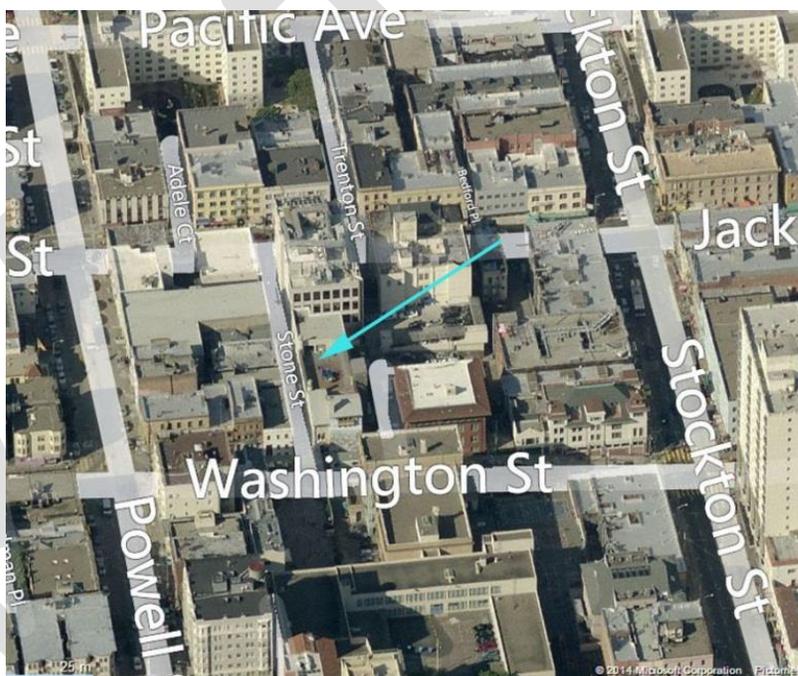


Figure 8. Stone Street, indicated by blue arrow
Source: Bing.com; annotated by Christopher VerPlanck

Though forbidden from intermarrying with Whites, there were no legal restrictions preventing African Americans from marrying other people of color, and given their mutual proximity, some African Americans did marry members of the city's much larger Chinese population.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Daniels, 76.

⁵⁷ Lapp, 103.

⁵⁸ Daniels, 79.

⁵⁹ Daniels, 97.

⁶⁰ Daniels, 98.

⁶¹ Daniels, 97.

Later on in the nineteenth century, as the primary source of African American employment shifted away from the waterfront and to the railroads and hotels south of Market Street, the residential center of Black San Francisco shifted south as well. Though they never formed a majority, U.S. Census records from the 1880s and 1890s reveal several distinct clusters of Black families along Minna, Tehama, and Natoma streets.⁶² However, wherever they lived in nineteenth-century San Francisco, African Americans were largely integrated along with other ethnic groups. Because they formed such a small minority, African Americans were not perceived as a threat by the White majority, allowing more prosperous Blacks to live largely wherever they liked.⁶³

Agitation for Civil Rights in San Francisco: 1852-1875

A local source of anti-slavery sentiment, the Athenaeum Institute diligently fought for the rights of San Francisco's African American residents. Two of the Institute's major causes included securing the right to vote and the ability to testify against Whites in court. The right to testify was especially important; without it African Americans were vulnerable to exploitation in business or beatings by hoodlums.⁶⁴ In 1852, local activists, spearheaded by David W. Ruggles and Mary Ellen Pleasant, founded the Franchise League with the goal of securing these basic civil rights.⁶⁵ Despite the tireless work of the group's volunteers and the political advocacy of leaders like Philip A. Bell, publisher of the *San Francisco Elevator*, these basic rights were slow in coming. Though the right to testify in court was achieved in 1863, California's African American men did not receive the right to vote until the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, five years after the end of the Civil War.⁶⁶

The Case of Archy Lee: 1857-1858

As previously mentioned, the California Fugitive Slave Act of 1852 posed a huge threat to African Americans living in California. Under its provisions any African American who could not prove that he or she had lived in California since 1849 could theoretically be sold into slavery. Even a Black person who was born free outside the South could be enslaved if someone was willing to testify that the individual was an escaped slave.⁶⁷ The hated law eventually expired in 1855 and it was not renewed. Following its expiration, African American Californians organized the first of several statewide "Colored Conventions" to alert African American slaves living in the state that they could claim their freedom. Additional conventions were held in 1856 and 1857 with similar goals.

One of the first test cases involving a slave claiming his or her freedom following the expiration of the California Fugitive Slave Act involved an 18 year-old Black man named Archy Lee. Lee had been brought to the state in 1857 by Charles Stovall. Unwilling to go back to slavery when Stovall decided to return home to Mississippi, Archy Lee hid out in a Black-owned hotel in Sacramento. In January 1858, his owner sued for his return and after a series of court decisions and appeals, in which Lee was represented by prominent abolitionist lawyers, the California Supreme Court decided that any person arriving in California with the intention to live, such as Charles Stovall, could not legally own slaves. Though this decision should have freed Archy Lee, the court decided that because Stovall was not in good health that Lee should be sent back to Mississippi with Stovall. After learning of the court's decision, several abolitionists intercepted Lee before he could be put aboard a ship headed out of San Francisco. As they

⁶² Daniels, 97.

⁶³ Daniels, 81.

⁶⁴ Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1993), 16.

⁶⁵ Broussard, 17.

⁶⁶ Broussard, 17.

⁶⁷ Lapp, 147.

were rowing back to shore the abolitionists were intercepted by local authorities, who then remanded Lee back into custody. This event launched a new round of trials, which after several twists and turns resulted in Archy Lee at last being declared a free man on April 14, 1858.⁶⁸

Lee was a hero to San Francisco's African American community, many of whom had gone into debt to pay for his legal defense (**Figure 9**). After being fêted in one of the boardinghouses owned by Black businesswoman and abolitionist, Mary Ellen Pleasant, Archy Lee decided to emigrate to Victoria, British Columbia, where he would be safe.⁶⁹ The case of Archy Lee was an important one for San Francisco's pioneer African American community because it finally ended the threat of de-facto slavery in California by freeing any slaves brought to the state. On the other hand, it did little for escaped slaves who came to California on their own volition; they were still liable to be returned to their owners under the federal Fugitive Slave Act.⁷⁰

Exodus of African Americans to British Columbia: 1858

By the late 1850s, San Francisco had a small but thriving Black community numbering perhaps 1,500. Flush with success over their successful efforts to free Archy Lee, San Francisco's Black community soon faced another challenge from pro-slavery Southerners in the California legislature. In 1858, Assemblyman J.B. Warfield of Nevada County introduced a bill to forbid the "immigration" of any people of African descent to California, including American-born Blacks from other states and U.S. territories. The bill would have required all resident African Americans to register and carry identification papers at all times. People who could not produce papers asserting that they had lived in California prior to 1858 were liable under the bill to be "deported," and if they did not have any money they would be forced into involuntary labor to pay their passage "home."

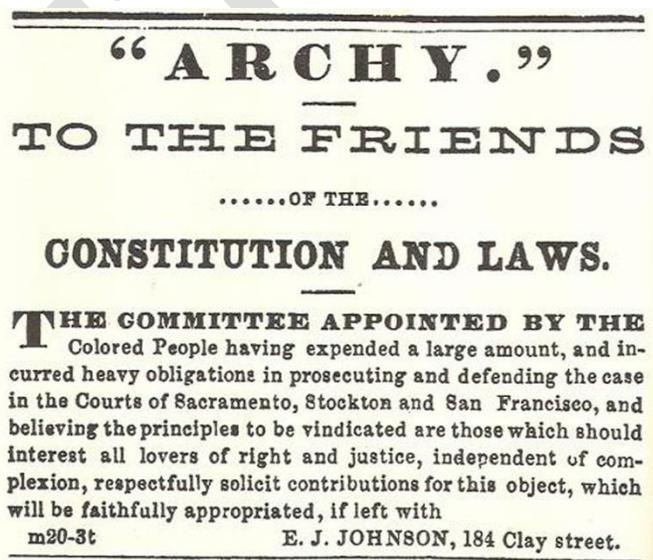


Figure 9. Advertisement soliciting funds to pay for Archy Lee's defense, 1858

Source: blackpast.org

Though the Warfield bill ultimately failed to make it out of committee, many local African Americans had had enough of the seemingly continual barrage of racist legislation coming out of Sacramento. Some made plans to emigrate. Initially Mexico and Panama (then part of Colombia) were considered as possible destinations, but some voiced concerns that these nations would eventually be absorbed by the United States.⁷¹ They then turned their attention toward Canada, which as a British dominion had been free from slavery since 1833. Canada, long the final destination of the Underground Railroad, had attracted thousands of African Americans, though mostly to Ontario. Plans became actions after Jeremiah Naglee, captain of the British steamer *Commodore*, attended a community meeting at A.M.E. Zion Church. A White man, Naglee informed those in attendance that Black people were treated with respect in Canada and he offered to transport anyone who desired to leave on his next voyage to

⁶⁸ Lapp, 151-2.

⁶⁹ Lapp, 153.

⁷⁰ Lapp 156.

⁷¹ Lapp, 240.

Victoria, British Columbia. On April 22, 1858, some 200 people took up Captain Naglee on his offer, including Archy Lee, Peter Lester, and many of San Francisco's best-known and most prosperous Black community members.⁷²

Many of the pioneers settled on Salt Spring Island, where they bought land, built homes, and established a small community of fishermen and farmers. Over the next several months, letters from emigrants to Victoria arrived in San Francisco. These letters reported on ample job opportunities, inexpensive real estate, and the relative lack of racial discrimination in the British territory. These glowing reports caused an unknown number of African Americans to emigrate between 1858 and 1860. Some apparently struck it rich in the gold fields of Fraser River but most others made a living from farming, land speculation, or various other commercial enterprises.⁷³ In 1860, the U.S. Census recorded fewer than 1,200 African Americans in San Francisco, or approximately 2 percent of the city's total population of 56,802. Though this figure represented an increase since 1852, it would have been a lot higher if some 400 to 800 African Americans had not emigrated to Canada.⁷⁴ Men outnumbered women almost two-to-one (711 to 435), reflecting a lingering imbalance between the sexes in San Francisco among all races.⁷⁵

Mary Ellen Pleasant

Mary Ellen Pleasant was one of the leading figures in California's abolitionist movement and an active participant in the Underground Railroad (**Figure 10**). Very little is known about her early life, which she kept a closely guarded secret. Some sources, notably Helen Holdrege's sensationalized 1953 book, *Mammy Pleasant*, maintain that Mary Ellen Pleasant was born into slavery around 1814 on a plantation in Georgia. In this account, her father was a White planter from Virginia and her mother a mixed-race slave from the former French colony of Sainte Domingue (Haiti).⁷⁶ A more recent (and credible) biography by Lynn Hudson casts doubts on this story, citing Pleasant's own statement that she was born free in Philadelphia to a Hawaiian father and an African American woman from Louisiana.⁷⁷ Regardless of her origins, Mary Ellen was by most accounts rather light-complexioned and at times she could evidently "pass" as being White, especially during her younger years.⁷⁸



Figure 10. Mary Ellen Pleasant, 1902
Source: Bancroft Library

Holdrege says Mary Ellen was purchased and subsequently freed by a White planter from Missouri who, impressed with her intelligence, paid for her education. Then, according to the Holdrege account, she lived in Cincinnati, and then Nantucket, and later Boston, working as a servant in all three places. According to Hudson she was sent to live in Nantucket by her parents when she was only six years old, possibly as an indentured

⁷² Lapp, 242.

⁷³ Lapp, 247.

⁷⁴ Lapp, 262.

⁷⁵ San Francisco City Directory, 1860.

⁷⁶ Helen Holdrege, *Mammy Pleasant* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1953), 24. Holdrege's book is not cited and almost certainly fictionalized.

⁷⁷ Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 12.

⁷⁸ The concept of light-complexioned African Americans "passing" as White is as old as America and it refers to the tendency of some lighter-skinned Blacks to identify as white in order to escape racial prejudice and the traditional binary definition of race in America. To explain their darker coloring some African Americans attempting to "pass" would claim Southern European, Arab, or Native American ancestry.

servant, to work for the Quaker Hussey family.⁷⁹ Most accounts agree that in her early twenties she moved to Boston, where she married a wealthy abolitionist named James W. Smith. Smith died not long after, in 1844, leaving his estate to his widow.⁸⁰ Mary Ellen vowed to use her husband's fortune to help free slaves and transport them to Canada. For the next eight years Mary Ellen Smith kept her vow, becoming one of the leading "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. Always a step ahead of authorities, Mary Ellen went into hiding several times when her activities became known.⁸¹

In 1847 or 1851, depending on the account, Mary Ellen married John James Plaisance (she later changed the spelling to "Pleasant"), a mixed-race former slave and fellow abolitionist. John and Mary Ellen Pleasant arrived in San Francisco in 1852. John worked as a ship's cook and Mary Ellen Pleasant took on the job of running the households of several wealthy families.⁸² Pleasant still had some money from her first marriage and she invested it in real estate. She also established three commercial laundries that she staffed entirely with ex-slaves brought to California via the Underground Railroad.⁸³

Believing that the Southern White aristocracy would never voluntarily relinquish slavery, Mary Ellen Pleasant thought that a massive slave uprising was the only way to end this noxious institution. To that end, in 1858, Mary Ellen Pleasant met with the abolitionist John Brown in Chatham, Ontario. She assisted him with technical and organizational advice, as well as a substantial donation of money raised from African Americans living in San Francisco. Though she was skeptical of his plans, which included raiding federal arsenals for weapons to start a slave rebellion, Pleasant may have further assisted Brown by traveling across the South on horseback, disguised as a jockey, to tell slaves to be ready to revolt. The planned revolt was canceled after Brown was captured and hanged on December 2, 1859, following his disastrous raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. A letter from Pleasant was found in Brown's coat when he was captured. It read: "The axe is laid at the foot of the tree. When the first blow is struck there will be more money and help." Federal authorities analyzed the signature but misinterpreted the initials "M.E.P" as "W.E.P." Nonetheless, Pleasant did not wish to be captured and executed, so she made her way back to California as soon as she could.⁸⁴

Mary Ellen Pleasant took the job of running the household of Selim and Lisette Woodworth following her return to San Francisco on the eve of the Civil War.⁸⁵ The Woodworths valued Pleasant as an employee and supported her civil rights efforts, including her work to desegregate San Francisco's private streetcar companies. In 1866, Mary Ellen Pleasant, supported with testimony from Lisette Woodworth, sued both the Omnibus Railroad Company and the North Beach & Mission Railroad for discrimination after being denied service.⁸⁶ In 1868, Mary Ellen Pleasant won damages in one of these lawsuits, winning the right of African Americans to ride public transit in California.⁸⁷

In 1869, Mary Ellen Pleasant had earned enough money from her various business ventures to open two boardinghouses, including one at 920 Washington Street and another at 708 Stockton Street, both near

⁷⁹ Hudson, 17.

⁸⁰ "Pleasant, Mary Ellen (1812?-1904)," W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African American Research: <http://dubois.fas.harvard.edu/pleasant-mary-ellen-1812-1904-legendary-woman-influence>

⁸¹ Helen Holdrege, *Mammy Pleasant* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1953), 24.

⁸² Hudson, 27.

⁸³ Hudson, 34.

⁸⁴ Hudson, 41.

⁸⁵ Hudson, 44.

⁸⁶ Hudson, 51.

⁸⁷ "Pleasant, Mary Ellen (1812?-1904)," W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African American Research: <http://dubois.fas.harvard.edu/pleasant-mary-ellen-1812-1904-legendary-woman-influence>

Chinatown (neither building is extant).⁸⁸ Her boardinghouses were known for their excellent food and accommodations and were therefore in high demand among the city's business and political elite. Pleasant's boardinghouse at 920 Washington Street was especially popular because it was close to Portsmouth Square and City Hall. Incidentally, it was across the street from The Athenaeum, another project of Pleasant's. The boardinghouse business was very lucrative, earning Pleasant \$15,000 in profits in 1870 alone.⁸⁹ Like her laundries, Pleasant staffed them with trusted ex-slaves. In her capacity as a trusted housekeeper, confidante, and possibly matchmaker to some of San Francisco's most powerful men, Mary Ellen Pleasant learned many important business secrets, especially mining stock tips.⁹⁰ With impeccable timing she invested in the Comstock Lode, a complex of silver mines in the Sierra Nevada. Whereas many San Franciscans who invested in these mining stocks lost everything, Mary Ellen Pleasant became very wealthy because she had inside knowledge of what stocks were worthless.⁹¹

As the media became increasingly aware of Mary Ellen Pleasant's wealth and her apparent influence over several prominent businessmen, in particular Thomas Bell, a mining investor and Bank of California board member, reporters began writing scurrilous articles about her that accused her of using "black magic" to achieve her ends. The media also bestowed a racist nickname – "Mammy" – which Mary Ellen detested and refused to answer to. Though reports of intrigue multiplied, Mary Ellen Pleasant continued to prosper as the silent business partner of Thomas Bell.



Figure 11. Thomas Bell House, looking west from Octavia Street, 1926
Note eucalyptus trees at left on Bush Street
Source: Bancroft Library

Between 1876 and 1878, Bell (using Pleasant's money) built an elaborately appointed mansion at 1661 Octavia Street, on the northwest corner of Octavia and Bush streets (building no longer extant) (**Figure 11**). The "House of Mystery," as the scandal sheets called it, was reportedly designed in part by Pleasant herself. The 30-room house contained a suite for Mary Ellen Pleasant, as well as two additional suites for Thomas Bell and his wife Teresa Bell. The mansion also contained accommodations for 15 servants, lavishly decorated entertaining rooms, and reputedly a room in the basement for Pleasant's Voudon ceremonies.⁹² The property, which occupied an entire half block, featured extensive gardens, walkways, and a circular drive. It was enclosed behind a wall ornamented with New Orleans-style friezes. Though the house was demolished in 1928, the five blue

⁸⁸ Holdredge, 4.

⁸⁹ 1870 Census.

⁹⁰ Holdredge, 51-4.

⁹¹ Hudson, 61.

⁹² "The Queen of the Voodoos," *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 9, 1899). Evidence does suggest that Pleasant may have been a practitioner of Voudon.

gum eucalyptus trees planted by Pleasant along Bush Street still exist.⁹³ The trees are designated as “landmark trees,” though they do not have protection under Article 10.

Mary Ellen Pleasant’s fortunes began to turn in 1884, not long after she testified in court against William Sharon, the wealthy mine owner and Republican Senator from Nevada. The press, never her friend, reviled her as a witch and a murderess, especially after Thomas Bell died under mysterious circumstances, after falling from the second-floor landing of the Bell House in 1892. In 1899, Bell’s widow, Teresa Percy Bell, forced Mary Ellen Pleasant out of the house and took control of her remaining money. Suddenly impoverished at the age of 85, Mary Ellen Pleasant died in 1904 in a ramshackle apartment building at 2107 Webster Street (building no longer extant).⁹⁴ Before her death she was befriended by members of the Sherwood family, who interred her remains in the Sherwood family plot in Tucolay Cemetery, in Napa. Her headstone reads: “She was a Friend to John Brown.”⁹⁵ Though much of her life is cloaked in mystery and innuendo, most of her most important accomplishments, especially as an abolitionist and a successful Black businesswomen, were true, making her an extraordinary woman of her era.

Factors that Restricted the Growth of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1860-1900

After growing very quickly during the Gold Rush, San Francisco’s African American population stagnated during the second half of the nineteenth century. By the Civil War, California’s Black population totaled around 5,000, with new arrivals largely balancing departures. By 1880, there were 6,018 Blacks residing in the entire state – mostly in Northern California – with the majority living in San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville. By 1890, this figure had nearly doubled to 11,322. Though an impressive jump, California’s Black population remained tiny in comparison with most Eastern and Midwestern states. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, most of the growth in California’s African American population occurred in communities where jobs in the state’s fast-growing railroad sector were available, especially Los Angeles and Oakland.⁹⁶

Between the Civil War and 1900, San Francisco’s Black population ever so slowly recovered from the exodus to Canada, growing from 1,176 in 1860, to 1,628 in 1880, and 1,847 in 1890. Nonetheless, San Francisco’s African American population did not keep pace with the city’s overall population growth, which stood at almost 300,000 in 1890. At this juncture Blacks comprised a little over half of one percent of the city’s population, the lowest percentage ever. In comparison, San Francisco’s Chinese population stood at 25,833, or 11.5 percent of the city’s population. Between 1890 and 1900, San Francisco’s Black population actually declined, shrinking to 1,654, or less than half of one percent of the city’s total population of 342,782. In comparison, New York’s Black population in 1900 stood at 60,666 (1.8 percent), Philadelphia at 62,613 (4.8 percent), New Orleans at 77,714 (27.1 percent), and Atlanta at 35,727 (39.8 percent). Though Oakland’s Black population (1,026) was still smaller than San Francisco’s, it was growing much faster and comprised 1.5 percent of the East Bay city’s total population.⁹⁷

Reasons for San Francisco’s declining Black population were many. The first and most significant reason was the region’s isolation from the traditional heartland of African American settlement in the South. Though several cities had experienced significant growth in their Black populations before 1900, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis, the West Coast was much farther away from

⁹³ Holdredge, 149-51.

⁹⁴ San Francisco Directory, 1904.

⁹⁵ Holdredge, 4.

⁹⁶ Lapp, 269.

⁹⁷ Daniels, 15.

the South than the major cities of the Northeast and Midwest. It was also expensive to travel across the continent, especially without the assurance of steady work, with a cross-country railroad ticket costing between \$65 and \$140 in 1900. Another factor was the rise of White labor unions. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, San Francisco's Black population lost ground to unionized European immigrants, who took over many occupational categories once open to African Americans, including hotel work, laundry work, and jobs in maritime industries.⁹⁸ In 1889, over 200 African American employees of the Palace Hotel were summarily dismissed and replaced with unionized White labor.⁹⁹ With unions choking off access to decently paying craft and industrial jobs, San Francisco's African American community found itself increasingly relegated to menial service jobs and day labor. Indeed, as early as the 1850s, Mifflin Gibbs recounted how he was forced to abandon carpentry because "white employees finding me at work on the same building would 'strike.'¹⁰⁰ As late as 1900, only four African American carpenters belonged to the Carpenters' Union, which had over 2,500 members. As the NAACP journal, *Crisis*, (edited by W.E.B. Du Bois) correctly pointed out, White trade unions had effectively "held the Negro out and down" in San Francisco.¹⁰¹

African Americans at the Presidio of San Francisco

San Francisco's African American population experienced a temporary uptick in 1899 with the arrival of Black troops at the Presidio, including members of the U.S. Army's 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. Collectively known as "Buffalo Soldiers" (a nickname given them by Plains Indians), members of all four regiments saw sustained action in the West, in particular during the Indian Wars. During the Spanish-American War Buffalo Soldiers gained a well-earned reputation for bravery and toughness, especially while fighting under Theodore Roosevelt in the Battle of Santiago in Cuba. Their presence in San Francisco for several months swelled the pride



Figure 12. Teddy Roosevelt being escorted by Buffalo Soldiers, 1904

Source: National Park Service

of local African Americans. Indeed, before they shipped out to the Philippines, some 150 local volunteers signed on for duty. Some had trained in local Black militias, including the Brannan Guards, the Sumner Guard, and the Moor Cadets.¹⁰² Following the Spanish-American and the Philippine-American wars, soldiers of the 24th Infantry and the 9th Cavalry remained at the Presidio of San Francisco for several more years. In 1904, Buffalo Soldiers formed President Theodore Roosevelt's Honor Guard when he visited San Francisco (Figure 12). They also patrolled Yosemite and other national parks before

⁹⁸ Daniels, 17.

⁹⁹ Daniels, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Mifflin W. Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography* (New York: 1968), 40.

¹⁰¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, as quoted in Daniels, 34.

¹⁰² Daniels, 133-5.

the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. Though eventually transferred elsewhere, African American military personnel stationed at the Presidio led to the development of a small community of Blacks in the adjoining neighborhoods of Presidio Heights and Pacific Heights.

African American Cultural Contributions: 1852-1900

African American musicians, actors, and other performers were popular with White San Franciscans throughout the nineteenth century, especially the Black Pacific Brass Band, which was often invited to perform at civic events. In addition to authentic exhibitions of Black talent, minstrelsy regrettably remained a popular diversion.¹⁰³ African Americans had their own saloons and music halls in San Francisco where members of the community could socialize and listen to music with friends and family. One of the earliest was George Smith's Magnolia Saloon, at 808 Pacific Avenue (building no longer extant), in Chinatown. The Magnolia, which opened in 1867 and became the Golden City Club in 1869, was located in Apollo Hall, which was destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake. Other early nightclubs that were owned by African Americans included the Aurora, at 649 Mission Street (building no longer extant); and Purcell's Elite Café and Purcell's So Different Saloon, at 520 Pacific Avenue, in Jackson Square (building no longer extant). The So Different Saloon, where the Turkey Trot was reputedly invented, was popular not only among African Americans but also Whites who enjoyed the saloons of the Barbary Coast. The So Different Saloon was described by contemporaries as being "furnished only with a bar, a few rough tables, and chairs, and a score or more wooden benches which faced a splintery dance floor."¹⁰⁴

Musicians and singers were well-represented in nineteenth-century San Francisco, including Alexander C. Taylor, who lived at 1006 Washington Street with his wife Sarah Miles. The sisters Anna Madah and Emma Louise, also residents of San Francisco, were acclaimed soprano and contralto singers.¹⁰⁵

Sporting was also popular among nineteenth century African Americans. Sports, such as boxing, allowed Black men the opportunity to display their ability to compete with White men and win. Fighters including Oakland's Jack Johnson and San Francisco's Peter Jackson became heroes, not only for their prowess at fighting but also for their wealth and good manners.¹⁰⁶

Visual artists were also well-represented. In addition to the daguerreotypist William H. Newby, other visual artists included Nelson A. Primus. Born ca. 1843 in Hartford, Connecticut, Primus arrived in San Francisco in 1849. After working as a carriage painter, Primus became a fine artist in the 1850s.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ As quoted in Daniels, 125.

¹⁰⁴ As quoted in Daniels, 147-8.

¹⁰⁵ San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Daniels, 139.

¹⁰⁷ San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society, 1.

C. African Americans in Early Twentieth-century San Francisco: 1900-1940

San Francisco's pioneer African American community never really recovered from the exodus to British Columbia in 1858. Once characterized by opportunity and relative freedom from the worst excesses of American institutional racism, African Americans of this era found themselves increasingly shut out of higher-paying industrial labor and increasingly hemmed into older residential districts by racial covenants in the fast-growing suburban parts of the city. Nonetheless, this era did see some gains from growing union membership and the access to jobs that came with union affiliation. San Francisco also began to see the formation of a small African-American community in the city's Western Addition, though at that time Blacks lived among a polyglot population of Japanese, Filipinos, and Eastern American Jews.

Population Characteristics: Decline in San Francisco's African American Population: 1900-1910

San Francisco's African American population, already in decline by the 1890s, continued to shrink after 1900. With good job opportunities in San Francisco increasingly restricted to Whites, many local African Americans relocated to the East Bay, where jobs with the railroads began to open up in the late 1890s. They went to work at the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe (Santa Fe) shops, which opened in Richmond in 1899, or the Southern Pacific Railroad's main maintenance facility in West Oakland. After 1900, many African Americans from San Francisco moved to West Oakland where they got jobs in the Southern Pacific carriage shops or as redcaps, cooks, waiters, and porters on the trains themselves. By the early 1900s, there was a thriving African American community located along 8th Street in West Oakland.¹⁰⁸

Even more African Americans left San Francisco for the East Bay after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, which destroyed nearly all of the neighborhoods where they had lived, including North Beach, Chinatown, and the South of Market Area (**Figure 13**).¹⁰⁹ African Americans who decided to stay in San Francisco found themselves competing with many other groups for scarce housing in the outlying neighborhoods that had survived the disaster, in particular the Western Addition, where many working-class earthquake refugees of all races and creeds sought refuge. African Americans who were able to find housing in the area mainly settled in flats along Bush, Pine, Sutter, and Post streets, as well as in rooms above storefronts along busy Divisadero and Fillmore streets.¹¹⁰

The 1910 census registered yet another drop in San Francisco's African American population, now a miniscule 1,642, or less than one third of one percent of the city's total population of 416,912. Meanwhile, Oakland's Black population tripled from 1,026 to 3,055.¹¹¹ Increasingly, Black migrants to California avoided San Francisco altogether and moved directly to Oakland or Los Angeles, which became the primary destinations for African American migration to the West Coast after 1900. By 1910, Los Angeles had 7,599 African American residents, by far the largest Black population west of the Rockies.¹¹² In West Oakland and Los Angeles' Central Avenue district there were enough Black residents to support a wide range of African American-owned businesses and cultural institutions. San Francisco, in contrast, scarcely had enough Black residents to keep a single barbershop in business. Those Black-owned businesses that did survive had to either appeal to a broad, multi-ethnic clientele or capture nearly all of the Black trade to survive.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Daniels, 102.

¹⁰⁹ Broussard, 23.

¹¹⁰ Daniels, 102.

¹¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹¹³ Daniels, 48.



Figure 13. Map showing the areas of San Francisco destroyed by fire in 1906

Source: Collection of David Rumsey

San Francisco's African American community began to grow again during World War I, reversing a nearly three decade-long slide. Some of the population growth reflected national trends, as African Americans migrated out of the South to fill factory jobs in the Northeast, Midwest, and West vacated by White servicemen. In 1920, San Francisco registered 2,414 African Americans, marking the first time that the city's Black population had exceeded the two thousand mark. San Francisco's Black community still comprised less than one percent of the city's total population of 342,782 but an increase of 800 people since 1910 indicated some economic opportunity.¹¹⁴ Some of the newcomers were West Indian cooks and stewards employed on coastal steamers. Mainly raised in the British island colonies of Jamaica and Barbados, most were laborers who had previously worked on the Panama Canal. When it was finished in 1915, some got jobs on the coastal steamers that plied between the ports of the West Coast. Nevertheless, in comparison with Oakland and Los Angeles, which saw huge increases in their Black populations between 1910 and 1920, the growth of San Francisco's African American community remained small. In 1920, Oakland registered 5,439 African American residents and Los Angeles

¹¹⁴ Broussard, 22.

15,579.¹¹⁵ **Table 1** provides population figures for each of the decennial censuses between 1900 and 1940 for San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles:

Table 1

Year	San Francisco	Oakland	Los Angeles
1900	1,654	1,026	2,131
1910	1,642	3,055	7,599
1920	2,414	5,489	15,579
1930	3,803	7,503	38,894
1940	4,806	8,462	63,774

Another factor in the growth of San Francisco’s Black population after 1910 was natural increase, a factor that can be attributed to an influx of African American women. Ever since the Gold Rush, San Francisco’s Black population had been characterized by an imbalanced ratio of men to women. California’s anti-miscegenation laws, which were not struck down until 1948, meant that African Americans had to find another Black partner or someone of another non-white ethnicity. The longstanding shortage of African American women in San Francisco during the nineteenth century meant that most Black men married and started families older and at a lower rate than native-born or European White men.¹¹⁶ Though there were some recorded Black/Chinese marriages in nineteenth-century San Francisco, for various cultural reasons the most feasible option for a Black man to start a family was to marry a Black woman. Improving transportation options and growing job opportunities did attract a growing number of African American women after 1910, which led to the growth of the community as a whole in later decades.

Civic Institutions: Creation of Social Infrastructure and Advocacy Groups: 1900-1940

Between 1900 and 1940, African Americans living in San Francisco chartered several political and social organizations to protect themselves from economic and housing discrimination, as well as other civil rights abuses. Several of the most important organizations formed during this period included the Bay Area Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Booker T. Washington Community Center, the National Urban League, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women.

NAACP

After a 1913 speaking tour that brought W.E.B. Du Bois to San Francisco, local African Americans formed the Northern California chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Headquartered in Oakland, the chapter was established in 1915 to organize civil rights activities throughout the Bay Area.¹¹⁷ Led by John Drake, the Bay Area chapter of the NAACP supported a range of issues, including supporting anti-lynching legislation at the federal level, combatting discrimination against Black customers by White and Chinese-owned businesses, investigating the condition of black soldiers stationed at the Presidio, and exposing police brutality.¹¹⁸ During its formative years, the NAACP boasted membership across the entire spectrum of the Bay Area’s African American community, galvanizing support early on by protesting D.W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation*.¹¹⁹ The NAACP also supported the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the African American union’s struggle

¹¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹¹⁶ Broussard, 25.

¹¹⁷ Broussard, 76.

¹¹⁸ Broussard, 81.

¹¹⁹ Broussard, 78.

to secure wage increases and improved working conditions.¹²⁰ In 1923, in response to the growth in San Francisco's African American population, the city finally got its own chapter of the NAACP.¹²¹

UNIA

In the early 1920s, the NAACP gained a rival, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a pan-Africanist educational and support group established by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born activist known primarily for his efforts to encourage African Americans to "repatriate" themselves to Liberia, in West Africa. After 1920, UNIA began gaining influence in San Francisco's African American community, much to the consternation of the NAACP, which encouraged African Americans to concentrate on improving conditions for Blacks in the United States.¹²² Ultimately the rivalries between the NAACP and UNIA subsided after the latter organization disintegrated following Garvey's imprisonment for mail fraud in 1923.

National Urban League

Founded in New York City in 1910 as the Committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes, the National Urban League, as it later became known in the 1920s, was one of the most important national civil rights organizations in the twentieth century. In addition to fighting for civil rights, the National Urban League concentrated on expanding access to education and employment. After visiting San Francisco in the 1920s, National Urban League President T. Arnold Hill observed that San Francisco's problems were "not too acute," probably because of the community's small size. Due to its own fast-growing Black population, the first National Urban League chapter on the West Coast was established in Los Angeles in 1930.¹²³ San Francisco did not get its own chapter until after World War II.

Booker T. Washington Community Center

In contrast to the NAACP or the National Urban League, the Booker T. Washington Center was a local organization. Founded in 1919 by Black World War I veterans frustrated by lack of access to housing, employment, and educational opportunities, the Booker T. Washington Community Center was intended to serve as both a community center and a "settlement house," a Progressive-era innovation designed to assist migrants to cities find jobs, healthcare, and decent housing. Based on the self-help principles of its namesake, the Booker T. Washington Community Center's principal mission was to offer wholesome recreational and educational opportunities to Black youth and steer them away from "the juvenile court, the prison, and not infrequently...an early grave."¹²⁴ Originally based in a building at 45 Farren Street (building no longer extant) in the Western Addition, the center offered boxing, basketball, and industrial arts programs to boys; and singing, sewing, and homemaking classes to girls.¹²⁵

In 1923, the Booker T. Washington Community Center purchased a building at 1433 Divisadero Street (building no longer extant) for the purpose of converting it into a full-fledged community center. The project was opposed by the Western Addition Improvement and Protective Association (WAIPA), a White property owners' group founded to oppose a supposed influx of African American into the Western Addition. WAIPA stated in a press release written in 1923: "It is now high time for the White residents and property owners to get together and protect themselves from this rapid invasion."¹²⁶ Under the able leadership of director Robert B. Flippin, the Booker T. Washington Community Center

¹²⁰ Broussard, 82.

¹²¹ Broussard, 85.

¹²² Broussard, 82.

¹²³ Broussard, 87.

¹²⁴ Daniels, 157.

¹²⁵ Daniels, 157.

¹²⁶ Broussard, 33-4.

fought off the opposition and pushed the project through the approvals process. The organization grew along with the city's African American community, adding social workers to its staff, creating a jobs program, and offering a counseling program for young mothers.¹²⁷ Running out of space on Divisadero Street during World War II, the Booker T. Washington Community Center leased quarters in a building at 2031 Bush Street (building extant) that had until recently housed the Japanese American Organization until the city's Japanese population was interned in 1942. It remained here until 1952, when it moved to its present location at 800 Presidio Avenue (building extant).¹²⁸

Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women

Another local San Francisco organization, the Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, was established in 1921 by Irene Bell Ruggles and Josephine Cole as a temporary home and social service provider for African American girls and young women newly arrived in San Francisco. It was named for Mrs. C.J. Walker (1867-1919), an African American entrepreneur and philanthropist who became one of the first Black millionaires in the United States. Though Mrs. Walker had no affiliation with the San Francisco organization, she was a well-known Black businessperson. In addition to providing young Black women with a place to stay, the organization offered employment counseling and a venue for social gatherings. The Madame C.J. Walker Home was located at 2066 Pine Street in the Western Addition, remaining at this location until 1972 (**Figure 14**). The Italianate style rowhouse still stands; it is San Francisco Landmark No. 211.¹²⁹



Figure 14. Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Young Women

Source: Third Baptist Church of San Francisco

Democratic Party

From 1870 until World War II, San Francisco's African American population voted solidly for the "Party of Lincoln." Though the Republican Party was supported by major Black political action groups like the California State Colored Republican League (CSCRL), the party's leadership did almost nothing for the state's African Americans. Before World War II, California's Black population was too small to pay much attention to. This state of affairs began to change in the 1930s with the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the Presidency. In addition to having African Americans in his informal cabinet, including Walter White of the NAACP and T. Arnold Hill of the National Urban League, Roosevelt's New Deal employment programs were open to African Americans. Consequently, by the late 1930s, many of San Francisco's African Americans had switched their registration to the Democratic Party, eventually forming several political clubs.¹³⁰

The Black Press

Until World War II San Francisco's African American community mainly depended on Oakland newspapers for their news and entertainment. One of the most important figures in the Bay Area's Black press was E.A. Daley. A native of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Daley arrived in Oakland in the 1920s. After saving up a nest egg from selling real estate, he purchased the *Oakland Voice*, an established Black

¹²⁷ Broussard, 33-4.

¹²⁸ San Francisco City Directories, 1923-52

¹²⁹ San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, *Draft Landmark Designation Report: Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women* (San Francisco: 2001).

¹³⁰ Broussard, 95-6.

weekly. He later purchased the *Western Outlook*, *New Day Informer*, and the *Western Appeal*, consolidating these three papers into the *California Appeal* in the 1930s. Because San Francisco's Black population was small, it remained dependent on Oakland-based Black newspapers throughout much of the first part of the twentieth century, not getting their own paper again until 1931, when the *San Francisco Spokesman* began publication.¹³¹ Founded by John Pittman, the *Spokesman* became known for its overtly left-wing outlook, especially in comparison with the reliably Republican *California Appeal*. The *Spokesman* was in part responsible for the defection of San Francisco's Black population to the Democratic Party in the 1930s.¹³² The *Spokesman* was published until the 1940s, when it was replaced by the *Sun-Reporter*, the paper founded by Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr.

African American Churches

During the early twentieth century, most middle-class African Americans in San Francisco attended one of three African American churches: Third Baptist, A.M.E. Zion, or Bethel A.M.E. These three institutions, whose roots extend back to the pioneer period, helped knit together multiple generations of San Francisco's small prewar African American community. In addition to providing spiritual sustenance, these churches' leaders helped to provide a network of protection from ongoing civil and economic injustices.¹³³ Their ministers, including the Reverends J.J. Byers and E.J. Magruder of A.M.E. Zion, and the Reverend F.D. Haynes of Third Baptist Church, were important public figures in the community at large, serving as the community's principal liaisons with San Francisco's White power structure and by sitting on multi-racial committees and panels.¹³⁴

Third Baptist Church, originally located on Dupont Street (now Grant Avenue), near Union Street, relocated to 1299 Hyde Street (building no longer extant), where it remained from 1906 until 1952 (**Figure 15**). In the 1930s, Bethel A.M.E. was still located at 1207 Powell Street (building no longer extant) in Chinatown, where it had been located since the nineteenth century. A.M.E. Zion, which had for many years been located on Pacific Avenue, near Powell Street (building no longer extant), was destroyed in 1906. In 1912, the congregation – then led by the influential Reverend W.J. Byers – moved to 1669 Geary Street in the Western Addition, where a new church was built (building no longer extant).



Figure 15. Third Baptist Church, 1945
Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection

In comparison with most Eastern and Midwestern cities, which had attracted large numbers of Black Southerners during the World War I-era "Great Migration," San Francisco did not and so it did not have many Southern-style Protestant "storefront" churches until World War II.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Broussard, 98.

¹³² Broussard, 99.

¹³³ Daniels, 113.

¹³⁴ Broussard, 63.

¹³⁵ Broussard, 64.

African American Social Clubs

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, San Francisco's growing African American community established several social and fraternal clubs. Some of the larger and better-known clubs included the Kalender Klub and the Cosmos Club. The Cosmos Club, organized in 1919 by Mr. William Henry Lashley, was the most prestigious of San Francisco's Black social clubs. The club, which was open to people of all races, met each month at the offices of the International Institute, San Francisco's Community Chest agency, at 1860 Washington Street in Pacific Heights (building no longer extant). Every year the Cosmos Club held an invitation-only ball at one of San Francisco's poshest hotels. Joseph Foreman, the doorman at the Shreve & Co. jewelry store in Union Square, was usually the Master of Ceremonies. Incidentally, Foreman was a fixture in San Francisco's central shopping district for decades, celebrated by *Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen for his decorum and elegance.¹³⁶

Several smaller and less formal groups, including the Monarchs, the Socialettes, the Alexander Dumas Club, and the Carpe Deum Club, were also founded during the early twentieth century.¹³⁷ Dancing and card-playing, as well as charity work, were popular activities in the clubs. These social clubs, which typically had between 15 and 20 members, did not have their own buildings. Instead, they met at the Booker T. Washington Community Center or at individual members' homes.¹³⁸ Mainstream fraternal lodges, including the Masons and the Odd Fellows, appealed to some African American men, including the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Freemasons. Like their White counterparts, San Francisco's Black lodges served both business and social interests, though they also paid death and sickness benefits and helped out-of-work members find jobs. These groups also hosted dances, picnics, card parties, and social outings for the wider community.¹³⁹ Even less formally, many African American men, especially working-class men, socialized at barbershops, on street corners, barbeque joints, and later, union halls.

Occupational Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1900-1940

The years immediately following the 1906 Earthquake were a difficult period for African Americans to find quality jobs. Although the economy of the city was expanding and wages remained relatively high, because of powerful all-white unions African Americans experienced little occupational advancement and most continued to work in menial occupations. The 1910 census registers close to 50 percent of African American men and over 70 percent of African American women employed in domestic or personal service work.¹⁴⁰ No other segment of the economy employed African Americans in even remotely similar percentages during the pre-World War II era. The next-largest category was manufacturing, which employed 10 percent of African American men and women. Transportation – mainly railroad work – employed another 10 percent of African American men.

Ten years later, in 1920, African American men had made some gains in manufacturing, largely due to labor shortages during World War I. By this time 27 percent of Black men worked in this sector. Meanwhile their participation in domestic services had shrunk to 40 percent. Railroad work continued to be an important category, especially cooks, stewards, and porters. Though much of this work was based in West Oakland and Richmond, there was a small community of Black railroad workers based in the South of Market Area, near the Southern Pacific depot at 4th and Townsend streets. The Pullman Hotel, at 236 Townsend Street (building extant), is where many of the Black railroad porters lived (**Figure 16**).

¹³⁶ Broussard, 65.

¹³⁷ Broussard, 67.

¹³⁸ Broussard, 67.

¹³⁹ Broussard, 68.

¹⁴⁰ Broussard, 41.

In other fast-growing sectors of the service economy, including retail, clerical, and professional and other white-collar work, Black men made only negligible gains.

For African American women, the situation had actually become worse between 1900 and 1940, with domestic work employing over 80 percent of all Black women in 1920. Meanwhile, African American women registered only static percentage increases, or decreases, in all other areas, including clerical employment, where Black women made minor inroads in occupations like typing, stenography, and office management.¹⁴¹ The only other bright spots for Black women were nursing and midwifery, where Black women made some inroads during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴²



Figure 16. Pullman Hotel
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

These largely disheartening statistics, caused in part by intensifying racial discrimination, earned San Francisco a reputation as a city to be avoided by African Americans. Compounding White racism was the fact that Blacks faced strong competition from other marginalized ethnic groups, including Chinese, Japanese, and Latinos. When an African American man named F. L. Ritchardson arrived in San Francisco in 1919 he observed: “There wasn’t (sic) many tasks that Negroes could perform except as doormen, elevator operators, redcaps, or domestic work.”¹⁴³ Indeed, whereas African American leaders encouraged Southern Blacks to move to Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and other industrial cities, some of San Francisco’s Black leaders actively discouraged African Americans from coming to San Francisco during the early twentieth century.¹⁴⁴

During the pre-World War II-era, San Francisco had a small population of African American professionals. Mainly because the city’s Black population was too low to support a practice based exclusively on African American patronage, African American doctors, lawyers, and other professionals tended to move to cities like Oakland where there were more potential clients. In addition, Black doctors did not have admitting privileges in San Francisco hospitals until the 1940s.¹⁴⁵ Until World War II, the largest categories of Black professionals in San Francisco, as defined by training and formal education, were ministers and musicians.¹⁴⁶

Some African Americans opened their own businesses in San Francisco, but by necessity these businesses were mostly small enterprises that catered to the African American community, including barbershops, candy stores, real estate offices, billiards parlors, funeral homes, newspapers, and smoke shops. In contrast to cities that had had large Black populations since World War I, such as Detroit, San Francisco did not acquire any Black-owned banks or insurance agencies until World War II. By the 1930s, most Black businesses in San Francisco were located along Fillmore Street, Divisadero Street, and several

¹⁴¹ Broussard, 44.

¹⁴² Broussard, 45.

¹⁴³ Broussard, 40.

¹⁴⁴ Broussard, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Broussard, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Broussard, 55.

intersecting in the Western Addition.¹⁴⁷ For most of their day-to-day needs, San Francisco's African American community patronized White or Asian-owned businesses, which tended to have easier access to capital and credit and a larger pool of multi-ethnic customers.

Even with its prosperous agricultural, manufacturing, extraction, and real estate sectors, the Depression crippled California. As early as 1931, one in three African Americans in Los Angeles was out of work.¹⁴⁸ Due in large part to their exclusion from manufacturing, African Americans in San Francisco were not as badly affected as their counterparts in Los Angeles or Oakland.¹⁴⁹ Smaller family sizes and the presence of African American women in the workforce also helped to shelter Black San Franciscans from the worst effects of the Depression.¹⁵⁰ African Americans made the necessary adjustments, including consolidating households, accepting boarders, and taking second jobs. San Francisco's African Americans welcomed the federal relief programs of the New Deal, particularly the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA), which employed a disproportionately large percentage of African Americans.¹⁵¹

The Depression did provide some unforeseen opportunities for Black San Franciscans, especially women. Overwhelmingly employed as domestic workers before the Depression, many Black women were assigned to semi-skilled relief jobs by New Deal agencies. These opportunities gave African American women valuable job skills that could be parlayed into better-paid work later on.¹⁵² Another positive development was the integration of the International Longshoreman's Association (later the International Longshore and Warehouse Union – ILWU). The maritime strike of 1934 brought African American men under union protection and ILA chief Harry Bridges ensured that they were paid the same as their White counterparts.¹⁵³ This action effectively ended the use of African Americans as strikebreakers on the waterfront and opened up many opportunities in unionized labor to Black San Franciscans.

Residential Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1900-1940

San Francisco did not have an African American-majority neighborhood until World War II. As American citizens, Blacks were not prohibited from owning property, though they were often forbidden from purchasing or renting in many exclusive subdivisions that had racial covenants prohibiting the sale or leasing of properties to African Americans, Asians, and other non-white ethnic groups. Entire swaths of San Francisco's West Side and Twin Peaks were basically off-limits to African Americans unless they were live-in domestic help. Neighborhoods with racial covenants included most of the residence parks built on what had been the San Miguel Rancho, including Forest Hill, Ingleside Terraces, St. Francis Wood, and some of the more modest speculator-built tracts in the suburban Sunset and Parkside districts. Black San Franciscans who chose to invest in real estate during this period often chose Oakland, where single-family homes were more plentiful and cheaper, the weather better, and where larger lots allowed room for gardening, raising animals, and space for children to play. Those who remained in San Francisco mostly rented, with only 8 percent of Black San Franciscans owning their own homes in 1900. This figure increased to 13.6 percent in 1930, but it was still much lower than the rates for native-born Whites (35.1 percent) and foreign-born Whites (41.6 percent).¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Broussard, 56.

¹⁴⁸ Lawrence B. DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, ed. *Seeking El Dorado* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Broussard, 117.

¹⁵⁰ Broussard, 113.

¹⁵¹ Broussard, 121.

¹⁵² Broussard, 122.

¹⁵³ Broussard, 129.

¹⁵⁴ Broussard, 31.

Western Addition

The few nodes of Black settlement in San Francisco that existed during the nineteenth century (the area north of Chinatown and Minna, Tehama, and Natoma streets in the South of Market Area) were leveled in the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. African Americans who did not move to Oakland after the disaster mainly relocated to the Western Addition, an aging district of Victorian-era dwellings west of Van Ness Avenue. Between 1920 and 1930, as San Francisco's Black population began to grow, almost half lived in the Western Addition. In 1930, Assembly District 30 housed 38.1 percent of the city's African American population. Assembly District 31 had another 15.8 percent. Other nearby assembly districts with measurable percentages of Black residents, included Assembly District 22 (14.6 percent) and Assembly District 33 (10 percent). Altogether these four assembly districts housed 78.5 percent of San Francisco's Black population in 1930, indicating that the Western Addition had indeed become the center of Black life before World War II.¹⁵⁵

In the decade preceding the war, the *San Francisco Spokesman* described the area bounded by McAllister Street to the south, Webster Street to the east, Sutter Street to the north, and Divisadero Street to the west as being "densely populated with Negroes." This area roughly corresponded to Assembly District 30. According to the 1940 Census, the census tracts within Assembly District 30 that were home to the most African Americans included J-6 (bounded by Gough, Sutter, Baker, and Geary streets), which housed 831 African Americans; and J-4 (bounded by Baker, California, Arguello, and Geary streets), which was home to 522 African Americans. Other census tracts in the Western Addition that contained over 100 African Americans included J-2 (322), J-3 (403), J-7 (406), J-8 (449), and J-10 (126). In this sprawling area bounded by Gough Street to the east, California Street to the north, Baker Street to the west, and Fulton Street to the south, dwelt a little over 3,000 African Americans, though they were still less than 6 percent of the overall population of the Western Addition (**Figure 17**).¹⁵⁶ An eight-block long stretch of Fillmore Street, between Sutter and McAllister streets, formed the "main street" of the emerging African American community in the Western Addition, an area increasingly referred to by its inhabitants as "The Fillmore."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Broussard, 30.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1940 Census of the United States. Brian J. Godfrey, *Neighborhoods in Transition* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1988), 98.

¹⁵⁷ *San Francisco Spokesman* (November 22, 1933), 6.

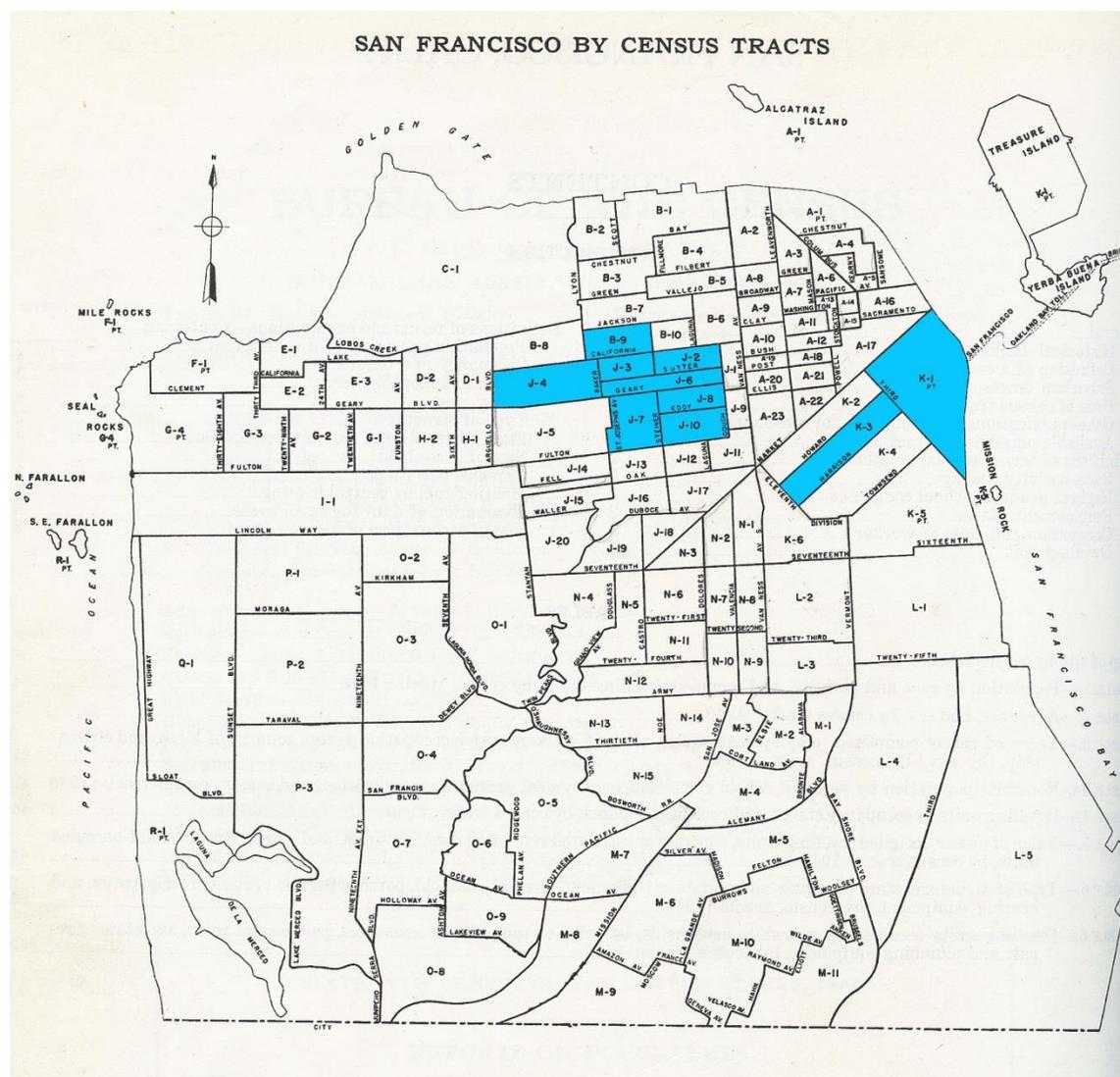


Figure 17. Map showing 1940 Census tracts containing at least 100 African Americans
 Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census

Other Neighborhoods

Additional concentrations of African Americans in 1940 could be found around the border of Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights and the South of Market Area. Assembly District 31, a large area bounded by Van Ness Avenue to the east, Lombard Street to the north, Parker Avenue to the west, and Pine Street to the south, housed San Francisco’s second-highest concentration of African Americans (15.8 percent of the city’s total Black population). Not as much is known about this population, though census research indicates that it was clustered in Census Tract B-9, an area bounded by Steiner, Jackson, Lyon, and California streets. According to the 1940 Census, this census tract was home to 136 African Americans (65 men and 71 women).¹⁵⁸ The third area with a measurable population of African American residents in 1940 was the South of Market Area. Two adjoining census tracts housed 247 African Americans, including Census Tract K-1 (bounded by the waterfront to the south and east, Market Street to the northwest, and Third Street to the south west) and Census Tract K-3 (bounded by Third Street to the northeast, Howard Street to the northwest, 11th Street to the southwest, and Harrison Street to the

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1940 Census of the United States.

southeast). Based on the location of these two tracts near the waterfront, as well as the imbalanced ratio of male-to-female residents (156 to 88), it seems likely that these tracts were home to single male maritime or railroad workers.¹⁵⁹

WPA 1939 Real Property Survey

Much of the housing that African Americans occupied in 1940 was judged by authorities to be substandard. According to the WPA's *1939 Real Property Survey*, a comprehensive survey of housing conditions in the city, San Francisco's Black population occupied housing that tended to be "in poor condition and more congested than homes occupied by white families." The report singled out the "J" census tracts in the Western Addition as being a "blighted community" containing over one-third of the city's substandard housing.¹⁶⁰ Most of this area was occupied by Victorian-era rowhouses whose owners had long-since abandoned the neighborhood and retrofitted the formerly single-family dwellings and flats into multiple small dwelling units.¹⁶¹ Inadequately maintained and bereft of adequate ventilation, water, and other services, much of the central portion of the Western Addition was described as a slum by 1940.¹⁶² However, African Americans were not alone in being subjected to such conditions. In addition to Black families, the central Western Addition was home to many recent immigrants, including large numbers of Russian and Eastern European Jews, Filipinos, Mexicans, and Japanese.

Housing Discrimination

Housing discrimination, never previously a strong impediment to African Americans in San Francisco, increased as the city's Black community began to grow between 1920 and 1940. As mentioned previously, by the 1920s many of the new City Beautiful-inspired "residence parks," picturesquely landscaped residential tracts built on the San Miguel Rancho and elsewhere on the West Side, had covenants written into the deeds restricting residence to members of the White or "Caucasian" race. These restrictions prevented middle and upper-class African Americans from moving out of the Western Addition into higher-status areas of the city.¹⁶³ On the other hand, the middle-class Richmond and Sunset districts on the West Side were not uniformly subject to covenants, and middle-class African Americans bought in these neighborhoods during the 1920s and 1930s without extraordinary difficulties.¹⁶⁴ This began to change in the 1930s when builders like Henry Doelger, Standard Building Company, and others began attaching deed restrictions to tracts that they developed on the West Side.¹⁶⁵

African Americans and other Minority Populations: 1920-1940

As mentioned previously, up until the 1906 Earthquake many of San Francisco's African Americans lived on the northern edge of Chinatown, where relations between Blacks and Chinese appear to have been neutral, if not friendly. Though from vastly different cultures, both groups' exposure to White prejudice probably created some sense of solidarity. Though not common, there were recorded instances of interracial marriages between Chinese and African Americans. The influx of several thousand African Americans into the Western Addition during the 1920s and 1930s brought the community into contact with several other non-white immigrant ethnic groups that had moved to the area after the 1906 Earthquake, in particular Japanese and Filipinos. As racial minorities living in an overwhelmingly White

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1940 Census of the United States.

¹⁶⁰ City and County of San Francisco, *1939 Real Property Survey, San Francisco, California* (San Francisco: 1941), 6, 7-9, 24-30.

¹⁶¹ Lynn Horiuchi, "Object Lessons in Home Building: Racialized Real Estate Marketing in San Francisco," *Landscape Journal*, 26:1 (Spring 2007), 61-82.

¹⁶² City and County of San Francisco, *1939 Real Property Survey, San Francisco, California* (San Francisco: 1941), 6, 7-9, 24-30.

¹⁶³ Horiuchi, 61-82.

¹⁶⁴ Broussard, 32.

¹⁶⁵ Mary Brown, *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925-1950* (San Francisco: San Francisco Planning Department, 2013), 35.

city one might have expected these groups to develop some common bonds forged by resistance to racism. Though there is not much research on this subject it seems that language probably complicated intragroup relations. In addition, competition for scarce resources – in particular jobs and housing – blunted some potential opportunities for interethnic cooperation. On the other hand, interracial marriage between non-white groups was not forbidden and some male Asian immigrants (who were overwhelmingly male) married African American women. The famous jazz singer, Sugar Pie DeSanto (born Umpeyllia Marsema Balinton), who was raised in the Fillmore district, had a Filipino father and an African American mother (**Figure 18**). Filipinos who grew up in the Fillmore during the 1930s and 1940s remember that relations between Filipinos and African Americans were generally good and that marriages and other interracial alliances were not uncommon.¹⁶⁶

African Americans were not allowed to marry, or after 1932, when an ordinance was passed to prohibit it, even dance with Whites in San Francisco's many integrated nightclubs. As San Francisco's Black population began to increase during the 1930s, incidents involving police stopping Black men in the company of White women increased drastically, signaling the popular unease of Whites with miscegenation, which remained illegal in California until 1948.¹⁶⁷

African American Cultural Contributions: 1900-1940

During the first half of the twentieth century, many of the most well-known (at least among the broader White community) African Americans in San Francisco were musicians and performers. Some performed at popular nightspots in San Francisco's Tenderloin area or in the nightclubs of the Barbary Coast, including The Acorn, The Apex, Sam King's, Purcell's, and Lester Mapp's. These cabarets frequently booked "all colored revues" to entertain mixed-race audiences. Black performers also entertained mixed-race audiences in San Francisco theaters, including minstrel shows and Vaudeville productions. Some African American street musicians attracted a devoted following during the early part of the twentieth century, especially Bert Williams and George Walker. Dancers like Al and Mamie Anderson brought the Cakewalk dance to San Francisco.¹⁶⁸



Figure 18. Sugar Pie DeSanto, n.d.
Source: bluesblast.com

Musicians

With ragtime, and later jazz, African Americans developed musical forms that were in demand among the wider community, leading to the popularity of Black-owned nightspots. African American nightclubs where both Blacks and Whites were welcome were called "black and tan" clubs. One of the most famous was Lester Mapp's Olympia Café which rose to prominence in the World War I era. It was located at 586 Eddy Street in the Tenderloin (building no longer extant). Photographer Arnold Genthe described the Olympia as "the most famous, as well as the infamous" of the Barbary Coast "resorts," where the "dregs of many countries" cavorted in "a vast palace of gilt and tinsel with a great circular space in the center and around it a raised platform with booths for spectators."¹⁶⁹ Entertainment was provided by Lester Mapp's Jazz Dogs and Sid Le Protti's Crescent Orchestra, both of which drew in mixed-race crowds with their jazz and ragtime numbers.¹⁷⁰ Prominent nightclub owners like Lester

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2006), 13.

¹⁶⁷ Broussard, 111.

¹⁶⁸ Broussard, 73.

¹⁶⁹ Arnold Genthe, *As I Remember* (New York: 1936), 175-6.

¹⁷⁰ Daniels, 148.

Mapp had many local connections with law enforcement which kept him out of trouble with federal authorities during Prohibition.

The growing demand for African American music led to the founding of the Colored Entertainers' Club in 1915. It was based in a two-story building at 107 Columbus Avenue (building no longer extant). The club featured offices, a reception room, and a dining room on the first floor and rehearsal space and a bar on the second floor. All members of the club had a key so that they could visit at any time, day or night.¹⁷¹ Many African American musicians won fame in the larger community and some became members of San Francisco's famed Bohemian scene. While San Francisco's African American musicians of this era do not seem to have pioneered their own style of jazz or ragtime, they were certainly up-to-date with popular music in New Orleans, Chicago, Memphis, and New York.

The new musical styles inspired new dances that were invented by African Americans but danced by everyone. Some of these dance styles, including the Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear, and the Texas Tommy, may have started in San Francisco. Many involved suggestive hip movements that some Whites thought were licentious. These dances caused much handwringing when they migrated from the Barbary Coast and Tenderloin dives into more "respectable" venues. Dancing was so suspect that bars and saloons were required to have a special license that specified the days of the week that dancing was allowed.¹⁷²

The passage of the Volstead Act in 1919 and the subsequent imposition of Prohibition gave the reformers the opportunity they were looking for, and many of San Francisco's nightclubs closed down, including the Olympia Café, the Jupiter Club, and Purcell's Elite Café. After being raided repeatedly over a course of several years, the Olympia Café closed in 1922 after police officers found "fashionably dressed white women....dancing with negroes and...white men ...waltzing on the floor with colored girl entertainers."¹⁷³ Lester Mapp, the owner of the Olympia Café, had beaten many a rap because of his connections with the local police, but this was the final straw and Mapp moved to Chicago for several years.¹⁷⁴

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 resulted in the opening of several new Black-owned clubs dedicated to jazz, blues, and other traditional African American styles of music. But after Prohibition these clubs were in the Western Addition, not the Barbary Coast or the Tenderloin. One of the first was Jack's Tavern, popularly known as Jack's of Sutter, at 1931 Sutter Street (building no longer extant). Originally owned by Lenna Morell, Jack's opened in 1933 in a mixed-race neighborhood of African Americans, Japanese, Filipinos, and Jews. In addition to local acts, like the Saunders King Band, Jack's hosted well-known out-of-town musicians, in particular Charles Mingus. Not long after it opened, Jack's was joined by Club Alabam, at 1931 Sutter Street (building no longer extant), which was run by nightclub impresario Lester Mapp, who had returned from Chicago. Around the same time the Town Club opened across the street from Jack's, at 1963 Sutter Street (building extant)



Figure 19. 1963 Sutter Street, former location of the Town Club
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

¹⁷¹ Daniels, 149.

¹⁷² Daniels, 154.

¹⁷³ *San Francisco Examiner* (December 26, 1921).

¹⁷⁴ Daniels, 155.

creating the third of the “Big Three” prewar nightclubs of the pre-World War II era (**Figure 19**).¹⁷⁵

Artists

Music was not the only artistic area where Black San Franciscans excelled. One of the most accomplished visual artists to emerge from San Francisco during this period was Sargent Johnson (**Figure 20**). Born in Boston to a Swedish father and an African American mother, Johnson was raised in an orphanage in Worcester, Massachusetts, and later by his mother’s relatives. In 1915, he moved to San Francisco and began studying art at the A.W. Best School of Art, and later the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), where he studied with well-known sculptors Beniamino Bufano and Ralph Stackpole. Sargent, who identified as African American, was also a member of the Communist Party for most of his life. He believed in the role of fine arts in improving the place of Blacks in American society, becoming a leading figure in the “New Negro” movement of the early twentieth century. This movement embraced W.E.B. Du Bois’ goal of fostering racial pride through cultural self-expression, economic independence, and progressive politics. During the Depression, Johnson was commissioned by the Federal Arts project (FAP) to decorate the interior of the new Aquatic Park Bathhouse in San Francisco, a contributor to a National Historic Landmark district.¹⁷⁶ He also executed a magnificent bas-relief frieze at George Washington High School, another masterpiece of the Late Moderne style. Both murals are still extant.



Figure 20. Sargent Johnson, ca. 1935
Source: National Archives

Architects and Builders

Many, though not all, of the unions that revived in San Francisco during the early 1930s continued early racist practices of excluding African Americans. This restricted the number of Black carpenters to only a few dozen at any given time and they could only work on non-union job sites. Even on non-union job sites African American carpenters often faced discrimination because many White carpenters refused to work with them. This meant that the only way that an African American carpenter could build a house was if he was a contractor with his own crew or if his client was Black or not prejudiced toward African Americans. Though he was based in Los Angeles, Paul R. Williams, one of America’s most famous African American architects, designed a house in San Francisco during this period. Designed in 1939 and built in 1940, Paul Williams’ Leon G. and Lillian Cuenin House, at 2555 Divisadero Street in Pacific Heights, is a good example of the architect’s “Hollywood Regency” style (**Figure 21**). Nicknamed the “architect to the stars,” Williams was Los Angeles’ celebrity architect from the 1920s until the 1970s. No



Figure 21. Cuenin House
Source: Flickr.com

¹⁷⁵ Pepin and Watts, 76.

¹⁷⁶ Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African American Artists from 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

homegrown African American architects are known to have been active in San Francisco before World War II.

D. African American Influx into San Francisco during World War II: 1941-1945

World War II changed San Francisco irreversibly. What was once a small provincial city became the center of the largest shipbuilding complex the world had ever known and an important center of the so-called “Arsenal of Democracy.” In need of labor to staff the many shipyards and defense plants ringing the Bay, federal agencies and private corporations recruited tens of thousands of workers from the American South, including many African Americans. Settling in San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, and Sausalito, African Americans created several Black-majority neighborhoods in San Francisco, including the Fillmore District (part of the Western Addition) and the naval housing adjoining the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. There were culture clashes between the city’s longstanding African American community and the “countrified” newcomers but both groups quickly realized that there was strength in numbers.

Population Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1941-1945

World War II brought a massive demographic upheaval to San Francisco unmatched by anything seen since the Gold Rush. The years between 1940 and 1945 saw a 30 percent increase in the total population of San Francisco and an astounding 665.8 percent increase in the city’s African American population.¹⁷⁷ The rapid emergence of the Bay Area as the center of the nation’s wartime shipbuilding complex, as well as the most important embarkation point for the Pacific Theater, accounted for most of this influx. Federal agencies, including the United States War Manpower Commission and private employers such as the Kaiser Shipbuilding Corporation and W.A. Bechtel, aggressively recruited workers from around the country to the Bay Area to work in these industries.

In 1940, San Francisco’s African American population stood at slightly fewer than 5,000 people. Some were longstanding residents of the city, including descendants of pioneer settlers. Others had arrived during the preceding two decades from various regions, including the British West Indies and the American South. San Francisco’s Black population was by any measure a small, close-knit, and cosmopolitan group, with a clearly defined class structure and a well-developed pattern of social connections through years of club and church affiliations.

Between 1941 and 1945, San Francisco gained over 27,000 African American residents, growing from less than 1 percent of the city’s population to 5.6 percent. It must be kept in mind that San Francisco’s entire population had grown by 30.4 percent during this period, surging from 634,536 to 827,400, making the growth of San Francisco’s Black population that much more impressive.¹⁷⁸ A significant impact of this influx was a drastic reordering of the city’s demographic makeup. Before World War II, Blacks comprised only 15.2 of San Francisco’s minority population; after the war, African Americans were 53.1 percent. Granted, the exile of Japanese Americans from San Francisco helped to shrink the percentage of Asian Americans, but the ascendancy of Blacks to the largest minority group for the first time in the city’s history was remarkable and brought San Francisco (for a time anyway) into line with most American cities.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Broussard, 135.

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹⁷⁹ Broussard, 135. Asian American groups did not, as a group, exceed the percentage of African Americans until the 1980 Census.

In addition to being recruited by federal agencies and private industry, many African American came West on their own volition in search of shipyard and defense industry work. Others decided to move to California to join friends and family who had already made the trek.¹⁸⁰ Most of the newcomers came from the “Old Southwest”: Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Many came by train, some with their passage paid by their future employers. Others traveled by bus or in private automobiles.¹⁸¹

San Francisco was not the only city to experience an upsurge in its African American population. The Bay Area’s entire Black population tripled between 1940 and 1944, with Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond registering the largest increases. **Table 2** illustrates the dramatic changes taking place in the demographic profiles of these four cities between 1940 and 1950.

Table 2

City	Black Population 1940	Black Population 1950	Percentage Increase in Population
San Francisco	4,846 (0.8 %)	43,460 (5.6 %)	665
Oakland	8,462 (2.8 %)	47,610 (12.4 %)	463
Berkeley	3,395 (3.9 %)	13,289 (12 %)	291
Richmond	N/A	13,374 (13 %)	N/A)
San Francisco Bay Area	N/A	147,223 (6.1 %)	N/A

In the East Bay many formerly White neighborhoods, including North Oakland and parts of East Oakland, became primarily African American as the Black population expanded beyond its traditional core in West Oakland. Richmond, which before the war had been a tiny industrial town with a negligible Black population, had the highest percentage of African American residents of any Bay Area city by the end of the war.¹⁸²

In addition to their sheer numbers, different cultural and generational traits characterized these migrants, quickly reshaping the demographic profile of Black San Francisco. The newcomers were on average younger than San Francisco’s prewar African American population, with the average migrant’s age being 23 as opposed to 26 years.¹⁸³ In contrast to San Francisco’s prewar Black population, which consisted of many unmarried individuals and childless couples, most migrants arrived as family units. In other cases, heads-of-households quickly sent for their families after their arrival in San Francisco. Their families were larger and younger than natives; one third of migrant heads-of-household were younger than 30 years old, compared to only one-seventh of natives and non-migrants.¹⁸⁴

Race was not an immediate bond between local African Americans and the newcomers, as the cultural gap between rural Southerners and sophisticated city dwellers seemed impossibly wide. As mentioned previously, most World War II migrants were overwhelmingly from a region once called the “Old Southwest,” which included the states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma.¹⁸⁵ Natives and newcomers were often described by outsiders as being “like two different peoples.” Some locals

¹⁸⁰ Broussard, 141.

¹⁸¹ Daniels, 165.

¹⁸² U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹⁸³ Broussard.

¹⁸⁴ Broussard, 139.

¹⁸⁵ Broussard, 138.

characterized the newcomers as “backwards” or “country.”¹⁸⁶ The promise of well-paid industrial employment, backed by President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802, inspired a certain level of self-confidence in the new arrivals that put off some local Blacks. Newcomers from the South were certainly glad to leave behind the Jim Crow South and the newfound sense of personal freedom in San Francisco probably contributed to the “liberated” attitude of some of the new arrivals. This attitude sometimes rubbed longtime San Francisco African Americans the wrong way. Local African Americans resented how decades of tireless activism had failed to achieve the occupational advances that seemed to have been bestowed on the new arrivals without any real effort on their part. However, the common goals of feeding their families, educating their children, and ameliorating overcrowded conditions in San Francisco’s fast-growing Black neighborhoods eventually brought the two groups together, creating a unified front against the growing race prejudice that began to overtake supposedly “tolerant” San Francisco.

Occupational Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1941-1945

The rapid growth in the number of Black workers employed in Bay Area shipyards and defense plants stemmed in large part from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802, which forbade discrimination “in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.” This order paved the way for African Americans to fully participate in the wartime economy and to enter the industrial sector in large numbers for the first time in San Francisco’s history.¹⁸⁷ By 1943, half of San Francisco’s African Americans, and 77.1 percent of recent Black migrants, were employed in manufacturing. Most newly arrived African Americans were employed in shipbuilding; in 1943 between 15,000 and 16,000 African Americans got jobs in Bay Area shipyards, including a large number of women (**Figure 22**).¹⁸⁸ African Americans worked at Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco, Marinship in Sausalito, Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, the four Kaiser yards in Richmond, and Moore Drydock in Oakland. The percentage of African Americans employed in service jobs was still relatively high but in second place to manufacturing. African Americans had also made impressive gains in professional occupations, with 10 percent of San Francisco’s Black population working in areas requiring advanced education and training. Part of this was because San Francisco now had a large enough Black population to support African American professionals including lawyers, doctors, dentists, and other highly trained professionals.¹⁸⁹



Figure 22. Shipyard workers in Richmond
Source: Dorothea Lange,

¹⁸⁶ Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 173.

¹⁸⁷ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

¹⁸⁸ Broussard, 145.

¹⁸⁹ Daniels, 167.

The opening of industrial trades to African Americans is not meant to suggest that employment discrimination had simply ended. Many industries and unions not directly involved in government-sponsored defense work refused to hire Blacks. Some attempted to excuse their discriminatory hiring practices by stating that they did not want to reduce the morale of White workers or that the unions that represented their workers would not admit Black members, which in many cases was true. Employment discrimination, especially at the hands of the unions, did not automatically end in defense industries either. Though the sprawling Hunters Point Naval Shipyard and other government-sponsored private shipyards, such as Marinship and the Kaiser yards in Richmond, were forbidden to discriminate against Black workers, many craft unions would not admit African Americans as full voting members.¹⁹⁰ Enforcement of Executive Order 8802 fell to the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). The FEPC had a regional office in San Francisco and it took a very active role in investigating and resolving discrimination complaints. The FEPC successfully resolved *every* reported case of racial discrimination, using aggressive follow-up procedures to ensure lasting compliance.¹⁹¹ These heroic efforts, combined with activism by African American workers, fundamentally restructured Black employment opportunities in San Francisco and the Bay Area during World War II.¹⁹²

Joseph James vs. Marinship

The most important court case challenging discriminatory union policies during World War II was initiated by Joseph James, a resident of San Francisco and a worker employed at Marinship in Sausalito. James, a “baritone of great promise,” and later head of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, moved to San Francisco from New York in 1939.¹⁹³ Joseph and his wife Alberta lived at 2806 Pine Street, in the Western Addition (building extant). James was 31 when he took a job at Marinship, the sprawling emergency shipyard operated by the W.A. Bechtel Corporation on Sausalito’s northern waterfront. He was one of approximately 2,200 African Americans employed at Marinship (a little over 10 percent of the total workforce). James trained to become a welder at Marinship. He proved so adept at his new trade that he was assigned to one of the shipyard’s famous “flying squads” – teams of expert welders assigned to complete some of the most technically difficult work.¹⁹⁴ He also often sung at ship launchings to wide acclaim.

When he first started working at Marinship, Joseph James could not join the Boilermakers’ union which represented the bulk of the skilled workforce at Marinship. During the early part of the war, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers Local No. 6 granted waivers to Black workers exempting them from having to pay dues. This changed as the number of Black workers began to increase at Marinship. In 1943, the union, as part of its agreement with Marinship, began forcing all new African American hires to join an all-Black local auxiliary. Though they had to pay the same dues as White workers they did not enjoy voting rights and were therefore forbidden to take part in other union business.¹⁹⁵

In response to what he called a “Jim Crow fake union,” Joseph James and several other African American workers formed the Committee Against Segregation and Discrimination in August 1943.¹⁹⁶ Citing parallels between America’s fight against Fascism abroad and the struggle against racism at home, James and his allies stood firm against the union and Marinship. On November 24, 1943, citing the

¹⁹⁰ Broussard, 145.

¹⁹¹ Broussard, 147.

¹⁹² Daniels, 167.

¹⁹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census,

¹⁹⁴ Charles Wollenberg, *Marinship at War: Shipbuilding and Social Change in Wartime Sausalito* (Berkeley: Western Heritage Press, 1990), 41.

¹⁹⁵ Wollenberg, 77.

¹⁹⁶ Wollenberg, 77.

closed-shop agreement the union had with Marinship, Local 6 requested that Marinship fire all Black workers who refused to join the auxiliary. After Marinship management complied by firing several hundred Black workers and refusing to allow other non-compliant workers to punch in for their shift, nearly 800 African American men and women rallied at the gates of Marinship to protest (**Figure 23**). The *San Rafael Independent* described the incident as “Marin’s greatest labor demonstration and most critical situation to arise since the San Francisco ‘general strike’ in the summer of 1934.”¹⁹⁷

The case was adjudicated by state and federal courts and commissions. On December 14, 1943, the FEPC ordered Local 6 to “eliminate all membership practices which discriminate against workers because of race or color.” The FEPC also forbade Bechtel (and Kaiser, Bethlehem Steel, Moore Drydock, etc.) from enforcing the union’s discriminatory policies. James also filed a lawsuit against Marinship for wrongfully dismissing Black shipyard workers who refused to join the auxiliary. A decision in *James vs. Marinship* was handed down by Judge Butler of the Marin Superior Court on February 17, 1944. Butler ruled that the Boilermakers’ policy of “discriminating against and segregating Negroes into auxiliaries is contrary to public policy of the state of California.” Marinship and the union appealed this decision, which they eventually lost at the California Supreme Court. This later decision stated that Blacks “must be admitted to membership under the same terms and conditions applicable to non-Negroes unless the union and the employer refrain from enforcing the closed shop agreement against them.”¹⁹⁸ This little-known case, which is now increasingly being recognized as one of the most important precursors to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, was a huge victory for African Americans because it significantly weakened discriminatory union hiring policies toward Blacks and other minorities.¹⁹⁹ Unfortunately, it happened just months before the end of World War II and the closure of Marinship and many of the other shipyards and defense plants.



Figure 23. African American shipyard workers demonstrate outside Marinship, 1943
Source: Bancroft Library

Audley Cole

Around the same time that Joseph James was fighting for equality in the shipyards, an African American man named Audley Cole broke the color line at San Francisco’s Municipal Railway (Muni) and the local Carmen’s Union that represented its workers. Between 1942 and 1945, Audley’s actions ended the informal ban on Black employees, causing the number of African Americans employed by Muni to skyrocket from 0 to almost 700.²⁰⁰ The Coles lived at 2142 Bush Street in the Western Addition (building extant).

¹⁹⁷ Wollenberg, 77.

¹⁹⁸ *James vs. Marinship*.

¹⁹⁹ Wollenberg, 80-1.

²⁰⁰ Broussard, 154.

Residential Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1941-1945

The difficulty of finding housing in World War II-era San Francisco was a common complaint of all newly arrived defense workers— both Black and White. Housing shortages were so acute that recruitment of workers for the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was temporarily halted during the first half of 1943 because the city had literally run out of housing.²⁰¹ In the search for decent housing, the Bay Area's swelling African American population experienced the additional burden of racial discrimination. Before World War II, African Americans had experienced housing discrimination in certain neighborhoods, usually where racial covenants and deed restrictions were in place, but in general African Americans were free to settle where such legal restrictions were not yet in place. However, the rapid influx of African Americans into San Francisco during the war inflamed racist attitudes in San Francisco, making it much harder for Black San Franciscans to find acceptable and affordable housing in areas where they had settled without difficulty in the past.

The Fillmore district/Western Addition

As mentioned in the last chapter, as early as 1930 a notable concentration of African Americans had grown up near the center of the Western Addition. This area, centered on Fillmore Street, between McAllister and Sutter streets, was not monolithically Black. Here, African Americans lived in close proximity to Japanese, Filipinos, Latinos, and Eastern European Jews. In 1942, after Executive Order 9066, which removed people of Japanese ancestry to internment camps, African Americans began moving eastward into the heart of Japantown, taking up residence in the flats and houses recently vacated by the Japanese.²⁰² By 1943, approximately 9,000 African Americans were crowded into *Nihonmachi*, a neighborhood that had housed fewer than 5,000 Japanese Americans.²⁰³ For the first time in its history, San Francisco now had a large, African American-majority neighborhood. Unfortunately, overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions became endemic in the Western Addition, but with racial covenants and prejudice closing off many surrounding areas to them, African Americans were essentially stuck. A survey conducted by the *San Francisco Sun-Reporter* found war workers “crowded 9, 10, and 15 to a single room with only one window. They work all day for the maintenance of democracy and come home in the evening to face the realities of domestic fascist practices.”²⁰⁴

Some White residents reacted with alarm at the influx of thousands of African Americans. Sociologist and researcher Charles Spurgeon Johnson, writing in his book *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco*, observed: “a concerted effort is being made by neighborhood groups, merchant associations and improvement clubs to restrict the area of living for Negro families to the present boundaries of the Fillmore district.”²⁰⁵ Restrictive covenants, which had been mainly used to exclude Asians from West Side neighborhoods, were reinvigorated during World War II, and over a half-dozen neighborhoods adopted covenants that explicitly prohibited African Americans from renting or purchasing real estate, including in new large-scale developments like Parkmerced.²⁰⁶ Lack of housing for African Americans exacerbated overcrowding and forced unrelated families to double-up and triple-up in flats and apartments. Additional units were carved out by subdividing existing units, but many did not comply with code requirements for access to light and fresh air. As the African American population increased in the Western Addition, remaining Whites began to leave, moving westward into the Sunset

²⁰¹ Broussard, 172.

²⁰² Godfrey, 100.33

²⁰³ Paul T. Miller, *The Interplay of Housing, Employment, and Civil Rights in the Experience of San Francisco's African American Community, 1945-1975* (Dissertation: Temple University, 2008), 74.

²⁰⁴ *San Francisco Reporter* (July 28, 1944).

²⁰⁵ Daniels, 169.

²⁰⁶ Daniels, 173.

and Richmond districts. As the Whites left more African Americans moved in, creating a nearly solidly African American “ghetto” in the heart of the Western Addition.²⁰⁷

Bayview-Hunters Point

Most residents of “The Fillmore,” as the newcomers called it, worked outside the neighborhood, mainly at Hunters Point Naval Shipyard or at Marinship in Sausalito. The Bayview-Hunters Point district, where the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was located, was an outlying area of commercial slaughterhouses, tanneries, and glue factories set within a semi-rural environment of truck farms and greenhouses, which still provided much of San Francisco’s fruits, vegetables, and flowers. The area was traditionally inhabited by White working-class people with roots in Ireland, Italy, France, and Malta. There was never a tradition of Black people living in Bayview-Hunters Point and there was some resistance to the Black influx during World War II. In 1942, because of the extreme housing shortage, the federal government constructed 5,500 units of “temporary” defense workers’ housing on Hunters Point, just outside the shipyard gates. The housing consisted of plywood dormitories and some portable house trailers (**Figure 24**). By 1945, the federal government had built over 12,000 housing units in Hunters Point, accommodating 26,000 people.²⁰⁸ This housing was initially reserved for Navy employees and their families, and because the workforce was integrated the housing was too. By 1945, 42 percent of the population of Hunters Point (not including the adjoining Bayview district, which remained predominantly White) was African American.²⁰⁹



Figure 24. Trailers and defense worker dormitories at Hunters Point
Source: San Francisco Public Library

Public Housing

Additional housing for defense workers was provided in public housing projects constructed by the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA). These projects offered some relief from the citywide housing shortage, but the SFHA’s policy of preserving “neighborhood patterns” meant that these housing projects remained segregated by race throughout the war. This policy, promulgated in 1942 to assuage White fears of housing projects becoming springboards for African Americans to move into White neighborhoods, stated: “In the selection of tenants for the projects of this Authority, this Authority shall act with references to the established usages, customs and traditions of the community” and “preserve the same racial composition which exists in the neighborhood where the project is located.”²¹⁰ Only one

²⁰⁷ Godfrey, 100.

²⁰⁸ Broussard, 175.

²⁰⁹ “Project Offers Housing to the Public,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 November 1945, Section A, page 11.

²¹⁰ Alice Griffith, *A Review of the Proceedings of the Housing Authority of San Francisco, April 17, 1938-August 17, 1943* (San Francisco: unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

project, Westside Courts in the Western Addition (complex still extant), was constructed in an area with a pre-existing Black majority, and therefore it was the only SFHA project that accepted African American tenants until the neighborhood pattern policy was overturned by the courts in 1952. Exclusion from several “Whites only” public housing projects further concentrated San Francisco’s African American population in the Western Addition. One visiting African American scholar warned that because of its exclusionist policies San Francisco was rapidly developing a “substandard Harlem,” where the concentration of poverty and racial isolation would permanently hobble the African American community’s chances for integration.²¹¹

African American Cultural Contributions: 1941-1945

African American cultural contributions during World War II skewed heavily toward music, dance, singing, and other performance-based arts. As the Fillmore became the center of African American nightlife during the 1930s, a handful of nightclubs became quite well-known, not only among Black San Franciscans but among the city as a whole. Minnie’s Can-Do Club, which opened in 1941 at 1915 Fillmore Street (building extant), was San Francisco’s longest-running jazz club in one location. It remained at this address until 1974, when it moved to 1725 Haight Street. It closed for good in the late 1970s.²¹² Other clubs that opened during World War II included the California Theater Club Restaurant, at 1650 Post Street (building no longer extant). This extraordinary nightclub was operated by Julius Delifus, who took over a space that had been previously occupied by the Cherryland Sukiyaki Restaurant until its Japanese American owners were interned in 1942. The California Theater Club Restaurant had a cocktail lounge and an elaborate Hollywood-style floor show featuring a chorus line troupe called the Ella Cummings Dancettes.²¹³ Mr. Delifus also operated the Havana Club, at 1718 Fillmore Street (building extant).²¹⁴

Sargent Johnson

African American artists like Sargent Johnson were active during World War II. In 1942, he was working on his famous frieze at Washington High School. In 1944, he won the Abraham Rosenberg Scholarship, which funded several trips to Mexico, where Johnson made art among the Zapotec Indians of San Bartolo Coyotepec.²¹⁵

E. African Americans in San Francisco during the Postwar Period: 1946-1960

The immediate post-World War II era was characterized by the maturation of San Francisco’s fast-growing African American community. Once a tiny minority without any political influence, the city’s Black population assumed the characteristics of an increasingly confident and economically well-rounded community commensurate with its growing numbers. Coinciding with the early years of the national Civil Rights movement, the 1950s witnessed the rise of a new generation of activists who began the process of dismantling institutional racism in San Francisco. This era was also characterized by the growth in numbers of Black professionals in many industries and professions. During the 1950s, African Americans began to move out of the core areas of settlement into new neighborhoods, including the Bayview District, Visitacion Valley, and the Oceanside/Merced Heights/Ingleside (OMI) district.

²¹¹ “Authority Warns of S.F. Harlem,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 September 1945, Section A, page 17.

²¹² Pepin and Watts, 83.

²¹³ Pepin and Watts, 134-5.

²¹⁴ Pepin and Watts, 137.

²¹⁵ Thomas Riggs, ed., *The St. James Guide to Black Artists* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997).

Population Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1945-1960

When World War II came to a close San Francisco was a demographically transformed city. The African American population stood at 43,460 in 1950, an astonishing 904 percent increase since 1940.²¹⁶ Despite the rapid demobilization of the defense industries, there was no indication that the African American migrants would return "home." By several estimates only 15 percent of the migrants who had arrived in San Francisco for wartime employment stated that they had any intention of returning after the war.²¹⁷ Persistent Jim Crow policies and the continued lack of economic opportunities provided little incentive to return to the South. Public officials in San Francisco, fearing flooded welfare rolls, offered recent arrivals (both Black and White) one-way tickets back to their places of origin, but this program was not widely embraced.²¹⁸ Though some Black migrants – mainly senior citizens – decided to return home, they were in the minority and were soon replaced by additional new arrivals. Many of the African Americans who had come to San Francisco during the war encouraged their relatives to make the trip after the war. Reflecting on the continued postwar influx, Seaton W. Manning, executive director of the newly founded San Francisco chapter of the National Urban League, informed National Urban League president Lester B. Granger that the "migration of Negroes into San Francisco and the Bay Area is still continuing." He concluded: "I find it hard to believe that there are any Negroes left in Texas and Louisiana."²¹⁹

While African Americans had dramatically expanded their occupational range during the war years, most of the defense industry jobs went away after the war.²²⁰ Unfortunately, there were not enough remaining jobs for the newcomers and public officials' fears of increasing welfare dependency among laid-off defense workers became a reality. By 1948, the unemployment rate for African Americans in the entire Bay Area was 15 percent, three times the rate for Whites.²²¹ Nonetheless, the Black population of San Francisco continued to soar during the postwar period, reaching 74,383 in 1960, or 10 percent of the city's overall population of 740,316.²²²

Racial tensions began to escalate in San Francisco during the postwar period. White citizens wrote impassioned letters to Governor Earl Warren, imploring him to "segregate us from them," as well as much harsher messages.²²³ Some Whites complained about "rude and uncouth" behavior among the newly arrived Blacks, fretting about escalating crime and openly worrying about interracial relationships. Members of San Francisco's pre-war Black establishment shared some of these concerns, openly expressing concerns about the assimilation of "countrified" Blacks in big city San Francisco.²²⁴ As San Francisco's Black population continued to grow, many Whites abandoned the Western Addition and the Bayview-Hunters Point district. Many left the city altogether. Between 1950 and 1960, San Francisco's White population declined by almost 100,000, dropping from 693,888 (89.5 percent) to 604,403 (81.6 percent).²²⁵

²¹⁶ Broussard, 205.

²¹⁷ Broussard, 206.

²¹⁸ Broussard, 206.

²¹⁹ Broussard, 205.

²²⁰ Broussard, 206.

²²¹ Broussard, 165.

²²² U.S. Bureau of the Census.

²²³ Broussard, 168-9.

²²⁴ Broussard, 171.

²²⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Occupational Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1945-1960

As previously mentioned, San Francisco's African American population was disproportionately impacted by job losses after World War II. Factors behind the community's 15 percent unemployment rate by 1948 included intense competition in an already crowded job market from returning GIs, the end of the FEPC and other federally mandated programs prohibiting employment discrimination, and the gradual deindustrialization of San Francisco.²²⁶ Because African Americans were used to near full-employment during the war, the closing of the shipyards, where so many African American workers had held high-paying union jobs, was devastating. The Kaiser shipyards in Richmond alone shed almost 40,000 jobs, reducing its workforce from 47,000 in 1944 to fewer than 9,000 in 1946.²²⁷ By 1949, unemployment among African American men stood at approximately 30 percent.²²⁸ Further damage was done by unions, some of which stopped representing Blacks after the war.²²⁹

Nonetheless, some African Americans held onto their unionized jobs and did well. Interviews performed by Fred Stripp of 205 Bay Area union officials affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) revealed that there were over 9,000 Black employees represented by 76 locals, comprising around nine percent of the unionized workforce. Though many African Americans still worked in the service industries, including hotel and restaurant work, around one-third worked in the building trades, which had been nearly all-White preserves before the war. Another 26 percent worked in the food and textile industries, two categories of manufacturing that actually grew in postwar San Francisco, and 14 percent in metalworking and machining.²³⁰

In terms of white-collar employment, African Americans made moderate-to-strong gains in many fields. African American men and women began to permeate the workforces of San Francisco's banks, insurance companies, and other corporations, working as clerks, stenographers, office personnel, and secretaries.²³¹ African Americans began teaching in the San Francisco Unified School District for the first time with the employment of Ms. Josephine Cole (married to Muni operator Audley Cole) in 1944. She eventually went on to be the principal of Balboa High School. The San Francisco Police Department integrated its workforce in the late 1940s, though the San Francisco Fire Department did not hire its first African American firefighter until 1955.²³²

In addition to private and civil service jobs, many university-trained African American professionals migrated to San Francisco during World War II and its aftermath, including doctors and dentists such as Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr. and Dr. Douglas Daniels, and attorneys like Cecil Poole and R.J. Reynolds. These advances, while important, affected a relatively small percentage of the African American population. In 1950, still more than half of all African American women were still employed as domestics, working in private homes as cleaners, maids, or taking care of children.²³³

Despite postwar gains, African Americans were still at the bottom rung of the occupational ladder in many industries. Often falling within the category of "last hired, first fired," Black workers clung tenuously to middle-class prosperity during the postwar period. In 1950, the median income for African

²²⁶ Broussard, 212.

²²⁷ Broussard, 209.

²²⁸ Broussard, 210.

²²⁹ Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage* (New York: Garland Publishing Group, 2000), 59.

²³⁰ Broussard, 206.

²³¹ Broussard, 206.

²³² Broussard, 208.

²³³ Broussard, 207.

Americans in San Francisco was \$1,924 (equivalent in purchasing power to less than \$19,000 in 2013) compared to \$2,545 for Whites and \$2,050 for other non-Whites.²³⁴ At the close of the decade which had begun with so much promise, the overall economic situation of the African American community had become increasingly precarious.

Though theoretically African Americans who had lost their jobs at the shipyards could find jobs elsewhere, it was not always an easy matter in a world where many private employers refused to hire qualified African Americans. When questioned, some employers stated that though they were “not prejudiced,” but that they feared complaints from their White staff members, or that their customers would no longer patronize their businesses if they had Black employees “up front.”²³⁵ With employment discrimination pervasive, African Americans and their liberal White allies advocated for the creation of a new California Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). After several failed attempts, a bill creating the California FEPC finally passed in the state legislature in 1959. The bill had heavy support from the local chapters of the National Urban League, the NAACP, and the recently founded Council for Civic Unity (CCU).²³⁶ By this time however, much of Black San Francisco had already become entrenched in poverty – either stuck in menial, low-wage jobs or unemployed altogether.

Residential Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1945-1960

Housing in San Francisco continued to be in short supply after the war, with returning GIs and Japanese Americans rejoining the city’s population and exacerbating the demand. At the same time, African Americans faced unique challenges in their search for housing. Restrictive covenants were in effect in much of the city, and approximately 90 percent of the new suburban developments springing up in fast-growing Marin and San Mateo counties excluded African Americans. Of the 75,000 building permits issued between 1949 and 1951 in the Bay Area, only six hundred were for units available for purchase by African Americans.²³⁷ Even where covenants were not in place, realtors, neighborhood “improvement” associations, and many White residents, were not shy about resisting African American residents. Most rehashed age-old stereotypes but all worried about declining real estate values and “red-lining,” the practice of banks and federal agencies for denying loans to residents of neighborhoods housing people of color.²³⁸

African Americans who wanted to buy in a White area could occasionally enlist the help of a sympathetic White friend who would act as a middle man by purchasing a home in a restricted neighborhood and then reselling it to a Black person.²³⁹ However, this strategy was risky and exposed the White seller to potential lawsuits filed by neighboring residents. It was not only private institutions that engaged in systematic discrimination in housing; the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) denied low-interest, long-term mortgages to African Americans. Furthermore, the FHA would only underwrite and insure loans to merchant builders who implemented racial covenants and deed restrictions. To assist African Americans refused residential financing by larger banks, African American financier Jefferson A. Beaver established the Transbay Federal Savings and Loan Association in 1949. This business, which was located at 1738 Post Street (building no longer extant) lent money to over 1,500 people by 1956 (mostly African Americans), recording only two repossessions in that time.²⁴⁰ Beaver later went on to direct the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP in the 1950s.

²³⁴ Broussard, 219.

²³⁵ Broussard, 211.

²³⁶ Broussard, 212.

²³⁷ Crowe, 43.

²³⁸ Broussard, 173.

²³⁹ Miller, 155.

²⁴⁰ Miller, 162.

Western Addition/Fillmore District

During the postwar period, real estate agents continued to funnel African Americans into the neighborhoods where they already had a strong presence, especially the Western Addition (**Figure 25**). By 1950, the Fillmore district's 26 blocks, originally designed to accommodate 50-to-75 people per acre, were reportedly housing upwards of 200 people per acre.²⁴¹ Besides being crowded, many of the neighborhood's aging Victorian-era houses – most of which had been carved up into smaller units – had little to no hot water, minimal sanitation facilities, and scarce access to natural light or outdoor space. Rat infestations were epidemic, causing public health officials to worry about the potential outbreak of disease.²⁴² The combination of overcrowding and poverty created sub-par conditions diagnosed as “blight” by the San Francisco Housing Authority. By 1960, more than one-third of San Francisco's African American population lived in the Western Addition, comprising 46 percent of the neighborhood's population.²⁴³



Figure 25. “Dilapidated” housing in the Western Addition, 1953
Source: San Francisco Public Library

Public Housing

As mentioned previously, the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA), which was created in 1938, responded to overcrowded housing citywide by constructing public housing projects throughout the city. Though the SFHA initially planned to build 11 permanent housing developments, it had completed only five by 1943. As mentioned, one of the first was Westside Courts, a 136-unit, six-building development that replaced a block of some of the most heavily blighted Victorian-era housing in the Western Addition. Westside Courts was the only project available to African Americans during the immediate postwar period. The other four projects built during World War II, including Holly Courts, Potrero Terrace, Sunnyside, and Valencia Gardens (1,605 units in all), housed only White tenants.²⁴⁴

The SFHA's official policy of segregated public housing was eventually struck down by the courts in 1952. In that year, the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP filed a lawsuit on behalf of Mattie Banks and her husband James Charley, Jr. The couple had tried to rent an apartment in the North Beach housing project near Fisherman's Wharf.²⁴⁵ Expertly litigated by NAACP attorneys Loren Miller, Terry Francois, and Nathaniel Colley, the case brought Francois, a young African American attorney, to prominence (**Figure 26**).²⁴⁶ On September 1, 1952, San Francisco Superior Court Judge Melvyn I. Cronin agreed with the plaintiffs and overturned the SFHA's decade-long racial segregation policies. Though the decision was later appealed by the SFHA to the U.S. Supreme Court, the decision stood



Figure 26. Terry A. Francois
Source: blackpast.org

²⁴¹ Miller, 142.

²⁴² Broussard, 174.

²⁴³ Miller, 165.

²⁴⁴ Broussard, 177.

²⁴⁵ Broussard, 223.

²⁴⁶ Broussard, 224.

and all public housing projects in San Francisco were eventually integrated.²⁴⁷ During the 1950s and 1960s, several formerly all-White projects became predominantly African American, including the Sunnydale Housing Development, a 767-unit public housing project constructed in 1941 on 48 acres southeast of McLaren Park, in Visitation Valley.²⁴⁸ By 1960, Census Tract M-11, which encompassed Sunnydale, housed 1,422 African Americans out of a total population of 7,583.²⁴⁹

Terry Francois' office during this time was located at 2085 Sutter Street in the Western Addition (building no longer extant). He and his wife Marion lived at 1608 10th Avenue in the Inner Sunset District (building extant).

Bayview-Hunters Point

Changed beyond recognition during World War II, the Bayview-Hunters Point district remained largely dependent on the fortunes of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard throughout much of the postwar period. By 1949, the total workforce at the shipyard had declined from its wartime peak of 18,235 to 6,000, severely impacting area residents, including many African Americans.²⁵⁰ In 1946, the SFHA assumed control of 5,500 units of former defense worker housing at Hunters Point Ridge, South Basin, Double Rock, and Candlestick Point. The SFHA initially leased the vacant units to returning war veterans and Japanese Americans. After these groups moved on, the SFHA opened



Figure 27. Hunters View, 1961
Source: San Francisco Public Library

some buildings to African Americans, though on a segregated, building-by-building basis. Nevertheless, by 1949, 38 percent of all SFHA units in Bayview-Hunters Point were occupied by Black tenants.²⁵¹ In 1956, the SFHA decided to tear down most (but not all) of the World War II-era housing atop Hunters Point Ridge and replace it with the new Hunters View Housing Development (**Figure 27**). The new development consisted of 55 buildings containing 10 one-bedroom units, 130 two-bedroom units, 112 three-bedroom units, 64 four-bedroom units, and nine five-bedroom units. All buildings were sited on a steeply sloped, 17-acre tract with views to the north and east of San Francisco Bay.²⁵² Although designed in a barracks-like, no-frills architectural vocabulary with little landscaping, they were superior to what had preceded them and were initially greeted with enthusiasm by local residents. These buildings are no longer extant.

²⁴⁷ Broussard, 226.

²⁴⁸ Carey & Company, *Historic Resource Evaluation: Sunnydale Housing Development, San Francisco, California* (San Francisco: May 25, 2001).

²⁴⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table P-1. – General Characteristics of the Population by Census Tracts: 1960."

²⁵⁰ Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices* (San Diego: BRAC Operations Office, Southwest Division, 2000), D-14.

²⁵¹ "S.F. Housing Board Keeps Racial Policy," *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 28, 1949).

²⁵² Carey & Company, *Hunters View Housing Development San Francisco* (San Francisco: 2007).

According to the 1960 Census, the African American population of Bayview-Hunters Point had continued to grow since World War II, with census tract L5A, an area comprising the housing projects on Hunters Point Ridge, housing 14,248 African Americans. Meanwhile, census tract L5B, an area bounded by Yosemite Avenue to the north, San Francisco bay to the east, San Mateo County to the south, and Third Street and Bayshore Boulevard to the west, housed another 1,059 African Americans. Though many African Americans lived in the public housing developments on Hunters Point Ridge, the census data reveal that some had begun moving south into the formerly all-white Bayview neighborhood, where African Americans began purchasing modest single-family homes in the 1950s. For some time White and Black residents coexisted without any problems. According to Ben Adams' 1961 *San Francisco, an Informal Guide*:

Negro leaders see more hopeful signs in [Bayview-Hunters Point]. Negroes have long owned small homes among Italian and other white families. Although more Negroes have moved in, few white families have moved out. Real estate values have not declined. Negro and white neighbors generally get along, belonging to the same community improvement clubs, and PTAs. Interestingly enough, the social problems found in areas of more concentrated negro population are largely absent.²⁵³

During the 1950s, African Americans also began to move into the newer residential tracts west of Third Street, including Silver Terrace, an area dominated by post-war speculator-built housing, but according to the 1960 Census, the census tracts west of Third Street all remained at least three-quarters White.²⁵⁴

The growing African American community of Bayview-Hunters Point lobbied the City to provide amenities for the neighborhood. In 1954, Gene K. Walker, an African American activist, lobbied the SFHA for money to purchase and rehabilitate the old South San Francisco Opera House (building extant) for use as a community center (**Figure 28**). He also lobbied the City to build parks for the bleak and windswept neighborhood. That same year, the Bayview Neighborhood Community Center was founded. Originally named the Crispus Attucks Club in honor of a Black patriot killed in the Revolutionary War, the center was originally located in a 1908 house at 1201-05 Mendell Street (building extant). In 1966, it moved to the old South San Francisco Opera House. The center provided a variety of services to neighborhood residents, including providing space for public meetings, job training and counseling, games and activities for youth, and arts and crafts programs.²⁵⁵ The South San Francisco Opera House is City Landmark No. 8.



Figure 28. South San Francisco Opera House, ca. 1950
Source: San Francisco Public Library

²⁵³ Ben Adams, *San Francisco: An Informal Guide* (San Francisco: Hill & Wang, 1961).

²⁵⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table P-1. – General Characteristics of the Population by Census Tracts: 1960."

²⁵⁵ "The Bayview Neighborhood Community Center," *The Spokesman* (n.d. 1966).

OMI

Though the Western Addition/Fillmore district and Bayview-Hunters Point were the two main nodes of African American settlement in San Francisco during the 1940s and 1950s, more well-off Black homebuyers began to make inroads in outlying parts of the city. What is now known as the OMI district (Oceanview, Merced Heights, and Ingleside) is a sprawling residential area composed of several tracts of housing that were subdivided and developed during the first half of the twentieth century. Located on the south side of Ocean Avenue, between I-280 and Junipero Serra Boulevard, the OMI district has its share of opulent homes, particularly those built in the 1920s-era residence park of Ingleside Terraces. However,



Figure 29. Typical residential street in the OMI
Source: streetadvisor.com

most of the district consists of steep hillside lots that remained undeveloped until World War II, when demand for housing made them worth developing. During the war, various construction firms began buying the unsold lots and building hundreds of modest five-room rowhouses (Figure 29).²⁵⁶ The neighborhood's commercial center was (and remains) Ocean Avenue, a prototypical "streetcar suburb" featuring commercial buildings from the 1920s onward. Scattered commercial development also exists along Broad Street and Holloway Avenue. As one of the only new, suburban parts of San Francisco where Blacks could evidently legally buy reasonably priced new houses, the area soon began to attract a lot of interest. As African Americans began to move in, some realtors began "block-busting." Block-busting is a now-illegal practice that involves using fear of racial integration to provoke a White homeowner into selling his or her property at a loss, often to the realtor, who then resells the house to a Black individual, typically at an inflated price. According to urban historian Brian Godfrey:

Apparently aided by block-busting realtors, several parts of the Ingleside (OMI) began to experience an influx of middle-income blacks in the 1940s, beginning in the southerly Ocean View (sic) neighborhood and spreading northwest into Merced Heights. The Ingleside District soon became San Francisco's middle-class black district, as opposed to the lower-income Fillmore and Hunters Point areas.²⁵⁷

Though affluent homeowners in nearby Ingleside Terraces (which did have racial covenants) complained, there was nothing that they could legally do to stop the influx of African Americans into the adjoining Ingleside and Merced Heights neighborhoods. As Godfrey says, block-busting did occur in the OMI on a fairly large scale. Nonetheless, the transition from White to Black was relatively gradual in comparison with many Midwestern and Eastern cities. In 1950, Blacks comprised five percent of the OMI's population and by the early 1960s it was about half (40 percent of Merced Heights, 32 percent of Ingleside, and 59 percent of Oceanview). By 1970, the Black population of the entire district had

²⁵⁶ Richard Brandi and Woody LaBounty, *San Francisco's Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside (OMI) Neighborhoods: 1862-1959* (San Francisco: 2010), 40.

²⁵⁷ Godfrey, 101.

increased to around 60 percent.²⁵⁸ Regardless, some observers viewed the OMI district as a good example of successful racial integration in an urban setting.²⁵⁹

Willie Mays Breaks the Color Barrier

Integration of private housing proceeded at a much slower rate than public housing in San Francisco, despite the overturning of racial covenants in 1948 by the Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer*. Though ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, racial discrimination in private housing markets waned only gradually, and many realtors and homeowners continued to informally discriminate against African Americans. Housing discrimination in San Francisco became national news in 1957 when Willie Mays, a famous African American baseball player, attempted to purchase a house in the city (**Figure 30**). Mays, a team member of the San Francisco Giants, which had just moved from New York to San Francisco, selected a newly constructed house at 175 Miraloma Drive (building extant), a quiet residential street adjoining the exclusive St. Francis Wood neighborhood. The contractor who



Figure 30. Willie Mays, his wife Margherite, and their son Michael, 1959

Source: San Francisco Public Library

built the house, Walter Gnesdiloff, initially agreed to sell it to Mays, but suddenly tried to back out of the deal, claiming that his business would suffer if it became known that he had sold a property to a Black man. Gnesdiloff claimed that he had received irate telephone calls from neighbors and neighborhood improvement clubs. This was probably true based on the public statements of several neighbors, including one man who stated: “Certainly I objected. I happen to have quite a few pieces of property in that area and I stand to lose a lot if colored people move in.”²⁶⁰ Faced with a public relations nightmare, Mayor George Christopher wrote the following letter to Mays and his wife:

Words cannot express my deep feeling of regret at this most unfortunate occurrence.

Mrs. Christopher and I extend to you our warmest invitation to be our guests in our home until you find suitable housing.

I sincerely trust that you will not feel that this incident portrays the sentiment of San Francisco. You may be assured that the vast majority of our citizens want to welcome you here.²⁶¹

As an individual who himself had been criticized for racial discrimination – Christopher had long refused to hire African Americans to work at his dairy – Mayor Christopher understood that San Francisco’s reputation for tolerance and civility was at stake. Under pressure from Mayor Christopher, Gnesdiloff

²⁵⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

²⁵⁹ “S.F. Study in Successful Integration,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 19, 1963).

²⁶⁰ Miller, 58.

²⁶¹ NAACP files, as quoted in Miller, 58.

telephoned Mays to offer him the property.²⁶² Mays accepted and purchased it for \$37,500, \$5,000 more than it had been previously offered to a potential White buyer. Though Mays publicly claimed that the incident did not affect his feeling toward San Francisco, his wife Margherite confessed:

Down in Alabama where we come from you know your place, and that's something at least. But up here it's all a lot of camouflage. They grin in your face and then deceive you.²⁶³

Though Mays' situation was satisfactorily resolved, mostly due to his public stature, as well as the political talents of his attorney, Terry Francois, everyday African Americans were rarely so lucky. According to San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, "What happened in Mays' case is dramatically enacted daily by hapless Negro families whose lack of prominence does not command the attention of the press and officials of San Francisco."²⁶⁴ The case also brought to light the subtle racism experienced by Black San Franciscans in a city which, then as now, was celebrated for its liberalism and cosmopolitanism.

Civil Rights Activism and Community Leadership in San Francisco: 1945-1960

As mentioned previously, the post-World War II era witnessed an influx of talented and dedicated Black professionals, including lawyers, doctors, and dentists – several of whom formed the vanguard of renewed civil rights activism in midcentury San Francisco. Members of this group included the physician Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr., Judge Cecil F. Poole, attorney and National Urban League president Seaton W. Manning, and dentist and Urban League founder, Daniel Collins.²⁶⁵ Several founded community organizations, including San Francisco's first National Urban League chapter and the National Council of Negro Women.²⁶⁶ Comprising a sizable minority of the city's electorate, African Americans' demands for political representation began to gain traction for the first time in San Francisco's history. Because of their potentially decisive role in local elections, African Americans began to demand and receive information about potential candidates' positions on civil rights. Although no African American candidate had been elected to a citywide office during the 1950s, several high-level appointments did go to African Americans. In 1949, attorney Cecil F. Poole was appointed head of the Superior Court Trial Division of the District Attorney's office, and Raymond J. Reynolds was appointed the first African American deputy District Attorney in 1954.²⁶⁷

Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr.

Physician Carlton B. Goodlett was one of the giants of San Francisco's postwar civil rights movement (**Figure 31**). Goodlett was born in Chipley, Florida in 1914 but he grew up in Omaha, Nebraska – attending local schools there. He attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., graduating in 1935. Several years later, he earned his Ph.D. in psychology from Howard University. In 1944, Goodlett earned his M.D. from Meharry Medical College, a historically Black medical school in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1945, Goodlett moved to San Francisco, where he established a medical practice. His office was located at 1845 Fillmore Street (building extant). He and his wife Willette lived at 579 Los Pamos Drive in Westwood Highlands (building extant).²⁶⁸

²⁶² "Willie Mays Buys S.F. Home," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1957).

²⁶³ "Willie Mayes is Denied," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1957).

²⁶⁴ San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, as quoted in Broussard, 240.

²⁶⁵ Broussard, 181-2.

²⁶⁶ Broussard, 180.

²⁶⁷ Broussard, 236.

²⁶⁸ San Francisco City Directories.

A “joiner,” Goodlett became a trustee of the Third Baptist Church and president of the local chapter of the NAACP. Not long after his arrival in San Francisco, Goodlett and his friend the dentist Dr. Daniel Collins invested in the *San Francisco Reporter*, a local Black newspaper established in the Fillmore district in 1942. Goodlett and Collins eventually gained full control of the paper, and in 1948, they bought the *San Francisco Sun*, another Black newspaper, combining them as the *San Francisco Sun-Reporter*. The *Sun-Reporter*, with offices at 1579 Post Street (building no longer extant), was San Francisco’s most important Black newspaper during the postwar period. As its head, Dr. Goodlett became one of the pre-eminent African American publishers in the nation.²⁶⁹ In 1963, Goodlett moved his medical office and the *Sun-Reporter* office to a building at 1366 Turk Street (building no longer extant).²⁷⁰ After a long and successful career, Dr. Goodlett died in 1997. In 1999, Mayor Willie Brown, San Francisco’s first African American mayor, renamed two blocks of Polk Street in front of City Hall Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr. Place.



Figure 31. Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr.
Source: San Francisco State University

Cecil F. Poole

Cecil F. Poole was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1914 and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Figure 32). Poole attended high school in Washington, D.C. and earned both his A.B. and LL.B. from the University of Michigan in 1935 and 1938, respectively. In 1939, he earned his LL.M. from Harvard University’s School of Law. Poole was drafted into the Army during World War II and assigned to Tuskegee Army Air Service Base, where he worked with the famous 332nd Fighter Group, an all-Black corps better-known as the “Tuskegee Airmen.” After World War II, Poole moved to San Francisco, where he initially worked as a labor relations lawyer for the federal government, and later as a District Attorney. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy appointed Cecil Poole U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California, making him the first African American to hold this position in the continental United States. Poole later served as a judge for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, and later, on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.²⁷¹ Poole and his family lived at 90 Cedro Way in Ingleside Terraces (building extant). Famously, the Pooles were the victims of a cross burning at their home shortly after moving there in 1958. The house was designated City Landmark No. 214 on the basis of its association with Cecil Poole and the developer Joseph Leonard, who built the house for himself in 1912. Cecil Poole died in 1997.



Figure 32. Cecil Poole (left) and Robert Kennedy (right), 1961
Source: San Francisco Public Library

²⁶⁹ Broussard, 182-3.

²⁷⁰ San Francisco City Directories.

²⁷¹ “Cecil F. Poole, 83, a Legal Leader for Blacks,” *New York Times* (November 16, 1997).

Seaton W. Manning

Seaton W. Manning, a Jamaican-born and Harvard-educated historian and activist had worked for the National Urban League in Boston before moving to San Francisco after World War II. He served as the executive director of the newly founded San Francisco chapter of the National Urban League from 1946 until 1960.²⁷² In contrast with other members of San Francisco’s African American elite, who tended to live in middle-class, White neighborhoods on the West Side, Manning and his wife Eugenia lived at 1032 Gilman Avenue in the Bayview-Hunters Point district (building extant). During the postwar period the San Francisco chapter of the National Urban League offices was housed in a brick building at 2015 Steiner Street (building extant) in the Western Addition (**Figure 33**).²⁷³



Figure 33. Former National Urban League headquarters, 2015 Steiner Street
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

Dr. Daniel Collins

Dr. Daniel Collins was born in 1916 in Darlington, South Carolina (**Figure 34**). Showing great academic promise as a boy, Collins was admitted to Paine College in Augusta, Georgia. In 1941, he graduated with his D.D.S. from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. He then earned a graduate degree in dentistry from the University of California, San Francisco. After graduating from UCSF in 1944, Dr. Collins decided to stay and open a practice catering to the city’s growing Black population. Two years later, he founded the San Francisco chapter of the National Urban League, later to be called the Bay Area Urban League. The San Francisco chapter of the National Urban League became an important force behind advocating for civil rights in San Francisco. Dr. Collins served on the organization’s board from 1965 until 1987. During this time Dr. Collins continued to maintain a successful dental practice at 2449 Sutter Street (building no longer extant) serving clients of all races. Dr. Collins was married to DeReath Collins and the couple lived in Mill Valley from the early 1950s until his death in 2007.²⁷⁴



Figure 34. Dr. Daniel Collins

²⁷² Broussard, 184.

²⁷³ San Francisco City Directories.

²⁷⁴ “Daniel Collins Dies: Dentist and Bay Area Urban League Founder,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 25, 2007).

Black Ministers

Before World War II, most of San Francisco's small Black population attended one of the major mainline Protestant churches: Third Baptist, A.M.E. Zion, Bethel A.M.E., and St. Cyprian A.M.E. The war years brought in a significant population of African American Catholics (mainly from Louisiana) who began attending Catholic services in several parishes throughout the city, especially Sacred Heart in the Fillmore and All Hallows and Our Lady of Lourdes in the Bayview-Hunters Point district. The postwar period also witnessed the founding of many new Protestant churches, including several dozen Evangelical and Pentecostal "storefront" churches, mainly in converted commercial buildings along Fillmore Street, Third Street, and elsewhere. The Reverend E.E. Hamilton of the Church of God in Christ presided over the largest African American congregation in San Francisco only two years after he arrived in San Francisco. Reverend Hamilton, along with Reverend H.B. Gantt of A.M.E Zion, Reverend Hamilton T. Boswell of Jones Methodist Church, and Pastor F.D. Haynes of Third Baptist, were all important figures in the Black Ministerial Alliance, a civil rights organization dedicated to gaining equal access for African Americans to jobs, housing, and health care.²⁷⁵ Another noteworthy church founded by a prominent African American minister was the Fellowship

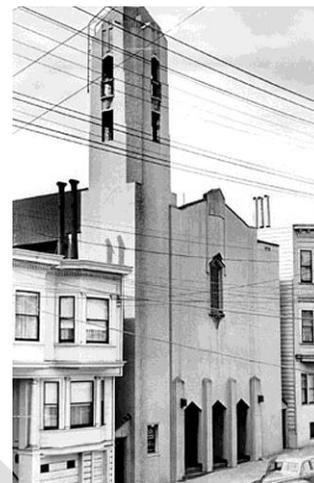


Figure 35. Fellowship Church of All Peoples
Source: San Francisco Library

Church of All Peoples, an interracial church founded in 1943 by Howard Thurman. The church, reputedly the first intentionally interracial congregation of its kind in the United States, was intended to foster good will between Whites and Blacks in postwar San Francisco.²⁷⁶ The church, which still exists, is located at 2041 Larkin Street (building extant) in Russian Hill (**Figure 35**).

During the postwar period many of the older pioneer African American churches were either at capacity or were too far from the fastest-growing centers of African American population. Because of these factors, the pastors of these churches all decided to move to the Western Addition. With his church located at 1299 Hyde Street from 1906 until after World War II, Reverend Frederick Douglas Haynes Sr., pastor of the Third Baptist Church, built a new church at 1399 McAllister Street (building extant) in 1952 (**Figure 36**). A.M.E. Zion, which since 1912 had been located at 1669 Geary Street (at Webster) in the Western Addition, was demolished in the late 1950s and reconstructed in 1960 at 2159 Golden Gate Avenue (building extant) (**Figure 37**). This building was designed by architect Robert Batchelor and constructed at a cost of \$130,000.²⁷⁷ Bethel A.M.E., which had previously been located at 1207 Powell Street (building no longer extant) since the late nineteenth century, bought an old, disused church building at 916-70 Laguna Street in the late 1950s. When this church became too cramped the congregation replaced it with a new facility in 1969-73 (building extant).

²⁷⁵ Broussard, 183.

²⁷⁶ Broussard, 187.

²⁷⁷ San Francisco Department of Building Inspection, "Permits on file for 2159 Golden Gate Avenue."



Figure 36. Third Baptist Church, 1953
Source: San Francisco Public Library



Figure 37. A.M.E. Zion Church, 1964
Source: San Francisco Public Library

Other Prominent African American Activists in Midcentury San Francisco

In addition to those very prominent individuals described above, several other people, both newcomers and natives, made significant contributions to the stability and betterment of San Francisco's African American community, including Fred Haynes, Robert B. Flippin, James Stratten, Sue Baily Thurman, and Frances B. Glover.

Reverend Frederick (Fred) Douglas Haynes was a Baptist clergyman active in the Third Baptist Church. Born in 1899, Haynes was a member of the prewar African American community, though he remained active in civil rights efforts and led his church from World War II until his death in 1971. He was married to Charlie Mae (Crawford) Haynes, a singer and church worker who was a successful candidate for the San Francisco School Board.²⁷⁸

Robert B. Flippin, the able leader of the Booker T. Washington Community Center, was another member of San Francisco's prewar African American community who remained active into the postwar era. Robert Flippin was born December 24, 1903 in Nebraska. During World War II he became the first African American parole officer at San Quentin Prison, remaining in that position until his death in 1963.²⁷⁹

James Stratten arrived in San Francisco in 1941 to serve as the associate regional supervisor for the YMCA-USO, helping to coordinate activities for African American soldiers on leave in the city. After the war he became the executive director of the Booker T. Washington Community Center, the most important secular organization established by African Americans during the pre-World War II era.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ California Historical Society, "Finding Aid for Frederick Douglas Haynes family papers."

²⁷⁹ U.S. Census.

²⁸⁰ Broussard, 184.

Stratten oversaw the construction of the Booker T. Washington Community Center’s existing building at 800 Presidio Boulevard (building extant) **(Figure 38)**.

Men were not the only important figures in postwar San Francisco’s African American community. Educated at Oberlin and Spelman colleges, Sue Baily Thurman was married to Reverend Howard Thurman of All Peoples Fellowship Church. She had taught at the Hampton Institute, later working in the Washington, D.C. offices of the YWCA, before coming to San Francisco after World War II to found a local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women. This civic organization achieved much for civil rights and women’s rights under Thurman’s directorship. Based on her accomplishments, Thurman was subsequently appointed to represent the United States at a UNESCO conference held in Paris in 1949.²⁸¹

Another prominent African American woman active in postwar San Francisco was Frances B. Glover. Glover was married to D. Donald Glover, vice-chairman of the California Federation of Civic Unity. She was educated at West Virginia State College and Ohio State University. Before coming to San Francisco after World War II, Mrs. Glover worked with Mary McLeod Bethune at the National Youth Administration’s Division of Negro Affairs in Ohio. During the 1950s, Glover served as the managing editor of Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Jr.’s *Sun-Reporter* and as secretary to the board of directors of the Central YMCA.²⁸²

San Francisco Council for Civic Unity

Founded in the waning days of World War II, the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity (CCU) was an interracial organization that was very effective in San Francisco’s civil rights community during the postwar period. Led for many years by a young White liberal named Edward Howden, the CCU leveraged the money and political influence of mainstream civic leaders to achieve much for San Francisco’s African American community. The organization, which was based in offices at 437 Market Street (building no longer extant), had between 1,700 and 1,800 members at its peak and an annual budget of between \$25,000 and \$30,000. The CCU successfully lobbied local and state legislators to pass laws that forbade discrimination in employment, accommodations, and housing and urban development. The organization was instrumental in the creation of the California Fair Employment Practices Commission (CFEPC). The CCU also published many studies and had a radio program called “Dateline Freedom.” The CCU was closely allied with the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP and other important Black-led groups. Together, these groups formed an important consortium of organizations that became extremely effective fighting official discrimination during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁸³



Figure 38. Booker T. Washington Center
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

²⁸¹ Broussard, 185.

²⁸² Broussard, 185.

²⁸³ Broussard, 197-201.

Societal Stressors

Despite the many advances that San Francisco's African Americans had made during the postwar period, persistent unemployment and underemployment, housing discrimination, and the scarcity of healthcare and recreational facilities in predominantly Black neighborhoods created conditions ripe for social pathologies. Crime was on the rise in San Francisco during the 1950s, especially in the city's Black neighborhoods. Several well-publicized incidents lead to an aggressive campaign by the African American press to expose and eliminate crime and vice in the Fillmore district.²⁸⁴ In addition to serious crimes like homicide and assault, arrests for petty crimes like vagrancy, street gambling, prostitution, and public drunkenness were common. Unfortunately, Blacks were twice as likely to be arrested as Whites, leading to charges of discrimination.²⁸⁵ These arrests were sometimes compounded by police violence, incidents of which were chronicled in the *Sun-Reporter*.²⁸⁶ Attempts to create a citizen-controlled review board to get a handle on police brutality were unsuccessful, and within the African American community there developed a pervasive distrust of the SFPD that would fester and eventually result in the Hunters Point disorder of 1966.²⁸⁷

As early as 1947, San Francisco District Attorney Edmund G. "Pat" Brown appointed the prominent African American attorney R.J. Reynolds to study the rising crime rate in San Francisco's African American neighborhoods. Reynolds' study confirmed the high incidence of certain crimes in the Fillmore district, but he concluded that Blacks were just more likely to be arrested than Whites for committing similar crimes. He also described crime in the city's Black neighborhoods as a generational aberration that he attributed to the influx of rural Southerners during World War II, many of whom he said had had a difficult time adjusting to city life. As evidence, Reynolds pointed out that before World War II San Francisco's African American residents committed many fewer crimes per capita than Whites. He concluded that Black crime would "level off" once the community gained equal access to jobs and housing and became better-integrated into local society.²⁸⁸

African American Cultural Contributions: 1946-1960

African American culture flowered in San Francisco during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, a period when the Fillmore district was nicknamed the "Harlem of the West" (**Figure 39**). During this time African American entrepreneurs opened several notable bars and nightclubs, including Louis Landry's New Orleans Swing Club (later the Champagne Supper Club), at 1849 Post Street (building no longer extant); the Long Bar, at 1633 Fillmore Street (building extant); Wesley Johnson's Texas Playhouse/Club Flamingo, at 1836-40 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant); Leola King's Blue Mirror, at 935 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant); the Ellis Theater, at 1671 Ellis Street (building no longer extant); Elsie's Breakfast Nook, at 1739 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant); Jackson's Nook, at 1638 Buchanan Street (building no longer extant); James and Mary McCoy's Primalon Ballroom, at 1223 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant); Charles Sullivan's Majestic Ballroom (renamed The Fillmore in 1952 – building extant), at 1805 Geary Boulevard; Charles Sullivan and Edward's Vout House/Jimbo's Bop City, at 1690 Post Street (building moved to 1712 Fillmore street ca. 1979); and Charles Sullivan's Booker T. Washington Hotel and Cocktail Lounge, at 1540 Ellis Street (building no longer extant).²⁸⁹ Jimbo's Bop City, which was later Marcus Books, is now City Landmark No. 266.

²⁸⁴ Broussard, 233.

²⁸⁵ Miller, 232.

²⁸⁶ Miller, 141.

²⁸⁷ Crowe, 218.

²⁸⁸ Broussard, 232.

²⁸⁹ Pepin and Watts, 72.

These postwar clubs joined the legendary “Big Three,” which had opened in the early 1930s near the intersection of Fillmore and Sutter streets (discussed above). All of these clubs booked Black, White, and interracial acts and attracted a similarly mixed crowd of revelers.²⁹⁰ Notable performers, including Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Chet Baker, Dinah Washington, Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Dave Brubeck, and many others performed at these venues. *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist and Fillmore district regular Herb Caen described the “after hours” scene in the Fillmore district:

Around 1 A.M., the crowd started filing out, to gather in knots on the sidewalk, yelling, laughing, chattering away. The Young San Franciscans, in the glow of health, the time of their lives. The mood was still as mellow as the weather, as redolent of the city’s long history as the foghorn that sounded occasionally. I thought briefly of my own youth, of making the rounds in The City That Was, hitting the after-hours spots, “slumming” (what a word) in Fillmore district jazz joints where a guy named Jimbo (Edwards) served up booze in a thick coffee cup.²⁹¹



Figure 39. 1800 block of Fillmore Street, looking south, 1964

Source: San Francisco Public Library

African American performers from out of town usually stayed in Fillmore district hotels and boardinghouses, including the Manor Plaza Hotel, at 930 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant) and the Booker T. Washington Hotel (building no longer extant). Although it was not a nightclub, the Melrose Record Shop, at 1226 Fillmore Street (building no longer extant), was another important business, where local residents could buy the latest jazz, blues, classical, and other styles of music on

²⁹⁰ Pepin and Watts, 72.

²⁹¹ As quoted in James R. Smith, *San Francisco's Lost Landmarks* (Sanger, CA: Word Dancer Press, 2005), 86.

records. Author Maya Angelou worked at the Melrose Record Shop during the 1950s, a time that she also danced professionally at the Purple Onion in North Beach (**Figure 40**).²⁹²

Commemorated in the lyrics of Lowell Fulson’s “Fillmore Mess Around” and in the pages of Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, these Fillmore nightclubs, taverns, and bars were part of a thriving business district containing dozens of other African American-owned businesses, including barbershops, billiards parlors, cleaners, shoeshine stands, barbeque pits, record stores, and various other stores and offices.²⁹³

Many people who grew up in the Fillmore do not recall the “blight” and slum conditions that City officials described in planning documents, but rather a tough but multicultural neighborhood where people of all races got along well enough – all participating in creating a cultural life that was uniquely San Franciscan. Steve Nakajo, a Japanese American resident of the Fillmore district in the 1950s, described the scene:

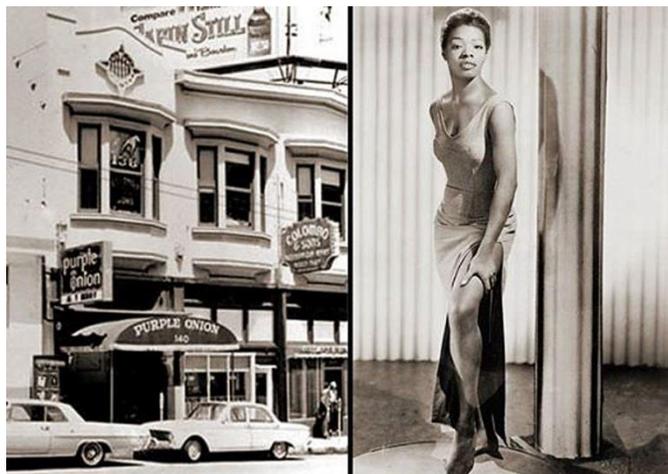


Figure 40. Purple Onion and Maya Angelou
Source: San Francisco Public Library

I had a mixed group of friends. Japanese, Filipino, Black. Mixed, like the neighborhood. We had the J-town walk. The J-town feel. When we got down to the Fillmore, we’d check everyone out and they’d check us out, because you had to know who your rivals were. The Fillmore was tough, but happenin’.

Walking down Fillmore Street with my friends was so cool. There were movie theaters. Soul food restaurants. Pool halls. A bowling alley and roller skating rink. You walked by different doorways, and you started to hear doo-wop. In the middle of the afternoon, these guys are cutting it up, singing in the doorway because the marble floor gives a better sound.

You know how kids in the suburbs go to amusement parks, or some place like that where kids go there all day for amusement? Well, Fillmore Street was like that for me.²⁹⁴

The famous Black nightclubs hosted both local and national talent. Well-known local musicians who played in these clubs included jazz drummer Earl Watkins, who played with Earl Hines and Dizzy Gillespie; bassist Vernon Alley, who played with the Wes Peoples Band and later Lionel Hampton’s band; drummer Eddie Alley (Vernon’s brother), who played with the Wes Peoples Band; singer Sugar Pie DeSanto; saxophonist John Handy, who played with Charles Mingus; violinist, bassist, and photographer Johnnie Ingram, who played with his own band, the Rhythm Czars; pianist Frank Jackson, who played with his own band, the Frank Jackson Trio; pianist and trombonist Wayne Wallace, who performed with various musicians, including John Lee Hooker, Sonny Rollins, and Ray Charles; trumpeter F. Allen Smith, who played with Benny Goodman’s band; and many others. Singer Sugar Pie DeSanto described the scene:

²⁹² Pepin and Watts, 56.

²⁹³ Pepin and Watts, 13.

²⁹⁴ As quoted in Pepin and Watts, 40.

The Fillmore club scene was a mixture. You'd go in one club, maybe the Sportsman, and they'd be doing blues and jazz. You'd go down the street, and they'd be doing jazz. Then another place would be records. You could just go from one end of the neighborhood to the other, and every block had a club. If you were a musician and needed a gig, you just went to the Fillmore. You could make a living.²⁹⁵

By the mid-1950s, San Francisco was widely recognized as the center of "West Coast Jazz," a more structured and less frenetic, but equally "hot," variant of America's most famous indigenous musical style.

Most people who remembered the Fillmore district's jazz scene mention how everyone dressed up to go out (**Figure 41**). Former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown describes the dress code of the Fillmore in the 1950s:

People would get dressed to kill. You saw great peacocks. Stacey Adams shoes with the white strings showing that they had been cleaned with Clorox. Diamond stick pins. Satin ties and long coats. Great looking jewelry on the women. Fur coats—there was no such thing as an endangered species. Believe me, you didn't go out in jeans and sneakers. You had to be dressed. It was a great, great time.²⁹⁶

Unfortunately for posterity, the Fillmore's place as one of America's most important African American-dominated entertainment zones, rivaling only New York's Harlem, came to an abrupt end with the Redevelopment Agency's demolition of the district during the 1960s and 1970s. Nearly all of the buildings housing the businesses mentioned above were destroyed, forcing them to relocate. Though many businesses were successfully relocated, and some limped along for a while, most soon closed for good because the community that had sustained them had been scattered to various parts of the Bay Area, reducing the resident population of the Fillmore district and therefore the number of people who had previously steadily patronized these businesses.



Figure 41. Patrons in front of Club Flamingo, ca. 1955
Source: Collection of Wesley Johnson

bob Kaufman

Music was not the only arena in which African Americans distinguished themselves in midcentury San Francisco. One of the then most widely respected but today little-known poets of the "San Francisco Renaissance" was a mixed-race man named bob Kaufman (**Figure 42**).²⁹⁷ Born in New Orleans to a German-Jewish father and an African American mother, bob Kaufman was first employed as a merchant marine. He met Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs while studying at the New School in New York in the 1940s. The three men left for San Francisco together where they joined Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac – together forming the core of the city's "Beatnik" community. Kaufman's

²⁹⁵ As quoted in Pepin and Watts, 73.

²⁹⁶ As quoted in Pepin and Watts, 38.

²⁹⁷ Kaufman spelled his first name with two lower-case b's.

poetry, which was heavily influenced by the melodic structure of jazz, became very popular in France, where he was referred to as the “black American Rimbaud.” Kaufman was friends with the pioneering figures of be-bop, including Thelonius Monk, Charles Mingus, and Charlie Parker. Kaufman’s desire to free poetry from the printed page – much as jazz had freed music from the printed score – influenced his fellow beatniks, including Allen Ginsberg’s first public reading of “Howl.” In San Francisco, Kaufman performed his poetry at the Coffee Gallery or in the streets, eschewing the bourgeois café culture entirely. His work was published by City Lights, the famous bookstore on Columbus Avenue (building still extant). He bounced around different apartments in North Beach and Telegraph Hill before moving to New York in the early 1960s. After President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, bob Kaufman took a Buddhist vow of silence that he maintained for a decade. bob Kaufman, who once declared that “I want to be anonymous...my ambition is to be completely forgotten,” died of emphysema in 1986 after a long cycle of poverty and methadone addiction, interwoven among extended creative periods.²⁹⁸



Figure 42. bob Kaufman
Source: unknown

F. Struggle for Civil Rights and Equality in San Francisco: 1960-1980

The struggle for civil rights in San Francisco, which began in the 1950s, picked up momentum during the early 1960s, as a new generation of activists and organizations such as CORE challenged the leadership of the NAACP and National Urban League. CORE and its allies staged sit-ins and demonstrations against businesses that refused to hire and/or promote African Americans. Winning several early successes, this younger generation of African American activists and their White allies pressed forward with demands for full racial equality, not only in employment, but also housing, schooling, and access to healthcare. Growing tensions with the police unleashed riots in Bayview-Hunters Point and the Fillmore in 1966. Increasingly frustrated by what was widely perceived to be government inaction, many African Americans during this era turned toward more radical groups, especially the Black Panthers. The late 1960s and early 1970s posed an existential threat to San Francisco’s Black community as redevelopment tore through the Fillmore district, forcing hundreds of Black-owned businesses and thousands of African American residents out of the city. After reaching a high point in 1970, San Francisco’s Black population began to decline for the first time since 1920.

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Population Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1960-1980

Throughout the 1960s, San Francisco’s African American population was still on the rise, increasing from 74,383 (10 percent) in 1960 to 96,078 in 1970 (over 13 percent).²⁹⁹ Most of the newcomers were from the same states that had been the primary sources of Black migration during World War II: Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. In addition to the rising African American population, the continued exodus of White people (36,700 between 1960 and 1970) from the city to the suburbs contributed to African Americans comprising a growing percentage of the city’s population.³⁰⁰ By the late 1970s, African Americans’ share of the city’s population had begun to decline, shrinking to 86,190 in 1980. Though representing a loss of almost 10,000 people, the percentage of African Americans in the city only declined to 12.7 percent, largely because the city’s overall population had shrunk at an even greater rate, dropping from 715,674 in 1970 to 678,974 in 1980.³⁰¹ Reasons for San Francisco’s shrinking Black

²⁹⁸ “Bob Kaufman: The Enigmatic Beat Poet,” <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5810>

²⁹⁹ De Graaf et al, 33.

³⁰⁰ Miller, 164.

³⁰¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960-1980.

population during the 1970s can largely be attributed to the parallel processes of state-sanctioned redevelopment and improved access to housing in the suburbs.

Occupational Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1960-1980

Despite comprising well over 10 percent of San Francisco's population during this period, the African American community as a whole did not experience a commensurate rise in economic status. Though more African Americans were joining the white-collar professions, many more were losing steady blue-collar jobs as the city deindustrialized. By 1970, 21.1 percent of San Francisco's African Americans lived below the poverty line, a marked contrast to the 4.1 percent of the city's overall population that did.³⁰²

The decade between 1960 and 1970 saw manufacturing employment in San Francisco decline by an astounding 19 percent. Hundreds of industrial enterprises moved to the suburbs, where they could have access to improved freeway connections, modern infrastructure and facilities, lower taxes, and a less labor-friendly political environment.³⁰³ The 1974 closure of the Hunters Point Naval Ship Yard dealt a particularly serious blow to African Americans (**Figure 43**). After it closed, over five thousand workers lost their jobs, including many African Americans. Although the Navy tried to help the laid-off workers find comparable jobs at other bases, the impacts on San Francisco's African American population were devastating. Already afflicted with a double-digit unemployment rate, the percentage of Bayview-Hunters Point residents mired in poverty surged to 20 percent.³⁰⁴ In a city already in the throes of deindustrialization, the closure of the shipyard drained the largest reservoir of high-paying skilled and semiskilled jobs for non-college educated people. As community activist Espanola Jackson described it: "The community died when the shipyard left. There was nothing. Everything that was here disappeared."³⁰⁵



Figure 43. Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, 1950
Source: San Francisco Public Library

As legal barriers to Blacks living in the suburbs began to fall in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many African Americans began to leave San Francisco, following jobs and housing to the East Bay and the Peninsula. Leading destinations included the East Bay cities of Oakland and Richmond and the Peninsula suburbs of Daly City, Pacifica, Menlo Park, and East Palo Alto. At the same time, college-educated African Americans in San Francisco began entering the professional fields in large numbers for the first time, including business, government, and the legal and medical professions. These two factors – middle-class exodus and improved access to professional jobs – led to a gradual socio-economic bifurcation of San Francisco's Black population into two communities: a prosperous middle class employed in the professions and a growing unemployed and underemployed underclass.

³⁰² Miller, 53.

³⁰³ Miller, 53.

³⁰⁴ Daniel Jacobson and Chris Stallworth, *Bayview-Hunters Point: Urban Transformations and Community Cooptation* (Paper prepared for Urban Studies Class at Stanford University, 2009), 13.

³⁰⁵ Espanola Jackson, as quoted in: Naval Facilities Engineering Command, D-44.

African Americans had long experienced unfair hiring in government employment, particularly in the San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) and the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD). After hiring one African American in 1955 – a man named Earl Gage – the SFFD did not hire another Black firefighter until 1967.³⁰⁶ At the SFPD the racial imbalance was so notable that in 1973 a Federal Judge ordered minority cadets to be hired at a 3-to-2 ratio to White cadets for as long as it would take to reach 30 percent minority employment.³⁰⁷ African Americans did better in other areas of government employment but they had to compete against an entrenched White (largely Irish and Italian American) civil service that continued to dominate most city departments well into the 1980s. African Americans also had to compete against surging ethnic and immigrant populations, including Asians (primarily Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese Americans), whose share of San Francisco’s population increased from 8 percent in 1960, to 13.3 percent in 1970, and 22 percent in 1980. During this same period Latinos grew from around 7 percent of the population in 1960, to 9.7 percent in 1970, and 12.4 percent in 1980.³⁰⁸

African Americans made some impressive advances in the building trades during the 1960s and 1970s, but much of this was tied to specific federal construction programs and no successful attempt was made to transfer these mandates to private industry.³⁰⁹

Residential Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1960-1980

Even with the dismantling of the legal infrastructure of segregation during the late 1960s and early 1970s, African Americans continued to struggle to find satisfactory housing in San Francisco. By 1960, more than one-third of San Francisco’s African American community lived in the Western Addition, comprising 46 percent of the neighborhood’s population.³¹⁰ By 1970, African Americans comprised at least 25 percent of the population of 14 of the 17 census tracts in the Western Addition. Seven of these census tracts (153, 158, 161, 163, 164, 167, and 168) contained populations that were at least 50 percent African American, with tract 158 – an area bounded by Steiner, Geary, Baker, and Fulton streets – registering a population that was 80.3 percent Black. When plotted on a map, the heavily African American census tracts of the Western Addition formed a rough square bounded by Arguello Avenue and Stanyan and Parker streets to the west; Waller Street and Duboce Avenue to the south; Gough Street and Van Ness Avenue to the east, and California Street to the north **(Figure 44)**.³¹¹

The 1970 Census was completed after the Redevelopment Agency had completed much of the A-1 (begun in 1956) and the massive A-2 (begun in 1964) project areas, suggesting that the populations of these Western Addition census tracts were likely much higher during the early-to-mid-1960s. These two projects displaced an estimated 12,000 to 20,000 residents from the Western Addition. Despite relocation certificates issued by the Redevelopment Agency to facilitate relocation within San Francisco, many African Americans had trouble finding new housing in other parts of the city and decamped for other cities.

³⁰⁶ Miller, 290.

³⁰⁷ Miller, 290.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960-1980.

³⁰⁹ Miller, 294.

³¹⁰ Miller, 165.

³¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970.

Avenue to the north, and I-280 to the south and east) registering a population that was 78.2 percent African American. The only section of the OMI district to remain predominantly White was the exclusive Ingleside Terraces neighborhood.³¹³ In contrast to the Western Addition, the OMI's residents –both Black and White – were overwhelmingly owner-occupants. Homeownership rates for African Americans were also very high in parts of the Bayview-Hunters Point district, especially the single-family rowhouse tracts of the Bayview proper and Silver Terrace. Indeed, until recently, the Bayview-Hunters Point District enjoyed some of San Francisco's highest rates of homeownership.

These three core areas: the Western Addition, Bayview-Hunters Point/Potrero, and the OMI housed the vast majority of all African Americans in San Francisco. In the rest of the city, 63 census tracts registered populations that were less than 2 percent African American. The only other census tracts outside these three areas that contained substantial African American populations in 1970 were census tracts 180 and 605. Census Tract 180, an area bounded by Harrison Street to the northwest, Third Street to the northeast, Townsend Street to the southeast, and 11th Street to the southwest, was 40.6 percent African American. This census tract, at the heart of the South of Market Area, once housed many residential hotels, where older, single male workers lived out their days, including many retired Black maritime workers. Census tract 605, an area encompassing McLaren Park, the Sunnydale and Velasco public housing projects, and the Geneva Towers housing development in Visitation Valley, was 46.5 percent Black in 1970.³¹⁴

Several smaller enclaves of African Americans could be found scattered throughout the city in 1970. One of the more notable was in Diamond Heights, a Redevelopment Agency project that created an entirely new residential neighborhood on 325 acres of former rangeland on Red Rock and Gold Mine Hills near Glen Park. Part of the project included the construction of 471 units of moderate and low-income housing along Addison, Moffitt, and Bemis streets. This housing, which was constructed 1962-63, was privately financed using low-cost FHA loans. The first complex, which consisted of 275 units, was called Glenridge; it was a cooperative development similar to St. Francis Square and several others built in the Western Addition. The other three developments were all rental housing. Some of this housing was reserved for African Americans evicted from the Western Addition and by the late 1960s a small African American community had emerged in Diamond Heights. Today the area remains 12 percent Black.³¹⁵

Rumford Fair Housing Bill

The dispersal of African Americans from of the Western Addition into other parts of the city was facilitated in part by the gradual chipping away at legal and extralegal barriers to equal housing opportunity. Though racial covenants and deed restrictions were stricken down by the courts as unenforceable in 1948, and the SFHA's "neighborhood pattern" policy was dismantled in 1952, less formal means of discrimination remained common for much longer. Unable to legally prevent African Americans from buying in White areas, many realtors simply steered Black clients to transitional neighborhoods, where "block-busting" may have occurred, such as in the OMI District. In the private rental market, White landlords would often tell African American applicants that the unit had just been rented even if it had not. Many recorded incidents of discrimination were documented by the newly founded San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC), including a case in 1967 in which a Black high school teacher named Robert Coleman was denied an apartment at 428 Sanchez Street based on his race. Told over the phone that it was available, an employee of Skyline Realty immediately told Mr. Coleman that it had been rented after Coleman arrived to see the unit.³¹⁶ With 45 percent of San

³¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970.

³¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970.

³¹⁵ Richard Brandi, *A Reevaluation of Urban Renewal in San Francisco* (Master's Thesis, Goucher College, 2008), 82-5.

Francisco's landlords admitting outright that they would not rent to African Americans, it shows how difficult it was for Black San Franciscans to find a place to live in much of San Francisco.

In response to incidents of illegal housing discrimination, State Assemblyman William Byron Rumford, an African American representing parts of Oakland, Emeryville, and Berkeley, sponsored a bill to outlaw informal means of housing discrimination (**Figure 45**). The Rumford Fair Housing Act, approved by the California Legislature in 1963, prevented property owners and landlords from denying housing to anyone on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sex, marital status, physical handicap, or familial status.³¹⁷ Controversial from the start, the act was quickly overturned by the subsequent passage of Proposition 14 by the majority of California's voters in 1964. Drafted by the California Real Estate Association and supported by many Republican organizations, Proposition 14 amended the California Constitution to give property owners "absolute discretion" in selecting tenants and buyers.³¹⁸ In response, the federal government immediately cut off all Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds to California. Though Proposition 14 was ultimately overturned in 1966 by the California Supreme Court, Pat Brown lost the governorship to Ronald Reagan in 1966, partly because of his support of the Rumford Fair Housing Act.³¹⁹



Figure 45. William Byron Rumford, ca. 1963

Source: California State Library

Redevelopment: Redevelopment Agency Demolishes the Fillmore District: 1957-1974

State-sponsored urban renewal swept through many American cities after World War II. Often justified by the laudable goal of improving living conditions for people living in aging and sometimes decrepit inner-city neighborhoods, urban renewal was essentially a property tax-financed slush fund for private real estate developers. Founded in 1948, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's avowed mission was to modernize and redevelop "blighted" areas of the city with modern infrastructure and development. However, Redevelopment Agency policy was controlled by prominent members of San Francisco's business community, whose real motivation was the replacement of low-value "slums" with high-value commercial and residential development. City officials, anxious for enhanced property tax revenues, did little to stop the destruction of poor and working-class communities targeted by Redevelopment during the 1960s and 1970s.

San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

At first the Redevelopment Agency concentrated on less-controversial projects, including the relocation of the old Produce District to Bayview-Hunters Point and the redevelopment of its site with the Golden Gateway and Embarcadero Center projects. Another early project involved the condemnation a ranch and several rural landholdings on Gold Mine and Red Rock Hills to make way for the new community of Diamond Heights. Neither of these project areas contained many residents, so they were completed relatively quickly and without much controversy. The Redevelopment Agency ran into trouble when it

³¹⁶ Miller, 119.

³¹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 47.

³¹⁸ Joseph, 47.

³¹⁹ Joseph, 48.

began targeting thriving working-class residential neighborhoods, especially the South of Market Area, the Western Addition, and the Mission district. Residents of these three neighborhoods, including many politically savvy union members, were successful in opposing, delaying, and mitigating some of the worst effects of Redevelopment.³²⁰

In order for the Redevelopment Agency to establish a “project area” it had to demonstrate that the neighborhood was “blighted.” Though this term was obviously quite subjective, to justify the redevelopment of the Western Addition, the Redevelopment Agency published reports defining blight as the “unlawful, non-conforming” conversion of single-family dwellings into apartments. Because so much of the housing stock in the Western Addition consisted of single-family dwellings and flats converted into apartments (mostly during World War II) the “evidence” was incontrovertible, the Western Addition was blighted.³²¹ The solution, according to the Redevelopment Agency, was to tear it all down and start over, combining the hundreds of small house lots into large “superblocks” capable of accommodating much larger buildings, including high-rise residential towers and shopping malls.

The local business community, represented by the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee and its advocacy arm, the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), were among the Redevelopment Agency’s biggest cheerleaders. As early as the 1930s, corporate property owners called for the removal of the “dreary Little Tokyo” that lay just west of San Francisco’s Civic Center. In 1943, the *San Francisco Chronicle* began a series of articles covering conditions in the Western Addition, which the articles referred to as “Little Dead End.”³²² Two years later, the Western Addition was targeted in the 1945 *Master Plan of San Francisco*, published by the San Francisco Planning Department, whose authors stated very frankly what many business leaders and government representatives hesitated to say in public:

It is close to the financial district...and contains slopes on which apartments with fine views can be erected. In view of the characteristically low incomes of colored and foreign-born families, only a relatively small proportion of them may be expected to occupy quarters in the new development.³²³

Of course, none of these articles or reports acknowledged the rich cultural heritage of the Western Addition, its thriving ethnic enclaves, or its bustling commercial thoroughfares. Though the Western Addition certainly had problems, most local residents did not want to move. As early as 1948, rumors began to reach the ears of local residents that the corporate real estate interests wanted them out. A multiracial coalition of residents came together in 1948 to voice their concerns. In a meeting held in July of that year at the Buchanan Street YMCA, at 1530 Buchanan Street (building extant), Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Jr., then head of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, and Mrs. Michi Onuma, publisher of the *Progressive News*, stated that “no guarantees have been provided that new housing built in the area will not be priced out of the range of the average worker living there.” Goodlett stated prophetically: “scores of small businessmen would be wiped out by the plan.”³²⁴

³²⁰ Chester Hartman, *The Transformation of San Francisco* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984).

³²¹ San Francisco Department of Public Works, Bureau of Building Inspection, Urban Renewal Division, *Survey of Converted Residential Structures in Study Areas A-2, A-3, and A-4, Western Addition, San Francisco, California* (San Francisco: November 1958).

³²² Pepin and Watts, 166.

³²³ San Francisco Planning Department, *The Master Plan of San Francisco: The Redevelopment of Blighted Areas* (San Francisco: 1945).

³²⁴ Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, as quoted in Pepin and Watts, 167.

Western Addition Project Area A-1

“This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it.” – Justin Herman, 1970.³²⁵

Though he was speaking of the South of Market Area, another project area in the sights of the Redevelopment Agency, Justin Herman, executive director of the Redevelopment Agency, described the underlying reason for redevelopment in the Western Addition. Located just west of the Civic Center and within easy commuting range of the Financial District, the Western Addition was to be redeveloped with high and mid-rise luxury apartments and shopping centers. The first phase, Project Area A-1, was a 108-swath bounded by Post Street to the north, Franklin Street to the east, Eddy and O’Farrell streets to the south, and Broderick Street to the west (**Figure 46**). Geary Street would be widened into a multi-lane, grade-separated boulevard. On the north side of Geary Boulevard, a Japanese-themed shopping center would take the place of Victorian-era housing and businesses. High-rise apartment buildings would go up along Franklin and Gough streets. Plans called for demolishing every building in A-1 except for the Buchanan Street YMCA (building extant) and two public schools: Raphael Weill (now Rosa Parks) Elementary School, at 1501 O’Farrell Street (building extant); and Benjamin Franklin Middle School (now Gateway High School), at 1430 Scott Street (building extant).³²⁶

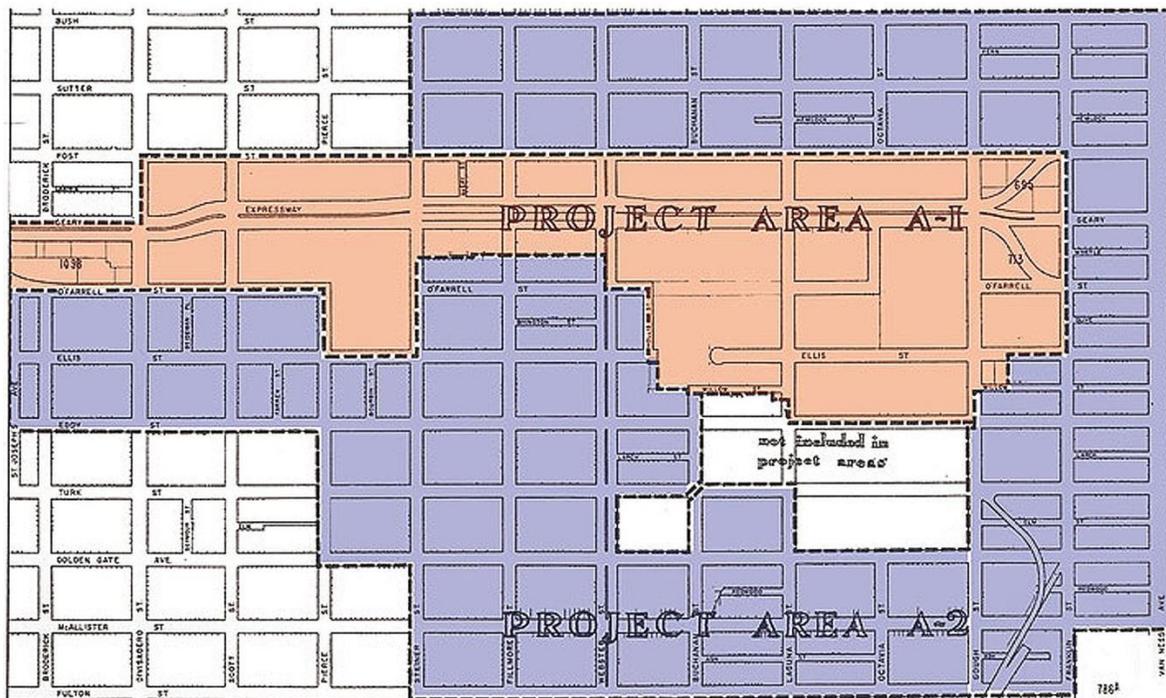


Figure 46. Map showing Redevelopment Project Areas A-1 and A-2
 Source: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

The Redevelopment Agency’s A-1 project dislodged at least 1,350 households and 358 businesses from the heart of the old Fillmore. Prior to 1958, the population of the A-1 project area was 6,112. After work was completed in 1973 it was 3,724. It is uncertain where all the displaced people went, but anecdotal information suggests that some moved into the adjoining Haight-Asbury and Duboce Triangle neighborhoods to the south. Others moved to Bayview-Hunters Point, the OMI District, or out of the city

³²⁵ Hartman.

³²⁶ Successor to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, “Redevelopment Program,” *Western Addition A-1*, <http://www.sfredevelopment.org/index.aspx?page=64>

altogether. The evictions were obviously very controversial and neighborhood residents fought to stay. Resistance was led by a group calling itself the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO). Abla led by the Reverend Hannibal Williams, WACO filed a lawsuit against the Redevelopment Agency in 1967, forcing it to prioritize the rehousing of local residents in the project area. Though a huge victory, the lawsuit came too late for most residents of A-1; most of the businesses and people were already gone. Probably the most beneficial impact of the lawsuit was a commitment from the Redevelopment Agency to prioritize the construction of affordable housing in the upcoming A-2 project.³²⁷

St. Francis Square

In addition to WACO, credit for keeping some of the Western Addition's longtime residents in the area goes to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), a traditionally left-wing union with many African American members. In 1960, the ILWU-PMA Pension Fund sponsored a cooperative housing project on a three square-block site bounded by Geary Boulevard to the north, Laguna Street to the east, Ellis Street to the south, and Buchanan Street to the west. Working with the Redevelopment Agency, the ILWU-PMA trustees founded the ILWU Longshore Redevelopment Corporation. The new venture hired the notable modernist architecture firm of Marquis & Stoller and put together a proposal to build a complex of cooperative garden apartments for union members on the site in May 1960 (**Figure 47**). The project got underway in 1962 and was completed at the end of 1963. Named St. Francis Square, the complex consists of 299 units in 28 buildings arrayed around verdant landscaping designed by Lawrence Halprin. The interior of the site is largely free of vehicular traffic, with internal streets and walkways named for famous California ships and prominent union members.³²⁸ St. Francis Square was instantly successful and became known as a good example of a high-quality, well-run, and integrated community housing African Americans, Whites, Latinos, Asians, and others. Today St. Francis Square is known as being one of the most architecturally and historically significant midcentury housing developments in San Francisco. It is still extant and very intact.



Figure 47. St. Francis Square, 1965
Source: San Francisco Public Library

Western Addition Project Area A-2

After the A-2 project area got underway, the ILWU got involved again, forming the Joint Housing Committee to ensure that all residents of A-2, not merely union members, could secure decent replacement housing in the neighborhood. As veterans of several major strikes and negotiations with government bodies, the ILWU understood that collective action was the only way to accomplish anything. A statement by the union summarized the project's goals:

Recent expressions from the office of the Redevelopment Agency seem designed to stampede residents of the second Western Addition Project Area into the belief that mass evacuation of their homes is obligatory and inevitable, and that each family would

³²⁷ Successor to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, "Redevelopment Program," *Western Addition A-1*, <http://www.sfdevelopment.org/index.aspx?page=64>

³²⁸ Carol Cuenod, "Redevelopment A-1 and Origin of St. Francis Square," *FoundSF*: http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Redevelopment_A-1_and_Origin_of_St._Francis_Square

do well to find its own separate solution to the problem of dislocation. The ILWU serves notice now that it will urge its members to join with all other tenants in A-2 in a mass refusal to budge from present dwellings until each and every family in the area has been provided with a home fit to live in a price they can afford.³²⁹

With St. Francis Square under its belt, the ILWU-PMA Longshore Redevelopment Corporation developed an alternative plan that ended up re-housing many longtime residents in the neighborhood. The ILWU plan phased redevelopment of A-2 in stages so that there would be no mass exodus from existing housing. As new housing was completed, current residents would get first priority. The ILWU also assisted local African American groups to develop new co-op apartment complexes modeled on St. Francis Square, including Martin Luther King-Marcus Garvey Square, at 1680 Eddy Street; Loren Miller Homes, at 937 McAllister Street; and Ammel Park Coop, at 656 Grove Street.³³⁰ All of these complexes are still extant.

Much larger than A-1, which it completely surrounded, Project Area A-2 was a 60-block, 277-acre swath of the Western Addition. Though approved by the Board of Supervisors on October 15, 1964, redevelopment of A-2 did not get underway until 1966, in part because the federal government withheld HUD funds following the passage of Proposition 14. Lawsuits filed by WACO further delayed construction. Consequently, construction of A-2 took over four decades, with the final component, the Fillmore Center, not completed until the early 2000s. In contrast to A-1, A-2 included much more low-income housing, mostly in response to the efforts of WACO and the ILWU. Much of the replacement housing consisted of two and three-story townhouse developments built between the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Most of these projects were built within a rectangular area defined by Ellis Street to the north, Gough Street to the east, Fulton Street to the south, and Webster Street to the west.³³¹ This area, which had previously contained approximately 2,500 Victorian-era houses (one of the best remaining collections in San Francisco) was entirely clear-cut (**Figure 48**), with only a handful of architecturally significant specimens saved, relocated, and restored by San Francisco Architectural Heritage.



Figure 48. Demolition of Victorians at Divisadero and Ellis streets, 1960

Source: San Francisco Public Library

Though the Redevelopment Agency argued that the replacement housing was better than what was there before, Redevelopment took a heavy toll on the once-vibrant cultural life of the Western Addition, especially the stretch of Fillmore Street between Pine and Turk that had been known during the 1950s as “Harlem of the West.” With the businesses scattered, much of Fillmore Street remained as barren, vacant lots for decades to come. Years later, Mayor Willie Brown assessed the impact:

³²⁹ Carol Cuenod, “The ILWU and Western Addition Redevelopment A-2,” *FoundSF*: http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_ILWU_and_Western_Addition_Redevelopment_A-2

³³⁰ Carol Cuenod, “The ILWU and Western Addition Redevelopment A-2,” *FoundSF*: http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_ILWU_and_Western_Addition_Redevelopment_A-2

³³¹ Successor to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, “Redevelopment Program,” *Western Addition A-2*, <http://www.sfredevelopment.org/index.aspx?page=65>

I think that the people who wanted to redevelop the Western Addition saw the commercial value of the space. It was centrally located; the dividing line between downtown and the Avenues in every sense of the word. I think they saw land and they had to clear the land, and the only way to clear the land was to use the tools of government to achieve that goal. You look at the results and it does appear to be “Black Removal,” but I think the motivation was pure commercial greed. But it was devastating to the Black community. The churches began to lose populations. The black businesses, which had been viable, wonderful, and productive, were totally destroyed. The entertainment world for African Americans virtually ceased to exist in San Francisco. The great life that was Harlem-ish for us was destroyed by the redevelopment process. It was a blow to African Americans. A blow from which we frankly have never recovered.³³²

Estimates of the number of people displaced from A-2 were as high as 13,500, with 60 percent forced to move out of the Western Addition and 15 percent away from San Francisco altogether.³³³ Though some African Americans eventually returned, especially once the low and moderate-income developments were completed in the early 1970s, redevelopment permanently removed a large stock of affordable housing, replacing it with fewer than 300 units of subsidized housing. By 1971, the Family Service Agency of San Francisco recommended that the Agency cease any further demolition activity or relocations from A-2 because of a worsening citywide housing crisis.³³⁴

The impact to Black-owned business was even worse. Out of 180 Black-owned businesses operating in A-2 before Redevelopment, only 48 were successfully relocated, meaning that 132 went out of business entirely.³³⁵ With the Western Addition’s Black population scattered across the city and the region, Black-owned businesses that catered mainly to African Americans found it difficult to survive when there were not enough Black customers to sustain them. The only other significant business district in a predominantly Black neighborhood was Third Street in Bayview-Hunters Point. There are some long-time African American-owned businesses in the area. One of the most important is Sam Jordan’s Bar, at 4004-06 Third Street (**Figure 49**). Sam Jordan was an African American Navy veteran who arrived in San Francisco after World War II. He bought a tavern in an 1883 Italianate-style commercial building on Third Street in 1958. After renovating the building, he opened Sam Jordan’s Tavern in 1959. The bar, which has served as an important linchpin of the Bayview-Hunters Point’s community, has remained in business in the same location for 55 years. In addition to the role it has played in the local community, the bar served as Sam Jordan’s campaign headquarters when he ran for mayor in 1963. It is San Francisco City Landmark No. 263.³³⁶



Figure 49. Sam Jordan’s Bar
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

³³² Willie Brown, as quoted in Pepin and Watts, 171.

³³³ Miller, 124.

³³⁴ Miller, 125.

³³⁵ Miller, 126.

³³⁶ Stacy Farr, *Landmark Designation Report: “Sam Jordan’s Bar”* (San Francisco: 2013).

Agitation for Civil Rights

In the mid-1960s, while San Francisco's African Americans were fighting the destruction of the Western Addition, others agitated for equal access to jobs, mirroring similar events across the country. Though San Francisco was no Montgomery or Greensboro, it was forced to reckon with its own less-overt but equally demoralizing forms of institutionalized racism. The 1960s witnessed the birth of several influential organizations locally, including the San Francisco chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Unified Freedom Movement (UFM), the Church-Labor Conference (CLC), and the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination. These years were characterized by the adoption of direct action techniques by traditional civil rights organizations, including the San Francisco chapters of the National Urban League and the NAACP. Most of these groups had interracial memberships and White liberals played an active role in many of the demonstrations and sit-ins. Several radical organizations also appeared during this era, including the Black Panther Party, which advocated policies of racial separatism and Black self-determination. The 1960s also marked a changing of the guard, as a new generation of Black leaders, including Terry Francois and Willie Brown, began to participate in state and local government.

African American Political Influence

Though African Americans struggled for fundamental civil rights during the 1960s, their growing numbers gave the community a level of political clout that it had never had before. In part because of the groundbreaking work of people like Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Dr. Daniel Collins, R. J. Reynolds, and many others, Black San Franciscans began to win appointments to city commissions. In 1958, an attorney named John W. Bussey was appointed to the San Francisco Municipal Court. Three years later, in 1961, James Stratten, the longtime director of the Booker T. Washington Community Center, was appointed to the San Francisco Board of Education. In 1964, Reverend Hamilton T. Boswell, pastor of Jones Memorial United Methodist Church, was appointed to the San Francisco Housing Authority Commission. 1964 turned out to be a banner year for Black San Franciscans, for it also marked the appointment of Terry Francois to the Board of Supervisors and the election of Willie L. Brown, Jr., a brilliant young attorney from Mineola, Texas, to the California State Assembly to represent the Western Addition (**Figure 50**). Brown went on to become one of the most powerful politicians in California's history, serving as Speaker of the Assembly from 1980 to 1995 (the longest tenure of any Assembly Speaker), and as Mayor of San Francisco from 1996 until 2004.³³⁷



Figure 50. Willie Brown, 1964
Source: San Francisco Public Library

CORE and the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination

As mentioned previously, the early 1960s was a period of generational change, as people who migrated to the Bay Area during World War II began to age and their offspring – the so-called baby boomers – began composing a larger proportion of the activist community. These individuals, who in many cases had grown up in San Francisco, were not as patient with the gradual pace of political change as their parents might have been. Not content to wait quietly for what might never come, many of San Francisco's new generation of activists openly challenged the longstanding dominance of the NAACP,

³³⁷ Broussard, 242.

the National Urban League, and other mainstream civil rights organizations.³³⁸ This younger generation of activists often preferred direct action over political negotiation to achieve their ends, including demonstrations, picketing, and sit-ins.

On the national stage, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) engaged in non-violent direct action techniques, including sit-ins, jail-ins, and freedom rides to advance the agenda of full civil equality. San Francisco had an active CORE group, which led protests highlighting employment discrimination throughout the city. In Bayview-Hunters Point, an early CORE protest against Lucky Stores, which employed no African Americans before 1948, successfully compelled the chain to begin hiring African Americans.³³⁹ In 1962, members of the San Francisco Negro American Labor Council and the Bay View Citizens' Committee picketed outside the Super Save Store on Third Street, in the Bayview-Hunters Point district, convincing the Chinese owner to hire two African Americans. As explained by Benjamin Christwell of the Bay View Citizens' Committee: "Elementary justice demands that Negroes be hired in businesses where they bank and spend their money. Our committee will continue to advise Negroes not to spend their money where they can't work."³⁴⁰

These early examples of direct action affected relatively small businesses in outlying neighborhoods. The first major effort to compel larger businesses to hire African Americans was launched in October 1963, when the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination, a local outgrowth of CORE, and members of the DuBois Club (a Communist Party organization for young African Americans), targeted Mel's Drive-in, a popular chain of carhops with restaurants throughout the Bay Area. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee staged protests outside the 1601 Monterey Boulevard home of Harold Dobbs, a co-owner of Mel's and a Republican mayoral candidate. In 1963, a mixed group of African Americans and Whites staged sit-ins at Mel's Drive-in at 3355 Geary Boulevard, near Laurel Village (building no longer extant). The sit-ins were extremely embarrassing for Dobbs and his partner Mel Weiss, and after much blustering they agreed to hire and train African Americans as waitresses, cooks, carhops, cashiers, and bartenders.³⁴¹ Dobbs' opponent, Democrat Jack Shelley, a union man and a sympathizer with African American causes, leveraged the bad publicity to his advantage and won the majority of the Black vote in the 1964 mayoral election, providing a conduit for African American political influence at City Hall.

Success at Mel's inspired the Ad Hoc Committee to launch a picketing campaign against the Palace Hotel. As discussed earlier, the Palace had summarily dismissed all of its Black workers in 1889 and since then it had employed virtually no African Americans. For years the NAACP had contemplated taking legal action, but the younger generation of activists no longer had the patience to wait and see. Led by 18-year-old Tracy Sims, a recent graduate of Berkeley High School, the demonstrations at the Palace Hotel gained a significant amount of media attention – not all of it favorable. During one particularly notable demonstration on March 1, 1964, 123 people were arrested, including Thomas N. Burbridge, the young president of the local chapter of the NAACP; attorney and soon-to-be supervisor, Terry Francois; CORE chairman William Bradley; and many others. When police tried to arrest the crowd of Black and White demonstrators, the protestors locked arms and refused to budge (**Figure 51**). The direct action of the young protestors, which played out over several days and nights, was greeted with disapproval by some older members of San Francisco's African American community, including Cecil Poole and NAACP regional director Terea Hall Pittman. Mayor John Shelley, with heavy support from the ILWU, negotiated

³³⁸ Broussard, 199.

³³⁹ Broussard, 119.

³⁴⁰ Benjamin Christwell, as quoted in Miller, 72.

³⁴¹ Miller, 76. Though there is a Mel's Drive-in in this location, it is not the same building where the sit-in was staged. The original was demolished in 1974; the building there now was built in 1988.

a hiring plan that would increase minority employment levels at the Palace Hotel from 0 to between 15 and 20 percent of the total workforce. The management of the Palace also agreed to drop any claims for civil damages against the protestors.³⁴² The Palace Hotel, at 2 New Montgomery Street, is still extant. It is San Francisco City Landmark No. 18.

Emboldened by their victories, the Ad Hoc Committee took on Auto Row, targeting the Don Lee Cadillac dealership at 1000 Van Ness Avenue (building extant), where only seven out of 258 employees were Black. In spite of reservations expressed by Black clergy and more conservative members of the civil rights community, the young activists pressed on. On March 14, 1964, 200 demonstrators chanted and sang freedom songs outside the building (Figure 52). The demonstration concluded with the arrest of 107 demonstrators. Mayor Shelley convinced the activists to cease protests for two weeks while he worked out an agreement with the Automobile Dealers Association. Ultimately the action against the Don Lee dealership was not as clear-cut of a victory as the actions against the Palace Hotel and Mel's Drive-in, and infighting between more moderate members of the civil rights community and more "radical" members soon tore apart the local chapter of the NAACP.³⁴³

Black Panthers

Toward the end of the 1960s, even the successes of CORE and the Ad Hoc Committee proved ineffectual for some in the African American community, and the non-violent direct action agenda of CORE eventually morphed into a more militant branch of activism. This new wave was symbolized by the rise of the Black Panther Party. Founded in Oakland in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party had a broad agenda, which in addition to the traditional focus on improved education, housing, and employment opportunities, advocated armed resistance to police brutality. The Black Panthers had around 200 members in San Francisco, including several students and faculty members at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University). The organization's headquarters moved often between Oakland and Berkeley, with a San Francisco office operating sporadically in different locations on Fillmore Street. The Black Panthers also started a free breakfast program for children that operated out of

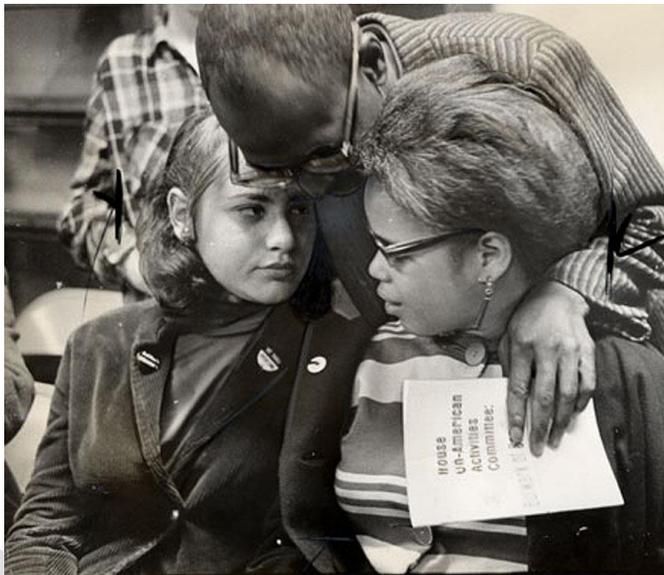


Figure 51. Tracy Sims (right) and other demonstrators at the Palace Hotel, 1964

Source: San Francisco Public Library

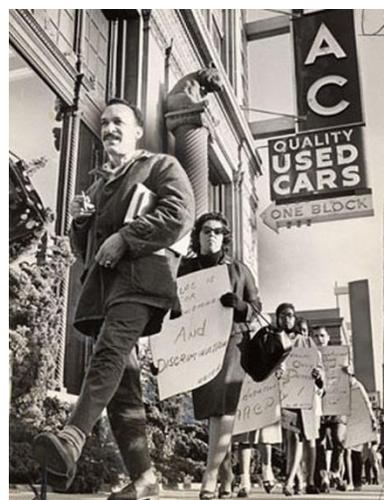


Figure 52. Demonstration in front of Don Lee Cadillac, 1964

Source: San Francisco Public Library

³⁴² Miller, 81.

³⁴³ Miller, 85.

various locations, including the basement of Sacred Heart Church at the corner of Fell and Fillmore streets (**Figure 53**). Sacred Heart Church, which is still extant, is listed in the California Register.

Resistance to Police Brutality

Tension between the African American community and the San Francisco Police Department reached a critical situation in the 1960s. In 1960, African Americans, though just 10 percent of the city's population, represented 35 percent of all arrests.³⁴⁴ The *Sun-Reporter* regularly published front-page stories detailing occurrences of everyday police brutality toward African Americans, including the case of Ralph Newman.³⁴⁵ Newman, who owed \$69 in traffic fines, voluntarily surrendered at the Hall of Justice, at 850 Bryant Street (building extant). Several hours later, he was admitted to Zion Hospital after being badly beaten by two police officers.³⁴⁶ Similar stories circulated among Black neighborhoods, inflaming sentiments and radicalizing formerly moderate citizens against the official state powers.

School Desegregation

For a decade or so after the Supreme Court ruled against segregated schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, San Francisco's public schools remained segregated. In 1962, the Council for Civic Unity (CCU) and CORE published a report documenting how segregated African American students were in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), identifying 17 elementary schools and two junior high schools that were at least 60 percent African American. The report recommended adjusting attendance area boundaries to ensure that schools were integrated. The recommendations were briefly considered by the Board of Education but then quietly dropped.³⁴⁷ Several years later, Mrs. Arthur Bloomfield, a board member of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, urged several Black families to become plaintiffs in a lawsuit to compel the SFUSD to integrate schools through busing. The lawsuit argued that the SFUSD violated the rights of Black students in Bayview-Hunters Point by sending them to equally crowded schools across town in the Western Addition rather than letting them attend under-enrolled, predominantly White schools in the nearby Portola district. After NAACP head Charles Belle blasted Mayor Alioto for dragging his feet on the issue, the Board of Education moved forward with a pilot busing program to integrate the city's public schools. This action was followed by a federal district court decision in 1971 requiring school districts across California to desegregate their schools. Carried out over the next four years, San Francisco's first busing program was a disaster. White parents pulled their children out of public schools en-masse, either sending them to private schools or leaving the city altogether. By 1975, White students dwindled to 25 percent of the district's student body, rendering racial integration largely ineffective.³⁴⁸



Figure 53. Black Panthers breakfast program, Sacred Heart Church, 1968
Source: Ducha Dennis/Found SF

³⁴⁴ Broussard, 176.

³⁴⁵ Crowe, 85.

³⁴⁶ Miller, 88.

³⁴⁷ Miller, 130.

³⁴⁸ Miller, 130.

Integration of the Civil Services

As mentioned previously, the SFFD hired its first African American firefighter, Earl Gage, in 1955. After 12 years on the job, Gage had only three other Black colleagues in a total force of 1,756 men. In 1969, Gage suggested that the SFFD suspend the civil service examinations used to screen applicants or modify them to allow more Blacks to qualify for jobs within the department. When Chief Murray resisted, Black applicants filed a lawsuit charging that the SFFD effectively barred African American and Chicano applicants “solely due to defendants’ illegal and discriminatory, nonmerit, anti-ability test.” The lawsuit was successful and in 1971, Judge William Sweigert ordered the San Francisco Civil Service Commission to modify the exams to reflect the actual job requirements.³⁴⁹ Lack of minority officers was also a problem for the SFPD. In November 1973, Federal Judge Robert Peckham ordered the SFPD to hire minorities at a 3-2 ratio until minority employment comprised at least 30 percent of the force, which would still be far less than the overall minority population of San Francisco at the time (43 percent).³⁵⁰

Trade Unions

As mentioned previously, African Americans had made significant gains in integrating many industrial trade unions – in particular maritime trade unions – including the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Marine Cooks & Stewards (MCS). The ILWU’s predecessor, the International Longshore Association (ILA), had integrated as far back as 1933. By the early 1960s, African Americans constituted a significant proportion of the ILWU’s rank-and-file and were elected to important leadership roles in the union, some of which served as springboards to appointments to city commissions. On the other hand, African Americans had found it difficult to break into the building trades, particularly various Carpenters’ Union locals, Sheetmetal Workers Local 104, Elevator Constructors Local 8, Iron Workers Local 337, Tile Setters Local 19, and Plumbers Local 38. In 1970, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission brokered an agreement with various building trades unions to ensure that at least half of all people hired to work on projects in Bayview-Hunters Point lived in the area, as well as an agreement that the unions would recruit racial minorities and train them in union-run job-training programs. Additional programs that helped boost Black employment in the building trades included an agreement negotiated by Gerald Johnson of the United Minority Business and Professional Association to ensure that 25 percent of all construction personnel hired to work on a project to seismically retrofit San Francisco’s public schools represented San Francisco’s minority groups.³⁵¹

Civil Disturbances: The Hunters Point Riots of 1966

By the mid-1960s, the redevelopment of the Western Addition, coupled with several well-publicized police beatings and shootings, caused tensions to grow increasingly deadly in San Francisco’s African American neighborhoods. Hugely destructive riots had already broken out in several American cities, including the 1965 Watts Riots, which resulted in the deaths of 34 people and the devastation of large swaths of South Los Angeles. In July 1966, rioting in the Western Addition was narrowly averted after Frank Jackson, an African American robbery suspect, was shot and killed by an off-duty Black police officer. In the wake of the shooting a crowd of several hundred gathered in the Fillmore and began throwing bottles and chanting anti-white slogans.³⁵² Larry Scott, one of several people arrested, observed:

³⁴⁹ Miller, 136.

³⁵⁰ Miller, 137.

³⁵¹ Miller, 139.

³⁵² Miller, 88.

Our brothers in Hunters Point, in Daly City, the Bayview and the Fillmore know that was just a warm-up too. You know what happened in Watts and Chicago, man? Well, that's gonna happen here too.³⁵³

Though people might have expected trouble to begin in the Western Addition, when it came, it took place in Bayview-Hunters Point. Though outside observers had long commented on the seemingly harmonious integration of the neighborhood, by the mid-1960s many of the longtime White residents had moved away, leaving behind a population that was increasingly poor and predominantly African American. African Americans chased out of the Fillmore had made it even more so; some estimates were that the Hunters Point projects were 96 percent Black.³⁵⁴ A *Chronicle* reporter writing of Hunters Point in 1963 painted a depressing picture: "There is a terrible bleakness about the place. Hardly any green grass, few lawns, few trees. There is only the gray monotony of the barracks-like buildings stacked like a row of crates on the wind-whipped hillside."³⁵⁵ Though many Whites had left, many of the businesses on Third Street remained either White or Asian-owned. Third Street was often described as being lackluster, lacking the vibrancy of the pre-redevelopment Fillmore Street, with many liquor stores and other downscale businesses (**Figure 54**).³⁵⁶ The aging neighborhood – never an affluent area to begin with – was also deteriorating. This, combined with the longstanding intermingling of residential and industrial uses, made Bayview-Hunters Point an unpleasant place to live as described in government documents:



Figure 54. Corner of Third Street and Newcomb Avenue, 1965
Source: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection
San Francisco Public Library

Lack of care in the utilization of separation of these different land uses has made environmental blight one of the major hazards to the financial and physical health of the area's housing. High property taxes, absentee ownership, and tight money, on the other hand, are making it increasingly difficult to prevent physical deterioration of much of the area's housing supply. Lack of sufficient amenities such as recreational facilities, adequate commercial facilities, and greenery, further make the area a less than adequate place to live.³⁵⁷

Neil Eddington, an African American anthropologist, took up residence in the Hunters Point projects in the 1960s to assess conditions. His research revealed no clothing stores for women, no doctors' offices, and few recreational opportunities. Eddington wrote: "The reputation of the place (Hunters Point) is so bad that even the low-caste job market is closed to some Negroes when they give an address in Hunters Point." He added that even residents of the Fillmore looked down on Hunters Point, concluding: "I believe that there's a conscious plan to create a plantation system. People don't want these Negroes in San Francisco. They don't want to give them a choice of where to live."³⁵⁸

³⁵³ Larry Scott, as quoted in Miller, 88-9.

³⁵⁴ Miller, 97.

³⁵⁵ "Life in S.F. Ghetto," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1963), 1, 14.

³⁵⁶ Miller, 95.

³⁵⁷ "Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency," Joseph Alioto Papers.

³⁵⁸ "A Plantation in S.F.," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1966).

The final straw came on September 27, 1966 – an unusually hot day for San Francisco – with temperatures reaching 85 degrees. At 3:10 PM, Alvin Johnson, a White policeman, shot and killed Matthew Johnson, an unarmed 16 year-old African American teenager, in Bayview-Hunters Point. Matthew Johnson, a resident of 1145 Hollister Avenue (building extant), was shot in the back as he fled from Officer Johnson. After his death, a crowd of angry residents gathered at the corner of Third Street and Palou Avenue. Several non-Black-owned businesses were vandalized, beginning with a shop at 4917 Third Street. This store (building extant), which is located at the northeast corner of Third Street and Palou Avenue, was the epicenter of the disturbance.³⁵⁹ Local residents gathered at the Bayview Community Center at Third and Mendell streets (building no longer extant) demanding to speak with Mayor Shelley. By the time Shelley arrived, the crowd was furious and he was forced to take shelter from bricks and a firebomb thrown by someone in the crowd. Mayor Shelley and his entourage retreated, but first he attempted to keep things in check by instructing the SFPD not to make an overwhelming show of force. However, by this time circumstances were beyond Shelley's control. In addition to the California Highway Patrol, Governor Pat Brown sent in 2,000 National Guard troops to quell the uprising.³⁶⁰

September 28, 1966, the second day of the disturbances, was much worse, with high temperatures and looted alcohol exacerbating the already tense situation. Some demonstrators took refuge in the old South San Francisco Opera House at Third Street and Newcomb Avenue (building extant) and began throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails at the police (**Figure 55**). Shots were reportedly fired from the building and police returned fire, injuring seven people.³⁶¹ Prominent community leaders, including Orville Luster, Willie Brown, Terry Francois, and Thomas Burbridge, tried to calm the anger of the hundreds of mainly poor and young residents of Bayview-Hunters Point. Sylvester Brown, a youth organizer at the Economic Opportunity Council in Hunters Point, told a reporter: "We're going to work, we're going to talk to them as best we can." Brown, whose voice was close to tears, told a reporter from the *Chronicle* that Matthew Johnson had attended a youth meeting the previous week.³⁶² Another civil rights worker told the same reporter: "All bedlam is breaking loose. I hate to see this happen. I really feel bad about this happening here." But he said, the "anger and rage" of the neighborhood youths might be too much for anyone to stop.³⁶³

The disturbances ended on October 1, 1966 due to a combination of factors, including the deployment of National Guardsmen on September 28th and a drop in daytime temperatures. The five-day disturbances resulted in 161 injuries (including 10 from gunshot wounds), 457 arrests, and 253 incidents of property damage totaling \$135,782.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁹ San Francisco Police Department, *Official Report by the San Francisco Police Department of the Civil Disturbance in San Francisco and the Events Related Hereto* (San Francisco: 1966), 7.

³⁶⁰ San Francisco Police Department, 12.

³⁶¹ San Francisco Police Department, 16.

³⁶² San Francisco Police Department, 7.

³⁶³ "The City's Troubled Night –Looting and Arson Erupt," *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 28, 1966), 1.

³⁶⁴ San Francisco Police Department, iii.



Figure 55. Police at Third and Newcomb streets, September 28, 1966

Source: San Francisco Public Library

Many liberal White San Franciscans seemed surprised by the events that took place in Bayview-Hunters Point, the Fillmore, and other pockets of the city in September 1966. After all, this wasn't Los Angeles or the Deep South. Many had to finally acknowledge San Francisco's "polite" racism. The Hunters Point disturbances called attention to many of the issues that continued to plague San Francisco's African American community, especially unemployment and poverty. Some people in authority understood that declining employment opportunities at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, as well as the gradual exodus of other high-paying manufacturing jobs from San Francisco, were partly to blame for the troubles. Lack of quality housing and endemic police brutality were additional triggers of the unrest. In response, Edward Howden, the executive director of the California FEPC called for the formation of a "blue ribbon commission" to conduct a "thorough and dispassionate" study of the disturbances in Bayview-Hunters Point.³⁶⁵

Several specific solutions proposed by Howden included working with banks and realtors to end "red-lining," a practice making it nearly impossible for residents of inner-city (often African American) neighborhoods to obtain mortgages or home improvement loans. Howden also cited the need to reduce the high rate of youth unemployment amongst African Americans, which was thought to run three times higher than White youth. High unemployment was frequently cited as a major cause of youth alienation, which often takes the form of "restless or destructive actions." Howden also mentioned the persistence of police brutality and the need for training programs to curb prejudice and violence toward African American residents. Finally, Howden recommended that the SFPD institute regulations to clarify what officers were allowed to do when confronted with a variety of situations in an effort to discourage lethal shootings.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Jerry Burns, "A Call for Full Study of S.F. Riot," *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 22, 1966).

³⁶⁶ Jerry Burns, "A Call for Full Study of S.F. Riot," *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 22, 1966).

In the city's African American neighborhoods reactions to the 1966 disturbances and their aftermath varied. Although some welcomed the efforts of government officials and outside organizations to help solve longstanding problems, others reacted with disbelief at the ignorance evident in the recommendations, especially the idea that simply making jobs available to poor Black youth, without addressing the underlying lack of access to education and job training, would be sufficient. According to Eunice Elton of the San Francisco Private Industry Council, an employment office:

It was very interesting. As a result of the riot, the Chamber of Commerce decided to get into the problem and help with the employment problem, and they were so naïve. They went out on the radio and said to everybody, saying "Give us your job opening so the young people can be employed." Well, a job opening for a secretary has to be able to do this, this, this, this. The jobs that came in were jobs that nobody in the unemployment group was going to be able to qualify for.³⁶⁷

Government agencies often assumed that private business and government agencies would be willing to provide extensive on-the-job training to people with little formal education and few job skills. Unfortunately, this level of commitment in the business world was in short supply.³⁶⁸

San Francisco authorities were perhaps more successful in addressing the physical blight of the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, in particular the blighted Hunters Point housing projects. According to an article in the September 7, 1967 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the City aimed "to make the area's ramshackle housing less ugly and more livable."³⁶⁹ To that end, the Board of Supervisors appropriated \$350,000, combined with \$150,000 of SFHA funds, to replace the roofing, paint, and make exterior repairs to the projects. Although local residents applauded the improvements, there was resistance to the circumstances that forced so many Black San Franciscans to live in public housing. According to the Reverend Hamilton T. Boswell, Chairman of the San Francisco Housing Authority Commission:

I have mixed opinions. As chairman, I am proud of this accomplishment...it expresses the spirit of a new day. But as a citizen, I say that this points up the dismal failure of the private housing industry to provide adequate housing for the city's people. I hope the day will come when this will not be necessary.³⁷⁰

The ineffectiveness of government programs to solve the increasingly intractable problems in Bayview-Hunters Point, combined with a growing suspicion of outsiders, influenced many activists to reject mainstream, White-dominated organizations altogether. Into this void stepped a group of young, radical activists, including the San Francisco section of the Black Panther Party. Dedicated to the premises of protecting the dignity of African Americans and self-defense from police brutality, the Black Panther Party also adhered to an ideology of self-help, ranging from patronizing and supporting Black businesses to its free breakfast program for poor children. Another Black separatist group that was active in San Francisco during the 1960s was the Nation of Islam. Founded in Detroit in 1930, the Nation of Islam established ministries in San Francisco and Oakland. Like the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam made self-determination and self-sufficiency central parts of its mission, including the establishment of bakeries, moving companies, and other Black-owned enterprises. The Nation of Islam continues to exist today, with mosques in Bayview-Hunters Point and the Western Addition.

³⁶⁷ Eunice Elton, as quoted in: Naval Facilities Engineering Command, D-40.

³⁶⁸ Tom Fleming, as quoted in: Naval Facilities Engineering Command, D-41.

³⁶⁹ William Chapin, "A New Look for an Ugly Old Ghetto," *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 7, 1967), 1.

³⁷⁰ William Chapin, "A New Look for an Ugly Old Ghetto," *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 7, 1967), 1.

Bayview Neighborhood Center and the “Big Five”

One of the most influential and politically effective groups in San Francisco’s Black community during the 1960s and 1970s was an ad hoc group of five women, consisting of Ardath Nichols, Elouise Westbrook, Julia Commer, Oceola Washington, and Bertha Freeman (Figure 56).



Figure 56. Elouise Westbrook speaks at a meeting, 1972

Source: Bancroft Library

Collectively nicknamed the “Big Five,” the group was at times augmented by Rosa Lee Williams, Ethel Garlington, and Ruth Williams. The women began meeting in 1956 at the Crispus Attucks Club, a community center founded in 1954 in a house at 1201-05 Mendell Street (building extant). The women later became the core of the Bayview Community Center, at Third and Mendell streets (building no longer extant), which served as a social center

and social services clearinghouse for residents of Bayview-Hunters Point. From this base the women worked diligently to improve conditions in their neighborhood. In addition to other accomplishments, the Big Five overturned several wrongful evictions, picketed businesses that refused to hire African Americans, and successfully secured funding to complete important infrastructure projects in Bayview-Hunters Point.³⁷¹ Five streets in the neighborhood are named in their honor, including Ardath Court, Bertha Lane, Commer Court, Garlington Court, and Oceola Court. The Big Five influenced a new generation of women activists, some of whom remain active, including, Espanola Jackson.

San Francisco State College Strike

The Hunters Point disturbances radicalized entire sectors of San Francisco’s African American community. One of the institutions where this played out was San Francisco State College (renamed San Francisco State University in 1974) in 1968. Following several months of tension on campus, San Francisco State College dismissed an African American graduate student and instructor who were affiliated with the Black Panthers. In response, a coalition of students, led by the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front declared the student body on strike. The two groups submitted a list of 15 demands to the administration, including the establishment of a Black Studies Program and the reinstatement of the fired faculty member, George Murray. San Francisco State College had to be shut down because of the strike and the sitting president was deposed. He was replaced by Samuel I. Hayakawa, an English professor. After several months of turmoil, during which time the faculty union also joined the strike, President Hayakawa and the college administrators worked out a settlement. The settlement led to the establishment of the first Black Studies program in the nation and the founding of several other ethnic studies programs representing other “Third World” groups.³⁷² Established in 1969, the College of Ethnic Studies still exists at 1600 Holloway Avenue in San Francisco. The San Francisco

³⁷¹ Miller, 144.

³⁷² Miller, 102-4.

State College Strike became one of the most notable events of the 1960s, in part because of the alliances made between minority groups, including Black, Asian, and Latino (Figure 57).

Redevelopment Redux –Redevelopment Agency in Bayview-Hunters Point: 1967-1973

Although proposals by the Redevelopment Agency to rebuild parts of Bayview-Hunters Point dated back to the early 1960s, the 1966 disturbances provided momentum for the first major redevelopment projects in the area. Fearing displacement, many local African Americans residents opposed redevelopment in Bayview-Hunters Point at first. Having learned its lesson in the Western Addition, the Redevelopment Agency changed course in Bayview-Hunters Point by emphasizing economic development and the reconstruction of deteriorated public housing. In 1967, the Redevelopment Agency designated the entire southeast corner of the city, an area defined by the San Mateo County line to the south, Bayshore Boulevard to the west, and Army Street to the north, as the Bayshore Redevelopment Area. Within this area, which largely conformed to the boundaries of Bayview-Hunters Point, the Redevelopment Agency designated several specific project areas, beginning with Butchertown, a decaying enclave of commercial slaughterhouses, tanneries, junk yards, and abandoned buildings.³⁷³

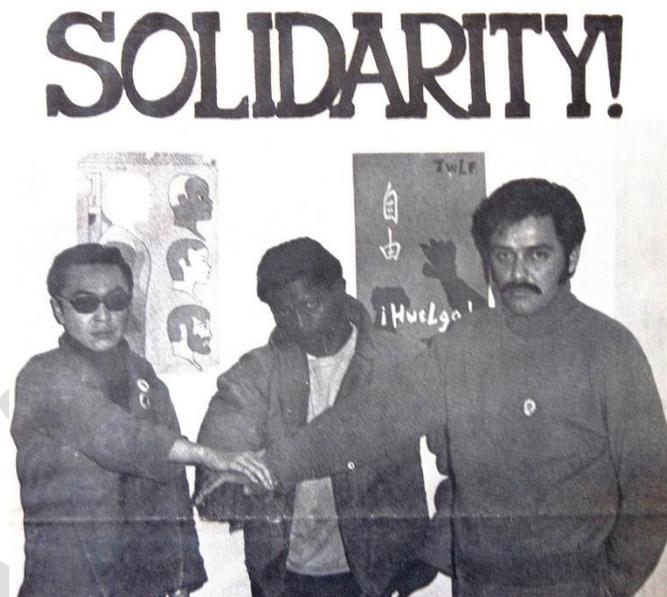


Figure 57. Solidarity poster
Source: San Francisco State University

Redevelopment Agency chief Justin Herman first announced the details of the Butchertown project on January 14, 1969. Funded by a \$30.4 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the project envision the demolition of the remaining slaughterhouses and junkyards of Butchertown and their replacement with a modern industrial park. The Redevelopment Agency used eminent domain to assemble the site, bounded by Cargo Way to the north, Jennings Street to the east, Hudson Avenue to the south, and Third Street to the west. Once the site was assembled, the Redevelopment Agency relocated the existing businesses and demolished 276 of the 309 buildings. The area was then re-subdivided into larger parcels conforming to modern industrial park standards. Most of the steep north-south streets were abandoned and/or reconfigured and the east-west avenues were widened to provide better vehicular access (Figure 58). Construction of the new buildings got underway in 1969 and the 81-acre India Basin Industrial Park was completed in 1973. In addition to new industrial facilities, the industrial park housed a City College branch campus, the US Postal Service’s main sorting center for San Francisco, and a neighborhood shopping center. The project, widely viewed as a success, employed 4,000 people within a year of its completion.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Ron Markowitz, “South Bayshore Renewal Project,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (June 21, 1968).

³⁷⁴ Scott Blakey, “Federal OK to Rebuild Butchertown,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 15, 1969), 1.

In addition to the India Basin Industrial Park, the Redevelopment Agency busied itself during the early 1970s with the replacement of the final remaining World War II-era defense workers' dormitories on Hunters Point Ridge with new residential townhouses. Paid for with a \$33.9 million grant from HUD, the Hunters Point Project Area resulted in 2,000 new homes, a childcare center, schools, churches, parks and playgrounds, and a new community center.

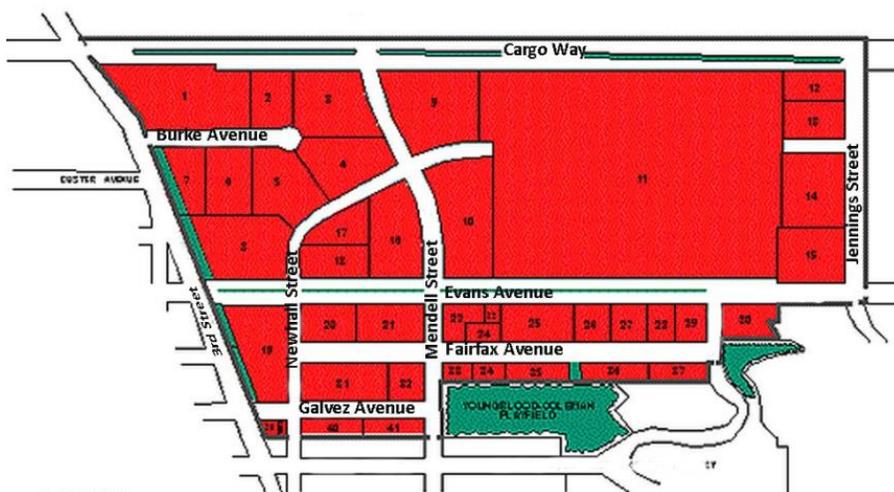


Figure 58. Map of India Basin Redevelopment Project Area
 Source: Successor Entity to the Redevelopment Agency; annotated by Christopher VerPlanck

Youngblood Coleman and Hilltop Parks were constructed as part of this project. In November 1973, the Nixon Administration cut \$15 million from HUD's budget when the project was only one-third completed. In response, the "Big Five" traveled to Washington, D.C. to get the funding restored, which they did.³⁷⁵ Today, much of the housing on Hunters Point Ridge, which encompasses two of the remaining African American-majority census tracts in San Francisco, dates from this redevelopment project of the early 1970s.

Peoples Temple/Jonestown Tragedy: 1971-1978

Around the same time that the Redevelopment Agency was rebuilding Butchertown and Hunters Point, a preacher from Indiana named Jim Jones arrived in San Francisco. Jones, the founder of the Peoples Temple, preached a vision he called "apostolic socialism." His leftist convictions, combined with Jones's integrationist views, got him into trouble in conservative Indiana. In 1965, in search of a friendlier environment, Jones and his Peoples Temple moved to Redwood Valley, California. Six years later, in 1971, the Peoples Temple opened a San Francisco branch in the former Albert Pike Memorial Scottish Rite Temple, at 1859 Geary Boulevard (building no longer extant), in the heart of the Fillmore district (Figure 59). In 1972, Jones purchased the property and in 1975 he relocated the

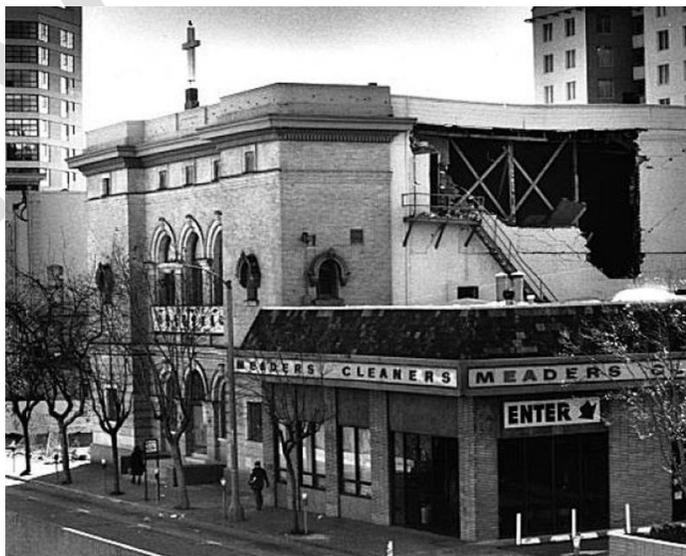


Figure 59. Peoples Temple, 1859 Geary Boulevard, 1989
 Source: San Francisco Chronicle

³⁷⁵ William Moore, "A U.S. Shocker for Hunters Point," *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 8, 1973), 2.

Peoples Temple's headquarters to San Francisco.³⁷⁶ Reverend Jim Jones continued to build his church membership in San Francisco, attracting a multiracial congregation that included a large proportion of African Americans. Members of the Peoples Temple of all races lived together in communal residences sprinkled throughout the Western Addition.

At first the Peoples Temple was praised by San Francisco's liberal leaders for its embrace of multiculturalism, as well as Reverend Jones' support for progressive causes and candidates. By the mid-1970s, it had become common knowledge that if you wanted to win citywide election as a progressive candidate you had better court Jim Jones. In 1975, Assembly Leader Willie Brown introduced Jones to Mayor George Moscone, a meeting that led to Jones' appointment to the San Francisco Housing Authority Commission. In the election of 1975, Jones' "foot soldiers" were crucial in ensuring the victory of Moscone over Republican John Barbagelata.³⁷⁷ Following this victory, Reverend Jones' star continued to rise, eventually winning the confidence of Vice-president Walter Mondale and First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

As Jones' profile continued to grow, his Peoples Temple became the subject of several media exposés, in particular an article by *Chronicle* reporter Marshall Kilduff that appeared in *New West*. The article was very critical of Reverend Jones, accusing him of being a cult leader. Jones, still the darling of San Francisco's progressive community, countered that Kilduff was merely trying to smear him because he championed unpopular groups and causes.³⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the article had done its damage and other exposés continued to emerge. Feeling persecuted in the United States, Reverend Jones made plans to relocate Peoples Temple to Guyana, where he had leased a tract of jungle from the Guyanese government. This future "socialist paradise," which Jones called the Peoples Temple Agricultural Project, was informally called "Jonestown." With pressure growing, Jones fled to Guyana in July 1977, where he began arranging for his followers to emigrate. By 1978, Jonestown's population was just under 1,000.

On November 14, 1978, Congressman Leo Ryan and a delegation of 18 (including his aide Jackie Speier) set off for Guyana to investigate charges of abuse. The delegation landed at an airstrip in Port Kaituma, six miles away from Jonestown. Jones reluctantly admitted the delegation to Jonestown to interview people. Despite Ryan's promise to make a favorable report, he and his delegation were attacked by Jones' men when they tried to fly out of Port Kaituma on November 18, 1978. In this incident, Congressman Ryan and four Peoples Temple defectors were killed. Nine others, including future Congresswoman Jackie Speier, were injured. Immediately following the attack, Jones' aides prepared a large vat of Flavor Aid laced with valium, cyanide, and other chemicals, and forced or convinced hundreds of Peoples Temple members to drink it. In total, 918 people died, including 270 children. Approximately three-quarters of those who died were African American, including many from San Francisco. The Jonestown Tragedy was the single-largest loss of American civilian lives until September 11, 2001.³⁷⁹ The former Peoples Temple building at 1859 Geary Boulevard was demolished after being severely damaged in the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989.

³⁷⁶ Marshall Kilduff and Phil Tracy, "Inside Peoples Temple," *New West Magazine* (August 1977).

³⁷⁷ Tim Reiterman, *Raven: the Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and His People* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982), 266.

³⁷⁸ Reiterman, 266.

³⁷⁹ Reiterman, 527.

African American Cultural Contributions: 1960-1980

The period spanning the two decades from 1960 to 1980 was a tumultuous one for San Francisco's African American community. It began with the destruction of the Fillmore district, which since World War II had been the heart of Black San Francisco and the location of many of its most important cultural treasures, including churches, bookstores, nightclubs, and community organizations. The destruction of the Fillmore dispersed these businesses and organizations. By the mid-1970s, the cultural center of Black San Francisco had shifted east to Oakland and south toward Bayview-Hunters Point. Nevertheless, San Francisco's African American community continued to produce individuals and institutions that contributed greatly to the cultural life of the city and the region.

Reverend Cecil Williams

African American pastors, always important political and cultural forces in San Francisco's Black community, made important contributions to San Francisco's cultural and artistic life during this period. In 1963, a young African American minister named Cecil Williams came to San Francisco to minister to a declining (mostly White) congregation in the Tenderloin called Glide Memorial Methodist Church. Reverend Williams' upbeat, jazz-filled services attracted many new parishioners, representing a cross-section of San Francisco's communities, including African Americans, hippies, and gays; as well as marginalized residents of the Tenderloin (**Figure 60**). Reverend Williams and his wife, dancer and poet Janice Mirikitani, eventually launched a free meals program for low-income people in the Tenderloin. They also assembled the famous Glide Ensemble, a choral group that continues to perform. Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, at 330 Ellis Street (building extant), remains a cornerstone of the Tenderloin community and a refuge for liberal San Franciscans of all races.³⁸⁰

Saint John Coltrane Church

Saint John Coltrane Church is another well-known cultural institution with roots in this period. Founded in 1971 by Archbishop Franzo King and Reverend Mother Marina King, under the original name of "One Mind Evolutionary Transitional Body of Christ," the church's founders were inspired by a live performance of John Coltrane that took place in San Francisco in 1965, which they referred to as a "sound baptism." Though loosely affiliated with the African Orthodox Church, which traces its lineage to the ancient Syrian Church of Antioch, Syria, Saint John Coltrane church is also a cultural organization dedicated to John Coltrane's "sacred" music, particularly "A Love Supreme." Formerly located at 351 Divisadero Street, Saint John Coltrane Church was compelled by escalating rents to move to a smaller storefront at 1286 Fillmore Street in 2007.³⁸¹ It is still in existence and provides services every Sunday.



Figure 60. Cecil Williams (right) and Maya Angelou
Glide Memorial Church, 1974
Source: Bancroft Library

³⁸⁰ "Our Story," Glide Memorial Methodist Church: <http://www.glide.org/page.aspx?pid=412>

³⁸¹ "About Us," Saint John Coltrane Church: <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!about2/c4nz>

Marcus Books

As mentioned previously, not many African American businesses survive from the old Fillmore. Until very recently, one exception was Marcus Books. Founded in 1960 as the Success Book Store, an auxiliary to the Richardson family's Success Printing Co., owners Julian and Raye Richardson changed the business' name to Marcus Books Printing and Marcus Bookstore in honor of the famous Pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey. In 1981, the business moved into a Victorian-era house at 1712-16 Fillmore Street that had formerly been located at 1690 Post Street. This Victorian, which during the 1950s and early 1960s had housed Jimbo's Bop City, was moved to its present location in the late 1970s along with several other houses as part of a Redevelopment Agency project called "Victorian Village." Marcus Books remained at this location for more than three decades. In 2013, the owners lost the property to the bank and the new owners evicted the business from the property in 2014. Marcus Books continues to operate in Oakland, but the loss of the San Francisco store, America's oldest Black-owned bookstore, signals the end of an era in the Fillmore district.³⁸² The building that formerly housed the store is City Landmark No. 266.

Musicians and Performers

The destruction of the jazz and blues clubs in the Fillmore during the 1960s and 1970s ended the "Harlem of the West," the most notable concentration of jazz venues on the West Coast during the post-World War II era. Though some clubs tried to reopen elsewhere in the city, the combination of demographic losses and changing tastes worked against them continuing on into the next century. Whereas jazz was the soundtrack of San Francisco in the 1940s and 1950s, rock bands dominated the scene in 1960s and 1970s. There were several African American singers and musicians from San Francisco during this period who rose to prominence, especially Johnny Mathis and the rock/funk/soul band Sly and the Family Stone. In addition, there were several prominent African American actors and performers from San Francisco who became prominent during the 1970s, including actor and San Francisco native, Danny Glover (**Figure 61**). However, for the most part, most notable African American artists and performers during this period operated out of Oakland, increasingly the center of Bay Area African American culture during the 1970s and beyond.



Figure 61. Danny Glover
Source: Wikimedia Commons

G. Epilogue –Black Exodus from San Francisco: 1980-2014

This final section of the narrative history discusses more recent developments affecting San Francisco's African American community. The dominant theme during this period is dislocation, as thousands of African Americans have left San Francisco for other communities throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Any properties identified in this section that are under 50 years old would need to show exceptional significance in order to be listed in local, state, and national levels. It is mainly included to provide continuity between the past and more recent events.

³⁸² "History of Marcus Bookstores," <http://marcusfillmore.wordpress.com/about/>

Population Characteristics of San Francisco's African American Population: 1980-2014

As mentioned previously, between 1970 and 1980, San Francisco's African American population declined from 96,078 (13.4 percent of the total population) to 86,190 (12.7 percent).³⁸³ Since 1980, San Francisco's African American population has continued to decline, dropping to 78,931 (10.9 percent) in 1990, 60,515 (7.8 percent) in 2000, and 48,870 (6.1 percent) in 2010.³⁸⁴

The earliest phase of this exodus, which began during the 1970s, can in part be explained by redevelopment and the concurrent opening of housing opportunities in Bay Area suburbs to African Americans. As racial discrimination became less of an obstacle, many African Americans who could afford to leave moved to the suburbs. This suburban exodus of African Americans was a statewide trend, as Black San Franciscans, , and Oaklanders departed for outlying communities.³⁸⁵ Many left for the same reason that Whites had fled the cities a generation earlier, including substandard schools, high taxes, fear of crime, and deteriorating public infrastructure. Rising property values provided an additional incentive, allowing some longtime homeowners to sell at a substantial profit and move to the suburbs.³⁸⁶ During the 1990s and 2000s, many took advantage of steadily rising property values to move away to places like Antioch, Fairfield, Vacaville, Stockton, Sacramento, and even out of state.

A second factor that pushed African Americans out of San Francisco during the 1980s and 1990s was the crack cocaine epidemic. Drug gangs operating mainly out of public housing projects ravaged Bayview-Hunters Point during the 1980s and the 1990s. Rising drug crime fed on the cycles of poverty and joblessness, leading to rising homicide rates as drug gangs battled over turf, often killing innocent bystanders in the process. Despite comprising less than 6 percent of the city's population, Bayview-Hunters Point accounted for half the city's homicides in 2004.³⁸⁷ According to an article in the December 16, 2001 *San Francisco Chronicle*, these conditions rendered Bayview-Hunters Point a "no-hope outpost hundreds of miles away from the city's glittery center."³⁸⁸ These conditions were demoralizing for many longtime African American residents, particularly of Bayview-Hunters Point, San Francisco's last Black-majority neighborhood. Those who could move out often did so, selling their property to buyers who in many cases were not Black. Though the phenomenon popularly known as "gentrification" (high-income Whites moving into minority communities) has been blamed for the continuing exodus of Black San Franciscans out of San Francisco, this trend largely played itself out in the Western Addition in the 1970s and the 1980s. Until very recently Whites have not been moving into either Bayview-Hunters Point or the OMI district in large numbers. In actuality, most of the newcomers in these neighborhoods are from mainland China. Chinese immigrants are now a majority of the population in Visitacion Valley and in most Bayview-Hunters Point census tracts west of Third Street. Indeed, Chinese immigrants appear to be becoming a majority in most outlying neighborhoods in San Francisco.³⁸⁹

³⁸³ U.S. Bureau of the Census.

³⁸⁴ MTC-ABAG Library: Bay Area Census, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty.htm>

³⁸⁵ De Graaf et al, 419.

³⁸⁶ MTC-ABAG Library: Bay Area Census (<http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/index.html>).

³⁸⁷ *Guide to the Joseph Alioto Papers: 1958-1977*, Online Archive of California.

³⁸⁸ Susan Sward, "The Killing Streets: A Cycle of Vengeance," *San Francisco Chronicle* (December 16, 2001).

³⁸⁹ U.S. Census, 2010.

Residential Characteristics of San Francisco’s African American Population: 1980-2013

Between 1970 and 2010, San Francisco’s African American population declined by approximately one-half. Population declines occurred evenly across the city. In comparison to the 1970 Census, in which there were 15 census tracts that were at least 50 percent African American, by 2010 there were only two – both in Bayview-Hunters Point. The most heavily African American census tract in the Western Addition was Census Tract 161, registering an African American population of 38 percent. This census tract, which is bordered by Eddy Street to the north, Gough Street to the east, Fulton Street to the south, and Steiner Street to the west, contains many low and moderate-income housing projects and cooperative apartments built during the 1970s. No other census tract in the Western Addition had an African American population exceeding 20 percent and the total percentage of Blacks in the entire neighborhood was down to 15 percent in 2010 (Figure 62).³⁹⁰ Similarly, the OMI district saw a significant decline in the number of African Americans living there. What was once a middle-class area with a majority Black population now has no census tract that is more than 18 percent African American.

By 2010, the last major pocket of African Americans in the Bayview-Hunters Point district is an area bounded by Innes Avenue to the north, San Francisco Bay to the east, Yosemite Avenue to the south, and Third Street to the west. All of the census tracts west of Third Street that were majority-Black as late as the 1990 Census now have Asian majorities or pluralities. Even in the two census tracts where African Americans retain a majority (census tracts 23102 and 23103), there were marked declines between 2000 and 2010. With the demolition and reconstruction of the Hunters View housing project underway, it is to be expected that the Black population of these two census tracts will continue to decline. Traveling down Third Street today one can see the evidence of the African American exodus: abandoned storefront churches and soul food restaurants, soon to be replaced by taquerías, Asian vegetable and seafood markets, and upscale cafés. Only a handful of traditional African American businesses continue to hang on along Third Street, including several soul food restaurants like Auntie April’s, at 4618 Third Street; Frisco Fried, at 5176 Third Street; and the Old Skool Café, at 1429 Mendell Street.

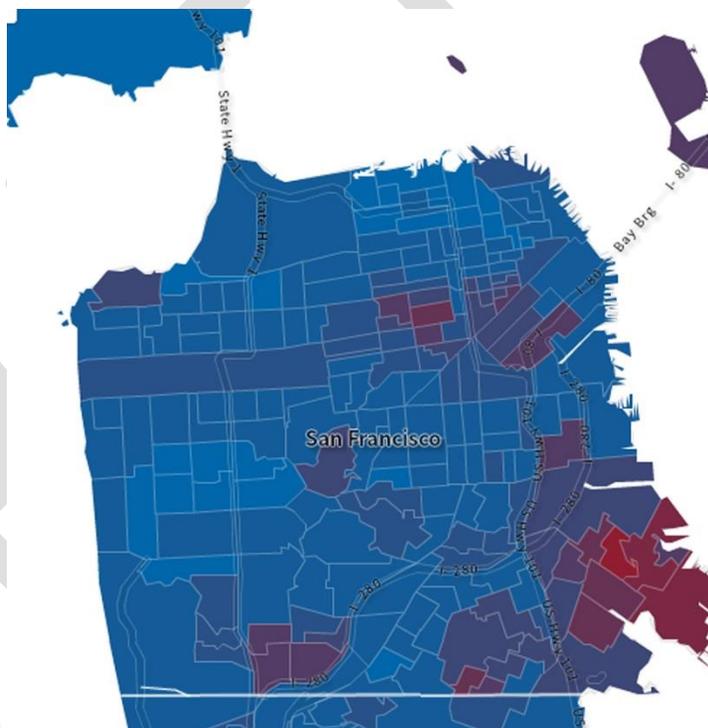


Figure 62. Map showing census tracts with significant concentrations of African Americans in San Francisco (in red), 2010
Source: Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

³⁹⁰ San Francisco Planning Department, *San Francisco Neighborhoods: Socio-Economic Profiles* (San Francisco: 2011).

According to *San Francisco's Neighborhoods: Socio-Economic Profiles*, a study completed in 2010 by the San Francisco Planning Department, the neighborhoods with the highest percentages of African American residents in San Francisco include: Bayview-Hunters Point (32 percent), Treasure Island (25 percent), the Western Addition (15 percent), Visitation Valley (13 percent), OMI (12 percent), Civic Center/Tenderloin (10 percent), South of Market Area and Potrero Hill (each 9 percent), and the Financial District, Diamond Heights/Glen Park, and Twin Peaks (each 6 percent). None of the remaining 25 neighborhoods in San Francisco had African American populations exceeding 5 percent.³⁹¹

San Francisco's civic leaders have worried over the decline of the city's Black population. In 1993, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission published *The Unfinished Agenda: The Economic Status of African Americans in San Francisco, 1964-1990*. The report acknowledged the decline in the city's African American population and analyzed its reasons, concluding that the decrease was not solely the result of increased opportunities elsewhere; many African Americans left San Francisco because of the loss of affordable housing and increased competition for lower-cost housing with other ethnic groups. This trend began with the redevelopment of the Western Addition in the 1960s. Because the pace of rebuilding was too slow, many African Americans had resettled outside the city before the new housing developments were completed in the early 1970s. Remaining Victorian-era properties within the Western Addition were then bought up by real estate investors, rehabilitated, and sold to affluent and moderately affluent Whites, causing gentrification in the parts of the Western Addition not cleared by the Redevelopment Agency. As mentioned, in the OMI, Bayview-Hunters Point, and other African American enclaves, gentrification was less of an issue than competition from Asian and Latin American immigrants, who in many cases were able to outbid African Americans for housing by pooling resources and living together in extended family units.³⁹²

The Unfinished Agenda also attributes the Black exodus San Francisco's shift from manufacturing toward highly specialized white-collar occupations. Many of these new occupations require advanced degrees or training that have historically not been as accessible to working-class African Americans. The end result has been a bifurcation of the city's Black population. As working-class and middle-income Blacks are pushed out of the city, they leave behind mainly poor African Americans – many trapped in public housing – as well as highly educated and high-income Blacks. These higher-income African Americans are dispersed throughout the city and do not necessarily identify with older African American communities.³⁹³ In effect, San Francisco's African American population (not unlike the city as a whole) has been hollowed out from the center, resulting in a population consisting of the very poor and the very well-off.

Since the publication of *The Unfinished Agenda* 20 years ago, the trends identified in the study have only intensified. Working-class and middle-class African Americans continue to leave the city and poorer African Americans remain trapped in reservation-like housing projects. Meanwhile, affluent Blacks live prosperous lives in predominantly White or mixed-race neighborhoods. In 2008, the African American Out-migration Task Force assembled by Mayor Gavin Newsom determined that in the previous ten years the number of African Americans living in very low-income households had increased, the number of African American-owned businesses had declined, and African Americans had gone from having the highest rate of home ownership to the lowest. Additionally, African Americans, who made up fewer than

³⁹¹ San Francisco Planning Department, *San Francisco Neighborhoods: Socio-Economic Profiles* (San Francisco: 2011).

³⁹² San Francisco Human Rights Committee, *The Unfinished Agenda: The Economic Status of African Americans in San Francisco, 1964-1990* (San Francisco, 1990).

³⁹³ San Francisco Human Rights Committee.

six percent of the population, comprised almost half of all residents living in public housing.³⁹⁴ African American unemployment in San Francisco stood at five times that of Whites in 2008.³⁹⁵ The Outmigration Task Force offered many recommendations, including implementation of a violence prevention plan, rebuilding public housing, improving schools, and promoting minority-owned business development. In the five years since it was published, very little progress has been made.

Mayor Willie Brown

The demographic decline of San Francisco's African American community in recent decades stands in contrast to the growing political influence of several prominent African American individuals, chief among them, Willie Brown (**Figure 63**). The election of Willie Brown as San Francisco's first African American mayor in 1996 signaled not only the political apex of his career but also the rise of African American politicians to positions of power and influence in non-Black majority communities. Elected mayor by a multiracial coalition with ample support from the downtown business community, Brown's election generated high expectations among the city's remaining African American residents. Mayor Brown presided over a period of tremendous economic expansion in San Francisco during the late 1990s and early 2000s. During his tenure, Mayor Willie Brown completed many major public works projects, including the restoration of City Hall, building a new DeYoung museum, spearheading the redevelopment of Mission Bay, and building the new International Terminal at San Francisco International Airport. He also launched the redevelopment of the long-closed Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. Despite his considerable accomplishments, Brown was often criticized for not paying enough attention to the city's poorest residents.



Figure 63. Mayor Willie Brown
Source: baycitizen.org

Despite their shrinking numbers African Americans have done quite well with commission and board appointments and elections, including Ella Hill Hutch, who was the second African American elected to serve on the Board of Supervisors (1977-1981), as well as supervisors Doris Ward (1979-1992) (**Figure 64**), and Reverend Amos Brown (1997-2000). Following the restoration of district elections in 2000, African Americans have been elected to office in Supervisorial District 10 (Sophie Maxwell and Malia Cohen) and Supervisorial District 5 (London Breed) – this despite the fact that African Americans are no longer the majority in either district. In addition, African Americans continue to be well-represented as appointees on various other boards and commissions, including the Human Rights Commission, the San Francisco Housing Authority, the Board of Education, the Planning Commission, and others.



Figure 64. Doris Ward
Source: San Francisco Chronicle

³⁹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 10, 2008) (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/08/10/BA5B1272U1.DTL#ixzz0TUKO3tQo>)

³⁹⁵ Joy M. Tyler, "The State of African American Business: Surviving the Economic Crisis?" (August 31, 2009).

African American Cultural contributions: 1980-2014

The period 1980 to 2014 saw the exodus of much of San Francisco’s African American population. As the city’s Black population has dwindled, the critical mass of people needed to support Black cultural institutions has been an ongoing challenge. Nonetheless, during this period several notable institutions recognizing the long-term contributions of African Americans to San Francisco were founded or expanded. Established in 1989, the African American Historical and Cultural Complex, which highlights African American-themed visual and performing arts, moved into the Western Addition Cultural Center at 762 Fulton Street. The African American Historical and Cultural Society, a descendent of the San Francisco Athenaeum and Literary Association, also maintains an archive and a gallery at 762 Fulton Street. In 1995, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency established the “Historic Fillmore Jazz Preservation District,” an attempt to restore some flavor of the old “Harlem of the West” to Fillmore Street. Though several jazz clubs remain in the area, the ongoing viability of the jazz district is doubtful. In 1999, San Francisco acquired the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD), which moved into the first floor of the St. Regis Tower, at Third and Mission streets. African American musicians and rappers have continued to represent San Francisco since the 1980s. R&B singers like Cindy Herron and Chanté Moore have scored several hits. Though lesser-known, Bayview-Hunters Point became a hotbed of the underground rap scene during the 1990s with artists such as Mr. Cee and Hitman.

Artistic contributions of San Francisco’s African American community have continued to enrich the city since the 1980s. African American muralists have painted murals on the sides of buildings throughout the Western Addition and the Bayview-Hunters Point district. One of the most notable murals is an indoor mural called the “Great Cloud of Witnesses.” Created under the direction of Reverend Roland Gordon, pastor of Ingleside Presbyterian Church, at 1345 Ocean Avenue, the collage/mural features prominent people in the Civil Rights movement and the local community spanning at least three decades (**Figure 65**). The mural is currently on the Historic Preservation Commission’s work program for possible landmark status.



Figure 65. Reverend Roland Gordon in front of the Great Cloud of Witnesses
Source: Ingleside Presbyterian Church

IV. GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING HISTORIC PROPERTIES

This chapter provides guidelines for evaluating and registering properties at the local, state, and national level, including the identification of a thematic framework for San Francisco's African American community, a definition of common property types, National Register criteria, California Register criteria, San Francisco Article 10 (local landmark) criteria, and a definition of integrity thresholds required to designate properties under these registration programs.

A. *Thematic Framework*

As a report prepared according to state and national guidelines, the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement identifies several themes and periods of development that will assist City staff, decision-makers, property owners, and other stakeholders evaluate the potential significance of individual properties and concentrations of historic property types. According to the National Park Service's Thematic Framework, "themes" are used to organize and interpret events, activities, groups of people and individuals, communities, and development patterns that have influenced the physical, historical, and cultural development of a particular area. In 1994, the National Park Service revised its method of identifying historic themes away from the traditional "chrono-centric" approach toward eight overarching themes that are intended to capture "the complexity and meaning of human experience and for understanding that past in coherent, integrated ways." The following list of seven themes is derived from the National Park Service's thematic categories:

1. **African Americans Settle in San Francisco:** This theme relates to early areas of African American settlement in San Francisco, including Stone Street in Chinatown, or Tehama Street south of Market Street, during the nineteenth century or the Fillmore district in the 1930s. It also refers to the expansion of African Americans into Bayview-Hunters Point, the OMI, Visitacion Valley, and elsewhere during and after World War II.
2. **African Americans and San Francisco's Economy:** This theme relates to categories of work and business where African Americans were heavily represented in San Francisco, including railroads, longshoring, shipbuilding, and hotel and domestic work. Sites that could be registered under this theme could include the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, the Pullman Hotel, and the Palace Hotel.
3. **African Americans in Education:** This theme relates to African Americans in local public and private schools as well as colleges and universities. Properties that may be eligible for designation under this theme could include the offices of the Black Studies Department at San Francisco State University or various public schools in the Western Addition or Bayview-Hunters Point notable for African American contributions to integration of public schools or for other educational advancements.
4. **African American Social Institutions and Movements:** This theme relates to sites important for their association with African American political, intellectual, and social organizations, including The Athenaeum, the Booker T. Washington Community Center, or the Madame C.J. Walker Home for Young Women and Girls. Religious congregations and their houses of worship could also be registered under this theme, including the three pioneer African American churches: A.M.E. Zion, Bethel A.M.E., and Third Baptist Church.

5. **African Americans in Business:** This theme relates to important, longtime African American-owned businesses, particularly those related to the business district once-known as the “Harlem of the West” in the Fillmore district or the Third Street corridor. Two existing city landmarks that embody this theme are Marcus Books and Sam Jordan’s Bar.
6. **African Americans and the Political Landscape:** This theme relates to local and national organizations that worked to obtain civil rights for African Americans in San Francisco, including the local headquarters of the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Black Panthers, as well as places where important political victories were won, such as the Palace Hotel, the Don Lee Building, or Mel’s Diner on Geary Boulevard.
7. **African American Cultural Institutions and Sites:** This theme relates to properties important for their place in African American cultural life, including any remaining jazz nightclubs, or sites associated with important artists, bookstores, newspapers, or other cultural organizations. Properties that could be designated under this theme include the African American Historical and Cultural Complex or the two Sargent Johnson murals at Aquatic Park and Washington High School.

B. Definition of Property Types

This section identifies and describes common property types associated with African Americans in San Francisco that may be eligible for designation under local, state, or national registration programs. As opposed to a traditional cultural resource survey, where architecturally significant buildings are the focus, the San Francisco African American Historic Context Statement is concerned primarily with culturally significant properties. According to the National Park Service’s *National Register Bulletin 38: “Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties,”* a traditional cultural property is one that is “associated with the cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that are (a) rooted in the community’s history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.”³⁹⁶ Traditional cultural properties run the gamut, ranging from historic-era European, African, Asian, or Latino settlements to prehistoric Native American sacred sites. Traditional cultural properties associated with San Francisco’s African American community primarily consist of churches and social institutions, though residential and commercial properties can be culturally significant if they have longstanding and important associations with Black San Francisco:

- **Residential Properties** encompass any building whose primary purpose is housing individuals and families. Common residential property types in San Francisco include single-family dwellings, ranging from small workers’ cottages to large mansions, and multiple-family properties, including flats, apartments, and condominiums. Though hotels and boardinghouses could be included within this category, their primary use is accommodating transients who do not live full-time in San Francisco. In addition, in San Francisco most hotels have ancillary commercial spaces, including restaurants or shops. For this reason hotels and boardinghouses are classified as commercial properties in this historic context statement.

Residential properties in San Francisco that could be designated under local, state, or national registration programs include dwellings significant for their association with persons important to African American history, such as the primary residences of Willie

³⁹⁶ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 38: “Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* (Washington, D.C.: n.d.), 1.

Mays in Sherwood Forest (Figure 66) or Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr. in Westwood Highlands. Flats or apartments associated with important events or individuals are more difficult to designate as landmarks because typically the entire building has to be registered, and not just the individual unit. In addition, for a residential property to be listed for its associations with a particular individual it should have been the place



Figure 66. Willie Mays House, 175 Miraloma Drive
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

where that individual achieved his or her most important accomplishments, or if it was the location of an important event. Certain early public housing projects may have some significance as the venue for housing desegregation battles, though North Beach Housing Project, that was the subject of the 1952 lawsuit that overturned racial segregation in public housing, is no longer extant.

- **Commercial Properties** are those that accommodate all types of non-industrial businesses, including office buildings, stores, hotels and boardinghouses, and restaurants/bars. Most commercial properties are used during regular business hours, though hotels, restaurants, and bars are often operated 'round-the-clock.

In San Francisco, most of the commercial properties that were part of the Fillmore district's famous "Harlem of the West" were destroyed during the 1960s by the Redevelopment Agency, meaning that aside from a handful of buildings that were spared, such as Marcus Books, there would not be many eligible commercial properties in the Fillmore district, the cultural heart of African American San Francisco. The commercial districts of Bayview-Hunters Point (Third Street) and the OMI District (Ocean Avenue and Broad Street) retain much of their older building stock, including several buildings that have housed longtime African American-owned businesses, such as Sam Jordan's Bar (previously discussed) or the commercial building at 4618 Third Street in Bayview-Hunters Point (Figure 67). Some of these commercial buildings may be eligible for registration, though additional research would be required to identify them.

- **Industrial properties** include any buildings or structures where goods are manufactured, assembled, stored, sorted, processed, or repaired. Industrial properties can include factories, warehouses, auto repair facilities, machine shops, mills, power plants, or utility substations.

In San Francisco, African Americans have long been disproportionately employed in transportation, maritime, and heavy industries, in particular shipbuilding, longshoring, warehousing, and other manufacturing, production, and repair businesses. Most of these industries employed people of other races, so it is unlikely that industrial facilities would be registered solely because of their connection with African Americans. Unless it was owned by an African



Figure 67. Auntie April's, 4618 Third Street
Source: Christopher VerPlanck

American the most likely scenario for designation as a landmark would be if an important event related to Civil Rights or other movement happened there, such as the strike at Marinship that broke the hold of racist unions during World War II. However, Marinship is in Marin County. Nonetheless, it is possible that similar events occurred at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. More research would be necessary to identify these events and link them to individual buildings or sites.

- **Religious Properties** include any private assembly buildings constructed to house religious services, ancillary residential structures built to house clergy and their families, shrines and reliquaries, and other monuments or artwork associated with religious practice.

Perhaps more than any other property type, churches and other religious buildings are the most tangible built artifacts of African Americans in San Francisco. Long after neighborhoods have transitioned away from being predominantly African American, the churches remain, with many parishioners commuting in from distant suburbs for Sunday services. During the postwar period, when San Francisco's Black population was growing rapidly, several of the older mainline churches, including Third Baptist, A.M.E. Zion, and Bethel A.M.E. constructed new churches in the Western Addition. African Americans also became the majority parishioners in several Catholic parishes, including Sacred Heart, All Hallows (**Figure 68**), and Our Lady of Lourdes. African American evangelical storefront churches remain relatively common in many outlying neighborhoods. During the 1960s, the Nation of Islam built a mosque and school in Bayview-Hunters Point. With further study it may be revealed that several of these properties are eligible for listing in the local, state, or national registers.

- **Government/Institutional Properties** are civic buildings constructed by local, state, or federal governments for the use of its employees and the public. Examples of institutional properties include city halls, government office buildings, libraries, recreation centers, post offices, and schools. Other non-governmental institutional properties, such as YMCAs, may also be included in this category.

As buildings constructed for all residents of San Francisco, there are probably few governmental or institutional buildings that are exclusively associated with San Francisco's African American community. One exception to this may include several public schools that have long served a predominantly African American population, including Rosa Parks, Malcom X, and Paul Revere schools. In addition, the Buchanan YMCA (**Figure 69**), one of the only buildings to be spared from demolition in the A1 and A2 redevelopment project areas, has a longtime association with San Francisco's African American community. Another institutional property that is associated with African Americans, the City-owned South San Francisco Opera House, is already a City Landmark.



Figure 68. All Hallows Church, 1440 Newhall Avenue
Source: Christopher VerPlanck



Figure 69. Buchanan YMCA
Source: Flickr.com

- **Public Open Space/Public Art** encompasses public parks and open space and civic monuments, including designed landscapes, sporting fields, ancillary structures, and public art and monuments.

Like government/institutional buildings, public parks and open spaces belong to all San Franciscans. Nonetheless, there are certain parks and playgrounds in traditionally African American neighborhoods that are important to the Black community, not only for their intrinsic value as open space, but because they were built with the impetus and input of local residents. Examples include Youngblood Coleman Playground and Hilltop Park in Bayview-Hunters Point or the Raymond Kimball Playground in the Western Addition. Public art made by and for African Americans is located throughout San Francisco. Some examples include the murals by Sargent Johnson at Maritime Park, the statue of Willie McCovey in China Basin Park, “Ndebele,” a sculpture at 1601 Griffith Street, and several murals dedicated to prominent African Americans on the sides of buildings in Bayview-Hunters Point, the Western Addition, Visitacion Valley, and the OMI.³⁹⁷

C. National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation’s comprehensive inventory of historical resources. Administered by the National Park Service, the National Register includes buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts that possess historic, architectural, engineering, archaeological, or cultural significance at the national, state, or local level. Typically, resources over 50 years of age are eligible for listing in the National Register if they meet any one of the four eligibility criteria *and* if the resource retains sufficient historic integrity. Resources under 50 years of age may be eligible if it can be demonstrated that they are of “exceptional importance” or if they are contributors to a historic district. National Register criteria are defined in depth in *National Register Bulletin Number 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. There are four criteria under which a structure, site, building, district, or object can be eligible:

Criterion A (Event): Properties associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

Criterion B (Person): Properties associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

Criterion C (Design/Construction): Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction; and

Criterion D (Information Potential): Properties that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

A resource can be significant at the national, state, or local level to American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. In addition to meeting at least one of the four eligibility criteria, a property or district must retain integrity, meaning that it must have the ability to convey its significance through retention of seven aspects or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity. These aspects are: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

As mentioned previously, there no National Register properties in San Francisco designated solely for their association with African Americans.

³⁹⁷ All of these can be viewed at the website: www.sfpublicart.com

D. California Register of Historical Resources

The California Register is the authoritative guide to significant architectural, archaeological, and historical resources in the State of California. Properties can be listed in the California Register through a number of methods. State Historical Landmarks and National Register-eligible properties (both listed and formal determinations of eligibility) are automatically listed. Also listed are State Historical Landmarks numbered 770 or higher, Points of Historical Interest recommended for listing by the State Historical Resources Commission, properties identified in cultural resource surveys with California Historical Resource Status Codes of 1 to 5, and resources designated as local landmarks by City or County ordinance. Properties can be nominated to the California Register by local governments, organizations, or private citizens. The evaluation criteria used by the California Register are closely based on those developed by the National Park Service for the National Register. In order to be eligible for listing in the California Register a property must be demonstrated to be significant under one or more of the following criteria:

Criterion 1 (Event): Resources that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Criterion 2 (Person): Resources that are associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history.

Criterion 3 (Design/Construction): Resources that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values.

Criterion 4 (Information Potential): Resources or sites that have yielded or have the potential to yield information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

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Similar to the National Register, a property determined eligible for listing in the California Register must retain historic integrity. The California Register uses the same seven aspects to define integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The California Register is a much broader and more extensive inventory than the National Register. By definition it encompasses all National Register-listed and National Register-eligible properties, as well as all city landmarks. Because there is not comprehensive inventory of California Register properties, it is not known how many there might be.

E. Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code

Under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code, city landmarks are defined as “any structure, landscape feature, site or area having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance in the history of San Francisco, the State of California or the nation.”³⁹⁸ Under Article 11, a “historic district refers to any area containing a significant concentration of structures, landscape features, sites or objects having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance which are contextually united.”³⁹⁹ San Francisco presently has 266 city landmarks and 13 historic

³⁹⁸ San Francisco Planning Department, *Preservation Bulletin No. 5: “Landmark and Historic District Designation Procedures”* (San Francisco: rev. ed., 2001), 1.

³⁹⁹ *Preservation Bulletin No. 5*, 1.

districts. The purpose of San Francisco's Article 10 process is to "provide examples of the physical surroundings in which past generations lived" and to "protect, preserve, enhance and encourage continued utilization, rehabilitation and, where necessary, adaptive reuse of significant cultural resources."⁴⁰⁰ Initiation of a city landmark can be made through one of three ways: a motion made by a member of the Board of Supervisors; a resolution of intention by the Planning Commission, Art Commission, or Historic Preservation Commission; or an application submitted by the owner(s) of the property or their authorized agent(s). Properties initiated for designation as city landmarks under Article 10 must meet at least one of the National Register eligibility criteria and retain integrity.

As mentioned previously, there are only five city landmarks designated specifically for their associations with African American history; they are:

- Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, 2135 Sutter Street (Landmark No. 202)
- Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, 2066 Pine Street (Landmark No. 211)
- Joseph Leonard/Cecil F. Poole House, 90 Cedro Avenue (Landmark No. 214)
- Sam Jordan's Bar, 4004-6 Third Street (Landmark No. 263)
- Marcus Books/Jimbo's Bop City, 1712-16 Fillmore Street (Landmark No. 266)

All but one (Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church) were nominated by Tim Kelley and Stacy Farr within the last 15 years.

F. Integrity Thresholds

Properties eligible for listing in the National Register, California Register, or for designation as a city landmark under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code *must* retain sufficient historical integrity. Integrity is defined by the California Register as "the authenticity of an historical resource's physical identity evidenced by the survival of characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance."⁴⁰¹ The National Register, California Register, and Article 10 each recognize seven characteristics, or "aspects," that define integrity, including: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. A property does not have to retain all seven aspects but it should retain a majority of them. *National Register Bulletin 15* provides in-depth definitions of each of the aspects:

- **Location:** Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.
- **Design:** Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
- **Setting:** Setting is the physical environment of a historic property.
- **Materials:** Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.

⁴⁰⁰ *Preservation Bulletin No. 5, 2.*

⁴⁰¹ Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, *Technical Assistance Series #6 "California Register and National Register: A Comparison"* (Sacramento: 2001), 2.

- **Workmanship:** Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
- **Feeling:** Feeling is the property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.
- **Association:** Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

There are two slight differences between the California Register and the National Register in regard to integrity. In some circumstances it may be possible that a property that is ineligible for listing in the National Register due to loss of historic integrity may still be eligible for listing in the California Register if it maintains the potential to "yield significant scientific or historical information or specific data."⁴⁰² The California Register is also more lenient in regard to registering buildings that are less than 50 years old or that have been moved, especially if they were moved in order to ensure their retention. Properties less than 50 years old can be listed in the National Register only if they can be demonstrated to be of "exceptional significance" under Criterion Consideration G.

The aspects of integrity that are most important for any given property to retain depend on the criterion/ia under which the property appears eligible. For example, a property eligible under National Register Criterion C/California Register Criterion 3 (Design/Construction) should certainly retain the aspects of design, materials, and workmanship. Similarly, properties eligible for listing under National Register Criterion B/California Register Criterion 2 (Persons) or National Register Criterion A/California Register Criterion 1 (Events) should retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, but also the aspects of association and feeling from the period in which a particular person occupied a property or when a certain event happened.

The degree of integrity that a property should retain also depends on the property type. As a rule, residential properties should retain a higher degree of integrity than commercial or industrial properties. In the course of their lifespan, commercial and industrial properties often undergo many incremental changes to accommodate new tenants or in response to changes in technology or production methods. Commercial and industrial properties are also more likely to undergo more extensive changes than residential, civic, or religious properties. In contrast, residential properties often do not undergo such drastic alterations because their use typically does not change. Residential properties are also usually smaller and alterations may have a more profound impact than on larger commercial or industrial buildings. Finally, institutional and religious properties should retain a higher degree of integrity than commercial or industrial properties because of their prominence and symbolic importance.

Some types of alterations may affect the integrity of a property more substantially than others. Alterations to primary street-facing façades are generally more harmful than alterations to rear or side elevations. Other types of alterations that can compromise integrity include difficult-to-reverse actions such as stripping a façade of its original finish materials or ornamental detailing, concealing its primary façade(s) behind an addition or other incompatible materials, significantly changing its fenestration pattern, or altering its roofline or massing. Alterations that may be less harmful to a property's integrity, though it depends on the building, include replacing windows within the existing openings, constructing

⁴⁰² Department of Parks and Recreation, 6.

a horizontal addition on a rear elevation or a vertical addition set back from the primary façade, or adding a limited amount of new windows to a non-character-defining elevation. The evaluation of integrity should also include some basis of comparison. For example, what is the overall level of integrity for the property type in the neighborhood or the city? If most remaining commercial buildings in a given district have been significantly altered, a property that has undergone substantial, but fewer alterations than its neighbors, may still qualify if it is the best remaining example.

Minimal Integrity Thresholds for Properties

Presented below is a list of integrity thresholds that a property should retain in order to qualify for listing in the National Register, the California Register, or Article 10 of the Planning Code:

- Retains historical form and roofline, especially the street façade. Properties that have gained additional stories after the period of significance general do not qualify for listing.
- Retains the majority of its historical window and doors in their original pattern.
- Retains its historical exterior cladding, such as wood, stucco, plywood, metal, etc. The cladding may have been replaced but it ought to match what was used when the property achieved significance. This can require a judgment call if no permits record any changes, but certain building types and styles within a defined geographical area typically use a narrow range of materials. Historic photographs, if available, can be of assistance in making this determination.
- Retains at least some of its historical ornament (if any), especially door and window casings, porches and vestibules, friezes and cornices, pilasters and columns, etc. The entire or partial replacement of storefronts and porches is a common alteration, but the replacement should be as close as possible to what existed during the period of significance.
- Replacement of doors and windows is generally acceptable as long as they conform to the original pattern and size of the original openings. A comparison of the property with comparable properties can assist in making this determination.
- Additions may be acceptable as long as the essential character of the historic building is preserved. In particular, rear additions, or additions built on other non-character-defining elevations that respect the scale of the building are acceptable. Some additions that do not fit within this guideline, in particular buildings that have been raised to receive a new ground floor, may have gained significance in their own right, if executed during the period of significance. Vertical additions, unless they can be set back or concealed from view of the street are generally discouraged.
- Setting is another important part of a property’s character-defining features. Setting includes things like yards and landscaping, outbuildings, setbacks, as well as neighboring properties. In general, for properties to be eligible for listing in the National Register they should not have been moved from their original site. The California Register allows moved properties to be registered if they were moved to ensure their protection.

V. PRESERVATION GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The African American Citywide Historic Context Statement is not meant to be a comprehensive history of San Francisco's African American community. Rather, it is a preliminary step in the documentation of the contributions of African Americans to the cultural and physical fabric of San Francisco. Further research is needed to identify additional significant persons, events, and institutions, and extant properties that may be associated with them. Historic context statements are considered to be living documents that can be amended as more research and documentation is undertaken. In the following sections we provide several actions that could be undertaken to document and register properties associated with the African American experience in San Francisco.

A. Further Research and Field Work

Cultural Resources Survey

A cultural resources survey (survey) is the act of identifying and gathering data on a community's cultural resources. It includes a field survey – the physical documentation of potential historical resources on the ground – and then the organization, interpretation, and presentation of the data gathered in the field survey. An inventory is one of the main products of a survey; it is an organized compilation of information on the properties evaluated. Evaluation is the process of determining whether the identified properties meet the criteria of historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance.⁴⁰³

As stated in the Introduction, very little work has been done to document the cultural and physical imprint of African Americans on San Francisco. Though this Historic Context Statement is a good start, it is only a broad-brush overview of the community's history as it relates to the physical environment. This report has made an attempt to identify the most important properties but we are limited by the comprehensiveness of the secondary sources consulted. Furthermore, neither time nor budget allowed for extensive primary research. As a result, there are surely significant persons, events, and properties that have been omitted from this document. To close the knowledge gap we recommend funding a citywide survey to develop a comprehensive list of properties that have meaningful associations with San Francisco's African American community. Oral histories and other primary sources must be consulted to identify properties not noted in this document, particularly traditional cultural properties that would only be known by residents of San Francisco's traditional African American neighborhoods.

B. Registration

Designation of New Historic Landmarks and Historic Districts and National Register Properties

Based on the results of the cultural resource survey proposed above, as well as the recommendations contained within this Historic Context Statement, the City, in conjunction with community stakeholders, could pursue the registration of properties associated with San Francisco's African American community as local landmarks or historic districts, as well as in the National Register. As mentioned previously, there are only five city landmarks with any significant associations with Black San Francisco. There are no properties in the National Register in San Francisco that were nominated on the basis of their association with African American culture or history. The following is a list of properties identified in this Historic Context Statement that may be eligible for local landmark, California Register, or National Register status:

⁴⁰³ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 24: "Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, rev. ed. 1985), 2.

- A.M.E. Zion Church, 2159 Golden Gate Avenue
- African American Art and Culture Complex, 762 Fulton Street
- All Hallows Church, 1440 Newhall Street
- Bethel A.M.E. Church, 916-70 Laguna Street
- Booker T. Washington Community Center, 800 Presidio Avenue
- Buchanan YMCA, 1530 Buchanan Street
- College of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue
- Crispus Attucks Club, 1201-05 Mendell Street
- Fellowship of All Peoples Church, 2041 Larkin Street
- The Fillmore (formerly the Majestic Ballroom), 1805 Geary Boulevard
- Glide Memorial Church, 330 Ellis Street
- Hannibal Lodge No. 1, 2804 Bush Street
- Hunters Point Naval Shipyard
- Ingleside Presbyterian Church, 1345 Ocean Avenue
- Mel's Drive-In, 3355 Geary Boulevard
- Minnie's Can-Do Club, 1915 Fillmore Street
- National Urban League Headquarters, 2015 Steiner Street
- Office of Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr., 1845 Fillmore Street
- Presidio of San Francisco (barracks associated with Buffalo Soldiers)
- Pullman Hotel, 236 Townsend Street
- Residence of Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Jr., 579 Los Palms Drive
- Residence of Terry Francois, 1608 10th Avenue
- Residence of Joseph James, 2806 Pine Street
- Residence of Willie Mays, 175 Miraloma Drive
- St. Francis Square
- Sacred Heart Church, 554 Fillmore Street
- Third Baptist Church, 1399 McAllister Street
- Town Club, 1963 Sutter Street

This list is not meant to be complete, but only a starting point. Each of these potential landmarks would need to be researched and their integrity studied to determine whether they qualify for local landmark status, and if so, placed on the Historic Preservation Commission's work program. In addition, it would be necessary to obtain the permission of the religious congregations to nominate any of the churches. Finally, the City could decide not proceed with nominating non-religious properties if their owners objected.

Preservation Incentives

The San Francisco Planning Department, the State of California, and the federal government offer various preservation incentives to assist property owners bear the additional costs of owning and maintaining a registered historic property. The federal government provides rehabilitation tax credits to owners of income-producing, National Register-listed properties who agree to rehabilitate them in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. At the local level, the City offers the Mills Act to incentivize the rehabilitation of local landmarks through reduction of property taxes. Additional preservation incentives at the state and local level include the California Historical Building Code, which is a less-stringent alternative to the Uniform Building Code, federal tax deductions for the donation of

preservation easements, transfer of development rights (in the downtown C-3 districts only), and several loan programs.

Identification of Notable Public Art

San Francisco has many public artworks that commemorate the Black experience. These range from sculptures and murals by well-known African American artists, to neighborhood buildings with murals painted on their sides. Though the San Francisco Arts Commission has jurisdiction over most public artwork – at least officially commissioned pieces – the City could commission a survey of all public artwork with an African American focus to ensure that important examples of unofficial “vernacular” pieces are retained to the degree possible.

Historical Plaques and Information Kiosks

Due to a number of factors, the inventory of extant buildings associated with San Francisco’s African American community is not very extensive. Prior to World War II, San Francisco’s Black community was very small and concentrated in several inner-city enclaves that were all destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. Additionally, many buildings, businesses, and other sites associated with post-World War II Black San Francisco were demolished by the Redevelopment Agency during the 1960s and 1970s. In instances where a building associated with an important person, event, or institution is gone, the City could install a historical plaque to provide information about the history of the site. If the space is available, especially for more important properties, a larger kiosk could be installed. Either way, the plaque or the kiosk ought to have text and images to provide a valuable and instructive experience. Presented below is a preliminary list of candidates for historical plaques. Several religious and cultural institutions moved at various times, so multiple listings and date ranges are provided for these properties:

- Leidesdorff Street
- A.M.E. Zion Church: 1864-1906, 1200 Stockton Street
- A.M.E. Zion Church and San Francisco Chapter of the NAACP: 1912-1960, 1669 Geary Street
- Athenaeum, 273 Washington Street
- Blue Mirror, 935 Fillmore Street
- Booker T. Washington Community Center: 1919-1923, 45 Farren Street
- Booker T. Washington Community Center: 1923-1942, 1433 Divisadero Street
- Booker T. Washington Center: 1942-1960, 1942-1952, 2031 Bush Street
- Booker T. Washington Hotel and Cocktail Lounge, 1540 Ellis Street
- California Theater, 1650 Post Street
- Club Alabam, 1933 Sutter Street
- Ellis Theater, 1671 Ellis Street
- Jack’s Tavern, 1931 Sutter Street
- Law office of Terry Francois, 2085 Sutter Street
- Long Bar, 1633 Fillmore Street
- Magnolia Saloon, 808 Pacific Avenue
- Melrose Record Shop, 1226 Fillmore Street
- New Orleans Swing Club, 1849 Post Street
- Primalon Ballroom, 1223 Fillmore Street
- Purcell’s Elite Café and Purcell’s So Different Saloon, 520 Pacific Avenue
- San Francisco Council for Civic Unity (CCU) headquarters, 437 Market Street
- St. Cyprian A.M.E. Church, intersection of Jackson Street and St. James Place

- Stone Street, San Francisco's earliest African American enclave
- Texas Playhouse/Club Flamingo, 1836-40 Fillmore Street
- Third Baptist Church: ca. 1857-1906, intersection of Montgomery and Union streets
- Third Baptist Church: 1906-1952, 1299 Hyde Street
- Thomas Bell Mansion, 1661 Octavia Street

Again, this list of sites worthy of commemoration with a historical plaque or kiosk is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a starting point. Additional research would be necessary to develop a methodology for determining what sites are worthy of recognition, as well as additional information on when important persons, businesses, and institutions occupied these sites.

History Walks

Most of the properties and sites listed above are located in geographical clusters, including the former Fillmore district, Chinatown/Jackson Square, and Bayview-Hunters Point. Where the concentration of historic properties and sites is dense enough – such as Fillmore Street – it would be valuable to establish a self-guided walking tour. The walking tour could be facilitated in several different ways, including with historical plaques and/or kiosks – like Boston's Freedom Trail or New York City's Harlem Walk of Fame – or virtual, using paper guides and/or handheld devices loaded with applications that would display photographs and other data when within range of a given property. Fillmore Street and its environs from approximately Page Street to Pine Street would be a natural place to start. Periodic guided tours led by members of the African American Historical and Cultural Society or others could be conducted in the Fillmore, Bayview-Hunters Point, OMI, and elsewhere, especially as research turns up more properties worthy of research, documentation, and registration.

C. Other Strategies

In addition to preserving the memory of businesses and cultural institutions that have disappeared, this Historic Context Statement recommends several concrete measures that can be taken to retain what remains of San Francisco's African American legacy, including financial incentives and honorary designations that can help to attract patronage. San Francisco Heritage's Legacy Project is dedicated to preserving important longstanding businesses in San Francisco. With escalating rents and out-of-control real estate speculation, many older San Francisco businesses are being forced to close or move out of the city. San Francisco Heritage's Legacy Project is a registry of important, longtime businesses whose retention is important to the preservation of San Francisco's culture and history. Being listed in the registry can help to bring in additional patrons through various local and national publicity outlets. Heritage is also working with Supervisor David Campos to develop a package of financial tax incentives, including tax breaks for landlords who agree to maintain reasonable rents for Legacy businesses. This would be a powerful tool for preserving local businesses, which in many cases cannot compete in regard to rents with well-financed national chains or newer, high-end establishments. Another model worth examining is the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District project. This project, which centers on a 16-block long stretch of 24th Street in the Mission district, is a collaborative effort by local business owners, the San Francisco Latino Historical Society, Supervisor David Campos, and San Francisco Heritage to facilitate the retention of longtime Latino businesses associated in *El Corazon da la Mision*. Such pragmatic steps are necessary to ensure that African American culture remains alive and well in fast-changing San Francisco.

VI. CONCLUSION

The African American Citywide Historic Context Statement was prepared to assist the City and other stakeholders identify, document, and evaluate individual properties and other historical resources associated with San Francisco's African American community. Though African Americans did not comprise a sizable percentage of the city's population until World War II, they were among the earliest settlers of San Francisco, and pioneer Black San Franciscans made outsized contributions to the city's early economic, social, and cultural life. Far from the rigid racial strictures of the East, many pioneer African American settlers prospered in San Francisco. Nonetheless, racial oppression was here too, causing several hundred Black San Franciscans to emigrate to Canada in 1858. The 1906 Earthquake resulted in an additional exodus of Black San Franciscans to Oakland, where unionized jobs with the railroads lured additional Black San Franciscans in later decades. After 1920, San Francisco's tiny African American population began to grow as unionized job opportunities opened up along the waterfront. The explosion of defense industry work during World War II – especially in the Bay Area's many shipyards – caused San Francisco's African American population to surge, reaching 33,000, or 5.6 percent of the population, in 1950. Their numbers continued to grow after the war, as friends and relatives of wartime migrants fled the Jim Crow South. Prosperity and good quality housing proved to be elusive to African Americans after the war as defense jobs dried up and discrimination intensified. On the other hand, the postwar period represented the apogee of African American cultural life in San Francisco, especially the flowering of the "Harlem of the West" in the Fillmore district during the 1950s and early 1960s. Since 1970, San Francisco's Black population has steadily declined. The causes are many, including the redevelopment of the Fillmore district, crime and deterioration, and the parallel growth of job and housing opportunities in the formerly majority-White suburbs. This exodus continues to the present day. It is the purpose of the African American Citywide Historic Context Statement to document the physical and cultural presence of African Americans in San Francisco and to recommend potential strategies to document and preserve this fragile legacy. It is also a living document meant to be amended as new information becomes available.

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