Architecture + Advocacy empowers communities to un-design spatial injustice.

Special thanks to FAME and the community of Sugar Hill for hosting us and to West Adams Heritage Association for sharing your knowledge.
WEST ADAMS HEIGHTS

In 1902, Frederick Hastings Rindge along with his close friend and business partner, Paul Revere Williams, purchased a large tract between Washington Blvd. and Adams Street, Western Ave. and La Salle. The tract, which they named West Adams Heights, featured a small hill that overlooked downtown and developed it for the wealthiest and socially prominent elites.

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

Racial covenants restricted non-caucasians from owning or renting property in many neighborhoods across Los Angeles. In West Adams, new homeowners were required to sign the covenants as a condition to obtaining a loan that would finance their property. The covenants required property owners and neighborhood associations often renewed the discriminatory housing restrictions.

RINDGE MANSION

Built: 1902
Architect: Frederick L. Roehrig | French Renaissance

Rindge was the son of a successful merchant in New York who owned all of Malibu and successfully developed it for the neighborhood by 1945. In 1904, Richard D. Richards built a 16-room home in West Adams Heights. His Shingle–style residence was built next to Rindge’s mansion and features a unique walled garden that was added in 1928. The house was purchased by FAME and renamed the ‘Allen House’ after Richard Allen, the influential Black leader who founded the First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church was founded in 1872 by Bridget (Biddy) Mason who arrived in Los Angeles as an enslaved woman and won her freedom in 1865. Biddy Mason went on to become an influential landowner and philanthropist in Los Angeles. FAME’s first permanent church building sat at 8th and Towne. In 1963, 500 congregation members with gold-pointed shoes broke ground at 2270 Harvard Blvd. for the construction of a new church designed by conger-gation member, board member, and prominent Black architect, Paul Revere Williams. FAME opened at this new location in Sugar Hill in 1968 and became a community landmark. Today, FAME continues to serve the community from this location and keep the spirit of Sugar Hill alive.

SUGAR HILL

Affluent social leaders in the Black community began to purchase homes in West Adams Heights in the 1940s. Recognized for its arts and architecture scene, the neighborhood attracted many famous and influential Black artists, writers, musicians, and film makers. It became known as ‘Sugar Hill’ in reference to the legendary Black neighborhood in Harlem and as many as 57 Black families lived in the neighborhood by 1945.

TOLHURST v. VENERABLE

When Blacks broke the color line in West Adams Heights, they faced a lawsuit from the all-white West Adams Improvement Association for violating the racial covenant on their properties. The civil rights case went to the Los Angeles Superior Court and then to the California Supreme Court in 1948 where Attorney Loren Miller successfully defended the Black homeowners right to own property and reside in the neighborhood.

SHELLEY v. KRAEMER

Restrictive covenants were brought to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948. Thurgood Marshall and Loren Miller successfully argued the case that ended the use of restrictive covenants based on race. It would be 20 years before the Fair Housing Act, “The Sugar Hill Case” of 1945 (Tolhurst v. Venable) and this landmark ruling in 1948 and huge steps towards abolishing housing discrimination based on race.

SANTA MONICA FREEWAY

In the early 1960s, construction of the Santa Monica Freeway cut through Sugar Hill destroying several dozen homes and irrevocably changing the landscape of this area forever. Historically, urban planning decisions and large infrastructure projects have been particularly destructive to communities of color. Despite other options for the route and protests by the community, the California Highway Commission ultimately planned and controlled the freeway through the center of Sugar Hill.

Today, the Sugar Hill Historic District is recognized as a historical land use area in the Santa Monica Historic Resources Atlas which fight for Black homeownership, and for its notable architecture that pre-dates WWI. Small businesses, community, and nonprofits have long since endured a sense of place with their deep investment in the arts and culture of Sugar Hill. We gather and walk today to recognize this hill with its second heritage tag and take in the證明 spatial injustices together.

DEAD-END

Built: 1964
Architect: Paul R. Williams

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HEDLAND HILL

Architect: Paul R. Williams

First African Methodist (FAM) Church was founded in 1872 by Bridget (Biddy) Mason who arrived in Los Angeles as an enslaved woman and won her freedom in a California court in 1865. Biddy Mason went on to become an influential landowner and philanthropist in Los Angeles. FAME’s first permanent church building sat at 8th and Towne. In 1963, 500 congregation members with gold-pointed shoes broke ground at 2270 Harvard Blvd. for the construction of a new church designed by congregation member, board member, and prominent Black architect, Paul Revere Williams. FAME opened at this new location in Sugar Hill in 1968 and became a community landmark. Today, FAME continues to serve the community from this location and keep the spirit of Sugar Hill alive.