

THE LOS ANGELES AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE AREA:
A PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

by

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Abstract

This thesis revolves around a proposal for creating a heritage area and tour related to African American history and the built environment in Los Angeles. The portion of the city to be examined will encompass the east side of Los Angeles, beginning with downtown and extending southward to Watts. Though not the sole location inhabited by African Americans, this is the area that will be explored in the course of this thesis. The heritage area proposed in this thesis will be based on past examples of heritage areas and tours around the country, some related and some unrelated to African American history. Some of the main challenges this thesis will deal with will be related to the commemoration of resources that no longer remain and the acknowledgement of a particular history in areas whose past is multiethnic and multiracial.

The South Central area of Los Angeles today is one that is portrayed in an overwhelmingly negative light in the media today. The view in the popular imagination is, as a result, negative as well. This image does not necessarily match the reality of life in these neighborhoods. They are places grounded in community, and it is community organizations that are leading the way to revitalization and redevelopment. A key factor in boosting this revitalization is altering the image of South LA in the popular imagination through education. Creating a heritage area and tour will bring people to these neighborhoods, and this in turn will aid in revitalization and increase economic viability. A heritage area thus not only creates the foundation for linking scholarship related to African American history to a physical and geographical expression of the African American experience in LA, but it also utilizes this history for the economic benefit of the area.

Introduction

The story of the African American community in Los Angeles, like the city itself, is complex and multifaceted. The proposal that follows in this thesis encompasses the beginnings of developing an approximately eight-mile long African American heritage area in central Los Angeles. Further exploration and development is needed, and the inclusion of sites and neighborhoods is by no means complete. However, the proposal lays the groundwork for further research and development. Linking together significant sites and exploring their significance as a whole through the creation of a heritage area would serve as an effective way to link history to place, encourage economic benefit for the neighborhoods, and educate the general public about an portion of the city that is generally viewed in a negative light. The story of heritage areas in the United States began in the 1980s at the federal level when the first National Heritage Area was created. NHA's and their state and local counterparts have contributed greatly to the appreciation of history in communities around the country. Creating a heritage area at the local level is an effective way to increase public awareness of the richness of the history in the South Central area and of African Americans in the city in general.

The dynamic history of African Americans in Los Angeles has left its legacy on the built environment of the city. In the eastern portion of the city, this physical legacy began downtown, where African Americans lived in the nineteenth century. It continued south along Central Avenue, the lifeline of the community after 1910. During World War II, the story of the community returned to downtown—roughly the same area in which African Americans lived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has subsequently been populated by Japanese and Japanese Americans and was known as

Little Tokyo until they were forcibly removed during the Second World War. Wartime migration to Los Angeles by African Americans in search of jobs left the Central Avenue district overcrowded, and the population spilled over into Little Tokyo, renamed Bronzeville during this period. Farther south, the town of Watts existed independently until 1926, when it was incorporated into Los Angeles. An African American community thrived here from the beginning of the city's existence, drawn by low prices for land and housing. Though not the sole location of African American habitation, this heritage area, which stretches from Little Tokyo to Watts, is the portion of the city that I will explore in the course of this thesis. African Americans left a physical legacy here, and though it is not always readily apparent, this does mean that it should not be commemorated. The architecture of African American history in the city can be elusive, but it is there. It is being studied, surveyed, and recognized more as time goes on. An important aspect of this recognition is the creation of a tour and heritage area. This recognition would follow a trend occurring in the field of preservation that increasingly focuses on cultural resources rather than solely architectural ones. The issue of how to commemorate African American resources in Los Angeles brings to the forefront key questions and challenges about recognizing and commemorating resources that are nontraditionally significant. What is an effective way to create a tour and heritage area that includes significant resources that are altered or no longer remain? How does a tour and heritage area deal with resources that are culturally rather than architecturally significant? Another key issue that I will discuss is the layering of history and how to deal with multiple histories in a given area over time. In a city like Los Angeles, where areas have often been home

to different groups, what are some effective ways to highlight the history of one without neglecting to acknowledge the histories and contributions of others?

In order to address some of these questions, I will begin in Chapter 1 by outlining the history and concept of heritage areas. National heritage areas and corridors provide a good model for commemorating Los Angeles' African American resources. I also introduce some of the challenges that arise when dealing with African American resources in the city, such as the challenge of commemorating a particular history in a city as dynamic as Los Angeles. I outline some of the benefits and results of heritage areas, such as economic redevelopment and heritage tourism, as well as providing examples of already established heritage areas and trails that can help inform work in Los Angeles. These case studies confronted challenges that are similar to those that might arise in Los Angeles, such as the diversity of the neighborhoods explored in the Chicago Neighborhood Tours and the exploration of African American urban history in Washington, DC's African American Heritage Trail and Chicago's Black Metropolis. I also examine several established programs that could provide good models for establishing a trail and tour in Los Angeles; these include the Curating the City program in Los Angeles, the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Alabama. These three examples provide excellent models for establishing an African American Heritage Corridor in Los Angeles.

The second and third chapters will provide an overview of African American history in Los Angeles in order to provide context for the trail. This overview will include a general history of African Americans in the city beginning in the late nineteenth century through the 1960s, the dichotomy of the draw of California for African Americans versus

the realities they found, and the migration and movement of the African American community both into and within the city. I will also include brief histories of some of the communities in which blacks lived—namely downtown, Little Tokyo, Central Avenue, and Watts.

The fourth chapter will include a discussion of the revitalization attempts that have occurred in South LA since the Watts riots. I will also examine some of the challenges faced when seeking to commemorate African American history in Los Angeles and ways to address these challenges. The main challenges I will look at will be related to how history can be recognized when the physical remnants of that history are lacking and ways that the issue of cultural versus architectural significance can be addressed. Secondly, I will address ways in which the layering of history in different areas of Los Angeles can be approached effectively, since, as Lisbeth Haas notes, the “politics of space” is crucial in developing and maintaining the identity of a community.¹ It is important to be respectful of both the past and present communities’ links to an area and to avoid favoring one group’s history over another’s. Lastly, I include a more focused examination of the heritage corridor and trail. The trail I am proposing will include both a physical and digital component. I will outline the advantages of each as well as the specific components of each.

South Los Angeles today is perceived as a place of gang violence, drugs, and rampant unemployment. While these issues are part of the landscape and life in South LA, there is more to the area than these negative aspects. South LA is rich in history. Raising awareness of this history plays an important role in altering the way the general public view these neighborhoods.

Introduction Endnotes

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Chapter 1: Overview and Examination of Heritage Areas

History and Beginnings of Heritage Areas

Cultural heritage corridors and areas are an aspect of historic preservation that go back to 1984 at the federal level, when Congress designated the first National Heritage Area, the 97-mile Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.¹ There are now forty-nine National Heritage Areas, or NHAs. NHAs are defined as an area in which “a combination of natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources has shaped a cohesive, nationally distinct landscape.”² Heritage corridors and trails fall under the same umbrella as heritage areas, but are more geographically linear in nature; heritage areas cover a wider landscape in general. Heritage areas, trails, and corridors are run by partnerships between the National Park Service (NPS), the state, and communities at the local level.³ They are not part of the National Park System, however, and remain in the ownership of whatever entity they existed previously, whether state, local, or even private, as well as possibly a combination of these three.⁴ The creation of heritage areas and corridors is not limited to the federal level and can also be undertaken at the state and local level. Whether at the federal, state, or local level, heritage areas and corridors have characteristics in common. They represent an attempt to conserve the entire setting of an area, rather than just a single feature or single type of feature.⁵ They are designed around the importance of the connection between the landscape and the culture and people that live on that landscape; they are committed to preserving that connection and the culture of the people in the area.⁶ They often begin at the grassroots level and remain this way in terms of management and organization. Cooperation and coordination is key, as many heritage areas encompass larger areas. They can range from the 97-mile long Illinois and

Michigan Canal corridor to the roughly one and a half mile long Black Heritage Trail on Boston's Beacon Hill.⁷ They can include both rural and urban areas. There are urban trails devoted to black history in cities large cities such as New York City and in more moderately sized cities like Savannah, Georgia. I am proposing a heritage area for African American sites in Los Angeles that will include trails within it to link sites by theme and neighborhood. The heritage area will be somewhat linear in nature, but it will cover more of the landscape than a corridor would and will have trails within it that allow for the history of African Americans in the city to be told in a more complex manner.

Chicago's Black Metropolis explores the remains of a community created by the influx of black migrants into the city during the early twentieth century.⁸ The area was also known as the Black Metropolis or Bronzeville and is the neighborhood from which Los Angeles' wartime Little Tokyo district gets its name. It was the main African American neighborhood in Chicago after the Great Migration in the 1920s and 1930s; it declined as public housing was built up around the area, shielding it from the development that was occurring in the rest of the city. The effort to revitalize Bronzeville began with the nomination of nine structures to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985; however, they subsequently remained boarded up and unused. The first goal for redevelopment was to preserve the structures and plan for their adaptive reuse.⁹ Main goals of the project were to make the buildings anchors of the community, to bring African American developers in to rehabilitate the structures as businesses and affordable housing, and to use the structures to answer community needs. The preservation and adaptive reuse of the area's structures has been crucial in revitalizing the area; it has been a twenty-year effort that is still ongoing. More recent efforts have focused on creating

jobs, attracting tourists, developing education, increasing a sense of cohesion, and involving the community—to serve as docents, for example. 2016 marks the centennial of the beginning of the Great Migration. Bronzeville aims to create permanent jobs and infrastructure and increase its attractiveness as the premier heritage tourism destination for African American history in the country in the years leading up to the centennial.¹⁰ A bill concerning the feasibility of creating the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area was put before Congress in November 2009, and the legislation is pending.¹¹ Even though the Black Metropolis NHA has not been officially created yet, the area is already experiencing a renaissance.

Heritage areas begin with the people that live in an area. They revolve around community involvement and the community caring about the area they live in. They often begin with grassroots involvement in the first place, and they are maintained at the most basic level by local people, even if, like NHAs, they receive support from the National Park Service. The NPS supports NHAs with “funding, training, technical assistance, and recognition for community efforts” but it is still the local communities that play a crucial role in heritage area creation, maintenance, and success.¹² This is important, as heritage areas do not necessarily possess the architectural cohesiveness of a historic district; they revolve, rather, around local culture and its connection to place, as well as “a sense of the geographic, architectural, economic, and social factors that shaped the region’s story.”¹³ This applies to African American resources in Los Angeles. Significant sites still exist, but most of them could not be grouped together under the umbrella of a historic district. Teresa Grimes, in the study *Los Angeles Landmarks: Reflections of Our Past and Symbols for Our Future*, notes that “historic neighborhoods [...] have retained their

importance as cultural [...] centers, even though [the groups that originally lived in them] have largely moved away.¹⁴ This is the case, not only for African American neighborhoods, but also for places like Little Tokyo and Chinatown. She goes on to say that “the remaining landmarks on Central Avenue [...] continue to have importance to the African-American community even though the area is now multi-ethnic.”¹⁵ These sites continue to have a great deal of cultural significance to groups even after they move, allowing for multiple layers of significance in an area. Heritage areas like the type proposed for Los Angeles thus, partly by necessity, have to go beyond a sole focus on architectural resources and encompass the cultural heritage of a place. They “embrace intangible resources, such as festivals, food, faith and music that express the culture of the people who live in the area.”¹⁶ They reflect the relationship between people and culture and the land they live on.¹⁷ The focus of heritage areas often centers on the development of a people and culture on a particular landscape; geography is key in the picture.¹⁸ This is important because “by involving the people who live in the region in telling its history from their perspective, underrepresented parts of the past are [...] revealed” and placed within a larger historical context.¹⁹ It is the local community that is the focus and the most important part of the picture.

Existing NHA's, as well as their state and local counterparts, can provide a good model for connecting and preserving African American resources in Los Angeles, as well as interpreting them and providing benefits to the communities in which they exist. One of the most effective ways to begin collaboration about preservation is at the local level, by the people that live in the area. Not all of the neighborhoods once occupied by African Americans in Los Angeles are still occupied by them. Los Angeles is an ever-changing

and evolving city that has a layered history. One of the challenges that must be addressed in interpreting and presenting African American history in a city like Los Angeles is in what manner this evolution can be interpreted and approached. The neighborhood downtown where blacks lived at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth as well as during World War II is now Little Tokyo, the center of the Japanese American community. Central Avenue, for the first part of the twentieth century the nexus of the African American community, is now a predominately Hispanic neighborhood. For places like this, the question is how to acknowledge and interpret these places' importance in African American history while engaging the present community and acknowledging their presence as another important aspect of the neighborhood's story. If heritage areas "tend to occur where the linkages between place, nature and culture, and the present and the past are traditionally connected, but currently threatened or weak," how can one formulate a method to reconnect these aspects of the African American community's history in a city as dynamic as Los Angeles?²⁰

Examinations of successful heritage areas illustrate that collaboration is crucial. Collaboration between the current and past communities is also important. A sense of a shared heritage is important, and this can be achieved even in a dynamic city like Los Angeles, where the make-up of most communities has changed, often many times in only the last one hundred years. The benefits of heritage areas for neighborhoods in Los Angeles would be tremendous, however. These are some of the questions that must be answered and issues that must be dealt with in the process of raising awareness about an aspect of history that has been too little addressed with respect to the built environment but is gaining more attention.

Results of Heritage Areas and the Potential for L.A. African American Sites

Heritage areas and tours are an important part of preservation. They have recognizable benefits to the communities in which they are created. They begin with a “desire to recognize and preserve the significance of the past” in a manner similar to other areas of preservation.²¹ They have the dual benefits of bringing to a community “tourism and economic revitalization as well as conservation and preservation.”²² They promote culture and history while at the same time fostering community revitalization and tourism.²³ They often “emerge in communities under stress,” where the economic base of the past is no longer present or the history embodied in the built environment is in danger of disappearing or being forgotten.²⁴ Central Avenue began slowly declining in the 1940s when upper-middle class blacks began moving out of the area towards West Adams. The Watts riot in 1965 wrought havoc and destruction on an already declining neighborhood.²⁵ It is slowly in recovery due to redevelopment and revitalization efforts over the past fifteen to twenty years, but this is a slow process. Today it is certainly no less a home and neighborhood, but the African American population has decreased and has been replaced with Hispanic residents over the past twenty to thirty years. The history of blacks tied to the area is too little known and recognized by the public at large, though that is changing. The African American history in places like Central Avenue and downtown is receiving more attention, but that history in relation to the built environment is just beginning to be recognized. The next step is to begin to pull it all together and tie it to the built environment.

Involvement with the current communities in areas where African Americans once lived is key. The layered history of the Los Angeles’ neighborhoods makes them

unique, and this layered history must be recognized. No group can be favored at the expense of another, especially the groups living in the areas today. For example, the current Japanese and Japanese-American community in Little Tokyo must be involved and consulted about the presentation of African American history in their community, since African Americans lived there twice in its history. In this area and others like it, there must be collaboration between the past and present members of the community in order to tell the varied stories of the groups that have lived there over time. Scott Standish, the deputy director for Long Range Planning on the Lancaster, Pennsylvania Planning Commission in speaking about Lancaster County Heritage says that “creating broad public awareness and keeping the public involved in the process has been one of the keys to our success.”²⁶ It is the public who make heritage areas successful. They must be aware of the creation of a heritage area and must be involved. This is especially the case for residents of an area, but also for others in order to draw them to the area to visit, appreciate the resources available, and to generate the economic benefits of heritage tourism. The area must be made available to the public. At the same time, however, “the first responsibility [...] is to protect and preserve the resource [...] interpretation of the site to visitors is an important function but it is of secondary importance to preservation.”²⁷ These aspects of preservation and heritage development are woven with “recreation, economic development, [...]and] heritage education [...] into a new conservation strategy” that can be highly effective.²⁸ Effective management can bring economic development and opportunities to an area.²⁹ Bronzeville in Chicago is a model referenced all over the country of an area utilizing historic preservation to revitalize a neighborhood. Over the past twenty years, the area has been nominated to the National

Register of Historic Places and redeveloped. The district has been using historic preservation and heritage tourism as catalysts to effect change—to create jobs, provide needed community services, and involve residents in their community’s history.

Successful Cultural Heritage Corridors and Some Case Studies

There are characteristics that most successful heritage areas have in common, regardless of the setting or nature of the resource. The African American Heritage Trail and Chicago Neighborhood Tours have utilized history and the built environment to promote education, awareness, and tourism for their respective cities.

The African American Heritage Trail in Washington DC highlights the contributions of African Americans throughout the city’s history. It outlines history ranging from the Underground Railroad to the African American art and literary scene in the twentieth century. There are more than two hundred sites on the trail.³⁰ These are divided into fifteen neighborhood trails, which are marked with placards along the routes. This solution addresses the wide geographical scope of the sites on the trail, which, without this division into neighborhoods, would become overwhelming and confusing. The African American Heritage Trail sites occur side by side with sites on neighborhood heritage trails around the city, allowing visitors to explore other types of history alongside the African American sites and discover how the two contexts fit together. The trail began as a survey in 2001, which inventoried over 200 sites.³¹ The advisory committee illustrates the collaborative nature of the project; individuals represent libraries, area universities, museums, and a local church, among others. The trail has served to highlight African American contributions as well as the strength and richness of the city’s modern African American communities.

Chicago Neighborhood Tours (CNTs), formed in a similar urban setting, must deal with the same types of issues as the African American Heritage Trail. Chicago's neighborhoods are incredibly ethnically diverse. The aim of CNTs is to highlight these diverse ethnic traditions and to keep them alive, whereas before "most tourists, and many Chicagoans [...] were either unaware of these communities or apprehensive about venturing beyond the commonly toured areas," an issue that applies well to areas of African American history in Los Angeles.³² The tours also want to encourage the ties between cultural heritage and heritage tourism. The solution in Chicago was to begin conducting van tours in these neighborhoods as well as to involve the residents of the neighborhoods in the presentation of their history. The tours strive to provide residents with economic opportunities by encouraging the "selling [of] ethnically specific and authentic, handcrafted merchandise" by individuals and shops.³³ The flip side of providing tours like these through neighborhoods is that one must be careful about being too invasive and impinging on residents' daily life or sense of privacy.³⁴ This will also be an issue in Los Angeles, where sites are located in functioning neighborhoods that are often not always inhabited by the residents with which the particular history is concerned. A middle ground must be found between heritage tourism and the daily workings of a living, breathing community. The benefits of an approach like this are varied. Heritage tourism generates economic benefits for the areas and their residents, as well as fostering community pride. Economic benefits help residents "to maintain and protect their historic built environment and perpetuate their cultural resources" further.³⁵ The success of Chicago Neighborhood Tours lies in its grounding in the communities it tours. It involves the communities and the residents of those communities; it makes them an integral part of

the process. Community involvement gives the tours an added dimension and builds community pride, crucial to the revitalization of an area. The heritage tourism brought about by the CNTs allows residents and tourists alike “to explore and embrace cultures they may not have previously understood; to tread in unfamiliar territory they might otherwise have avoided.”³⁶ In the case of Los Angeles, this would be beneficial, as other ethnic groups now make up a larger percentage of the population in neighborhoods African Americans occupied historically. Highlighting the African American history in these areas will give current residents more perspective and information about the areas’ pasts and hopefully allow them to appreciate that history as part of the evolution of the neighborhood. Acknowledging the African American history in the areas is not intended to be an attempt to detract from their current stories but would give residents insight into the past, and hopefully that insight will allow the African American history to become more widely known while avoiding any attempt to make current residents feel that their neighborhoods are being overshadowed by a history that is no longer as evident.

The examination related to creating a heritage area for African American sites in Los Angeles will be based on several examples of the ways in which historic sites can be tied together into a cohesive whole. This chapter has already examined several successful heritage areas, some of the challenges associated with them, and the manner in which these challenges have been addressed. From here, the chapter will examine several case studies that can be used as models for a heritage area in Los Angeles. The three examples that will be discussed will be Curating the City, a program that highlights the history and significance of Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Alabama.

The Curating the City program, created by the Los Angeles Conservancy, commemorates the significance of Wilshire Boulevard in the history of Los Angeles. Wilshire Boulevard now stretches from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica, and is about 16 miles long.³⁷ The program kicked off in 2005 with a tour of some of the architectural highlights of Wilshire Boulevard, beginning in downtown and ending in Santa Monica. It featured events involving over a dozen museums, churches, historical societies, and creative and performing arts organizations. The program also included a comprehensive website presenting a timeline, interactive map, and history of the boulevard. It also produced teaching materials and lesson plans, a brochure in three languages, and a children's book. The website includes an interactive "Memory Book" that allows people to share information, photos, and stories about sites on Wilshire. Even after the completion of the tour and related events, the program, which "treats the city as a living museum, offering a fresh look at L.A.'s architectural and cultural heritage," continues to highlight the significance of places that can appear everyday and commonplace, simply because they are such an integral part of the life of the city.³⁸ This is a goal that will hopefully be achieved someday by the increasing attention paid to sites related to African Americans in the city.

The Curating the City program is an excellent example of the way in which the story of the built environment can be highlighted in the context of a living, ever-changing city like Los Angeles. The manner in which the program reached out to cultural and historical organizations would be beneficial for sites related to African Americans in the city. The program reaches out to the public with education materials and brochures. It provides visual context with a timeline and map. These strategies would be useful in

conceptualizing the African American experience in the city, since they no longer live in some of the areas they inhabited historically. The way in which Curating the City used the city and its physical landscape as a teaching tool for preservation and history should be emulated in the creation of a heritage area related to African American historic sites.

The Black Heritage Trail in Boston, also known as the Boston African American National Historic Site, commemorates and highlights the contributions of the city's free black community in the nineteenth century. It contains the largest area of pre-Civil War era African American owned structures in the country. The trail is comprised of fourteen sites on the north side of Beacon Hill in Boston; these sites include churches, businesses, homes and schools. Some of the sites are city owned, such as the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial on Boston Common; the African Meeting House and the Abiel Smith School are owned by the Museum of African American History, and the other sites are privately owned and not open to the public.³⁹ The trail's history is brought to the public by self-guided tours and ranger-guided tours that are available on certain days of the week. (See Figure 1.) There are two websites devoted to the trail as well—a site through the National Park Service and another through the Museum of African American History. Both websites provide a digital summary of the physical tour, with a page devoted to each site. They provide a good model for outreach and education. The downloadable and clickable maps are detailed enough to provide important information but not so elaborate that they are overwhelming. A website with similar maps would be extremely useful in visualizing and conceptualizing the physical nature of African American history in Los Angeles.



Figure 1. A view of Beacon Hill on Boston’s Black Heritage Trail tour. The neighborhood’s environment today is very different from what it was in the nineteenth century. Then it was an undesirable community because of its proximity to the Charles River. Today, it is one of Boston’s premier real estate locations. (Image courtesy of the author.)

The last case study that will be examined is the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. The trail was established in 1996 to commemorate the 1965 civil rights march on Montgomery, Alabama. It was established to operate under National Park Service jurisdiction. The route is also a National Scenic Byway and an All-American Road. It has two websites, both through the National Park Service. They feature information on the history of the march and independent but related tours in the vicinity, sites, and museums. An interesting feature, similar to Curating the City’s “Memory Book,” is the Selma to Montgomery People of the Movement page, in which visitors can listen the stories of the people who participated in the march.

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail provides a good example of an effective heritage area over a large geographic area. Along with the African American

Heritage Trail in Washington DC, it provides a model for commemorating twentieth century African American urban history. It incorporates different types of sites such as the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the site of the confrontation on March 7, 1965 between civil rights marchers and state troopers that became known as Bloody Sunday, and campsites used by demonstrators on the 54-mile, five-day march led by Martin Luther King, Jr. two weeks later from Selma to Montgomery. There are not many physical, remaining sites on the trail, which is one of the challenges of its commemoration; the trail, however, effectively integrates these sites' significance into a larger context and cohesive whole. This case study highlights that much of history cannot be idealized. The violence and racism that led to the march is as much a part of the story of civil rights as the peaceful march led by Dr. King. In a similar vein, the Watts riot is as important a part of the story of African Americans in LA as jazz on Central Avenue, albeit it has more potential be controversial and to cause discomfort.

The above case studies provide good models for creating a heritage area in Los Angeles for African American sites. They present ways to deal with the challenges that often arise in relation to heritage areas and illustrate the benefits that can arise as well. African American history in Los Angeles is complex and multi-faceted. It unfolds in many neighborhoods in the city, some of which will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

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Chapter 2: History of the African American Community in Los Angeles

Overview

Los Angeles has had a distinct African American community since the late nineteenth century. It grew alongside the white community in the boom of the 1880s, when the Southern Pacific completed a line to Los Angeles and the population of the city increased. Until this time, more blacks went to San Francisco and Sacramento; the boom in Los Angeles made the city more popular with African Americans. The late nineteenth century growth of the African American community “equaled that of the city as a whole” though the community remained relatively small in comparison.¹ The small size of the black community did not preclude blacks from creating a social and cultural life. They established churches, social clubs, and fraternal organizations; by the beginning of the twentieth century, there were three newspapers, a nursery for the children of working parents called the Women’s Day Nursery, and the Sojourner Truth Industrial Club, “founded by African American females in 1904 to ‘establish... a safe refuge’ for the hundreds of young working women streaming into the city.”² After 1910, Los Angeles would be the premier destination for African Americans migrating to California.³

The California Dream was a very real and strong draw for African Americans. Their Dream was much like the version white Americans had; the nice weather and lifestyle drew them. However, African Americans also sought out a new life in California with the hope of finding jobs and a better racial climate as well as the ability to own their own homes.⁴ Charlotta Bass, editor of the *California Eagle*, one of the leading African American newspapers in the West, wrote that “Negroes were looking for more: they were in search of dignity; they sought escape from lynch mob terrorization; they were looking

for civil rights.”⁵ They migrated “hoping to find in that promised land rewards for their labor and evidence of their equality.”⁶ The idea of the West occupied a meaningful place in the hearts and minds of Americans in general and equally, if not more so, in the hearts and minds of African Americans. The idealized West “was a singularly egalitarian place, where opportunity was open to all citizens, regardless of background, lineage, or wealth. The West was the freest part of free America—pure democracy,” an idea that naturally had a powerful hold on the minds of black Americans.⁷ And though this ideal would turn out to be different than the reality, it continued to have a powerful influence on the behavior and expectations of many African Americans. Word of the life available in the West spread through boosterist promotion, family letters, newspapers, and magazines. A migrant to Los Angeles recalled, “I grew up in the deep South ... and we would have people visit us from California...we always had the impression that going to California was like going to heaven, there is no racism—you do what you want.”⁸ Urban booster E.H. Randall wrote in 1907 that “Southern California is more adapted for the colored man than any other part of the United States [because] the climate of Southern California is distinctly African ... This is the sunny southland in which the African thrives.”⁹ It was a land of opportunity for all, including African Americans, and many went looking for a better life than was available to them in the East, be it the North or the South. W.E.B. DuBois wrote after a visit to the city in 1913,

Los Angeles is wonderful. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high. [...] Out here in this matchless Southern California there would seem to be no limit to your opportunities, your possibilities.¹⁰

Los Angeles in many respects did not disappoint. African Americans were able to find better paying jobs, and the rate of homeownership was one of the highest in the country, for both blacks and whites.¹¹ Similarly, jobs for African Americans were more plentiful and better paying in California. This does not negate the fact, however, that the jobs available to African Americans in California were not especially different than the jobs they performed in other cities around the country. They most often worked in positions such as domestic help, porters, hotel waiters, janitors, and cooks, a kind of *de facto* segregation and discrimination operating that kept them in lower positions on the occupational ladder.¹² Jobs in manufacturing would not become available to blacks until the Second World War. A black middle class did emerge, though, as African Americans opened up their own businesses and became doctors and lawyers, ministers and dentists. Jobs like waiters and porters were considered white collar to blacks and were better than the industrial jobs available in other cities or the farm work available in the rural South. So although the jobs available were limited on the basis of race, the city became known as a place that offered better job possibilities.¹³ Employment trends in the city would not change until World War II.

The 1920s and 1930s

The 1920s were a time of great wealth and prosperity for the black community in Los Angeles. The end of the decade, though, also saw a shift in the treatment of blacks in the city. Lonnie Bunch argues that throughout the 1920s, a “rising tide of racism” faced blacks in the city but that the prosperity of the decade masked it.¹⁴ The stock market crash in 1929, however, revealed the truth of race relations in Los Angeles and brought an end to what Bunch has called the Golden Era of Black Los Angeles. The Great

Depression did not immediately affect the city. Despite the Depression, the black community around Central Avenue was mostly middle class in the mid-1930s, with more than 30 percent of households owning their own homes.¹⁵ When the Depression did hit blacks suffered worse than those in other parts of the country.¹⁶ Unemployment for blacks was slightly higher in Los Angeles than in other cities. The unemployment and poverty of the Depression years shattered the ideal of Southern California, and yet blacks continued to come. Blacks from other parts of the country, especially the South, moved into the area in large numbers. Migration increased, rather than decreased, during the Depression. Population estimates vary, but they all speak of the massive increase in the number of African Americans in the city, ranging from about 25,000 to about 36,000 blacks migrating to Los Angeles in the 1930s alone.¹⁷ By the end of the decade, Los Angeles had one of the largest populations of African Americans in the West.¹⁸ Many of the new arrivals were poorer, changing the nature of the city's black population. This changing demographic led to tension within the community. Lawrence de Graff wrote in 1962 that a rift grew "between established residents and the newest migrants who were regarded as a threat to the economic position of resident Negroes."¹⁹ The established black community also viewed the new migrants' more outspoken and militant demands for equality as a threat to the progress they'd made by trying to assimilate into the dominant white culture. New migrants were regarded as uncouth and countrified, despite the fact that many came from cities in the North or West. There were migrants from the rural South, and they came to represent the ruling stereotype for newcomers. In 1939, the *California Eagle* wrote, "If only as a simple measure for self-preservation, veteran black citizens of California must take an active part in training incoming Negroes from the

South in basic rules of culture. This problem, however, cannot be approached with any false idea of superiority or condescension. By instilling in these people, especially the youth, an appreciation for inconspicuous conduct in public places, local residents will be safeguarding their liberties in the most practical and intelligent manner.”²⁰

The increase in the black population caused greater tension, not only within the African American community, but between whites and blacks as well. Blacks were increasingly confined to the inner city, and the first years of the 1930s saw the consolidation of 70% of the black population into the area around Central Avenue between San Pedro Street on the west, Alameda Street on the east, roughly Washington Avenue on the north and Slauson Avenue on the south.²¹ (See Map 1.)

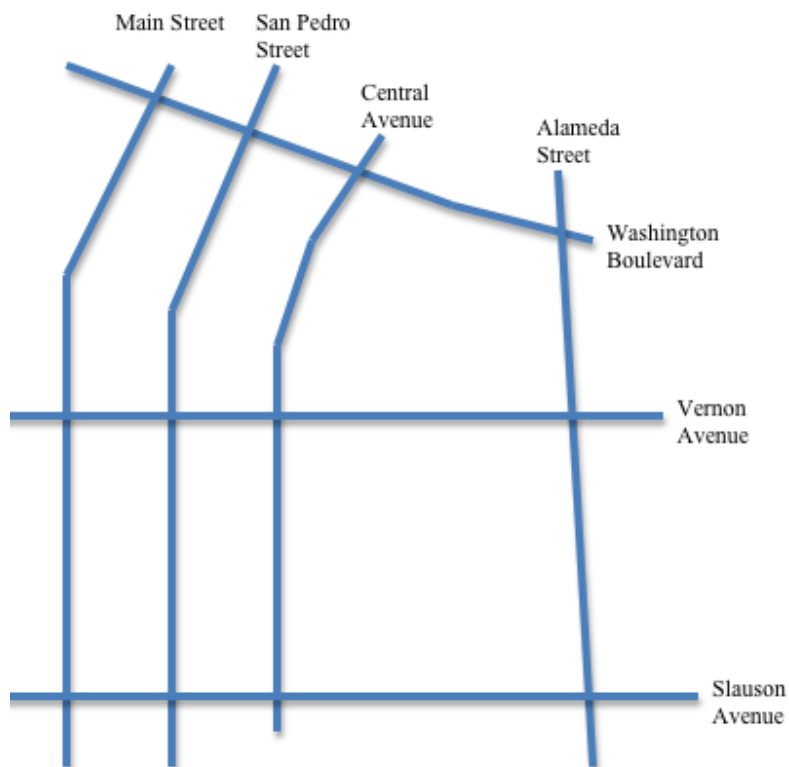


Figure 2. Map of the area of African American settlement in the 1930s. (Map courtesy of the author.)

Although Central Avenue was the nexus for the black population, however, the neighborhood retained its multiethnic character. Seen as the city's premier black community, it was still only 35% black. African Americans Los Angeles' neighborhoods lived alongside Mexicans, Mexican Americans, whites and Japanese. Residents remember growing up in ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Musician Buddy Collette recalled growing up in Watts before World War II; he remembered, "we had whites, Japanese, Mexican, and Blacks living in the neighborhoods, and it worked. We got along fine."²² It was not until the beginning of World War II that the demographic character of Los Angeles' neighborhoods would begin to shift.

The issue of housing was not a new one by the 1930s. Although neighborhoods were more integrated and diverse than those in other cities where blacks lived, African Americans were still prevented by restrictive covenants from living in many parts of the city. A 1927 covenant covered the residential area between the University of Southern California and the suburb of Inglewood, placing it off limits for people of color for ninety-nine years. In order to ensure convenient domestic help, however, the covenant exempted 'domestic servants, chauffeurs, or gardeners [who live] where their employers reside.'²³ In 1929, the California Supreme Court upheld the legitimacy of restrictive covenants and campaigns to 'keep neighborhoods white' by ruling that restrictions on land based on occupation and use were legal.²⁴ This was only one such instance in which racial covenants were upheld. They were also enforced by sheer brute force and intimidation on the part of neighborhood residents. Charlotta Bass relates the story of a woman who bought a house on East 18th Street in the Central Avenue area in 1914. At

the time, only whites lived on the block in question. The neighbors resolved to make the African American woman leave the area. Bass writes:

When Mrs. Johnson had left the premises for a few hours one day they entered her home, and when she returned she found her furniture, bedding, kitchen utensils, and other belongings spread out on the front lawn. A crudely hand-painted sign across the nailed-up front door read: *Nigger if you value your hide don't let night catch you here.*²⁵

She sought the help of the black community, and a group of women went to her home to stand guard in front of her house that evening. The women were eventually able to enlist the help of the sheriff, who opened the windows and front door, which had been nailed shut, and allowed Mrs. Johnson back into her home.²⁶ Although this incident took place in the 1910s, instances like it happened throughout the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Norman Houston, president of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, bought a house in the West Adams neighborhood of Sugar Hill in 1938 but was afraid to move in until 1941, instead renting the house to a white tenant. Despite opposition from neighbors, he eventually moved in, followed by other members of the city's black upper middle class.²⁷ It was not until 1948 that the Supreme Court declared restrictive covenants illegal in the case *Shelley v. Kraemer*, and it still took years before this could positively affect the lives of African Americans. Bunch argues that the discrimination imposed by restrictive covenants was not thoroughly eradicated until the Open Housing Act of 1968.²⁸ Though the city represented an escape from the dangerous and overt racism blacks faced in the South, where in the early twentieth century lynching and racial violence were common and segregation was all encompassing, the increase in the black population in 1920s and 1930s brought about a rise in racism and discrimination against blacks in Los Angeles. The growing numbers of white Southerners

who also sought work in the city further exacerbated these problems. As African Americans became a more prominent part of the population, they lived in a city increasingly influenced by Jim Crow. Charlotta Bass wrote African Americans, “who had come to the new country to make better lives for themselves and their children [and who] were content that they had left their prosecutors behind” soon realized that the horror they had tried to escape had followed them.²⁹ These decades saw the increasing prominence of the Ku Klux Klan, not only in Los Angeles but in other cities around the country as well. And although newspapers like Charlotta Bass’ *California Eagle*, which was read throughout the country, contained reports of the “difficulties of Black life in depression plagued Los Angeles,” the pull of the California Dream remained a strong force that continued to bring migrants seeking work to the city.³⁰

The Second World War

The migration during the Great Depression paled in comparison with black migration during World War II. As during the Depression, they were drawn to Los Angeles by the possibility of finding jobs. Josh Sides points out that Roosevelt’s New Deal “created a new post-Depression definition of American citizenship, one influenced by President Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms. This included the right to property ownership, union representation, and high industrial wages as more than just ‘perks,’ but rather as fundamental American rights.”³¹ The idea of the California Dream endured, but more than anything, it was finding jobs after the poverty of the Depression that drew blacks to California, especially after the defense industry opened factories in Los Angeles. The first year of the defense boom was in 1941, but many blacks faced job discrimination until 1942, when labor shortages and pressure from African American organizations and the

Fair Employment Practices Commission forced employers to offer jobs to blacks.

Lawrence De Graff highlights one of the problems that blacks encountered when first trying to enter wartime industrial employment, noting that “training programs like the United States Employment Service (USES) augmented these discriminations, denying blacks entry with the assertion that they could not be hired, which allowed employers to reject them for lack of training.”³²

One of the greatest problems that arose during the war was related to housing. The neighborhoods in which blacks had been residing for decades could simply not accommodate the thousands of migrating blacks. Yet, restrictive covenants still limited where blacks could live, and they were more strictly enforced as more and more blacks migrated to the city.³³ Very few additional areas opened for black Angelenos. Some moved into the newly empty Little Tokyo, resulting from the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans, but this could not relieve the pressure put on black neighborhoods. Overcrowding prevailed, and substandard housing was the general rule in areas like Central Avenue and Little Tokyo, renamed Bronzeville during this period. After a commission was called together to investigate the conditions of wartime Los Angeles, the deputy mayor commented that the conditions in the Central Avenue district were so bad that “you will see life as no human is expected to endure it.”³⁴ Public housing provided a path towards homeownership for both black and white war workers, and it did not carry the negative connotations that it later would.³⁵ Blacks faced discrimination in finding public housing, however, and there were only a small number of units open to them, due to racial quotas and segregation. The housing conditions during the Second World War, especially the legacy of restrictive covenants and segregation, would lay the foundation

for the formation of ghettos in the post-war era. The restrictions placed on blacks during the war and the migration of large numbers of blacks, who settled in the traditionally black neighborhoods, made these areas increasingly African American. They began to lose their multiethnic character. The war did see some progress in terms of racism and discrimination; for example, many restaurants and nightclubs began to accept black patrons, with the latter starting to allow black performers as well.³⁶ Despite the progress made, the conditions of the war would lead to the problems of the postwar period.

The migration during the war again brought about tension within the black community between established residents and new migrants, repeating the patterns of the Depression. Again there was the fear that new migrants would be too aggressive in pushing for civil rights and upset the delicate balance created by the city's established black community.³⁷ In the postwar period, after the war had highlighted the hypocrisy of being denied the rights that the United States was fighting to restore in other parts of the world, the struggle for civil rights would intensify as conditions in the black community worsened and blacks had to fight ever harder to obtain their version of the California Dream.³⁸

The Post War Era and the 1960s

The end of the war brought about the reconversion of the defense industries, and blacks were one of the groups most affected since they made up a large portion of the defense worker population. Furthermore, the gains in civil rights and against discrimination made during the war were largely nullified once peace returned. Blacks were once again discriminated against in the job sector, and the return of men from the war and Japanese Americans from internment camps made it that much harder for blacks

to find jobs. The late 1940s and the 1950s also saw an increase in racial tension due to the explosion of the black population during the war, exemplified in increased Ku Klux Klan activity and incidents of police brutality.³⁹ Organizations advocating for black civil rights, like the American Civil Liberties Union and the local chapter of the NAACP, “agreed that there was a noticeable and ‘dangerous’ rise in police violence toward blacks that was a direct result of the influx of wartime migrants.”⁴⁰ The new decade also saw the continuation of segregated neighborhoods and housing despite the *Shelley v. Kramer* decision. Even when covenants were not an issue, continuing discrimination in the job market put restrictions on black mobility and opportunity for financial improvement.⁴¹ Despite racial tension, segregation in housing, and unemployment, however, many blacks opted to stay in Los Angeles, for even with these factors, Los Angeles was still better in many ways than the rural South. It was still viewed by blacks with a similar optimism to that of the previous decades.⁴² The 1950s and 1960s saw an increase in the black middle class as World War II soldiers who had been in or through Southern California returned, using the GI Bill to buy homes and go to school.⁴³ On the other hand, the 1960s also saw a worsening in condition for the black lower class, for though employment was higher after the war than it had been before, the jobs blacks occupied after the reconversion of defense industries tended to be low on the occupational ladder and thus low-paying. Problems related to housing that had begun during the Great Depression accelerated in the years after World War II. The over-crowding and bad conditions worsened. Neighborhoods such as Central Avenue and Watts that previously had been racially diverse, which had “long [been] viewed by African Americans as evidence of Los Angeles’s relative racial tolerance compared to both southern and northern cities,”

became more predominately black.⁴⁴ The patterns of pre-war segregation, namely whites from all non-whites, changed. Other non-white populations faced increased acceptance and moved into neighborhoods that had been formerly occupied solely by whites, and blacks “became increasingly concentrated and increasingly isolated from the rest of Los Angeles.”⁴⁵ The city that had once been viewed as an ideal because of the absence of ghettos began to change dramatically in that regard. These trends would lead to the development of the ghetto in South Los Angeles, and frustrations concerning issues such as racism, overcrowding, and the increasing feeling of isolation in South Los Angeles would erupt in violence in August 1965.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

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⁸ Lonnie G. Bunch, *Black Angelenos: The Afro-American Experience in Los Angeles, 1850 – 1950* (Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum, 1988 – 1989), 10.

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- ²⁶ Bass, *Forty Years*, 95.
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- ²⁸ Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 42 – 43.
- ²⁹ Bass, *Forty Years*, 32.
- ³⁰ Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 36.
- ³¹ Sides, *Working Away*, 79.
- ³² de Graff and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 28.
- ³³ Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 39.
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- ³⁸ de Graff and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 30.
- ³⁹ de Graff and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 32 – 33.
- ⁴⁰ Sides, *Working Away*, 214.

⁴¹ Sides, *Working Away*, 254 – 255.

⁴² de Graff and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 35.

⁴³ Bunch, *Black Angelenos*, 43 – 44.

⁴⁴ Sides, *Working Away*, 226, 249.

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Chapter 3: African American Communities in East Los Angeles

Migration and Movement of the African American Community

African American migration to Los Angeles stemmed from the hope embodied in their version of the California Dream, but it also had a deeper meaning, one unique to their race. The movement of African Americans to Los Angeles in the first place spoke to an extremely significant ability, one that reached back into the history of blacks in the United States, for “only free people can move freely, and no one understood that better than slaves and their descendents.”¹ The story of African Americans in Los Angeles is one centered on migration and movement, both into and within the city. It is one of the most important and defining aspects of black history in Los Angeles. From a small but steadily growing population in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the influx of migrants during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the migration of blacks into Los Angeles was shaped by events in the city and has in turn shaped the African American experience there.

Downtown and Little Tokyo

The African American population at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was concentrated in downtown, in the area that became and is now Little Tokyo, between 1st and 3rd Streets, and Alameda and San Pedro Streets. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the black community downtown had established businesses on Asuza Street, near San Pedro Street, just south of 2nd Street. (See Map 2.)

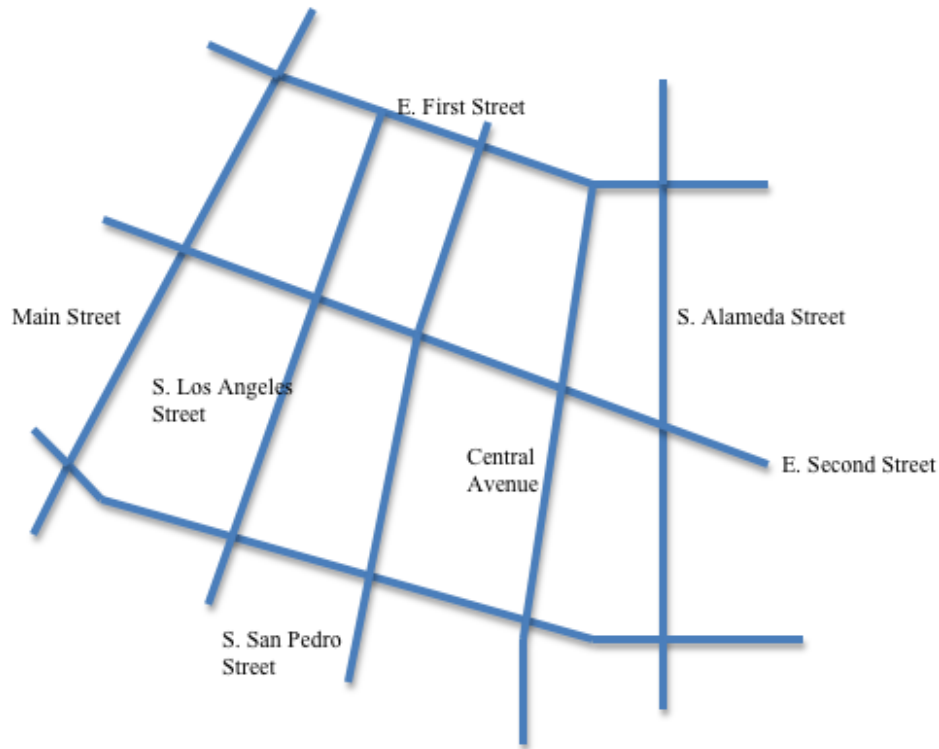


Figure 3. Map of African American settlement before 1910. (Map courtesy of the author.)

One of the first black residents in the downtown area, and one who would have a profound impact on the area and the black community for years to come, was Bidly Mason. A slave brought to Los Angeles, she petitioned for and was granted her freedom by a Los Angeles court, since California was a ‘free state’ after 1850. She thereafter settled in the home of Robert Owens, who was a prominent member of the early black community and whose descendents would continue to be influential. The Owens home was located at 1st and Los Angeles Streets, and it was the center of the early black community’s meetings and gatherings. Bidly Mason became a midwife and nurse, and was widely respected throughout the Los Angeles community, both black and white. She eventually acquired a parcel of land located between 3rd and 4th Streets and between Spring Street and Broadway, slightly outside the center of town; she was one of the first

women to own property in her own right in the city.² She built a two-story brick commercial building on the site, at what is now 331 South Spring Street. The site today is home to Bidly Mason Park, part of the Power of Place project aimed at highlighting the stories of women and minorities throughout Los Angeles history. The park includes public art installations dedicated to her life and times and a series of plaques detailing her life. There are tables and benches, as well as shade trees. (See Figures 4 and 5.) The site is tucked away, however, and there is not a great deal of evidence elsewhere showcasing its existence. There are no signs in the vicinity indicating its location, for instance, as there are for other landmarks like the Bradbury Building. Only a short paragraph discusses her and points to the existence of the park. (See Figures 6 and 7.)



Figures 4 and 5. Views of the installations at Bidly Mason Park. (Images courtesy of the author.)



Figures 6 and 7. The view of the building in front of Bidley Mason Park and the entrance to Bidley Mason Park from Spring Street. To enter the park, one must pass under the building. (Images courtesy of the author.)

Mason eventually acquired more land and later was able to sell it at great profit; she was a philanthropist in the early days of the city, among other things, helping families displaced by seasonal flooding and providing food and shelter for those in need.³ She helped organized the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in her own home and donated the land that the church was built on. At the time of her death in 1891, she owned multiple plots of land around the downtown area.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, blacks put their stamp on the area of downtown they occupied just east of the Bidley Mason homestead, namely by establishing and building black businesses. Furniture stores, dental offices, blacksmith shops, newspapers, and grocery stores were established as the community grew. The First AME Church moved out of the home of Bidley Mason. It would ultimately move to Eighth Street and Towne Avenue. Although its official name was the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, black Angelenos would come to know it as Eighth and Towne. The Gothic style church was built in 1903, and at the time it was the most architecturally impressive building in black Los Angeles. It had a sanctuary four stories tall “and a bank of stained-glass windows on the street side”; an imposing bell tower was topped with four spires.⁴ The structure was made a local landmark in 1972 but was destroyed by fire the next year and no longer remains.

The Second Baptist Church, another early church in Los Angeles, was established in the 1870s. While still a very small congregation, the church constructed its first building, a small frame building, in the middle of barley fields between 7th and 8th Streets on Maple Avenue, south of the initial African American settlement downtown. A larger two-story brick building was built in 1892 on the same lot. The church would eventually

move down to the Central Avenue area in the 1920s. Numerous other churches, which were not only centers of worship but also community gathering places and centers of social, political, and civic life, were established downtown in the first parts of the twentieth century, such as Wesley Church and Azusa Street Mission at 312 Azusa Street in what became Little Tokyo.⁵ (See Figure 8.) The Azusa Street Revival, the home of the Pentecostal movement, was based in Los Angeles and began in 1906. Minister William Seymour began preaching in the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry at 214 (what is now 216) North Bonnie Brae Street. When the group became too large for the home, they moved to 312 Azusa Street, to a building that had been constructed in 1888 by the First AME Church before it moved to Eighth and Towne in 1904. The Azusa Street Mission leased the building from the First AME Church and became officially known as the Apostolic Faith Mission.⁶ The building was described as “a boxy, two-story wooden building which, except for a tall Gothic window on the front of the second floor, looked like the general store in many a small, western town.”⁷ Word of the church and its role at the center of a religious revival spread and the church grew with “unparalleled speed”; within three months, the congregation had grown so that people were peering in the windows to catch the sermons.⁸ It was not uncommon for five to seven hundred people to attend; though the church was predominately African American in the beginning, it did not take long for it to become multiracial, as Seymour envisioned it would from the beginning. The attendees of the mission were from various racial and ethnic groups, including black, white, Native American, Asian and Latino. Cecil Robeck notes that it “became one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups to gather in the city

of Los Angeles at that time.”⁹ Its outreach programs and missionary efforts ensured the spread of its message around the country and eventually around the world.



Figure 8. The site of the Asuza Street Mission today. The plaque on the left reads “Azusa St. Mission: Site of the Azusa Street Revival from 1906 to 1931, cradle of the worldwide Pentecostal movement.” (Image courtesy of the author.)

African Americans would move back into Downtown in the 1940s, to the area known as Little Tokyo, which had been home to the Japanese community since the turn of the century. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War Two left the neighborhood empty. In the face of the intense overcrowding around wartime Central Avenue, blacks moved into the neighborhood. Before the war, Japanese and African Americans had good relations, often living together in different neighborhoods around the city. They “ ‘shared cooking secrets’ and offered mutual support during the years prior to Pearl Harbor [...] developing intense personal relationships.”¹⁰ If new migrants arriving between 1942 and 1945 did not have friends or relatives in Los Angeles, who more likely than not lived in

the Central Avenue area, they ended up in Little Tokyo, or Bronzeville as it came to be known. A resident of the city observed, “the better adjusted in-migrant usually goes to the South or Western areas of LA [...] and only the friendless and helpless come to Little Tokyo.”¹¹

Soon, black-owned hotels, businesses, and clubs began popping up. Nightclubs like the Finale Club were extremely popular and featured dancing as well as jazz musicians’ performances. The building that housed the Finale Club, located at 230 ½ East First Street was constructed in 1910.¹² It was one of the many clubs that opened at this time; the area surrounding San Pedro Street between First and Fifth Streets held a number of clubs like the Finale and Shep’s Playhouse that competed with the clubs on Central Avenue, though most of these structures no longer remain. The neighborhood became a popular place for war workers to go after hours. However, it became known not only for its entertainment but also for its vice and debauchery; public drinking and prostitution were not uncommon. The established African American community lamented the number of “shoeshine parlors,” which were covers for the brothels popping up in Bronzeville.

The sheer number of people that moved into Bronzeville caused overcrowding, and soon it was one of the worst slums in the city. The area, which had housed about 30,000 people before the war, ended up housing over 70,000 people by 1944, according to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.¹³ Apartments that had housed one family now held anywhere from two to four or more, and because of the need for housing, landlords were able to charge high rental rates for poor accommodations. The substandard housing became rife with disease and rodents. Rather than attempting to address the problems in Little Tokyo, the reaction of the white community was hostile.

They saw the problems in the neighborhood as “evidence of black inferiority” and even tried to limit the number of blacks migrating to the city, though the city ordinance that proposed this did not pass. New migrants did not feel any more welcomed by the established black community and were mostly left to find their own solutions to their problems, doing so by forming their own community organizations like Pilgrim House, a community center housed in what had been the Japanese Union Church at 120 North San Pedro Street. Pilgrim House provided services like a health center and day care center for war workers.¹⁴ The organization turned the building back over to the Japanese Union Church after the war. The church, built in 1923, stands today in Little Tokyo and houses the Union Center for the Arts.¹⁵ It is a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument and is a contributor to the Little Tokyo National Register Historic District.

The Furlong Tract

By the first decade of the twentieth century, blacks lived in several other neighborhoods around the growing city, including Pico Heights, Boyle Heights, and the Furlong Tract. The Furlong Tract was a working class African American neighborhood located near what is now the city of Vernon. The area was bounded by 50th and 55th Streets on the north and south and Alameda and Long Beach Avenues on the east and west.¹⁶ The area came into being at the turn of the century when James Furlong, an Irish farmer and one of the founders of the city of Vernon, began selling land to working class African Americans, one of the first landowners in the city to do so.¹⁷ It was filled with single-family homes and eventually had a pharmacy, grocery stores, doctor’s offices, and an ice cream parlor, among other things.¹⁸ The 51st Street School, now called the Holmes Avenue Elementary School and located at 5108 Holmes Avenue, was the first African

American school built in the city. The building, erected in 1910, burned down in 1922 and was rebuilt. The area was largely abandoned after the Long Beach earthquake in 1933, when many of the area's structures were damaged. The neighborhood was deemed substandard by the City Housing Authority and demolished in the 1940s to clear the way for the Pueblo del Rio housing project.¹⁹ This 400 unit complex took two years to build, from 1941 to 1942, and was designed for workers in the defense industry.²⁰ The complex at 52nd Street and Long Beach Avenue was designed by a group of architects that included some of the city's most well-known and respected designers including Richard Neutra and the prominent African American architect, Paul Revere Williams. The housing development became primarily African American as whites moved out of the area in subsequent decades.²¹

Central Avenue

By 1910, the lifeblood of the black community had migrated south to Central Avenue at 9th Street (now Olympic Boulevard), later moving slightly further south to 12th Street.²² As whites began moving out of the area, blacks, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants began moving in, attracted by the affordable home prices in the mostly blue-collar neighborhood.²³ Even though Central Avenue became the heart of the black community, it remained mixed racially, and blacks were a minority of the population. By the 1920s, the community moved again down Central Avenue, south of Washington Boulevard towards Vernon Avenue. This movement was spurred by the construction of new buildings by major black institutions, such as the Hotel Somerville on Central Avenue, the Second Baptist Church on 24th Street and the YMCA on 28th Street, the latter two designed by Paul Revere Williams. These new buildings "boosted the reputation of

black L.A. and helped attract new migrants” and they also expressed the “rising expectations and deepening resources” of African Americans in Los Angeles.²⁴

John Somerville and his wife Vada Watson Somerville, the first African Americans to graduate from the University of Southern California’s dental school and active participants in the black community, built the Hotel Somerville in 1928. Later known as the Dunbar Hotel, it was built in response to blacks being refused accommodation in white-owned hotels. The hotel is a five-story Spanish Colonial Revival building located at 4225 South Central Avenue.²⁵ (See Figure 9.) The lobby and 100 hotel rooms were elaborately furnished. It had a restaurant, cocktail lounge, flower shop, pharmacy, barbershop, and beauty parlor on the ground floor. The dining room seated a hundred people and an orchestra balcony.²⁶ Notable visitors to the hotel over the years included W.E.B. Du Bois and Billie Holiday.²⁷ The area around the Dunbar became the most thriving and concentrated African American commercial area in the Central Avenue district. “Numerous jazz clubs [...] the two biggest newspapers, barbershops and pool halls” appeared; it was the area where the community gathered.²⁸ The Somervilles had to sell the hotel after the stock market crash in 1929. It fell on hard times as blacks began moving out of the Central Avenue area in the 1960s and 1970s. The building was purchased in 1968 to serve as a hotel and the Dunbar Hotel Black Cultural and Historical Museum devoted to African American history, but the hotel was closed again in 1975. The hotel was eventually rehabilitated as affordable housing apartment units, which opened in 1990.²⁹ It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument.



Figure 9. The Dunbar Hotel at 4225 South Central Avenue. (Image courtesy of the author.)

Central Avenue would see the rise of a vibrant black culture in the 1930s and 1940s. The area would become known for its jazz music and would become a West Coast parallel to New York City’s Harlem of the same period. As in Harlem, Central Avenue became the entertainment center of the city and thus saw the practice of slumming, when whites attended black nightclubs, “lured by the music, the exotic notion of associating with Blacks and the desire to flaunt accepted racial conventions.”³⁰ This made Central Avenue “the only integrated setting in Los Angeles.”³¹ This did not mean that there were better race relations along the Avenue. The two groups did not interact or communicate.

At the same time that Central Avenue was experiencing growth in its music scene, it also experienced problems as blacks streamed into the city. The boundaries of the neighborhood remained unchanged as a result of restrictive covenants, yet in the 1930s and 40s, the population exploded. It became “the port of entry” for new migrants during

World War II, and the area experienced intense overcrowding. The racial composition of the neighborhood changed dramatically. While it had been multi-ethnic before the war, Central Avenue after the war went from around fifty percent black to just over eighty percent black. Post-war Central Avenue changed from a place of single-family homes and black entrepreneurship to an overcrowded area of apartments and less than savory conditions, lacking in city resources and basic services like proper sanitation and transportation.³²

Watts

African Americans entering Southern California also found a home in Watts, an independent city about seven miles south of Los Angeles. Watts was established in 1903 from the Tajauta land grant. The town saw growth in two building booms, one in the 1880s and the other in the decade after 1900. The Watts railroad junction was created in 1902, spurring subdivision and development; sleepy Rancho Tajauta became the busy, growing tract of Watts Junction. The town boasted that it was the “Hub of the Universe,” for its railroad junction saw the passing of the Pacific Electric lines between Long Beach, San Pedro, and Los Angeles, and as well as others.³³ The railroad station at 103rd Street and Grandee Avenue was built in 1904 and still stands today. It remained vacant and deteriorating after the closing of the Red Car line in the 1960s but reopened in 1989 as a Department of Water and Power customer service office and a museum of Watts history.³⁴ Today, it is part of the Metro Blue Car line. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the small, inexpensive lots in the Watts area were attractive to working class families. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1904

advertised Watts Junction as “the Home of the Workingman” where people could “own their own homes at \$1 a week.”³⁵ It was nicknamed Mudtown, since it was in a low-lying basin with marshy land. Developers did not bother with the area, and thus land prices were low, allowing minorities to move in and purchase homes. From the beginning, whites, Mexicans, Japanese, and blacks purchased homes and farms there. By 1920, Watts had the highest percentage—14%—of blacks of any community in California.³⁶ The southern portion of the town became the center of its black community. Companies were established to help blacks acquire houses and settle down. Leake’s Lake, open to both blacks and whites and established by black realtor Charles C. Leake and his wife Sarah, “was like a resort,” a white resident remembered, “They sold cat fish there. We used to go down there and take our children.”³⁷ For this reason, Watts became even more attractive to migrating blacks. By the 1920s, Watts had come to be thought of as a black community. White residents petitioned the city council in Los Angeles to annex the town, afraid of it becoming an all black town and of “the real possibility of the election of a black mayor and the expansion of [black] political power in Watts.”³⁸ They were successful when Los Angeles annexed Watts in 1926.

The Great Depression hit Watts hard, for it was in effect isolated from Los Angeles, despite belonging to the city. These problems were exacerbated by the influx of migrants during the war years. The other populations that had occupied the town moved out during and after World War II, and the percentage of African Americans increased from about 30% in 1940 to about 70% in 1950. The problems that had started during the Depression continued to worsen as the population increased without an accompanying increase in services. The town was underfunded, and there were too few community

institutions. The Congested War Production Areas Committee in 1943 surveyed Los Angeles and reported the services available in different areas; Watts was found to have only one school, one church, and three grocery stores, despite the large numbers of people, especially African Americans, that were settling there.³⁹ The area also lacked basic transportation and emergency services. Black newspapers in the 1940s wrote frequent accounts of “people who died or who lost all their possessions because the fire department responded slowly and with an inadequate force”; neighbors had to resort to using fire hoses themselves to fight the fires in their neighborhoods. A lack of proper street lighting increased crime in the area.⁴⁰

It is in Watts that one of the most well-known art structures exists today. Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant born Sabato Rodia who lived in Watts from 1921 until he relocated to Martinez, California in 1955, constructed the Watts Towers, which he called *Nuestro Pueblo*, meaning ‘our town’ in Spanish on the residential lot beside his home.⁴¹ The towers, located at 1765 East 107th Street, consist of seventeen separate sculptural pieces constructed of steel rods and pipes, wire, and covered with cement and pieces of glass, porcelain, and tile. The tallest tower stands at almost 100 feet (30 meters), and all of the structures were built without the aid of bolts or welds. Rodia only used scrap steel wrapped around wire or wire mesh and held together with cement.⁴² He worked on them until he left the site in the 1955.⁴³ Today, the site has great significance to the Watts African American community. The site is home to the Watts Towers Art Center, which leads tours and hosts exhibits, lectures, and art classes for the community. The site hosts the annual Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival, the Watts Towers Day of the Drum Festival, and the Watts Cinco de Mayo celebration, co-hosted by the area’s Latino and

African American communities. The Watts Towers of Simon Rodia State Historic Park is a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument and are listed on the California Register of Historical Resources, the National Register of Historic Places and are a National Historic Landmark.

The Watts Riots of 1965 and Its Aftermath

The period of the Second World War and postwar period laid the foundations for the formation of the ghetto in black Los Angeles, with Watts and Central Avenue at its core. One of the biggest factors was the influx of migrants into the city during and after the war. The population increase in a decade was staggering. In 1940, there were 97,847 African Americans in the city of Los Angeles; only ten years later, the population had more than doubled and was 211,585. The black population of South Central Los Angeles alone was 92,177 people in 1950. Confronted with this drastic increase in population, areas like Watts were unable to expand services like transportation, housing, and schools to adequately provide for the new residents. Existing services were stretched to their limit. The drastic increase in population led to overcrowding and poor housing conditions. In Watts, it was not uncommon for illegal add-ons to be constructed to accommodate the increase in population and to gain a profit from the people who needed housing; housing was subdivided to allow more families to fit, as was done in Little Tokyo.⁴⁴

The problem of overcrowding was worsened further by the demolition of Watts' illegal construction beginning in 1954; in addition, about a quarter of the existing residential structures in the area were demolished because they were deteriorating. The amount of substandard housing drastically decreased in Watts, but too few alternatives

were presented for the construction of new housing.⁴⁵ Paul Bullock points to the construction of public housing as a factor in hastening ghettoization; three public housing projects, Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts, and Hacienda Village, were constructed in the 1940s as housing for war workers and another, Nickerson Gardens, designed by Paul Revere Williams, in 1955. These housing complexes were supposed to be interracial but they ended up being occupied almost exclusively by blacks. As a result of the demolition of housing, almost a third of Watts' population lived in the projects by the end of the 1950s, and they were occupied by far more people than had been originally planned.⁴⁶ These issues were compounded by Proposition 14, which was brought to the table in the November 1964 elections. It would repeal the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which was "designed to alter entrenched patterns of bias in the housing market" that prevented blacks from obtaining mortgage loans and equal housing opportunities and confined them to certain areas.⁴⁷ The Rumford Act, which was passed in 1963, prevented "discrimination in the sale or rental of many types of housing."⁴⁸ Proposition 14 repealed the act by a two to one margin.

The factors that caused the Watts riots, which would begin on August 11th and last until August 18th, were many and varied. The McCone commission, which was appointed to investigate the riots and find its causes, cited issues such as unemployment and police brutality. Many immediately after the riots and since have felt that the McCone commission report did not adequately uncover the issues behind the riots. Gerald Horne notes that "uprisings like those in Watts in 1965 are akin to a toothache in that they alert the body politic that something is dangerously awry."⁴⁹ The riots began with the arrest of a motorist named Marquette Fry by the California Highway Patrol, which escalated as a

crowd gathered around an incident they viewed as yet another example of the police's mistreatment of blacks. Robert Fogelson notes that many of the riots that occurred around the country in the 1960s were caused by incidents involving the police. He argues that these occurrences, which were otherwise not out of the ordinary, reached a point "at which the police perceived the confrontation as a test of their authority and the Negroes perceived it as a challenge to their pride and loyalty."⁵⁰ Resentment on the part of blacks and racism against blacks on the part of the police that had been simmering for years came to a head in the Watts riots. The issues that had faced blacks throughout the twentieth century and had been intensified with the influx of African Americans during and after the Second World War—unemployment, overcrowding, and restrictive covenants, among others—exploded in violence that August.

Gerald Horne points out that the issues that resulted in the riots went beyond these factors, however. The increasing isolation of South Los Angeles, including lack of access to adequate resources such as transportation, contributed to the resentment blacks in the area felt. There were also divisions within the black community historically that made the residents of Watts feel isolated. The tensions between the established African American community and new migrants during the Second World War led to a feeling of isolation for residents in Watts and Central Avenue. As the African American population of Watts grew and South Central Los Angeles became more predominately African American, these issues of isolation and inferiority grew. In a study conducted three years after the riots, H. Edward Ransford found that African Americans "with intense feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction are more prone to violent action than those who are less alienated [... and] isolation has its strongest effect upon violence when individuals feel

powerless to control events in the society or when racial dissatisfaction is intensely felt.”⁵¹ This feeling of powerlessness can be seen in African Americans’ relationship with the Los Angeles Police Department, who was resented and viewed in a highly negative light. David Sears points out that “ninety-two percent of the whites, and only 41% of the blacks felt ‘you generally can trust the police,’ while 54% of the blacks, and only 6% of the whites, felt you could not.”⁵² Furthermore, when “both groups were asked whether the police lack respect or use insulting language in their dealings with [...blacks], and 71% of the blacks, against 59% of the whites, felt they did. Similarly, 72% of the blacks, and 64% of the whites, felt [... blacks] were roused, frisked, and searched without good reason.”⁵³ Fogelson notes that blacks were “subject to brutality and harassment, few ghettos are adequately protected, and few complaints are impartially processed.”⁵⁴

The problems facing blacks in Los Angeles were compounded by the fact that they felt they were not being heard and that the leadership that was supposed to be representing and aiding them was out of touch with their needs. The Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP was comprised of largely middle class African Americans who had established ties to Southern California, a far cry from many of the residents of South Los Angeles, who were recent migrants and mostly working class.⁵⁵ Assemblyman Mervyn M. Dymally, who represented much of the area affected by the riots, admitted that “he felt the rioting was in part a revolt against the Negro leadership—and this included himself.”⁵⁶ “We’ve been pushing for civil rights, but we’ve missed the point completely in Watts,” he admitted.⁵⁷ He recounted a story in which he was trying to persuade some black children to stop throwing rocks. “They asked me whose side I was on [...] and I said, ‘Man, I’m on your side... I’m for the people.’” The response of the children spoke

volumes about the perceived relationship between the two parties—“Where have you been all the time if you’re for the people?”⁵⁸ Writing a few years later in 1969, Paul Bullock noted that black “politicians, as a rule, are not trusted much more than are the white [...for residents felt] that the ‘leaders’ and the ‘spokesmen’ have drifted away from Watts, and that they serve their own interests before those of the community.”⁵⁹ Bullock illustrates the distance between African American politicians and the residents of South Central:

Many of the Negro leaders and spokesmen identified in the press are unrecognized in Watts; a few, like Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and local militants such as Ron Karenga and Tommy Jacquette, are known to the young people, but the reactions vary sharply. Of course, the late Malcolm X has wide recognition among the hip youngsters, and his reputation appears to be more favorable than that of, say, either King or Carmichael. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Floyd McKissick of CORE, and Whitney Young of the National Urban League are virtually unknown. The youngsters have heard about NAACP, but tend to regard it as primarily an older people’s organization.⁶⁰

Thus, not only did residents feel that local black politicians did not represent them properly, but there was also a feeling of distance and alienation from the leadership of the civil rights movement occurring elsewhere in the country. It was extremely frustrating for blacks to hear about the supposed progress of the civil rights movement and influence it was having, but to see none of that evident in their own community.

When the trends of previous decades resulted in violence that summer, the violence was not completely disorganized. There was purpose to it, in a sense. Police Chief William Parker noted, “This situation is very much like fighting the Viet Cong... We haven’t the slightest idea when this can be brought under control.”⁶¹ Blacks targeted their anger specifically. For example, though the burning of buildings was in a sense random, with some black-owned stores burned, most of the burning was inflicted upon

stores owned by whites, including food, clothing, and furniture stores. The riots resulted in destruction and violence in much of South Central Los Angeles. The area affected was bordered by Washington Boulevard at the north, Rosecrans Avenue at the south, Crenshaw Boulevard at the west, and Alameda Street to the east. The center of the riot, however, was 103rd Street in Watts. People took to the streets, burning and looting. As fireman tried to put out the blazing buildings, the crowd harassed them, as well as the press that flocked to cover the riots. Pelting them with sticks and rocks, they shouted, “ ‘White devils, what are [you] doing in here?’ [...] ‘White men, you started all this the day you brought the first salve to this country.’ Another called out: ‘You created this monster and its going to consume you. White man, you got a tiger by the tail. You can’t hold it. You can’t let it go. The next time you see us we’ll be carrying guns. It’s too late, white man. You had your chance. Now its our turn.’”⁶² These comments are telling in illustrating the sense of abandonment and resentment felt by blacks in South Los Angeles. The riot did not center on blacks exacting revenge for racial crimes, however. It was an expression of the pent up resentment and frustration felt by blacks locked out of opportunities and confined to the ghetto.

When the riots were over, 34 people were dead, 1,000 more injured, and 4,000 people arrested. An estimated \$200 million of property damage occurred in a 46.5 square mile area.⁶³ The business center of Watts on 103rd Street was destroyed. It was nicknamed ‘Charcoal Alley’ and was now home to the shells of burned buildings and empty lots where stores had once stood. This would still largely be the case in 1969, when Paul Bullock wrote, “Some physical improvements along 103rd Street are now in evidence. [...] Yet most of the empty lots remain, and little private capital had ventured

back into the area.”⁶⁴ In other parts of the community, not much had changed since before or immediately after the riots. There were moves to improve the community and money came into the community for new facilities and programs, but these attempts did not last long enough or bring enough money into the area to affect lasting positive change.⁶⁵ Out of the riots, however, came one of the longest-running African American cultural festivals in the country, the Watts Summer Festival. It was first held in August 1966 to honor the 34 people who lost their lives in the riots and to bring the community together in a positive way.⁶⁶

Freedom City

Another trend in the wake of the riots was the push for South Central LA to create its own separately incorporated city. The idea became known as Freedom City. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that the drive to incorporate Watts into Freedom City began in June 1966.⁶⁷ The area intended to be Freedom City had boundaries that extended “from Vernon to El Segundo and the Harbor Freeway to Alameda.”⁶⁸ The leaders of organizations like US, the cultural nationalist organization, and the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) believed it was a positive move for the community despite resident opposition to the idea. Ron Karenga, head of US, felt that “the residents [of Watts] do favor the disincorporation idea, for it represents the American ideal of self determination, of having something of their own”; the only reason residents were opposed to it, Barbara Sperling, head of the local office of the SNCC, maintained was because “they don’t really know anything about it yet.”⁶⁹ Organization leaders pushing for the separate city aimed for self-government and to give residents more control over what happened to their lives and city. Residents, on the other hand, illustrated that they

were aware of the concept and ramifications of the creation of Freedom City. In the end, they were violently opposed to it. One resident pointed out,

actually it is not the people of the community that are saying all this. It is the outsiders, people that come from outside that are saying Watts ought to be this, Watts ought to be that. Actually, it should be left to the people who dwell there. Another point about Watts trying to become a city. Watts can't be considered as becoming a city. It takes money to run a city, and this is something that Watts cannot have.⁷⁰

Another resident argued after the fact that “we could not support a separate school system, we could not maintain public utilities, we would have had to support ourselves out of our own taxes. The unemployment rate here would have killed us; we would have been bogged down in the mud and so we would have been able to lift ourselves out of it.”⁷¹ These sentiments were not uncommon; most residents felt that Watts could not support itself on their own. A longtime resident said of the prospect of self-imposed segregation after years of fighting for integration, “No, I don't believe in segregation. If I wanted to live in a city of blacks, I'd go back to Africa.”⁷²

The Rise of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles

Though most residents were opposed to the idea of Freedom City, the aftermath of the riots did give rise to a desire “for community power and responsibility” and for “organizations and institutions which [...were] led by, and entirely responsible to, the residents of the community itself.”⁷³ This desire for the black community to control its own fate gave rise to the Black Panther Party and other forms of nationalism in Los Angeles. Based in Oakland, the Black Panthers were begun in 1965 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.⁷⁴ Horne argues that the Red Scare in the 1950s suppressed the ideological left in the city, and this vacuum was filled by the rise of black nationalism, of

which there were two major offshoots that were at odds with each other—revolutionary nationalism, embodied in the Black Panther Party, and cultural nationalism, embodied in the US Organization created by Maulana Ron Karenga.⁷⁵ The NAACP denounced “black power” militant groups like the BPP, saying that black power is “the father of hatred and the mother of violence.”⁷⁶ Civil rights groups opposed black power organizations’ methods—“Physical tactics,” they said, “give us little hope in the game where the big contest is waged to win the minds of men.”⁷⁷ Proponents of black power, however, denied these negative comments, stating that black power was “simply a tactic for gaining political power for Negroes through the utilization of traditional and legitimate processes.”⁷⁸ The occurrences of the years after the riots, however, spoke differently. The *Sentinel* reported that violence between the Karenga’s US organization and the Black Panthers was a regular occurrence in the wake of the riots.⁷⁹ Run-ins between the Panthers and police were no less common. A shoot-out occurred in August of 1968, after which Mayor Sam Yorty assured Angelinos that “there were no racial tensions [...] in the wake of a series of police incidents” that involved three Black Panther members, two of whom were killed.⁸⁰ A week later the Watts Summer Festival ended in violence. What began as a planned outburst between the nationalist organizations the Sons of Watts and the Panthers ended with police arriving to arrest shooters and clear out the park. Snipers belonging to the aforementioned organizations shot at the police.⁸¹ The confrontations between the Black Panthers and police came to a climax on December 8, 1969, when police raided Black Panther headquarters, located at 4115 South Central Avenue. Police armed with tear gas, dynamite, and guns fought for five hours with Black Panthers armed with rifles and handguns.⁸² The incident began at 5:30 in the morning; in the end, the

Black Panthers surrendered and members were arrested. Tensions rose between police and the people who had gathered, but were not told what was happening. The reaction of neighborhood adults during the shootout was astonishment and confusion about what was happening. Younger spectators, however, began taunting the police and throwing rocks and bottles, telling “the police in nitty-gritty language exactly what they thought of them.”⁸³ In the wake of the raid, neighborhood residents’ reactions were varied. They ranged from astonishment and fear to rage that the incident “involved far more than just the attack on the Panther headquarters [...but was] an organized attempt to silence all strongholds of black dissent.”⁸⁴ The Urban League or NAACP, which were peaceful organizations fighting for civil rights, could be targeted next, some said; no black organization working for change was safe. Other residents wondered “what affect [...the shootout would] have on the various positive programs now under way in the South Central area [...] many people are wondering if it was all for naught.”⁸⁵ Many were left wondering what would happen to the programs attempting to get the Central Avenue area back on its feet in the face of what was regarded as a “major setback.”⁸⁶

The years following the riot would see various programs and developments to revitalize the South LA region. They were accomplished with varying degrees of success. Redevelopment like housing and shopping centers are crucial elements of revitalization; these alone, however, are not enough. The image of South LA in popular culture and imagination is an essential part of the equation. This image must be changed, and an effective way to do this is to educate the public about the rich history of the region. These areas contain a cultural and architectural legacy that needs to be highlighted and

preserved. The proposal for creating a tour related to this history will be outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

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- ³² Sides, *Working Away*, 282 – 284.
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Chapter 4: The Heritage Area as a Catalyst for Revitalization

Past Redevelopment and Revitalization Projects

After the riots in 1965, and again in 1992, a push, aided by both the public and private sectors, was made for revitalization in South Central Los Angeles. Some projects have been more successful than others. One of the biggest hurdles to redevelopment and revitalization is that, for the past fifty or so years, the image of South Central Los Angeles in the mainstream media and imagination has been overwhelmingly negative. It is seen as an unchanging and homogenous area of violence, drugs, gangs, unemployment, and blight, “the epitome of the inner-city ghetto.”¹ This view, however, neglects the positive aspects of the communities in South Los Angeles. A study conducted after the 1992 riots by professors in the School of Business and Economics at California State University, Los Angeles found that the South Central Los Angeles depicted in the media as an area of economic decline was not to be found.² They expected to find, among other problems, “a growing and belligerent underclass, a mass exodus of businesses, high unemployment as the result of fewer jobs and a skill mismatch between residents and local jobs, and a growing conflict between African-American and Latinos over the few remaining jobs.”³ This, however, did not turn out to be the reality. In truth, while the level of unemployment may be higher than in other areas of the city, Thomas Tseng pointed out in a study conducted in 1999 that “many people living in South Los Angeles are actually involved in full- or nearly full-time work.”⁴ Though there are many families below the federally declared poverty line, the members of these families are actually working and have a desire to work, “contrary to perceptions that joblessness and welfare dependency dominate the area.”⁵ In addition, South Central is an area that has been in a

state of flux for the past thirty or so years, as immigrants from Central America and Mexico settled in the neighborhood.⁶

The area possesses assets that have been and must continue to be tapped into. The main community asset to be discussed here is the history of the area and the attempts that have been made to tap into that history for the benefit of the area, as well as some of the redevelopment projects that have occurred. There is certainly an awareness of this history in the Central Avenue district. Historically, the boundaries of the African American-occupied Central Avenue district were San Pedro Street on the west, Alameda Street on the east, Washington Avenue to the north and Slauson Avenue to the south. Central Avenue ran right down the middle of this corridor. At the height of its jazz era in the 1920s, the district's nucleus existed in the area around the Dunbar Hotel, on Central Avenue just north of Vernon Avenue. Today, wire sculptures of jazz instruments on the street corner at Vernon and Central Avenues and a park across the street from the Dunbar called the Central Avenue Jazz Park proclaim the awareness of this history. Banners on lampposts also illustrate the area's link to jazz and the past. This is a promising beginning, linking the present landscape to its history. It should be applied to more than the history of music so that it may reveal the history of African Americans in the city in more general and sweeping terms.

After both the 1965 and 1992 riots, there was an outpouring of support to help improve South LA. In both cases, interest eventually waned, however; funds stopped coming in, and not a whole lot changed.⁷ Lori Speese of Los Angeles Neighborhood Housing Services believed that it was because "in the past, a lot of outsiders came into the communities, told people what they needed and offered quick-fix solutions" instead

of committing to the long term work required to effect lasting change.⁸ General redevelopment that has made a difference has included the creation of community centers and low-income housing, involving both new construction and rehabilitation of historic buildings. It has also included the building of shopping centers like the Magic Johnson Shopping Center farther west in Baldwin Hills, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Shopping Center at the corner of 103rd Street and Grandee Avenue in Watts. These projects have been highly successful, in part due to the area's lack of retail facilities. Since the riots in 1965, retail chains have been moving out of the area, and residents were confronted with a lack of shopping centers and stores common in other communities.⁹ Centers like the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Magic Johnson Shopping Center, and Vermont Village Plaza at 81st Street and Vermont Avenue, which includes office and retail space as well as 36 townhomes for first-time homebuyers, are answering this need and bringing life back into the community.¹⁰

Community and redevelopment organizations are stepping in to fulfill the needs of residents and change the district for the better. They are reaching out and creating programs to improve the quality of life and provide positive environments for residents, especially youth. The Community Redevelopment Agency, the Vermont Slauson Economic Development Corporation, and the Dunbar Economic Development Corporation have been instrumental in bringing development and business in. They have also led the way in tapping into the history of the area to affect change. The Dunbar EDC has been in charge of developing the Ralph Bunche House and the Dunbar Hotel in the Central Avenue district. This work needs to continue and needs to be implemented in other neighborhoods like Downtown, Little Tokyo, and Watts.

South Central Los Angeles seems to be changing, slow as it may be. The results of about fifty years of history cannot be eradicated quickly, but the area is seeing improvements. One of the most pressing needs now is a change in how the public views South Central. It is an area with a troubled period in its past, one that still exists to different extents in different neighborhoods. However, it is also a place rich in history, no less so than Los Angeles' other neighborhoods. Thomas Tseng notes that South LA has “economic, social, cultural, institutional, and physical assets” throughout its neighborhoods, and these need to be highlighted as a method to bring about change.¹¹ In addition to the revitalization attempts that have taken place from the outside in—they involve bringing resources into the area—projects also need to work from the inside out, utilizing the assets already present to affect change. There has already been work along these lines. Projects that seek to enrich the community and highlight its history as part of revitalization and redevelopment, such as the rehabilitation of the Dunbar, have occurred but have been scattered.

One of the efforts being made to utilize South Central's culture and history is a tour called LA Gang Tours. The tour is intended to educate “people from around the world about the Los Angeles inner city lifestyle, gang involvement and solutions [...] as a vital step towards a peaceful existence.”¹² It is not intended to glorify gangs or their activities but to provide jobs and opportunities for residents from the tour's profits. This is an attempt to bring the outside community in so that they may become educated about an aspect of life in South LA. It is important that the public is educated about such a subject, but it would be more instructive and have more of a positive impact if more aspects of culture and history were discussed. Though the tours are not intended to be a

glorification of gang activity and the purpose of behind the tours is to end gang violence, educate the public, and provide for jobs and lasting change, more needs to be done. Gang culture is an aspect of South LA life that the public is familiar with; it is one of the images that arises in the media most often. The South LA that exists alongside gang violence and other negative factors is not shown, however. This needs to be highlighted as well. Black history needs to be spread further and awareness of it increased. It has shaped the city and its landscape into what it is today. It needs to be linked to place and the present community.

Previous projects have focused on economics, have promised jobs but have not delivered in a meaningful way, and involve outsiders developing the community. A key difference in what I am proposing is that it would involve the members of the community in the presentation of its history and image. It would mean looking past stereotypes, simplified and two-dimensional ideas, and first impressions to explore the culture, history, and dynamism that exist in South LA. Any heritage corridor that is developed for this area must involve its residents and community organizations. These neighborhoods still have a significant African American population, as well as a growing Hispanic population. Residents have an awareness of history and pride in that history. They should be involved in the planning and implementation of a heritage corridor and tour. Workshops can be held to receive community input. Residents can serve as docents and tour guides. They must have a role in the shaping and portrayal of their neighborhoods, something which they have not typically received.

Challenges of the Heritage Area

The commemoration of African American history's legacy on the built environment of Los Angeles presents some unique challenges in relation to heritage areas and historic preservation. The history of African Americans in Los Angeles is well documented through photographs, oral histories, other primary sources, and secondary sources; it is less well represented in the present-day built environment, however. African Americans made an unmistakable contribution to the neighborhoods in which they lived historically, but much of that physical evidence is gone or altered today. Many of the clubs along Central Avenue and in Little Tokyo, such as the Savoy Club at 55th Street and Central Avenue or Shep's Playhouse at 1st and Los Angeles Streets in Little Tokyo, have been demolished or have a different use today; a number of buildings downtown, like the Azusa Street Revival Church and Bidy Mason's homestead, no longer remain.¹³ However, a lack of an architectural presence does not make it any less imperative that this history be commemorated, nor does it lessen the impact of this history. The recognition of the contributions of the Azusa Street Revival Church in Little Tokyo with a sign and of Bidy Mason's home with a park downtown serve as effective ways to acknowledge their contributions. Though there is not always the space necessary to commemorate sites in this manner, it provides a good model for recognizing significant sites that no longer remain or even that have been altered to the point where they look drastically different than they did during their period of significance. This is an instance in which a digital tour and site on the Internet, discussed later in this chapter, also becomes useful. This would allow for sites that have been demolished but were important to African American history to stay within the context of that history. A heritage trail

would be another good way to recognize and interpret these types of significant sites. They can be mentioned on a trail and tied into the greater historical context.

Alison Rose Jefferson deals with issues of cultural significance and sites that are no longer extant as they relate to the African American resort at Lake Elsinore, about seventy miles southeast of Los Angeles. She notes that within the field of preservation traditionally “the documentary value of a historic property is the primary factor in the reasoning to support its preservation. Properties or places are most often saved because of their historical association or architectural significance.”¹⁴ This cannot always be applied to Los Angeles’ African American sites. They are often culturally significant. These types of sites need the attention of the preservation and heritage tourism communities the most, since they are often the types of sites that are overlooked or threatened because their significance is not as obvious. They are often the kinds of sites that, as Jefferson puts it, express and “describe our identity as a society, and can provide emotional anchors to a community as a whole.”¹⁵ This is the case with the Central Avenue corridor. This area continues to anchor the African American community, though today it is no longer the bustling center of jazz and nightlife that it was at its peak in the 1920s and 1930s. Its history is remembered with pride and fondness. Older residents interviewed speak of it with nostalgia. The history of the Avenue is marked with public art of musical instruments at the corner of Vernon and Central Avenues. (See Figures 8 and 9.) Signs point out major sites of historical importance, like the Dunbar Hotel. It is a place that continues to have value in the consciousness of the African American community.



Figure 10. Sculpture at the corner of Vernon and Central Avenues commemorating the area's jazz history. (Image courtesy of the author.)



Figure 11. Painting on a building along Central Avenue recognizing the importance of jazz in the neighborhood's past. (Image courtesy of the author.)

A challenge that arises in relation to these sites is the need for an effective way to explore, interpret, and present them. While there are African American sites, such as the

Dunbar Hotel and the Second Baptist Church, whose significance includes architecture, many sites are important because of their significance within the black community. The Ralph Bunche house, for example, is a modest house just off of Central Avenue; it is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument. It is significant primarily for its association with the civil rights figure and United Nations diplomat Ralph Bunche, who negotiated an armistice agreement ending the Arab-Israeli war in 1949 and won a Nobel Prize in 1950 for his efforts.¹⁶ He was the first African American to win the prize. Bunche lived in the house at 1221 East 40th Place (then 37th Street) for a decade following 1917, while attending middle school, high school at Jefferson High School, and then college at the University of California Los Angeles. He left Los Angeles in 1927 to attend Harvard University for graduate work in political science and in 1928 went on to Howard University upon receiving an offer to organize the political science department there and become a professor.¹⁷

There are many similar sites in the city of Los Angeles whose significance is not necessarily related to architecture and is thus not immediately apparent. The Black Panther headquarters from the 1960s is an excellent example. Located at 4115 South Central Avenue and constructed in 1923, the building was the site of a shoot-out between the police and Black Panther Party members in 1969. This is an important aspect of the African American community's history, as it encapsulates the issues related to black nationalism and African Americans' negative views of the police in the 1960s. Yet it is not evident when merely looking at the building. Since cultural significance of this type is not as apparent as architectural significance, it can potentially be more challenging to

raise awareness for sites of cultural significance and to educate the public about their importance.

Much of Los Angeles has been home to different ethnic and racial groups at different times. It is necessary to commemorate the different layers of history that have been laid down in an area over the years. There is no one answer for this, however, and it may vary from area to area, as well as from city to city. Attempting to do this comes with its own types of challenges. As Hillary Jenks illustrates in her PhD dissertation “Home is Little Tokyo,” the move to recognize the multiracial history of Little Tokyo has been met with resistance. The 2006 SpiritWalk project, spearheaded by Whites, Japanese Americans, and African Americans, was intended to commemorate the multiracial history of the area’s Azusa Street Mission in the early twentieth century. It was to consist of a mural and promenade illustrating the multiracial history of the neighborhood and church. Some residents of the Little Tokyo neighborhood opposed this collaborative project, however. George Yoshinaga, a second generation Japanese American and longtime resident of Little Tokyo, disagreed with “commemorating an African American past he in no way shared.”¹⁸ He wrote:

Over the past several decades, I have seen the Little Tokyo that we used to know fading away and I hate to see it continue in that direction. When I think of the effort and finances JAs [Japanese Americans] put forth to establish the JACCC [Japanese American Cultural and Community Center], I’m totally disenchanted by all this talk about the Azusa Project. Yeah, I know. Some will think I take this position because of the racial overtone associated with the project....Little Tokyo, by its own name, tells us what our community is all about. Let’s try to protect JTown [Japan-town] and what it means to the Japanese American community. If that makes me a racist, so be it.¹⁹

Another resident argued, “Little Tokyo is the heart and soul of the Japanese American community and we have to protect J-Town in order to maintain this togetherness.”²⁰ In a

place that holds a great deal of meaning to Japanese Americans and is a place “intended to sustain ethnic identity and unite ethnic community” as well as “the only place in which Japanese Americans [...] can collectively envision and debate their past [and] their future,” is there a way in which a multiracial past can be remembered and recognized in a tour without disrespecting or downplaying the current community?²¹ Little Tokyo is an example of how, as Lisbeth Hass says, “the politics of space is closely connected to the formation of collective identities that are grounded in particular interpretations of the past” and how any threat to this is seen as a threat to a community’s history.²² This collective history need not be threatening, however, and it is important to recognize the layers of history in an area and the different groups that have occupied it, since this happens often in a city like Los Angeles. Including areas like this in a tour and presenting their multiethnic history provides a way to recognize this history while still respecting the current communities. Recognizing the history of one group does not mean disrespecting or disregarding the history of another. It is a way of acknowledging this layered history, of pointing out to visitors that the landscape visible today is not necessarily the only one that has existed, while in no way detracting from the present communities. Current community should be engaged; it is important that the history told of these neighborhoods include the modern residents. They should not be excluded any more than past residents should be, merely because they no longer occupy the area.

Exploration of the Heritage Areas and Its Trails

The heritage area will stretch from the downtown area of what is Little Tokyo today south around Central Avenue to Watts. It will encompass African American history in the city from the turn of the twentieth century to the late 1960s. Sites of both

architectural and cultural significance will be included, as well as structures that no longer stand. In downtown there is Bidley Mason Park, Azusa Street Revival Church, and Fire Station 30 at 1401 South Central Avenue. In Little Tokyo next door, known in the 1940s as Bronzeville, there is Shep's Playhouse and the Finale Club, as well as hotels and churches developed by the African American community from existing structures. Central Avenue is home to businesses and community institutions like the Dunbar Hotel, Second Baptist Church, the Lincoln Theater, Angelus Funeral Home, the 28th Street YMCA, the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Building, and the 51st Street School. Its clubs like Club Alabam, the Savoy, the Apex, and the Kentucky speak of its heyday in the era of jazz. The Black Panthers had their headquarters on the Avenue in the 1960s. Further south, Watts' diverse history is expressed in the early twentieth century Watts Station, the Watts Towers from the middle of the century, and the housing projects of Jordan Downs and Imperial Courts built during the 1940s as war worker housing. The sites included here (see Appendix A for a listing) are by no means the only sites in the city related to an African American heritage area. A more thorough listing is laid out in Teresa Grimes' National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles." There are two different types of possible trails for the sites in the heritage area. One trail is physical and related to the landscape; the other is digital, though still very much connected to the landscape and built environment. A physical tour allows for the exploration of the built environment and gives concrete context to the history. Through a digital format, the past physical landscape of these areas can come alive again through historic photographs and reminiscences.

The Curating the City program included both a physical tour and a webpage. The physical tour included some of the significant sites along Wilshire Boulevard from downtown to Santa Monica. The tour had a significant digital component as well. A web page included an interactive map of Wilshire Boulevard with sites that, when moused over, expanded to show more information and an image. The advantage of the digital map and tour is that it could include sites that have been demolished, one particular reason this digital tour is an excellent model for a Los Angeles African American tour. The program also produced educational materials and teaching tools. It encouraged people of all ages to use the built environment as an educational tool. A digital format tour of this type will allow the public to have access to information related to significant structures that are no longer standing. It will also allow for the breaking up of the heritage area into multiple trails based on themes or decades. Examples of themes are jazz, politics, civil rights, and significant figures in history. The digital tour will consist of a timeline and map of the area in East Los Angeles, allowing viewers to get a sense of the history and events as related to time and space. Accompanying the online trail and tour will be a context outlining a basic history of African Americans in the city and the four areas featured (Downtown, Little Tokyo, Central Avenue, and Watts), as well as a self-guided tour people could take to visit the sites presented in the digital tour. Since the tour covers a somewhat extensive geographic area, the map online will be clickable so that different areas can be selected. Each of the four areas will have their own page with more specific information on the history of the area and on specific sites, as well as a map with sites pinpointed. The sites for each area will have a page devoted to them and will be laid out in a list format. If a site (the Dunbar Hotel, for example) were selected from an area

map or page (Central Avenue), visitors would be taken to the page devoted to all of Central Avenue's sites. The page would scroll automatically to the portion devoted to that particular historic site—in this case, the Dunbar Hotel. Each site's listing will include the name, address, date of construction, builder or architect (if known), date demolished or altered (if applicable), and a brief statement of significance. It will also have a photograph, which could be historic, contemporary, or both. The format is as follows:

Site: Dunbar Hotel

Address: 4225 South Central Avenue

Designation: National Register of Historic Places, Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Date Constructed: 1928

Builder: John and Vada Somerville

Significance: The Hotel Somerville, later renamed the Dunbar Hotel, was built by John and Vada Somerville in 1928. They built the hotel in response of a lack of accommodations that would accept blacks. The hotel became a source of pride for the black community. It contained a hundred hotel rooms, a restaurant, an exquisitely decorated lobby, and dining room with an orchestra balcony. The ground floor hosted a number of businesses, including a barber shop and pharmacy. It served as an anchor for the community, and when it was constructed, it served to shift the nexus of the community further south on Central Avenue. With the stock market crash in 1929, Somerville had to sell the hotel; it was renamed the Dunbar Hotel by its new owners. The hotel was rehabilitated as low-income housing and opened for occupancy in 1990.

Photograph:



Figure 12. The Dunbar Hotel (Image Courtesy of the Author.)

The fact that many sites no longer remain must be taken into account when creating a physical tour, but it is not an impediment to its creation. Sites like Leake's Lake Recreational Area in Watts, the Bidy Mason homestead, and the clubs on Central Avenue will be pointed out and their significance described. It is not necessary for the building to remain or be completely intact for its importance to be highlighted. The impact of giving events physical context can be just as effective. The physical tour will be organized by both geographic area and theme. An example could be a tour of Watts called "From Mudtown to Freedom City: Watts from 1903 to 1966," which could include sites like Watts Station, the Watts Towers, the 103rd Street business district that burned during the Watts riots, Leake's Lake Recreational Area, the Imperial Courts public housing complex on East 113th Street, and the Jordan Downs public housing complex south of East 97th Street. Imperial Courts and Jordan Downs were constructed by the City Housing Authority during World War Two as temporary war worker housing and converted to public housing after the war. A more far-reaching tour, "African American Churches in South LA," could include sites like Second Baptist Church on 24th Street just off of Central Avenue and Bethlehem Baptist Church at 4901 Compton Avenue, a few blocks south of Vernon Avenue. It was built in 1944 for an African American congregation and the only church designed by Modern architect Rudolph Schindler. The tour would also feature the Azusa Street Revival Church in Little Tokyo, First AME Church, also known as Eighth and Towne south of downtown towards Central Avenue, and Macedonia Baptist Church on 114th Street in Watts. The type of full day bus tour used by LA Gang Tours is ideal for African American sites in the Central Avenue area, Watts, and downtown. A self-guided driving tour, in which visitors are given access to a

brochure or guidebook that they can take with them as they explore the sites themselves, is another good option for exploring sites. Both of these options allow for people to traverse the larger geographic area that African Americans occupied on the east side of Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century.

Two advantages of these tours, both physical and digital, are increased visibility to the public and the ability to use these sites, both extant and demolished, as a teaching tool. This would increase awareness of significant structures and how the history they express has contributed to the story of the city. It would help educate the public about South Central LA. A major goal of the creation of a tour and heritage area is the alteration of the image of South Central LA in the public imagination, for its negative image has hindered development and revitalization. History—a major asset if utilized correctly—can be used to change this negative image. It helps shift the focus from South Central as a place of gangs, crimes, and unemployment to South Central as a living, breathing community with a fascinating history that has contributed to the character of the place today. Knowledge of this history transforms South Central. It gives dimension and background to the landscape today; it lends perspective and context. It can make a place seem less alien. For revitalization to occur, people outside these communities must see the vitality that exists within them; educating them about its history is a step in the right direction.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

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³ Larson and Finney, *Rebuilding South Central*, 12.

⁴ Tseng, *Common Paths*, 9.

⁵ Tseng, *Common Paths*, 9.

⁶ Tseng, *Common Paths*, 8.

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¹¹ Tseng, *Common Paths*, 17.

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¹⁸ Hillary Jenks, “Home is Little Tokyo: Race, Community, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles” (PhD diss, University of Southern California, 2008, In Proquest Dissertations and Theses, <http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.usc.edu/> (accessed January 25, 2010), 2 – 3.

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²² Jenks, “Home is Little Tokyo,” 4.

Conclusion

This thesis proposes the development of an African American heritage area in downtown and central Los Angeles. Further work is necessary in the neighborhoods discussed as well as those not examined here, including Florence-Graham between Central Avenue and Watts, Leimert Park, Baldwin Hills-Crenshaw, Boyle Heights, and Jefferson Park. Further work is also needed to identify more significant sites in the areas highlighted, especially those in which this history is not as widely known, such as Downtown and Little Tokyo. Survey work has been conducted in the Central Avenue district, but no comprehensive surveys have taken place to identify African American resources in the Downtown/Little Tokyo area or in Watts. Little Tokyo especially poses an interesting challenge due to the short-lived nature of the Bronzeville community. The constantly shifting demographics of these areas—and thus the ever-changed nature of the built environment—present challenges when creating trails and tours. The uses of buildings and the businesses within them often changed, and at times structures were demolished to make way for new uses of the site. What was once home to the African American community downtown is now Little Tokyo. What was a park and lake in Watts is now a public housing project, built during the 1940s and significant to the story of Watts in its own right. The story of this change is a part of the story of African Americans in Los Angeles.

African American history cannot be told without taking into account the constant changing demographics and multiracial character of the city. It lends a unique dimension to the story and presents specific interpretive challenges. It is not always a positive history, but the fact of restrictive covenants and racism is as much a part of the history as

the Avenue's heyday as a center of jazz music. On the other hand, it is not a history steeped in negativity, and it must not be told in that manner. While African Americans faced setbacks, they also created lively communities and established lasting neighborhood institutions. Los Angeles both promised and presented the possibility of homeownership and a more tolerant racial environment than elsewhere in the country. Neither side of the story can be told without the other.

The benefits of a heritage area and heritage tourism for these neighborhoods are tremendous, including not only historic preservation and education but also revitalization and redevelopment. A heritage area could create jobs in these communities and involve residents in the tours. Shedding light on this history will hopefully illustrate the complex nature of these neighborhoods and present an alternate picture to the common perceptions. It is a way to show that there is dynamism and promise in South LA, which will hopefully encourage businesses to reenter the area and bring more services and facilities to residents. As with Chicago Neighborhood Tours, an African American heritage area in Los Angeles could highlight the diversity of these places and bring visitors to neighborhoods they might not otherwise have thought to go. One of the most important desired outcomes of a corridor is the ability to alter the manner in which the public views South Central Los Angeles. The vibrant communities that existed in the past still exist there today; it just takes a little digging to find them behind the stereotypes about South LA. This ability to use the built environment as a teaching tool for as many people as possible could begin to help change perceptions about South LA. It is a highly effective tool for increasing public knowledge about this history and that history's impact

on the built environment today. It makes the dynamism of this history tangible and gives it a physical context that is irreplaceable.

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Appendix: Sites for the Heritage Area

Some of the sites intended for the heritage area are listed below and are organized by neighborhood. This is by no means a complete list. There are many more sites that require further research to locate and include in the heritage area.

Downtown and Little Tokyo:

Biddy Mason Park, 331 South Spring Street, 1989 – 1990
No designation

First AME Church (Eighth and Towne), 801 Towne Avenue, 1903
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument
Building no longer remains, destroyed by fire

Azusa Street Revival Church, 312 Azusa Street, 1888
No designation
Building no longer remains

Fire Station 30, 1401 South Central Avenue, 1913
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Shep's Playhouse, 1st and Los Angeles Streets, date unknown
No designation
Exact location unknown

Finale Club, 230 ½ East 1st Street, 1910
No designation

Pilgrim House/Japanese Union Church, 120 North San Pedro Street, 1923
Contributor to the Little Tokyo National Register Historic District
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Central Avenue:

Dunbar Hotel, 4225 South Central Avenue, 1928
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Second Baptist Church, 1100 East 24th Street, 1926
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Lincoln Theater, 2300 South Central Avenue, 1926
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Angelus Funeral Home, 1010 East Jefferson Boulevard, 1934
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Fire Station 14, 3401 South Central Avenue, 1949
National Register of Historic Places

28th Street YMCA, 1006 East 28th Street, 1926
National Register of Historic Places
Contributing Structure to the 27th Street Historic District
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Ralph Bunche House, 1221 East 40th Place, 1904
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Building, 4261 South Central Avenue, 1928
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Fifty-First Street School, 5108 Holmes Avenue, ca. 1922
No designation

Furlong Tract, boundaries of 50th and 55th Streets, Alameda and Long Beach Avenues
No designation
Homes replaced by Pueblo del Rio Public Housing Project

Club Alamab site, 4221 South Central Avenue, date unknown
No longer remains
No designation
Site recognized by reconstructed awning with club name displayed

Savoy Club site, 55th and Central Avenue, date unknown
No longer remains
Exact location unknown

Kentucky Club site, 25th and Central Avenue
No longer remains
Exact location unknown

Jefferson High School, 1319 East 41st Street, 1935
California Register of Historical Resources
Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places

Black Panther headquarters site, 4115 South Central Avenue, 1923
No designation

California Eagle office, 4071 South Central Avenue, 1906
No designation

Bethlehem Baptist Church, 4901 Compton Avenue/1468 East 49th Street, 1944
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Watts:

Watts Station, 1686 – 1690 East 103rd Street, 1904
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument

Watts Towers, 1765 East 107th Street, 1921 – 1955
National Register of Historic Places
Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument
National Historic Landmark

Leake's Lake Recreational Area, near South Wilmington Avenue and Imperial Highway,
built sometime during World War One
No designation
No longer remains, replaced by Imperial Courts Public Housing Project

103rd Street Corridor, center of violence during the Watts riots in 1965
No designation

Macedonia Baptist Church, 1755 East 114th Street, 1949
No designation

Jordan Downs, 9800 Grape Street, 1944
No designation

Imperial Courts, 11541 Croesus Avenue, 1944
No designation

Nickerson Gardens, 1590 East 114th Street, 1955
Determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places