

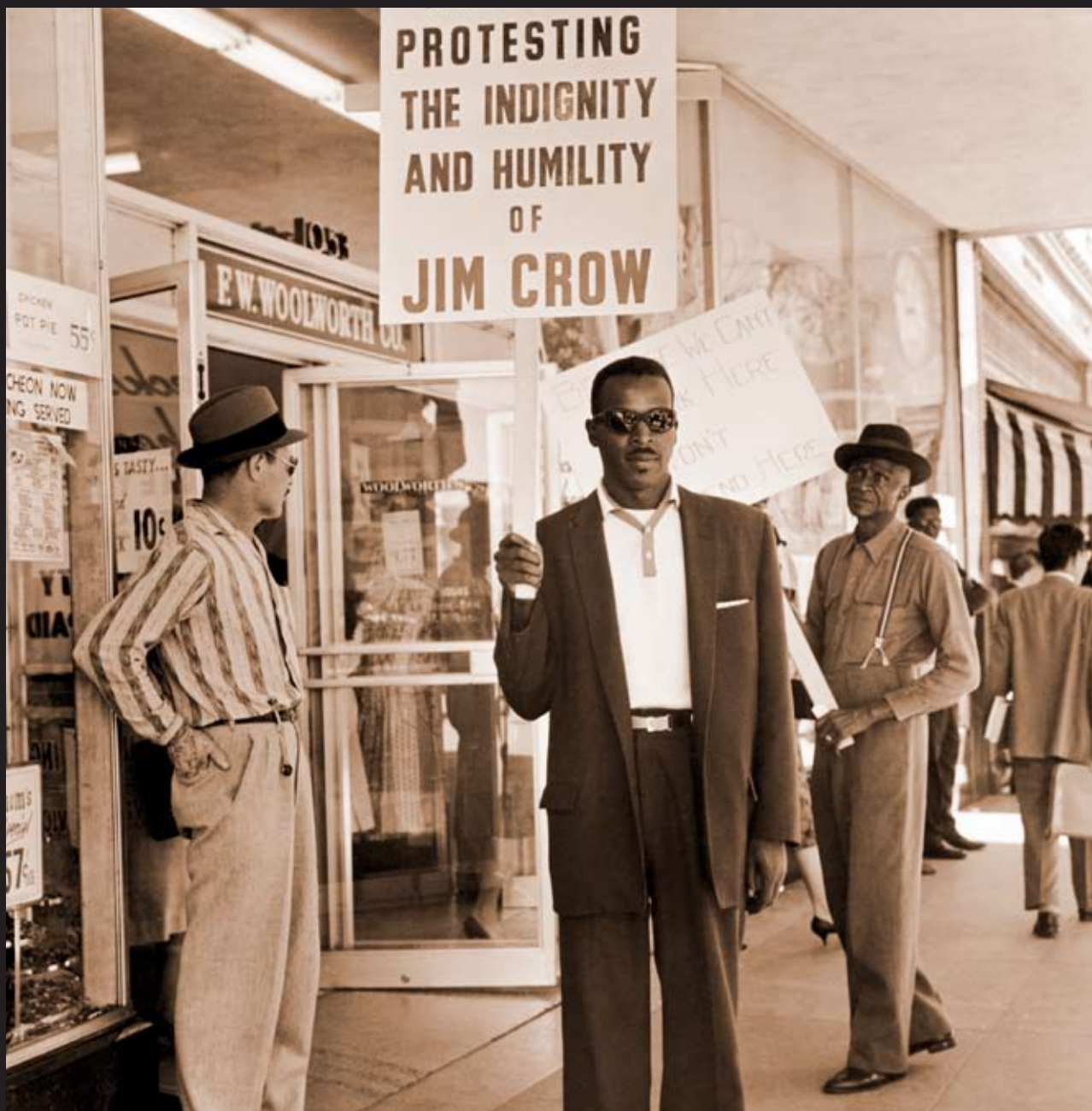
THE JOURNAL OF  
SAN DIEGO  
HISTORY

VOLUME 54

WINTER 2008

NUMBER 1

THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY



Publication of *The Journal of San Diego History* has been partially funded by generous grants from the Joseph W. Sefton Foundation; Natale A. Carasali Trust; Quest for Truth Foundation of Seattle, Washington, established by the late James G. Scripps; Philip M. Klauber; and an anonymous friend and supporter of the *Journal*.

Publication of this issue of *The Journal of San Diego History* has also been supported by a grant from "The Journal of San Diego History Fund" of the San Diego Foundation.

The San Diego Historical Society is able to share the resources of four museums and its extensive collections with the community through the generous support of the following: City of San Diego Commission for Art and Culture; County of San Diego; foundation and government grants; individual and corporate memberships; corporate sponsorship and donation bequests; sales from museum stores and reproduction prints from the Booth Historical Photograph Archives; admissions; and proceeds from fund-raising events.

Articles appearing in *The Journal of San Diego History* are abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life*.

The paper in the publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science-Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

**This Journal is a special issue on Race and Space in San Diego History.**

**Front Cover:** Segregation protest at E. W. Woolworth Co., March 19, 1960; UT85\_A8281-2 ©San Diego Historical Society.

**Back Cover:** First Birthday Banquet of Harue Asakawa, June 26, 1917. Photo by U. Shindo. San Diego. No. 13721-2 ©San Diego Historical Society.

**Cover Design: Allen Wynar**





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Published since 1955 by the  
SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
1649 El Prado, Balboa Park, San Diego, California 92101  
ISSN 0022-4383

THE JOURNAL OF  
**SAN DIEGO  
HISTORY**

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Published quarterly by the *San Diego Historical Society* at 1649 El Prado, Balboa Park, San Diego, California 92101.

A \$60.00 annual membership in the San Diego Historical Society includes subscription to *The Journal of San Diego History* and the *SDHS Times*. Back issues are available at [www.sandiegohistory.org](http://www.sandiegohistory.org).

Articles and book reviews for publication consideration, as well as editorial correspondence, should be addressed to the Editors, *The Journal of San Diego History*, Department of History, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110

All article submissions should be typed and double-spaced with endnotes, and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Authors should submit three copies of their manuscript, plus an electronic copy, in MS Word or in rich text format (RTF).

The San Diego Historical Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of the authors or reviewers.

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ISSN 0022-4383

Periodicals postage paid at San Diego, CA

Publication No. 331-870

(619) 232-6203

[www.sandiegohistory.org](http://www.sandiegohistory.org)

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# African Americans and Historic Preservation in San Diego: The Douglas and the Clermont/Coast Hotels

Leland T. Saito

Embedded in the sidewalk at the San Diego downtown corner of Second Avenue and Market Street, on a block bordering the southern side of Horton Plaza, is a commemorative 24" by 18" brass plaque. The plaque reads:

Former Site, Douglas Hotel, 1924. Known as the "Harlem of the West," the hotel included the Creole Palace nightclub where black stage and screen stars of the 1930's and 1940's performed. The Douglas Hotel was the only major downtown hotel to provide accommodations to black visitors in San Diego during the era of segregation.

The plaque is the only reminder of the most important entertainment venue, and the main place of lodging, for African Americans in downtown San Diego during the first half of the twentieth century. Celebrities such as Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, and the Mills Brothers, stayed and played there. Today, most pedestrians walk by without ever noticing the plaque's existence, unaware of the city's history represented by the Douglas Hotel, which was torn down in 1985 to make way for a mixed-use residential and commercial development.<sup>1</sup>



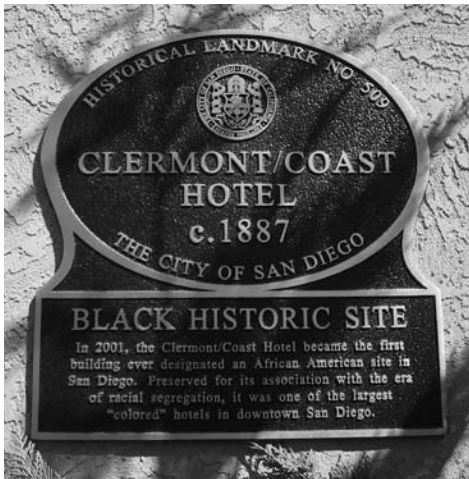
*Plaque commemorating the Douglas Hotel at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Market Street, 2007. Photo by author.*

In contrast, two decades after demolition of the Douglas Hotel, the city in 2005 placed a bronze plaque on the front of the Clermont/Coast Hotel, proclaiming the historic status of the building. The plaque reads: "In 2001, the Clermont/Coast Hotel became the first building ever designated an African American site in San Diego. Preserved for its association with the era of racial segregation, it was one of the largest 'colored' hotels in downtown San Diego."

Why is it that the city razed the Douglas Hotel in 1985 while preserving the

---

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*Plaque commemorating the local historic status of the Clermont/Coast Hotel on the façade of the building facing 7th Avenue, 2007. Photo by author.*

Clermont/Coast Hotel in 2005? What explains why the city treated these two historic properties associated with African Americans so differently? From 1980 to the present, the city has prioritized urban growth and redevelopment over historical preservation and also largely failed to recognize structures of social and historical significance to people of color as worthy of preservation. The reason why the one hotel was destroyed and the other saved, then, has nothing to do with a change at the top. Rather, the Clermont/Coast Hotel was saved because an African American grassroots movement forced the city to change.

## Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Growth Machine

Downtown areas across the country experienced economic decline in the post-WWII era as suburbanization accelerated and residents, businesses, and manufacturers increasingly favored suburbia over the aging downtowns. From the 1950s through the 1970s, cities partnered with the federal government to revitalize their urban cores through urban renewal and the construction of the interstate highway system. Established by the Housing Act of 1949, the major goals of urban renewal were to revive urban economies and improve housing for the poor by eradicating substandard buildings in business and residential areas and constructing new, modern structures. The Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956 provided funding to build new freeways connecting urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

The history of these projects, however, was marked by the destruction of low- and moderate-income communities, especially those inhabited by African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. By 1967, for example, urban renewal projects had displaced approximately 400,000 families, the majority of whom were low-income racial minorities. The construction of highways led to the destruction of 330,000 housing units by 1968. The targeting of minority communities was often clear and purposeful. Local governments strategically developed and employed images of racial minority communities as “blighted” neighborhoods and “slums” to justify displacing residents and businesses and to make room for redevelopment projects. These explicitly racialized urban renewal programs earned the well-deserved title: “Negro Removal.”<sup>3</sup>

In a pivotal work on race, William J. Wilson contends that government policies changed as a result of events during the 1960s, in particular the Civil Rights Movement. Prior to the 1960s, the state established laws and institutions that generated and supported racial inequality. Wilson argues that after the 1960s the state worked to implement and enforce racial equality. While there are important arguments countering Wilson’s claim that the significance of race has declined,

there is a difference between explicitly state-sponsored inequality and supporting policies that are believed to be color blind or race neutral.<sup>4</sup>

Concern about the massive displacement of residents and small businesses, loss of housing for low-income residents, and urban renewal's limited success as an economic stimulus for cities (despite its enormous fiscal and social costs), led to the end of urban renewal and its replacement by the Community Redevelopment Act of 1974. This Act aimed to improve housing in and the economies of urban areas, and also attempted to end the worst practices of urban renewal by incorporating greater involvement of community residents in the planning process for economic redevelopment projects. Rather than the large-scale demolition of entire neighborhoods, the Act emphasized the conservation and rehabilitation of existing structures.

Shifts have also occurred in historic preservation. During the first half of the twentieth century, preservation focused on structures reflecting historic events of national significance, major buildings of aesthetic importance, and the work of prominent architects. Structures associated with racial minorities were largely ignored. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act amended the 1935 Historic Sites Act, expanding preservation criteria to include the social history of structures and properties of local (rather than just national) significance. Some historic preservationists used these changes in the law to preserve sites related to the everyday lives of immigrants, the working class, and racial minorities.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of new "color blind" policies in government as well as important changes in urban redevelopment and historic preservation policies, San Diego government, like that in other cities, moved away from deliberately removing communities of color and razing historic structures associated with racial minorities. But this hardly meant that post-1960s urban renewal in San Diego became race-neutral.

After 1960, the city of San Diego did not, by and large, pursue historic preservation as an important goal in and of itself. In the United States in general, and San Diego in particular, growth policies have been a central concern of city politics, and developers have played major roles in the formation of public policy. Promoting new development and luring tourists, conventioners, and suburban shoppers back to downtown are the primary objectives. Historic preservation, rather than an important goal in itself, became another tool in the development of areas to produce tax revenues for cities. This process of economic redevelopment has been controlled by local political and economic elites and aimed at generating profit for major developers, business interests, property owners, and tax revenue for local governments.<sup>6</sup>

After the 1960s, the elites who dominated urban economic development in San Diego and in other cities did not deliberately target African-, Mexican-, and Asian-American communities and structures for destruction, as their predecessors once did. In fact, sometimes these elites preserved minority historical structures, but often if they served the interests of economic development. Over all, though, the buildings associated with racial minorities have not fared as well as other historic structures. This is because many elite participants in urban economic redevelopment projects tend to be largely blind to the history of people of color. They frequently failed to see why the homes and businesses of people of color were "historically significant." This blindness is why post-1960s urban development



*Market Street Apartments took the place of the Douglas Hotel. View from the southwest corner of Second Avenue and Market Street, 2007. Photo by author.*

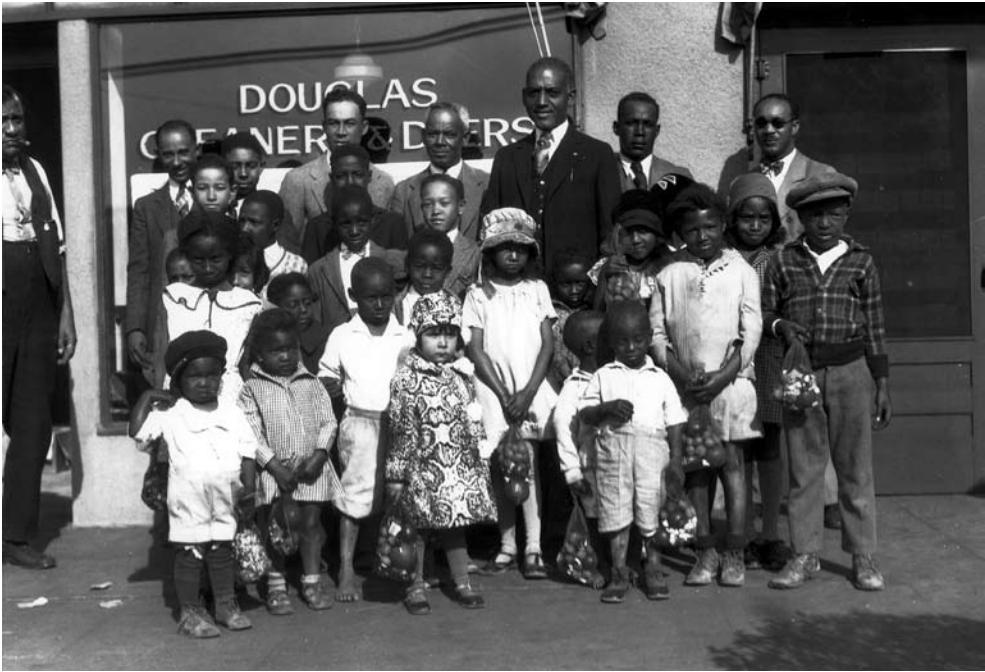
continued to be racialized.<sup>7</sup>

The results of racialization born of blindness (rather than malice) are quite evident in Southern California. A 1986 evaluation of “Los Angeles’s designated cultural-historic landmarks,” for example, determined that only 2.3 percent referred to African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans, despite the long histories of these groups in the city. The Douglas Hotel was demolished in 1985 and examining the San Diego Historical Resources Board’s (HRB) list of “Historical Landmarks” as of 1986 provides an indicator of what was considered historically important at that time. The list has 369 sites and structures.



*Hotel Douglas Entertainers, April 1, 1930. © San Diego Historical Society Sensor 7-316.*

In terms of a historical connection with racial minority communities, two dealt with Mexican Americans, one with Filipino Americans, and eight with Chinese Americans. No site or structure dealing with African Americans made the list. Eleven out of 369, or, three percent, is better than the Los Angeles list, but still small, especially taking into account that five of the Chinese American sites and the one Filipino American site made the list as part of the 90 buildings grouped together



*George Ramsey with community members 1929. © San Diego Historical Society UT 20962.2-4.*

and listed in the Gaslamp Quarter Historic District.<sup>8</sup>

The dramatic difference in the number of structures and sites for whites as compared to racial minorities in the San Diego and Los Angeles lists, and the absence of structures related to African Americans on the San Diego list (until the Clermont/Coast Hotel was added in 2001), suggest the tendency of routine, institutional processes to recognize structures that reflect the history of white communities rather than those of racial minorities. As a result, while the clear intent of urban renewal's "Negro Removal" is missing, with seemingly race-neutral policies, the results may be similar.

## **The Douglas Hotel**

African American businessman George Ramsey, and his partner Robert Rowe, built the Douglas Hotel in 1924, providing, according to local historian Micheal Austin, the "only place of quality lodging and entertainment for Black visitors to the city of San Diego during a period of intense segregation in the United States."<sup>9</sup> Cecile Picou, a writer for the *Voice & Viewpoint*, San Diego's major African American community newspaper, notes that in 1923, whites lynched twenty-nine African Americans across the nation, and "Leeches from that parasite became infectious in San Diego's White population with posted signs reading, We do Not Cater to Negro Patronage, and For Whites Only." She described the importance of the hotel within this context of extreme discrimination:

Segregation had created an insufferable and bleak situation for African Americans. And their most common problem[s]: Where



Exterior of the Douglas Hotel facing Market St. No date. © San Diego Historical Society Sensor 7-139.

could a[n] African American get something to eat? What hotel would accommodate him? Where would someone go for entertainment? When the Douglas Hotel opened in 1924, the African American finally found that everything he needed, was in one place. Located at 206 Market Street, the hotel maintained a restaurant, card room, barbershop, dry cleaners, bell boys and billiard rooms. The adjoining room was the Creole Palace nightclub, well[-]known for its jazz/blues, boogie-woogie, Charleston music and dancing.<sup>10</sup>

Austin's and Picou's argument that the hotel provided a refuge for African Americans during an era of racial exclusion was echoed by African Americans who shared their memories of the hotel in *San Diego Union-Tribune* articles. They described the hotel as a welcoming safe haven and an entertainment mecca. Bea Wilson stated that "the hotel was a comfortable place, with no fear of being bothered day or night. People felt right at home there....Walking into the Douglas, gave the African American a sense of having a place that they could call their own." Fro Brigham, a jazz musician and Creole Palace manager during the 1940s and 1950s, remembered that "there wasn't another place like it. People came from L.A. just to visit the Creole Palace."<sup>11</sup>

The hotel also served as an important place of employment. As Austin notes, "There was a lot of tourism in San Diego during that period, and there were plenty of jobs, mostly service-oriented, for black people." Austin explains that "the most prized work was at the Douglas because it paid relatively high wages and its success ensured job security.... People valued their jobs there.... They worked very hard to make it a nice place."<sup>12</sup>

The postwar expanding economy, changing patterns of segregation, and suburbanization, however, drew African Americans to new residential, shopping, and commercial opportunities beyond the downtown area. Austin explained that



*Creole Palace performers at the Douglas Hotel facing Market Street, c. 1934. © SDHS #20009.*

“By the late 1950s the glory days were gone.” Similarly, the *Voice and Viewpoint* wrote, “By the end of the ‘50s, the Douglas Hotel had become a flophouse, with rented out rooms.”<sup>13</sup>

Located directly across the street from Horton Plaza’s (the main downtown shopping center) southern edge, and just west of the Gaslamp district (the major downtown restaurant and bar area), the Douglas Hotel was in a prime location for the city’s redevelopment efforts. The Centre City Development Corporation

(CCDC), which was in charge of downtown redevelopment, proposed a four-story project for the Douglas Hotel site that would cover the entire block. Street-level commercial space, underground parking, and 192 apartment units in the floors above would replace the two-story Douglas Hotel.<sup>14</sup>

## **Historic Preservation and African Americans**

The standard city procedures for redevelopment and historic preservation led to the demolition of the Douglas Hotel. Evaluating the physical condition of the Douglas Hotel and other structures on the block, CCDC in 1984 stated that “The block is extremely blighted.” In terms of the Douglas Hotel’s historical value,



*George Ramsey and Joe Louis stand by Skippy Smith, owner of the Pacific Parachute Co. in 1942. © SDHS #96\_19521.*

the 1984 CCDC Environmental Impact report noted that "The Douglas Hotel is not listed on any city, state or national historical list or register. In addition, it was not identified in the 'Report on Significant Structures in the Centre City Redevelopment Projects' compiled by CCDC and approved by the City Historic Sites Board." While the structure may not be significant architecturally, the report did recognize its possible value in terms of the city's social history, acknowledging that "Although the Douglas Hotel has not been identified as a unique ethnic cultural resource, its previous use as a nightclub and hotel catering to black patrons in the 1930s and 1940s may be of historical interest." Rather than saving the building from destruction, however, the report suggested that "the Redevelopment Agency proposes establishment of a photographic/commemorative display on the early days of the Douglas Hotel within the proposed development."<sup>15</sup>

Although there was interest among city residents to preserve the Douglas Hotel, no major lobbying effort occurred. Picou notes that "most African Americans wanted to try and raise money to restore and preserve the Douglas Hotel, but that never happened." A 1979 article in the *Voice and Viewpoint* declared in the title that a "Drive starts to save Douglas Hotel." The article explained that "James Pusey, 42, a retired Navyman and graduate student in history at the University of San Diego said if there is a campaign to restore the Old Globe Theater and the Aerospace Museum, why can't there be a drive to preserve and restore the Hotel Douglas?" Interviewed in 2001, Pusey recalled that his efforts did not go beyond his class research and explained that "I wasn't really involved in an effort to save the Douglas, it was more a class project to do research."<sup>16</sup>

African Americans held conflicting opinions about the Douglas Hotel's historical significance, as did whites, and this may have contributed to the lack of action to save the hotel. The Douglas Hotel had a controversial history. Its existence was a stark reminder of racial exclusion and segregation. Although exclusively all-white hotels from that era also existed downtown, this aspect of their history did not generate the same concerns as the Douglas Hotel because white racial privilege often went unrecognized. Also, while the hotel's importance as an African American-owned business and place of entertainment was clear, others, such as Jasper Davis (the second black on the San Diego police force) noted its location in the Stingaree District, San Diego's former center of illegal behavior, such as prostitution, gambling and other illicit activities. While there is disagreement on whether or not prostitution actually occurred in the hotel, it is known that when owner Robert Rowe passed away several months after the hotel opened, Mabel Rowe, his widow, took over his work responsibilities, lived in the hotel, and, as a madam, ran her prostitution business at a nearby hotel. As Reverend George Walker Smith, an African American and one of the city's major community leaders, explained, "I don't know why people place so much emphasis on the Douglas Hotel. There are other historic things that happened down there."<sup>17</sup>

African Americans in San Diego have achieved a fair record of electoral success. From the election of Leon Williams in 1969, African Americans have elected a steady stream of representatives to the San Diego City Council. In 1990, at about the time that the city demolished the Douglas Hotel, the African American population in the county was 159,306 out of 2.5 million people, or just about 6.4% of the total population. African American community activism concentrated on



economic development, public education, political empowerment, and employment issues in southeast San Diego, the contemporary center of the African American population.<sup>18</sup>

African Americans did not use their political capital on downtown historic preservation in the 1980s. According to Larry Malone, who was the community program director for the San Diego Historical Society when the Douglas Hotel was slated for demolition, leaders were too busy with issues in southeast San Diego to focus on historic preservation downtown. He explained that “no one was really advocating at that time and historical preservation was just taking off. No individual or groups organized. We lost a jewel.” Like Malone, San Diego resident Karen Huff believed that the failure to save the Douglas Hotel resulted from lack of knowledge about local history. Huff explained that “San Diego itself didn’t know much about historic preservation until the 1970s, and clearly by 1980s there was not any movement in the black community in preserving historic sites....There was no organization.”<sup>19</sup>

This changed, however, when Karen Huff helped establish the Gaslamp Black Historical Society (GBHS) in 1999 to prevent the further loss of downtown’s African American history. The Society’s brochure states that:

Our mission is to study and ultimately recommend ways of mitigating the impact on black historic and cultural properties in the downtown redevelopment areas....Our mission is to preserve, protect, interpret, and restore the historic Harlem of the West. Our goal is to be the catalyst for black history preservation in San Diego County. Our goal is to provide research and archived material documenting the lives of pioneering blacks in San Diego....Our goal is to become a community asset by preserving a piece of our San Diego heritage.<sup>20</sup>

Huff explained her motivation for creating the organization, “The Douglas Hotel was black-owned and it was a beautiful structure where all the top jazz acts played. Once I heard that it was being torn down, I couldn’t believe it....I promised myself that I would become involved in the community to prevent the loss of other black historical sites in San Diego County.” Huff co-authored a February 2000 proposal submitted to CCDC requesting that the city recognize the importance of downtown’s African American history, stating that:

(a)the City of San Diego, and the Centre City Development Corporation should recognize the contributions of Blacks to the development of the Gaslamp/Stingaree districts, (b) the creation of a CCDC committee working in conjunction with the Gaslamp Black Historical Society’s preservation and restoration efforts...<sup>21</sup>

The 2000 proposal requested that CCDC fund a study of the history of African Americans in the area, stating that “in order to prevent further destruction.... CCDC must immediately provide for a historical study of the Harlem of the West district....CCDC, and the City of San Diego must admit and recognize the contributions of Blacks to the developments of the Gaslamp/Stingaree districts.” The proposal also stressed the economic benefits of an African American historic



*Exterior of the Clermont Hotel at the northeast corner of 7th Avenue and Island Ave. No date. © SDHS #6589.*

district. It noted that in the past, “urban renewal [was used] for tearing down and erasing ... Black culture sites,” but that “worlds of changes have swept across this nation in recent years whereby the advantages of recognizing the contributions of Blacks to the development of American cities have proven to be an economic boom, enhancing the flavor of a particular historic area.” The report pointed out “Memphis, Tennessee...with its focus and redevelopment of Beale Street as the Blues-Mecca is attracting valuable tax dollars to the city” and that “other cities like Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, and even Boise, Idaho are reclaiming and restoring their Black Cultural Sites.”<sup>22</sup>

### **The Clermont/Coast Hotel**

In 2000, development interests threatened the Clermont/Coast Hotel with destruction. The hotel, then an aging halfway house, was located at 501 7th Avenue, two blocks due north of the future baseball stadium, Petco Park. Developers wanted to transform the hotel into a parking structure for the new ballpark. In contrast to the absence of any major attempt to support the preservation of the Douglas Hotel, Karen Huff and the Gaslamp Black Historical Society fought to preserve the hotel as a local African American historic landmark.

The Clermont/Coast Hotel was built in 1887 as a lodging house, and before such an old structure could be altered or destroyed, the CCDC required that the Historical Resources Board examine the building for historical and/or architectural significance. In 2000, Scott Moomjian conducted a study of the hotel. Moomjian reported that the 1988 Centre City Historic Survey of the Clermont/Coast Hotel gave the building a “Tentative Rank: 3.” He referred to the 1988 report and stated that “Prior historical research has determined that the Coast Hotel is both historically and architecturally insignificant.” He explained that the “3”

ranking “meant that it was not eligible for the local register.” After conducting his own research on the hotel, Moomjian discovered that the hotel’s name changed repeatedly. First called the Occidental, the hotel became known as the Clermont, and then, in the 1960s, the Coast. He explained that his research has found “no historical evidence was identified which would support a determination that the Coast Hotel exemplifies or reflect elements of San Diego’s, Centre City’s, or the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue area’s historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.” He concluded that “no historically significant events or individuals were ever associated with the Coast Hotel.”<sup>23</sup>

At its July 27, 2000 meeting, the Historical Resources Board considered the designation of the Clermont/Coast Hotel as a historical resource. The Board decided to request that Moomjian conduct further research and respond to questions raised by board members concerning the architectural and social significance of the building, particularly in terms of the African American history of the area. Moomjian’s second report noted that the GBHS had prepared a “Black Cultural Sites List,” which identified the Clermont/Coast Hotel in the following way: “Though never black owned, [the] hotel catered to blacks during era of segregation 1920’s-1960’s. Hotel’s occupants continued to be primarily black until the mid-1980’s.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Moomjian’s second report (released February 2001), the fact that the Clermont/Coast Hotel was associated with African Americans during the period of segregation was not important enough to warrant historic designation.



*Clermont/Coast Hotel. Exterior of the Clermont Hotel at the northeast corner of 7th Avenue and Island Ave, 2007. Photo by author.*

The second report stated that additional research “failed to identify any evidence which would establish that the Coast Hotel was ever important to the San Diego African-American community” and concluded that “no historical evidence was identified which would support a determination that the Coast Hotel is either historically or architecturally significant.”<sup>25</sup>

In March, the Historical Resources Board issued their report, finding that since the building had experienced extensive alterations, it was not architecturally significant. In terms of its historical and social significance, the report acknowledged that similar hotels in the city once served African Americans and that a number of African American-owned businesses and properties previously existed in the area, but no substantial evidence existed that demonstrated the importance of the Clermont/Coast Hotel to the African American community. The report stated that the hotel did not meet the criteria for historical designation, explaining that

although staff recognizes from the record and additional studies that hotels of this type did play a significant role in providing housing for African-Americans and there is information available to point to a number of African-American owned properties in the general area, there is no clear or specific evidence on the record of the role of this particular hotel in serving the African-American community.<sup>26</sup>

In August 2001, Karen Huff, representing the GBHS, researched and authored a report, “Hotel for Colored People (A Supplemental Assessment To The Clermont/Coast Hotel).” This report acted as the catalyst for the reversal of the Historical Resources Board’s assessment of the hotel. Huff’s realization of the historic importance of the Coast Hotel occurred when she came across an advertisement for the hotel in a mid-1950s San Diego County telephone directory. The advertisement stated that the hotel was “COLORED.” An enlarged photocopy of the advertisement appeared on the cover of Huff’s August 2001 report. According to Huff’s report, the Clermont/Coast Hotel was historically significant because it was “the very first hotel in San Diego County to be officially recognized as segregated or ‘colored only.’” Huff discovered through her research that Eugene and Mamie Deburn bought the hotel around 1922, and, as Huff explained, “A black owned or operated hotel in San Diego recognized as ‘black only’ was unique.” Huff pointed out in her report that unlike the Douglas Hotel, which allowed both African Americans and whites to rent rooms, the Clermont/Coast Hotel served only African Americans. Huff noted that Charles T. Robinson bought the hotel in 1938, and in 1945 the Clermont became a black-segregated hotel and “was officially identified as ‘A Hotel for Colored People.’”<sup>27</sup>

The Historical Resources Board responded quickly to Huff’s research. In a September 6, 2001 report, the HRB used Huff’s findings as the basis for recommending a city historical landmark designation for the hotel. The HRB report summarized the history of the area, noting that in the “early 1900’s the area around the hotel became settled by African Americans,” and that in “the 1920’s the area immediately surrounding the hotel was settled by numerous businesses owned by African Americans.” The report concluded that “based on the new information submitted by the Gaslamp Black Historical Society staff believes

that the Clermont/Coast Hotel is a significant structure reflective of the African American settlement in central San Diego, and a documented remnant of the area's segregated era of development from 1920 to 1960."<sup>28</sup>

The owners of the hotel opposed the historical landmark designation. One of the owners, Arturo Zepeda, explained, "I have trouble with the concept of trying to preserve an eyesore....It's a halfway house....This building looks nothing like it did in its heyday." Although the hotel was in poor shape, missing in this assessment was an evaluation or appreciation of the social significance of the structure.<sup>29</sup>

On December 20, 2001 (the day of the Historical Resources Board meeting to decide on the local historical landmark designation of the Clermont/Coast Hotel), the Gaslamp Black Historical Society staged a demonstration in front of the hotel. A group of about thirty people shouted "Save our history" and "Keep these walls up." They then marched to City Hall for the HRB meeting. The HRB voted unanimously in favor of the historic designation.<sup>30</sup>

In November 2005, the city placed a bronze plaque on the front of the hotel, proclaiming the historic status of the building. The building's new owners - Anthony Laureti, Larry Sidiropoulos and Ashley Abamo - paid for the plaque and the installation. The three-story hotel, with its fifty rooms, currently serves as a residential hotel to low-income renters.<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

San Diego's "growth machine" successfully worked to reverse the decline of the downtown area and to construct high rise office buildings, preserve older structures, and transform the area into the region's main entertainment site for residents, tourists, and convention attendees. During this process, to its credit, CCDC carried out formal reviews of the Douglas and Clermont/Coast Hotels. The studies examined the hotels for historical and architectural significance to San Diego in general, and the African American community in particular. The results of the studies, however, concluded that the buildings were not historically significant.

The destruction of the Douglas Hotel served notice to African Americans about the need to conduct their own research to discover and preserve the remaining downtown buildings connected with African American history. As Larry Malone described the situation concerning the Douglas Hotel, the African American community was not involved in historic preservation at that time, and as a result, "We lost a jewel." Therefore, community members needed to be educated, and they mobilized around the issue of historic preservation. Research by Karen Huff and the Gaslamp Black Historical Society uncovered the advertisements in old phone directories that established the historical importance of the Clermont/Coast Hotel.

The results of formal studies of the city on the Douglas and Clermont/Coast Hotels, the absence of buildings related to the history of African Americans on San Diego's list of historic structures until the addition of the Clermont/Coast Hotel in 2001, and the extremely small number of sites related to racial minorities on a similar list for Los Angeles, demonstrate that the social history of racial minorities often has not been recognized by institutionalized city processes. As a result, race-neutral policies still had racialized consequences. But unlike earlier urban renewal

projects (with explicit goals to demolish and remove racial minority communities), racialized urban planning in San Diego after the 1960s resulted from the decisions of elite participants in urban planning who were largely blind to African American history and the importance of preserving African American historic structures. To change racialized urban planning in San Diego, local people, such as Karen Huff, had to get involved in the politics of urban development. Grassroots community activism explains why the Douglas Hotel was lost and the Clermont/Coast Hotel was saved.

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# Americanism and Citizenship: Japanese American Youth Culture of the 1930s

Susan Hasegawa

In a 1936 essay contest sponsored by the American Legion, Point Loma High School student May Sakamoto won first prize with an essay entitled “Americanism.” Sakamoto, an American born citizen of immigrant Japanese (Issei) parents, described Americanism as a “deep loyalty and love of country in our hearts, not only because we are American citizens, but because we are attached to American ideals and government.” She went on to highlight positive contributions of Japanese Americans (or Nikkei) to American society. These contributions included second generation Japanese Americans (or Nisei) forming international clubs on school campuses and military service by Japanese Americans for their adopted country. She noted that Japanese immigrants had fought in World War I and that they later formed the Japanese American Legion called the Perry Post (probably named after U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry, who opened Japan to the West in 1854). While Sakamoto described Japanese American loyalty to America, she also noted that the Nisei had a special role. They were the generation that bridged the divide between the Issei (who were prohibited from becoming



*Japanese gather at the Hotel del Coronado, 1914. © San Diego Historical Society. No. 12296*

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*Japanese Vegetable Growers Market, 1919. © SDHS #13721-25.*

naturalized U.S. citizens) and the mainstream American population. In her words, the Nisei served as a “mediator of two civilizations.”<sup>1</sup>

During the 1930s, young Nisei, such as Sakamoto, created their own definition of what it meant to be an American. They pledged loyalty to the United States and embraced many aspects of dominant American culture while at the same time remaining supportive of the older Issei generation and serving as mediators between Japanese and American cultures. In other words, during the 1930s these Nisei invented and created space for a distinctive Japanese American youth culture in Southern California. Nisei did this by forming their own youth organizations, sponsoring their own community activities, and writing and publishing their own newsletter, *The Southern Blue Page*.

The first documented Japanese immigrants came to San Diego in the late 1880s. They worked as track crews on the local railroad, as farmers in Chula Vista, Lemon Grove, and La Mesa, and as laborers in the San Diego Bay salt fields. In the early twentieth century, Japanese immigrants would also become heavily involved in the fishing industry, and by the 1920s, Nikkei families had settled throughout rural San Diego County and in the southern part of downtown San Diego.<sup>2</sup>

The perpetuation of the Japanese American community depended on the picture bride system, which enabled Issei bachelors living in San Diego to marry Japanese brides. Go-betweens or matchmakers chose Japanese brides for prospective grooms. But unlike traditional arranged marriages, the matching process was completed not through face-to-face meetings but through photographs and letters. After a successful match, the Japanese bride, who frequently had little or no English language skills, sailed for America. After coming through Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco, she met her husband, usually for the very first time.<sup>3</sup>

To forge community among Japanese immigrants in San Diego, the Issei formed prefectural (or regional) organizations, temples, and religious groups. The most important secular organization was the Japanese Association, which was formed in 1906. The Japanese Association fostered strong ties with Japan, sponsored Japanese sports (such as sumo wrestling), and cultural events, such as the showing of Japanese language movies.<sup>4</sup>

As Issei farmers became prosperous, they also faced growing opposition from white farmers and politicians who sought to limit their competitiveness. In 1913, California enacted its first Alien Land Law. The law prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from purchasing land and limited land leases to three years. In 1920, the California legislature updated the law to close the loopholes that had made it possible for some Nikkei to purchase land. Although the Alien Land Laws made it difficult for Issei farmers, they devised methods to secure land and increase acreage needed for farming. One of the most popular methods of overcoming the Alien Land Laws was naming American-born children as owners on land deeds. Another strategy was acquiring land with the help of white or Nisei partners.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1900s, California fanned the fires of a national anti-Japanese movement and successfully pushed for tighter restrictions on Japanese immigrants. In the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908, Japan restricted the migration of Japanese laborers to the United States and the U.S. prohibited Japanese laborers from entering the United States. Picture brides, however, were not covered by this agreement. But with the growing number of picture brides and the formation of more Nikkei families, exclusionist forces in 1920 moved to stop the immigration of Japanese women. The Cable Act of 1922 went even further, stripping U.S. citizenship from Nisei women who married Issei men. The backlash against Japanese immigrants was part of the growing anti-immigrant sentiment that



*Nisei formed Seinen-kai (student associations) both in schools and in the community. This 1941 Wakayama Seinen-kai gathering in Balboa Park hosted student representatives from around the state, Tijuana, and possibly even Tokyo, Japan. Note the Tokyo sign in the far left of the photo and Tijuana sign in the middle of the photo. © Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego (JAHSSD).*



*Nisei women relax at a San Diego beach in 1939. © JAHSSD.*

reached an apex in the 1920s. In the wake of World War I, nativist fears, and the first red scare, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924. In addition to setting strict quotas on new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the federal legislation completely banned Japanese immigrants from entering the country.<sup>6</sup>

Within this context of exclusion and racism, the Nisei generation came of age. They grew up in traditional Japanese households, attended Japanese language schools, and participated in Nikkei community activities, but, as adolescents and young adults, these Nisei ultimately created a culture very different than that of their parents. While the Issei enjoyed Japanese

cultural and sporting activities, the Nisei were largely drawn to mainstream American activities. They followed American fashion fads and played American sports, such as baseball. Many participated in the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and to accommodate Nisei interest in this American institution, the Japanese Buddhist temple sponsored a Boy Scout troop during the 1930s. In 1935, the first Japanese American in San Diego (Motoharu Asakawa) achieved the Eagle Scout award.<sup>7</sup>

Nisei youth also exerted their independence from the older generation by forming youth-centered organizations in the public education system. For example, the Seinen-Kai at San Diego High School was a coeducational club promoting friendship “among Japanese American students.” Started in 1932, Seinen-Kai sponsored a faculty tea, skating parties, and recreational outings to the beach and mountains. Nisei students publicized club activities on the main school bulletin board. Importantly, in 1940 they proclaimed their loyalty to America by announcing the purchase of a United States bond instead of making their standard \$25 club contribution to the school scholarship fund. In Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, on baseball teams, and in organizations such as the Seinen-Kai, Nisei youth and young adults were forming social networks focusing on their priorities, and forging a separate Japanese American youth culture.<sup>8</sup>



*Obayashi House, San Diego. © San Diego Historical Society No. 13721*



*Nippon Company, c. 1930s. © San Diego Historical Society. 13721-11.*

This newly emerging Japanese American youth culture could be seen plainly on the pages of *The Southern Blue Page*, a weekly Nisei newspaper published during the Great Depression. The newspaper obtained financial funding from both Nikkei and non-Nikkei sponsors, as well as individual subscriptions. Early 1936 editions included sponsorship by Miss Mary Ishino, a nurse at Mercy Hospital, Roy Hanaoka of Brawley, Susie Mukai of Spring Valley, Central Park Shoe Shop under the ownership of Mike De Turi, and Miss Anness Sloss, a singing teacher. The last two names obviously were not Japanese Americans, but they probably had a substantial clientele of Nikkei families. In fact, Central Park Shoe Shop seemed to be a consistent advertiser during the



*Nisei Florence Asakawa and her sister pose for a formal graduation photo taken in the 1930s. © JAHSSD.*

life of the paper. Nikkei attendees looking for footwear for socials and semi-formals surely patronized Central Park Shoe Shop. The paper, which in the mid 1930s circulated 300-500 copies per week, stated its intention: to “create a true and strong Japanese American spirit that is distinctively San Diego’s and Imperial Valley’s which would harmonize in the social machines of our country.”<sup>9</sup>



*Although baseball was much more popular in the Nikkei community, a handful of Japanese American men played organized football, c. 1930s. © JAHSSD*

The ambitious staff of *The Southern Blue Page* had a vision of a united Nikkei community here in the southernmost region of California. An interesting aspect of the newsletter was its attempts at



*Nisei boys and young men were active participants in Boy Scouts. Moto Asakawa (pictured second row, first from left) was a leader for this Nisei boy scout camping trip (c. 1930s). © JAHSSD.*

geographical inclusiveness. It was based in Logan Heights and reported on events and activities of the Nikkei community from North County to the Mexico border. The intrepid editors also sought out stories from the far corners of the region, with reports from Brawley, El Centro, and Calexico. Readers heard of Brawley's post-Christmas dance headed by committee chair Tsuyako Morita, and the local junior college's Di Gamma Japanese dinner organized by Toshiko Hamai, Suma Taira, Taka Aisawa, and Yone Tamaki. The El Centro Young Men's and Women's Buddhist Association (YMWBA) planned a farewell outing for Mr. M. Okita, a teacher at the Buddhist Church who was moving to San Luis Obispo. Calexico's Japanese Boy Scout Troop 20 of Holtville celebrated a banquet in November 1936. These stories brought together readers from all parts of San Diego and Imperial Counties. Editors worked diligently to bring together towns separated by geography during the Great Depression and celebrate successes and victories of the Nikkei community.

A distinctive Japanese American youth culture can also be seen in the formation of the San Diego chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). The national JACL (founded in 1930) acknowledged on-going discrimination and challenged racist laws, especially the Cable Act. But unlike Issei organizations, such as the Japanese Association, the chief aim of the JACL was political and cultural Americanization. The first sentence of the JACL creed (written in 1940) stated: "I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry, for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this nation." The creed also urged members to prove



*Young people listened to the latest popular music and attended community dances c. 1930s. © JAHSSD.*



*Group of Nisei girls pose for a photo on the football field. © JAHSSD.*

themselves “worthy of equal treatment and consideration.” Despite (or perhaps because of) hostility from the dominant culture, the Nisei wholeheartedly embraced American ideals and engaged in what scholars Roger Daniels and Harry Kitano call “hypernationalism.”<sup>10</sup>

The San Diego chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (founded in 1933) shared the national organization’s focus on acculturation and assimilation into American society. The major emphasis of the San Diego chapter was loyalty to the United States, participation in the American political process, and the fostering of friendship between the Nikkei community and mainstream America. Given clear hostility toward the Nikkei community, the San Diego Nisei had to tread very lightly outside of their ethnic community.<sup>11</sup>



*A 1931 community picnic in Chula Vista included both sumo (traditional Japanese wrestling) and baseball as part of the festivities. © JAHSSD.*

The issue of Nisei dual citizenship, Japanese and American, was a hot topic for the local JACL. Before 1924, Japan considered American children born of Issei as citizens of Japan. The Nisei were thus dual citizens. In 1924, Japan changed its law. Issei parents now had to register their infant within fourteen days of birth to obtain Japanese citizenship for the child. At the same time, Nisei with dual citizenship could now renounce their Japanese citizenship if they filed the appropriate paperwork. San Diego JACL President George Ohashi and other cabinet members pushed Nisei to become totally American and to give up their Japanese citizenship. Since dual citizenship was a factor in branding the Japanese American community as disloyal during World War II, it was prescient that young leaders urged citizens to cut official ties to the nation of Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Not only did the local Japanese American Citizens League encourage young Japanese Americans to renounce their Japanese citizenship, but the organization called on Nisei to fully participate in American politics. In September 1936, for instance, the JACL called on young Japanese Americans to register to vote so that they could fully participate in the upcoming American presidential election.<sup>13</sup>

The San Diego Chapter of the JACL was popular among Nisei youth and it was quite active. President Ohashi organized aggressive regional membership campaigns and recruited over a hundred new members by 1936. The San Diego group also played an active role in the national JACL organization. In the summer of 1936, the chapter sent Pol Nakadate to the National Convention held in Seattle. He returned with a scathing report to the local cabinet. The local chapter in turn called for greater accountability of national finances and objected to the unexplained travel expenses of national officers. The San Diego cabinet issued an ominous threat to “drop out” if relevant information was not distributed in a timely manner from the national office. San Diegans such as Pol Nakadate, George Ohashi, and other cabinet members were outspoken in their criticism and demanded monthly financial statements at both the national and local level.<sup>14</sup>

Nisei youth organizations, such as the Seinen-Kai and the San Diego branch of the Japanese American Citizens League, were very different than the organizations founded by the Issei. Prefectural organizations and groups such as the San Diego Japanese Association were very much oriented toward remembering Japan and maintaining Japanese culture and language in America. In contrast, Japanese American youth frequently renounced their Japanese citizenship, pledged loyalty to the United States, participated in the American political system, embraced American culture (such as baseball, scouting, and fashion), and spoke and wrote to their friends in English. Another important difference between the two generations was the place of women. In contrast to the male-dominated Issei organizations, women played a greater role in leading Nisei organizations. Hanako Moriyama, a young Nisei woman, presided as the temporary chair during the formation of the San Diego chapter of the JACL.



*Mrs. Doi and Frank Doi hold U.S. war bonds, December 29, 1941. © San Diego Historical Society UT 3736*

Furthermore, women comprised five of the eight officers installed in a JACL ceremony in September 1933. Female leadership signaled a decided change from the traditional gender-based structure of the Issei group, such as the prefectural organizations, the Japanese Association, and various religious groups.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1930s, the Nisei asserted their independence, which resulted in a cultural gap between the Issei and their children. But despite this assertion, Japanese American youth such as May Sakamoto also understood the importance of serving as mediators. While forming a distinct Japanese American youth culture, most young Japanese Americans still expressed respect for and deference to their elders. At many cultural

events, Japanese and Japanese American cultures peacefully co-existed, such as at a 1931 Chula Vista picnic where traditional Japanese sumo wrestlers and Japanese American baseball players posed together for a photograph. JACL events also incorporated the Issei. For instance, at the inaugural reception of the JACL, the chapter invited two officers from the Japanese Association to speak. The fact that the reception was held at the Buddhist Temple of San Diego also illustrates continued respect for hierarchy and the older generation.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, *The Southern Blue Page* editors appealed to Issei readers by occasionally publishing sections in Japanese. The editors appealed to young people's economic obligations to the Issei generation. The newspaper made it clear to young people that it was important during a national emergency with double-digit unemployment to patronize the stores owned by the older generation. For instance, an August 1936 editorial proclaims that the Isseis "are reaching a crisis! Their customers are Japanese, and in the decreasing population of isseis and a tendency of niseis to buy American, their business in time would fade out." But the editorial also depicted Nisei grievances with these businesses. The last part of the editorial stated, "but there is one thing that must be abolished before the niseis will buy from Japanese stores: the treatment of nisei customers by issei clerks must be improved, and personal criticism in the form of personal gossip must be abolished." While the Nisei editors rallied the community to ethnic economic solidarity, people like the editors also wanted simple respect for their efforts.<sup>17</sup>

The closing paragraphs of May Sakamoto's winning essay expressed the following on the domestic situation and foreign policy: "Even though America is menaced by unemployment, and other perils besides the ones we have now, there is always the strong under-current of Americanism which overpowers them and keeps the country from fears of any kind of civil war." She also commented on America's inner strength: "Although America is not in the League



Sam Fujita and Frank Otsuka, January 30, 1942. © San Diego Historical Society. UT 3737



of Nations, she has enough will power from the mass of people to stay out of war and maintain peace. The thing which keeps America out of war is, I believe, the strong and independent international policy of the American government." May Sakamoto's youthful optimism for peaceful international relations would soon be shattered as Japan and the United States advanced down the road to war. Despite Nisei attempts to carve out a Japanese American presence that focused on "Americanism," the American public would only see the Japanese part during World War II.<sup>18</sup>

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# “Skid Row”: Filipinos, Race and the Social Construction of Space in San Diego

By Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr.\*

Like other racial and ethnic minority groups in early twentieth century San Diego, Filipinos found their use of space profoundly circumscribed. Racial segregation restricted where Filipinos could live, work and enjoy their leisure time. Like other Asian immigrant groups before them, Filipinos were prohibited from owning land or property in California due to existing alien land laws. In addition, the city’s racial structure also ensured that Filipinos were denied access to rental housing in various parts of San Diego, which limited their choices. As a result of these restrictions, Filipinos remained in several enclaves: the South Bay and Southeastern sections of San Diego, small pockets in Coronado and La Jolla (known as the “servants quarters”) and in downtown San Diego’s Chinatown, or as many called it, “skid row.”<sup>1</sup> This area, which was described as the “tenderloin” of San Diego, was as one 1946 report noted, “the location of most of the interracial



*Stingaree, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and J Street, c. 1924. © SDHS #14116.*

multiple family dwellings in San Diego” where “rooming houses, cheap hotels and tenements” were located.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I argue that this restricted area – encompassing the blocks of Fourth through Sixth Avenues, Island, Market, and J Streets –served as the spatial locus for the formation of a distinct Filipino community in San Diego.

Ironically, Filipino migration to California was largely the result of late nineteenth and early twentieth century American policies to exclude Asian

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\* The author would like to thank Colin Fisher and Margaret Fajardo for reading over previous drafts of this essay.

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immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907-08 restricted the flow of Chinese and Japanese immigrants that served as a critical labor force in West Coast agriculture.<sup>3</sup> In desperation, employers looked for another cheap labor source. Filipinos were an ideal replacement. After the Spanish-American War (1898) the United States began its own imperial project to colonize the Philippines. This resulted in the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). In the end, the U.S. remained in the Philippines, molding their new colonial subjects through American education and ideals of democracy.<sup>4</sup>

As colonial subjects with U.S. national status, Filipinos were exempt from U.S. immigration laws. Starting in 1923, thousands of young Filipinos arrived in California, where they labored in agriculture, fish canneries, the service industry, and in domestic servant roles as houseboys for rich white American families. Filipinos also came as part of the U.S. Navy, where they served primarily as stewards. Because U.S. employers did not usually pay for the passage of families and most Filipinos were not allowed by their parents to leave home, the Filipino population in California was overwhelmingly male.<sup>5</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, Filipinos (along with other racial and ethnic minorities) found themselves relegated to skid row in San Diego, and this is where they lived, established businesses, and enjoyed their free time. To outsiders, skid row was a place where the homeless and derelicts went to drink their lives away. It was seen as the red light district or the tenderloin area where men saw sexually suggestive shows, visited prostitutes and sought out other vices. All racial and ethnic minorities associated with the area carried the stigma of inferiority and criminality, including the Filipino, Chinese, African American, Mexican, and Latino populations that were forced to live there. Such segregation, one scholar noted, "does not rest on inherent group inferiority, it creates it."<sup>6</sup>

While outsiders associated Filipino men (among other racial and ethnic minorities) with the negative connotations of skid row, Filipinos living and working in downtown worked hard to forge community and to transform this blighted area into home. As one Filipina recalled, skid row was "not a scary place because it was home." She would be sent with her siblings to go shopping, even walking at sundown, yet she always felt safe. Rather than see the bachelors who frequented the area as dangerous, sex crazed men, she experienced them as friendly individuals who always treated the children with kindness, oftentimes buying them candy.<sup>7</sup>

Filipinos were forced to live in and around skid row because of economic and racial restrictions. Ruth Abad remembered that during the 1940s poverty kept many Filipinos confined to downtown San Diego: "A lot of Filipinos used to live there, on Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Streets. Almost all our neighbors were Filipinos. That was where the cheapest houses were."<sup>8</sup> Some Filipinos lived where they worked: in a number of downtown hotels and restaurants. Racial segregation also played a major role. Landlords outside the district simply refused to rent to Filipino bachelors, so skid row became home for many of them. Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan called the downtown section "our world," where "the streets were filled with pimps and prostitutes, drug addicts and marijuana peddlers, cutthroats and murderers, ex-convicts and pickpockets. It was the rendezvous of social outcasts."<sup>9</sup> He went on to write: "There was no other place in the district where we were allowed to reside, and even when we tried to escape from it, we were always



*Filipino, Chinese and American Food at Fifth Avenue and Market Street. UT 80-4137 © San Diego Historical Society*

driven back to this narrow island of despair.”<sup>10</sup>

Filipinos were living in skid row as early as the 1920s. Trapped downtown and with limited means, Filipino men used available rental space efficiently. Migratory field hands who lived off of seasonal income especially had to be cost conscious, and sometimes ten or twelve Filipino men shared a single hotel room or small apartment. For example, in 1932, Porfirio S. Apostol and twelve other Filipinos rented a room at the Earl Hotel for \$8 a month. Those with more steady employment in service related work in the downtown district were able to have a bit more stability in regards to their living situation. Others, like Felix Budhi and Ciriaco “Pablo” Poscablo, lived in the area with their Mexican wives and multiethnic Filipino-Mexican children.<sup>11</sup>

Skid row was also home to a number of Filipino businesses that catered to the needs of Filipino men. San Diego City Directories for the years 1920 to 1965 provide a glimpse of the various Filipino-owned businesses. During this period, one found Filipino markets, restaurants, cafes, pool halls, and dance halls alongside Japanese, Chinese, Mexican and other establishments. The directories also suggest that as the Filipino community grew, Filipino businesses did as well, although not as much as one would expect. This may have been a result of continued confinement of Filipinos downtown, which had limited space for growth.

Skid row was also the place where Filipino men enjoyed their leisure. Just as Filipinos had trouble renting rooms outside of downtown, they also had difficulty gaining access to public parks, beaches, theatres, restaurants, nightclubs, and other places of public and commercial leisure. Filipinos, for instance, could not hold dances at the U.S. Grant, Coronado, or El Cortez ballrooms (despite the fact that many Filipinos worked in these hotels).<sup>12</sup> In order to keep from being humiliated and angered and to avoid racial confrontation and discrimination, Filipino men tended to steer clear of these spaces. Instead they enjoyed themselves closer to home. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century (and all the way up to the 1970s), downtown San Diego remained the hotbed for Filipino social life. It was there that Filipino men forgot exclusion and work, and enjoyed themselves. As one

Filipino student noted in 1929: "In his spare hours, he [the Filipino] seeks ... the places and companionship that can make him forget, even for a moment, that he has become a slave, not in name to be sure – but what is in a name?"<sup>13</sup>

For Filipino men, some of the most important places of leisure were taxi dance halls, pool halls, restaurants (such as chop suey houses), barbershops, and gambling dens, sometimes known as "Filipino Social Clubs." During the first half of the twentieth century, outside observers of these places of leisure frequently associated them with social disorganization and pathology. The writer Carey McWilliams noted, for instance, that the taxi dance hall, the pool hall, and the Filipino Social Club "preyed upon their [the Filipinos] loneliness and ostracism."<sup>14</sup> In reality, though, Filipino agricultural workers, sailors, cooks, janitors, and bellhops used these institutions to forge community. This is where Filipinos (among others) sought out recreation, camaraderie, and a good time. As Consuelo Zuniga recalled: "There used to be a Filipino district in downtown. They had bars down there...down on Fifth Street...it was like little nightclubs. It was mainly populated by Filipino people. You know we had the Filipino Hall on Market Street...we used to go dancing there, they'd have a wedding there."<sup>15</sup>

The ways Filipinos spent their leisure time was quite similar to the ways that early twentieth century African Americans spent it. Historian Douglas Daniels notes that nightlife in San Francisco actually served to bring the African American community together. Entertainment, music, dancing, and socializing, he argues, "made racism seem less important." People from different racial and class backgrounds mixed together without the constraints of outside norms. Similarly, dance halls, restaurants and barbershops gave Filipino men a place where they could escape from work and persecution and forge bonds with other countrymen.

Restaurants played an important function as a site for the creation of a Filipino bachelor subculture. There was the Luzon Café, which was located on Third Avenue and Market Street. Owned by the Manzano family, the Luzon Café was a popular place where the old *manongs* (elder males) gathered, ate, and enjoyed each other's company.<sup>16</sup> The café was also a place where many Filipino sailors on shore leave went to eat cheap food and meet friends and women.<sup>17</sup> Right next to the restaurant was the Luzon Pool Hall. Other Filipino restaurants included the Manila Café on Market Street.<sup>18</sup>

The Custado family owned Bataan Café located on Fourth and Island Avenue during the 1940s. Hugo Marzo and Julio Advincula owned the P.I. Café on Fourth Avenue. There was also the Mabuhay Café on Island Avenue. It was a restaurant that also served as a bar and dance spot. Rolando Mata recalled that in the



*Manila Café – Photo courtesy of Herb S. Tuyay.*

Mabuhay, you could order beer and eat *tapa* (dried or fried meat) and request short orders like *pancit* (a stir-fried noodle dish). There was also music that played from the jukebox. As he recalled, "...it's dark, lights are dim. Music most of the time they play, you know dancing music: Latin, jazz, and some bouncy music." It was in the Mabuhay that he met Mary, a "*mestiza*" who often frequented the place with her Mexican girlfriends.<sup>19</sup> Other non-Filipino owned restaurants that catered to their large Filipino clientele included the Nanking Café on Fifth and Island Avenue and the Sun Café on Market Street, where Rolando Mata noted they served sukiyaki, which he recalled was "very popular here at the time."<sup>20</sup>

Filipino barbershops also played a role in fostering sociability. Marciano Padua owned a shop on Third and Island Avenues.<sup>21</sup> A man named Hermipaco, or "Paco," owned another barbershop that was popular among Filipinos during the 1930s. It was located on Fifth and Market Street. As Pedro Lacqui, a Filipino migrant who lived in San Diego during the 1930s noted, many happy times were spent at the barbershop. There, the old *manongs* came to gossip and listen to the local *rondalla* groups (or string ensembles) that came to play for them.<sup>22</sup> By the 1960s, Filipinos frequented the Manila Barber Shop, located on Fifth Avenue and owned by Cris S. Reyes Dangan. There was also Johnnie's Barber Shop on Fourth Avenue.<sup>23</sup> Ricardo Romio remembered going to the Manila Barber Shop with his father and experiencing the vibrant social scene:

I'd go with him and get my haircut and sometimes he would stay there and not leave. And they had a pool hall right behind there, at Mr. Reyes's barbershop. Actually, there was a pool hall and they used to have a little room in the front where you cut hair, and I used to go in there and shoot pool sometimes. It was a hang out where they hung out at all the time...I'd go over there and they'd do more talking than cutting...I'd be sitting there eating and blah blah blah...that's all they did. They just got together. My dad used to walk all the way up there, half the day up there with him and walk home.<sup>24</sup>

As can be seen in the above quote, pool was also an important diversion, and there were a number of pool halls (besides the one in back of Mr. Reyes barbershop) that catered to the Filipino population. Rudy Guevarra, Sr. remembers going to the poolroom with his grandfather Pablo and his grandfather's friends. At the pool hall, Rudy watched Pablo and the other *manongs*, dressed in their khakis and flannel shirts, the pool hall filled with smoke and the sound of their *Ilocano* dialect and pool balls cracking all around him.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most important (and for whites, notorious) places of leisure was the Filipino taxi dance hall. The Filipino population in San Diego was almost exclusively male. Because of racism and fears of miscegenation, there were serious limitations on whom Filipinos could date or marry. As such, the dance halls were the locations where most socializing with women occurred. As sociologist Paul G. Cressey observed in his study of the taxi dance hall during the 1930s: "The Filipino finds himself in a racially hostile society where not only his occupational and professional opportunities are restricted but where he is denied the usual contacts with social women." Whites saw Filipinos as brown bodies, as "objects of labor." But within the dance hall, Filipino men found a different world. For ten to fifteen

cents a dance (which usually lasted about a minute), Filipinos could enjoy the warm touch and be lost in a moment of dancing with a woman as the music played. It was an escape from the reality of life on the margins of society.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most popular dance halls in San Diego was the Rizal Dance Hall, located on Market Street. As one migrant noted about the city's Filipino district, "Oh, you should have seen Market Street then. It was like the Las Vegas strip with all those bright lights and dancing girls."<sup>27</sup> As the center of recreational life it was the "rendezvous point" where as one scholar noted, "Filipinos could cement and rejuvenate personal bonds, share food, swap stories, and surely gossip about the *kababayan* (countrymen) among the migration circuit."<sup>28</sup> As outsiders, Filipinos and other marginalized groups in San Diego formed this subculture that allowed them to be themselves, find recreation and some sort of normalcy from their everyday working lives.

Most of the women who worked in the Filipino dance halls were white, although Mexican and African American women danced too. The idea of white women dancing with Filipino men angered some white men, and this resulted, occasionally, in horrible acts of violence. In taxi dance halls in Chicago, Los Angeles, and throughout California, violent mobs sometimes confronted Filipinos. One white attacker described a fight (not in San Diego) with Filipino men at a taxi dance hall:

Us guys were standing outside one of those dance halls on Madison Street waiting for the "niggers" [Filipinos] to come out. When our gang goes to one of those halls we just about run it. These "niggers" came out and they said real polite like, "We don't want to fight. We want to be your friends." They would have gotten away with it, but somebody yelled, "Don't let them get away so easy!" So we all chased after them. One "nigger" was wearing a big new topcoat, and a big fellow from our gang chased after him, and would have caught him. The Filipino took off his coat as he was running, and threw it right into the big fellow's face. Of course, the "nigger" got away, but the big fellow didn't care because he had a good topcoat.<sup>29</sup>



Marciano Raguro Padua, January 14, 1954, © San Diego Historical Society

One report noted that:

The Pinoys [Filipinos] have been molested for many months by these gang of white fellows. They get after the Pinoys because they can get dates with some of the girls and the gangsters can't. So they began attacking Filipinos where there were only one or two together. They would jump on a couple of Pinoys and tear their clothes and take their money.<sup>30</sup>

In San Diego, there are no records of major altercations between whites and Filipinos in the dance halls, but this hardly means that San Diego was free of this sort of violence. Given the ubiquity of racial violence at taxi dance halls elsewhere, it is likely that San Diego also experienced white-on-Filipino violence, especially given the city's conservative atmosphere and poor treatment of Filipinos. We do know that whites, despite the fact that they had their own "whites only" dance halls, did sometimes go downtown and crash the Filipino dance halls. As one white patron noted: "When I was at State we'd sometimes take a fraternity pledge down there to one of these Filipino dance halls. There was one called Rizal. For fifteen cents a dance, there were white girls and the Filipinos liked to dance with the white girls. I think the girls got seven and a half cents a dance. We'd go down and dance with them just for fun."<sup>31</sup> When asked if he saw any violence there, the man replied, "They were fairly well run. The Filipinos were rumored to carry a knife, but I never saw any disturbances down there myself."<sup>32</sup> Some Filipinos tell a different story. Vincent Elquin, a Filipino migrant in San Diego noted that "the Mexicans and Anglo guys did not like us because we got all the girls at dance halls. We wore the best clothes in the market and entertained the girls well."<sup>33</sup>

One way the San Diego City Council tried to curtail Filipino dance halls was to make it illegal to operate a dance hall with "dancing partners." The new ordinance created a major obstacle for Patricio Yangco, a Filipino entrepreneur who had just requested a permit to operate a taxi dance hall on Market Street. Yangco was able to overcome this problem, though, by simply filling out a new permit. Women in his establishment would not be dancing partners, but dancing instructors. Because there was no rule against instructors, the Council was forced to issue Yangco his permit. It was a minor victory for Filipinos who had limited options for recreation outside of the city's tenderloin district.<sup>34</sup>

At dance halls, barbershops, pool halls, and restaurants, Filipinos



*Crescencia Padua, 1950. UT 84\_14380 s, 1950. © San Diego Historical Society*



came to exchange information such as employment opportunities as well as the latest gossip about their countrymen. These spaces were, in conjunction with ethnic newspapers, the means by which this “bachelor subculture” was able to create and expand notions of home and community. This community not only included permanent residents, but also migratory Filipino laborers and sailors. By having what Linda España-Maram called “portable communities,” or “mobile homes,” Filipinos were able to “tailor a life in harmony with their migratory work patterns, they created a community that was versatile, and for them, functional. They took their communities with them.”<sup>35</sup> It was in the confines of these sedentary spaces however, that the portable or mobile communities met up to share news, information and each other’s company.



*Deanna Miraflores, Filipino Women's Club Queen, 1952.  
UT - 84\_12877.1 © San Diego Historical Society*

For Filipinos who were permanent residents in San Diego, Filipino places of leisure were the hub where information was exchanged and the space where migrants met and relaxed. Given the nature of their geographically mobile community, they could find each other only through advertisements and word-of-mouth. It was indeed a means by which they took home wherever they went. Thus, home and community did not necessarily mean permanency, though the roots of several families tied everyone together in an intricate web of familial, kinship, and friendship networks. This was also true for migratory laborers and visiting Filipino sailors who were stationed in San Diego. What bound all of these migrants and sailors was the fact that many were homesick and they also shared a collective experience of racial discrimination and violence.<sup>36</sup>

Although racial segregation confined Filipinos and other nonwhites to multiracial and multiethnic communities at the margins of white society, these spaces provided important functions. These spaces helped them to cope with their conditions by allowing them to feel a sense of safety and security from the outside world, which was often unwelcoming to Filipinos. These cultural islands also provided domiciles for families and individuals, an ethnic labor market, a space to start small businesses, and places where one could find some refuge and healing from an oftentimes hostile outside environment. In these enclaves, Filipinos created social stability and shaped a collective identity. This became the foundation for early ethnic social organizations and clubs, which were formed in response to their isolation. Because this shared identity was dependent on shared community space, these spaces had significant meaning to those that lived there.<sup>37</sup>

Families welcomed newcomers and provided community for those that had none. Residents were responsible for the cultural retention and survival of their communities by creating this safe haven for new and old residents alike.



*Tommy Mangusing, 1954, UT 84\_1152, © San Diego Historical Society.*

Indeed, cultural retention functioned as a mechanism for the survival of Filipino communities in San Diego. The area also provided a sense of home away from home, where familiar sights, sounds and smells could be found. These were experienced within the various Filipino owned or managed barbershops, restaurants, pool halls and other establishments. This also provided a sense of safety and comfort for these men who were not welcomed by the white population. Filipino markets and the space outside these establishments for example, provided a sense of familiarity to those who were alienated from mainstream society. Here, Filipinos could do their shopping, eating, and also meet up with friends



*Filipinos came to San Diego via the U.S. Navy. Most Filipinos served as stewards like Venancio Ayap (left) who served aboard the U.S.S. Taconic, August 25, 1948. Photo courtesy of Freddie Ayap.*

and family to talk and share the latest news. Thus, in addition to goods and services, Filipino owned stores reminded their ethnic patrons of the sari-sari stores of their homeland, conjuring up a sense of nostalgia, where the sights, sounds and smells provided comfort and fellowship.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, these spaces provided a sense of normalcy and permanency in an environment where Filipino men were always on the move. Their transient, migratory life made a sense of “home” problematic.



*Inside the Bataan Cafe, Filipino Restaurant on Island Street between 4th and 5th avenues, ca. 1954. Owned from 1946 to 1954 by Sophia and Sixto Custado. MSS 407, File 10, Box 2. [copyright sign] San Diego Historical Society.*

By having a physical location where Filipinos could frequent and find a sense of home, safety, and normalcy, these spaces provided them with a reason to endure the senseless acts of discrimination and racism that they felt on a daily basis. Many of these aging *manongs* had no family so other Filipinos provided a sense of family for them. They picked them up and took them to their homes to celebrate holidays and special events. These families were also the only ones that were available to identify the bodies of those that died alone. Nena Amaguin recalled her role among the old *manongs*, whom she visited and brought home. She stated that:

I used to pick them up (from downtown)...there are Filipinos who have been old and living in a small shack there...there were five or six of them in a dinky house...then some of the older people died and they don't have nobody, nobody even buried them...there's so many of them that don't even know their family. Some are farmers, some from Stockton and then they live here in San Diego because of the weather.<sup>39</sup>

Nena's role highlights the sense of family and community that was established by Filipinos in an era when they were not always welcomed in San Diego. Indeed, skid row was just one of several locations in San Diego where Filipinos lived, worked and spent their leisure time. Today, there is little to remind us of the Filipino district, or skid row, that once pulsated with life in the early to mid twentieth century, save for two photographs that are housed in the historic U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego. These photographs, along with the countless memories of those that lived in the area, as well as the presence of Filipinos in San Diego today, are testimony to the racialized space that many once called home.

NOTES

1. The first alien land law in California was passed in 1913. See Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne, 1991), pp. 38-39, and Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 41. See also See R. Marciano, D. Goldberg, S. Beemer, K. Franklin, and C. Hou, *T-RACES: a Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces*, <<http://salt.sdsu.edu/T-RACES>> accessed 18 December 2006. I would like to thank Richard Marciano for allowing me to use his maps and other related information on segregated housing in San Diego.
2. Laurence I. Hewes, Jr., and William Y. Bell, Jr., *Intergroup Relations in San Diego: A Report to the City Council and the Board of Education of the City of San Diego* (San Francisco: American Council on Race Relations, 1946), p. 10.
3. See Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, eds., *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), and Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).
4. For more on the Philippine-American War and its aftermath in the Philippines, see Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia, eds., *Vestiges of War: The Philippine- American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T'Boli Publishing, 2004); Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Quezon City, Philippines: Garotech Publishing, 1990), pp. 213-386; Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006), and Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The U.S.-Philippine War of 1899," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (December 1973), pp. 2-16.
5. On Filipinos and immigration to California, see Will J. French, dir., *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California, Special Bulletin No. 3* (San Francisco: State of California Department of Industrial Relations, 1930); Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration To Continental United States and Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); The Commonwealth Club of California, "Filipino Immigration," *The Commonwealth*, Vol. 24, No. 7 (November 5, 1929); Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (Seattle: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 26-31, and España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, p. 167.
6. Walter G. Beach, "Some Considerations in Regard to Race Segregation in California," *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (March-April 1931), pp. 346-350.
7. Carol Hemminger, "Little Manila: The Filipino in Stockton Prior to World War II," Part II, *The Pacific Historian*, Vol. 24 (Spring 1980), p. 214.
8. Espiritu, *Home Bound*, p. 113.
9. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, p. 258.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
11. Interview with Rolando Mata, interview by author, La Puente, Calif., 1 September 2004, and Adelaida Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego, 1900-1946" (master's thesis, University of San Diego, 1979). See also Buenaventura, "San Diego's Manongs of the 1920s and 1930s," *Filipino American National Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 5 (1998), p. 31.
12. Espiritu, *Home Bound*, p. 113.
13. D.F. Gonzalo, "Social Adjustments of Filipinos in America," *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (November 1929), p. 170.
14. Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 238.

15. Interview with Consuelo "Connie" Zuniga, interview by author, San Diego, Calif., 20 August 2001.
16. *Manong* means older brother. It is a term of respect and endearment for the majority of elder Filipinos, who were bachelors in the U.S.
17. Jona Cruz, Jessica Sarsoza, Ronald S. Buenaventura, and Fidencio S. Pampo, "A Sailor's Sacrifice: The Navy Steward," *Kalayaan*, Vol. 3 No. 3 (March 1997), p. 6.
18. According to several San Diego City Directories, the Manila Café was listed as being located at 429 Market Street (1944-1945) and 470 Fifth Avenue (1960 and 1965). A photograph of the Manila Café circa 1970 also shows it as being next to a building numbered 515 ½, which may be located on Fifth Avenue. Because of the frequency of having to move establishments due to new ownership and rental space, this may account for the different locations. For more on this see *Polk's San Diego City Directories, 1944-45, 1960, and 1965*, and "Photo of Manongs in front of Manila Café," circa 1970, Photograph Collection, Filipino American National Historical Society, San Diego Chapter. The author would like to thank Felix Tuyay for providing the photograph for this essay, courtesy of Herb S. Tuyay.
19. "Photograph of Bataan Café, 1946," Kistner, Custado, Redondo Collection (Mss 169), Box 1, San Diego Historical Society; Gunitaang Palatuntunan Souvenir Program, Philippine Independence Day, Cavite Association of San Diego County, June 12, 1965, Filipino Organizations Folder, Thelma Hollingsworth Local History Room, National City Public Library. See also interview with Rolando Mata, interview by author, La Puente, Calif., 1 September 2004.
20. *Ibid.* See also *Polk's San Diego City Directories, 1930 and 1960*.
21. *Polk's San Diego City Directories, 1920-1965*; Buenaventura, "San Diego's Manongs of the 1920s and 1930s," p. 31.
22. Rondalla are Filipino string bands that include guitars, ganjo and the "kudyapi" (a small guitar that has its origins in the Philippines during the 1500s). For more on the barbershop and its activities, see Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego, 1900-1946," pp. 81-82.
23. Gunitaang Palatuntunan Souvenir Program, Philippine Independence Day, Cavite Association of San Diego County, June 12, 1965, Filipino Organizations Folder, Thelma Hollingsworth Local History Room, National City Public Library.
24. Interview with Ricardo Romio, interview by author, Lakeside, Calif., 4 May 2004.
25. Notes from personal conversations with Rudy Guevarra, Sr., San Diego, Calif., July 5, 2001.
26. Paul G. Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 145. For more on the activities of Filipinos in the taxi dance halls, see Roberto V. Vallangca, *Pinoy: The First Wave* (San Francisco: Strawberry Hill Press, 1977), pp. 50-53; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "'White Trash' Meets the 'Little Brown Monkeys': The Taxi Dance Hall as a Site of Interracial and Gender Alliances between White Working Class Women and Filipino Immigrant Men in the 1920s and 1930s," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1998), pp. 118-121, and España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, pp. 105-133.
27. Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego," p. 106.
28. España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, p. 110.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
30. Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, p. 218.
31. Interview with John Spencer Held, interview by Ruth V. Held, San Diego, Calif., 4 August 1990, Oral History Collection, San Diego Historical Society.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego," p. 52.
34. "Wrong Word Used in Dance Request," *San Diego Union*, December 19, 1934, p.8, and "Taxi Dance 'Partners' Now 'Instructors,'" *San Diego Union*, December 27, 1934, p. 5.
35. Linda Nueva España Maram, "Negotiating Identity: Youth, Gender, and Popular Culture in Los Angeles's Little Manila, 1920s -1940s" (Ph.d. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 48-50. For more on the concept of "mobile homes," see Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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36. Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego, 1900-1946," p. 42.
37. See Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 199-201.
38. Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity & the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), pp. 57-91.
39. Interview with Nena Amaguin, interview by author, San Diego, Calif., 6 July 2004.



*Filipino bands were popular forms of entertainment in their communities. The individual holding the saxophone is Ciriaco "Pablo" Poscablo, circa 1940s. Photo courtesy of author.*

# A Compromised Country: Redefining the U.S.-Mexico Border

Joel Levanetz



San Diego Historical Society

*A group of border surveyors operating in San Ysidro Valley, Mexico, no date available. © SDHS# 88\_16994*

The southwestern United States is undeniably unique. The region's dramatic landscapes have long provoked the human imagination, and its vastness has challenged countless people to make sense of its topography and bring its boundless parameters into understandable and manageable terms. Indians,

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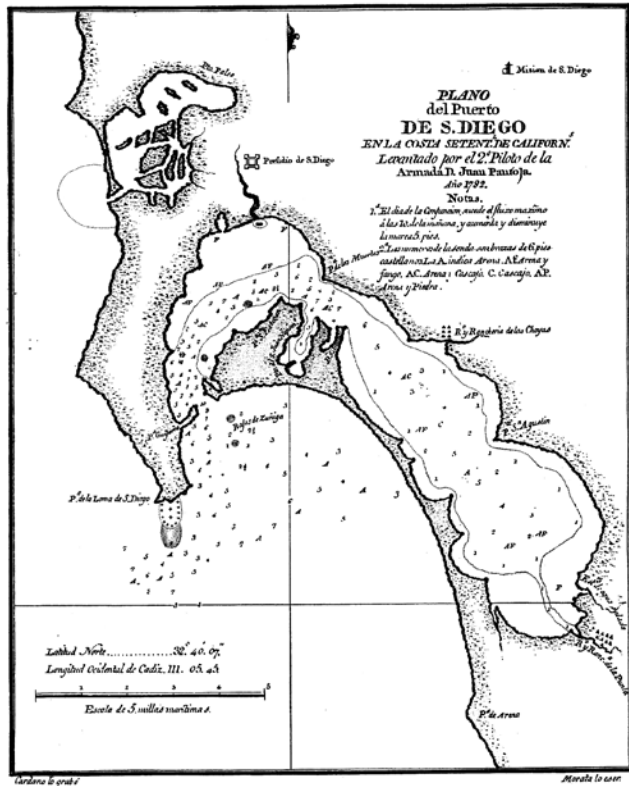
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Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans created lines in the sand throughout the Southwest. Because humans created boundaries, they are inevitably political. San Diego and Tijuana are part of the same ecosystem, and were once part of the same nation. Today an international boundary runs between the two cities. On one side are Mexicans; on the other Americans.

This line had its origins in the Mexican American War, a war that began over a border dispute. In 1846, Mexico declared that the Nueces River was its northern border with Texas. The United States held that the border was actually the more southern Rio Grande. After Mexican troops attacked American troops who had ventured south of the Nueces in May 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico. After a year and a half of fighting, the United States ultimately prevailed and demanded an enormous swath of northern Mexico, including the future states of Nevada, California, and Utah and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. As outlined in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (the February 2, 1848, Peace Treaty ending hostilities), San Diego, once part of Mexico, was now part of the United States.

While an American flag flew over San Diego, the exact line demarcating the boundary between southern California and northern Mexico needed to be measured. Under the provisions of the treaty, Mexico and the United States each contributed members to a bi-national surveying team. William Hemsley Emory headed the U.S. group, while José Salazar y Larregui led the Mexican team. As mandated in the treaty, the product of this collaboration would be recognized as the international boundary. Needless to say, these men held enormous influence over the future physical parameters of their respective nations. On July 6, 1848, the Mexican and American surveyors met just south of San Diego's port to establish a clear line of delineation, as set forth in the treaty.

Immediately, the surveyors found themselves faced with insurmountable challenges. In order to establish the rough boundary, the authors of the Treaty of Guadalupe



Lithograph of 1782 map of San Diego Bay by Juan Pantoja y Arriaga, Second Pilot, Spanish Armada.



Hidalgo made reference to natural landmarks and a 1782 map.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, the surveyors would find both unreliable.

The map became a problem on the first day of what would be a six-year long survey. According to the treaty, the border would start at “a point on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, distant one marine league due south of the southernmost point of the port of San Diego, according to the plan of said port made in the year 1782 by Don Juan Pantoja, second sailing-master of the Spanish fleet...” Pantoja’s work was useful to eighteenth-century explorers, but his work was less than adequate for nineteenth-century surveying. The Boundary Commission quickly discovered that the point designated by Pantoja as the southernmost point of San Diego Bay was actually 3,500 feet north of where the Bay actually ended. Despite the flaws in the map, the surveyors established an “Initial Point” to divide the new two nations and erected a monument on the site. A different reading of the map might have garnered 31,500 additional acres to the territory of Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

The other resource on which the surveyors relied, natural landmarks, proved as faulty as the Pantoja map. In Article V of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, rivers were used to demarcate the course of the border:

The boundary line between the two Republics shall commence in the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, opposite the mouth of the Rio Grande... or Opposite the mouth of its deepest branch... from thence up the middle of that river, following the deepest channel... northward, along the western line of New Mexico, until it intersects the first branch of the river Gila... thence down the middle of the said branch and of the said river, until it empties into the Rio Colorado; thence across the Rio Colorado, following the division line between Upper and Lower California, to the Pacific Ocean.

The problem is that rivers slowly move, and sometimes they change course dramatically, especially after floods. Had Texas experienced flooding in 1849, the international boundary could have shifted significantly, which would have affected other survey points. Had the Southwest experienced a drought that year, the path of the Rio Grande might have given the surveyors a very different point of reference.

These dynamics became vividly apparent when the team surveying the Western portion of the border set out from San Diego to establish the boundary at the intersection of the Gila and Colorado Rivers. While Emory and Salazar negotiated where to place the decisive Initial Point, Lieutenant Amiel Weeks Whipple (an American surveyor) and other surveyors left San Diego to find where the Gila River empties into the Rio Colorado. From there, the surveying party could extend the borderline back to the Initial Point on the Pacific Ocean, ultimately establishing a boundary between Alta and Baja California. As in San Diego, the task of marking this point was easier in theory than in practice.<sup>3</sup>

When Whipple and his men arrived at the junction of the two rivers, they once again had to reinterpret the Treaty. At that particular moment, the Colorado River flowed south, bent sharply to the west where it met the Gila River, then continued southward to the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California). Since the rivers joined at a bend, it was difficult to determine where the Gila ended and the Colorado began.

To further complicate matters, erosion at the rivers' banks surrounding this junction indicated that the course of both bodies was subject to frequent change. Once again, the United States benefited from geographic indeterminacy and expanded its borders below the Colorado River, thereby allotting ten additional miles to the burgeoning nation. A different interpretation of Initial Point and the confluence of the Gila and Colorado would have resulted in a net gain of more than 300 square miles for Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

After completion of the initial survey, seven monuments marked the 2000-mile long border. The border, initially, was more apparent on maps than on the ground. Many on the border lived a bi-national existence without even knowing it. But during the twentieth century, the border became much more of a physical reality. In 1993, nearly one hundred and fifty years after the original survey, San Diego fortified its segment of the international boundary by building a fourteen-mile fence between the United States and Mexico. Despite protests from environmentalists and a divided Kumeyaay Nation, the barrier along the world's busiest border crossing was completed. Today, its three layers of fencing follow the line negotiated in 1849. This contentious wall stands not only as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but the bargaining power of surveyors.

## NOTES

1. See Neal Harlow, *Maps of the Pueblo Lands of San Diego, 1602-1874*. Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1987.
2. Curtis M. Brown and Michael J. Pallamary, *History of San Diego County Land Surveying Experiences* (San Diego. Privately printed, 1988), 21.
3. Thomas L. Scharf, "Amiel Weeks Whipple: Boundary and Railroad Surveys in the Southwest, 1849-1854," (master's thesis, University of San Diego, 1973).
4. Michael Dear, "Monuments, Manifest Destiny and Mexico," *The National Archives* 2 (Summer 2005): 2. See also Charles Hughes "'La Mojonera' and the Marking of California's U.S.-Mexico Boundary Line, 1849-1851," *Journal of San Diego History* 53 (Summer 2007):126-147.

# Profile of a Public Historian: Susan Hasegawa

Colin Fisher

In the opening sequence to the film *Democracy Under Pressure: Japanese Americans and World War II*, FBI agents burst in on a contemporary middle-class European American family living in the San Diego suburbs. As horrified family members look on, the agents hustle the father off for unknown relocation. The agents also repeat the process, but now at an African American and an Asian American home. A quote from U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye then appears: "If



*Public Historian Susan Hasegawa*

this great democracy, with her extraordinary Constitution, could imprison people only because of their ethnic background, it could happen again. And it could happen to anyone, black, brown, yellow or white."

Susan Hasegawa, who served as the project manager for the film, uses this sequence to explain her philosophy of pursuing public history: "always think about what is important to your audience." She pursues this philosophy at San Diego City College, where she is a professor and former chair of the History and Political Science Department. In the classroom, she encourages her students to pursue their own interests and to write papers that weave together oral history and more traditional research. This

approach, she explains, brings the past alive, even for students who hated history in high school.

Hasegawa's approach is also evident in an exhibit that she and Linda Canada created and installed in the San Diego Historical Society's Youth Gallery. "Nikkei Youth Culture: Past, Present, and Future" (on exhibit from November 2006 to March 2007) showed how Nikkei (or those of Japanese descent) teenagers and young adults created a vital youth culture during the first half of the twentieth century. Through the use of sports, boy scouting, dances, outings, and their own newspaper, Japanese American young men and women in San Diego and Imperial County created their own world and their own definition of what it meant to be American.

But for Hasegawa, it was important to make the story of pre-World War II Japanese American youth relevant to youth today. She, in fact, had gotten the

idea to create the youth culture exhibit after attending an Obon Festival at the Buddhist Temple of San Diego on Market Street. She found that contemporary Japanese American youth culture had made the San Diego festival very different than the ones she had attended in her native Hawai'i. Here in California she saw very good traditional dancers who had obviously practiced a great deal, but they wore baggy pants and they occasionally busted out hip-hop moves on the dance floor. At the festival, she also ate an excellent snow cone prepared by a "Goth" kid dressed entirely in black, and she heard the Beach Boys on the temple amplifier. With this in mind, she reached into the past, but also made the past speak to the current generation. For the exhibit, she asked teenagers at the temple to portray contemporary Japanese American youth culture for the public at the San Diego Historical Society.

Although the Nikkei Youth Culture exhibit has closed, we will undoubtedly see more of Hasegawa's installations. This last summer, Hasegawa and Linda Canada worked diligently in the new archival facility of the Japanese American Historical Society on Austin Avenue in Spring Valley. Surrounded by artifacts, donated computer equipment, and carefully arranged archival containers, they prepared for an upcoming exhibit at the Bonita Museum and Cultural Center. The exhibit, called "Homegrown," explores the early twentieth-century Japanese American agricultural experience in southern San Diego County. Profiled in the exhibit is the story of the Oyama family, who fought California's Alien Land Law in court and won an important U.S. Supreme Court victory in 1948.

It is Hasegawa's great hope that the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego (JAHSSD) will grow and eventually have a more permanent home. The JAHS started in 1993 following a reunion of San Diegans who, during World War II, had been interned in a U.S. government camp located on the Colorado River Tribal Reservation in Poston, Arizona. Until two years ago (when the new archival facility opened), members of the Society (including the late Don Estes, an expert in Japanese American history and a mentor to Hasegawa) kept archives and artifacts in their homes. Hasegawa envisions a larger, more public space that will be open to school groups as well as scholars. The new facility, if and when it is built, will undoubtedly serve as an important forum for continued dialogue between the past and the present.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Testimonios: Early California Through the Eyes of Women, 1815-1848*. Translated by Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2006. Bibliography, illustrations, index, and notes. 288 pp. \$27.50 cloth. \$17.95 paper.

Reviewed by Deborah Lawrence, Associate Professor Emeritus of English, California State University, Fullerton.

Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz's *Testimonios* is a fascinating collection of interviews with thirteen women who lived in California during the late Spanish and Mexican periods. Collected in the 1870s, these oral histories were part of historian Hubert Howe Bancroft's effort to write an exhaustive history of California. Until now, these interviews have never been brought together in one translated edition.

In nineteenth-century America, men were regarded as the makers of history and, consequently, interviewing women for Bancroft's project was only incidental to the larger consideration of men. Yet even a casual reader of *Testimonios* will appreciate the significance of these women's observations. Not surprisingly, their stories offer an intimate look into their family lives: courtship, childbirth, and household chores. Of special interest to readers are the glimpses of how these women's domestic spheres were inextricably linked with California's changing social and political events. For example, Eulalia Pérez remembers that she was ready to give birth when an earthquake destroyed the San Juan Capistrano church. Describing her elopement after Governor Echeandía forbade her marriage to Henry Fitch, Josefa Carrillo claims that the governor thwarted their marriage not only because he was hostile toward foreigners, but because of his love for her. Juana Machado recalls her parents' distress when her father was forced to cut off his braid when California became part of Mexico. These firsthand accounts mention almost every significant military and political event from 1818 to 1847, including the transfer of power from Spain to Mexico, the secularization of the missions in the 1830s, and the American invasion of 1846.

The diversity of the women in this collection is impressive. Eulalia Pérez and Apolinaria Lorenzana spent time working at the missions. A few of the women came from elite families with long and well-known histories in California. Some of them, such as Catarina Avila, Juana Machado, and Felipa Osuna, are from prominent landowning families. Dorotea Valdez was a mestiza, and Isidora Filomena was an indigenous woman whose husband had been an important ally of the Mexicans in the Sonoma area in the 1830s and 1840s. Because the women are from various locations – including Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, San Diego, and Santa Clara – sectional differences between northern and southern Alta California are illuminated.

Unlike autobiography, oral history is not self-generated work. Bancroft's interviewees – Henry Cerruti, Vicente Gómez, and Thomas Savage – came to the interviews with a series of prepared questions. These women were answering questions directed at them by a man they had just met, and thus they were not always willing to be bound by the interviewers' priorities. Their testimonios

occasionally reveal the women changing the subject, expanding on their answers, and squeezing in topics they wanted to talk about.

This book also contains excerpts from “Ramblings in California,” by Henry Cerruti, the entire manuscript that Savage wrote describing his efforts to obtain the testimonios, and a series of short, biographical sketches of historical figures. The introduction includes an explanation of the editors’ methodology for translation, the chronological organization of the book, and the setting of the original interviews. Each testimonio is preceded by a commentary that provides an informative synthesis of the oral narrative and its cultural and historical context.

Beebe and Senkewicz’s introduction, notes, and appendices provide an excellent guide to the interviews and to the historical background of California from 1815 to 1848 for both the novice and specialist alike. Consequently, *Testimonios* is a valuable source not only for scholars of Alta California, but for anyone wishing to have a firsthand account of early California – from the woman’s perspective.

*Spreading the Word: A History of Information in the California Gold Rush.* By Richard T. Stillson. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. Appendices, illustrations, maps, index, and notes. 278 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Michelle E. Jolly, Associate Professor, Department of History, Sonoma State University.

As Richard T. Stillson notes in the conclusion to his intriguing study, *Spreading the Word: A History of Information in the California Gold Rush*, “few events in American history have been retold as many times and for as many reasons as the gold rush,” (p. 183). Stillson’s “history of information” encourages readers to see the gold rush – and the myriad firsthand accounts of the gold rush with which they may be familiar – through a new lens that refocuses our attention even on such oft-told tales as that of the overland route.

*Spreading the Word* is, in Stillson’s words, about “how Americans from the East who went overland to California for the gold rush in the years 1849 to 1851 obtained, assessed, and used information,” (p. 1). When the news first came in late 1848 about the discovery of gold, California was so distant – physically and in the American consciousness – that would-be argonauts’ primary need was for more and better information. Were the claims about gold in California true? How much gold was there? Would it be worth a trip? What was the best way to get to California? What supplies should one bring? These kinds of driving questions emerged in the context of an information revolution that was taking place in mid-nineteenth-century America. As information itself became a commodity, newspaper editors, government officials, authors of guidebooks, and epistlers from the gold fields took on the task of meeting this demand for information while consumers struggled to figure out how to assess and use it.

Stillson takes us into this varied and changing world of information. He tells us how eastern Americans acquired and assessed information in the first months of the gold rush and the extent to which that information varied by region (affected both by regional politics and by the economics of publishing). Then

Stillson analyzes the Overland Trail in terms of information flow: how information changed as goldrushers moved west toward the trailheads in Missouri and Iowa and then toward California, and the ways in which goldrushers' preferred sources of information—and their criteria for assessing that information—changed as they moved west. Finally, Stillson describes how the argonauts' arrival in California shaped the flow of information, both for the goldrushers themselves and for easterners who could now get firsthand accounts to supplement other sources of information.

Stillson's emphasis on the importance of information – and the variations by time and place in how goldrushers received, evaluated, and used it – is thought-provoking. As I read other gold rush histories that describe migrants' motivations for making the trip to California, I am now more conscious of the flow of information: How did these particular people get their information? What kinds of information did they have? How did newspapers, government reports, guidebooks, traders' reports, and letters answer their questions about the gold and about the trip to California? How did their access to, and assessment of, information change over time?

At the same time, Stillson's approach to the gold rush itself strikes me as simplistic. He utilizes a body of secondary sources on both the gold rush and the history of information that seems thin and, in the latter case, somewhat dated. Moreover, this study focuses almost exclusively on the information experiences of white, middle-class, northeastern men who traveled to California on the Overland Trail. Such a focus might make it easier to see the flows of information, as Stillson claims, but it also reinforces an image of the gold rush as primarily involving gold seekers of these particular characteristics. Even granting Stillson's emphasis on the American experience, nearly half of all U.S. migrants to California in 1849 – and most of those from the East Coast – did not travel overland but by sea. How did their information needs, access to information, and methods of assessment change and compare to the experiences of those goldrushers who traveled overland? What effect did the existing trade and information routes to California, the timely establishment of a steamer mail route between Panama and California just as gold was discovered, and the presence of Americans living and trading abroad have on information dispersal and assessment? Although the study would surely be more complex, more attention even to the experiences of other Americans – such as those who traveled by sea, women, and southerners – seems warranted.

Stillson's book certainly intrigued me and encouraged me to ask different questions about the gold rush and about the history of information in antebellum America. But I wish that Stillson had extended his analysis to offer a fuller story of the myriad ways in which information – its availability, its sources, its commodification, its assessment, and its uncertainty – shaped the gold rush and its era.

*Eugenic Nation: Faults & Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America.* By Alexandra Minna Stern. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2005. Bibliography, illustrations, index, and notes. 361 pp. \$25.95 paper.

Reviewed by Christina Cogdell, Ph.D., Department of Art and Art History, College of Santa Fe, New Mexico

Alexandra Stern's *Eugenic Nation: Faults & Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* aims to fill a gap in the literature on the twentieth-century American eugenics movement by exploring its manifestations on the West Coast and California in particular. The book's title, therefore, inaccurately suggests that it is a history of the national movement that focuses closely on issues of breeding in modern America. The book examines the *legacies* and *offshoots* of eugenic ideas and policies more than serving as a definitive documentation of the history of the movement itself. Despite the misnomer, however, Stern offers her readers some new and compelling material – particularly in her discussion of the period from the mid-1940s through the 1970s – that shows how developments in California, both for and against eugenics and its legacies, affected the broader national populace.

The book is organized into chapters that combine a chronological approach with a close topical focus on such issues as tropical disease control and immigration restriction (Chapters 1 and 2, 1900-1940s), sterilization legislation and practice (Chapter 3, 1910-70s), the environmental conservation movement (Chapter 4, 1900-60s), postwar marriage counseling and gender role reification (Chapter 5, 1945-70s), and counterculture protests against discriminatory practices which, for years, were bolstered by eugenic ideology (Chapter 6, 1960s-present). These topics are united by Stern's regional focus on the West Coast, and together they reveal the diverse interests and conceptual legacies of eugenics supporters and critics. Stern generally succeeds in demonstrating at least some connection between her chosen topics and concurrent ideas about eugenics and controlled breeding.

For example, the first two chapters address issues of disease control and immigration on the West Coast, first at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 and then after 1924 at the U.S.-Mexico border. Stern shows that U.S. public health officials who combated tropical diseases in Panama by destroying insects and other carriers of disease brought their techniques home, albeit with changed approaches for differing contexts. The San Francisco fair was the most hygienic to date, although immigrants and their neighborhoods were disproportionately singled out as potentially diseased. Similarly, in order to eliminate diseases from Mexico entering the U.S. on the backs of "Mexican paupers," the U.S. Border Patrol initiated stringent practices of dousing immigrants with kerosene and, later, DDT, after stripping them of their clothes.

Such practices undoubtedly constituted harassment and abuse based upon racist and classist assumptions equating impoverished ethnic others with disease, a mental connection that many eugenicists most certainly embraced. However, without explaining how disease control through environmental sterilization relates to human heredity and controlled breeding, Stern fails to convince that these racist impulses were demonstrations of eugenic social policies. Killing disease-carrying insects might be considered a form of eugenics, but certainly not



eugenics directed at humans. The federal anti-immigration legislation of the 1920s was in fact sponsored by ardent eugenics supporters, so Stern's mistake is more one of argument and documentation than accuracy. By not laying out in detail the nature-nurture debate and its changes between 1900 and 1940 – with regards to neoLamarckian emphases on the environment as a source for hereditary change, germ theory, and Mendelist theories of innate disease susceptibility – she weakens the argument of the book's title that her topical discussions do, in fact, demonstrate the implementation of eugenics.

This oversight infiltrates aspects of other chapters. For example, early conservationists' arguments for the necessity of untouched environments were oftentimes based upon neoLamarckian impulses, and not just Mendelist metaphors of "race suicide," as Stern asserts. Without an explanation of this, though, the reader does not have a sense of the eugenic ramifications beyond the level of metaphor and projection. Or, take the case of Paul Popenoe's postwar marriage counseling tactics. His methods of personality testing, theories of biotypology, and strict gender constructions based upon biological determinism undoubtedly derived from earlier eugenic approaches. Stern's discussion of this is very convincing and enlightening; this is the strongest section of the book. However, it remains unclear to readers how his goal of saving all marriages, especially dysfunctional ones, was supposed to have a eugenic outcome, if eugenics in fact means genetic improvement (or "better breeding") and not just the social reinforcement of strict gender "norms."

These differences in belief, definition, and explanation do matter, for they affect our understanding of reformers' motivations, of the history of science (which Stern hardly touches), and of whether or not their actions are justifiably classified as eugenic. Hygiene measures, racism, primitivism, xenophobia, homophobia, and conservative heterosexist gender construction do not by themselves equal eugenics, despite the fact that the converse – that many eugenicists promoted these attitudes and justified them as supposedly derived from scientific evolutionary theories – is true. The nuances and complications of this difference must be carefully explored, documented, and argued in order for a historical discussion of the former to serve as a history of eugenics.

*Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America.* By Mae M. Ngai. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Bibliography, illustrations, figures, tables, index, appendix, and notes. xxii + 377 pp. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewed by Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr., Postdoctoral Fellow, University of California, Berkeley.

Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects* rearticulates how we debate immigration history by moving away from the European model of assimilation and inclusion and centering the argument on racialization and exclusion. The book covers the period between 1924 and 1965 and demonstrates how immigration restriction created the "illegal alien" in American society. As Ngai notes, "Immigration restriction produced the illegal alien as a *new legal and political subject*, whose inclusion within

the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility – a subject barred from citizenship and without rights” (p. 4). This “production” of illegal aliens was further reinforced by U.S. racial ideology, which placed both Mexicans and Asians in a category Ngai calls “racial otherness.” Combined, these forces had profound impacts on how Mexicans and Asians were treated, not only through their exclusion, but also in relation to the creation of the Border Patrol in the 1920s and deportation policies.

Ngai’s study fills a much needed gap in the literature by arguing how many Americans in this particular time period differentiated between desirable and undesirable immigrants. Restrictionists used the post-World War I era and the rising red scare to put an end to open immigration from southern and eastern Europe. They accomplished this with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. The establishment of quotas based on race and nationality created what Ngai calls a “hierarchy of desirability” (p. 17). Furthermore, she shows how racial overtones influenced this categorization as the United States was moving from an industrial to a post-industrial era. The demand for labor prior to the late nineteenth century created an environment in which immigrants were encouraged to come to contribute to the industrial growth of America. With the rise of mechanization in American industries by the early 1920s, a massive labor force was no longer needed. The exception, of course, was large-scale agriculture, most notably in cotton, fruit, and vegetable production.

One of the most interesting sections of her study examines what Ngai calls “imported colonialism” and how the demand for cheap labor in the agricultural industry, most notably on the West Coast and in the Southwest, necessitated the importation of both Mexican and Filipino workers to the United States. As U.S. nationals, Filipinos were exempt from immigration restrictions. Mexico’s proximity to the U.S. and the exemption of the Western Hemisphere from restrictions under the 1924 Immigration Act ensured that Mexican immigrants met these labor demands in large numbers. As the Great Depression crippled the U.S. economy during the 1930s, both became targets for xenophobic whites who called for their exclusion and deportation. For Asians, the 1924 Immigration Act ensured that they remained a small group, since they were practically barred from coming to the United States. Furthermore, many whites questioned the loyalty and place of American-born Japanese and Chinese based on what Ngai calls their “alien citizenship.” Their perceived racial foreignness was equated with being unassimilable.

The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 may have abolished racially restrictive quotas, but as Ngai also notes, numerical restrictions placed on immigration continued to create illegal immigrants. In fact, illegal immigration increased due to legal restrictions on Western hemisphere countries combined with an increased demand for low wage labor during the 1980s. She poignantly points out how the U.S. has a “schizophrenic attitude” towards illegal aliens. Americans need their labor in “unwanted” occupations, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and service and domestic work, yet at the same time want them out of sight and out of mind.

Nativist rhetoric of Mexican hordes overrunning America’s borders led to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1990s. Furthermore, increasingly strident nativist movements, such as the one that led to California’s Proposition 187, added to the growing animosity towards the undocumented. Moreover, the

racial implications of who is considered “illegal” also affects U.S.-born Mexicans, Latinos, and Asians, who continue to bear the stigma of racial foreignness as they fight for their place in the social fabric that is America.

This book will be of use to historians interested in the intersection of immigration, race, labor, and citizenship. Ngai’s study not only helps us to reexamine the immigration question, but encourages us to consider how future generations of Americans will decide who gets to be included in citizenship and ultimately, nationhood.

*The Battle for Los Angeles: Racial Ideology and World War II.* By Kevin Allen Leonard. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Photographs, notes, and index. xii + 360 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Min Hyoung Song, Associate Professor, Department of English, Boston College.

*The Battle for Los Angeles* is a scrupulous study of the ways in which Los Angeles-area newspapers covered the issue of race between the years 1940 and 1946. Kevin Leonard examines the major dailies – the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Los Angeles Examiner*, and the *Daily News* – as well as ethnic newspapers – the Spanish-language *La Opinión*, the English sections of *Rafu Shimpo*, the *California Eagle*, and surviving issues of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Los Angeles Tribune*. Discussion of this concentrated archival undertaking is divided into several chapters clustered around important historical events. The first chapter begins with an examination of how the coverage of the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) differed between the major dailies and the ethnic press. The second chapter focuses on the coverage of Japanese Americans immediately after Pearl Harbor, the third on juvenile delinquency and Mexican Americans, the fourth on Sleepy Lagoon and the Manzanar riots, the fifth on the Zoot Suits Riots, the sixth on the ending of internment and the return of Japanese Americans, and the final chapter on the Cold War.

One important conclusion that can be drawn from this survey of newspaper coverage is the ways in which Angelenos debated the meaning of race, yielding a gradual but noteworthy widening of vocabulary for talking about this topic. In the early years, the dailies were narrowly receptive to biologically based ideas about race as well as to sweeping generalizations about whole groups based on such ideas. “To a growing number of people” in the later years, as Leonard observes, “‘race’ meant something different. It meant a set of distinct biological characteristics, but these characteristics determined only a person’s outward appearance. They did not affect a person’s beliefs, behaviors, abilities, or place in the social order” (p. 297). Although the greater circulation of this “modernist racial ideology” made earlier notions of race unacceptable in public discourse, substantive change was much slower to come.

Leonard argues such changes were unlikely to “have occurred if the war had not led to changes in the language that people employed to discuss ‘race’” (p. 301). For example, he reveals the ways in which the major dailies were fixated on

Japanese Americans during the whole of the war years, rarely allowing coverage about this group to die down even when they were no longer physically present in the Los Angeles area. At the same time, coverage of Mexican Americans, and especially of the Zoot Suits Riots, seems to mark an important turning point in the kind of language the dailies employed to talk about racial difference. The African American newspapers, especially the *Eagle* under the leadership of the charismatic Charlotta Bass, also play an important role in the story Leonard tells. These papers exerted a steady pressure on the ways in which race could be talked about in the press. The role that African Americans themselves played in the changing meaning of race during the war years, however, remains unclear.

Overall, *The Battle for Los Angeles* is a welcome addition to the critical literature on mid-century race relations in the Southland. By deliberately limiting itself to the longitudinal study of a specific type of archival material, it thoughtfully complements recent works like Eduardo Obregón Pagán's *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, Eric Avila's *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, and Lon Kurashige's *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*.

*Border Oasis: Water and the Political Ecology of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975.* By Evan R. Ward. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2003. Bibliography, illustrations, index, and notes. 230 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Eric Boime, Assistant Professor, History Department, San Diego State University-Imperial Valley Campus.

The story of the Colorado River Delta's modern metamorphosis is an iconic tale of audacious imagination, technological marvel, and tragic unsustainability. Prodigious amounts of wealth, extensive exploitations of humans and nature, and acute political laxities have made the region the "poster child" for Carey McWilliams's *Factories in the Fields*, Mark Reisner's *Cadillac Desert*, Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire*, and other pivotal chronologies of the western waterscape. Yet this narrative allure is so much beside the point. The future growth of California, Arizona, and Baja California has literally come to hinge on the delta's lion's-share allotment of the Colorado River. Inevitably, Southwesterners will be asking how seemingly remote places like Mexicali, Yuma, and the Imperial Valley were able to lay claim to so much of this vital resource.

Accordingly, Evan Ward's *Border Oasis* is a history that is long over due. His is an exclusive focus on the delta rather than a mere chapter in a larger study of water policy, or an obligatory prelude to the more famous epic of Hoover Dam. His book also underscores the "transcendent role" of U.S.-Mexican relations and their impact on the shape and trajectory of regional transformation (p. xxviii). Either of these reasons makes *Border Oasis* an essential contribution to the history of western water, the majority of which has been framed north of the boundary line.

The complex legal and diplomatic wrangling between and among federal, state, and local agencies, as well as among myriad urban, rural, Native American and environmental groups (the acronyms fly fast and furious), might make Ward's

story unavoidably slow going at times, but scholars, journalists, technocrats, and politicians on both sides of the border will be grateful for his concise synthesis of complications, decisions, and debates regarding the allocation and use of the Colorado. For those dealing with the ongoing ramifications of rural-urban water transfers, salinity problems, and groundwater depletion, the book will be an indispensable resource.

Ideally, the book will challenge the myopia of policy makers and influential groups, who, according to Ward, have been unable to rise above their narrow interests or particular fields of jurisdiction. The best parts of *Border Oasis* emphasize the delta's "shared history, ecosystem, and regional identity" (p. 152). Agribusiness on both sides of the border owed their livelihoods to U.S. capital and Mexican labor power. Actions taken by both nations to assert independence from the other – through new hydraulic works, ground water pumping, federal investments, or binding international agreements – only further bound them in a web of conflict and cooperation.

The "salinity crisis" of the postwar years is the principal template for Ward's major themes. Its political origins (not its ecological ones) lay in the notoriously constructed Wellton-Mohawk Project near Yuma, Arizona. The irrigation district's poor drainage facilities resulted in an unremitting salty froth that devastated acreage along the lower Colorado, and, most significantly, in the Mexicali Valley in the 1950s and 60s. Grass-roots outrage in Mexico led to protests in Mexico City, stoked the election of socialist candidates in Baja California, and stirred deep nationalist sentiment. It also spurred Mexicali's dependence on subterranean sources, creating new international friction over the depleting aquifer.

Rural Arizonians won initial funding for Wellton-Mohawk to prevent urban Arizona (Phoenix), as well as Mexico and California, from seizing the Gila confluence. Such dynamics portended the lengthy and convoluted resolution that would ensue. The crisis would underscore "the challenges" for policies endeavoring to "balance diplomatic, national, regional, and local priorities within the river basin" (p. 141). Regional inflexibility forced the intervention of national governments, whose need for international harmony placed them at odds with local entities. Mexico City's proactive stance was taken to protect Baja California and to co-opt radical elements. The unwillingness of U.S. western states to concede anything drove the ever-expanding, ever-malfunctioning, obscenely expensive construction of a desalinization plant in the Sonoran Desert. Ultimately regional interests could all agree on their shared dependence on U.S. federal largess to combat basin-wide salinity problems.

*Border Oasis* is primarily a compilation of already published essays, which may or may not explain the book's sparse historiographical context. While Ward mentions "environmental history," his contribution to that field is especially elusive. The non-human world (i.e. water) is less an actor in his narrative than a commodity. Various interpretations of nature and their impact on the landscape are only superficially examined. Ward himself invites this criticism with a largely disconnected collection of two- to three-page snippets at the end of each chapter. These self-labeled "Deltascapes" are comprised of individual accounts (one by a historian, another by a naturalist, and another by a journalist), sidebar descriptions ("the threat of salinity"), and a musing on the Las Vegas Strip (the only time Nevada is even mentioned). Their detachment from the larger story calls attention

to the omission of significant cultural questions. What, for example, was natural or unnatural in the delta environment, a stunning hybrid concoction of elemental forces and human terra-forming? How did water policy reflect and influence people's real and imagined relationships with nature?

Such questions may well be tangential inquiries in what is really a solid policy piece. As the politics of the delta inexorably interweave with the entire river basin, many people will be thanking Ward for doing the difficult and essential homework.

*Drift: A Novel.* By Jim Miller. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. Photographs, illustrations, and maps. 208 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Bart Thurber, Professor of English, University of San Diego.

Jim Miller, the author, with Mike Davis and Kelley Mayhew, of *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* and the editor of *Sunshine/Noir: Writing from San Diego and Tijuana*, has now written a novel, *Drift*. For the most part it is the story of Joe Blake, a disaffected and under-employed academic on a kind of pilgrimage through San Diego(s) past and present, searching for significance in a land of radiant sunshine, the ghosts and echoes of pasts that did or did not happen, and the complex detritus of failed dreams, including his own.

But the novel is more than just the story of Joe Blake and his progress towards, in the end, love and redemption. There are sections too of actual San Diego history and the interwoven narratives of other characters with whom Joe interacts, sometimes, or who are just there, part of the tapestry the author weaves of life in San Diego, circa 2000. *Drift* is both a novel, then, and an attempt to come to terms with actual San Diego history; it is also an attempt to give voice to the voiceless – a prostitute in Tijuana, a homeless former student, an angry retiree living in a cheap downtown hotel – each of whom, the author suggests, has a story to tell that otherwise would not be heard.

The strength of the novel lies in the way it looks at San Diego itself. The city is overwhelmingly *there*, felt and seen, not simply as an actual place but as its own metaphor, which in the author's telling is a fading, sometimes shabby remnant of Anglo dreams of yet another Southern California Shangri-La, or the forced destruction of entire neighborhoods in the name of progress. And there is an accompanying apocalyptic vision, the price we pay, for Miller, for dreaming, rather than seeing, the actual: in the final pages of the novel Joe and Theresa, the woman he finds at last, visit the remains of long-closed hotels and broken down bars surrounding the Salton Sea. "It's like," Theresa says, "the party for the end of the world." It is, Miller is suggesting, an image of what the future of San Diego can only be, given the self-indulgent, exclusive, and overwhelmingly Citizen Kane-ish fantasies out of which San Diego was born.

That San Diego is so present in the novel is noteworthy in and of itself; San Diego has been, except for the novels of Max Miller, Oakley Hall and a few others, largely invisible in the literary universe, unseen and unimagined, especially by comparison to Los Angeles, San Francisco or New York. On the other hand, Miller's

San Diego is *a* San Diego; whether it is San Diego itself is open to question. Not so much because his history is wrong – I have no reason to doubt any of it – but because he has axes to grind. His sympathies are with the underclasses: the Wobblies, the union organizers, and immigrants terrorized (then and now) by white San Diego thugs. There are at least three problems with this. First, from a novelistic point of view it is hard to see what the history of the Wobblies in San Diego County has to do with the narrative present, except, perhaps, that some things never change, in the author's view; second, it means there are characters the author likes and characters he doesn't like, judging them for what they are rather than simply letting them *be* what they are. "Why do they deserve special treatment?" one character, Janie, asks of fat-cat union organizers on her way to her "nice new peach Santa-Fe style home"; the author's scorn is palpable, but this makes Janie a cartoon, a stick figure rather than a fully-imagined human being. And finally, there is what the author leaves out in this novel cum history cum novel: the Navy, the new demographic (sometimes in partnership with the Navy but often without) that has led to the rise of high tech industry, especially in and around UCSD, and the fact, which readers of *Drift* might not otherwise guess, that large swathes of San Diego county are now more Democrat than Republican. History *Drift* is, then, but it's a certain history told in a certain way.

*Strange New World: Art and Design from Tijuana*. Edited by Rachel Teagle. San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2006. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, and exhibition checklist. 254 pp. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Vanessa M. Corbera, Curatorial Department, San Diego Museum of Art.

It is about time that Tijuana was given its due. In 2006, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego attempted to do just this in the exhibition *Strange New World: Art and Design from Tijuana*. Broad in scope, this exhibition presented a thoughtful overview of the history and development of contemporary art in Tijuana. Accompanying the exhibition is a bilingual catalogue written by multiple contributors representing a wide range of disciplines, including the visual arts, architecture, and music. Part "cultural experimentation" (according to contributor Teddy Cruz) part artistic "revolution" (in the view of Rachel Teagle), this exhibition catalogue delivers an insightful discussion of and stimulating journey through Tijuana as a legitimate player in the contemporary art world.

For decades, Tijuana has been viewed as a cultural abyss. The catalogue attempts to change this perception by tackling issues of such grand proportion as the economic, political, and geographical disparity that are both reflective of Tijuana's position as a border town and complicated by the city's transient nature. Some of the questions these writers address are how artists in Tijuana are challenging norms accepted throughout the West (including in both the United States and Mexico) and, at the same time, how these artists come to reference such norms through artistic expression. These sorts of questions are critical to understanding the catalogue's central purpose, which is to highlight the artistic

surge currently taking place in Tijuana.

What this catalogue sets out to accomplish is of unquestionable importance. Perhaps too ambitious in its efforts, the essayists nonetheless should be applauded for their keen understanding of the city's art scene, and further, for beginning a much-needed dialogue. Thus what is most exciting about the collection of essays is the study it offers of what Tijuana artists are currently doing. This is most clearly seen in exhibition curator Rachel Teagle's essay. She presents a succinct overview of the city's artistic production of the past thirty-five years and depicts Tijuana as a laboratory where artistic expressions come together. Moreover, Teagle successfully explores how these artists are concerned with projecting a certain image of themselves as *Tijuanenses*.

Overall the catalogue is more narrative than analytical. This narrative quality is illustrated in sociologist and film historian Norma V. Iglesias Prieto's essay. She offers a clear, historical outline of the avant-garde film industry of Tijuana from its inception to its current manifestation. Iglesias Prieto suggests that artists have used film, a relatively under-explored medium in Tijuana, to define and expose the border as a contested space. She sheds light on how these artists are no longer using film as part of "a survival mechanism" but rather are challenging the very stereotypes created by an earlier generation. This worthwhile discourse on identity elucidates the methodologies behind these artists' works.

The catalogue not only references the visual arts but also emphasizes the importance of architecture. In his essay, Tijuana-born architect Rene Peralta revisits architectural modernism as a "cultural product" of the West, but it is architect Teddy Cruz who takes this idea a step further. On the one hand, Cruz explores how the city's location in relation to San Diego creates an ironic contradiction where the stark contrast between San Diego's "McMansions" and Tijuana's shacks brings attention to the vast social and economic gap between the cities. On the other hand, San Diego's gated communities are being imported into Tijuana, which in turn raises questions about the "privatization of social and public institutions." Is Cruz suggesting that to some extent Tijuana has become a make-shift utopic vision of American urban planning? Have border towns become playgrounds for corporations of the West? Ultimately, Cruz's essay is an intelligent reflection on the complex and varied "allure of Tijuana."

One of the many factors that contributed to the exhibition's success was its presentation of the multi-faceted approaches of these artists. But in this strength of the exhibition also lies the principal weakness of the catalogue. However, despite its heavy-handed romanticization of the city as a present-day art Mecca, the catalogue is a valiant attempt to demystify Tijuana as a city of stereotypes, one that embodies all that is corrupt, seedy, and sordid. Instead, the catalogue presents Tijuana as a legitimate player on a universal stage. And perhaps, as Teagle muses, Tijuana, as a metaphor for a cultural phenomenon taking place in developing countries around the world, is a vision of a global artistic revolution in the making.



*The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City.* Updated with a new preface. By Robert Gottlieb, Mark Vallianatos, Regina M. Freer, and Peter Dreier. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2006. Photographs, illustrations, table, index, and notes. xxiv + 304 pp. \$21.95 paper.

Reviewed by Keith Pezzoli, Lecturer, Urban Studies and Planning Program, University of California, San Diego.

*The Next Los Angeles* is a major contribution to new progressivism on several fronts: theory, vision, method, and praxis. The book is peppered throughout with theoretical insights regarding urban-social change under conditions of hardship and struggle in one of the world's greatest cities: Los Angeles. Many of the book's colorful stories of L.A.'s progressive people, organizations, social movements, and policy initiatives draw attention to significant untold histories. The co-authors build on this hidden history well. They provide a historically-grounded and forward-looking vision for progressivism at the dawn of our complicated twenty-first century. The vision is not the abstract concoction of arm-chair academics. The co-authors characterize their commendable approach as "scholarship of engagement" (p. xii). About themselves, they say: "The four of us have been writing about and have been participants in this aspiring progressive political force that has taken shape in Los Angeles since the civil unrest in April 1992" (p. xii). The collective grassroots experience of these authors combined with their critical pragmatism is a breath of fresh air. The book includes a detailed appendix outlining "A Policy Agenda for the Next L.A." Much of the urban studies literature is heavy with critique but light on normative guidance in terms of methods and praxis. Thus this book's successful integration of hard-hitting critique and constructive vision is much needed.

The first edition of *The Next Los Angeles* was written prior to the election of L.A.'s progressive mayoral candidate Antonio Villaraigosa. The second edition (reviewed here) was published after Villaraigosa's victory in May 2005; it includes an updated preface with an upbeat but cautious retrospective analysis of Villaraigosa's first six months in office. Gottlieb and his co-authors note how the new mayor's landslide victory injected hope into "Progressive L.A." – a term they use "to describe an emerging social change movement concerned with issues of social and economic justice, democracy and livability" (pp. 4-5). But the hope is tempered. Recent events like the eradication of the South Central Urban Farm (an important site for community gardening and efforts to make L.A. a greener and more livable city) and the police violence against protesters assembled in L.A.'s MacArthur Park on May 1, 2007 are indicative of deep-seated problems and obstacles. The leaders of L.A.'s progressive movement, Gottlieb et al argue, are well aware of such obstacles. They know that even with the support of a progressive mayor they must continue to "build the base": recruit new activists, strengthen their organizing and forge new coalitions, and improve their capacity to mobilize for elections, grassroots campaigns, and protests" (p. xxi). This is what makes *The Next L.A.* such a timely and useful text. The authors are well aware of the forces arrayed against progressivism at local, regional, national, and global levels – yet they do not shy away from articulating a utopian vision (with a pragmatic twist).

As a way to get their message across, the authors combine biography, narrative,

and critical analysis to good effect. For instance, they tell the story of Charlotta Bass, an unsung champion of progressive activism in L.A. for over 40 years during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The case of Charlotta Bass goes beyond her remarkable skills as a communicator and negotiator. Gottlieb et al reference the Bass case to highlight important strategies for putting progressivism into action. In a way that prefigures contemporary efforts focused on community-based advocacy and cross-constituency organizing, Bass advocated a kind of activism that saw strength in building new kinds of multi-issue and multiracial coalitions, and she saw the power in providing public access to good information.

*The Next L.A.*'s most important message can be summed up as follows: L.A. has a fertile progressive history (much of which is still not well documented in the urban studies literature), and this history embodies vital lessons. Some contemporary efforts are building on this legacy to good effect – including, for instance Justice for Janitors (pp. 87-90) and the living wage initiative (pp. 45-47). But much remains to be done with respect to scale and integration: “The history of Progressive L.A. in the twentieth century – dynamic movements, important policy breakthroughs, and a wave of social action, but an inability to extend itself beyond the political moment to establish a more cohesive and continuing alternative to the dominant forces in the region – remained an invaluable, though ambiguous legacy” (p. 48). Thus, one of the most significant challenges that lie ahead, as the authors point out, is the task of “constructing a regional progressive politics” driven by a new, more sophisticated, locally-embedded but globally-minded “civic left” (p. 185). This is complicated. What L.A. and other city-regions of the world need is a dynamic form of Progressive Regionalism (a subject on the rise in the planning literature). *The Next L.A.* does a great service in pointing the way forward. The book puts meat on the bones of key themes and principles for progressivism: livability, democratic participation and empowerment, and social and economic justice. The book is a must read for anyone engaged in struggles for the common good in urban and regional contexts.

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## BOOK NOTES

*A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960.* By Shirley Jennifer Lim. New York: New York University Press, 2006. Illustrations, notes, and index. ix + 241 pp. \$21.00 paper. Shirley Lim examines the lives of American-born Asian women who attempted to translate their status as United States citizens into American "cultural citizenship" through pursuit of various leisure activities, patterns of consumption, and involvement in voluntary associations.

*American Dreaming, Global Realities: Rethinking U.S. Immigration History.* Edited by Donna R. Gabaccia and Vicki L. Ruiz. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. x + 563 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$75.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper. The twenty-two essays in this collection explore immigrant experiences in an age of globalization and transnational identities.

*Hardy Californians: A Woman's Life with Native Plants.* Expanded edition. By Lester Rowntree. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. lxxxii + 308 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$19.95 paper. This updated edition of the pioneering botanist's 1936 book includes descriptions of the flora of a number of California environments. The book also contains practical advice pertaining to the cultivation of native plants.

*Making the Americas: The United States and Latin America from the Age of Revolutions to the Era of Globalization.* By Thomas F. O'Brien. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 390 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95 paper. O'Brien draws on the rich literature on international relations to examine how Americans have sought to transform Latin America over the past two centuries. He examines the development of the process of Americanization and the responses it has engendered.

*Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgment Process.* By Mark Edwin Miller. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xii + 355 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 paper. Miller explores the historical development of the process by which the federal government determines whether a Native American community receives official recognition as a tribe. Four chapters provide case studies of Indian struggles to achieve federal recognition.

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