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Multiform segregation in the context of the urban crises in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, 1930 - 1980

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MULTIFORM SEGREGATION IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE URBAN CRISES IN LAS VEGAS AND
LOS ANGELES, 1930 – 1980

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Boston College
2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in History
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ABSTRACT

Multiform Segregation in the Context of the Urban Crises in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, 1930 – 1980

by

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Multiform segregation in the context of the urban crises was a complex socio-historical phenomenon. The primary focus of this study addresses racial segregation in at least three basic societal areas: housing, employment, and education. Through the spatial separation of multiple ethnoracial groups such as African Americans and Mexican Americans, multiform segregation precipitated the urban crises. In the 50-year period this study covers, Las Vegas and Los Angeles sustained a two-tiered class system according to the prevailing racial attitudes of each city's business elite. As a resort city, Las Vegas could not endure ethnoracial tensions while Los Angeles' industrial base provided the city with the socio-political capital necessary to withstand rioting. Research materials include oral interviews, newspaper articles, governmental reports, and scholarly manuscripts. The main conclusion of this study reveals that multiform segregation was a citywide process marked by crises such as housing shortages, labor disturbances, race riots, and underperforming schools.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The primary argument being put forth in my thesis centers on multiform segregation as a distinctly urban process that precipitated crises in housing, employment, and education. Although the urban crisis stemming from racially segregated public places, including hotels, parks, buses, and restaurants, was perhaps the most pervasive in mid-twentieth century American society, I will not consider it as part of my overall analysis. In effect, it was the close proximity of ethnoracial groups in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Los Angeles, California, that pushed different peoples to interact and interrelate. Yet after World War II, whites became increasingly absent from participating in race relations throughout these cities. That is, through suburbanization and white flight, Anglo Americans avoided interracial contact by leaving the city.

With its plethora of casinos and hotels, Las Vegas is the archetypal resort city. As for Los Angeles, the industrial base that exists around San Pedro and Long Beach will qualify the city as industrial for the purposes of my thesis. While Los Angeles could economically and politically endure race riots and labor strikes at times, Las Vegas could not. Its reliance on tourism meant that ethnoracial disturbances had to be minimized. The contrast derived from this industrial-resort paradigm holds vast implications for each city's race relations. Since this paradigm coincides with the urban ethnoracial framework, it serves as an important cross-reference when analyzing the intricacies of both multiform segregation and the urban crises.

Urban Ethnoracial Framework

The urban ethnoracial framework is perhaps best understood as a progression from ghettoization in the early twentieth century to race riots in the mid-twentieth century. Even though urban ethnoracial history overlaps with the traditional Montgomery-to-Memphis framework of the Civil Rights Movement, it is consistently viewed by scholars as a separate entity altogether. The reasoning behind their distinctive separation ultimately resides in the regional differences that arise when studying African-American urban history. For example, since this study investigates two Western cities, references to Martin Luther King, Jr. or Fannie Lou Hamer or any other Southern civil rights leader will be kept to a minimum. That is, the Civil Rights Movement was predominantly a Southern phenomenon while urban ethnoracial history occurred first in Northern cities like Chicago and New York, but later in Western cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

Although this thesis mostly addresses African Americans and Los Angeles' Mexican Americans, there is certainly a need for future research on Asian Americans. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, a concerted effort to deemphasize race in American society developed. Sociologists such as William Julius Wilson have deemed class consciousness and social stratification as bigger indicators of economic success than race. Such socio-economic postulates are becoming increasingly popular in a political climate that stresses a color blind approach to judicial matters. Yet recognizing race in American society is essential for preserving the republican values upon which the United States thrives. It ultimately becomes a viable means for addressing the various inequities that exist between certain ethnoracial groups.

Definition of Key Concepts

For the purposes of this thesis, there are several key concepts that merit clarification. The differences between segregation, desegregation, integration, and discrimination ought to be clearly defined. These terms are key components of this thesis' main argument, which deems multiform segregation a distinctly urban process that spurred the urban crises. Multiform segregation consists of a unique combination of the aforementioned terms; all of which are socio-political processes. While segregation is the systematic separation of racial groups either by law (*de jure*) or custom (*de facto*), desegregation represents the undoing of the separation that existed between racial groups. Integration, however, signifies the actual mending of racial inequities and it necessarily follows desegregation. Evaluating the effectiveness of integration is difficult, as the process should be about more than just having members of different races sitting in the same classroom or living in the same neighborhood.

Like integration, discrimination embodies a certain degree of difficulty when evaluating. It is often considered synonymous with segregation, especially in the realm of housing. But discrimination is surely distinctive from segregation in the area of employment. As a socio-political process marked by racial privilege and labor segmentation, discrimination is perhaps best understood in the context of change over time. In the reindustrializing period of World War II, blacks and Mexicans comprised an underprivileged and segmented labor force. They held separate posts in factories and lived in separate quarters. Ultimately, I believe racial discrimination changed in the deindustrializing postwar era, as ethnoracial groups like blacks and Mexicans faced labor exclusion in their ghettos and barrios.

Reasoning of Timeframe

The years 1930 and 1980 can serve as beginning and end points for this thesis. Ghettoization for African Americans and barrioization for Mexican Americans became largely solidified by the 1930s while voluntary desegregation replaced mandatory busing by the 1980s. After World War I, massive rural-to-urban migrations occurred among certain racial groups, particularly African Americans. These migrations mainly altered urban populations in Northern cities like Chicago and New York, but Las Vegas and Los Angeles also began to receive Southern blacks. Construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s and World War II defense spending in the 1940s brought great numbers of blacks to the Southwest. The Bracero Program saw the importation of Mexicans, primarily in California, for temporary contract labor between the 1940s and the 1960s. This mass influx of racial minorities into Southwestern cities certainly affected race relations.

Race relations, especially in Los Angeles, were chaotic during the 1940s and 1960s. These two decades are the central focus of Chapter 3, which covers race riots and the ghetto underclass. Residential segregation and labor segmentation appeared to be the riots' primary precipitants. Yet Los Angeles' Zoot Suit Riots in 1943 and Watts Riots in 1965 contained implications that stretched beyond racial injustice. They symbolized the failure of municipal governance, especially in the area of public services. This idea directly incited the push to desegregate many of America's urban public school systems on a mandatory basis. Without integrated schools, children of segregated backgrounds could never develop the kind of mutual respect for each other demanded by a democratic society like the United States.

Comparative Urban History's Pitfalls

Comparative urban history is a relatively new field of study. Its origins date back to the mid-nineteenth century. Charles Dickens' 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities* was probably one of the earliest examples of comparative urban analysis, but not in a scholarly, albeit academic, manner. The field requires a focused framework to mold one's analysis into a reasonable study. And therein resides the first pitfall. Urban historians who undertake a comparative approach must be wary in choosing an analytical framework that relates to the cities being examined and their areas of interests as scholars. A second pitfall, which is contingent upon the first, involves the application of one's framework to every aspect of each city's history. There are, however, occasional anomalies in a city's history that simply will not fit into any analytical framework.

Fortunately, these pitfalls can be mitigated by relating the local issues of each city to the larger issues of the nation. This methodology for mitigating comparative urban pitfalls necessitates a comprehensive overview of the historiographical materials surrounding a given topic. For example, a sizable historiography exists concerning school desegregation following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Court battles over school desegregation became big areas of ethnoracial contention in Las Vegas and Los Angeles in 1972 (*Kelly case*) and 1976 (*Crawford case*), respectively. Therefore, I think the extent to which *Brown* influenced the legal outcomes of each city's court cases constitutes an overarching connection that can serve as a major point of inter-city analysis while writing a comparative urban history.

CHAPTER 2

A PRELUDE TO THE CRISES: HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

SEGREGATION IN LAS VEGAS AND

LOS ANGELES, 1930 – 1960

Introduction

Investigating housing and employment segregation in Las Vegas and Los Angeles helps urban historians to identify the primary precipitants of each city's race riots and school desegregation. I tried to structure my thesis like a chronological crescendo, as it covers increasingly bitter aspects of both cities' urban ethnorracial history until drastic measures occur. And perhaps the biggest indicators of looming violence are housing and employment segregation. As tangible commodities that contain what historians John Logan and Harvey Molotch call "use" and "exchange" values, housing and employment are essential components of a person's economic and social vitality.¹ They embody and even determine the nature of class consciousness among residents in any given community. But when housing and employment segregation produced heightened levels of racial tension, especially in the post-World War II era, people began to react forcefully.

Unlike school segregation, housing and employment segregation were deeply ingrained in American society. The school desegregation debate began in 1850 with the *Roberts v. Boston* case while housing desegregation did not start in the courts until the early twentieth century and finally reached the Supreme Court in 1948 with *Shelley v. Kraemer*. Aside from court cases, property rights have an aura of

¹ John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1.

permanence to them. In fact, they are perceived by some Lockean idealists as indelible rights of Nature. Yet property typically cannot be acquired without labor. That is, people must work to attain enough capital for the purchasing of property. Therefore, housing and employment generally go hand-in-hand when considering their collective societal impact. Although this chapter addresses housing and employment segregation, there will be a greater emphasis on segregated housing due to the widespread socio-political implications that it holds for American society as a whole. The primary problem facing segregated housing and employment, however, resides in the separate, and thus, unequal systems that developed in urban environments according to race. In short, just as school desegregation meant forced busing, housing and employment segregation signified ghettoization for African Americans and barrioization for Mexican Americans.

People, Property, and Labor

Before investigating the housing and employment segregation in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, it is important to examine the historiographical implications of urban and suburban space. In 1947, African-American sociologists Herman H. Long and Charles S. Johnson published *People vs. Property: Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing*. This work typified how black ghettos formed in urban environments through the effective use of housing covenants. For the most part, these covenants represented a binding legal obligation written into the housing deed that imposed various stipulations from the seller onto the buyer. Such obligations often contained elements of racial restriction whereby the seller of a house could not sell it to a buyer

of color. It was these racial restrictions that entrenched residential segregation into American society. And it was these racial restrictions that certain African-American constituencies sought to overturn in 1948 with *Shelley v. Kraemer*. But little progress occurred until the 1968 Civil Rights Act, which provided the legislative teeth needed to minimize legally the effects of race restrictive housing covenants. Yet as Long and Johnson found, housing covenants spurred the formation of “racial islands” in cities where black neighborhoods became “ill-kept and unsightly.”²

To explain their findings, Long and Johnson enumerate a variety of problematic features associated with urban black ghettos. Two of these features, however, seem to be recurring themes, as they occur “in every major American city.”³ The first involves the idea of black neighborhoods being “located in the oldest part of the city” while the second entails the notion of blacks as perpetual renters.⁴ These ideas date back to the First Great Migration during World War I when African Americans fled the rural South in favor of the urban North. In general, the areas where they settled in Northern cities were former neighborhoods of European immigrants “such as the Little Italys and Little Bohemias.”⁵ Blacks therefore tended to occupy the leftover apartments and tenement complexes as the white immigrants eventually spread to the city’s outlying areas. Yet this concept of neighborhood replacement came at a high social cost for African Americans.

² Herman H. Long and Charles S. Johnson, *People vs. Property: Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing* (Nashville: Fisk University Press, 1947), 4. This sociological work was particularly groundbreaking because it represented one of the first studies done by African Americans on racially restrictive housing covenants. In fact, it reinforced the idea that African Americans disproportionately experienced the ills of poverty due to limited housing opportunities in urban environments.

³ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 2.

⁴ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 2-3.

⁵ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 2.

The high social cost facing urban blacks primarily stemmed from the racial isolation they experienced while sequestered in a ghetto. According to Long and Johnson, the “social costs of segregation” reside “in the isolation of one part of the community from another.”⁶ This idea represented the basic objective of racial segregation. Isolating ethnoracial groups in urban environments served to maintain a stratified societal structure where certain peoples are guaranteed privileges at the expense of others. The ultimate goal, therefore, behind a sociological study such as Long and Johnson’s centered on examining the opportunity costs experienced by everyday African Americans.

Opportunity costs signified the biggest hindrances to racial equality that African Americans encountered when considering housing segregation. That is, urban blacks had less economic opportunities than Anglo Americans, and thus, they had a lower social class standing. The examination of opportunity costs helps urban historians to uncover the human agency component behind the collective struggle of inner-city African Americans against residential segregation. In effect, through various Jim Crow statutes, middle-class whites became juxtaposed on the same socio-economic scale as upper-class blacks. The differentiation in social class scales corresponds directly to the notion of “congestion” in black sections of American cities. While some sociologists viewed residential congestion as a negative symptom of racial segregation, others saw it as emblematic of communal development. The latter idea became a fundamental tenet in Earl Lewis’ 1993 book *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*. Unlike Long and Johnson, Lewis deemed residential segregation as a vital mechanism for

⁶ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 7.

helping newly immigrated Southern blacks cope with the trials of rural-to-urban “chain migration.”⁷

As a complex sociological phenomenon, chain migration involves the existence of kinship networks among migrating individuals. For example, a migrant might have both a prearranged place of residence and employment prior to embarking on his journey. The chain migration that occurred between Northern and Southern African Americans has probably been over-examined by scholars. But that certainly does not preclude it as a topic for future research. Although it may have produced congestion in black areas of American cities like Chicago and New York, rural-to-urban chain migration was an instrumental aspect of creating viable African-American communities and workforces. In the case of Los Angeles, however, the rural-to-urban paradigm became reversed as historian Douglas Flamming uncovered evidence to suggest that many black Angelenos had migrated from Southern cities like Atlanta, Georgia.⁸

Aside from Flamming’s inter-regional study of chain migration in early twentieth century America, other ghetto synthesis surveys like Gilbert Osofsky’s *Harlem* have examined foreign-based chain migration. In the case of Harlem’s African-American population, Osofsky found that discrimination became institutionalized when southern blacks began to settle the once white neighborhood after 1900.⁹ But the migration of Caribbean blacks into what eventually became

⁷ Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth- Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 31-32.

⁸ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 40-41.

⁹ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890 – 1930*, 2nd Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 131.

Spanish Harlem during and after World War I further reinforced the Jim Crow process already underway. The racial infighting that ensued between Harlem's American blacks and Caribbean blacks became emblematic of the larger housing and employment struggles facing African Americans in cities. Therefore, the American black ghetto possessed a stratified social structure, which not only confined its inhabitants to a specified urban area behind invisible walls, but also forced residents to endure the sometimes harmful effects that chain migration had on housing segregation.

But the connection between chain migration and housing segregation is not well-defined in the historiographical scholarship yet. Long and Johnson address the connection by stating that “new waves of Negro migration to the North and West have swelled Negro populations in the cities to uncomfortable proportions.”¹⁰ Ghettos had become overcrowded and there was a “general housing shortage” among African Americans in Northern and Western cities.¹¹ Like Gunnar Myrdal, who in 1944 argued that racial segregation contradicted the American Creed, Long and Johnson further that claim by contending that “the prevalent policy of enforced racial separation in housing” had become “a disturbing threat and challenge to the democratic tradition itself.”¹² In a 1932 report by the U.S. government's Committee on Negro Housing, Johnson depicted urban black residences as congested,

¹⁰ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 102.

¹¹ Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 102.

¹² Long and Johnson, *People vs. Property*, 103.

dilapidated, and unsanitary.¹³ In many American cities, black neighborhoods existed alongside areas of heavy industry, which negatively affected property values.

Isolated neighborhoods in urban environments with heavy industry are the prototypical aspects of ethnoracial housing segregation. The images of an African-American ghetto or a Mexican-American barrio spring to mind when considering residential segregation in cities. But the relationship between ghetto formation and housing segregation has not been analyzed in depth by urban ethnoracial historians. This relationship ought to merit greater attention in urban ethnoracial historiography as time progresses. The primary question facing urban ethnoracial historians, however, involves ghetto types. For example, given its proximity to the manufacturing processes occurring around San Pedro and Long Beach, black Los Angeles (Watts) became an industrial ghetto with disputes over labor and housing. Alternatively, given its dearth of industry, black Las Vegas (Westside) was a residential ghetto driven by a combination of internal and external forces surrounding the local casinos and hotels.

Ghetto types are important insofar as they help urban historians to frame the various complexities inherent in housing segregation. Perhaps the first and most complete study of the African-American ghetto is Kenneth Clark's *Dark Ghetto* (1965). As a trained psychologist, Clark considered the ghetto to be an "institutionalized pathology" that terrorized the psyches of black folk and perpetuated

¹³ Charles S. Johnson, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, eds. John M. Gries and James Ford (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 26-27. This 1932 report prepared by Charles S. Johnson for the U.S. government addresses the potential housing crisis facing black Americans in urban environments.

vicious cycles of poverty, crime, and suicide.¹⁴ Aside from the industrial and residential ghetto types, Clark provides historians with the pathological ghetto type. Although all ghettos are urban by definition, their type depends largely on the local environment. Also, while ascertaining ghetto types, urban ethnoracial historians should acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of their scholarly field by recognizing the socio-economic, psychological, and political elements of it.

Another frequently overlooked aspect of the relationship between housing segregation and ghetto formation is organized labor. Since people tend to live where they work, employment and housing become intricately connected. In effect, the role that trade unions played in determining blue-collar employment opportunities for urban minorities was significant. Due to a low rate of higher education among urban minorities, manual labor jobs were their primary means of economic survival. According to labor historian James Olson, the basic structure of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was one of the country's earliest and largest labor federations, "prevented uniform levels of racial justice in unions throughout the nation."¹⁵ This idea encapsulates the uphill battle facing many ethnic minorities on the blue-collar employment front. Fortunately for blacks, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) often served as a "viable alternative to [the] industrial paternalism and union exclusion" of the AFL.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 81. This work is fundamental in the ghetto synthesis debate that occurs in urban ethnoracial history today. It builds, at least partially, on Clark's previous work with prejudice and children at his Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU), which was a social activist program designed to create greater prospects of education and employment for black youths.

¹⁵ James S. Olson, "Race, Class, and Progress: Black Leadership and Industrial Unionism, 1936-1945," in *Black Labor in America*, ed. Milton Cantor (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 153.

¹⁶ Olson, "Race, Class, and Progress," 154.

Aside from organized labor, the political economy of employment segregation was an additional factor in precipitating ghetto formation. For the most part, a political economy consists of a dynamic interplay between governance, production, consumption, and employment in any given city or state. Outside the African-American ghetto, black workers generally represented a colonized labor force that responded to the whims of “the white working class.”¹⁷ Inside the black ghetto, however, a distinctive political economy developed around the socio-economic values of communal patronage and self reliance. With respect to the urban labor market, the differences between the ghetto and the city at large were astounding. Historian Joe Trotter appropriately captured these differences in *Black Milwaukee*. His analysis of “the proletarianization of Milwaukee blacks” demonstrated an adept resourcefulness among the city’s African-American workers in an exclusive labor environment.¹⁸ As a process, proletarianization refers to the transition of an individual from employer to employee, and as such, it is particularly applicable to industrial ghettos like Watts in Los Angeles. Lastly, even though proletarianization was emblematic of downward social mobility, Trotter highlights the ability of Milwaukee’s blacks to embrace their condition and turn an otherwise negative employment outlook into a positive feature of ghetto cohesion.

¹⁷ William K. Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 115.

¹⁸ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 39. Like Gilbert Osofsky’s work on ghetto formation in the 1960s, Trotter’s book was groundbreaking in the historiography surrounding urban ethn racial history. His ghettoization model shifted the emphasis from external forces to internal ones. In other words, blacks became the central focus instead of laws and whites. He emphasized human agency in the study of African-American urban history. Prior to Trotter, urban blacks were victims in the large structural processes created and maintained by suburban whites. In short, Trotter’s book was the first to react and upend the ghetto synthesis literature of the 1960s and 1970s.

Black Las Vegas

Multiform segregation in Las Vegas was an intricate sociological process. It entailed the systematic separation of racial groups in the areas of education, employment, and housing so as to create and maintain the privileges of one race over others. In a way, multiform segregation could only exist in urban environments. The proximity of varying races to one another precipitated the kind of laws necessary to subjugate and confine ethnic peoples in urban spaces. Las Vegas serves as an important case study for examining multiform segregation in the West. It possesses a segmented labor force with evidence of residential segregation. From education to employment to housing, racial segregation has existed in America since the first African-American slaves arrived in 1619. But according to historian C. Vann Woodward, it was not until the 1890s that segregation became codified in laws when “the bi-racial partnership of Populism began to dissolve in frustration and bitterness.”¹⁹

In an effort to gain a greater understanding of Las Vegas’ multiform segregation, it becomes necessary to investigate the Jim Crow South. This region produced segregationist laws that were not entirely new. These laws solidified thirty years of customary segregation based on the racial affinities of Southerners that existed from the late 1860s to the late 1890s. Jim Crow segregation, on the whole, constituted a severe impediment to the fluidity of social relations. Blacks and whites had to follow strict patterns of behavior in both public and private spaces. For example, “up and down the avenues and byways of Southern life appeared with

¹⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 80.

increasing profusion the little signs: 'Whites Only' or 'Colored.'"²⁰ These signs made a clear statement that even though the North won the Civil War, the South prevailed in Reconstruction. While the North attempted to rehabilitate the South in its secessionist ways, the South infected the North and eventually the West with its institutionalized racism. And even though Jim Crow was originally a Northern theatrical concoction, it symbolized a racial mockery that placed whites over blacks.

Racial segregation was a sociological phenomenon that involved all races. Yet the starkest contrast, and thus, gravest inequities, occurred primarily between African Americans (blacks) and Anglo Americans (whites) in the United States. Due to its agrarian society, segregation in the South was a predominantly rural occurrence. In the North, however, segregation was urban, as its cities contained the largest population bases of African Americans. Racial tensions occasionally erupted into violence which caused economic strife and drove many Southerners from their homes. Blacks and whites alike emigrated from the South to both the Northern and Western regions of the country. By the 1930s, Southern Nevada was a particularly favored destination for unemployed Southerners.

The construction of Hoover Dam (originally called Boulder Dam) attracted an increasing number of black and white Southerners to Clark County, Nevada. These Southerners brought both their linguistic twang and their racial customs. Due to their growing presence, Nevada eventually achieved unwarranted notoriety in the media as "the Mississippi of the West."²¹ But this description was largely inaccurate for it implied that Nevada possessed statewide *de jure* (legal) segregation. When Jim Crow

²⁰ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 98.

²¹ James W. Hulse, *The Silver State: Nevada's Heritage Reinterpreted*, 3rd Edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 308.

did appear in the state, it tended to be highly localized. Even though economic motives primarily drove African Americans to the West, many emigrated to escape the institutional racism of the South. Yet according to historian James Hulse, employment discrimination initially confronted black Las Vegans in 1931, as “the Six Companies, builders of the Hoover Dam, refused to hire blacks on their construction crews.”²² Making matters worse for black Nevadans was the fact that Boulder City, a company town for dam workers, had corporate stipulations that required it to remain all-white.²³

With its single-race demographic, Boulder City appeased Southern white dam workers and frustrated blacks. In 1932, after a year of discriminatory hiring practices, the Six Companies employed its first black laborers to work on the dam. But these African Americans still faced housing discrimination in Boulder City, and thus, they had to commute from Las Vegas on a daily basis. The combination of employment and housing discrimination was actually quite foreign to black Nevadans in the Las Vegas Valley. Yet it was this combination that permitted the feeble barrier between discrimination and segregation to disintegrate. Customary segregation, therefore, became contingent upon the precedents set by the types of racial discrimination that black Las Vegans faced.

Prior to the 1930s, “there was no sign of housing or social segregation in Las Vegas,” at least on a legal level.²⁴ The city’s lack of racial discrimination in the 1910s and 1920s resulted from its relatively small population of African Americans.

²² Hulse, *Silver State*, 307.

²³ Roosevelt Fitzgerald, “The Evolution of a Black Community in Las Vegas: 1905-1940” (Unpublished paper: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1981), 13.

²⁴ “Las Vegas’ Black Pioneers,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (4 June 1972), 29.

Even by 1940, there were only about 200 black residents in Las Vegas.²⁵ Despite such a seemingly negligible population, many white Las Vegans still pushed to segregate the city's African Americans. Given their small numbers, black Las Vegans were almost a kind of anomaly. Nevertheless, Las Vegas' early black settlers consistently experienced the evils of racism. Multifarm segregation did not become a sociological aspect of Las Vegas' burgeoning urban life until the Great Depression. But it was ultimately World War II (WWII) that accelerated the processes of residential and employment segregation in the Las Vegas Valley.

Abraham Mitchell was one of the earliest black settlers in the Las Vegas Valley. He acquired a sizable plot of land for dryland farming under the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act.²⁶ This federal law specifically targeted regions of the country with little rainfall, and thus, it increased the number of acres that a prospective farmer could potentially own. Mitchell's farm mainly produced vegetables that he sold in town where the Los Angeles and Salt Lake (LA&SL) Railroad had its Las Vegas station. Other early black Las Vegans, like Joe Lightfoot, were able to own land and maintain jobs, especially with the railroad.²⁷ But as the city's black population grew, so did the presence of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK). In 1924, the KKK organized a parade down Fremont Street.²⁸ For the most part, this parade appeared to have a two-fold purpose. First, it demonstrated that white supremacy was the reactionary populist attitude of white Las Vegans who felt threatened by blacks in the Downtown area. Second, it signaled civic leaders to

²⁵ Fitzgerald, "Black Community in Las Vegas," 12.

²⁶ "Las Vegas' Black Pioneers," 29.

²⁷ "Las Vegas' Black Pioneers," 29.

²⁸ "Klan Parade," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (14 November 1924), 1.

initiate a process whereby blacks would be systematically separated from whites, particularly with regard to Downtown businesses.

As economic conditions deteriorated in Las Vegas and across the country during the 1930s, “white townsmen informally supported efforts to move blacks from Fremont Street to the old Westside section across the railroad tracks.”²⁹ Historian Eugene Moehring wrote, “everyone knew that at least for the next two decades, most commercial and residential development would take place primarily east of the railroad lines.”³⁰ The city grew toward Hoover Dam, as it represented Las Vegas’ main source of cheap power and decent jobs. Therefore, black Las Vegas moving to the Westside (West Las Vegas) faced the prospects of both economic and residential isolation. As early as 1932, the Westside became known as the “Negro Quarter.”³¹ This label insinuated that “illegal activities” like bootlegging plagued the area.³² With an ill-reputed image, Westside property values “failed to keep pace with the citywide appreciation of real estate.”³³

Westside land values decreased as the black population increased. This inverse relationship became especially clear at the onset of World War II. In June 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which stated “that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or

²⁹ Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930 – 2000*, 2nd Edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 176. This book probably offers the most comprehensive examination of Las Vegas’ history during the twentieth century. From early boosterism to infrastructure development to civil rights, historian Eugene Moehring depicts the complex social costs and processes behind the creation of a resort city in the desert. The origins of Las Vegas’ enormous growth over the past two decades are clearly laid out in Moehring’s work.

³⁰ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 176.

³¹ “Negro Quarter,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (25 January 1932), 3.

³² “Illegal Activities,” *Las Vegas Review Journal* (25 January 1932), 3.

³³ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 176.

government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”³⁴ The primary reasoning behind Executive Order 8802 was interest convergence whereby the interests of all Americans, regardless of race, converged over the issue of national defense. Interest convergence increased efficiency in the defense industry by meeting labor demands with workers from all ethnic backgrounds. Southern Nevada experienced a labor boom with the 1937 construction of a processing plant for Basic Magnesium, Inc., (BMI) in Henderson. Between 1941 and 1943, approximately 4,000 African Americans arrived in Southern Nevada to work either at BMI or in other WWII-related industries.³⁵ Such a demographic shift resulted in a housing crisis for the Westside, as its “black population exceeded 3,000, thanks to the recruitment efforts of Basic Magnesium.”³⁶

Magnesium was one of the magic metals for aircraft production. When combined with aluminum, it formed a light-weight alloy that was ideal for fuselages and wings. Gabbs, Nevada, in Northwestern Nye County, contained high-grade magnesium ore deposits. BMI mined and trucked the magnesium ore down U.S. Highway 95 into Henderson for processing at its plant. The cheap hydroelectricity of Hoover Dam served as the main impetus for constructing the BMI plant in Henderson. After processing, BMI shipped the magnesium to aerospace firms like Northrop and Hughes Aircraft in Southern California. The intricacies of magnesium mining and processing brought around 13,000 jobs to Henderson, which was to

³⁴ Daniel S. Davis, *Mr. Black Labor: The Story of A. Philip Randolph* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), 109.

³⁵ Roosevelt Fitzgerald, “A Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium on Southern Nevada” (Unpublished paper: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1982), 9.

³⁶ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 177.

overtake Las Vegas as the largest city in Clark County.³⁷ Yet black workers at the Henderson plant faced residential segregation. BMI built only about 300 residences for African-American employees at Carver Park, which was east of Boulder Highway and separate from the white residences.³⁸ To casual observers, it seemed as though these African Americans had become passive victims in an active process of corporate segregation.

But blacks in Carver Park and West Las Vegas did not necessarily perceive themselves as victims. One such resident of the Westside was Lubertha Johnson. She arrived in the Las Vegas Valley with her family in 1943 during the labor boom occasioned by Basic Magnesium.³⁹ As a result of employment discrimination, Johnson held a variety of jobs. She first worked as a social worker in Carver Park, named for George Washington Carver, a peanut scientist at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Her work led her to conclude that “most of the black migrants who came seeking jobs in the metal industries were originally from two Southern states, Arkansas and Louisiana.”⁴⁰ For Johnson, this conclusion helped to explain the employment discrimination facing most blacks in Henderson.⁴¹ In addition, Carver Park’s housing segregation only exacerbated the fact that “blacks were usually given less desirable dirty jobs” at BMI.⁴²

³⁷ Fitzgerald, “Impact of Basic Magnesium on Southern Nevada,” 9.

³⁸ Fitzgerald, “Impact of Basic Magnesium on Southern Nevada,” 9.

³⁹ Elizabeth Nelson Patrick and Rita O’Brien, “Abstracts of Oral Interviews,” *Black Experience in Southern Nevada* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 1978), 4. As an oral interview project, the *Black Experience in Southern Nevada* truly captures the attitudes and opinions of everyday black Las Vegans toward Jim Crow segregation. It aided my attempt to construct a comprehensive social history.

⁴⁰ Patrick and O’Brien, “Abstracts of Oral Interviews,” 4.

⁴¹ Patrick and O’Brien, “Abstracts of Oral Interviews,” 4.

⁴² Patrick and O’Brien, “Abstracts of Oral Interviews,” 4.

Johnson's story epitomized the plight of other black Las Vegans living in the Westside. She became a staunch advocate of African-American civil rights, as her 40-year membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) indicated.⁴³ Johnson felt that with enough hard work and determination, every discriminatory obstacle could be overcome. Yet by the 1950s, the Westside still lacked adequate housing and municipal services such as water and sewer facilities. In response, she joined "the Human Rights Commission of the City of Las Vegas" to address the housing crisis in the Westside.⁴⁴ Johnson believed that part of the problem for black Las Vegans resided in the difficulty of securing mortgages.⁴⁵ Las Vegas' banks were hesitant to lend money to African Americans, which primarily stemmed from the vestiges of New Deal practices like redlining. In this regard, Las Vegas was similar to other American cities.

Another Westside resident who endured the effects of customary segregation was Sarah Ann Knight. Her family came to Las Vegas in 1942, after her father obtained employment in Henderson. She stated that there was "no housing over on the Westside" and that people had to either live in tents or "sleep in the streets."⁴⁶ Knight's family was fortunate enough to live in "little shacks," but they had to walk "as much as five blocks to haul water."⁴⁷ Automobile traffic in the Westside was sparse, as there were no paved streets. Like Johnson, Knight also recalled how

⁴³ Patrick and O'Brien, "Abstracts of Oral Interviews," 4.

⁴⁴ Patrick and O'Brien, "Abstracts of Oral Interviews," 4.

⁴⁵ Patrick and O'Brien, "Abstracts of Oral Interviews," 4.

⁴⁶ Rita O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads: A Forum," *Nevada Humanities Committee* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 1977), 5. This source provides a transcript of a forum on the relationship between black civil rights and the Westside. Various African-American residents of the Westside spoke at the forum. They mainly recalled the traumatic events of their lives under Jim Crow.

⁴⁷ O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads," 6.

difficult it was for black Las Vegans to obtain bank loans.⁴⁸ As a result, many Westside blacks simply built their own homes out of any sturdy materials that they could find. The *ad hoc* manner in which the Westside's homes and streets developed contributed greatly to its reputation as a slum. But the fact that the Westside contained only African Americans made it a ghetto.

By the early 1950s, multiform segregation in the Westside was firmly in place. After working as a dealer in the segregated Cotton Club, Knight fled Las Vegas in favor of Hawthorne. She mistakenly believed that racial segregation was not as prevalent in Nevada's rural communities.⁴⁹ Although Knight and her husband built a respectable restaurant and casino business that catered primarily to black laborers at the Naval Ammunition Depot (NAD), they consistently faced bomb threats from their white neighbors.⁵⁰ In 1957, Knight decided to move back to Las Vegas only to discover that the city was more segregated than before she left. At that time, it became eminently clear to many Westside blacks that Las Vegas was approaching a breaking point with respect to race relations. Given that public accommodations on the Strip were still off limits to African Americans meant it was time for blacks to take action.⁵¹

As members of the NAACP, Johnson and Knight sought to end segregation in education, employment, and housing. The NAACP first organized a local chapter in Las Vegas in October 1918.⁵² Under the guidance of Leland Hawkins in the 1930s, it investigated the discriminatory hiring practices of the Six Companies on the Hoover

⁴⁸ O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads," 6.

⁴⁹ O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads," 8.

⁵⁰ O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads," 8.

⁵¹ O'Brien, "West Las Vegas at the Crossroads," 9.

⁵² Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 174.

Dam project.⁵³ In the 1940s and 1950s, the Las Vegas NAACP maintained its primary focus on ending employment segregation. Without jobs, black Las Vegans were unable to acquire adequate capital for fighting segregation in education and housing. Consequently, Johnson's NAACP efforts mainly concerned the segregated elementary schools in the Westside, while Knight's involvement mostly related to black voter registration.⁵⁴ In short, it was the varying interests of the Las Vegas NAACP's members which ultimately pushed the organization to attack all forms of segregation by the 1960s.

The president of the Las Vegas NAACP in 1960 was Dr. James McMillan. Originally from Mississippi, he came to Las Vegas in the mid-1950s after being discharged from serving as a dentist in the U.S. Army.⁵⁵ Along with Dr. Charles West, a medical doctor, McMillan was one of the only African-American professionals in the city. He opened a dental practice on West Bonanza Road and bought a house on Wyatt Avenue.⁵⁶ Both of these locations were inside the boundaries of the Westside, which included A Street on the East, Bonanza Road on the South, Highland Avenue (now Martin Luther King Boulevard) on the West, and Lake Mead Boulevard on the North. The traditional boundaries of the Westside ghetto have expanded since the 1950s, but the core streets remain. Unfortunately for

⁵³ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 175.

⁵⁴ Patrick and O'Brien, "Abstracts of Oral Interviews," 4-6.

⁵⁵ James McMillan, *Fighting Back: A Life in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, ed. R.T. King (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1997), xii. This source offers a firsthand account of Dr. James McMillan's life through various oral interviews. The book mostly reads like a transcript with frequent quotations. It was helpful in situating C. Vann Woodward's thesis, which regarded the expansion of Jim Crow segregation from an idea to an institution. McMillan's life was a testament to the application of Woodward's thesis in Las Vegas. In that sense, the city had "more Jim Crowism than Jim Crow laws." Mayor Oran Gragson did not want McMillan to organize the same civil rights demonstrations that were occurring in other U.S. cities, especially since they would have crippled Las Vegas' tourist industry. The most poignant part of the book centers on the discussions of a desegregation agreement between McMillan and Gragson in February 1960.

⁵⁶ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 71.

McMillan, his dental practice on the corner of Bonanza and H Street saw no business during its first month of operation.⁵⁷ In order to attract more black business, he stayed open later, increased his involvement in the Las Vegas NAACP, and helped start the city's first African-American newspaper.⁵⁸

Modeled after the *Chicago Defender*, the newspaper began operation in 1957. McMillan and West provided the initial funding; they were among the few black Las Vegans with enough economic resources to initiate and oversee such a task.⁵⁹ Originally called *The Missile*, the newspaper's name changed to *The Voice* in 1963 when West acquired full financial control.⁶⁰ The primary purpose of *The Voice* was to bring positive news on a weekly basis to Las Vegas' black community.⁶¹ It instructed African Americans living in the Westside to pool their money together in a collective effort to fight multiform segregation throughout the city.⁶² Since McMillan first published the newspaper out of the local NAACP office, he used it to transmit updates on the desegregation battle. This communication method helped instill a sense of immediacy in black Las Vegans, particularly with regard to civil rights issues.

In February 1960, McMillan received instructions from the national NAACP office to organize against all forms of segregation in the region.⁶³ As a result, he wrote a letter to Mayor Oran Gragson in March 1960, which threatened a black

⁵⁷ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 71.

⁵⁸ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 78-80.

⁵⁹ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 80.

⁶⁰ McMillan *Fighting Back*, 81.

⁶¹ Frances D. Powell, "The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice: Nevada's Largest and Most Complete Black Community Newspaper" (Unpublished paper: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1982), 1.

⁶² Powell, "The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice," 1.

⁶³ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 91.

boycott of public accommodations on the Strip.⁶⁴ The boycott would also be accompanied by a civil rights march on Las Vegas Boulevard (The Strip).⁶⁵ According to McMillan, his letter would not have received the amount of attention that it did if it was not for Hank Greenspun.⁶⁶ As editor and publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun*, Greenspun ran a story on McMillan's letter. It garnered an immediate response from Mayor Gragson who called a special meeting with McMillan and many of the city's business leaders. Yet the mayor "abruptly canceled the meeting (scheduled for March 23) after some political and business leaders expressed fears that it could become a fertile ground for hot-headed agitators."⁶⁷

After the meeting's cancellation, the potential for a civil rights demonstration appeared high. But "word came on March 26 that the city would order the integration of all public places within municipal borders and the Strip would voluntarily follow suit."⁶⁸ McMillan did not have to act on his threats of a black boycott and march. As a resort city that relied heavily on tourism for revenue, Las Vegas simply could not afford to handle race-based disturbances. Tourists would have refused to visit a city mired in a civil rights war. Although McMillan enjoyed the initial fruits of his civil rights victory, he began to question whether an integrated Las Vegas actually benefited the black community.⁶⁹ From an economic viewpoint, McMillan believed that integration only helped white businesses flourish and black businesses suffer.⁷⁰

This mentality was similar to Malcolm X's rejection of civil rights, as he felt that civil

⁶⁴ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 92-93.

⁶⁵ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 93-94.

⁶⁶ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 92.

⁶⁷ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 185.

⁶⁸ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 185.

⁶⁹ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 137-39

⁷⁰ McMillan, *Fighting Back*, 137-39.

rights ultimately helped whites sustain their power structure. Prior to integration, black Las Vegans had a distinctive place to call their own. As an insulated neighborhood, the Westside represented a unique cultural milieu for the underprivileged. But that was precisely what black Las Vegans had to relinquish in the name of equality. In short, the drive for racial equality in black Las Vegas did not end in March 1960, as problems ranging from welfare rights to segregated schools continued to plague Westside residents.

Multiethnic Los Angeles

Unlike Las Vegas, Los Angeles' multiform segregation involved multiple ethnoracial groups. Due to the wide array of ethnoracial groups living in Southern California in the 1930s and 1940s, Los Angeles' multiform segregation was also multiethnic. In effect, African Americans were not the only racial group affected by the city's multiform segregation, as Mexican Americans encountered it as well. Isolated pockets of residential and employment segregation existed in the traditional black and Mexican neighborhoods of South Central and East Los Angeles, respectively. For the most part, I believe there are two schools of thought regarding Los Angeles' multiethnic segregation. Either segregation was a systemic by-product of the city's expansive growth during the early twentieth century or it was a necessary evil in an attempt to control that growth. Perhaps Los Angeles' annexation efforts did the most to further these two schools of thought.

In the 1910s and 1920s, Los Angeles embarked on a major annexation process to consolidate what were mainly unincorporated communities in its vicinity. While

Las Vegas failed to annex the lands south of Sahara Avenue, by the 1930s, Los Angeles had grown to around 450 square miles due to annexation. On the whole, annexation growth was coercive since it typically stemmed from a survival-of-the-fittest mentality relating to municipal services. In Los Angeles, the primary precipitant behind its annexation growth was the completion of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1913. The unincorporated communities of the San Fernando Valley needed access to water, and thus, their options were either to incorporate and levy taxes to purchase water from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) or join the city of Los Angeles as an annexed community. A 1915 voter referendum by San Fernando Valley residents permitted Los Angeles to annex over 150 square miles of land for the purpose of gaining access to municipal water services. With the city acquiring large tracts of land through annexation, the drive to claim urban space among various ethnoracial groups became heightened.

The drive to claim Los Angeles' urban ethnoracial space occurred at an increased pace after each World War. Domestic chain migration from the East brought scores of African Americans westward. Whether their motives comprised finding work, securing housing, or escaping Jim Crow, black Angelenos increased from about 15,000 in 1920 to about 40,000 in 1930.⁷¹ Although this exponential increase of Los Angeles' black population continued at a similar rate in the 1950s and 1960s, the circumstances were different. Urban spaces had largely been claimed, but there is always a hint of temporality behind spatial relations, especially when considering ethnoracial groups. Watts, for example, was once a working-class white

⁷¹ J. Max Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1936), 35-39.

neighborhood driven by employment surrounding the railroad industry. African Americans, in fact, did not become the racial majority there until after World War II.

The earliest socio-historical studies to treat Watts and South Central Los Angeles as a black ghetto did not emerge until the 1970s. These early studies tended to highlight the external forces such as Jim Crow laws acting on urban blacks. In “The City of Black Angels,” historian Lawrence De Graaf claimed the study of black urban populations in the American West has been largely ignored because Western blacks constituted “only 2.2 percent of the nation’s Negro population” by 1940.⁷² However, the census had long recognized Los Angeles “as one of only two substantial Negro centers in the West.”⁷³ The two main questions De Graaf attempted to answer were: when did the city’s black community form a ghetto and why did it develop in the way it did.⁷⁴ To construct plausible solutions to the aforementioned questions, De Graaf drew an important distinction for the word “ghetto.” In general, a ghetto is either “an area which houses people concerned with the perpetuation of a peculiar (and different) culture” or “a slum neighborhood characterized by poverty and physical and social deterioration.”⁷⁵ Unlike most ethnoracial historians at the time, De Graaf embraced the former definition, which deemed Los Angeles’ black ghetto a positive force for culture creation.

By 1930, a black ghetto had emerged along Central Avenue (See Map II in Appendix). It predominantly consisted of “single-family dwelling units,” which led

⁷² Lawrence B. De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39, No. 3 (August 1970), 323. This scholarly article represents one of the first socio-historical examinations of Los Angeles’ black ghetto that grew along Central Avenue in the 1920s. Although De Graaf mentions the severe limitations of employment and housing for African Americans, he generally perceives the ghetto as a positive entity.

⁷³ De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels,” 324.

⁷⁴ De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels,” 324.

⁷⁵ De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels,” 324.

many onlookers “to conclude that the city had no extensive Negro slum.”⁷⁶ But Los Angeles’ rapid development in the early twentieth century had eclipsed black frustrations. Construction of railway lines and suburban expansion took priority over the social deterioration and racial confinement of particular ethnoracial groups. Still, there was an overwhelming sense of cultural cohesion in the residential settlement patterns of black Angelenos. Insofar as the ghetto formation process required racial unity, the city’s African-American population centralized in a manner that brought members of the same race together.⁷⁷

Similar to African-American ghetto formation, the development of Los Angeles’ Mexican barrio contained elements of both racial confinement and cultural cohesion. Neighborhood replacement affected the barrio, as Mexican Americans settled “along the Los Angeles River” east of Downtown in an unincorporated area “amid old housing tracts belonging to European ethnics of an earlier generation.”⁷⁸ Yet unlike the black ghetto, the Mexican barrio faced a linguistic barrier. For Mexican Americans, the Spanish language was undoubtedly a source of pride in the barrio, as it signified a form of covert resistance to the *de facto* English standards outside the barrio. Aside from linguistic discrimination, which limited housing and employment opportunities for Mexican Americans at times, the Eastside barrio was a place of architectural discrimination as well. For instance, features commonly associated with classical Spanish architecture, such as red-tile roofing and stucco,

⁷⁶ De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels,” 326.

⁷⁷ De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels,” 327.

⁷⁸ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), viii.

became adopted by white Angelenos to fashion their single-family homes in a manner that romanticized Los Angeles' Spanish (not Mexican) heritage.

The techniques of adopting and romanticizing Spanish architecture among white Angelenos were emblematic of a larger socio-political process. According to architectural historian Dana Cuff, that socio-political process was “slum clearance.”⁷⁹ In effect, slum clearance permitted city officials to diminish the prevalence of Los Angeles' Mexican past by gentrifying neighborhoods. To gentrify a neighborhood means to increase property values through building reconstruction and renovation. On the surface, gentrification may seem like a beneficent process, as it seeks to eradicate poverty by engendering wealth on a communal level. But the unintended consequences of gentrification often entail the removal of underclass ethnoracial groups in favor of wealthier residents. In short, “slum clearance” was merely the term used to describe urban renewal prior to the advent of the term “gentrification” in the mid-1960s.

Perhaps the most complex example of slum clearance in Los Angeles occurred at Chavez Ravine. Although not necessarily part of the Eastside barrio, the Chavez Ravine neighborhood largely contained Mexican Americans in public housing tenements. But in the early 1950s, Mayor Norris Poulson “was willing to do virtually anything” to attract the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles.⁸⁰ Poulson claimed that he was working on behalf of a “legion of backers” who wanted another professional sports team in addition to the Los Angeles Rams.⁸¹ Yet according to

⁷⁹ Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 104-11.

⁸⁰ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 297.

⁸¹ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 297.

Cuff, there was a severe backlash against public housing in the city at the time.⁸² And since Chavez Ravine was one of Los Angeles' public housing epicenters, Poulson believed that it was a prime real estate opportunity for developers like Fritz Burns to build a new stadium.⁸³ Burns and Poulson became close allies as "eminent domain proceedings" eventually evicted Mexican Angelenos from their tenements.⁸⁴ Ultimately, it was ironic for public housing opponents to argue that Chavez Ravine tenements represented "creeping socialism" while using eminent domain to acquire public land.⁸⁵

Public housing tracts like Chavez Ravine became increasingly prevalent after Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949. Even though the National Housing Act of 1934 had already established basic home loan provisions through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), the new law authorized large-scale federal funding for the creation of public housing complexes in municipalities. The 1949 law also guaranteed public funds to encourage both slum clearance and community redevelopment. In the case of Chavez Ravine, therefore, an incentive existed for Mayor Poulson to declare the neighborhood a slum. Local urban renewal efforts had effectively become incentivized by the federal government. It was now in Los Angeles' best interest to access federal funds for community reinvestment projects like the construction of a professional sports stadium. For the Mexican Americans living in Chavez Ravine,

⁸² Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 290-91.

⁸³ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 296.

⁸⁴ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 295-97.

⁸⁵ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 301.

who suffered from the unintended consequences of the 1949 Housing Act, they mostly relocated within the built environment of the Eastside barrio.

But the Mexican-American residents of Chavez Ravine did not succumb to governmental coercion without a legal battle. One of the primary arguments made on their behalf was that Los Angeles' Housing Authority had no right to deed nearly 200 acres of public land to the city (and eventually to the Dodgers) because that land had been sold to the housing authority by the federal government "for public use only."⁸⁶ This argument, however, encountered resistance in the California Supreme Court, as it offered a "unanimous decision" affirming "the constitutionality of the city's deeding of the acreage."⁸⁷ In fact, as early as 1953, the city had the option to purchase those 200 acres of Chavez Ravine (public) land from the federal government for about \$1 million.⁸⁸ This option ultimately stemmed from a compromise worked out by Mayor Poulson between the federal and city governments, "which ended the public housing program in Los Angeles."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it was clear that Chavez Ravine faced the prospects of Anglicization, as its Mexican heritage appeared increasingly whitewashed.

Since the city's original public housing plans for approximately 3400 "low-rent dwelling units" in Chavez Ravine became nullified in the courts, the neighborhood's Mexican American residents had to relocate.⁹⁰ Their initial migratory impulses led them to the Eastside barrio. This intra-urban migration across the concrete-lined Los Angeles River was symbolic for the city's race relations.

⁸⁶ "High Court Again OKs Chavez Deal," *Los Angeles Times* (22 April 1959), 1.

⁸⁷ "High Court Again OKs Chavez Deal," 1.

⁸⁸ "Plans for Huge New Park in Chavez Ravine Outlined," *Los Angeles Times* (15 October 1953), A1.

⁸⁹ "Plans for Huge New Park in Chavez Ravine Outlined," A1.

⁹⁰ "Huge Public Housing Plan in Chavez Ravine Disclosed," *Los Angeles Times* (8 August 1950), A1.

Although the river was a marvel of physical engineering, it also signified a socially constructed racial barrier between Anglos and Mexicans.⁹¹ Historian William

Deverell writes:

A concrete river used to be a beautiful thing, a place where exuberant Angelenos would be able to stroll placidly amidst the visionary city that they had created, the city of the future, the city that had beautified itself by perfecting Nature. But concrete rivers are not beautiful today. The enduring irony of the Los Angeles River is that those exuberant future-obsessed Anglos do not inhabit the river's spaces. It is the immigrant and homeless, mostly Latino, people living in a depressing deindustrialized corridor who drink the water, swim and wash in it, and even farm its banks and belly.⁹²

This remark aptly encompasses the sharp divide between the appearance and reality surrounding the river's man-altered existence. White Angelenos viewed the river as a symbol of progress to protect their high-value real estate from devastating floods while Mexican Angelenos saw it as a kind of invisible wall to solidify racial lines and section off their inferior property (urban spaces) along the Eastside.

With an increasing influx of Mexican Americans into the Eastside barrio during the 1950s and 1960s, some Latino families began to push further eastward in the hope of securing suburban property. Just as black Las Vegans lived in the Westside ghetto and then expanded out to Carver Park in Henderson, Mexican Angelenos spread outward beyond the Eastside barrio to create their version of the American Dream in Los Angeles' eastern suburbs. For historian Greg Hise, the socio-economic and political process of suburbanization, especially in Los Angeles, is synonymous with urbanization.⁹³ He states:

⁹¹ William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 127-28.

⁹² Deverell *Whitewashed Adobe*, 127-28.

⁹³ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 4. This book provides urban planning historians with an

In the past decades, critics and urban theorists who examine contemporary spatial patterns have begun staking the contours of a postmodern urbanism, presenting evidence that urban regions, such as the five-county Los Angeles conurbation, represent a new kind of city, a landscape with indeterminate coordinates, loosely anchored by speculative office parks, big-box retail, and gated residential enclaves.⁹⁴

This statement is akin to Lewis Mumford's "megalopolis" in which distinct metropolitan areas like Las Vegas and Los Angeles are linked by either transportation, industrial, or sociological means. And given the cross-cultural contact that exists between the two cities, Las Vegas has become the easternmost suburb of Los Angeles. Yet one of the primary sociological questions remains, where do black and Mexican Americans fit into the megalopolis that is *Los Vegas*?

One area where Mexican Americans began to claim en masse was La Puente, California. Sociologist Gilda Ochoa conducted a case study of the Mexican-American community in this Los Angeles suburb which examined the influence of immigration on the local culture. For the most part, she argues that the 1940s and 1950s Bracero Program, which brought thousands of Mexican immigrants to work initially in Los Angeles' wartime industries and eventually on the area's various farmlands, "created a social and economic hierarchy within the Mexican-origin community."⁹⁵ This socio-economic hierarchy extended into Mexican-American suburbs like La Puente, as a *barrio* developed under circumstances similar to Los Angeles' Eastside *barrio*. In referring to the 1950s, La Puente resident Leticia Mendoza recalls:

architectural framework for examining the complex proto-governmental and infrastructural forces that affect both urban and suburban development.

⁹⁴ Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 4.

⁹⁵ Gilda L. Ochoa, *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 41.

We had a barrio, and it was from Central up to Valley Boulevard. We were not allowed to buy a home outside of Central. We were all segregated. We all lived in this barrio, and we all knew each other. The area isn't that big. Where the library is now, that was our school, called Central School.⁹⁶

The existence of La Puente's barrio, which was emblematic of housing segregation, reinforced the idea of a suburb as replicating elements of the core city around which it grew. Barrios and ghettos, therefore, often became common features of ethnorracial suburbs where the majority race was not white.

Aside from La Puente's barrio (and its housing segregation), another common feature of an ethnorracial suburb was school segregation. The primary goal behind segregated schooling in La Puente involved Americanization programs for the Mexican community.⁹⁷ These curricular programs emphasized learning the English language and American culture while classes in civics and California history attempted to instill in the minds of young Mexican students a respect for American forms of government and authority.⁹⁸ District Superintendent D. P. Lucas remembers the objectives of the barrio's Central Avenue School as follows:

Mexican tots who were among the first pupils at Central have carried to their homes the type of instruction that is imparted in the school. These boys and girls, some of them, have grown to manhood and womanhood and have been able to create an entirely different attitude toward the institutions of the state than their parents hitherto had experienced.⁹⁹

In effect, Mexican-American (suburban) school segregation differed from the black experience, especially since the language barrier provided school officials with a definitive aim when developing Americanization programs. But the black suburban

⁹⁶ Ochoa, *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community*, 50.

⁹⁷ Ochoa, *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community*, 52.

⁹⁸ Ochoa, *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community*, 52.

⁹⁹ Ochoa, *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community*, 52.

experience in Los Angeles occurred closer to the ghetto in South Central. And in many ways, it did not occur at all.

Aside from a few upper-class black families who made their way to Pasadena, California, prior to World War II, many African Americans remained confined in Los Angeles.¹⁰⁰ Essentially, Los Angeles' black suburbanization was a socio-economic process defined by "spillover ring developments" that stemmed from "increased housing demand."¹⁰¹ Suburban cities like Inglewood and Compton began to receive an influx of black Angelenos from the Watts ghetto in the 1960s.¹⁰² Yet cities such as South Gate and Lynwood, which have nearly identical proximities to Watts as Inglewood and Compton, were largely successful in preventing African Americans from spilling over into their neighborhoods. In short, racially restrictive housing covenants, and later, homeowners' associations (HOAs), were two of the biggest factors in determining the direction and scale of suburbanization for black Angelenos.

As evidenced by the limited nature of Los Angeles' black suburbanization in the 1950s, general African-American mobility within the city's limits was also at risk. Even though a few black families began to settle in the San Fernando Valley districts of Pacoima and Van Nuys, they faced "a pattern of housing segregation" similar to that found in the South Central ghetto.¹⁰³ Nestled between Pacoima and Van Nuys was the district of Panorama City. Originally developed as a planned community by Fritz Burns and Kaiser Community Homes (KCH) in the 1940s, Panorama City did

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20.

¹⁰¹ Harold M. Rose, *Black Suburbanization: Access to Improved Quality of Life or Maintenance of the Status Quo?* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976), 15.

¹⁰² Rose, *Black Suburbanization*, 62.

¹⁰³ "Housing Segregation Held Serious Valley Problem," *Los Angeles Times* (8 November 1959), SF1.

not permit the settlement of non-white ethnoracial groups. But the largest pocket of African-American housing segregation existed “in an area of Pacoima bounded generally by the Southern Pacific track, Foothill [Boulevard], Sun Valley, and the boundary of the city of San Fernando.”¹⁰⁴ This area of Pacoima was ultimately an example of both functional and racial segregation, as the Southern Pacific rail line functionally separated residential and industrial processes while Foothill Boulevard and other “artificial” boundaries racially separated Pacoima’s residents.

By the 1960s, housing for African Americans in Pacoima and South Central (Watts) was becoming a crisis. Los Angeles’ black population faced a housing shortage, as families often endured congestion and overcrowding in homes that had been previously abandoned by whites.¹⁰⁵ It was clear that access to adequate housing offered “the key to the goals [that black Angelenos] strive toward – equal opportunity, equal participation, [and] assimilation into the community as a whole.”¹⁰⁶ In effect, adequate housing gave black Angelenos a sense of place that grounded them in the everyday life of the city. Yet for the most part, Los Angeles’ municipal government did little to address the housing needs of its black residents. The federal government eventually intervened in 1968 with plans for “a 220-unit” housing project in Pacoima.¹⁰⁷ Although it partially placated the housing shortage, the Pacoima project arrived three years after Watts’ segregation-induced violence. Black Los Angeles in the 1960s, therefore, underwent a transformation that started

¹⁰⁴ “Housing Segregation Held Serious Valley Problem,” SF1.

¹⁰⁵ Gene Sherman, “Housing Is Key to Aspirations,” *Los Angeles Times* (4 July 1962), 2

¹⁰⁶ Sherman, “Housing Is Key to Aspirations,” 2.

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth J. Fanucchi, “Housing Project Caught in Race Balance Debate,” *Los Angeles Times* (25 February 1968), SF_A1.

with housing and employment segregation and ended with an urban crisis marked by race riots and police brutality.

Conclusion

Overall, housing and employment segregation were deeply entrenched features of American society in the mid-twentieth century. They consisted of physically and socially separating urban and suburban spaces according to the dictates of race. There was an inherent fear among property owners that racially integrated neighborhoods resulted in depressed home values. This fear resounded widely throughout the school desegregation debates of the 1960s and 1970s, but it originated in the post-World War II period of cookie-cutter-style suburbanization. For example, suburban tract housing, such as the development of Levittown, New York, between 1947 and 1951, was an exclusive process open only to white families. The racial exclusivity of suburbanization, however, was an outgrowth of the racial fears that existed in the city. In short, racial divisions, especially in urban and suburban housing, pushed many American cities to the brink of violence.

Although employment segregation was not given the same attention as housing segregation in this chapter, it will resurface when discussing the relationship between social class and race riots in the next chapter. The primary reason housing segregation often overshadows employment segregation when discussing these topics concurrently is that many urban ethnoracial groups tend to work where they live, as they do not possess the means to move when employment becomes scarce. Sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton recognize the heightened importance of residential (housing) segregation when compared to urban employment

conditions. They assert that residential segregation deprives certain ethnoracial groups, especially African Americans, of socio-economic opportunities and privileges otherwise enjoyed by whites.¹⁰⁸ This assertion speaks to the general lack of options facing residentially segregated ethnoracial groups. Yet ultimately, through urban historical studies of these ethnoracial groups and their struggles with racial segregation, people will conclude that “the United States cannot be called a race-blind society.”¹⁰⁹

As for the urban societies of Las Vegas and Los Angeles, housing and employment segregation were particularly prevalent aspects. They contributed to an increasing degree of social isolation among certain ethnoracial groups. Black Las Vegas, for instance, endured systematic separation from the city’s white community, which often stemmed from either coercive laws rooted in an institutionalized racism or customary practices centered on a vibrant communal patronage in the Westside ghetto. In multiethnic Los Angeles, however, both black and Mexican residents experienced the effects of racial isolation. The idiosyncratic differences that developed between the South Central (Watts) ghetto and the Eastside barrio, such as the language barrier, only enhanced the degree of Los Angeles’ ethnoracial diversity. And this diversity even extended into the city’s suburbs, which was a notably absent feature of the Las Vegas’ suburbanization (aside from Henderson’s Carver Park).

¹⁰⁸ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2-4.

¹⁰⁹ Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 3.

CHAPTER 3
THE URBAN CRISES ERUPT: RACE RIOTS AND THE
GHETTO UNDERCLASS IN LAS VEGAS AND
LOS ANGELES, 1940 – 1970

Introduction

Race riots and the ghetto underclass in Las Vegas and Los Angeles were the result of years of substandard housing, schooling, and employment for both African and Mexican Americans. This chapter will primarily address the racial violence in Los Angeles, the Zoot Suit Riots (in the 1940s) and the Watts Riots (in the 1960s). It will also consider the ghetto underclass in Las Vegas, which exists below the working poor. As part of the American lower class, I think the ghetto underclass is often associated with the typical elements that define racial segregation such as public housing, underachieving schools, and labor segmentation. And despite their reluctance to use a term like ‘undeserving poor’ when referring to the ghetto underclass, sociologists like William Julius Wilson argue that “a culture of poverty and a culture of welfare” have developed around this largely ethnoracial social class.¹

Conceivably, the most insightful way to view the ghetto underclass and its role in race riots is through the analytic frame of economic restructuring. In the post-World War II era, the shift in a city’s economy from manufacturing to service defines economic restructuring. Otherwise referred to as deindustrialization, this socio-economic process pulled capital and jobs away from the inner city, which consequently brought about depressed circumstances for the ethnoracial groups living

¹ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9. This book was groundbreaking in the field of American urban sociology, as it precipitated President Bill Clinton’s welfare reforms in the 1990s.

there. But the ghetto underclass cannot be understood merely as a product of postwar deindustrialization. Even though the post-World War II era saw a net decrease in industrial output, which exacerbated working conditions in the urban core, the ghetto underclass existed well before this time period. For the purposes of this chapter, postwar deindustrialization and the ghetto underclass will be juxtaposed in relation to the race riots in Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

Mob Mentalities and Class Consciousness

Prior to examining race riots and the ghetto underclass in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, it becomes necessary to investigate the larger historical environment surrounding them. In 1968, the United States government published the Kerner Commission's report concerning the race riots that erupted throughout the country the previous year. This report was a product of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission) and it became a bestseller after more than two million Americans purchased copies. But apart from investigating "24 disorders in 23 cities," the Kerner Commission also produced a detailed sociological sketch of how America had become so racially polarized.² Chapter 2 of the report in particular examined both "the kinds of communities" in which race riots occurred and "certain popular conceptions about riots."³

² National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, New York Times Edition (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968), 6. This report highlighted the importance of race relations in America during the 1960s. Even though President Lyndon Johnson ushered civil rights legislation through Congress (Great Society) in 1964 and 1965, there was still a fundamental disconnect between white and black Americans, as race riots erupted in dozens of cities across the nation.

³ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 109.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Chapter 2 in the Kerner Commission's report was the description it attributed to "the typical rioter."⁴ It states:

The typical rioter in the summer of 1967 was a Negro, un-married male between the ages of 15 and 24 in many ways very different from the stereotypes. He was not a migrant. He was born in the state and was a life-long resident of the city in which the riot took place. Economically his position was about the same as his Negro neighbors who did not actively participate in the riot. Although he had not, usually graduated from high school, he was somewhat better educated than the average inner-city Negro, having at least attended high school for a time.⁵

Notwithstanding its sweeping generalizations, this statement helps urban ethnoraical historians to capture, at least partially, the racial profile assigned to rioters. It also provides insight into the potential reasons why a person would engage in such large-scale communal violence. Even though the Kerner Commission's report does not specifically address the riots in Las Vegas or Los Angeles, it still aids the socio-historical framing of those events in the context of the ghetto underclass. As a result, either disrupting the status quo of racial inferiority or rejecting civil rights as a white man's concoction seemed to be two of the primary motives for why African-American men rioted. So, was racial segregation in urban environments the root cause of the 1967 riots? Urban ethnoraical historians now possessed a basic postulate from which they could research, discuss, and debate.

Aside from depicting typical rioters and offering reasons why race riots occurred, the Kerner Commission's report outlined a variety of choices facing Americans for the future course of race relations. In effect, the two most viable

⁴ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 128.

⁵ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 128.

options included “the Enrichment Choice” and “the Integration Choice.”⁶ For the Enrichment Choice, “the nation would seek to offset” racial segregation in inner-city black ghettos by “creating dramatic improvements” through increased federal spending for these “disadvantaged” neighborhoods.⁷ Under the Integration Choice, American society would be drastically remade to reflect the kind of distributive justice necessary for preserving a democratic republic. That is, the federal government would make a concerted effort not only to improve the infrastructure of the inner-city ghetto, but also to help members of the ghetto underclass move into “largely white residential areas.”⁸ Despite its interest in facilitating African-American social mobility, the federal government had clearly placed the burden of integration on the ghetto underclass.

The burden of integration on the ghetto underclass, however, existed well before the Kerner Commission’s recommendations. In fact, three years prior to the publication of the Kerner Commission’s report, President Lyndon Johnson signed a law to create the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As part of Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, this new agency sought to oversee an increased governmental role in urban housing. In doing so, it built upon many of the ideas and policies found in the 1949 Housing Act. That is, local urban renewal efforts ought to be prioritized in a manner that brings the greatest amount of housing opportunities to the largest number of underclass people. But urban renewal and housing assistance

⁶ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 395-96.

⁷ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 395.

⁸ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 396.

became increasingly politicized and racialized throughout the 1960s. The primary beneficiaries of these new government programs were “senior citizens” and “low-income families.”⁹ Since the ghetto underclass mostly consisted of low-income families, there was a high degree of ethnoracial tension associated with the enactment of HUD and its designated purpose of eradicating poverty through public housing.

As HUD re-centered the federal government on the ethnoracial tensions surrounding urban housing, especially in light of the escalating Vietnam War, it pushed the Johnson administration to enact strong measures for prohibiting racial discrimination in housing. Originally intended as a follow-up measure to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which barred discriminatory practices in most areas of American society, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act) provided the legislative wherewithal necessary to fulfill the basic promise of ending race restrictive housing covenants by *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948. By ending racial discrimination in housing, the natural progression would entail a systematic end of segregation in urban neighborhoods. Yet that progression did not always occur, and in many instances, inner-city segregation worsened. The ghetto underclass began to develop a socio-political disdain for the government’s inability to address adequately its racially-induced problems.

The socio-political disdain for government and its civil rights legislation among members of the ghetto underclass became endemic after the publication of the Moynihan Report in 1965. Produced by the Department of Labor under the direction of future U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, this report “emphasized that family

⁹ John B. William, *The Department of Housing and Urban Development* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 80-82.

deterioration – as revealed in urban blacks’ rising rates of broken marriages, female-headed homes, out-of-wedlock births, and welfare dependency – was one of the central problems of the black lower class.”¹⁰ In effect, “Moynihan’s unflattering depiction of the black family in the urban ghetto” demonstrated that there was a dramatic rift between the white American nuclear family and the largely dysfunctional African-American family.¹¹ Critics of the Moynihan Report pointed to its lack of insight on the communal benefits afforded to the residents of a black ghetto. At times, crowded public housing fostered neighborly cooperation, close relationships, local patronage, and cultured schools.

In many American cities, congested neighborhoods and single-race schools were features of both the ghetto underclass and the black middle class. When these two social classes found common ground in their opposition to government and civil rights, race riots erupted. And one of the primary questions that followed rioting was whether segregation or desegregation could be highlighted as the main cause. Yet what constituted the black middle class? Sociologist Mary Pattillo-McCoy examined the black middle class in the Groveland neighborhood of Chicago’s South Side ghetto and discovered that “being *black* and middle class” was often more challenging than being part of the ghetto underclass because racial obstacles became more intense for those blacks attempting to maintain middle-class status.¹²

¹⁰ Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 21.

¹¹ Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 21.

¹² Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 15. This book largely upends the sociological work of William Julius Wilson. In fact, Pattillo-McCoy studied under Wilson at the University of Chicago during the 1990s. Ultimately, she sought to challenge his systematic effort at deemphasizing race through the precepts of American urban sociology.

In Las Vegas and Los Angeles the black middle class typically coexisted alongside the ghetto underclass. Yet both social classes tended to be viewed by their respective municipal governments as separate entities. It was the plight of the ghetto underclass that merited the foremost attention from each city's officials, but the black middle class simultaneously struggled for employment in Las Vegas' resort economy and Los Angeles' industrial economy. Ironically, the national welfare reform measures of the early 1960s, which the ghetto underclass needed, occurred "during an era of general economic prosperity."¹³ These reforms affected local municipalities by encouraging the elimination of urban poverty through the expansion of unemployment insurance. This policy was especially pertinent to Las Vegas, as it could not afford to have either race riots or an outward display of urban poverty due to its heavy reliance on tourism.

Las Vegas' Ghetto Underclass

Since the majority of black Las Vegans arrived in the city either during or after World War II, there was not an extensive period of time for the ghetto underclass to meld together prior to the racial disturbances of the 1960s. Los Angeles was similar in this regard, but its black middle class was much bigger due to a greater diversity in employment opportunities. The large in-migration of black Las Vegans during the 1940s resulted from the high demand for labor at the Basic Magnesium plant in Henderson. And many of the black migrants to the Las Vegas Valley originated in the Mississippi Delta region of the South, which included the states of

¹³ Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 129.

Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.¹⁴ Given their rural and often impoverished backgrounds as sharecroppers, molding into Las Vegas' ghetto underclass required a vast sociological transition.

One black migrant to the city who underwent this transition was Ruby Duncan. In 1952, she arrived in Las Vegas on a bus from Tallulah, Louisiana, and found work cleaning private homes before moving on to the Flamingo hotel.¹⁵ Duncan became a member of "Hotel and Culinary Workers Union, Local 226," which provided her with a certain degree of job security in addition to basic medical benefits.¹⁶ But union membership for black Las Vegans was still second rate when compared to white union membership. Partially integrated, Local 226 was one of the only unions to recruit black members, as its leader in the 1950s, Al Bramlet, "made repeated trips to small towns in Louisiana and Arkansas, where he promised cotton pickers and mill-hands wages beyond anything they could hope to make in the Delta."¹⁷ But until Local 226 "struck an accord with the largest Las Vegas hoteliers," work on the Strip proved scarce for black Las Vegans.¹⁸

As a member of Local 226, Duncan worked as a hotel maid to support her family. Apart from a five-year marriage to Roy Duncan in the early 1960s, she was a single mother of seven. Historian Annelise Orleck has conducted extensive research on Duncan's life and has concluded that although she "had always spoken up for herself," Duncan had a proclivity for "being a lone hothead" at times.¹⁹ This

¹⁴ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 7-10.

¹⁵ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 55.

¹⁶ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 55.

¹⁷ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 54-55.

¹⁸ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 55.

¹⁹ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 55.

character trait actually helped her when she began to organize against societal segregation, and subsequently, for welfare rights in the 1960s. Nevertheless, when the Moynihan Report emerged in 1965, local movements for welfare rights, such as Duncan's in Las Vegas, were stymied to an extent. The report tended to vilify the black single mother, which it perceived as being increasingly dependent on government welfare programs.

Although the Moynihan Report mainly discussed welfare rights and their impact on African-American families at the national level, it spurred local responses. Dozens of states, counties, and cities slashed their welfare benefits as a partial reaction to report's recommendations. The 1967 race riots in many American cities, which the Kerner Commission investigated, can even be viewed as a violent response to the reduction of local welfare programs. Nevada, in particular, passed "a 1967 state law requiring county prosecutors to interrogate every Nevada woman who applied for [welfare] assistance."²⁰ At the same time, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) formed in Washington, D.C. to push for greater governmental action in augmenting the welfare rights of women and children. And with astute coaching by NWRO leaders such as Dr. George Wiley and Johnnie Tillmon, Duncan became one of the primary leaders in Las Vegas' welfare movement.

Modeled after the NWRO, the Clark County Welfare Rights Organization (CCWRO) elected Duncan as its president in 1969. Along with other Westside mothers, including Essie Henderson, Rosie Seals, and Alversa Beals, she first pressured Las Vegas' city government and eventually Nevada's state government to help those affected by the recent welfare cuts with food and clothing distribution

²⁰ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 117.

centers on the Westside.²¹ But Duncan's appeals went mostly unheard, as welfare reduction tended to be the dominant public policy on both a national and local level. For most black Las Vegans, especially single mothers like Duncan, the fight for welfare rights became a necessary task since employment discrimination in the city's hotels and casinos pushed many of them out of work. Even though unions such as Local 226 had black members, questions of fairness remained with regard to the job opportunities available for blacks.

The local culinary and teamster unions began to face increased legal pressure from the Southern Nevada chapter of the NAACP. In 1967, then lead attorney and director of the Southern Nevada NAACP, Charles Kellar, blasted Local 226 "and its secretary-treasurer, Al Bramlet, for failing to push the employment of its black members."²² In fact, "Kellar threatened to cut the union down to size by asking the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to decertify it as the hotel workers' official bargaining agent."²³ For Duncan and other welfare advocates in Las Vegas, the heightened legal pressure on local unions by the Southern Nevada NAACP was a welcome sign. If welfare rights for black Las Vegans did not become a reality, at least the opportunity to avoid menial labor and work for a decent wage seemed plausible in the not-so-distant future.

Yet seven years after Dr. James McMillan and the local NAACP reached an integration agreement with the city in 1960, black Las Vegans were still protesting.

²¹ Ruby Duncan, "We the Undersigned," *Ruby Duncan to Honorable Governor Paul M. Laxalt* (8 August 1969), 1. This letter, which is actually a petition, originates with the Ruby Duncan collection at UNLV's Special Collections Department in the Lied Library. It signifies one of the first initiatives undertaken by Duncan while President of the CCWRO. Duncan donated most of her biographical and personal materials to the collection to enhance the insight of researchers covering black Las Vegas.

²² Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930 – 2000*, 2nd Edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 189.

²³ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 189.

Woodrow Wilson, a black community activist from the Westside and former Nevada State Assemblyman, recalled the importance of the 1960 integration agreement. He stated:

It was a situation here in Las Vegas, even in the 1950s and early 1960s, before the accommodation law was passed that no one was working above a porter, a dishwasher, someone that's doing menial jobs [in the city], involved in the gambling casinos, involved in any other situation Downtown...²⁴

This statement, which occurred at a civil rights forum in 1977, demonstrated the lack of job opportunities available to black Las Vegans prior to “the confrontation with the city” in March 1960.²⁵ Wilson continued on to state that the integration agreement “was brought about by [a] concerted effort” on behalf of the local NAACP and its original members including Dr. Charles West, Lubertha Johnson, and Bob Bailey.²⁶ But despite the 1960 integration agreement, black Las Vegans and the local NAACP (now under Kellar’s leadership in 1967), sought to augment and secure a greater degree of black civil liberties through the courts.

Even though Nevada passed a strong anti-discrimination law in March 1965, “many Downtown and Strip hotels continued to discriminate against blacks in employment.”²⁷ The question of legislating equality was one that Kellar now challenged by filing a variety of civil complaints and appeals in court. While Kellar began his legal assault on employment segregation, black Las Vegans protested outside various hotels and casinos along the Strip. By 1969, these employment protests eventually carried over into some of the area’s local high schools including

²⁴ Rita O’Brien, “West Las Vegas at the Crossroads: A Forum,” *Nevada Humanities Committee* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 1977), 24-25. This source provides a transcript of a forum on the relationship between black civil rights and the Westside. Various African-American residents of the Westside spoke at the forum. They mainly recalled the traumatic events of their lives under Jim Crow.

²⁵ O’Brien, “West Las Vegas at the Crossroads,” 25.

²⁶ O’Brien, “West Las Vegas at the Crossroads,” 25.

²⁷ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 189.

Rancho High School, Las Vegas High School, Clark High School, and Valley High School. These school protests, which mimicked race riots, can be explained through the socio-political process of racial socialization. In effect, the frustrations exhibited by unemployed black parents became impressed upon their children, who in turn, released these frustrations at school, often in the form of hallway shoving matches or schoolyard brawls. But white students also racially antagonized black students by ridiculing them over the employment struggles of their parents. Finally, in a rigorous attempt “to end the cycle of violence” in early 1970, school board officials announced the hiring of more black teachers and administrators.²⁸ If black students witnessed more black teachers and administrators in the high schools, then the negative feelings of racial isolation would be somewhat mitigated.

Los Angeles’ Race Riots

While Las Vegas had a minor riot during World War II and in 1969 a brief, three-day disturbance in the Westside, Los Angeles endured full-fledged multiethnic race riots in the 1940s and 1960s. Occasioned by World War II, Los Angeles’ industrial boom attracted scores of migrants to the city. Whether they were temporary contract workers from Mexico with the Bracero Program or inner-city African-Americans from the Southern United States, these migrants brought their cultural customs, which at times, elicited social friction from white residents. According to historian Mark Wild, “On almost any level World War II was a

²⁸ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 194.

watershed event in the history of Los Angeles.”²⁹ Both the South Central ghetto and the Eastside barrio “sprang back to life,” as the demand for wartime laborers in defense firms saw the momentary relaxation of discriminatory employment practices.³⁰ Given the looming threat posed by Japan in the Pacific, it was especially important for the federal government to streamline munitions production by removing racial barriers in the defense industry. Therefore, in June 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which established “the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to eliminate discrimination in defense plants.”³¹

In Los Angeles’ numerous defense plants, however, “race relations were anything but idyllic.”³² Although World War II initially precipitated a “euphoria of unity” among the city’s multiethnic work force, “darker developments” emerged between workers as the war progressed.³³ After the Bracero Program began in August 1942, thousands of Mexicans arrived in Los Angeles County to perform agricultural labor. The Program stemmed from a series of diplomatic arrangements between Mexico and the United States to meet the increased labor demand of wartime industries. By importing such a large number of Mexican farm workers, more Americans were able to work in the defense plants. Yet aside from the mass influx of Mexicans to Los Angeles, the Bracero Program spurred a deep xenophobic reaction among many white Angelenos. Rooted in widespread racial fears, this reaction became violent with the Zoot Suit Riots in 1943.

²⁹ Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 201.

³⁰ Wild, *Street Meeting*, 201.

³¹ Wild, *Street Meeting*, 202.

³² Wild, *Street Meeting*, 202.

³³ Wild, *Street Meeting*, 202.

The Zoot Suit Riots complicated racial perceptions between Mexican and Anglo Americans.³⁴ Historian Mauricio Mazón argues that it is difficult to classify the Zoot Suit Riots as “riots” because “no one was killed” and “property damage was slight.”³⁵ Yet they signified a socio-political coalescence among Mexican-American youths, which brought a heightened sense of ethnoracial solidarity to the Eastside barrio. And despite the ability of Mexican Angelenos to parlay their near whiteness into decent paying jobs at times, many of them still encountered discriminatory barriers while seeking employment in Los Angeles’ booming defense industry. Due to the Bracero Program, there was a societal stereotype that Mexican Angelenos ought to work strictly as farmhands in order to offer the defense plant jobs to the city’s white residents.

The employment-based ethnoracial tensions between Mexican and Anglo Americans first turned violent in May 1943, but none of the incidents actually involved zoot-suiters.³⁶ These violent street clashes, which resulted in numerous deaths, mostly occurred between white Navy servicemen stationed in Los Angeles and Mexican-American youths. Yet when these Mexican-American youths wore zoot suits, they became *pachucos* or punkish gang members in the eyes of local authorities. Originating with the swing jazz scene of the early 1930s, the zoot suit was fashionably symbolic for ethnoracial minorities like Mexican Americans because it reflected the urban subculture surrounding the daily struggles of barrio life. When Mexican-American youths dressed in zoot suits, they felt distinctly opposed to

³⁴ Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), xi.

³⁵ Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots*, 1.

³⁶ Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots*, 68.

members of the white bourgeoisie who directed most of Los Angeles' entrepreneurial endeavors such as the defense plants. And it was this feeling of socio-political disparity (class consciousness) that pushed these Mexican-American youths to clash with those whom they perceived as representing the dominant (white) social order.

But the zoot suit represented more than the rebellious subculture of Los Angeles' Mexican-American youths. In the military, for example, it symbolized everything "that was morally and politically deficient with the home front" during World War II.³⁷ Some young Mexican Angelenos, such as Alfred Barela, realized the societal stigma attached to the zoot suit, and recalled:

Ever since I can remember I've been pushed around and called names because I'm a Mexican. I was born in this country... Pretty soon I guess I'll be in the Army and I'll be glad to go. But I want to be treated like everybody else. We're tired of being told we can't go to this show or that dance because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair cut the way we want to.³⁸

As a zoot suiter himself, Barela's statement captures the ethnoracial angst of the zoot lifestyle in Mexican-American Los Angeles. Multifarious segregation had facilitated the growth of an ethnoracial tension to the point where violence appeared almost inevitable. Yet for violence to erupt, there requires a spark. And that spark came on the night of Thursday, June 3, 1943, when Anglo servicemen encountered a gang of Mexican zoot suiters in East Los Angeles.

The Anglo servicemen, all of whom were sailors in the Navy, claimed to have been "jumped and beaten by a gang of at least thirty-five [Mexican] zoot suiters."³⁹ In response, for the following four days and nights, Anglo servicemen proceeded to

³⁷ Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 3.

³⁸ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*, 1-2.

³⁹ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*, 168.

target and assault both African-American and Mexican-American zoot suiters throughout Los Angeles. Ethnoracial neighborhoods like the Eastside barrio and the South Central ghetto became semi-war zones, as officers from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) frequently swooped in to arrest zoot suiters after they had already been beaten by throngs of white sailors.⁴⁰ But the LAPD and “other law enforcement agencies” received praise from Governor Earl Warren for their roles in “breaking up the tense situation” surrounding the riots.⁴¹ In short, there was a general consensus, especially in the local media, which painted the ethnoracial zoot suiters as the riots’ perpetrators and the Anglo servicemen as its victims.

Even though a majority of the zoot suiters targeted by the servicemen were Mexican Americans, there were still many African Americans involved in the riots. To downplay the role of race in the Zoot Suit disturbances, Mayor Fletcher Bowron cited the pernicious increase of gang activity among Los Angeles’ youths as the main problem behind the city’s street violence.⁴² He did so to preserve the city’s racially tolerant image in an attempt to attract more minority workers and convince the Roosevelt Administration that, unlike Detroit and other martial cities where racism prevailed, wartime Los Angeles was not another bastion of Jim Crow. Although rioting happened throughout Los Angeles, the Eastside barrio and the South Central ghetto (Watts) were areas of heightened ethnoracial conflict. In particular, Rev. Francisco Quintanilla, who was a pastor at the Mexican Methodist Church in Watts, preached about the negative publicity that the riots brought to both Mexicans and

⁴⁰ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*, 168.

⁴¹ “Zoot Suit War Runs Course as Riots Subside,” *Los Angeles Times* (12 June 1943), A.

⁴² “Issue Not Race Discrimination, Mayor Declares,” *Los Angeles Times* (11 June 1943), A.

blacks in his community.⁴³ In effect, Watts was in the process of becoming a multiethnic community, but the ethnoracial skirmishes associated with the Zoot Suit Riots had left a socio-political wound that would later be reopened in 1965.

By the time of the Watts Riots in August 1965, the South Central ghetto had become somewhat of an afterthought for city officials. Urban renewal plans mainly centered on public housing projects in the Pacoima district of the San Fernando Valley, and even those did not seem plausible until the federal government intervened in the early 1960s. Similarly, African-American lawmaker William Byron Rumford introduced a fair housing bill to the California legislature, which sought to equalize housing access for ethnoracial groups (and other underrepresented minorities) by prohibiting discrimination in the housing process. After the bill became law, the Rumford Fair Housing Act faced intense resistance, especially from real estate associations.⁴⁴ This resistance resulted in a 1964 ballot measure (Proposition 14) to amend the California Constitution and overturn the new law. Although Proposition 14 passed with a large majority in the 1964 state elections, it was eventually ruled unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court in 1966 and the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967.

Yet aside from Proposition 14, which partially precipitated the ethnoracial tensions of the 1965 Watts Riots, other socio-political factors were affecting black Los Angeles. In a 1972 case study, Frederick Case found that “business opportunities” for black capitalists living in the South Central ghetto were nearly non-

⁴³ “Watts Pastor Blames Riots on Fifth Column,” *Los Angeles Times* (11 June 1943), A.

⁴⁴ Gene Blake, “PROPOSITION 14: The Cases for and Against,” *Los Angeles Times* (20 September 1964), K1.

existent.⁴⁵ The idea of a black “small businessman” in Watts during the 1960s was anachronistic since the early examples of communal patronage in the ghetto’s formative years (1920s and 1930s) had become replaced by governmental agencies such as the Small Business Administration (SBA).⁴⁶ Despite the purpose of these governmental agencies to provide small businesses with advice and credit, they mostly avoided urban ghettos like South Central because they deemed the small businesses there too “high-risk.”⁴⁷ In short, small-business capitalism in black ghettos like Watts was the first casualty of the new urban economics forged in the post-World War II period.

As Carl Abbott and other historians have noted, progressive-minded business elites gradually took control of Western city governments during and after World War II.⁴⁸ It was not for new factories that these elites cleared space, but for office buildings and other structures serving America’s growing service-sector economy. This urban renewal process ultimately provided thousands of new jobs for mostly white, college-educated workers. Yet “the economic plight of [urban] black communities,” which partly stemmed from deindustrialization, could not be prevented by the mere presence of these revitalization programs.⁴⁹ Apart from these programs, it was the lack of black-owned businesses in Watts that contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate of African Americans in South Central. And governmental efforts “to foster minority capitalism” through improvement programs

⁴⁵ Frederick E. Case, *Black Capitalism: Problems in Development: A Case Study of Los Angeles* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 71.

⁴⁶ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 71.

⁴⁷ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 71.

⁴⁸ Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 199.

⁴⁹ Case, *Black Capitalism*, ix.

in areas like Watts “have ignored, or been oblivious to, the economics of job creation” and “minority employability.”⁵⁰

With black frustrations mounting over the dearth of economic opportunities in Watts, ethnoracial tensions were high. The potential for rioting existed on multiple socio-political levels, as black workers and white authorities (LAPD, city officials) were growing increasingly antagonistic. And like the Zoot Suit Riots, a distinctive spark set off the Watts Riots. On the night of August 11, 1965, an African-American man named Marquette Frye faced arrest after being pulled over by the LAPD for driving while intoxicated. His arrest brought scores of Watts’ residents into the streets, as a police struggle ensued with Frye and his family. Rumors of police brutality began to spread throughout South Central and “crowds of angry blacks” started torching homes and businesses over “a 46-square mile inner-city area.”⁵¹ Mayor Sam Yorty’s response was simple but somewhat ineffective: bring in the National Guard and hold a curfew. Coincidentally, close to “70 percent of Los Angeles County’s 650,000 blacks” lived inside the boundaries of that 46-square mile zone.⁵²

After nearly 40 deaths and 4,000 arrests, the Watts Riots, which lasted for six days, had taken both a physical and mental toll on Los Angeles and her residents. A majority of Angelenos “had regarded their community as immune to this kind of violent disturbance.”⁵³ Whether the Watts Riots resulted from inadequate municipal services, i.e., schools, infrastructure, and transportation, or the lack of economic and

⁵⁰ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 76.

⁵¹ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 3.

⁵² Case, *Black Capitalism*, 3.

⁵³ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 3.

housing opportunities for black Angelenos, the recurring theme of the ghetto underclass (inner-city poor) remained present.⁵⁴ In a December 1965 report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots (McCone Commission), three potential causes of the riots received attention. The first was the fact that Los Angeles' black population had "increased almost tenfold from 75,000 in 1940 to 650,000 in 1965."⁵⁵ The second entailed the ethnoracial controversy of Proposition 14 and the Rumford Fair Housing Act while the third highlighted the near parity of Watts' black and Mexican populations.⁵⁶ This last demographic point concerning black and Mexican Angelenos was particularly important because it demonstrated the extent of ethnoracial competition for jobs and housing in South Central.

The near parity of Watts' black and Mexican populations by the mid-1960s pushed many black Angelenos to adopt some of the tenets surrounding the Black Power movement. With an emphasis on the culture of blackness, the Black Power movement sought to uplift African Americans by utilizing black history to chart a path to self-sufficiency in black communities. A black resident of South Central, Robert Mason, explained the Watts Riots from a Black Power perspective:

My thought is that any black community has to go through three different stages. Number one is the destructive stage, in the case of Watts the '65 revolution. The second stage would be the unity stage, with the idea of self-reliance and socio-economic independence of the black community. Number three would be integration or, at least, peaceful coexistence. But at this particular point in time, black people realize that there is no such thing as integration. Integration has to be done on the [white] man's terms. It means

⁵⁴ Case, *Black Capitalism*, 3.

⁵⁵ Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City – An End or a Beginning?* (Los Angeles, 1965), 3. Commissioned by California Governor Edmund Brown, this report specifically examined the potential causes of the Watts Riots. It provided extensive demographic statistics concerning the South Central ghetto, as well as detailed maps that addressed the level of physical destruction in Watts. And when the federal government produced the Kerner Commission in 1968, it followed a similar investigative structure to California's McCone Commission.

⁵⁶ Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City*, 4-5.

accepting the society and accepting white values and white laws. But this isn't us.⁵⁷

Mason's explanation signified the anti-integration stance assumed by most Black Power advocates. As a socio-political process, the integration of Watts had failed. And it failed precisely because it was never actually attempted in the first place. Adequate municipal services were practically non-existent while black schools often faced closure without being rearranged to reflect the main tenets of racial integration. In brief, the development of a mutual respect between black and white Angelenos still remained at large in the 1960s.

Developing mutual respect among black and white Angelenos initially required the recognition of inequality as a problem. And from that recognition, Angelenos can begin to connect inequality with race. One South Central resident, Paul Williams, understood the problem that emerged when attempting to connect race and inequality in a black ghetto like Watts:

But the problem, as it exists now, is black people in this country, and I'm black, so I'm part of the problem. You live with the problem, you die with the problem, you think with the problem, you do everything with the problem. I think I have a unique responsibility. I don't know if it's to my people, for my people, whatever, but I kind of think more than just about my family – I think about everybody in the neighborhood.⁵⁸

Williams' remarks were reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's 1960 painting of Ruby Bridges (*The Problem We All Live With*) where she is depicted on the first day of school integration in New Orleans. In effect, many black residents of Watts felt a communal responsibility to maintain their neighborhood's security, and thus, the Watts Riots were troubling. There was plenty of culpability for the riots to be

⁵⁷ Paul Bullock, *Watts: The Aftermath: An Inside View of the Ghetto by the People of Watts* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 72.

⁵⁸ Bullock, *Watts: The Aftermath*, 77.

allocated, but the American societal consciousness had already determined that inner-city blacks were the primary problem.

Black frustrations constituted the main reasons behind the designation of black Angelenos as the primary problem of the Watts Riots. These frustrations continued for years after the riots. They mostly stemmed from Watts' "high black unemployment" rate "and an increasing shortage of affordable housing [for blacks] in Los Angeles."⁵⁹ Despite the limited socio-economic opportunities for many of Watts' black residents, most of them "do not seem to be eager to move out of the area."⁶⁰ Yet although Watts became increasingly multiethnic in the years following the riots, there was still a collective feeling among African Americans of being "trapped in their neighborhood," which consequently resulted in a downward sense of social mobility (proletarianization) for black Angelenos throughout the city.⁶¹ In short, perhaps the Watts Riots' most indelible feature entailed the attention that it brought to the afflictions of the ghetto underclass in urban environments.

Conclusion

Overall, urban crises erupted in Las Vegas and Los Angeles during and after World War II. They mainly consisted of race riots that stemmed from a frustrated ghetto underclass. Comprised of inner-city African Americans, the ghetto underclass experienced limited socio-economic opportunities. But in Los Angeles, there also existed a barrio underclass in which many Mexican-American males found communal

⁵⁹ George Skelton, "15 Years After Riot: Blacks Still Pessimistic," *Los Angeles Times* (13 August 1980), 19.

⁶⁰ Skelton, "15 Years After Riot," 20.

⁶¹ Skelton, "15 Years After Riot," 20.

solidarity in the zoot suit lifestyle. From housing shortages to job discrimination to underperforming schools, Las Vegas' Westside and Los Angeles' Watts constituted epicenters for the failings of municipal governance. Frequently, the police were the only consistent municipal service afforded to the residents in each city's ghetto. Given that roads often went unpaved and sewer systems were ill-maintained, the ghetto's basic infrastructure left much to be desired. At the same time, it was the lack of adequate municipal services that rallied the ghetto underclass to embrace their disadvantaged status as a fundamental component of black culture. At the very least, the ghetto represented a definitive urban space that inner-city African Americans could call their own.

As basic socio-political and ethnoracial components of the inner city, ghettos and barrios have become stigmatized at times by historians, economists, politicians, and sociologists alike. Through the analytic frame of economic restructuring, which can otherwise be referred to as deindustrialization, everyday residents of the ghetto and barrio were often considered pawns in a larger structural process. The key therefore to uncovering the ghetto/barrio underclass and their collective role in each city's race riots was to analyze the personal statements of people such as Woodrow Wilson in Las Vegas or Alfred Barela in Los Angeles. Their statements, along with others by ghetto/barrio residents, offer special insight into how ethnoracial conflicts occurred in the context of underprivileged urban environments. In the end, both cities' race riots made the ghetto/barrio underclass a visible yet isolated socio-political entity that demanded the attention of all city residents in order to reconcile.

CHAPTER 4
AGAINST ALL INSTINCTS: MANDATORY BUSING AND
SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN LAS VEGAS
AND LOS ANGELES, 1950 – 1980

Introduction

Mandatory busing and school desegregation in Las Vegas and Los Angeles were intricate by-products of the Civil Rights Movement. Each city's mandatory busing experiments constituted a visceral reaction to the larger process of societal segregation. In general, societal segregation entailed a systematic separation of the races, so that one social group could maintain certain privileges over the other(s). While school desegregation sought to undo separation between the races, school integration attempted to smooth over the crudeness of desegregation by creating adequate racial balances.¹ During the twentieth-century, Americans saw a wall of separation between blacks and whites. Otherwise called Jim Crow, this wall divided blacks and whites to the point where blacks became second-class citizens. Therefore, I believe that rectifying the negative effects of racial segregation required a drastic measure, and forced busing surely qualified as such.

Undoing societal segregation was a daunting endeavor. Civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) did not necessarily know where to begin at first. By the 1950s, racial segregation existed at virtually every level of American society including

¹ For the purposes of this chapter, the terms “desegregation” and “integration” will be used interchangeably. While desegregation involves ending racial segregation, integration entails creating equal opportunities for members of all races. Desegregation, therefore, must precede integration. But the overarching connection between these terms is the sociological progression they represent. In other words, both terms imply a progression toward a unified society without separation according to race.

neighborhoods, jobs, hotels, buses, trains, theaters, and schools. With their varied understandings of constitutional law in hand, NAACP legal pioneers such as Thurgood Marshall and Julius Chambers decided that schools were the most logical places to initiate desegregation. Public education was an agent of fundamental change, and thus, teaching young children in integrated schools to respect not only themselves, but also their fellow students was vital to the working order of a republican society like the United States.

Historiographical Debate and Psychological Dilemma

To understand forced busing in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, it is important to examine the historiography and psychology surrounding school desegregation. Integrating the public schools required a certain “will to power” in America’s black community.² The will to power was “simply the will to life,” and black Americans certainly exhibited this trait in the face of societal segregation.³ As second-class citizens, they pushed for dynamic change within the heart of American democracy: the public schools. The separate-but-equal doctrine, which originated with the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case, proved a serious bane in African-American life. In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, however, the Court overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine after ruling that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Despite *Brown II* (1955), which ordered school desegregation

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208. The use of this philosophical text may appear “ahistorical,” but it helps frame the existential qualities of underprivileged racial groups in their collective battle against societal segregation. Historiographical frameworks often have their roots in philosophical theories, especially when examining the relationship between people and government.

³ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 208.

efforts to occur “with all deliberate speed,” for the next ten years the Warren Court and federal district court judges in the South issued numerous rulings that reinforced the first *Brown* decision. But real progress in school integration did not happen in cities like Los Angeles until the mid-to-late 1960s when the federal government encouraged school districts to integrate by tying Great Society funds to compliance.

The *Brown* decision altered the landscape of American race relations. For critical race theorist, Derrick Bell, the central question facing Chief Justice Earl Warren was whether or not the racial segregation of children in elementary and secondary schools generated “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”⁴ Spearheading the legal arguments for the plaintiffs was NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who contended that “separate educational facilities” were “inherently unequal,” and thus, they violated “the plaintiffs’ rights under the equal protection clause” of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁵ Adding weight to Marshall’s arguments were the testimonies of noted African-American psychologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who conducted “doll tests” with black and white children to determine the extent of ingrained racial prejudices for young school students.⁶ Their findings showed a clear preference among both black and white children for the white doll, which in turn, indicated “a fundamental conflict at the very foundation of the ego structure.”⁷

⁴ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

⁵ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 17.

⁶ Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 82.

⁷ Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 83.

For the Warren Court, school segregation perpetuated feelings of inferiority amid black children. Consuming the black psyche were notions of self-hatred, frustration, and fear.⁸ According to historian Daryl Michael Scott, whiteness became the norm for blacks to the point where it was perfectly natural for blacks to idealize white culture.⁹ Such a practice, however, only “proved to be a fatal psychological poison,” as white standards were simply unattainable for blacks.¹⁰ Having considered the psychological aspects of school segregation, the Warren Court voted unanimously to end racial discrimination in America’s public schools. Yet after a year, the Warren Court heard arguments regarding the implementation process of its original ruling. The outcome of these hearings was *Brown II* (1955), which in effect, asserted that the first *Brown* decision “was more symbolic than real” in its monumental claims for school integration.¹¹

Brown II set a dangerous precedent. It placed the responsibility of school desegregation in the hands of local school boards.¹² In doing so, it gave the local school boards complete autonomy over how the integration process would occur. Chief Justice Warren opined that district courts and local school authorities must work in conjunction with each other and act “with all deliberate speed” to eradicate racial segregation in the public schools.¹³ The Supreme Court’s actions, therefore, permitted an indefinite delay with respect to implementing desegregation. If the first *Brown* ruling constituted a national call for desegregation, *Brown II* almost certainly

⁸ Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 83.

⁹ Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 83.

¹⁰ Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 83.

¹¹ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 19.

¹² Nicolaus Mills, *Busing U.S.A.* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), 54.

¹³ Mills, *Busing U.S.A.*, 53.

made that call into a regional plea. Local school boards, especially in the South, could easily employ the local autonomy granted to them by *Brown II* to gerrymander their districts so that whites and blacks remained segregated. By the early 1970s, it was clear that drastic measures were necessary to combat the stagnated integration process. One such measure included busing, which first came to prominence in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled busing constitutional. This 1971 decision established a national precedent for mandatory busing as a means to affect urban integration. It also signaled a reversal of sentiment among the nine justices sitting in the now Warren Burger Supreme Court. When President Richard Nixon appointed Burger as Chief Justice in 1969, he intended to inject a conservative sentiment into the Court. As an advocate of judicial restraint, Burger seemed to be the answer for Nixon. Even so, Burger quickly found himself at the center of a judicially active Court, especially concerning the issue of school desegregation. With the *Swann* ruling, Charlotte became “the national test case for busing.”¹⁴ Given that Jim Crow segregation was particularly deep-seated throughout the South, desegregation busing became the city’s “proudest achievement” during the 1970s.¹⁵ Yet busing in Charlotte did not commence in a harmonious fashion; it entailed “boycotts and white flight and violence day after day in the schools.”¹⁶ The Las Vegas busing decision came one year after *Swann* in 1972 while the Los Angeles case arrived two years after *Milliken* in 1976.

¹⁴ Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina*, 3rd Edition (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), xi.

¹⁵ Gaillard, *Dream Long Deferred*, xi.

¹⁶ Gaillard, *Dream Long Deferred*, xi.

With *Milliken* the threat of resegregating America's public schools became a stark reality. The Supreme Court curtailed inter-school-district busing by requiring hard evidence of deliberately-pursued segregation policies in multiple school districts.¹⁷ Thus, multidistrict busing could no longer serve as a remedy for one school district's segregation problems. The *Milliken* case specifically involved the Detroit Board of Education (DBOE), which "maintained optional attendance zones" in 53 separate school districts throughout the city's metropolitan area.¹⁸ Such a practice, argued the NAACP, was conducive to the sociological phenomenon known as "white flight" where the newer schools built in Detroit's outlying neighborhoods tended to be "one-race schools" for whites.¹⁹ The conditions fostered under these circumstances were particularly harmful to Detroit's inner-city black population. They faced cultural isolation, especially since the DBOE "never bused white children to predominantly black schools."²⁰ To the extent that *Milliken* perpetuated the process of ghetto formation for Detroit's blacks, it symbolized a step backward for American school desegregation. And the psychological implications of the inner-city isolation that it spawned were widespread.

One of the major psychological implications associated with the inner-city was fear. As prominent social psychologist Gordon Allport argued, segregation, as a racial process rooted in fear, "is a form of discrimination that sets up spatial boundaries of some sort to accentuate the disadvantage of members of an out-

¹⁷ Mills, *Busing U.S.A.*, 98.

¹⁸ Mills, *Busing U.S.A.*, 100.

¹⁹ Mills, *Busing U.S.A.*, 101.

²⁰ Mills, *Busing U.S.A.*, 101.

group.”²¹ African Americans were the archetypal out-group who had to confront the negative side-effects of their history as slaves and the generalized stigmas concerning their physical anatomy. For Allport, “it is the rule in American cities to find Negroes living in segregated regions” where basic social accommodations like housing and schools were of significantly less quality than those of whites.²² With the guise of “preferential thinking,” a “group-norm theory of prejudice” emerged where all social groups “develop a way of living with characteristic codes and beliefs, standards and enemies to suit their own adaptive needs.”²³ Nowhere was this theory more evident than in America’s public schools.

Public education is one of the cruxes of American democracy. It places children at the center of society.²⁴ Kenneth Clark claimed that schools define the collective sentiments of a community, as they “change their policies from traditional to progressive or vice versa in order to meet the needs of the children.”²⁵ Under Jim Crow, however, “racial symbols” were “so prevalent” in America’s public schools that even young children recognized them.²⁶ Exposing children to school segregation meant indoctrinating them with attitudes of superiority or inferiority toward other races. Such a practice was counter-productive for not only school desegregation, but also for the attainment of values expressed in the “American Creed,” namely equality

²¹ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 52. In the field of developmental psychology, Allport’s work was groundbreaking. It addressed the various forms that prejudice could assume as a person’s mind matured. Public situations, such as schooling, tended to be the major areas where people created notions of self-perception. For African Americans who lived in racial isolation, they often did not engage in the vital process of self-perception creation by interacting with members of other races.

²² Allport, *Nature of Prejudice*, 52.

²³ Allport, *Nature of Prejudice*, 38.

²⁴ Kenneth B. Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 3.

²⁵ Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, 3.

²⁶ Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, 28.

and liberty.²⁷ Moreover, through parental socialization, a young child begins to construct ideas of race that reflect those held by his parents. The degree to which parents impose disciplinary measures on their child often ascertains the level of prejudices employed by that child.²⁸ Thus, if parents are quick to enforce harsh punishments on their child, then the child is more likely to cultivate “intense prejudices toward individuals of another race.”²⁹

Overall, the historiographical debate and psychological dilemma of school desegregation centered on attempting to engender a cross-racial acceptance. Although fear constituted a permanent side-effect of the school desegregation process, it nevertheless helped to expose the various problems associated with segregated schools. Such problems included the racial imbalances between black and white schools and the resultant disparities in per-pupil spending among those schools.³⁰ For the most part, school integration marked both “an educational success” and “a political failure.”³¹ It succeeded educationally in the sense that members of all races gained an equal opportunity to improve themselves through academic achievement.³² But it failed politically because most of the major decisions surrounding the school desegregation process occurred at the hands of local school

²⁷ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), lxxi. As a Swedish economist, Myrdal was somewhat of an outsider in the field of ethnoracial history. But after being commissioned by The Carnegie Foundation to conduct this monolithic study of American race relations, he became a major figure in the desegregation debate. In the 1954 *Brown* ruling, the Supreme Court cited Myrdal’s work as strong evidence for desegregating the nation’s public school system. Ultimately, Myrdal’s idea of the American Creed stems from the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence where Thomas Jefferson discussed equality and liberty among all men.

²⁸ Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, 27.

²⁹ Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, 27.

³⁰ Christine H. Rossell, *The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation Policy: Magnet Schools or Forced Busing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 160-61.

³¹ Jennifer L. Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

³² Hochschild and Scovronick, *American Dream and the Public Schools*, 29.

boards whose largely white members instituted reforms at their own pace and with their own interests in mind.³³

Busing in Las Vegas

In the Western United States, school integration resembled the process in the South. Insofar as Charlotte embodied the ideal model of desegregation busing with its large, consolidated school district, Las Vegas served as an intriguing case study from which the school integration process for Western cities could be examined. And as a distinctly Western city, Las Vegas developed much later than its Eastern counterparts. If World War I brought African Americans from the South to the North, then World War II facilitated African-American migration from the East to the West. The Hoover Dam's completion in 1936, along with "an air base, a magnesium plant, and a new suburb to house defense workers" by 1942, meant that Las Vegas was quickly becoming a metropolitan area.³⁴

Urbanization in Las Vegas could not have taken place without "federal spending, and lots of it."³⁵ This high degree of federal spending under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal primarily targeted public works projects, which in turn, generated a high demand for labor. Employment opportunities, therefore, became available for both black and white workers. But "by the late 1930s, despite their growing importance to the community's infant resort industry, blacks faced

³³ Hochschild and Scovronick, *American Dream and the Public Schools*, 29.

³⁴ Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930 – 2000*, 2nd Edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 14.

³⁵ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 13.

more segregationist barriers.”³⁶ These barriers included “being denied service not only in hotels, but also in a growing number of restaurants and stores.”³⁷ Jim Crow further manifested itself when white city officials, anxious to please Southern white dam workers, sought to rid Downtown of black business owners through a variety of informal actions.³⁸ Such actions entailed the systematic refusal of city hall “to renew the licenses of black-owned businesses” in the Downtown district unless the owners “relocated to the Westside.”³⁹

Due to these unofficial social zoning procedures, Las Vegas’ Westside became a black ghetto by the early 1940s. Its land values were “chronically low,” as the area “somehow eluded the building boom occasioned by the Hoover Dam.”⁴⁰ Historian Eugene Moehring argued that “police patrols were almost the only symbols of the city’s presence in the Westside.”⁴¹ The district faced the prospects of complete abandonment by the city, especially when considering the blatant lack of adequate municipal services.⁴² Yet the most glaring detriment of the Westside was the condition of its schools. Similar to the situation that sparked *Brown*, segregation existed primarily in the elementary schools.⁴³ The main question, however, was whether or not the Clark County School District (CCSD) (and its pre-1956 counterpart, the Las Vegas Union School District) should be held responsible for the *de facto* segregation in the Westside’s schools.

³⁶ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 175.

³⁷ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 176.

³⁸ Ronan Matthew, “A History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case: Kelly et al. v. The Clark County School District” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1998), 9.

³⁹ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 176.

⁴⁰ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 176.

⁴¹ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 178.

⁴² Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 179.

⁴³ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 16.

Segregation in the Westside permeated all levels of its tight-knit ghetto society. Black residents patronized black businesses, which spurred the growth of a strong race-based loyalty. Ethnic bonds, particularly in the context of a segmented labor force, tended to trump any kind of overarching class consciousness within the boundaries of the Westside. In fact, black Las Vegans faced both residential and commercial confinement between the North-South barriers of Owens Avenue and Bonanza Road with Avenue A and Martin Luther King Boulevard (formerly Highland Avenue) as the East-West boundaries, respectively (See Map I in Appendix).⁴⁴ The Westside's confined nature undoubtedly had major psychological repercussions for its black residents. Racially restrictive housing covenants contributed to a sense of entrapment, as blacks felt gradually more encircled by whites. By the 1960s, residential segregation in the Westside was a seemingly indelible fact of life. And black Las Vegans were becoming increasingly frustrated over the segregated conditions that they endured on a daily basis.

Tensions over jobs, housing, and discrimination grew throughout the 1960s, reaching a boiling point in 1968. The Southern Nevada chapter of the NAACP finally decided to move against the school segregation problem in the Westside. As the nation's foremost civil rights organization, the NAACP believed that school desegregation ought to be one of the biggest priorities in combating the larger system of societal segregation.⁴⁵ Just one year prior, however, black attorney, Charles Kellar, filed a legal complaint regarding job discrimination in Las Vegas' "culinary

⁴⁴ Matthew, "History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case," 29.

⁴⁵ Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 819.

and teamsters unions.”⁴⁶ If attacking labor segregation was for the black adults, then tackling school segregation was for the black children. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) comprised a separate entity designed specifically for the purpose of combating segregation through the judicial system.⁴⁷ Having initially started as the legal branch of the NAACP in 1910, the LDF gained independent status in 1957.⁴⁸ Headquartered in New York City, the LDF oversees and maintains local branches in regions like Southern Nevada (Clark County) throughout the United States.⁴⁹ Thus, the LDF carried out the actual litigation process for desegregation cases, such as the 1954 *Brown* decision, which Thurgood Marshall argued before he became a Supreme Court Justice in 1967.⁵⁰

It was under the guidance of Marshall that Kellar came to Las Vegas in 1960.⁵¹ Determined to integrate the city’s black community, he became the lead attorney and president of the local NAACP by 1967.⁵² Like most NAACP lawyers, Kellar possessed expert knowledge of constitutional and civil rights law. And after Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, he “believed that the law was on his side.”⁵³ According to Title IV of the 1964 law, “We [Congress] have tried to point out that the progress in school desegregation so well commenced in the period 1954-57 has been grinding to a halt.”⁵⁴ Kellar intended to jumpstart the school integration

⁴⁶ Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 190.

⁴⁷ United Press International (UPI), “NAACP Lawyers Wage 60-Year Rights War,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (8 May 1968), 71.

⁴⁸ UPI, “NAACP Lawyers Wage 60-Year Rights War,” 71.

⁴⁹ UPI, “NAACP Lawyers Wage 60-Year Rights War,” 71.

⁵⁰ UPI, “NAACP Lawyers Wage 60-Year Rights War,” 71.

⁵¹ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 16.

⁵² Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 190.

⁵³ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 16.

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964, 2508. This report covers the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which legally barred racial discrimination in most areas of American society.

process on a local level in Las Vegas by filing a class-action lawsuit against the CCSD in the Eighth Judicial District Court of Nevada on May 13, 1968.⁵⁵ Although the CCSD had somewhat anticipated the legal action taken by Kellar and the NAACP, it had made little progress in developing a comprehensive and reasonable school integration policy.⁵⁶

Headed by future Nevada Governor, Kenny Guinn, the CCSD was responsible for educating all of the children in Clark County aged 6 to 18. As the Superintendent from 1969 to 1978, Guinn oversaw a majority of the desegregation process. He asserted that the primary cause of the racial segregation in the Westside's elementary schools "was more geographic" than political or lawful.⁵⁷ Echoing these sentiments was the lead attorney for the CCSD, Robert Petroni. He contended that the CCSD did not have "to integrate racially imbalanced schools because the district did not create the imbalance."⁵⁸ Kellar, on the other hand, argued that the burden of school desegregation rested with the CCSD regardless of what gave rise to the segregation in the Westside.⁵⁹ Besides, Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act explicitly stated that the NAACP should not have "to take the lead" in desegregating America's public schools through costly litigation.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Kelly v. Clark County School District, 456 F.2d 100 (1972), 1. I was fortunate enough to obtain original copies of the legal briefs filed for this court case in the Eighth Judicial District Court of Nevada. Dr. David Tanenhaus was able to get them loaned to the Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the William S. Boyd School of Law. The briefs demonstrated clearly the legal opinions of each side (plaintiff and defendant) on where the responsibility to desegregate resided.

⁵⁶ Clark County School District, *Status Report on the District's Integration Policy* (Las Vegas, 1968), 1.

⁵⁷ Matthew, "History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case," 113.

⁵⁸ Kelly v. Clark County School District, 1.

⁵⁹ Kelly v. Clark County School District, 5.

⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964, 2508.

Known as *Kelly v. Clark County School District*, the Las Vegas school integration case proved to be a costly endeavor.⁶¹ The litigation process spanned four years from 1968 to 1972. In the lawsuit, Kellar claimed that the constitutional rights of black Las Vegans, particularly those granted in the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, had been knowingly and willingly violated by the CCSD's refusal to adopt an adequate desegregation plan.⁶² After years of delay, the CCSD proposed the "Sixth Grade Center Plan" (SGCP) which provided that the six elementary schools in the Westside become sixth grade classrooms that black and white students attended from "open zones" throughout Las Vegas.⁶³ These open zones, which did not cover all of Clark County, initially hinted that the SGCP was voluntary.⁶⁴ In fact, Superintendent Guinn asserted that the CCSD originally thought of desegregating on a voluntary basis through the use of magnet schools.⁶⁵ Yet the SGCP's voluntary nature soon became mandatory when in February 1972, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered busing as the primary mechanism for integrating the city's black and white communities. In *Swann*'s aftermath, school integration, for the courts, effectively meant forced busing, as they deemed it the only plausible way to rectify the racial imbalances that existed in segregated schools.⁶⁶

The transition from voluntary to mandatory busing was an issue that inspired much resistance. Many white parents simply refused to send their children to

⁶¹ *Kelly v. Clark County School District*, 1.

⁶² *Kelly v. Clark County School District*, 4.

⁶³ Clark County School District, *Report of Task Force on Integration* (Las Vegas, 1969), 3. This report showed a lack of preparation by the school district with respect to developing a feasible integration policy. It also confirmed the need for a greater number of African-American educators and administrators in the CCSD to help assuage the negative psychological side effects associated with the desegregation process for black students.

⁶⁴ Clark County School District, *Task Force*, 3.

⁶⁵ Matthew, "History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case," 115.

⁶⁶ *Kelly v. Clark County School District*, 10.

integrated schools. Forced busing posed a serious threat to the *status quo* that middle class whites were determined to preserve. Therefore, according to Superintendent Guinn, “the burden of busing was on the black community” in Las Vegas.⁶⁷ For black students living in the Westside, the SGCP obligated them to be bused out of the area for “all but one of the 12 mandated years of schooling.”⁶⁸ Aside from the sixth grade year, which involved whites being bused to the Westside, black students had to endure one-way busing to white schools. But “the general feeling in the black community was that this inconvenience was better than segregation.”⁶⁹ Eleven years of one-way busing, however, constituted more than just an inconvenience for black students. In white schools, they experienced social isolation as an out-group. Psychologically, such a process could only harm the black children’s collective self-esteem. Not seeing black teachers or administrators had affected the motivation of black students.⁷⁰ Indeed, the CCSD’s Task Force on Integration pointed precisely to this idea in 1969 when its report stated that black “children should be able to see black people in positions of day-to-day power and authority.”⁷¹ Unfortunately, one-way busing prevented this necessary step in the school desegregation process from happening.

Segregated schools and one-way busing eroded any semblance of stability within the CCSD. In 1969, race riots erupted at various high schools across the Las Vegas Valley.⁷² CCSD officials scrambled to modify and implement the SGCP

⁶⁷ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 115.

⁶⁸ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 108.

⁶⁹ Matthew, “History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case,” 108.

⁷⁰ Clark County School District, *Task Force*, 14.

⁷¹ Clark County School District, *Task Force*, 14.

⁷² Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 191-93.

during the litigation process in order to avoid contributing to the growing violence. One of the primary points of concern involved the sheer financial costs attached to the SGCP. A year after the *Kelly* decision, in 1973, the United States Commission on Civil Rights published a report entitled “School Desegregation in Ten Communities,” which investigated the economics behind the SGCP.⁷³ In effect, the CCSD’s “1972-73 budget of approximately \$64 million” incurred supplemental costs of around \$2 million related to just “desegregating the elementary schools.”⁷⁴ Thirty new buses - “each costing \$18,000 apiece”- joined the CCSD’s fleet strictly for the purpose of handling “the increase in the number of students” bused to school under the SGCP.⁷⁵

In response to the enormous supplemental costs and perceived violent side effects of mandatory busing, an ideology of reactionary populism emerged within the city’s white community. The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* carried more stories related to busing opposition just prior to the opening of the 1972-73 school year, which was the first year of the SGCP. One story that proved particularly contentious entailed a statement from the Deputy Superintendent of the CCSD, Clifford Lawrence, in which he claimed that “the busing moratorium bill passed by Congress and signed by President Nixon” provided a stay for the school district.⁷⁶ This article incited a controversial string of events that nearly led to a Supreme Court hearing. Generally speaking, the CCSD threatened not to implement the SGCP due to developments in the legislative proceedings of Congress and the Nixon administration. Such a threat

⁷³ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Ten Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Commission on Civil Rights, 1973), 209. This federal government report helped frame the school desegregation debate for Las Vegas and how it compared to other cities.

⁷⁴ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Ten Communities*, 209.

⁷⁵ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Ten Communities*, 209.

⁷⁶ Mary Hausch, “L.V. Busing Contempt Charged,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (9 August 1972), 2.

was not welcome in either the courts or Las Vegas' black community. A public outcry quickly ensued.

The public outrage stemming from Deputy Superintendent Lawrence's comments spurred the courts to act. Federal district judge, Bruce Thompson, ordered the CCSD officials "to appear in court to explain why they should not be held in contempt of court" over their "intended violation" of the *Kelly* ruling.⁷⁷ According to that August 1972 *Review-Journal* article, Deputy Superintendent Lawrence believed that Nixon's busing moratorium bill acted as a hold on the SGCP.⁷⁸ Although the CCSD committed a "constitutional violation" by not adhering to the provisions stipulated in *Swann*, the *Kelly* decision clearly stated that Nixon's busing moratorium was not self-executing.⁷⁹ Therefore, at the heart of this dilemma sat the U.S. Constitution. The plaintiffs (NAACP) were abiding by the courts while the defendants (CCSD) were following the executive and legislative branches. Was the *Kelly* case single-handedly dissolving the system of checks and balances within America's governmental structure? If nothing else, urban desegregation busing, as typified by plans like the SGCP, struck at the core of what American democracy truly signified.

The SGCP went into effect in September 1972. Judge Thompson denied the CCSD's motion of appeal regarding a stay on busing.⁸⁰ But a populist group called *Bus-Out* began to rally around the anti-busing cause.⁸¹ For the most part, *Bus-Out*

⁷⁷ Matthew, "History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case," 95.

⁷⁸ Hausch, "L.V. Busing Contempt Charged," 1.

⁷⁹ *Kelly v. Clark County School District*, 5.

⁸⁰ Matthew, "History of the Las Vegas School Desegregation Case," 97.

⁸¹ Mary Hausch, "Busing Protesters in Attempt to Halt Sixth Grade Plan Start," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (2 September 1972), 1.

firmly adhered to Nixon's busing moratorium bill, which disallowed the "transportation of students or teachers in order to overcome racial imbalances" in the public schools.⁸² In demonstrating their opposition to the SGCP, *Bus-Out* sued the CCSD and asked for an injunction from the courts to stop forced busing.⁸³ Given the controversial nature of busing, grassroots organizations such as *Bus-Out* were not unique to Las Vegas. In the end, *Bus-Out* failed to prevent the SGCP from moving forward because the courts declined to hear their lawsuit. As the CCSD prepared to integrate the Westside's schools through busing, there was an aura of nervous anticipation that surrounded Las Vegas in the fall of 1972. The potential for racial disturbances over the SGCP was high, but most city residents understood its importance for race relations, and thus, they endured. Moreover, the suburban cities of Henderson and Boulder City as well as unincorporated communities south of Las Vegas were not in the mandated busing zone, so there were enclaves where middle class white families could flee to escape the traumas of mandatory busing.

Busing in Los Angeles

As in Las Vegas, mandatory busing in Los Angeles entailed the movement of black students from an area of high concentration to an area of low concentration. Unlike Las Vegas, however, Los Angeles' mandatory busing plan also included Hispanic (Mexican) students. It represented a larger sociological diffusion of ethnic minorities. According to historian Josh Sides, racially restrictive housing covenants, which the 1948 Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* deemed constitutional yet

⁸² U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1972, 442.

⁸³ Hausch, "Busing Protesters in Attempt to Halt Sixth Grade Plan Start," 1.

unenforceable by the judicial process, were “the most entrenched barrier[s] to neighborhood integration.”⁸⁴ And since the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) maintained a neighborhood school policy, residential desegregation essentially translated into school integration. For African Americans living in postwar Los Angeles, “residential integration was always about more than just owning property -- it was about dignity, opportunity, and their children’s future.”⁸⁵

Los Angeles’ black community traditionally faced racial confinement along Central Avenue south of Downtown. The 1920s saw a huge effort, through housing covenants, to confine African Americans in this particular area.⁸⁶ But in the postwar era, black Angelenos “wanted to move out of areas where they had traditionally been concentrated.”⁸⁷ Their collective drive to suburbanize met fierce resistance, especially from “the white working-class suburbs surrounding the South Central” black ghetto.⁸⁸ For white suburban Southern Californians, residential and school desegregation posed a serious threat to the moral, aesthetic, and financial well-being of their neighborhoods and schools.⁸⁹ Even white Angelenos joined the anti-integration movement by forming the Committee against Integration and Intermarriage (CII).⁹⁰ By the early 1960s, Los Angeles’ blacks were becoming increasingly marginalized due to the complete segregation of their community.

Making matters worse was the relative ineffectiveness of Los Angeles’ NAACP. After the *Brown* decision, school desegregation moved at an extremely

⁸⁴ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African-American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 95.

⁸⁵ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 95.

⁸⁶ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 17.

⁸⁷ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 95.

⁸⁸ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 96.

⁸⁹ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 96.

⁹⁰ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 165.

slow pace in the city. Critical race theorist, Derrick Bell, suggested that integration efforts only happened if they served the larger interests of the country.⁹¹ Given the importance of the defense industry in postwar Los Angeles Bell's "interest-convergence principle" was particularly pertinent to the city's race relations during the Cold War.⁹² The Soviets could easily point to the overt contradiction in American democracy where blacks endured the detriments of second-class citizenship in a society that professed the equality of all. Chief Justice and former California Governor, Earl Warren, regarded this paradox as damaging to the aims of American foreign policy, and as a threat to U.S. national security interests.⁹³ If *Brown* initiated the school integration process for the nation; it would take another court case to desegregate the public schools on a local basis in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles school integration case became known as *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles*. It originally began as a class-action lawsuit filed against the LAUSD by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in August 1963.⁹⁴ Yet the case did not receive a final ruling until June 1976.⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, the thirteen-year litigation process had negative consequences for Los Angeles' school desegregation. In a way, the LAUSD sought to draw out the case for as long as possible in an attempt to delay the adoption of an integration plan. As evidenced by Ronald Reagan's successful gubernatorial election in 1966, California faced a rising tide of "white conservatism," which stood to hamper school desegregation

⁹¹ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 49.

⁹² Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 67-69.

⁹³ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 65-66.

⁹⁴ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 167.

⁹⁵ *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles*, 17 Cal. 3d 280 (1976), 1.

efforts across the state.⁹⁶ Since the LAUSD refused to integrate its schools, the school district, in short, became an emblem of this resurging conservative reaction to judicially active courts.

Originally argued in Los Angeles Superior Court, the *Crawford* case faced an uphill battle from the start. In 1970, Judge Alfred Gitelson, a magistrate sympathetic to school integration, ordered the LAUSD “to prepare and implement a reasonably feasible plan for the desegregation of its schools.”⁹⁷ Yet the LAUSD appealed the ruling to the California Supreme Court, which later affirmed Judge Gitelson’s decision.⁹⁸ The outcome of the *Crawford* case held vast implications for Los Angeles, as a massive integration plan covering “nearly 62,000 elementary school children” was to go into effect during the 1977-78 school year.⁹⁹ With a mixture of voluntary and mandatory elements, the LAUSD’s desegregation plan became the largest of its type. Like the CCSD, the LAUSD initially emphasized the use of magnet schools for integration. But the courts swiftly dismissed that method of desegregation, especially since many white parents chose not to send their children to magnet schools. In addition, both the CCSD and the LAUSD targeted multiple elementary school grade levels for mandatory desegregation busing.

For a school district encompassing some 710 square miles, magnet schools made sense from a practical viewpoint.¹⁰⁰ They were schools that attracted students, regardless of race or gender, for specific vocational purposes. Although critics

⁹⁶ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 194-95.

⁹⁷ *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles*, 1.

⁹⁸ *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles*, 1.

⁹⁹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived: Los Angeles School Desegregation* (Washington, D.C.: Commission on Civil Rights, 1977), 13.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 4.

contended that magnet schools merely served as instruments for maintaining segregated schools, proponents saw them as places where a diverse student body could gain valuable vocational experience. The problem, of course, was that magnet school attendance occurred on a voluntary basis. In a school district as large as the LAUSD, mandatory measures were necessary to affect any kind of broad-based change. And such change had to occur first in the elementary schools, which represented the highest degree of segregation in the district's schools at about 60 percent.¹⁰¹ Therefore, as a minimum objective, the LAUSD had to integrate "at least 50 of the 264 segregated elementary schools" in the district through forced busing.¹⁰² This minimum objective amounted to about 19% of the LAUSD's schools with segregation problems.

The California Supreme Court actually mandated this minimum objective, but left the Los Angeles Superior Court to monitor compliance.¹⁰³ Judge Paul Egly oversaw the development and implementation of the LAUSD's integration plan.¹⁰⁴ Some black activists even wanted him to design the plan, however, that option proved too controversial to be viable.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the LAUSD formed a special committee to draw up the eventual desegregation policy. Known as the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Student Integration (CACSI), its primary mission was "to reduce racial isolation" in Los Angeles' public schools through a workable integration strategy.¹⁰⁶ The first recommendations from CACSI to the LAUSD came in August 1976. They

¹⁰¹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 202.

¹⁰² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 208.

¹⁰³ Myrna Oliver, "The Busing Suit: A Long Legal Journey," *Los Angeles Times* (11 September 1978), C1.

¹⁰⁴ Oliver, "The Busing Suit: A Long Legal Journey," C1.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver, "The Busing Suit: A Long Legal Journey," C1.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 62.

included “a proposal to expand the Permits with Transportation (PWT) program,” which was the busing component of the desegregation plan.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, the LAUSD did not immediately heed CACSI’s calls to reform and enhance the district’s integration initiative.¹⁰⁸

By March 1977, CACSI had submitted its final recommendations for a desegregation plan to the LAUSD. In effect, the proposed plan encompassed “a 3-year period beginning in September 1977” and ending in June 1980.¹⁰⁹ It explicitly stated that “all schools would be integrated so that no school enrollment would exceed 60 percent of one minority.”¹¹⁰ The plan mandated desegregation for the LAUSD’s segregated elementary schools through mandatory busing in the first year and for its junior high schools in the second year. However, integrating senior high schools through forced busing in the third year did not occur. Instead, those schools faced the ill-fated prospects of voluntary desegregation “through magnet schools.”¹¹¹ Despite CACSI’s integration proposals, the LAUSD decided that mandatory busing would only work best at the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade levels. Paralleling the CCSD’s Sixth Grade Center Plan in Las Vegas, the LAUSD established “specialized learning centers to which fourth, fifth, and sixth graders attending segregated schools (75 percent minority or white) would be transported for one 9-week period during the school year.”¹¹² Such a plan “allowed for no desegregation from kindergarten through third grade” due to concerns over the psychological traumas stemming from

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 63.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 39.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 39.

¹¹¹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 39.

¹¹² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 39.

busing at such a young age.¹¹³ Thus, a sharp divide had clearly developed between CACSI and the LAUSD over how to properly integrate Los Angeles' schools.

This divide rapidly manifested itself in a battle between the courts and the LAUSD. Judge Egly and the LAUSD sparred repeatedly over the creation of an adequate desegregation plan.¹¹⁴ Bill Boyarski, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, described the situation as “a classic confrontation of American government - a judge pitted against a school board in a desegregation case, part of a struggle that goes back to the days when judges first began ordering school boards to desegregate.”¹¹⁵ This depiction basically defined the nature of the school integration debate in many American cities during the 1970s. Mandatory desegregation was an issue that garnered much flak, particularly in the realm of politics. Yet the typical response by school boards was “to put pressure on the judge.”¹¹⁶ Nathaniel Jones, an attorney for the Los Angeles NAACP, claimed that such a tactic “frees them (the board) of any political heat.”¹¹⁷ Making the courts appear like the true villains in the school desegregation process was the boards' ultimate goal.

Even though the *Crawford* decision ended in 1976, the infighting between the courts and the LAUSD turned into a kind of post-trial litigation process. Judge Egly declared the LAUSD's integration plan to be “constitutionally deficient under California constitutional standards,” as it “neither eliminates nor begins to eliminate segregated schools.”¹¹⁸ Yet the LAUSD appealed Egly's condemnation to identify

¹¹³ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Bill Boyarski, “Egly, Board Open Round 2 on Integration,” *Los Angeles Times* (8 November 1977), B1.

¹¹⁵ Boyarski, “Egly, Board Open Round 2 on Integration,” B1.

¹¹⁶ Boyarski, “Egly, Board Open Round 2 on Integration,” B1.

¹¹⁷ Boyarski, “Egly, Board Open Round 2 on Integration,” B1.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Generation Deprived*, 216.

the “legal basis” and “constitutional mandate” for desegregation.¹¹⁹ And like the *Kelly* case in Las Vegas, the courts found that segregated schools violated minorities’ (blacks and Hispanics) rights to Equal Protection.¹²⁰ Perhaps the bigger question regarding Los Angeles’ school integration was where the responsibility to bus resided. Of course, the arguments of LAUSD officials resembled those of the CCSD in declaring that residential segregation was not the product of their policies. Therefore, “the legal burden to desegregate” did not necessarily sit with the LAUSD.¹²¹

Another point of contention between the courts and the LAUSD involved the disparities in per-pupil spending among segregated schools. This issue also surfaced in the *Kelly* decision, as schools in the Westside received less funding from the CCSD compared to schools in other areas of the school district.¹²² In a court battle that raged in the California judicial system at the same time as the *Crawford* case, the 1971 *Serrano v. Priest* decision “declared that the disparities between rich and poor [school] districts resulted in unequal – and therefore unconstitutional – distribution of funds.”¹²³ Accordingly, the *Serrano* ruling invalidated “the state’s system of financing schools with local property taxes.”¹²⁴ In doing so, the California Supreme Court sought to attack residential segregation by equalizing school funding. Since residential segregation effectively brought about school segregation, the *Crawford* and *Serrano* cases were simply another means to combat residential segregation.

¹¹⁹ Jeanne Thiel Landis, “The Crawford Desegregation Suit in Los Angeles 1977-81: The Multiethnic Community Versus BUSTOP” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 65.

¹²⁰ Landis, “The Crawford Desegregation Suit in Los Angeles 1977-81,” 65.

¹²¹ Landis, “The Crawford Desegregation Suit in Los Angeles 1977-81,” 66.

¹²² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Ten Communities*, 209.

¹²³ Jack D. Fine, “Benefits of Public-Interest Lawyer Fees,” *Los Angeles Times* (31 March 1978), E7.

¹²⁴ Fine, “Benefits of Public-Interest Lawyer Fees,” E7.

The *Serrano* decision equalized school funding, but it did so at the expense of taxpayers. There was a massive backlash against this court ruling, particularly from wealthy Californians who did not want their tax dollars funding poor, inner-city, and segregated schools. In 1978, Californians voted for Proposition 13, which capped property taxes throughout the state. It served as the vehicle through which wealthy [white] Californians vented their collective frustrations over the *Serrano* case. Yet the courts largely ignored this taxpayer revolt. In fact, the California Supreme Court even cited the *Serrano* decision as a precedent for *Crawford*, asserting that “wealth discrimination in the public school system” constituted a form “of *de facto* racial segregation” that could not stand in a school district as large as the LAUSD.¹²⁵

As if pressure from the courts was not enough, the LAUSD faced lawsuits from both the San Fernando Valley Chamber of Commerce (SFVCC) and BUSTOP. These lawsuits collectively represented the anti-busing faction in Los Angeles. Both the SFVCC and BUSTOP were semi-reactionary organizations that viewed forced busing as an unwarranted nuisance.¹²⁶ Given that the city’s busing initiative primarily entailed black and Hispanic students being bused from South Central and East Los Angeles to white schools in the San Fernando Valley, the SFVCC claimed the Valley had suffered dire economic consequences from busing.¹²⁷ But the courts saw no merit in hearing these particular lawsuits, especially since *Serrano* proved that wealth discrimination in California’s public schools ought to be eliminated even at the expense of potential economic harm to a community.

¹²⁵ *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles*, 8.

¹²⁶ Ken Lubas, “Chamber Sues to Stop Busing,” *Los Angeles Times* (16 November 1978), SF1.

¹²⁷ Lubas, “Chamber Sues to Stop Busing,” SF1.

Conclusion

Above all, mandatory busing in the context of school desegregation was a unique American phenomenon. No other Western society engaged in this kind of social experiment on such a large scale. It gained momentum on the coattails of the Civil Rights Movement. The 1954 *Brown* decision coupled with the 1964 Civil Rights Act served as two major catalysts for school integration. Yet it was not until the 1971 *Swann* ruling that busing became a constitutional solution to an unconstitutional problem. As a lingering *constitutional* legacy from the late nineteenth century, the Jim Crow system had become politically unpalatable by the early 1970s.¹²⁸ And with forced busing, Jim Crow was once again able to reemerge in the ethnoracial fear and violence that materialized during the school desegregation process. Ultimately, the extent to which ethnoracial tensions drove the busing movements in Las Vegas and Los Angeles was clearly evident in the legal briefs filed for each city's court case, as the NAACP and ACLU both emphasized multiform racial segregation as the primary problem.

Upon further examination of the busing process in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, there were two main parallels. First, wealthy whites in both cities were able to take their children out of the public schools, and thus, they avoided the negative side effects associated with mandatory busing. Wealthy whites also pointed to the ethnoracial violence that stemmed from forced busing to demonstrate that the process was simply unacceptable in a society that cherished law and order. Second, poor whites and ethnic minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics, had to endure

¹²⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 214.

firsthand the psychological traumas of busing. The burden of busing undoubtedly resided with ethnoracial minorities. It was their schools that faced closure, and in one-way busing plans, they were the ones who had to endure the inconveniences of additional transportation measures. These facts put pressure on the courts to recognize the potential harm being done to young students, especially given their impressionability. In the end, however, mandatory busing constituted a necessary measure along the road to ridding many of America's inner-city public schools of Jim Crow segregation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Purpose of Study (Reanalyzed)

One of the primary purposes of this study centers on demonstrating how the industrial-resort paradigm applies to Las Vegas and Los Angeles. For the purposes of my thesis, Las Vegas signified the resort city with its cornucopia of casinos and hotels and Los Angeles represented the industrial city with its coastal trade operations and manufacturing core. The idea of tourism as Las Vegas' main source of revenue meant that ethnoracial tensions had to be tightly controlled by the city's government. Los Angeles, alternatively, maintained a more diverse urban economy, and thus, interruptions to its revenue stream from race riots and other ethnoracial disturbances could be tolerated to a certain degree. In short, the industrial-resort paradigm serves as an important complement to the urban ethnoracial framework.

Aside from its complementary role with the urban ethnoracial framework, the industrial-resort paradigm promotes the idea that multiform segregation is a uniquely urban process marked by the close social interactions of multiple ethnoracial groups. In fact, the clustered environments of most urban (and suburban) ghettos and barrios encouraged residents to cooperate, especially in adverse situations. This cooperation often led to the development of strong communal bonds, even as the urban crises threatened to destroy any semblance of unity among residents in either the ghetto or barrio. But after World War II, the presence of whites in the inner city grew increasingly scarce. In the end, there was a friction of distance between whites and other ethnoracial groups that only resulted in fear and mistrust.

Revisiting the Urban Ethnoracial Framework

Available to historians and sociologists alike, the urban ethnoracial framework seeks to explain how multiform segregation can lead to urban crises. Although it generally falls outside the traditional Montgomery-to-Memphis structure of the Civil Rights Movement, the urban ethnoracial framework does offer a basic foundation for the school desegregation narrative. And unlike the Montgomery-to-Memphis story, which was primarily a Southern phenomenon, the urban ethnoracial framework addresses segregation, ghettos/barrios, and riots in any American city that displays the pertinent historical or sociological symptoms. With their extensive racial segregation in housing, schooling, and employment, especially at the onset of World War II, Las Vegas and Los Angeles appeared ideal when considering the application of the urban ethnoracial framework in a comparative historical study.

In conducting a comparative historical study, the urban ethnoracial framework permits historians to evaluate the history of multiple cities with constant references to multiform segregation and the urban crises. For instance, historian Thomas Sugrue found that “segregated housing compounded the urban crisis” and “the combination of deindustrialization, white flight, and hardening ghettoization” only muddled urban ethnoracial issues.¹ Even though Sugrue’s main focus centered on inner-city Detroit, his remarks explicitly allude to the urban ethnoracial framework. But urban ethnoracial issues were “as much a political as a social construction.”² Therefore, the urban ethnoracial framework should be flexible in its interpretation of processes such as deindustrialization, ghettoization, and segregation.

¹ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8.

² Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 9.

Comparing and Contrasting the Two Cities

The primary contribution of my thesis to the pertinent historiography is the comparative study it offers of Las Vegas and Los Angeles with respect to ethnoracial issues such as segregation and rioting. Because Las Vegas possessed a smaller population than Los Angeles and relied mostly on tourism for municipal revenues, race relations were more fluid, and thus, ethnoracial tensions flared and sub-sided in a more rapid fashion. Los Angeles, however, sought to maintain an image of racial tolerance to attract a large workforce for meeting the labor demands of its booming economy. This image became shattered due to race riots in the 1940s and 1960s, but the city's large industrial base was able to absorb most of the detrimental societal effects stemming from ethnoracial violence. Ultimately, these similarities and differences can be explained by the industrial-resort paradigm.

Since ghettos and barrios signified the outward manifestations of racial segregation in each city, clear explanations of them are essential. Ghettos, in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, consisted of African Americans who congregated in particular urban and suburban spaces according to cultural affinities such as single-race housing, jobs, and schools. Although racially isolated and spatially separated from other areas of the city, these ghettos thrived on the spirit of self-reliance. Similarly, Los Angeles' barrio encompassed Mexican-American neighborhoods with distinctive cultural traditions rooted in the Spanish culture. These cultural traditions encountered resistance on occasion from Anglo Americans who viewed the city's Mexican past as a negative part of its history. The racial tensions that resulted from such an ethnocentric outlook were a major component of the city's race riots.

Comparative Urban Analysis (Continued)

To reinforce the comparative urban analysis presented in my thesis, it becomes necessary to define the word “urban” and how it relates to Las Vegas and Los Angeles. In effect, urban means city, which demographically defined for the purposes of this study would involve a specified area exceeding 30,000 people. Under that definition, Las Vegas did not become “urban” until the 1950s. Los Angeles, on the other hand, achieved “urban” status in the late nineteenth century. Given the distinct rates of population growth, each city’s ethnoracial issues developed differently. But the urban ethnoracial framework accounts for these differences by also considering geographic features as part of the comparative urban study. In this regard, Las Vegas and Los Angeles are grouped as Western cities with the legacy of World War II defense spending as inciting the growth of ethnoracial diversity.

Overall, Las Vegas and Los Angeles are two Western cities with histories rooted in ethnoracial tension. This comparative urban study demonstrates how the similarities and differences between each city affected the development of multiform segregation and the urban crises in housing, employment, and education. Race riots and the ghetto underclass collectively signify intricate by-products of the urban crises that multiform segregation precipitated. Conducting a comparative analysis of the ethnoracial histories of both cities reveals that not only was multiform segregation present in each one, but also the integration solutions to eradicate it were both gradual and ineffective at times. Ultimately, Las Vegas and Los Angeles serve as poignant case studies for investigating the development of urban race relations in the American West.

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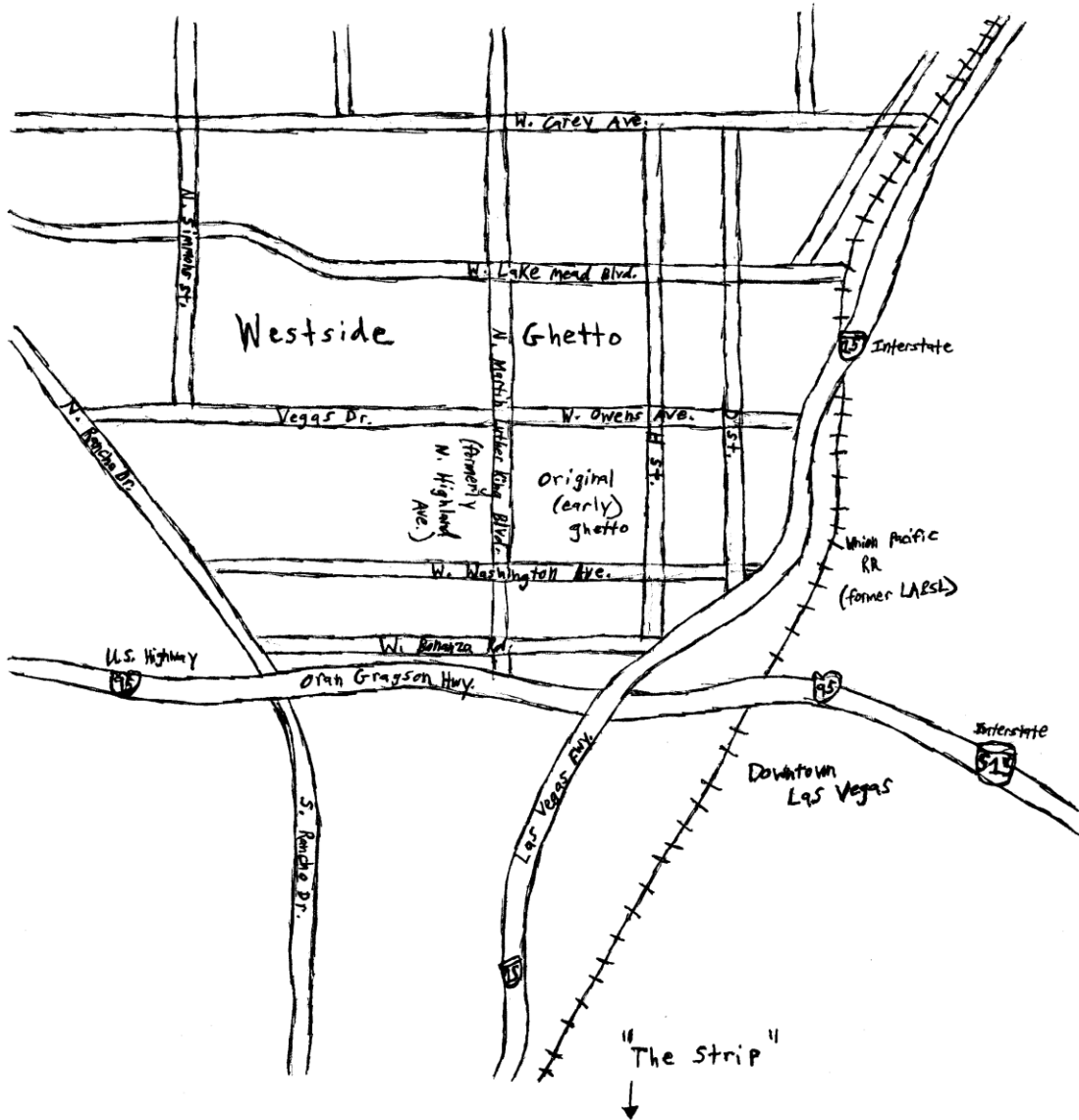
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APPENDIX

MAPS

Westside Ghetto (Las Vegas)

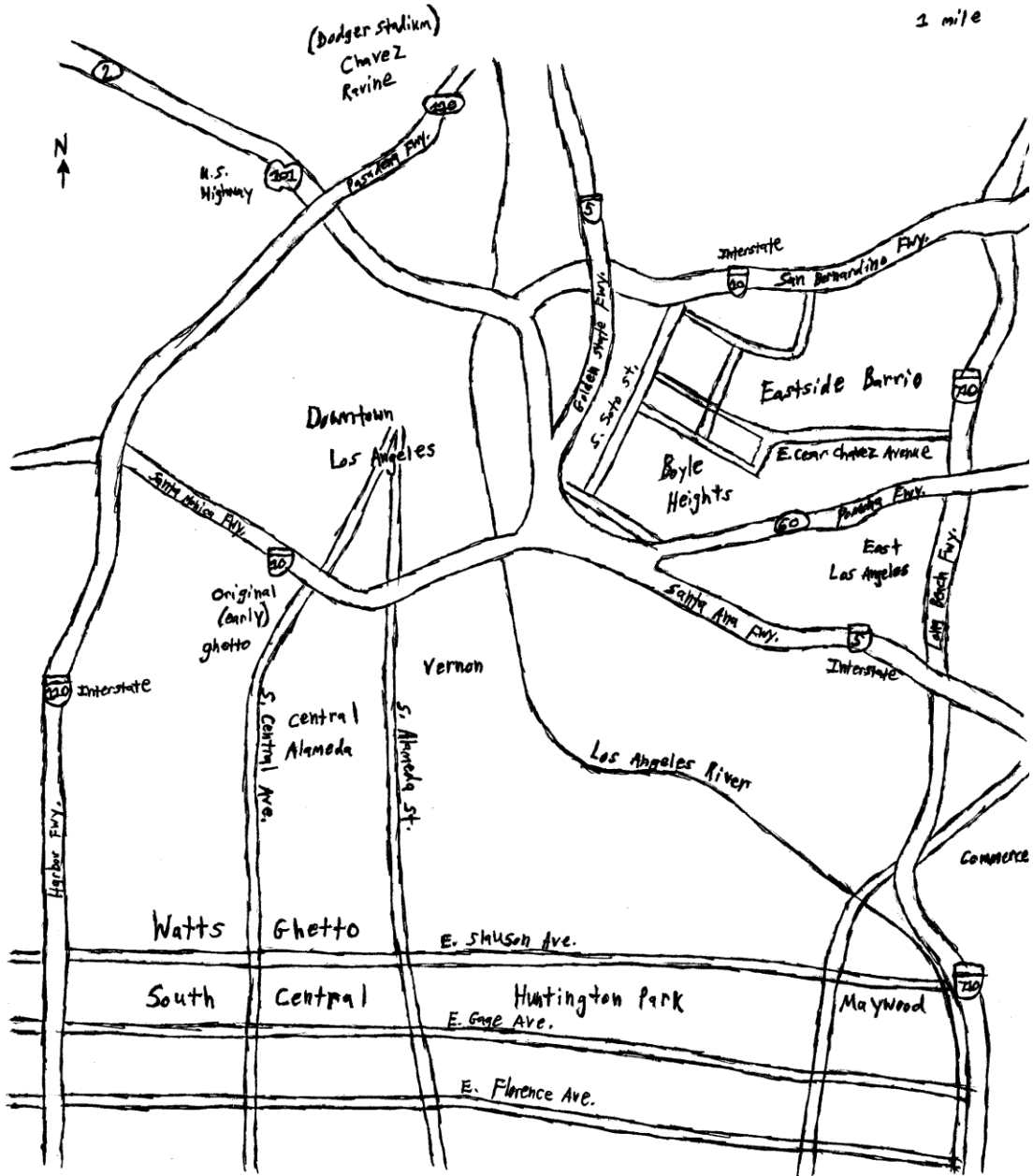
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Map I (Present Day Central Las Vegas)

Watts Ghetto & Eastside Barrio (Los Angeles)

Scale: 1 inch = 1 mile



Map II (Present Day Central Los Angeles)

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Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, History, 2008
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Thesis Title: Multiform Segregation in the Context of the Urban Crises in Las Vegas
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