



# Culver City Historical Context Study

*Prepared for:*

City of Culver City

*Prepared by:*



Architectural  
Resources Group

Los Angeles, CA

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# 1. Introduction

## Project Background

In June 2021, the City Council of Culver City adopted Resolution No. 2021-R066, expressing its commitment to making Culver City a welcoming and inclusive community, and acknowledging and rectifying aspects of the City's racial history. The resolution includes the following recitals<sup>1</sup>:

- A. The City acknowledges, apologizes for, and condemns all racially motivated, discriminatory, or exclusionary aspects of the City's history, and deeply regrets the pain, hurt, and suffering such policies have caused;
- B. City Council and staff will continue to engage in individual and collective work to understand bias;
- C. The City will continue to examine the historical role that racism has played in Culver City by committing resources to draft a Racial Equity Action Plan and will review and revise its policies, procedures, ordinances, values, goals, and missions through an anti-racism lens to foster an unbiased and inclusive environment that is free of discrimination and harassment toward any person or group;
- D. The City will continue to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in its access to City services, programs, and facilities, and will stand up to bigotry, hatred, intolerance, racism, and violence; and
- E. The City unequivocally rejects racism in all its forms and is committed to working towards building an antiracist Culver City where people of all races and cultural backgrounds are welcome to live and prosper.

The resolution was adopted following discussion among the City Council, receipt of community comments, and information provided by City staff. The adopted resolution sets forth a series of concrete, actionable steps that the City shall take to work toward achieving racial equity.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2022, the City Council authorized the issuance of a Request for Proposal (RFP) to prepare a Historical Context Study for Culver City. The purpose of the Historical Context Study is to examine, analyze, and document the history of discriminatory dynamics in Culver City's history, particularly those related to race and ethnicity. The findings of the Historical Context Study are intended to provide the historical context and background needed to inform future efforts to work toward achieving racial equity. In 2023, Architectural Resources Group, Inc. (ARG) was selected to prepare the Historical Context Study.

## Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this study is to examine the history of Culver City through the lens of race and other discriminatory dynamics. Throughout the historical development of metropolitan Los Angeles, a

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<sup>1</sup> City of Culver City, Resolution No. 2021-R066, adopted Jun. 17, 2021, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> City of Culver City, "Resolution Acknowledging Culver City's Racial History," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/City-Hall/Get-Involved/Race-and-Equity>.

convergence of public policies and private practices routinely and systematically worked against Blacks and other communities of color, religious minorities, members of the queer (LGBTQ+) community, and other groups who have historically been marginalized and disenfranchised. As a result of these policies and practices, these groups were routinely denied the opportunity to own and occupy property; patronize businesses, institutions, and places of public accommodation; and enjoy legally and socially sanctioned rights. This resulted in patterns of segregation and the reinforcement of prevailing racial, cultural, and class biases.

Discriminatory policies and practices have resulted in long-lasting, generational impacts in multiple realms: population makeup, homeownership rates, generational wealth building, education, and land use and planning decisions. They have created and sustained attitudes that exclude or minimize the interests of racial, religious, and cultural minority groups and prevent them from enjoying equal access to the rights bestowed upon them.

These dynamics are not unique to Culver City – they historically played out across the nation, including in communities throughout Southern California. However, Culver City has proactively pursued a comprehensive study of its racial history to better understand how discriminatory dynamics played out in the local context. This document examines, in detail, how the history of discrimination shaped the built environment and cultural context of Culver City between its inception in 1913 and the recent past.

This document is intended to be an informational tool. Acknowledging and understanding the history of discrimination in Culver City is imperative to shaping current and future initiatives aimed at achieving the goals of the aforementioned Resolution No. 2021-R066.

It should be emphasized that the objectives of this document, a Historical Context Study, are different than those of a Historic Context Statement. A Historic Context Statement is a planning tool that documents the history of a community and identifies standards that shall be met for properties to qualify for historic designation. This document is not a Historic Context Statement. Rather, the purpose of this document is to provide an account of the history of discrimination in Culver City. The topics addressed herein are intended to provide essential context about the history of discrimination in Culver City, so that the City has sufficient historical context and background to develop and implement equity initiatives.

## Research Methods

### Primary and Secondary Source Research

A variety of research materials were consulted to complete this project. ARG conducted extensive primary and secondary source research related to the racial and cultural history of Culver City. Primary sources included historical newspaper archives obtained from regional publications like the *Los Angeles Times* and *Los Angeles Evening Express*; local periodicals like the *Evening Star-News* (a Culver City publication) and the *Evening Vanguard* (a Venice-based publication that reported on issues in Venice and other nearby Westside communities); and Black-owned newspapers including the *California Eagle* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which often reported on race-based incidents that were not noted in any of the above-listed publications, whose audiences were predominantly White.

Other primary sources that were consulted included various city documents provided by the City of Culver City; historical demographic data, including Federal census data obtained from Ancestry.com and

census data for 1940-2000 amalgamated by Philip J. Ethington, et. al; data and associated reports prepared in 1939 by the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which included written descriptions of the racial composition of neighborhoods; and property deeds, obtained from the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, which often had clauses related to race and ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

ARG also consulted with the Culver City Historical Society, which maintains an extensive archive of primary source materials on topics related to the City's history. ARG visited the archives of the Culver City Historical Society and reviewed its collection of newspaper articles, city documents, historic photographs, and other materials of interest to this study.

Various secondary source materials were also consulted. These included books and academic dissertations and theses regarding topics in Southern California racial and cultural history, some of which include information germane to Culver City. ARG also consulted contemporary studies of racial discrimination in California, including the *California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Final Report* (Jun. 2023).

This Historical Context Study benefited from the existing work of various local researchers, who studied issues related to racially and culturally inequitable policies and practices in Culver City at length. Pertinent information from this existing body of research was incorporated into this study, as applicable.

## Outreach

ARG and City staff developed a public outreach program at project commencement. In May 2023, a dedicated project web page was created, which included information about the project and its objectives and provided answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).<sup>4</sup> The web page also included a public comment form, where members of the public could share information with the project team about their personal recollections of, or experiences with, discrimination in Culver City.<sup>5</sup> Information provided in the public comment forms was reviewed by ARG and incorporated into the narrative of the study, as applicable. No names or other identifying information were included in the study to protect the privacy of respondents. A total of 179 public comment forms were received between May and September 2023. The project web page and public comment form were available in both English and Spanish.

On the public comment form, respondents were asked whether they would like to schedule a follow-up conversation with a member of the ARG project team to discuss their comments in more detail. Respondents who requested follow-up were directly contacted and offered a 30-minute phone or virtual (Zoom) conversation. 35 follow-up conversations were conducted between May and September 2023.

Personal stories gleaned from public outreach help to paint a more complete picture of discrimination in Culver City by ensuring that multiple experiences and perspectives are reflected in the document. In some cases, personal stories were incorporated into the document; in others, they were used as starting

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<sup>3</sup> Ancestry.com (various databases), accessed Aug. 2023; Philip J. Ethington, et.al, Los Angeles County Union Census Tract Data Series, 1940-2000, created with the support of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2000-2006).

<sup>4</sup> The project web page is available at <https://www.culvercity.org/Have-Your-Say/Historical-Context-Study>.

<sup>5</sup> A blank copy of the public outreach form is included as an attachment to this report.

points for additional research and/or follow-up.

## Project Team

The project team included ARG staff Katie E. Horak, Principal; Andrew Goodrich, AICP, Senior Associate; Elysha Paluszek, Associate; Sydney Andrea Landers; and Morgan Quirk. Guidance and project support was provided by subject matter expert Becky M. Nicolaidis, Ph.D.

Ms. Horak, Mr. Goodrich, Ms. Paluszek, Ms. Landers, and Ms. Quirk are Architectural Historians and Preservation Planners who meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards* (36 CFR Part 61) in the discipline of Architectural History.<sup>6</sup>

Becky M. Nicolaidis, Ph.D. is an expert in the subjects of urban and suburban history who has specialized expertise in the Los Angeles region. She is the author of *The New Suburbia: How Diversity Remade Suburban Life in Los Angeles After 1945* (Oxford University Press, January 2024) and *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), and co-editor of *The Suburb Reader* (Routledge, 2016). Ms. Nicolaidis is also a research affiliate with the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West.

## Terms, Definitions, and Language

Terms that are used to refer to individuals and groups of people carry a tremendous amount of meaning and power. They can convey positive or negative attributes toward people or groups of people. Racism and discrimination can influence the language used in both the past and present when referring to groups of people, especially groups who have historically been disenfranchised.

This document attempts to talk about topics related to race, ancestry, and other indicators of identity with dignity, respect, and objectivity. Various source materials related to the use of inclusive and sensitive language were consulted, including the American Psychological Association (APA)'s style guide on race and ethnic identity (found online at APA Style Guide and in the APA Publication Manual, Seventh Edition) and the Diversity Style Guide (found online at Diversity Style Guide).<sup>7</sup> The project team also consulted the National Archives' Statement on Potentially Harmful Content (found online), which offers guidance on the presentation of materials or sources that reflect outdated, biased, or offensive views and opinions.<sup>8</sup>

It should be emphasized that terminology related to race, ancestry, and other indicators of identity evolve frequently. Some terms that were considered to be sensitive in the past are no longer regarded as acceptable, and conversely, some of the terms that are used in this document – while currently regarded

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<sup>6</sup> For information on the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards, refer to <https://www.doi.gov/pam/asset-management/historic-preservation/pqs>.

<sup>7</sup> American Psychological Association, "Historical Context," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/historical-context>; Diversity Style Guide, accessed Aug 2023, <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> National Archives, "NARA's Statement on Potentially Harmful Content, online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/research/reparative-description/harmful-content>.

as acceptable – may no longer be considered as such in the future. Terms used throughout this document are rooted in present-day best practices, per the source materials listed above.

Since this report addresses issues of race, ancestry, and other indicators of inequity through a historical lens, some sensitive terminology does appear. This includes terms that were used in the past but are now considered to be derogatory or offensive, primarily in primary source materials. Whenever used, these source materials are cited in quotation marks to direct readers to the original source, to clearly distinguish between present-day practices and historic attitudes towards topics on race and/or ethnicity.

The APA style guide notes that while care must be taken to avoid perpetuating biases and demeaning attitudes about people, at the same time, “historians and scholars writing analyses of past events or times or of historical figures must be careful not to misrepresent the ideas of the past in an effort to avoid language bias.”<sup>9</sup> Alterations to language may result in changes to the ideas conveyed in a primary source, and “the best approach is to retain the original language and to comment on it in the discussion. Quotations should not be changed to accommodate current sensibilities.”<sup>10</sup>

Following is a discussion of key terms that are used in this document to address race, ethnicity, and culture. Race refers to “the physical differences that groups or cultures consider socially significant” (e.g. Black or African American, Asian, etc.).<sup>11</sup> It is a social construct that is not universal and whose meaning has changed with perceptions over time. For instance, some groups that today are considered to be “White” in the United States were considered “non-White” in previous eras, as noted in federal census data and in mass media and popular culture (e.g. those who identify as Irish, Italian, and Jewish were historically classified as “non-White” in spite of their European origins). Ethnicity, on the other hand, refers to “shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs” (e.g. Latino).<sup>12</sup> Terms for all racial and ethnic groups are proper nouns and are capitalized. Note that terminology related to race/ethnicity is personal and is not applied uniformly across a particular group of people. Some people may prefer one identifier over another, and people may identify as belonging to multiple groups.

- **African American and Black:** refers to people in the United States whose ancestral lineage traces directly or indirectly back to Africa. These terms are often used interchangeably but do not necessarily mean the same thing. Black tends to be a broader term because it encompasses those of African descent who do not necessarily identify as American or are not from America. According to the APA, some American people of African ancestry prefer the term Black, while others prefer African American. Both terms are acceptable, and some individuals may prefer one or the other. Throughout this document, the group referred to as Black is generally of African descent and born in America, though it is recognized that this is a generalization. The terms Black and African American are both used throughout this report.

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<sup>9</sup> American Psychological Association, “Historical Context,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/historical-context>

<sup>10</sup> American Psychological Association, “Historical Context,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/historical-context>

<sup>11</sup> American Psychological Association, “Racial and Ethnic Identity,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities#:~:text=Race%20refers%20to%20physical%20differences,M%C4%81ori%2C%20or%20some%20other%20race>

<sup>12</sup> American Psychological Association, “Racial and Ethnic Identity,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

- **Asian and Asian American:** the term Asian refers to people with ancestry from the Asian continent. The term Asian American is appropriate for people of Asian descent from the United States. According to the APA, the terms Asian and Asian American are not to be used interchangeably, as doing so “reinforces the idea that Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners.”<sup>13</sup> In this document, when both terms are used, it is done to encompass both groups. The intent is to recognize that historically, both groups existed side by side, not to lump them together as one group. If a specific group is discussed (e.g., Japanese or Japanese American), that specific identifier is used.
- **Hispanic and Latino:** usage of the terms Hispanic and Latino is evolving. Neither is all-encompassing, and each has a different connotation. The term Latino may be preferred by people from Latin America. Some prefer the term Hispanic to refer to Spanish-speaking people, though not all people from Latin America speak Spanish. Various groups use and advocate for different identifiers. This document uses the term Latino, except in source materials containing information taken from the U.S. Census, or when referring to a more specific group of people.
- **Indigenous Peoples:** terminology used to describe those who are native to the Americas vary from person to person and nation to nation. Some Indigenous nations identify using names that they did not choose for themselves but were instead selected by Western colonizers (e.g. many of the indigenous populations in Southern California were re-named by Spanish explorers). For instance, the Indigenous people of the Los Angeles basin were given the name Gabrieleño by Spanish colonizers in the eighteenth century. When discussing a particular Indigenous group, it is best to consult members of that group for their preferred nomenclature. In this document, sources written by Native Americans were referenced according to their preferred name.<sup>14</sup>
- **White and European American:** this document uses the term White to describe people of European ancestry. The APA notes that “the use of the term Caucasian as an alternative to White or European is discouraged because it originated as a way of classifying White people as a race to be favorably compared with other races.”<sup>15</sup> In accordance with this guidance, this document avoids the use of the term Caucasian unless it is directly cited from a primary source. It should be noted that some of the source materials consulted for this project include the word Caucasian.

Many media outlets and inclusive language guides now capitalize terms when referring to a race, including both Black and White, though this is not universal and may change over time. It should also be recognized that language evolves over time, often rapidly, and continues to do so. Nomenclature that is considered to be acceptable in this document may not necessarily be perceived as such in the future.

Following are definitions for additional terms that are used in the document. Definitions, unless otherwise stated, are derived from the Racial Equity Tools glossary.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that this is not a

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<sup>13</sup> American Psychological Association, “Racial and Ethnic Identity,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

<sup>14</sup> For more on appropriate language when referring to indigenous peoples, refer to the Native Governance Center’s guide “How to Talk about Native Nations,” available online at <https://nativegov.org/resources/how-to-talk-about-native-nations/>.

<sup>15</sup> American Psychological Association, “Racial and Ethnic Identity,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

<sup>16</sup> Racial Equity Tools, “Racial Equity Tools Glossary,” online, accessed Aug. 2023,, <https://www.raciaequitytools.org/glossary>



comprehensive list, and its contents are likely to evolve over time as perceptions of race continue to evolve. For information on terms related to race, and inclusion, refer to the Racial Equity Tools glossary.<sup>17</sup>

- **Discrimination:** refers to the unequal treatment of members of various groups on the basis of race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, and/or other categories.
- **LGBTQ+:** an acronym that collectively refers to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, sometimes classified as LGBT or, historically, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The “Q” can also stand for “questioning,” referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The “+” represents those who are part of the community but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their personal identity.
- **People of Color/Communities of Color:** often the preferred collective term for referring to non-White racial groups. Racial justice advocates have been using the term “people of color” (not to be conflated with the similar, but pejorative term “colored people”) since the late 1970s as an inclusive and unifying frame across different racial groups that are not White.
- **Racism:** is categorically different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one racial/ethnic group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of a given society, and by influencing the cultural beliefs and intrinsic values that support those racist policies and practices.
- **Sexual Orientation:** one’s sexual attraction toward other people or no people. While sexual activity involves the choices one makes regarding behavior, one’s sexual activity does not necessarily define one’s sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, and all people have one. Typically, it is attraction that helps determine orientation.

## Structure of the Historical Context Study

This document is organized chronologically and is divided into three chapters, each of which generally corresponds to a broad historical period:

- The first chapter addresses discrimination in Culver City in the period before World War II. It begins with an acknowledgment of the indigenous Gabrieleño/Tongva people who historically occupied the Los Angeles region before their land was seized by Spanish colonizers in the eighteenth century, and continues with a discussion of discriminatory policies and practices that occurred between City’s inception in 1913 and the World War II period.
- The second chapter addresses discrimination in Culver City in the post-World War II period, from about 1945 to 1980. It includes a discussion of how discriminatory policies, practices, and attitudes evolved during and after the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, a social movement and campaign that resulted in a series of landmark legislative achievements that curtailed legally sanctioned segregation, though it did not eradicate discriminatory attitudes entirely. This chapter also addresses local efforts to address and account for discrimination in Culver City at this time.

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<sup>17</sup> Racial Equity Tools, “Racial Equity Tools Glossary,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

- The third chapter addresses discrimination in Culver City in the contemporary era, which is broadly defined as the period after 1980. It traces how discrimination has persisted into the recent past, as well as strides that have been made in recent years to make Culver City a more inclusive and welcoming community.

Each chapter begins with a historical overview, which provides context about the history and development of Culver City in its respective period. It then addresses public-sector and private-sector policies and practices that discriminated against communities of color and religious minorities (specifically, those of Jewish heritage), and when applicable, a discussion of how these policies and practices played out in Culver City. Each chapter also includes a breakdown of demographic data obtained from the U.S. Census and other sources, to show how Culver City's population has evolved over time.

## 2. Culver City Prior to World War II

### Historical Overview

#### The Culver City Area Before 1913

The story of Culver City begins centuries before real estate developer Harry H. Culver stood before a captive audience at the California Club in 1913 and declared his ambitious plan to develop an entirely new city at the approximate mid-way point between Downtown Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean.

The original settlers of the Culver City area were Indigenous people who were known alternatively as the Gabrieleño and Tongva. The name Gabrieleño is not rooted in Indigenous culture; rather, the Spanish bestowed this name upon Indigenous Californians living in the greater Los Angeles region when they arrived in the mid-eighteenth century. This name refers to the Mission San Gabriel Arcángel, located in the present-day City of San Gabriel, and reflects the fact that in the spirit of advancing their imperial aspirations, Spanish explorers seized land that had belonged to Indigenous people for thousands of years.

Tongva is often used as an alternative to Gabrieleño, though the use of this term has been subject to debate and dispute. The term “Tongva” was introduced in the early twentieth century by a White anthropologist interviewing an Indigenous woman, and was based upon the anthropologist’s understanding of the name of the village where she lived. The name was incorrectly interpreted by the anthropologist as the name of the woman’s tribe. Indigenous Californians derived their identity from their ancestral villages and did not have a unifying identity as the names Gabrieleño/Tongva falsely suggest.

The Gabrieleño/Tongva resided in what is today the southern portion of Los Angeles County, the northern portion of Orange County, and the western portions of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, encompassing the majority of what is now the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area.<sup>18</sup> The region was known by its original occupants as Tovaangar and stretched from what is now Palos Verdes to San Bernardino, and between Saddleback Mountain (in Orange County) and the San Fernando Valley. Though data is scant, scholars estimate that before 1770, the Indigenous population in Tovaangar was approximately 5,000 people.<sup>19</sup>

The Gabrieleño/Tongva were hunter-gatherers, and are described in ethnographic accounts as being a generally peaceful people who lived in semi-ephemeral villages ranging in size from to about 50 to 200 inhabitants. Each village was an independent entity and was loosely interconnected to those surrounding it through an extensive network of earthen trails.<sup>20</sup> The larger Indigenous settlements throughout the Los Angeles region “functioned as political, legal, and administrative centers” and “served as ritual centers [...or] focal points for traditional activities.”<sup>21</sup> The largest village in the region was called Yaanga

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<sup>18</sup> Los Angeles Almanac, “Original People of Los Angeles County,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <http://www.laalmanac.com/history/hi05.php>.

<sup>19</sup> William McCawley, *The First Angelinos: The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles County* (Banning, CA: Malki Museum Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Sean Greene and Thomas Curwen, “Mapping the Tongva Villages of L.A.’s Past,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 2019, online, accessed Aug. 2023 at <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-tongva-map/>

<sup>21</sup> McCawley, *The First Angelinos* (1996), 27.

(sometimes spelled Yanga), which was located to the north of what is now Downtown Los Angeles, along the banks of the Los Angeles River.

Near present-day Culver City, on the banks of Ballona Creek, was a Gabrieleño/Tongva village called Huachongna (alternative spellings also include Guashna, Waachnga, and Sa'angna).<sup>22</sup> There is little written documentation about the history of Huachongna, and its name is subject to debate. However, like the rest of Gabrieleño/Tongva culture, it is known that the residents of Huachongna engaged in hunter-gathering, and resided in semi-ephemeral villages comprising domiciles constructed of native tule reeds.<sup>23</sup>

The Gabrieleño/Tongva were “one of the most materially rich and culturally influential Indian groups of Southern California.”<sup>24</sup> This group developed and sustained what has been described as “a complex society of significant economic power and cultural influence.”<sup>25</sup> They regularly partook in trade with neighboring Indigenous groups including the Chumash, Serrano, and Cahulla people. Tar extracted from what are now known as the Baldwin Hills was an important natural resource. Extracted tar was used to construct *te'aats* (plank boats) that were used to travel up and down the coastline, and also to the Channel Islands. Tar was also an important component of the local economy and was used for trade.<sup>26</sup>

The lives and traditions of the Gabrieleño/Tongva were abruptly upended when Spanish colonizers came to California. Spain had a presence in the Western Hemisphere beginning in the sixteenth century. In 1769, Captain Gaspar de Portolá and Father Junípero Serra led an expedition from Baja California to the area they called Alta California. They traveled through the Los Angeles area in the summer of 1769 as they made their way north. As they traveled northward, these Spanish colonizers founded a system of religious centers (called missions) with the purpose of converting Indigenous Californians to Catholicism and, by extension it was believed, into loyal subjects of Spain. Spain aspired to create a self-sufficient colony that was protected from foreign incursions and would help maintain the country's foothold in the region.<sup>27</sup> The missions were an important component of this system as they helped sustain the regional economy.<sup>28</sup> This economic success relied in large part on the exploitation of the region's Indigenous people, who were conscripted to work in the missions' agricultural hinterlands and in similar capacities.<sup>29</sup>

Many Indigenous Californians were relocated to the missions or their hinterlands – sometimes by coercion, and often by force – at the hands of Spanish colonizers. The occupants of Huachongna were moved to the San Gabriel Mission, which was located about 30 miles to the north and east. There, they were required to abandon their traditional ways of life, cultures, languages, and religions, and many succumbed to communicable diseases that were introduced by the Spanish, for which immunity had not been developed. Life at the mission was starkly different than the traditions that Indigenous Californians were accustomed to, and overcrowding and mistreatment were common. Indigenous Californians who

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<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey H. Altschul, et al., “At the Base of the Bluff: Archaeological Inventory and Evaluation along Lower Centinela Creek, Marina del Rey, California,” Jul. 2003, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Tyler D. Lachman, “Attitudes About Work and Time in Los Angeles, 1769-1880,” Thesis, University of San Diego, Aug. 30, 2016, 32; “Tongva People: Villages,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, [https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page\\_id=696](https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page_id=696).

<sup>24</sup> Lachman, “Attitudes About Work and Time in Los Angeles” (2016), 32; “Tongva People: Villages,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, [https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page\\_id=696](https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page_id=696)

<sup>25</sup> McCawley, *The First Angelinos* (1996),9.

<sup>26</sup> Altschul, “At the Base of the Bluff” (2003), 21-24.

<sup>27</sup> Spain also established pueblos (civilian towns) and presidios (military fortifications which were created to protect Alta California from attack by other nations).

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Prosser, “Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849,” *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement*, prepared for the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Feb. 2016, 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Prosser, “Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849” (2016), 5.

forcibly relocated to the missions would often suffer from hunger and mistreatment at the hands of Spanish missionaries.<sup>30</sup>

The Indigenous Californians who were relocated to the missions generated tremendous wealth for the Spanish mission system. They constructed buildings and other infrastructure, and provided the labor that was essential to sustaining the mission's operations. However, not all of the area's Indigenous people were forced onto missions or converted to Catholicism. Those who chose not to convert lived near the pueblo of Los Angeles and worked there, or on privately-owned ranches.<sup>31</sup>

In 1821, Mexico won independence from Spain, and by the 1830s the Mexican government had secularized the Spanish missions. The secularization effort was driven by "the anti-clerical liberal belief that the land would be more productive in privately-owned hands and that the Native Americans would benefit from not being under the control of the [Spanish] friars."<sup>32</sup> The land that had previously been part of the missions was to become property of Indigenous Californians, and the missions themselves would serve as parish churches for the area's Indigenous population. However, this plan did not come to full fruition, and few Indigenous Californians were actually able to achieve land ownership. Of those who did, yet fewer were able to gain possession of the land promised to them due to discrepancies between Spanish and Mexican title laws.<sup>33</sup> Much of the former mission lands instead fell into the hand of local governments, and by proxy, members of the local ruling class in the form of Mexican land grants, or *ranchos*. The ranchos continued to rely on the exploitation of Indigenous labor to sustain their operation.

What is now Culver City was once a part of two adjacent ranchos, which collectively encompassed much of what is now the Westside of Los Angeles and nearby communities. Most of present-day Culver City was located within the boundaries of Rancho La Ballona, a 13,920-acre land grant conferred by Governor Juan Alvarado to Ygnacio and Agustin Machado and Felipe and Tomas Talamante in 1839. The Machados and Talamantes used the land to graze cattle.<sup>34</sup> To the east was the smaller Rancho Rincón de los Bueyes, which comprised 3,127 acres. It was conferred in 1821 to Bernardo Higuera and Cornelio Lopez, and included what is now the east part of Culver City and the nearby community of Baldwin Hills.<sup>35</sup>

Conditions did not improve for Indigenous Californians after Alta California became a part of the United States in 1848. In fact, by some accounts they only got worse. Under American rule, Indigenous Californians were "categorically deemed nonwhite, politically disenfranchised, and ruthlessly segregated from European Americans," in spite of their role as the historical occupants and stewards of the land that would later develop into the Los Angeles region.<sup>36</sup> Motivated by bigotry and fear, White Americans were intent on removing the roughly 150,000 Indigenous people who remained in California. It is estimated that throughout California, the Indigenous population drastically fell from 150,000 in 1848, to 30,000 by

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<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Madley, "California's First Mass Incarceration System: Franciscan Missions, California Indians, and Penal Servitude, 1969-1836," *Pacific Historical Review* 88 (2019), 14-47.

<sup>31</sup> McCawley, *The First Angelinos* (1996), 200.

<sup>32</sup> Prosser, "Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849" (2016), 18.

<sup>33</sup> Prosser, "Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849" (2016), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Sister Clementia Marie, J.M.D., *The First Families of La Ballona Valley*, *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 37.1 (Mar. 1955), 48-55; City of Culver City, "Culver City Fact Sheet," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/Explore/About-Culver-City/Culver-City-Fact-Sheet>.

<sup>35</sup> City of Culver City, "Culver City Fact Sheet," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/Explore/About-Culver-City/Culver-City-Fact-Sheet>.

<sup>36</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, repr. 2009), 5.

1870, and to 16,000 by 1900. This precipitous decline was the result of myriad factors including communicable disease, starvation, and violence, much of which was sanctioned by the government.<sup>37</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the native village of Huachongna was but a fleeting memory. The Indigenous people who had lived along the banks of Ballona Creek for generations were among those subjected to the atrocities that came with Spanish colonization and Mexican and American statehood. The area was used for agricultural purposes for the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, specifically barley and bean fields that were planted on the riparian land alongside Ballona Creek. Also in the area was a short-lived Union tent camp called Camp Latham, which existed from 1861 to 1862 and was located near what is now Jefferson Boulevard and Overland Avenue.<sup>38</sup>

The plight of Indigenous people in the area at the hands of colonial occupiers of early California is among the most profound and enduring examples of discrimination in the area that would become Culver City. By seizing their land, coercing them to provide labor, and disrupting their lifestyles, colonial occupiers uprooted the lives of many Indigenous people in the region. The Indigenous population was not only physically displaced, but they also suffered disruptions to their ways of life, customs, religions, languages, and settlement patterns as Spain, Mexico, and the United States successively took control of the area.

### Origins and Early Growth of Culver City

In 1910, Nebraska native Harry Hazel Culver arrived in Southern California and quickly became involved in the local real estate business. In 1913 – speaking before an audience at the California Club in Downtown Los Angeles – Culver announced plans to develop a new city at the western foot of the Baldwin Hills, approximately halfway between the central business district of Los Angeles and Abbot Kinney’s burgeoning seaside resort town of Venice. Culver City, as the new community would be known, was located at the junction of three major streetcar lines: the Venice Short Line (to Venice), the Santa Monica Air Line (to Santa Monica/Ocean Park), and the Del Rey Electric Line (to Redondo Beach), and was served by a Pacific Electric passenger depot at Venice Boulevard and Bagley Avenue.<sup>39</sup> Given the abundance of public transit options, Culver adopted the advertising slogan “All Roads Lead to Culver City.”<sup>40</sup>

Following Culver’s announcement, the community of Culver City began to take shape adjacent to the junction of the three streetcar lines. To the immediate south of the Pacific Electric passenger depot, several businesses were constructed along Main Street, which emerged as the new city’s commercial node. A handful of houses were built on adjacent blocks, and a grammar school was built to the south of the business district.<sup>41</sup> Several miles of streets were graded and paved, concrete sidewalks were poured,

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Julie Lugo Serra, “Camp Latham/Civil War Campsite,” *Culver City News*, Apr. 21, 2011; Los Angeles Almanac, “Civil War Camps and Barracks Los Angeles County,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.laalmanac.com/history/hi06b.php>.

<sup>39</sup> “Ivy Substation and Depot Have Special Place in the City’s History,” *Culver City News*, Mar. 10, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Nathan Masters, “Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland,” *KCET*, Jun. 6, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> “Building To Change Culver City Skyline,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, Sept. 13, 1913.

and electric streetlights were installed.<sup>42</sup> Culver City notably resisted an annexation effort by Los Angeles in 1914, electing to remain an independent community.<sup>43</sup>

Culver City incorporated in 1917, initially encompassing an area of 1.2 square miles that was centered around what is now Main Street and the Downtown neighborhood.<sup>44</sup> There were 530 people living in the city at the time of its incorporation.

Culver City was founded just as Southern California's motion picture industry was coming of age. Harry Culver encountered silent film actor and filmmaker Thomas H. Ince when he was filming along the banks of Ballona Creek, and successfully convinced the film titan to construct a studio complex in his new community. In 1915, Ince, then working for the Triangle Motion Picture Company, built a new studio complex on Washington Boulevard and Motor Avenue in a staid Greek Revival style. (This complex is extant and is now Sony Picture Studios). The site was described as being "halfway between Los Angeles and the beach centers, as well as its nearness to the foothills."<sup>45</sup> In 1918, after selling the property to Samuel Goldwyn, Ince established his own independent studio, called the Thomas H. Ince Studio, and set his sights on an irregularly-shaped, 11-acre site at Washington and Culver boulevards. The Ince Studio – the second studio complex in the city – opened in 1919. The public-facing studio building, which is colloquially known as The Mansion, was designed in the American Colonial Revival style, complete with strict symmetry and an aura of East Coast pretension.<sup>46</sup>

A third studio complex was built in 1919 near the corner of Washington and National boulevards by producer Hal Roach. Known as Hal E. Roach Studios (and also as "The Laugh Factory to the World"), the studio was the site of many major productions including the *Our Gang* comedy films, most of the *Laurel and Hardy* movies, and comedies starring silent film star and stunt performer Harold Lloyd.

With three major production studios within its relatively compact boundaries, Culver City was marketed by Harry Culver and other business interests as "the heart of screenland."<sup>47</sup>

Like many communities in Southern California, Culver City witnessed rapid growth during the 1920s with the end of World War I, the resurgence of the regional economy, and a large population influx. The city completed five annexations between 1921 and 1926, which extended its boundaries.<sup>48</sup> The construction of the six-story Culver Hotel in 1924 gave its downtown a visually prominent anchor. Residential tracts were developed, and an increasing number of commercial properties including restaurants, retail stores, and banks emerged to support the growing residential community. Several nightlife venues including speakeasies and clubs opened along the Washington Boulevard corridor.

Civic institutions including a city hall, hospital, and fire and police departments were also built, and city leaders hastened to pave streets and expand municipal services. In the 1920s and 1930s, additional

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<sup>42</sup> "Building To Change Culver City Skyline," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, Sept.13, 1913.; "Dirt Will Fly at Culver City," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 24, 1913.

<sup>43</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>44</sup> City of Culver City, "About Culver City," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/Explore/About-Culver-City>.

<sup>45</sup> Hadley Meares, "Culver Studios Before Amazon," *CurbedLA*, Nov. 21, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Julie Lugo Serra and Marc Wanamaker, *Movie Studios of Culver City* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 63; Pacific Coast Architecture Database, "Ince, Thomas, Studio Building, Culver City, CA," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/building/16643/>.

<sup>47</sup> Masters, "Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland" (2012).

<sup>48</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, "City of Culver City Annexations," Jul. 17, 2013.

institutions were established including places of worship, schools, a library, community groups, fraternal organizations, the Culver City Woman’s Club, a Chamber of Commerce, and an airport. In 1925, Harry Culver established the Pacific Military Academy and moved it just north of the City, to the present-day community of Cheviot Hills (slightly outside the Culver City limits) in 1928; the military boarding school was a forerunner of other military-based institutions that proliferated in Culver City.<sup>49</sup>



*The Culver Hotel, pictured in 1924, was an early commercial anchor of Culver City’s downtown business district (Los Angeles Public Library)*

Culver also encouraged the development of industry in the community, particularly uses related to the motion picture industry (but not exclusively so). In 1922, the Western Stove Company opened a new factory in the eastern portion of the city, adjacent to what is now the Hayden Tract.<sup>50</sup> The factory, which manufactured kitchen stoves and their requisite parts, was a major boon to the local economy and provided employment to those who lived nearby. Several years later, in 1931, the Helms Bakery opened a

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<sup>49</sup> Culver City Historical Society, “Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about-culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>50</sup> Masters, “Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland” (2012).



large new commercial bakery and distribution center on Venice Boulevard in Culver City, where loaves of Olympic-branded bread and other baked goods were shuttled to households across Southern California.<sup>51</sup>

Culver City's healthy mix of land uses – residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial – helped distinguish the community from many other suburban enclaves, which tended to heavily promote residential development and discourage industrial uses that were seen as noxious. With the presence of industry – particularly its trio of major motion picture studios, which employed many studio hands and other support staff – Culver City developed a strong base of working class residents in its formative years.

In Culver City, like the rest of Southern California, development activity was stymied by the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the economic depression that ensued. The pace of development activity declined during the Great Depression. However, because of the city's solid economic base and the staying power of the film industry, the city fared better than many other Southern California communities at the peak of the Great Depression. Its film studios remained open for business, though some passed through a succession of owners. In 1937, the Culver City Chamber of Commerce proposed that the city change its name to Hollywood to capitalize on its motion picture ties – a proposal that was swiftly swatted down by the City of Los Angeles, which adopted an ordinance creating official boundaries for Hollywood within the city.<sup>52</sup> Later that year, the Culver City and Hollywood Chambers of Commerce held a “bury the hatchet” ceremony at Grauman's Chinese Theatre to signify the end of the naming battle.<sup>53</sup>

## Public Sector Discrimination Prior to World War II

Discrimination against people of color, ethnic and religious minorities, and other historically disenfranchised groups took place in communities throughout Southern California and across the nation in the first several decades of the twentieth century. Discrimination during this time took on a variety of forms but was especially acute in public sector actions, particularly in the context of laws and policies that pertained to zoning, land use, and housing. These policies were implemented at the federal, state, and local levels of government and sanctioned practices that systematically discriminated against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. They normalized exclusionary attitudes that resulted in communities such as Culver City remaining racially homogenous and almost entirely White.

This section explores how public policies – many of which were broadly applied in communities across the nation – affected Culver City in its formative years of development, generally defined as the period between the community's inception in 1913 and the World War II years. The city came of age when Jim Crow-era attitudes prevailed and the “separate but equal” doctrine sanctioned racially segregated spaces.

Documentation of public sector discrimination specific to Culver City during this time is difficult to locate. This is likely due to several reasons. First, institutionalized racism was accepted as the status quo in the early twentieth century, so discriminatory policies on the part of public agencies were common and thus rarely made headlines. Second, Culver City was not unique among suburban communities that witnessed growth during this period, almost all of which were influenced by the same broad collection of

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<sup>51</sup> Masters, “Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland” (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Stephanie Frank, “Claiming Hollywood: Boosters, the Film Industry, and Metropolitan Los Angeles,” *Journal of Urban History* 38.1 (2012), 71-88.

<sup>53</sup> Culver City Historical Society, “Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

exclusionary zoning, land use, and housing policies. Third, at this time there were few protections for those who were subjected to discrimination, and speaking out against or discussing discriminatory incidents could result in reprisal.

Finally, many of the primary source materials from the period, most notably newspapers, were White-owned, and as a result issues affecting communities of color were either underreported or unreported by mainstream media outlets. Issues involving discrimination were of little interest to these newspapers' mostly-White readers. Black-owned newspapers, including the *California Eagle* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, covered incidents regarding discrimination and hate, but were primarily focused on urban Los Angeles and offered relatively little coverage of issues occurring in smaller communities like Culver City.

### **Zoning and Land Use Policy**

Zoning, a practice dating to the early twentieth century, entails the division of a municipality's land into discrete areas called zones. Zones are generally categorized by land use and are accompanied by rules and regulations regarding the use, scale, and density of development that is permitted in each zone.

Zoning has existed in various forms since at least the twelfth century. However, in the United States, zoning originated during the Progressive movement of the early twentieth century, which was described by historian Robert Wiebe as a "search for order" in an increasingly industrialized society.<sup>54</sup> The practice of modern zoning allowed city planners to systematically organize a city into distinct areas for industry, residences for different classes, and administrative and commercial uses, with each area's roads and other public facilities specifically tailored to the corresponding use. Zoning, argued its proponents, would help improve the quality of life of a city's inhabitants by reducing the spread of disease, preventing exposure to environmental toxins, designating open space for leisure, and expediting the flow of traffic.

Modern zoning is known as single-use zoning or Euclidean zoning, a process by which land resources are divided into discrete zones that correspond to a particular use (residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, and mixed). This practice has been in place since the turn-of-the twentieth century.

Urban historian Andrew Whittemore notes that "early land use zoning schemes came into being during a period characterized by mass migration to U.S. cities from abroad and the rural American south, and it was axiomatic among urban elites that income, ethnic, and racial groups should be separated to maintain communities' social and economic value."<sup>55</sup> Some communities, particularly those in the American South, zoned areas on the basis of race with separate districts for Whites and Blacks, "for the stated purpose of preventing social conflict and disease and preserving property values."<sup>56</sup> In 1917, the United States Supreme Court struck down racial zoning codes in its ruling for *Buchanan v. Warley*, a landmark court case that challenged the constitutionality of a racially drawn zoning district in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>57</sup> The case was brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which argued that the implementation of said ordinances interfered with individuals' property rights.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

<sup>55</sup> Andrew H. Whittemore, "Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 87:2 (2021), 168.

<sup>56</sup> Whittemore, "Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates" (2021), 168.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Jones-Correa, "The Origins and Diffusion of Race Restrictive Covenants," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115.4 (Winter 2000-2001), 548.

<sup>58</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler* 1926, qtd. in Sonia Hirt, "Home Sweet Home: American Residential Zoning in a Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 10 (5), 9.

The *Buchanan* decision prohibited the use of explicit racial zoning. However, it did not end the practice of using zoning as a tool for segregation. According to Whittemore, “land use zoning could not directly control who lived in a given area, but is used to sort housing and business types into different neighborhoods, it could effectively achieve social segregation under the guise of ‘a progressive, technocratic veneer’ concerned with market stabilization and infrastructure and service provision.”<sup>59</sup> Increasingly, zoning was used to shield single-family dwellings from lower- and moderate-income accommodations that were more commonly inhabited by immigrants and minorities. Advocates of single-use zoning saw the intermingling of different land uses, and the class and racial implications that came along with it, as a threat to the property values of single-family houses. Communities often used zoning codes to prevent or heavily restrict the construction of multi-family housing. These tactics did not technically run afoul of the *Buchanan* ruling but nonetheless worked to enforce patterns of segregation.

The practice of zoning was upheld in the landmark Supreme Court case *Euclid v. Ambler* (1926). The *Euclid* decision revealed the high court’s “preoccupation with elite residential neighborhoods,” and a municipality’s right to protect them from threats like multifamily housing.<sup>60</sup> In its decision, the court concluded that:

The development of detached house sections is greatly retarded by the coming of apartment houses, which has sometimes resulted in destroying the entire section for private houses; that in such sections very often the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district. Moreover, the coming of one apartment house is followed by others [...] until finally the residential character of the neighborhood and its desirability as a place of detached residences are utterly destroyed. Under these circumstances, apartment houses, which in a different environment would be not only entirely unobjectionable but highly desirable, come very near to being nuisances.<sup>61</sup>

Since the *Euclid* decision legitimized this facet of institutionalized racism, the practice continued unabated in subsequent years. Though not explicitly states in its decision, the Supreme Court almost certainly “understood the discriminatory potential of separating housing types” because the lower court had explicitly made the point years earlier that “colored or certain foreign races” were undesirable in single-family (e.g. White) areas.<sup>62</sup> The idea of separating housing types into different neighborhoods – like single-family uses from multi-family uses, and even large-lot single-family properties from small-lot-single-family properties – emerged as a central pillar of American planning practices in the early decades of the twentieth century. Zoning became a strategy “to frame housing type and resulting class, ethnic, and racial segregation in the public interest.”<sup>63</sup>

Zoning policy and land use management were thus rooted in notions of discrimination. As public agencies leveraged tools like zoning ordinances to perpetuate patterns of segregation and prevent people of color from living in White neighborhoods, they shaped the racial and demographic composition of cities.

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<sup>59</sup> Whittemore, “Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates” (2021), 168.

<sup>60</sup> David Freund, *Colored Property* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 88.

<sup>61</sup> *Euclid v. Ambler* 1926, qtd. in Sonia Hirt, Home Sweet Home: American Residential Zoning in a Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 10 (5), 9.

<sup>62</sup> Whittemore, “Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates,” 169.

<sup>63</sup> Whittemore, “Exclusionary Zoning: Origins, Open Suburbs, and Contemporary Debates,” 169.

While Culver City was incorporated in 1917, it did not adopt a citywide zoning ordinance until 1937, suggesting that associations between the City’s zoning framework and racial dynamics were not formally codified in the early years of cityhood.<sup>64</sup> However, by setting aside parcels for single-family residential use, and by advertising that these parcels were accompanied by restrictions and development standards, were well-known exclusionary tactics that were “successful in keeping low-income African Americans, indeed all low-income families, out of middle-class neighborhoods.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Housing Policy and Federal Housing Agencies**

Prior to the Great Depression, the construction of housing was generally left to the private sector and involved minimal government intervention. However, as the effects of the Great Depression took hold in the 1930s and more Americans lost their homes and lived in ramshackle conditions, the federal government stepped in by enacting the New Deal. The New Deal introduced new government assistance programs that profoundly changed the way that private housing was financed, designed, and built. These new housing programs mainly benefitted White males, while excluding people of color and women from directly participating. While beneficial to some (namely White male Americans), this disenfranchised others by codifying patterns of racial segregation that worked against the interests of people of color and religious minorities.

Following the Stock Market Crash of 1929, the housing market suffered immensely, as very few developers were willing to take on the risk of building new housing. To boost the economy and assist destitute homeowners, the federal government passed a number of housing initiatives and funding programs, as part of the New Deal. In 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was created “to assist homeowners who were in default on their mortgages and in foreclosure.”<sup>66</sup>

The HOLC devised a system by which neighborhoods were evaluated and categorized according to four grades. The grades were: A (green), B (blue), C (yellow), and D (red), with A being the most desirable. This classification system applied racial considerations (among other factors) to assess whether neighborhoods posed financial security risks for underwriters. Generally, neighborhoods that were White, middle-class, low-density, zoned single-family residential, and removed from noxious and odious industrial uses received the desirable “green” or “blue” ratings. Neighborhoods deemed riskier tended to be non-White, denser, in closer proximity to industry, or demographically and socioeconomically diverse.

HOLC appraisers – often realtors -- surveyed every developed neighborhood in metropolitan Los Angeles to assign it a rating, and they filled out worksheets with their description of each area. These worksheets used language that revealed racial biases, such as the “infiltration” of African American and “foreign-born” residents into White neighborhoods, which negatively impacted an area’s rating.<sup>67</sup> Race was often the key determinant of a neighborhood’s rating, and often eclipsed other considerations and any positive attributes an area might have. An analysis of all areas surveyed in Los Angeles found that Blacks had a more negative impact on HOLC ratings than other ethno-racial groups, regardless of the conditions of the

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<sup>64</sup> “City of Culver City General Plan Land Use Element,” adopted Jul. 2, 1996, amended through Feb. 28, 2000, LU-2.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 59.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 196.

<sup>67</sup> John Kimble, “Insuring Inequality: The Role of the Federal Housing Administration in the Urban Ghettoization of African Americans,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 32, No. 2 (Spring 2007): 405.

neighborhood; with few exceptions, neighborhoods with Black residents received a D (red) rating.<sup>68</sup> The term “redlining” originated within the context of this system – referring to neighborhoods penalized with a “red” rating for traits like race, which then excluded them from being able to access federally underwritten loans. Redlining was rooted in the idea that the presence of homeowners of color – particularly Blacks – would diminish property values and threaten mortgages in predominantly-White neighborhoods that were later underwritten through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which is discussed below. These racialized assumptions influenced the decisions of private banks, who were extending mortgage loans ensured by the FHA.

By the time Culver City was evaluated by HOLC appraisers in 1939, the evaluations noted the presence of race restrictions, signaling the widespread use of this segregation tool. At the same time, they noted some pockets where non-White residents were living in the city, which the appraisers deemed a “hazard” to Culver City’s status. The HOLC appraisals of Culver City convey not only the racial biases of the appraisers, but also the racial terrain of Culver City in 1939. Given that these appraisals would influence who could benefit from certain federal housing programs, this evidence is worth a closer look, as it provides a glimpse into the racial composition of Culver City at this time.

HOLC appraisers divided Culver City into five areas that ranged from B (blue) to C (yellow). The developed area nearest Downtown was assigned a C (yellow) grade. The worksheet associated with this area provides insight into how appraisers arrived at this grade, which was based in part on racial composition.

The area is described in the worksheet as follows:

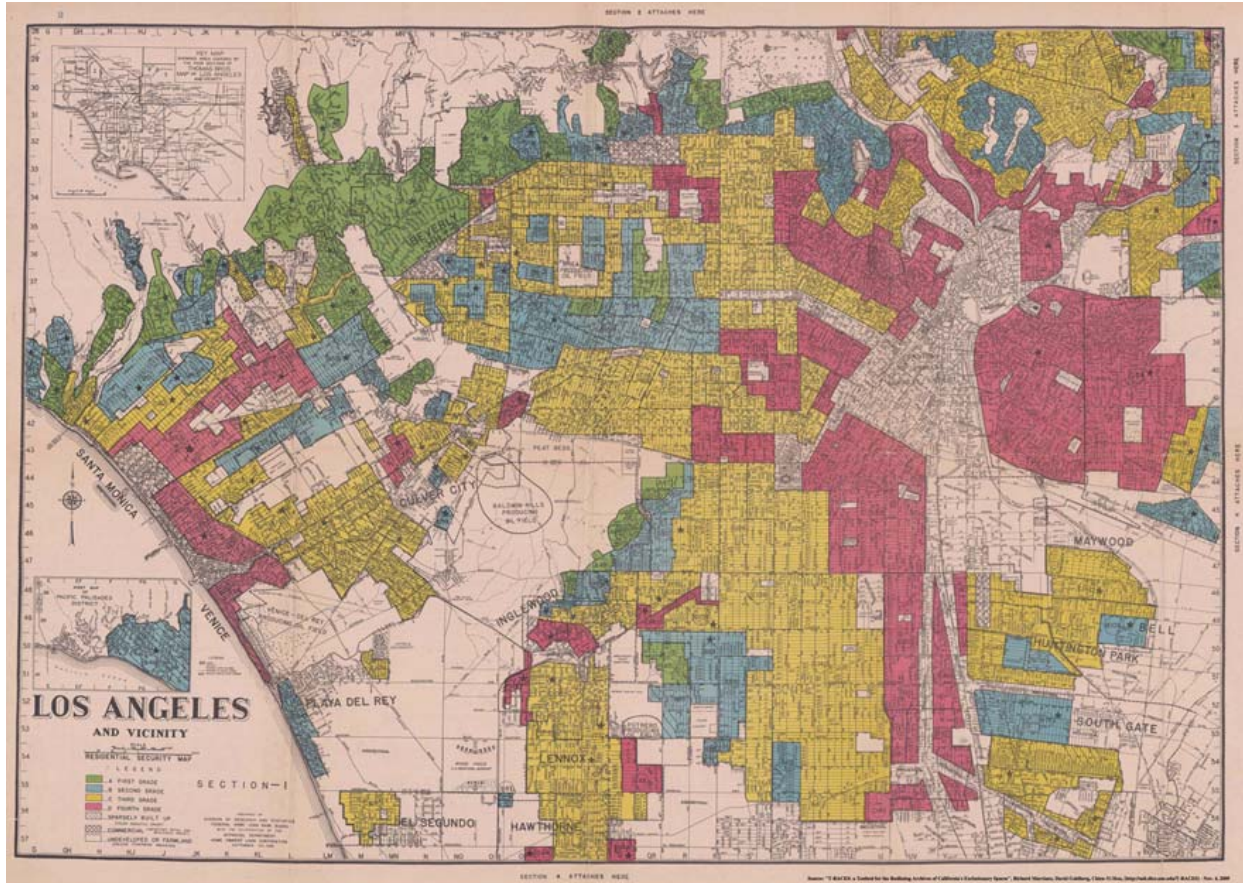
Low lying level. Draining problem causes slight construction hazard. Land improved 80%. Deed restrictions covering part of area provide for minimum of 100 sq. ft. dwellings and protect against racial hazards. Zoning is mixed, generally single family. Conveniences are all available but not readily so. This are[a] is between 25 and 30 years old. Never been popular district...Lot values are low, being from \$10 to \$15 per front foot. Construction is inclined to be substandard. Maintenance is somewhat spotted but generally good. Heterogeneous population and improvements. Location is unattractive detrimentally affected by proximity to industry and business districts (Which contain a number of Mexican families) and oil wells one half mile southeast. Improvements along Madison Ave. are of slightly better grade. The stage is set for a rapid decline in this area, and it is accorded a “low yellow” grade.<sup>69</sup>

While not exclusively based on race, conclusions about the area’s suitability for mortgage assistance were driven in part by the presence of a handful of Mexican American families.

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<sup>68</sup> Becky Nicolaides, *The New Suburbia* (New York: Oxford University Press), 75-76, 430-31-37. Neighborhoods of Mexican, Japanese, Jewish, and other non- WASP groups received both C (yellow) and D (red) ratings in Los Angeles County. Of the 71 neighborhoods that received a D (red) rating, 69 had people of color in them, and 35 included African Americans.

<sup>69</sup> HOLC security maps and worksheets accessed via Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America, online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>.



*HOLC Residential Security Map of Greater Los Angeles, 1939 (Mapping Inequality)*

An additional two districts west of Sepulveda Boulevard were also assigned a C (yellow) grade. Culver Boulevard was the dividing line between these districts. The worksheet for these districts also placed emphasis on racial and demographic indicators. For instance, in District C-100, which included blocks to the south of Culver Boulevard, appraisers noted that deed restrictions were in place to protect against “racial hazards,” and also that “there are a few Japanese gardeners in the area, but these are considered as being only temporary residents.”<sup>70</sup> In District C-68, north of Culver Boulevard, they noted that deed restrictions had expired and that there were Mexican American landowners and Japanese American gardens, which “may prove of sufficient influence to adversely affect [the] area.”<sup>71</sup> However, on the whole these C (yellow)-graded neighborhood were almost entirely White, as noted in the worksheets.

Two HOLC districts in Culver City – District B-91 (southwest of Culver Boulevard and Overland Avenue) and District B-93 (northwest of Jefferson Boulevard and Overland Avenue) – were assigned the more desirable B (blue) grade. HOLC appraisers described these districts as being occupied by white collar

<sup>70</sup> “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>.

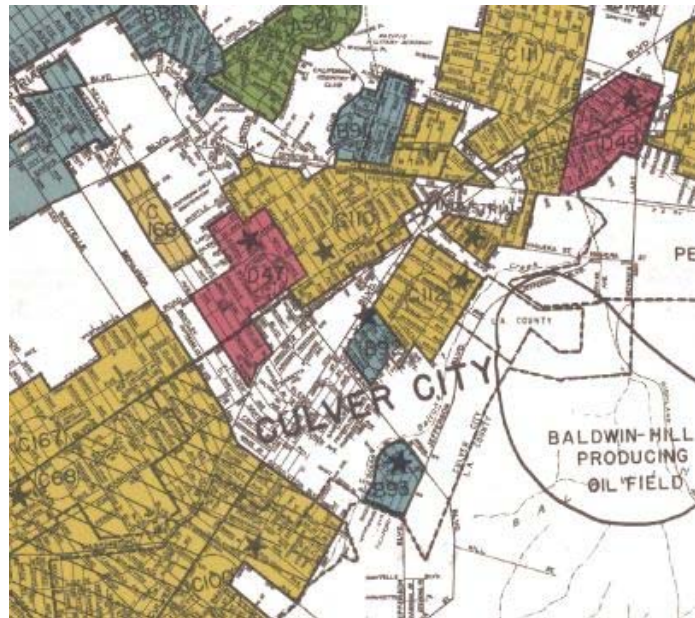
<sup>71</sup> “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>.

businessmen, motion picture workers, and skilled artisans – all White – with no people of color present. They also referred to the presence of deed restrictions which protected against “racial hazards.”<sup>72</sup>

**AREA DESCRIPTION**  
Security Map of Los Angeles County

1. POPULATION: a. Increasing Moderately Decreasing None  
b. Class and Occupation: Studio employees, technicians, etc., skilled & unskilled labor. Income \$1500-\$2000.  
c. Foreign Families: Few 5 Nationalities: Mexicans - In concentration 4 Negro - 0 5  
d. Skirting or infiltration of more Mexicans a threat but not serious
2. BUILDINGS:
 

a. Type and Size: 5-6 room bungalows b. Construction: Frame & stucco c. Average Age: 15 years d. Repair: Fair to good e. Occupancy: 95% f. Owner-occupied: 60% g. 1935 Price Bracket: \$2000-3000 Exchange \$ Exchange h. 1937 Price Bracket: \$2000-3000 \$ \$ i. 1939 Price Bracket: \$2000-3000 \$ \$ j. Sales Demand: Fair to good for new - Slow on old k. Predicted Price Trend (over 6-12 months): Stable l. 1935 Rent Bracket: \$25-40 Exchange \$ Exchange m. 1937 Rent Bracket: \$25-45 \$ \$ n. 1939 Rent Bracket: \$25-45 \$ \$ o. Rental Demand: Good p. Predicted Rent Trend (over 6-12 months): Stable	OTHER TYPE: 2 & 4 family dwellings Some 4-room bungalows 1935 Rent Bracket: \$25-40 Exchange \$ Exchange 1937 Rent Bracket: \$25-45 \$ \$ 1939 Rent Bracket: \$25-45 \$ \$ Rental Demand: Good Predicted Rent Trend (over 6-12 months): Stable
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3. NEW CONSTRUCTION (over 100 sq. ft.) No. 10 Type # Price \$4500-\$5000 How Selling: Some built.
4. OVERHANG OF HOME PROPERTIES: a. HOLC: 3 b. Institutions: Many
5. SALE OF HOME PROPERTIES (3 mo.): a. HOLC: 4 b. Institutions: Many
6. MORTGAGE FUNDS: Ample 7. TOTAL TAX RATE PER \$1000 (1937) \$ 22.14
8. DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA:  
 Terrain: Low lying level. Driveway problem causes slight construction hazard. Land improved 80%. Deed restrictions covering part of area provide for minimum of 3000 sq. ft. dwellings and protect against racial hazards. Zoning is mixed, generally single family. Conventions are all available but not readily so. This area is between 25 and 30 years old. Former boom popular district. Some 4 room FHA Title I improvements. Elimination of an old valuer's bond issue two or three years ago has had slightly stimulative effect. Lot values are low, being from \$10 to \$15 per front foot. Construction is inclined to be substandard. Maintenance is somewhat spotted but generally good. Heterogeneous population and improvements. Location is unattractive and detrimentally affected by proximity to industry and business districts (which contain a number of Mexican families) and still within one half mile southwest. Improvements along Indian Ave. are of slightly better grade. The street is set for a rapid decline in this area, and it is accorded a "low yellow" grade.



Example of an HOLC worksheet for Culver City (left); Residential Security Map showing Culver City and environs (right), 1939 (Mapping Inequality)

An adjacent district was largely located in the adjacent community of Palms, which is located in the City of Los Angeles, but also included several blocks to the south of Venice Boulevard that would later be annexed by Culver City. This district was assigned a D (red) grade, the lowest grade. Race appears to have influenced this assignment, at least in part – according to the associated HOLC report prepared for this area, it contained 5 percent “foreign families” of Mexican and Italian descent – though on the whole, the worksheet for this district makes frequent reference to the substandard quality of housing in the area.<sup>73</sup>

Related to the HOLC was another federal agency called the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which was created in 1934 under the auspices of the National Housing Act (1934). The FHA, which was intended to help revive the nation’s economy,, encourage residential construction by making it easier for prospective homeowners to obtain financing for mortgages by insuring loans from private lenders.

The FHA’s *Underwriting Manual* (1938) borrowed from the racial principles espoused by the HOLC. Specifically, the manual stated that “areas [...] are investigated to determine whether incompatible racial and social groups are present, for the purpose of making a prediction regarding the probability of the local [area] being invaded by such groups. If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that

<sup>72</sup> “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>.

<sup>73</sup> “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>.

properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally contributes to a decline in [property] values.”<sup>74</sup> Implicit in this language is the prevailing notion that neighborhoods should continue to be strictly segregated on the basis of race.

The FHA’s underwriting policies strongly preferred neighborhoods to be racially homogenous, and encouraged the refusal of federal mortgage assistance to Black homeowners and other people of color – a practice that came to be known as “redlining.” Thus, home loans given to White homeowners made possible by the FHA were seen to be at risk if Blacks or other minority groups purchased property in the neighborhood and introduced what the FHA called “racial hazards.”<sup>75</sup> These policies influenced the decisions of banks and private lenders regarding who was eligible to receive mortgage assistance.

These policies provided a strong financial disincentive against developing racially integrated neighborhoods, and effectively shut out anyone who did not meet the FHA’s definition of White from purchasing or occupying residential property. (However, this idea was not rooted in fact and was countered by reality as Blacks, who were afforded few options on where to live, were often willing to pay a higher price to live in a “desirable” White neighborhood, which drove property values up).

In addition to race and ethnicity, the policies of the FHA also worked against the interests of religious minorities, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community and those who were not part of a traditional, heteronormative nuclear family. As described by scholar Ian Baldwin, “it was taken for granted that applicants should live in what was then regarded as an optimal family unit consisting of mother, father, and children – no more and no less.”<sup>76</sup>

Often lauded for making homeownership accessible to many Americans, the policies of the HOLC and FHA promoted exclusion by making race part of their criteria for evaluating neighborhoods as security risks for home loans. These programs generally believed that the presence of Blacks, Asians, Mexicans, Jews, and other non-White and non-Christian groups threatened the stability and value of neighborhoods.

The discrimination implicit in FHA and HOLC policies has lasting impacts on people of color. Based upon preconceived ideas that the presence of minorities brought down property values, these areas were deemed unworthy of investment. Areas assigned C and D ratings saw lower financial investment and were less likely to receive home loans or mortgage insurance, thus deteriorating further. It is hard to quantify how much these policies affected people of color in Culver City or the trajectory of the area’s development.

## Private Sector Discrimination Prior to World War II

Private sector actions played an important role in sustaining and enforcing patterns of racial discrimination in Southern California communities prior to World War II, including Culver City. These actions included exclusionary real estate practices, developer initiatives, and measures taken by individual homeowners. Each is discussed in more detail below.

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<sup>74</sup> FHA *Underwriting Manual*, 1938 qtd. in Kimble, “Insuring Inequality: The Role of the Federal Housing Administration in the Urban Ghettoization of African Americans” (2007), 405.

<sup>75</sup> The term “racial hazard” is used in HOLC survey forms prepared in the late 1930s to describe the racial composition of neighborhoods.

<sup>76</sup> Clayton Howard, *The Closet and the Cul de Sac: The Politics of Sexual Privacy in Northern California* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).



## Discrimination in the Housing Market

Equal access to housing, though influenced by government entities like the FHA and HOLC, was largely governed by private-sector initiatives that were in place well before the federal government stepped into the housing market in the 1930s. These private sector actors often employed tactics like restrictive covenants, intimidation, and violence to prevent racial and religious minority groups from purchasing or occupying property in “Whites-only” neighborhoods. Developers and real estate interests contributed to this trend by deliberately “steering” people of color away from non-White neighborhoods, and by refusing to sell properties to buyers who did not identify as White. These developers and realtors would often justify these attitudes as a way to protect their business interests.

Restrictive covenants were one of the most common and readily identifiable types of housing discrimination during the first half of the twentieth century. They were legal clauses written into a property’s deed, which specified that the owner could only sell or rent the property to “Caucasians.” Some restrictive covenants also stated that houses could not be owned or occupied by those not of the Christian faith – which would have affected various religious minorities, but was especially aimed at those of Jewish heritage. If a property owner violated the covenant, they ran the risk of being sued or losing their property.

Sometimes, covenants were explicit in their listing of particular groups who could (or more often, could not) own or occupy a property, while others were more generalized and simply stated that properties could only be sold or rented to Whites or “Caucasians.” Restrictive covenants were intended to run with the land, despite future transfers in ownership, and typically lasted 20-30 years, and sometimes in perpetuity.<sup>77</sup> One African American resident of Los Angeles described the impact of these covenants this way: they created “invisible walls of steel. The Whites surrounded us and made it impossible for us to go beyond these walls.”<sup>78</sup>

After the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), which prohibited the practice of racial zoning, restrictive covenants increasingly became seen as a reliable, enforceable means of drawing racial lines and maintaining racially segregated neighborhoods. Two major court cases, both brought before the court because of African American resistance to restrictive covenants, upheld their use. In *Los Angeles Investment Co. v. Gary* (1919), the California Supreme Court issued a nuanced interpretation of covenants, concluding that while racially restrictive covenants were invalid, the restrictive occupancy clauses underpinning these deeds were valid. For all intents and purposes, covenants remained legal. Historian Douglas Flamming noted that “restrictive covenants could not prevent African Americans from buying a home, but they could prevent the Black owners from living in it.”<sup>79</sup> In another case, *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926), the Supreme Court, citing lack of jurisdiction, upheld a lower court ruling that ruled in favor of enforcing racial covenants. These opinions coincided with the 1920s building boom in Southern California, and so restrictive covenants were very commonly used in new residential neighborhoods that were being developed across Los Angeles County.

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<sup>77</sup> Wendy Plotkin, “Restrictive Covenants,” in David Goldfield, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Urban History, Vol. 2* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 681; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 69.

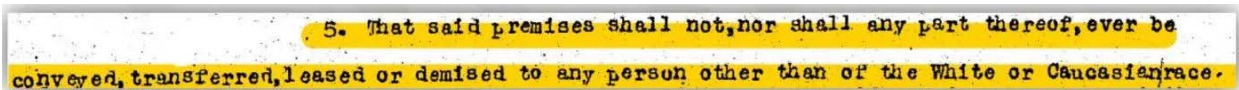
<sup>78</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In search of the racial frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: Norton, 1998), 235.

<sup>79</sup> Flamming, , *Bound for Freedom* (2005), 156.

With this sanctioning of the courts, race restrictive covenants were generally applied and enforced by individual homeowners and developers. Developers, then, emerged as formidable reinforcers of racial segregation in the housing and real estate market. They could attach restrictive covenants to all properties in their developments, and impose their own race restrictions to exclude people of color. Some developers, citing these covenants, outright refused to show or sell properties to people of color in the purported interest of protecting property values.

Stated simply, people of color were permitted to work in the capacity of domestic servants in White neighborhoods, but themselves were otherwise prohibited from owning or occupying properties in these neighborhoods. This practice significantly restricted where non-Whites were allowed to live.

It is known that restrictive covenants were applied to properties in Culver City. Following is text from one such covenant applied to the deed for a property on Sherbourne Drive, in the McManus neighborhood of Culver City. The covenant stated that “said premises shall not, nor shall any part thereof, ever be conveyed, transferred, leased, or demised to any person other than of the White or Caucasian race.”<sup>80</sup>



*Excerpt of property deed for a residential property in Culver City, showing racial restrictions attached to the deed (John Kent, Streetsblog LA)*

In addition, early advertisements for Culver City often referred to the “restricted” nature of properties in the city, which was understood at the time to include restrictions on the basis of race. Early advertisements for Culver City sometimes include references to said restrictions. In 1913, a newspaper advertisement for property sales in Culver City was published by developer Guy M. Rush. This advertisement was written in December and was narrated through the perspective of “your old fat friend, Santa Claus.” Prospective property owners who came to tour the new city were promised “a big box of fine candy,” and “a real Christmas present that will tickle you.”<sup>81</sup> It also noted that “lots and presents [are] restricted to [the] Caucasian race.”<sup>82</sup>

Other advertisements from this time were more subtle in their messaging. Beginning in 1914, Harry Culver published advertisement beckoning visitors to visit his “model little white city, scarcely a year and a half old.”<sup>83</sup> Similar advertisements reference the city’s “model white business district,” in addition to other improvements.<sup>84</sup> Culver’s advertisements do not make explicit mention of race, and his attitudes on the topic are not known; nonetheless, they promoted an image of “whiteness” as something optimal, paralleling broader societal attitudes toward race and ethnicity at the time.

Realtors reinforced racial discrimination in housing during this period. For instance, in 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) amended its “code of ethics” to prohibit realtors from

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<sup>80</sup> John Kent, “The Hidden History of Culver City Racism,” *Streetsblog LA*, Apr. 5, 2019; from Laura Redford, “The Promise and Principles of Real Estate Development in an American Metropolis: Los Angeles 1903-1923,” PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014, 102.

<sup>81</sup> Newspaper advertisement, *Los Angeles Herald*, Dec. 19, 1913.

<sup>82</sup> Newspaper advertisement, *Los Angeles Herald*, Dec. 19, 1913.

<sup>83</sup> Newspaper advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 16, 1914.

<sup>84</sup> Newspaper advertisements (multiple) *Los Angeles Times*, multiple dates.

“introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.<sup>85</sup> According to beliefs held at the time (which are unsupported by evidence and were later shown to be wrong), the introduction of people of color into a White neighborhood did just that.

**Get Your  
Free Gift  
Sunday**

**Boys and Girls:**  
Get your father, mother or some grown-up friend to go with you next Sunday and meet me at "Brooklyn". West. EVERYTHING IS FREE.  
Special trains from 4th and Hill, beginning at 11 o'clock. Get free tickets now at 901 Story Building. Meet me at "Brooklyn"-West and get—

**1—A Big Box of Fine Candy.  
2—A Real Christmas Present  
That Will Tickle You.**

Be sure and get tickets now.  
Your old fat friend,  
SANTA CLAUS.

**50-Foot Lots \$550 and up**

10% cash—balance as you like.  
10% discount for building.  
10% discount for cash.  
3 car lines.  
3 boulevards.  
31 minutes from 4th and Hill. All improvements included in price.  
(Lots and presents restricted to Caucasian race.)

**Guy M. Rush Co.**  
901-5, 927 Story Building, Sixth and Broadway  
P. S.—Office open evenings.

**FOR SALE—CITY LOTS**

**CULVER CITY ANNEX**

IN THE PATH OF HOME PROGRESS  
MR. RENTER. HERE'S YOUR CHANCE

Beautiful, high, level homesites in a built-up neighborhood, garden soil, sidewalks, curbs, finished streets, gas, light, water, stores, car line and schools for the kiddies. Caucasian race restrictions.

**\$765 TO \$975**

NONE LOWER      NONE HIGHER  
**\$25 DEPOSIT: \$15 PER MONTH**

NO LUNCH      NO PRIZES  
BUT  
REAL VALUES

SEEING IS BELIEVING  
DO IT TODAY

Motor out Washington blvd. to Jasmine or Motor ave., opposite Goldwyn Studio—turn right to Venice blvd., one block, then left short distance on Venice blvd. to tract.  
7801 VENICE BLVD.

**RALPH P. MASKEY**  
SALES AGENT  
L. A. OFFICE, 1701 WEST PICO  
WILSHIRE 6443—WEEK DAYS

**CULVER CITY ANNEX**

1913 advertisement for lots in Culver City; note language related to race in parentheses (left); 1923 advertisement for lots in Culver City; note reference to "Caucasian race restrictions" (right) (Los Angeles Times)

The NAREB reiterated this rule in its 1943 publication *Fundamentals of Real Estate*: “The prospective buyer might be a bootlegger... a madam... a gangster..., a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites... no matter what the motive or character of the would-be purchaser, if the deal would instigate a form of blight, then certainly the well-meaning broker must work against its consummation.”<sup>86</sup> If a realtor breached this code, they risked losing their license. The code of ethics remained in full effect and influenced the housing industry

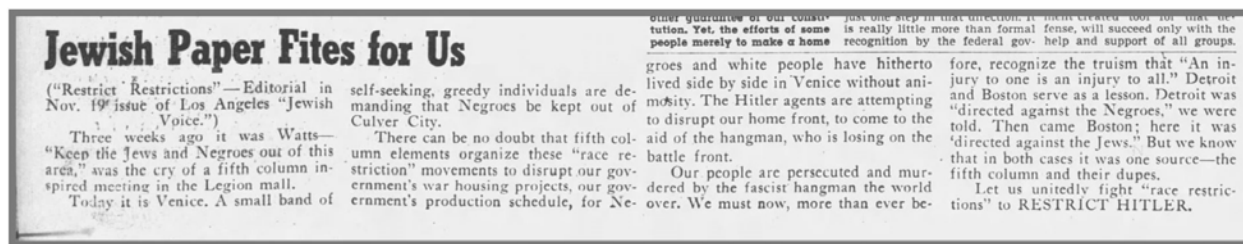
<sup>85</sup> Richard T. Ely, *The Administration of Real Estate Boards* (New York: MacMillan, 1) qtd. in Michael Jones-Correa, “The Origins and Diffusion of Race Restrictive Covenants,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115.4 (Winter 2000-2001), 564..

<sup>86</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, “With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States,” in *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 75.

until the late 1950s, even after racial covenants were deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in its landmark decision *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), which struck down the enforcement of racial covenants.<sup>87</sup>

The effectiveness of restrictive covenants and other tactics of housing discrimination in Culver City is corroborated by the HOLC surveys discussed above, which were published in 1939. Three of the four HOLC districts that were surveyed were noted as having deed restrictions that were intended, among other things, to prevent “racial hazards” – a thinly-veiled reference to people of color. The fourth HOLC district was noted as having restrictions that had since expired, indicating that racial covenants were at least once in place.

These HOLC reports further indicate that Culver City’s neighborhoods were more or less racially homogenous prior to World War II. Two of the four HOLC districts were entirely White, with no foreign-born residents or people of color. The other two HOLC districts were noted as having very nominal numbers of Mexican American and/or Japanese American residents amid their majority-White populations. The HOLC data is indicative of the hurdles that people of color encountered when trying to purchase property in new Southern California subdivisions during the first half of the twentieth century.



Instances of housing discrimination in Culver City was typically reported in Black newspapers, such as this 1943 article from the *California Eagle* (Los Angeles Public Library)

The idea of maintaining Culver City as a model “White city” was not uncommon at the time. Prevailing ideas at the time, imbedded in classism and racism, associated people of color and the working class with characteristics of disease, immorality, and inferiority. Whites often blamed immigrants and people of color for problems such as overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the rapidly industrialized cities of the East and Midwest. Many civic leaders and city planners believed that it was necessary to segregate these populations to reduce the spread of disease, save homes from the threat of environmental toxins, and improve quality of life (but only for some). In cities across the country, for example, workers of color were segregated from their White counterparts in company-provided housing. In neighboring Los Angeles, city leaders sought to create a “city of homes” that would avoid “the blight, decay, civic corruption, or criminal activity that plagued other urban areas.”<sup>88</sup> Such a model city would balance the necessary evil of industry and commerce with residential development by strictly controlling what and who was allowed where.

<sup>87</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 106; Andrea Gibbons, *City of Segregation: One Hundred Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), 63.

<sup>88</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38.

## Other Forms of Private Sector Discrimination: Business Practices, Intimidation, and Violence

Unofficial, unsanctioned intimidation and violence were also used to enforce racial segregation in Southern California, including in Culver City. Across greater Los Angeles there were numerous examples of White residents taking it upon themselves to prevent people of color from buying property in their neighborhoods.

Early in its history, Culver City was purported to be a “sundown town.”<sup>89</sup> The term “sundown town” was coined in the nineteenth century and referred to the notion that African Americans and other people of color were allowed to work in the city during the daytime, but were required to leave by “sundown.”<sup>90</sup> Scholar James Loewen, who has written extensively on the subject, described sundown towns as follows:

A sundown town is any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus ‘all-white’ on purpose...Many towns drove out their Black populations, then posted sundown signs. Other towns passed ordinance barring African Americans after dark or prohibiting them from owning or renting property; still others established such policies by informal means, harassing and even killing those who violated the rule. Some sundown towns similarly kept out Jews, Chinese, Mexicans, Native Americans, or other groups.<sup>91</sup>

Scholar Kelly Lytle Hernández nods to this perception in her book *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles*, noting that in the 1920s and ‘30s, Black musicians referred to the suburbs of Los Angeles as “Little Texas” or “Little Mississippi.”<sup>92</sup>

There is no concrete evidence indicating that Culver City had posted signs or other “official” indicators that it was a “sundown town.” However, as explained by Loewen and suggested in other sources, this was not uncommon, as many communities enforced these attitudes through practices that achieved the goals of achieving racial segregation through less overt means.

Evidence that appears to confirm Culver City’s reputation as a “sundown town” involves Sebastian’s Cotton Club. This popular jazz club was located near Washington and National boulevards. The club was opened in 1926 by entrepreneur Frank Sebastian and hosted a long roster of prominent African American bands and orchestras, including Louis Armstrong and his band. The well-known Armstrong first came to Culver City in 1930 to perform at Sebastian’s Cotton Club for nine months, and his act was so popular that he was invited to return to the club for another residency in 1931.

Sebastian’s Cotton Club remained in business until 1937 and was notable as “one of the very first jazz clubs to play exclusively all-Black bands and orchestras.”<sup>93</sup> However, evidence suggests that the Black performers who attracted large crowds and sustained the operations of the business were not welcome to otherwise enjoy the establishment. As noted in an editorial penned by Harry Schooler, who was a

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<sup>89</sup> James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 112.

<sup>90</sup> Loewen, *Sundown Towns* (2005), 4.

<sup>91</sup> Loewen, *Sundown Towns* (2005), 4.

<sup>92</sup> John Kent, “The Hidden History of Culver City Racism,” *Streetsblog LA*, Apr. 5, 2019; from Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 164.

<sup>93</sup> “Sebastian’s Cotton Club Culver City California (1926-1938),” Jul. 22, 2017, online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/sebastians-cotton-club-culver-city-california-1926-1938/>.

subsequent owner of the venue, under Sebastian's management "no colored patrons were admitted, the entertainers had their own entrance and were excluded from mingling with customers."<sup>94</sup>

Schooler, who operated the club in the 1940s, sought to distance himself from these earlier policies in his editorial, which was published in the *California Eagle* in 1948. By this time, the club was known as the Meadowbrook. Said Schooler:

There is no person alive who can say they were refused admission, or treated discourteously in any spot I have operated during my tenancy because of the color of their complexion...There is absolutely no prejudice at the Meadowbrook and, most important of all, our clientele continues at a high social level, with the intermingling of dancers...in closing, may we again invite you and members of your staff and your readers to come out any Friday, Saturday, or Sunday night and see for yourselves the fine spirit of true inter-racial harmony being fostered.<sup>95</sup>



Reporting in the *California Eagle*, including this article from 1948, provides evidence that Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities were denied service at some Culver City businesses, a common tactic in "sundown towns" (*California Eagle*)

<sup>94</sup> Eddie Burbridge, "No Fooling," *California Eagle*, Jan. 1, 1948.

<sup>95</sup> Burbridge, "No Fooling" (1948).

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – a White supremacist hate group that used violence and intimidation against people of color, Jews, and other non-WASP groups – was also active in the early years of Culver City. The KKK equated White Protestant culture with “true Americanism,” believed that people of color and non-Christians posed a threat to the American way of life.<sup>96</sup> Members of the KKK often resorted to tactics of violence and intimidation such as cross burning to prevent non-Whites and non-Christians from living in or visiting a community. There is evidence that the KKK had some association with Culver City, as discussed in detail in the next section about discrimination in Culver City during and after World War II.

## Demographics Overview

Demographic data for Culver City between its founding in 1913 and the 1930s is more difficult to obtain and analyze than for later years, because the Census did not collect detailed data on small communities in those years. By 1930, Culver City’s population was just 5,088, putting it in that category of small community.

Nevertheless, information from other sources offers insight into the city’s demographics from the period prior to World War II. It is known that when Culver City was incorporated in 1917, it had a population of 503. Sanborn fire insurance maps that were prepared for Culver City note its population as 1,000 in 1919, and 4,000 in 1924.<sup>97</sup> Census data from 1930 list the population of Culver City as 5,088.<sup>98</sup> *The New York Times*, reporting on the 1930 figure, marveled at the city’s swift growth, which grew by 1,011.5 percent between 1917 and 1930, and bestowed upon Culver City “the honor of being the city to show the largest percentage of growth in census returns announced to date.”<sup>99</sup> Culver City’s growth reflected the overall 1920s boom in Southern California, in the population, real estate, and regional economy.



*Culver City’s population grew manifold during the 1920s, as touted from this 1930 photograph (Los Angeles Public Library)*

<sup>96</sup> George Lewis, “An Amorphous Code: The Ku Klux Klan and Un-Americanism, 1915-1965,” *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 47.4 (Nov. 2013), 971-992.

<sup>97</sup> “Culver City Gains 1011.5% in Census,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1930.

<sup>98</sup> “Culver City Gains 1011.5% in Census,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1930.

<sup>99</sup> “Culver City Gains 1011.5% in Census,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1930.

The aforementioned HOLC reports that were prepared for Culver City in 1939 provide additional insight into the racial composition of the city’s population prior to World War II. As noted, these reports demonstrated that Culver City’s neighborhoods were almost exclusively White, apart from a very small number of Mexican American and Japanese American households who resided in some neighborhoods near Downtown and on the western flank of the city, respectively.

Beginning in 1940, more reliable census data is available. Based on this data, a breakdown of Culver City’s population in 1940 was as follows:

1940	Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
	White	9,374	98.33%
	Black	4	0.04%
	Hispanic	79	0.83%
	Other <sup>100</sup>	76	0.80%
	<b>Total Population:</b>	9,533	

Source: U.S. Federal Census

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<sup>100</sup> Here and throughout this report, the term “Other” refers to those individuals who fall into the “Some Other Race” category listed in the Federal Census; this category is used to describe individuals who do not identify with the Census’s racial categories and/or belong to one or more races.



### 3. Culver City During and After World War II, 1940-1980

#### Historical Overview

Culver City's economy persevered during the Depression and World War II years, sustained largely by its major studios which continued to produce a succession of major motion pictures. Iconic films from the era including *A Star Is Born* (1937), the *Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Gone With the Wind* (1939), and *Citizen Kane* (1941) were filmed at Culver City's studios in the Depression years. Other industrial employers including Western Stove, Helms Bakery, and nearby defense industry plants further sustained the economy.

The city's industrial base expanded with wartime operations. In 1940, noted aviator Howard Hughes purchased 380 acres of land adjacent to Ballona Creek, between the communities of Culver City and Playa del Rey. The Hughes Aircraft Company moved to this site from its original location in Glendale, and Hughes developed a new private airport – then the world's largest privately owned airport – at this sprawling new site.<sup>101</sup> Hughes Aircraft played an influential role in the wartime economy of the 1940s through its contracts with the United States military. In 1941, Hughes was commissioned by the government to build a prototypical flying boat that could transport people and materials over long distances. Known as the Spruce Goose, the prototype took years to build – by the time it was completed in 1946 and made its maiden voyage, World War II had already ended.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, the construction and successful operation of the Spruce Goose marked a major milestone in aviation history.

Hughes Aircraft was located outside of, but was proximate, to the Culver City limits, and thus its operations weighed heavily in supporting the local economy. It provided steady employment, which in turn helped set the stage for a swift and robust economic recovery in the post-World War II era.

Other major local industries also stepped in to support the war effort. For instance, Culver City's movie studios produced promotional content for the military during the war. In the 1940s, the Hal E. Roach Studios leased its property to the U.S. Air Force. It temporarily became known as "Fort Roach" and was used to produce films for training, morale, and propaganda. Actors Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable, Alan Ladd, and Ronald Reagan, all enlisted in the military, were among those who were stationed there.<sup>103</sup> Also contributing to the war effort was Western Stove, which temporarily pivoted from producing kitchen appliances to manufacturing parts for the government during the war years.<sup>104</sup>

By 1940, the population of Culver City had grown to about 9,500.<sup>105</sup> At this time, most of the city's developed areas were concentrated in and around the Downtown area, as well as along Washington and

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<sup>101</sup> Sam Gnerre, "South Bay History: Hughes Airport – Birthplace of the Spruce Goose, the World's Largest Seaplane," *Daily Breeze*, Mar. 16, 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Gnerre, "South Bay History: Hughes Airport" (2020).

<sup>103</sup> The Wende Museum, "Cold War: Culver City: Hal Roach Studios and the First Motion Picture Unit (FMPU)," online, accessed Aug. 2021, <https://www.coldwarculvercity.org/hal-roach-studios.html>; Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>104</sup> "The Hayden Tract is Rich in History," *Culver City News*, Apr. 10, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Masters, "Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland" (2012).

Culver boulevards as they reached further west toward the ocean.<sup>106</sup> (Much of the land area within present-day Culver City would not be annexed by the city until after World War II, as discussed later).

Like the rest of Southern California, Culver City witnessed unprecedented population growth and extensive new development after World War II, as new residents coursed into the region and set their sights on purchasing new homes in the suburbs. This led to the subdivision of new neighborhoods in areas of Culver City that still had open land, as well as residential infill in existing neighborhoods. The city also accommodated new development at this time by annexing adjacent land in undeveloped Los Angeles County, which expanded the city's geographic footprint and contributed to its present-day irregular boundaries. Culver City completed a total of 33 annexations between the years of 1948 and 1977.<sup>107</sup>

In 1947, Culver City transitioned from a general law city to a charter city.<sup>108</sup> This evolution into a charter city gave local leaders more direct control over municipal affairs, and perhaps most importantly also allowed the city to unify its school district. The Culver City School District was established in 1949; several elementary schools, a junior high school, and a senior high school were added to the newly-established local school district in subsequent years to accommodate a significant uptick in student enrollment.<sup>109</sup>



*The Culver Center, which opened in 1949, was a significant regional shopping destination in post-World War II Culver City (Culver City Historical Society)*

<sup>106</sup> Broad development patterns from this period gleaned from Sanborn fire insurance maps dated 1950 and aerial photographs.

<sup>107</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, "City of Culver City Annexations," Jul. 17, 2013.

<sup>108</sup> City of Culver City, "About Culver City," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/Explore/About-Culver-City>.

<sup>109</sup> "Freeholders Endorse New Charter Plan," *Evening Vanguard*, Dec. 9, 1946; Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about-culver-city-timeline/>.

The Culver City Chamber of Commerce played an active role in promoting new development in the city in the post-World War II era. The Chamber championed the opening of the city's first industrial tract, which was developed by glass manufacturer and East Coast transplant Sam Hayden in 1949. The Hayden Tract, which was located east of Downtown Culver City and sat adjacent to Ballona Creek, consisted of 24 industrial buildings that were leased to manufacturers, and a 30,000-square-foot service warehouse that was constructed for Fox-West Coast Theaters.<sup>110</sup> The development of the Hayden Tract bolstered Culver City's already-diverse economic base, and its presence provided jobs to local residents and further balanced the diverse mix of land uses that had long distinguished Culver City from other suburban locales.

In 1949, a new shopping mall called the Culver Center opened at the far north end of Culver City, on Overland Avenue between Venice and Washington boulevards. Early anchors of the shopping mall included prominent retailers like J.C. Penney, Market Basket (a supermarket chain), W.T. Grant (a five-and-dime chain), and Hellman Hardware.<sup>111</sup> The Culver Center embodied hallmark characteristics of a postwar suburban shopping mall, with ample on-site parking and a concentration of modern retail stores. It immediately became a key regional shopping destination for those living in Westside communities. Car dealerships also opened along Washington Boulevard and further invigorated the city's economy.<sup>112</sup>

Motion picture studios continued to have a strong local presence. Culver City's three major studios – Ince Studios (which had operated under a litany of other names by this time), Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and Hal E. Roach Studios – continued to produce a significant number of major motion pictures, and by this time had also expanded their repertoire to also include television production. However, in 1959, Hal E. Roach Studios filed for bankruptcy while under the management of Roach's son, and after a failed attempt to revive the business, it closed entirely in 1962. The studio was razed in 1963 and replaced with industrial buildings.<sup>113</sup>

Increased suburban development in Culver City was hastened by the construction of a vast network of freeways in Southern California, which connected key destinations across the region and provided prospective homeowners with improved access to more peripheral suburban areas. In the late 1950s, the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10) was built between Downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica, skirting a portion of Culver City's northern boundary along its route. The stretch of the San Diego Freeway (I-405) between the Los Angeles International Airport (which began providing commercial airline service in 1946, and was modernized beginning in the 1950s) was also built at this time and was dedicated in 1958.<sup>114</sup>

Plans to construct a third freeway in the area, the Slauson Freeway (SR-90), were also pursued by State highway officials in the 1950s. The proposed freeway would have begun at Marina del Rey and continued east to Yorba Linda in eastern Orange County, roughly paralleling the routes of Slauson Avenue and Imperial Highway. A small slice of the proposed freeway would have skirted the southern edge of Culver City. However, community opposition killed the project and resulted in the proposed freeway remaining almost entirely unbuilt, aside from a small segment at its far western end that begins in Marina del Rey,

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<sup>110</sup> "The Hayden Tract is Rich in History," *Culver City News*, Apr. 10, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> "Ground Broken for \$5,000,000 Shopping Center; Farragut School Improvement Ceremonies Held," *Evening Vanguard*, Jan. 13, 1949.

<sup>112</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>113</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>114</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

crosses over the I-405, and ends shortly thereafter at Slauson Avenue. This small segment opened in 1968 and is extant.<sup>115</sup>

Decennial census data indicate just how much the population of Culver City had grown in the immediate postwar years. In 1940, the population of Culver City was approximately 9,500; by 1950, that number had more than doubled to 19,720; and by 1960, it had grown even more, to 32,163. (Demographics are addressed in greater detail later in this chapter).

By about 1960, the existing boundary of Culver City was almost entirely built out. However, the city continued to pursue new annexations in adjacent unincorporated areas to further augment its boundaries and accommodate additional growth. One of the largest and most contested annexations was that of Fox Hills, which at the time consisted of mostly undeveloped open space at the western foot of the Baldwin Hills. Culver City annexed Fox Hills in 1964, which added roughly 300 acres of land area to the city.<sup>116</sup> The decision to annex Fox Hills drew the ire of residents of nearby Ladera Heights, who wanted the area to remain as open space and expressed concern about Culver City's ambitions to develop the land with modern improvements, which they saw as threatening its still-semi-rural quality of life.<sup>117</sup>

Two of Culver City's longest-serving industrial employers closed shop in the 1960s. Western Stove (which by this time, operated under the name Western-Holly), shuttered its manufacturing plant in the early 1960s, and Helms Bakery closed its bakery and distribution center on Venice Boulevard in 1969.<sup>118</sup>

In the 1960s and '70s, new development in Culver City mostly occurred in and around the newly-annexed Fox Hills area. By this time, new residential construction generally consisted of larger and denser townhome and condominium developments. The city's first condominium complex – the Studio Village Townhouses – was built in 1965 on the west side of Sepulveda Boulevard, adjacent to Ballona Creek.<sup>119</sup> Several large condominium complexes were constructed in the Fox Hills neighborhood in the 1970s, collectively adding hundreds of new dwelling units to the city's housing stock.

In 1975, the Fox Hills Mall opened at Sepulveda Boulevard and Slauson Avenue, adjacent to the junction of the San Diego and Marina freeways. Designed by the noted architectural firm Gruen Associates, the shopping mall made headlines as the first three-story shopping mall in Southern California, and was a prototype for future mall development.<sup>120</sup> It quickly became a key destination among those who resided on the Westside of Los Angeles, and benefited the city by providing a substantial amount of tax revenue.

Culver City – including its multitude of annexations – was entirely built out by about 1980, after the construction of the Fox Hills Mall and multi-family residential complexes transformed the Fox Hills district from sparsely-improved hinterlands to an integral part of Culver City's built environment.

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<sup>115</sup> Martha Groves, "Plan Puts Marina in Fast Lane," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 23, 2006.

<sup>116</sup> "Culver Starts Annex Action on Fox Hills," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 12, 1964.

<sup>117</sup> "Culver Starts Annex Action on Fox Hills," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 12, 1964.

<sup>118</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>119</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>120</sup> Rose-Marie Turk, "Older, Mellow, and Gentle on the Budget," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 12, 1993.

## Public-Sector Discrimination After World War II

### Changes in Housing Policy Amid the Modern Civil Rights Movement

Prior to World War II, racial discrimination in the housing market was widely accepted as standard practice and, as evidenced by the policies of federal housing agencies including the HOLC and FHA, was sanctioned by the federal government. The status quo at that time was for residential neighborhoods to be strictly segregated on the basis of race. African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans were routinely prohibited from purchasing or occupying property in areas that were deemed as “White only” through the various segregation mechanisms described earlier. The effects of these policies were manifest in the racial and ethnic composition of Culver City, whose population was about 98 percent non-Hispanic White in 1940.<sup>121</sup> At this time, Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color were generally confined to communities in South Los Angeles and East Los Angeles, which had fewer racial restrictions.

Many of these policies and programs persisted into the early postwar period. The HOLC continued to function until 1954, when the agency was disbanded. However, stereotypes about financial risk and economic worthiness that had been perpetuated by the HOLC, which favored Whites and worked against communities of color – and particularly Blacks – continued to shape decisions regarding financial stability and risk in American cities long after the HOLC was disbanded. So too did the practices of the FHA, whose practices were largely dictated by similar racial stereotypes within its underwriting manual. Decisions rendered by the FHA continued to be influenced by the racially dubious assumptions within the manual.

These policies continued to severely limit options for people of color to own and occupy property in suburban settings that had historically been seen as the domain of Whites. This is evident in the racial and ethnic composition of Culver City. Between 1940 and 1950, Culver City’s population had more than doubled, from roughly 9,500 to 19,540. However, its population remained racially homogenous and continued to be almost exclusively White, with more than 97 percent of its population identifying as non-Hispanic White in the 1950 census – less than a one percent decrease from 1940 Census data.<sup>122</sup>

The continued challenges that people of color faced in securing fair access to housing was seen in the case of Carl A. Dent, a Black physician who attempted to purchase a house in Culver City in 1948. After Dent signed a contract to purchase a home in one of Culver City’s restricted tracts, “Jim Crow residents of the tract called a meeting to oppose Dr. Dent’s action and...passed a resolution in opposition to Dr. Dent, based on an antiquated restricted covenant” that prevented non-Whites from owning property there.<sup>123</sup>

However, by the postwar period a movement was afoot to change the status quo. People of color – and particularly African Americans, who had been subjected to some of the most overt forms of racism – sought basic civil liberties and the right to self-determination that had long been denied them. During World War II, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos had made contributions to the war effort, both through military service and by working in defense factories that supplied the government with essential wartime goods. When the war ended, there was less acceptance of policies and practices that relegated people of color to the status of second-class citizens, and efforts to end discrimination

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<sup>121</sup> Gleaned from U.S. Federal Census Data for Culver City, 1940.

<sup>122</sup> Gleaned from U.S. Federal Census Data for Culver City, 1940.

<sup>123</sup> “Venmar IPP to Fight Covenants in Culver City,” *California Eagle*, Sept. 2, 1948.

intensified.<sup>124</sup> The Civil Rights Movement gained traction in the 1950s and sought to abolish legalized segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement across the nation, including in Southern California.

The Modern Civil Rights Movement culminated in significant policy wins. At the federal level, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 998 in 1948, which banned segregation in the Armed Forces. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued its landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, in which it ruled that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional.<sup>125</sup> California also took steps to curtail public-sector discrimination. One of the earliest examples of state legislation toward this end was California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, which was adopted in 1959. Named for its chief sponsor, California State Assemblymember Jesse M. Unruh, the legislation provided protection from discrimination by business establishments in the state, including in the areas of housing and public accommodations.<sup>126</sup>

Also in 1959, California passed the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), which prohibited discrimination in employment and housing on the basis of race, religion, national origin, and ancestry. The FEHA resulted in the creation of the Fair Employment and Housing Commission (FEHC), an appointed body tasked with ensuring compliance with the law and investigating allegations of violation.

California took further steps to address racial discrimination in the housing and real estate industries. In 1963, the California legislature passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act (also called the California Fair Housing Act), which set out to strengthen earlier fair housing bills. The legislation was drafted by W. Byron Rumford of Berkeley, who was the first African American from Northern California to serve in the state legislature, and stipulated that landlords could not deny people housing for reasons relating to their race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.<sup>127</sup> At the time, this legislation was seen as progressive and preceded the adoption of similar federal legislation by nearly half a decade. The Rumford Act was strongly opposed by many Californians and by commercial landlords, who argued that implementation of the law would infringe upon their ability to maximize profits attained from rental income. The bill ultimately passed, though most forms of private and single-family housing – which constituted the vast majority of California's housing stock – were exempted from its provisions. The law prohibited discrimination in public housing and private multi-family properties comprising more than five units.<sup>128</sup>

A swift backlash followed. Landlords and members of the real estate lobby led an effort to repeal the law. The California Real Estate Association (CREA), an entity that advocated on behalf of the interests of real estate professionals, introduced a ballot initiative called Proposition 14, which sought to repeal the Rumford Act in its entirety. The CREA argued that the Rumford Act threatened the financial interests of realtors, who had come to see “the promotion, preservation, and manipulation of racial segregation as

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<sup>124</sup> Library of Congress, “‘Equality of Treatment and Opportunity:’ Executive Order 9981,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/diverse-experiences-in-service/equality-of-treatment-and-opportunity>.

<sup>125</sup> National Archives, “Brown v. Board of Education (1954),” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/brown-v-board-of-education>.

<sup>126</sup> State of California Civil Rights Department, “Legal Records and Reports,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/legalrecords/>.

<sup>127</sup> State of California Civil Rights Department, “Legal Records and Reports,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/legalrecords/>.

<sup>128</sup> State of California Civil Rights Department, “Legal Records and Reports,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/legalrecords/>.

central – rather than incidental or residual – components of their profit generating strategies.”<sup>129</sup> Simply stated, from the perspective of real estate interests it made good business sense to allow segregation in the housing market. The CREA’s campaign for Proposition 14 expressed hostility toward liberal social programs, as well as concerns about the effects of fair housing legislation on individual property rights.

Others who expressed support for Proposition 14 included organizations like the American Nazi Party and branches of White Citizens Councils, a network of White supremacist organizations that formed after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling to economically and socially oppress people of color.<sup>130</sup>

Proposition 14 appeared on the 1964 ballot, and it passed. The initiative would have nullified the Rumford Act, as well as other key milestones in the quest for racial equality like the Unruh Civil Rights Act. However, in 1967 the initiative was overturned by the United States Supreme Court case *Reitman v. Mulkey*, which found that the initiative violated the Fourteenth Amendment and was unconstitutional.<sup>131</sup>

The federal government passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. This landmark piece of legislation expressly “prohibited discrimination in the workplace, public accommodations, public facilities, and agencies receiving federal funds, and strengthened prohibitions on school segregation and discrimination in voter registration.”<sup>132</sup> Four years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Also known as the Fair Housing Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 expanded on the scope of the 1964 legislation, and specifically “prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, (and as amended) handicap and family status.”<sup>133</sup>

Redlining – a practice that had been widely applied since the 1930s, and was perhaps one of the most overt forms of government sanctioned discrimination against communities of color in the twentieth century – was prohibited upon the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. It was no longer endorsed by the FHA, though enforcement mechanisms were initially lacking and would take years to firmly take hold.

Further strides in the spirit of fair housing were made in 1977, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) modified its definition of “family” to include any “stable” relationship – not just the nuclear, heteronormative family united that had been preferred in prior years.<sup>134</sup> This meant that non-traditional families, including LGBTQ+ households, also now had access to federal housing assistance.

Though they were implemented at the federal and state levels, these policy reforms would also have effects in local communities including Culver City, by ending state-sanctioned tactics to exclude people of color and religious minorities from being able to purchase and occupy houses in its neighborhoods. However, the integration of suburban settings that had historically been racially homogenous was indubitably met with resistance from White property owners and landlords who, in spite of the recently

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<sup>129</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 265.

<sup>130</sup> Self, *American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (2003), 265.

<sup>131</sup> Kenneth L. Karst and Harold W. Horowitz, “Reitman v. Mulkey: A Telophase of Substantive Equal Protection,” *The Supreme Court Review*, Vol. 1967 (1967), 39-80.

<sup>132</sup> Library of Congress, “The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom,” accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/civil-rights-act-of-1964.html>.

<sup>133</sup> United States Department of Justice, “The Fair Housing Act,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fair-housing-act-1>.

<sup>134</sup> Ian Baldwin, “Family, Housing, and the Political Geography of Gay Liberation in Los Angeles County, 1960-1986,” PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2010, 8.

passed legislation aimed at fair housing, continued to resist efforts to allow Blacks and other people of color to purchase and occupy homes in what continued to be seen by some as “White” neighborhoods.

To ensure that fair housing laws were being enforced, organizations known as Fair Housing Councils were formed amid the passage of civil rights legislation, and took action to ensure compliance with federal and state fair housing laws. The Westside Fair Housing Council was created in 1968 and covered communities on the Westside including Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, West Hollywood, and Culver City.

The organizations helped people secure access to housing; educated owners, landlords, and property managers on fair housing legislation; and assisted prospective homeowners/tenants with filing complaints and lawsuits. The organizations also enlisted a team of volunteers to accompany home seekers of color, or to act as White “testers.” Testers would attempt to buy or rent the same units as people of color to determine whether the property owner or landlord was discriminating based on race and therefore running afoul of the law.<sup>135</sup>

In Culver City, one such lawsuit challenging the application of fair housing laws was filed by two prospective tenants against Doverwood Town Houses, a multi-family residential complex at 5818 Doverwood Drive. According to the lawsuit, in early 1973 the prospective tenants, who were Black, attempted to see vacant apartments in the Doverwood development, but were unable to do so because its owners would not answer the door whenever they would visit the property. The Westside Fair Housing Council stepped in and offered assistance, as described in a 1973 article published in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*:

Finally, [the prospective tenants] sought assistance from the Fair Housing Council, which dispatched several teams of volunteers to the building to investigate the complaint. When minority volunteers went to the scene, they were told single persons were unacceptable as tenants. On the contrary, when Caucasian volunteers went, there was no objection to their being single. The council finally referred the [plaintiffs] to Atty. Richard Field of the Los Angeles firm of Adams, Duque & Hazeltine, who filed suit and finally negotiated a \$2,000 settlement.<sup>136</sup>

Another organization that was formed in the late 1960s to provide housing assistance and other resources related to the racial integration of local neighborhoods was founded in 1968 and was called Culver Neighbors. Composed of community members and stakeholders, Culver Neighbors launched “an active program...to overcome racial discrimination in the community” by hosting workshops and focus groups that were intended to educate the community and change negative perceptions of race and race relations amid a period of change brought on by civil rights and fair housing legislation.<sup>137</sup> Theirs was primarily an organization based on outreach and education to community members and stakeholders, to provide information about fair housing laws and assuage concerns about the racial integration of local neighborhoods that some property owners and landlords continued to espouse. As stated in the *Evening Vanguard* (a newspaper serving Westside communities) by the organization’s president, Hal Richards:

Our group is striving for a happy, racially integrated community...one that will continue to be attractive, well-maintained and dynamic in its human relations. In order to accomplish this task,

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<sup>135</sup> “Fair Housing Council Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 8, 1983.

<sup>136</sup> “Minorities Gain Momentarily With Aid From Fair Housing,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Nov. 14, 1974.

<sup>137</sup> “Culver Neighbors’ Formed to Promote Human Relations,” *Evening Vanguard*, Dec. 30, 1968.



we have to work with the community to change attitudes, not to run roughshod over their lives, and we think that the study group will aim us in this direction for the benefit of all.<sup>138</sup>

## 'Culver Neighbors' formed to promote human relations

"We have a dream, that someday we will all live together, side by side, and take no notice of our neighbor's race, creed or color."

That is the hope of Culver Neighbors, a newly formed human relations organization, which is launching an intensive information and action program in the New Year to overcome racial discrimination in the community, Hal Richards, president of the organization, said.

One of its first actions will be general meeting, open to the public, at 8:15 p.m., Jan. 23, at the Grace Lutheran Church, Carl Martin of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission will discuss, "A Challenge for Democracy."

The meeting is the first of a series of six study groups being held by Culver Neighbors in cooperation with the county commission. In following weeks, commission staff will discuss such topics as equal opportunity in employment and housing, and present day racial attitudes.

"The study groups are being held for purposes of educating the community and changing attitudes on race relations generally," Richards said.

"Our group is striving for a happy, racially integrated community," Richards said, "one that will continue to be attractive, well-maintained and dynamic in its community relations."

"In order to accomplish this task, we have to work with the community to change attitudes, not to run roughshod over their lives, and we think that the study group will aim us in this direction for the benefit of all," Richard said.

"Already Culver Neighbors is showing their concern for a broad-based program of change in the community," Richards said. The organization has designated committees to gather information about local education, government, housing, religious groups, and business and civic affairs."

With this information, Culver Neighbors will communicate with local organizations to develop mutual efforts for the total community. Some of the groups Culver Neighbors have been working with have already expressed their support for the new organization's program. One is the Culver City Community Coordinating Council.

"Having worked in community affairs for the last 15 years," Frank McCann, a commissioner in the coordinating council said, "It gratifies me to see the formation of Culver Neighbors. I have looked forward to the creation of groups with goals such as theirs, groups that can work with our council throughout the city."

Another interested group is the Culver City-Palms Ministerial Association. Marshall Ketchum, president of the association, has attended Culver Neighbors meetings. "I am favorably impressed by the way in which Culver Neighbors has approached the needs of our community," he said. "It is not fanatical, it has a concerned, sensible approach to the problems we all face with regard to race relations."

For further information on Culver Neighbors, call 838-3131.

## Open Housing Topic of Talk

WEST LOS ANGELES — Miss Marge Anderson, of the Culver Neighbors, will speak on the application of the open housing laws, at the Westside Open Housing Center, 11669 Santa Monica Blvd., Room 204, at 10 a.m.

The meeting is opened to apartment seekers, and others interested in the open housing laws and the general rental picture in West Los Angeles.

*Local organizations like Culver Neighbors, founded in 1968, worked toward improving human relations and racial dynamics in Culver City at the height of the Modern Civil Rights Movement (Evening Vanguard; Hollywood Citizen-News)*

### Local Government Agencies

By the mid-twentieth century, examples of public-sector discrimination in Culver City had grown to include policing and law enforcement tactics that disproportionately affected people of color.<sup>139</sup> Since discrimination related to the police department was not documented in the same way that housing policies were, information is largely reliant upon the personal experiences and recollections of individuals who encountered racism or discrimination at the hands of police officers. This section draws on such recollections, as well as scattered newspaper reports to the extent that they are available.

As discussed above, there is evidence that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had a presence in Culver City, as they did in many communities across Southern California and throughout the nation. In 1940, a high-ranking Culver City police officer was accused of having ties to the KKK and using his stature as the city's chief peace officer to recruit members into the organization, which was reported in the *California Eagle*.<sup>140</sup>

Aside from this reporting by the *California Eagle*, reporting on this incident was scant, and as such it could not be confirmed whether the allegations were found to be factual. For these same reasons, it is also difficult to know if this was an isolated incident, or whether it was indicative of a more deeply-rooted culture of racism that could have existed within the police department and other governmental agencies.

A second known incident dates back to 1943, at the height of the U.S. involvement in World War II, and is documented in the work of scholar Richard Rothstein, whose work examines discrimination in education

<sup>138</sup> "Culver Neighbors' Formed to Promote Human Relations," *Evening Vanguard*, Dec. 30, 1968.

<sup>139</sup> John Kent, "The Hidden History of Culver City Racism," *Streetsblog LA*, Apr. 5, 2019, online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://la.streetsblog.org/2019/04/05/the-hidden-history-of-culver-city-racism>.

<sup>140</sup> "Political Pot Pie," *California Eagle*, Jun. 20, 1940.

and housing. In November 1943, Culver City convened a meeting of its air raid wardens at City Hall. Air raid wardens were individuals tasked with protecting the lives of their fellow citizens in the chance that the war came onto U.S. soil. They would visit community members and educate them on what to do and how to respond if an air raid were to occur.<sup>141</sup> Present at this meeting were various local officials including the City Attorney and chief building inspector, the head of the local Chamber of Commerce, and members of a private citizens group called the Culver City for Caucasians Committee, which was organized to fight the construction of a racially integrated public housing development near the west edge of Culver City.<sup>142</sup>

At the meeting, wardens were advised on how to canvass the city's neighborhoods and educate households on proper protocol in the event of an aerial attack, including measures like turning off lights and installing blackout curtains. However, the meeting took a more insidious turn. According to Rothstein, the City Attorney "instructed the assembled wardens that when they went door to door, they should also circulate documents in which homeowners promised not to sell or rent [property] to African Americans. The wardens were told to focus especially on owners who were not already parties to long-term covenants." This incident revealed how civic leaders remained preoccupied with racial exclusion, even during the wartime crisis.<sup>143</sup>

The *California Eagle* learned about the plan and, again, was the sole newspaper to report on it, in 1943:

Air raid wardens were tasked with getting the petitions signed 100 percent; for if even one person balked at the idea the work would be useless. Mr. Teague [who was Culver City's building inspector and its head of civilian defense operations] declared, 'You might find some trouble. There may be one person who says 'I don't mind if a Negro lives next door to me, or if I rent to a Negro.' Try to win them over but don't argue too much. I know how you feel if someone did talk to you like that. Deep down in my heart I would like to tell them a thing or two, but there is no use arguing too much, just turn their names over to me and I will send someone else to talk to them. We'll find a way!'<sup>144</sup>

Reporting on air raid wardens in the *California Eagle* contrasted with coverage in White-owned newspapers and media outlets, which focused solely on the wardens' efforts to educate citizens about proper protocol in the chance of war and made no mention of the racial covenant issue.

Reflecting the still-then-racially homogenous character of its population, Culver City's law enforcement personnel continued to be exclusively White well into the postwar period. It was not until 1967 that the Culver City Police Department hired its first Black officer. This officer reported experiencing racism during his early years on the police force, generally in the form of name calling and pejorative language. A biography of the officer published in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that upon joining the force, he "discovered that there was major racism within the department" – an observation that in his opinion, was associated with "the fact that in 1967, there was not one Black family in residence in Culver City."<sup>145</sup> (Note that Census data from 1960 found a total of 35 Black residents in Culver City, as discussed below in the

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<sup>141</sup> World War II American Experience, "Civilian Defense & Air Raid Wardens," online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://la.streetsblog.org/2019/04/05/the-hidden-history-of-culver-city-racism>.

<sup>142</sup> Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (2017), 82.

<sup>143</sup> "Venice Hate-Race Meet Reported On," *California Eagle*, Nov. 18, 1943.

<sup>144</sup> "Venice Hate-Race Meet Reported On," *California Eagle*, Nov. 18, 1943.

<sup>145</sup> Marsha Mitchell, "James Forte - Pioneer With Culver City Police, Fire Dept.," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Feb. 21, 1991.

section on demographics). The officer also noted that he believed these racist attitudes were reflective of individuals' convictions, not a department policy."<sup>146</sup>

While problems involving race relations in the public sector continued to exist within the city, Culver City officials made a concerted effort to study and rectify racial tensions. In 1968, Culver City financed the development of a report related to race relations by the non-profit Coro Foundation.<sup>147</sup> The report acknowledges that in an era marked by momentous achievements in civil rights, Blacks increasingly had the agency to move out of the urban neighborhoods to which they had long been restricted and into suburban communities such as Culver City. Anticipating negative attitudes and tensions that were likely to arise with the influx of more Black residents into Culver City, the report issued a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the city would be able to effectively manage its forthcoming demographic changes.

Shortly after the report was issued, Culver City created a Human Relations Committee in 1969, an appointed body of citizens whose task was to study problems of discrimination and work toward finding solutions. The resolution included a recital stating that "the City Council of Culver City finds that prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination against any individual or group because of race, religion, national origin or cultural background causes tension and conflict and are therefore a menace to peace and public welfare," and further states that "such prejudice, intolerance and discrimination is contrary to the principles of our democratic way of life."<sup>148</sup> The resolution tasked the newly-formed committee with identifying human relations problems within the community, devising solutions to said problems, and educating the community about tolerance, civic peace, and mutual understanding and respect of ideas.<sup>149</sup>

The desegregation of Culver City's schools after World War II was periodically a point of friction. By the late 1970s, Culver City's schools had diversified – 53 percent of its students were White, with 26 percent identifying as Hispanic, 11 percent as Black, and 10 percent as Asian.<sup>150</sup> These figures were more diverse than the population of Culver City itself, which was about 66 percent non-Hispanic White in 1980 (see discussion of demographic trends at the end of this section for more information about population breakdown). The diversity of the student body within Culver City schools was a testament to the effects of busing and other methods of desegregating schools that were implemented after World War II. But efforts to further diversify the city's schools were met with resistance. In 1978, Culver City was one of three Westside school districts – the other two being Beverly Hills and Santa Monica – that resisted an effort to institute a broader, metropolitan integration program with the adjacent Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), whose students, in contrast, were then 70 percent non-White. Officials from the Culver City district and other smaller districts that opposed this move cited the need to maintain local control over their schools, and administrators from Culver City pointed to the fact that their schools already had a relatively diverse mix of racial and ethnic groups.<sup>151</sup> Nonetheless, this move to formally

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<sup>146</sup> John Greenwood, "Racial Transition and Culver City," Jun. 1968, accessed Sept.2023 via the archives of the Culver City Historical Society.

<sup>147</sup> John Greenwood, "Racial Transition and Culver City," Jun. 1968, accessed Sept.2023 via the archives of the Culver City Historical Society.

<sup>148</sup> "Proposed Ordinance of the City of Culver City, California, Establishing a Human Relations Commission of the City of Culver City," 1969, accessed Sept. 2023 via the archives of the Culver City Historical Society.

<sup>149</sup> "Proposed Ordinance of the City of Culver City, California, Establishing a Human Relations Commission of the City of Culver City," 1969, accessed Sept. 2023 via the archives of the Culver City Historical Society.

<sup>150</sup> Pat B. Anderson, "Desegregation Plan May Face 3-District Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 28, 1978.

<sup>151</sup> Pat B. Anderson, "Desegregation Plan May Face 3-District Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 28, 1978.

oppose the integration plan was seen by some as an effort to prevent additional students of color from being able to access Culver City schools.

According to several community members who participated in the public outreach component of this project, Culver City schools may have had a healthy mix of White and non-White students, but discriminatory attitudes persisted within the school system nonetheless. Several participants remarked that when they attended Culver City schools in the 1970s and 80s, it was often assumed that Black and Latino students did not live in Culver City, but were rather bussed in from neighboring areas, simply based on the color of their skin.<sup>152</sup>

## Private Sector Discrimination After World War II

The use of restrictive covenants continued into the early postwar period, and accordingly Culver City's residential neighborhoods remained almost entirely – and often entirely – White. However, by this time some began to push back against the discrimination of restrictive covenants. A severe housing shortage in the years immediately after the war meant that people of color felt the exclusionary effects of restrictive covenants more acutely, given the scant amount of neighborhoods in which they were able to buy homes. They attempted to move out of older and deteriorating neighborhoods and into new suburban settings like Culver City, but were prevented from doing so time and time again because of the covenants that were so often tacked onto property deeds.

Opponents of restrictive covenants became increasingly organized, forming activist groups and challenging these practices in court, often in tandem with noted civil rights organizations like the NAACP. Their efforts paid off in 1948, when the use of restrictive covenants was finally scrutinized by the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark case *Shelley v. Kraemer*. Los Angeles attorney Loren Miller and future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, both of whom were Black, played instrumental roles in arguing the case on behalf of the NAACP.<sup>153</sup> In its decision, the Court found that the enforcement of restrictive covenants was unconstitutional. According to the Court, while covenants were a private agreement and outside the realm of the Constitution, state rulings enforcing such covenants violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In effect, the *Shelley* decision meant that restrictive covenants attached to property deeds could not be enforced.

The *Shelley* decision did not end housing segregation. Instead, discriminatory housing practices evolved at the hands of realtors, homeowners, banks, and others. Some realtors simply refused to sell homes to people of color in White neighborhoods. Others continued the practice of steering, which referred to directing non-White homebuyers away from predominantly White neighborhoods. Often, available properties in predominantly White neighborhoods were not divulged to prospective Black or Jewish buyers. These practices prevented the racial integration of many neighborhoods, and had the effect of sustaining color lines in the same way that restrictive covenants had in the pre-*Shelley* years.

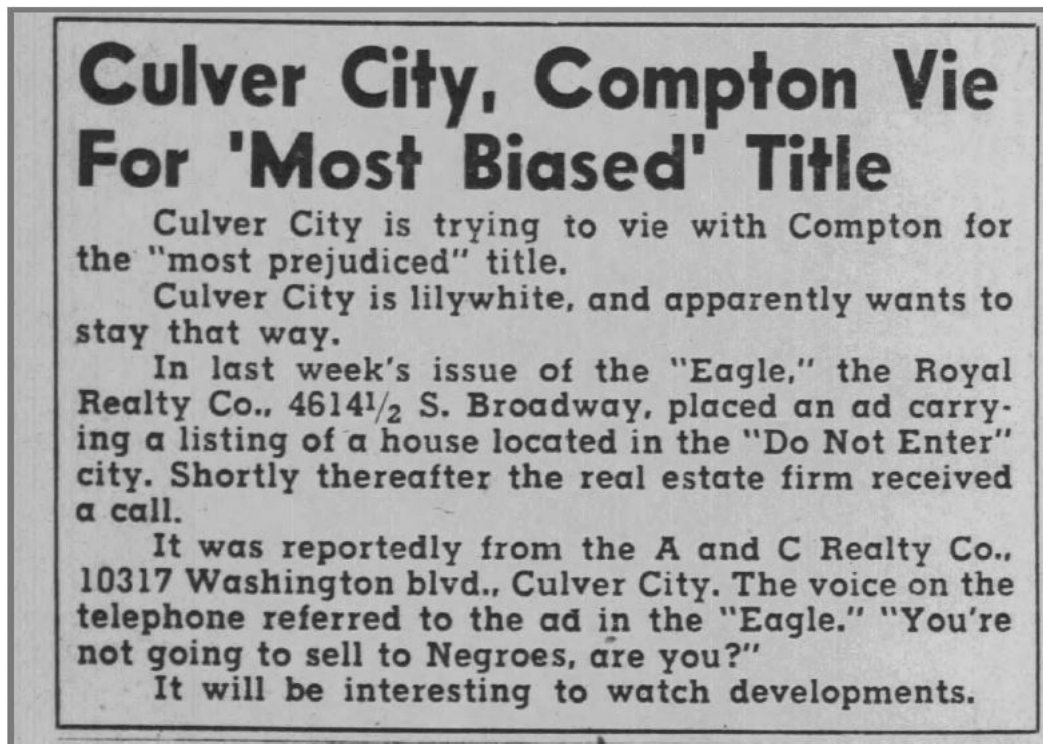
Real estate professionals utilized additional tactics aimed at keeping neighborhoods racially segregated. For example, the California Real Estate Association (CREA) suggested that homeowners' associations could require a discretionary occupancy permit for residences under their purview. These permits would

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<sup>152</sup> Information obtained from public outreach conducted as part of this project.

<sup>153</sup> Gibbons, *City of Segregation: One Hundred Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (2018), 63.

not make any “reference to race or color, but [would] require personal qualifications as a good neighbor, or in other words, cultural status.”<sup>154</sup> The CREA’s attorney advised that “if fairly administered so as to exclude undesirable persons irrespective of race or color, no difficulty should be encountered.”<sup>155</sup> Realtors that did sell homes to people of color in these areas ran the risk of losing their licenses.



Reporting in the California Eagle in 1953 indicates that exclusionary tactics continued to be applied in the private real estate market in spite of court decisions banning restrictive covenants (California Eagle)

These reputedly “colorblind” tactics to ensure racial segregation after *Shelley* occurred in suburban settings nationwide, and likely would have affected Culver City. The city’s demography attests to the area’s continued racial exclusivity. Culver City’s population remained almost entirely non-Hispanic White by 1960 – more than a decade after the *Shelley* ruling. Meanwhile, adjacent communities like Leimert Park, View Park, Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, Mid-City, Mar Vista, and Palms experienced influxes of Black families who were able to move out of older segregated neighborhoods.<sup>156</sup>

Homeowners' protective associations, which had existed in previous years as well, continued to apply pressure on residents to maintain racial barriers, and often resorted to threats, intimidation, and violence against people of color who attempted to move into their neighborhoods.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Gene Slater, *Freedom to Discriminate: How Realtors Conspired to Segregate Housing and Divide America* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2021), 160.

<sup>155</sup> Slater, *Freedom to Discriminate* (2021), 160.

<sup>156</sup> Demographic trends in these areas gleaned from analysis of Census data and other available sources of demographic information.

<sup>157</sup> For more detail on the ways realtors and property owners circumvented the *Shelley* ruling, see Slater (2021), 160-161.

## Cross-burning said not a prank

By Richard Simon  
Copley News Service

LOS ANGELES — A victim of one of the recent Ku Klux Klan-type cross burnings in Southern California called on law enforcement authorities Wednesday not to dismiss the incidents as the work of pranksters.

Shirley Scott, whose Culver City home was the scene of a cross burning, claimed the incidents are organized attacks against blacks.

The young black woman said police explained the cross burning at her home Monday night as "a foolish

prank."

"If it is, I don't think it's funny," she said.

Ms. Scott was joined by civil rights leaders at a new conference at the Greater Los Angeles Press Club in deploring the incidents.

Among those attending was Charles H. Johnson, coordinator for the Southern Area Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Johnson, who said he has recently received a death threat, criticized police for "sweeping these incidents under the carpet."

He cited a federal govern-

ment official who was quoted as saying, "Nine times out of 10 these are kids playing games."

"If it is, they are very well organized," Johnson charged.

Robert Boyd, executive director of the County Human Relations Commission, rejected blaming youths for the incidents.

"Young people have been maligned enough," he said.

The Rev. Payton Russell, head of the United Citizens for Emergency Action, called the press session to alert citizens "the Klan has raised its ugly head."

Mr. Russell listed numer-

ous examples of racial disharmony which he claimed occurred in the county in the last year.

They include cross burnings in Redondo Beach, Cudahy and West Los Angeles, the hanging in effigy of a black man in Bell, the fire bombing of a white home in Duarte, a house burned to the ground in Granada Hills and the skinning of a cat on the steps of an Indian woman in Burbank.

"Behind the cross burnings, there is a motive," Mr. Russell said, warning the incidents could lead to racial violence.

*Intimidation aimed at non-Whites continued to occur in Culver City well into the post-World War II period, as discussed in this newspaper article from 1976 (News-Pilot)*

Tactics of intimidation and violence were sometimes used to deter Black homebuyers and other people of color from moving into neighborhoods that had historically been almost entirely White. A 1948 article in the *California Eagle* reports that the home of a Black couple in Culver City had been vandalized in what was presented as a racially-motivated incident.<sup>158</sup> And in 1976, a cross was burned onto a Culver City property which was owned by a Black woman.<sup>159</sup> The woman summoned the police to investigate the incident, who dismissed the incident as "a foolish prank" carried out by pranksters rather than an act of overt intimidation.<sup>160</sup> The police's response was rebuked by the woman – "if it is [a prank], I don't think it's funny," she said – and was denounced by local civil rights activists including Charles H. Johnson, coordinator of the Southern Area Conference of the NAACP. Johnson criticized police for "sweeping these incidents under the rug" and minimizing the real threat of racial violence that incidents like the Culver City cross burning presented.<sup>161</sup>

Private-sector discrimination was often manifest in the context of housing and real estate, as demonstrated in the examples above. However, it also played out in the context of businesses, some of which continued to discriminate against patrons of color into the postwar years by refusing them service. Once such documented incident occurred in 1949. The successor business to Sebastian's Cotton Club – which by this time, was operating under the name Yucca's – was sued by three Black patrons for refusing

<sup>158</sup> "The California Eagle News Events of 1949," *California Eagle*, Dec. 22, 1949.

<sup>159</sup> Michael A. Levett and William C. Rempel, "KKK Activity Feared in L.A.-Area Cross Burnings," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1976.

<sup>160</sup> Michael A. Levett and William C. Rempel, "KKK Activity Feared in L.A.-Area Cross Burnings," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1976.

<sup>161</sup> Michael A. Levett and William C. Rempel, "KKK Activity Feared in L.A.-Area Cross Burnings," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1976.

them service. The trio had purchased tickets to attend the club by telephone, but upon arriving to the venue to retrieve their tickets “they were shunned and left standing to the side long after other guests had been seated.”<sup>162</sup>



Some local businesses continued the practice of denying service to Black patrons into the post-World War II period, as described in this 1950 article regarding Sonny Reed and the Roller Dome (California Eagle)

Another documented instance took place in 1950 when Sonny Reed, a Black musician and band leader, took a group of friends and family to the Roller Dome, a roller skating rink located at the corner of Washington Boulevard and Washington Place in Culver City. When the group arrived, they were denied entry, as reported by the *California Eagle*:

Mr. Reed had called earlier to find out what time they had opened, what the price of tickets was, and what the proper type of dress was. The group came according to the instructions they had received. Mr. Reed and friend, Stanley Smith, walked to the ticket window and asked to buy tickets for admission. They were told by the manager-owner that, ‘We don’t admit Negroes. Negroes are not allowed to skate here, take your skating elsewhere.’<sup>163</sup>

The article in the *California Eagle* further described that when Reed pressed the issue, the manager of the roller rink responded by saying, “Other arenas had to go out of business when they admitted Negroes and I’m not going to have it happen to me. You have to take your skating elsewhere.”<sup>164</sup> The manager escalated the situation by calling the Culver City police, who arrived at the scene and instead of rendering

<sup>162</sup> “To Sue Culver City Spot,” *California Eagle*, Sept. 26, 1948.

<sup>163</sup> “No Skating for Negroes In Roller Dome, Culver City, Negroes Told,” *California Eagle*, Dec. 14, 1950.

<sup>164</sup> “No Skating for Negroes In Roller Dome, Culver City, Negroes Told,” *California Eagle*, Dec. 14, 1950.

justice for Reed, falsely accused him of tampering with cars parked nearby and instructed him to leave immediately. Police officers allegedly told Reed and those who were with him to “clear out of Culver City and never show their faces again.”<sup>165</sup>

## Demographics Overview

The postwar period ushered in the beginnings of demographic change in Culver City – although it would take decades before such changes were evident in the statistical makeup of its population. As landmark pieces of Civil Rights legislation were passed, and fair housing laws were introduced, people of color – and especially Blacks, who had routinely been denied the opportunity to purchase houses in suburban environments like Culver City – increasingly had the agency and wherewithal to move out of the older urban neighborhoods to which they had been largely confined and into more desirable suburbs. The following demographic data, obtained from the U.S. Census, illustrate the gradual, yet tangible effect of fair housing legislation on the racial composition of Culver City. Through the 1960s, the population of the city remained almost entirely non-Hispanic White, with scant numbers of other ethnic and racial groups. However, by 1970 the number of non-Hispanic Whites had been reduced to about three-quarters of Culver City’s population, though the number of Black residents continued to remain nominal at that time.

An overview of demographic data from 1950 to 1980 is included below:

### 1950

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	19,252	97.63%
Black	25	0.13%
Hispanic	315	1.60%
Asian	98	0.50%
Other	30	0.15%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>19,720</b>	

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Native born	17,906	90.80%
Foreign born	1,814	9.20%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>19,720</b>	

<sup>165</sup> “No Skating for Negroes In Roller Dome, Culver City, Negroes Told,” *California Eagle*, Dec. 14, 1950.



**1960**

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	30,709	95.48%
Black	35	0.11%
Hispanic	1,116	3.47%
Asian	271	0.84%
Other	32	0.10%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>32,163</b>	

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Native born	29,050	90.32%
Foreign born	3,113	9.68%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>32,163</b>	

**1970**

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	25,672	74.52%
Black	131	0.38%
Hispanic	4,187	12.15%
Asian	972	2.82%
Other	3,489	10.13%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>34,451</b>	

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Native born	27,710	80.43%
Foreign born	6,741	19.57%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>34,451</b>	

**1980**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
White (non-Hispanic)	25,031	65.63%
Black	3,046	7.99%
Hispanic	6,428	16.85%
Asian	3,050	8.00%
Other	584	1.53%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,139</b>	

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Native born	30,160	79.08%
Foreign born	7,979	20.92%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,139</b>	

## 4. Confronting the Past: Culver City in the Contemporary Era (Post-1980)

### Historical Overview

By the 1980s, present-day Culver City was almost entirely built out. In past decades, the city had significantly expanded its footprint by completing more than three dozen annexations. As the amount of available land on the periphery of the city diminished as communities adjacent to Culver City experienced a tremendous amount of suburban development in the decades after World War II, the pace of annexation came to a near halt. Only three outlying areas were newly annexed into Culver City after 1980, all of which were located at the foot of the Baldwin Hills and became additional open space for the city. In 1982, 76 acres of land south of Jefferson Boulevard at Duquesne Avenue was annexed to the city and was developed into Culver City Park; two additional areas that together totaled about 30 acres were annexed between 1996 and 2000 and are now a part of the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook.<sup>166</sup>

In the 1980s, Culver City – along with the cities of Inglewood and Los Angeles – expressed interest in annexing Ladera Heights, an upper-middle-income residential neighborhood in the Baldwin Hills that was (and still is) a part of unincorporated Los Angeles County. Culver City took a particular interest in Ladera Heights because of its relative affluence and its potential to bolster the local tax base.<sup>167</sup> However, expressing satisfaction with the quality of life and services they received under the control of the County, residents of Ladera Heights successfully staved off annexation and held onto its unincorporated status.<sup>168</sup>

Instead, from the 1980s onward the largely-landlocked Culver City accommodated growth with infill and redevelopment projects, many of which were undertaken by the city's Redevelopment Agency, which had been established in 1971.<sup>169</sup> In the 1980s, the Culver City Redevelopment Agency facilitated the construction of a new corporate business park called Corporate Pointe at the southeast corner of Culver City, to the immediate east of the Fox Hills Mall and south of Slauson Avenue. This land had once been owned by Caltrans and was along the route of the SR-90 (Marina) Freeway, but by the late 1970s plans to construct the proposed east-west freeway had been shelved. The new business park was a master planned campus comprising "low rise garden offices and office towers up to 12 stories in height."<sup>170</sup> The first building within the business park opened in 1984, with more buildings added in subsequent years.

By the 1980s, many of the defense and aviation plants that had employed considerable numbers of Culver City residents in years past had since either closed or relocated, and the studios that had been an integral part of Culver City's economy since its inception were in decline. Hal E. Roach Studios had long been gone, having closed in 1963, and in 1986 MGM sold its studio lot and film laboratory to Lorimar, a

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<sup>166</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, "City of Culver City Annexations," Jul. 17, 2013.

<sup>167</sup> James Rainey, "Affluent and Unincorporated: 3 Cities Lay Claim to Ladera Heights," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 9, 1984.

<sup>168</sup> Linda Beth Mothner, "Proud Community Maintains its Independence," *Los Angeles Times*, Jun. 20, 1993.

<sup>169</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023,

<https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about-culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>170</sup> Lauren Tsujimoto, "\$300-Million Corporate Pointe Slated," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 21, 1982.

television production company.<sup>171</sup> The city around it was showing visible signs of decline, especially the Downtown neighborhood with its aging buildings and lack of a visible social scene.<sup>172</sup>

The Culver City Redevelopment Agency steered considerable resources toward reversing this trend. In 1983, the agency completed a \$12 million renovation of the Culver Center at Overland Avenue and Venice Boulevard, which had once been a major shopping destination but had since become dilapidated and plagued by stubbornly high vacancy rates. The renovation helped to reinforce the importance of the commercial center.<sup>173</sup> In 1987, the agency negotiated a 40-year lease with the City of Los Angeles to renovate the long-neglected Ivy Substation and Media Park at Venice and Culver boulevards. The historic building was renovated into a cultural center, and the park was re-landscaped. Both opened in 1993.<sup>174</sup>

In 1990, the Lorimar (formerly MGM) studio lot was purchased by Sony Pictures Entertainment, which re-named the property Columbia Studios. Sony subsequently invested \$100 million into renovating the studio lot, which was renamed Sony Pictures Studios. The revitalized studio complex was instrumental in breathing new life into the local economy.<sup>175</sup>

Also in the early 1990s, the city, working via its Redevelopment Agency, embarked upon an ambitious program to revitalize and reinvigorate its struggling downtown. The renovation of the Ivy Substation and Media Park were already underway and would provide downtown Culver City with a more visually prominent eastern anchor upon their completion. In 1993, the Redevelopment Agency began work on an extensive \$11.8 million streetscape project that was geared toward drawing in foot traffic and attracting new businesses to the economically depressed area. Throughout downtown, sidewalks were widened to encourage the opening of outdoor cafés, streets were flanked by new shade trees and planters, and street furniture including lamps, benches, and trash cans were reproduced to emulate historic conditions.<sup>176</sup> The problematic intersection of Culver and Washington boulevards, two major streets set at conflicting angles, was reworked to incorporate a park. The Redevelopment Agency also offered low-interest loans for business owners to renovate their storefronts, which helped transform the area into a desirable destination.<sup>177</sup>

Other major catalysts to the revitalization of Downtown included the construction of a new City Hall building at Culver Boulevard and Duquesne Avenue, which opened in 1995; a renovation of the Culver City Police Station in 1997; and a renovation of the historic but long-neglected Culver Hotel, which was completed in 1998 and transformed the iconic building from transient housing to a boutique hotel.<sup>178</sup> Several years later, in 2004, the historic, but shuttered Culver Theatre at Washington Boulevard and Duquesne Avenue was reborn as a live entertainment venue and re-named the Kirk Douglas Theater.<sup>179</sup> It attracted further activity to the Downtown area by serving as another prominent neighborhood anchor.

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<sup>171</sup> "Lorimar Buys MGH Facility," *The New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1986.

<sup>172</sup> Martha Groves, "Cultivating Culver City," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 7, 2008.

<sup>173</sup> "33-Year Old Culver Center Revitalized, Fully Leased," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 1983.

<sup>174</sup> Bernice Hirabayashi, "Getting a Line on History," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 15, 1993.

<sup>175</sup> Masters, "Culver City: From Barley Fields to the Heart of Screenland" (2012).

<sup>176</sup> Hirabayashi, "Face Lift Set to Start in Summer" (1993).

<sup>177</sup> Hirabayashi, "Face Lift Set to Start in Summer" (1993).

<sup>178</sup> Culver City Historical Society, "Culver City Timeline: A Work in Progress," online, accessed Aug. 2023,

<https://www.culvercityhistoricalsociety.org/about-culver-city/about/culver-city-timeline/>.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid; "Center Theatre Group Honors the Life of Kirk Douglas," *Culver City News*, Feb. 6, 2020.

In due time, new businesses trickled into the revitalized Downtown area, which was reinvented as a vibrant and walkable dining, entertainment, and arts district. The district continues to be a popular and highly activated hub of dining, entertainment, and the arts on the Westside of Los Angeles.

Reporting on the transformation of Culver City in 2007, the *New York Times* remarked that “Culver City, once considered a place to drive by on your way to somewhere else, has become Los Angeles’ newest stylish neighborhood, a magnet for lovers of the arts, good food and culture.”<sup>180</sup> The article further states that “one part Hollywood nostalgia, one part modern design, the city-within-a-city now inspires expressions like ‘nascent Chelsea’ (referring to the New York neighborhood) and ‘L.A.’s new restaurant mecca,” a testament to the city’s evolution from sleepy suburb to cosmopolitan locale in recent years.<sup>181</sup>

Formerly anonymous industrial areas at the eastern edge of Culver City have also taken on new life in recent decades, concurrent with the revitalization of Downtown. Beginning in 1986, Frederick and Laurie Samitaur Smith – owners of the Hayden Tract at the east end of the city, which by this time consisted primarily of outmoded warehouses – hired noted local architect Eric Owen Moss “to transform the derelict spaces into offices that would attract creative-minded companies.”<sup>182</sup> Moss, in turn, embarked on an extensive renovation of the tract’s stock of nondescript buildings into a collection of extremely atypical buildings comprising “seemingly incoherent shapes and jarring combinations of proportion and materials,” which embody the architect’s signature, enigmatic style and buck all vestiges of convention.<sup>183</sup>

The city’s emergent identity as an epicenter of the arts was solidified in the early 2000s, when warehouses and other existing brick industrial buildings at the far east end of the city, along La Cienega Boulevard, were converted to arts galleries. Blum and Poe was the first gallery to arrive in Culver City in 2003, quickly followed by other galleries who were attracted to the ample availability of old and underutilized brick warehouses.<sup>184</sup> More than two dozen galleries opened here in ensuing years, lending impetus to a teeming arts district. The east edge of Culver City “supplanted Chinatown [in Los Angeles] and Bergamot Station [in Santa Monica] as Los Angeles’s center for cutting-edge and conceptual art.”<sup>185</sup>

Culver City bore a direct link to Southern California’s emergent public transit system when the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) extended a new light rail line (originally called the Expo Line, and now known as the E Line) to the city. The first stretch of the E Line opened in 2012 and traveled to its terminus on National Boulevard, between Venice and Washington boulevards, near the east end of Culver City.<sup>186</sup> By 2016, the line was extended further west to its final terminus in Santa Monica.<sup>187</sup> Construction of a light rail line directly through Culver City further contributed to the growth and prosperity of its Downtown district by providing a means by which patrons from elsewhere in Los Angeles could conveniently travel to Culver City to enjoy its vibrant collection of restaurants and other venues.

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<sup>180</sup> Janelle Brown, “In Culver City, Calif., Art and Food Turn a Nowhere into Somewhere,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 28, 2007.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, “In Culver City, Calif., Art and Food Turn a Nowhere into Somewhere” (2007).

<sup>182</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, “Eric Owen Moss,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.laconservancy.org/learn/architect-biographies/eric-owen-moss/>.

<sup>183</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, “Eric Owen Moss,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.laconservancy.org/learn/architect-biographies/eric-owen-moss/>.

<sup>184</sup> Janelle Brown, “In Culver City, Calif., Art and Food Turn a Nowhere into Somewhere,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 28, 2007.

<sup>185</sup> Brown, “In Culver City, Calif., Art and Food Turn a Nowhere into Somewhere” (2007).

<sup>186</sup> Steve Hymon, “E (Expo Line) Celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of First Segment Opening,” *The Source* (Metro), Apr. 28, 2022.

<sup>187</sup> Hymon, “E (Expo Line) Celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of First Segment Opening” (2022).

## Discrimination in the Contemporary Era

Considerable strides have been made in the fight for racial, religious, and social equality, in Culver City and across California and the United States. By the post-1980 period, many of the tactic which had historically been used to perpetuate patterns of racial segregation had been outlawed. Fair housing laws enacted at the federal and state levels, and privately-managed fair housing councils, helped to ensure that people of color and other marginalized groups were given a fair chance to purchase a home of their choice in a community of their choice.

But these achievements did not mean that discrimination was eradicated. Discrimination continued to occur in ways that were less overt and more nuanced. More recent examples of discrimination in Culver City were not as explicit as the exclusionary attitudes of years past, but nonetheless continued to work against people of color and often made them feel like outsiders in their own community.

For instance, suburban communities increasingly used the power to control public spaces as a way to manage racial dynamics and protect the interests of White homeowners, often cloaked, somewhat putatively, with “colorblind” language. One example from 1982 illustrated this. That year, the Fox Hills Property Owners Association, a politically powerful consortium of property owners and real estate interests in the southernmost section of Culver City, petitioned city officials to remove basketball courts at Fox Hills Park. The association listed a number of grievances against park patrons, some of whom came to the park from neighboring communities but many of whom lived in Culver City. They were accused of “playing their radios too loud, participating in noisy, late-night basketball games, gambling, littering, picnicking without permits,” and a sharp uptick “in vandalism and other crimes.”<sup>188</sup> The association prevailed when the City Council, in a 4-0 vote, ordered the removal of the basketball hoops for 60 days.<sup>189</sup>

Racial dynamics were indubitably at the root of the effort to remove basketball facilities at Fox Hills Park and transform it into a “passive green belt,” entirely devoid of team sports.<sup>190</sup> Those who complained about park patrons were mostly White, those who used the courts were mostly Black, and all members of the Culver City Council who voted on the matter were White. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

After lengthy public testimony, [the Culver City Human Services and Parks Commission] held hearings on the charges. After lengthy public testimony, it dismissed most of them as having little merit and hinted that the real reason for the group’s concern may stem from its fear of the growing use of the park by blacks. The commission stated...’The common theme...is that these problems taken by themselves are not unlike the problems experienced at other parks. The one thing that is different about Fox Hills is the high number of blacks who use the park. At any given time, the ratio of blacks to whites in the park is at minimum 50-50 and usually 60-40 or 70-30. It is safe to say that the white population in the park is usually a minority.’<sup>191</sup>

The president of the neighborhood association further remarked that by preventing basketball players (who were Black) from enjoying the park, “many of us are trying very hard to keep it as a very desirable

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<sup>188</sup> John L. Mitchell, “Charges of Racism Arise as Culver City Changes Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 10, 1982.

<sup>189</sup> Mitchell, “Charges of Racism Arise as Culver City Changes Park” (1982).

<sup>190</sup> John L. Mitchell, “Hoops at Park Will Stay Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 28, 1982.

<sup>191</sup> Mitchell, “Hoops at Park Will Stay Down” (1982).

neighborhood, but the noise has depressed property values some 20%. We would like to retain the neighborhood as a quiet, stable community in which families can walk the streets and enjoy the park.”<sup>192</sup>

These remarks painted a sharp contrast between the interests of White property owners, who were framed as wanting to maintain the peace, and those of Black residents and other communities of color, who were described as “noisy” and resembling members of “a circus.”<sup>193</sup> After copious press coverage and extensive debate, Culver City’s City Council voted to continue the prohibition of basketball at Fox Hills Park for an extended period in 1982 – a significant victory for the predominantly-White homeowners association, and a loss to the local Black community.<sup>194</sup> The basketball ban remained in effect until 1998.<sup>195</sup> Similar actions occurred in other communities across the nation, seeking to protect their racial and class character from unwanted disruptions.<sup>196</sup>

In the 1990s, Culver City leaders and departments were at the center of several local controversies around racial issues. By this time, immigration to the United States from Mexico and other Latin American countries had increased significantly, and many immigrants arriving at this time were undocumented – a politically charged issue that played out in the broader context of federal and state politics.

The first incident occurred in 1991 and centered around the subject of undocumented immigration. The then-Mayor of Culver City commented publicly about the economic impact of undocumented Mexican immigrants, and suggested that President George H.W. Bush close the border to undocumented immigrants. In his State of the City address, the Mayor remarked that:

If George Bush wants to draw a line in the sand, he should draw a line between Tijuana and San Diego, not just between Iraq and Kuwait...Schools, courts, hospitals, jails, and freeways are collapsing under the strain of excess population...25% of jail inmates, and 85% of expectant mothers at Los Angeles County General Hospital are illegal aliens...[by the turn of the twenty-first century], half of the people of Los Angeles will not be able to read, write or speak English.<sup>197</sup>

The Mayor continued by linking the rise of undocumented immigration from Mexico to the well-being of Culver City. People who “don’t read, write, speak English – what are they going to do for jobs?” Driven by poverty into crime, “they’re going to steal just as much from Culver City as they do from Los Angeles.”<sup>198</sup>

These comments garnered a considerable amount of press coverage due to the perception by some that they were inflammatory and incendiary. The Mayor responded by stating that his remarks were driven by economic concerns, and were not driven by animus toward Latinos. He stated that “it wasn’t a question of disliking Mexicans, but of wanting to relieve the burden on America’s overtaxed social services.”<sup>199</sup>

The Mayor was articulating a common critique in this period, when immigration had become a highly divisive issue in Los Angeles and California. Other politicians harbored similar views. State Assemblymember Dick Mountjoy, who represented Monrovia, introduced a ballot initiative in 1994 that

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<sup>192</sup> Mitchell, “Hoops at Park Will Stay Down” (1982).

<sup>193</sup> Mitchell, “Hoops at Park Will Stay Down” (1982).

<sup>194</sup> Mitchell, “Hoops at Park Will Stay Down” (1982).

<sup>195</sup> Julia Scheeres, “Residents’ Fears Raised After Slaying at Park,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 26, 1998.

<sup>196</sup> Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, eds., *The Suburb Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge: 2016), chapter 16, and especially pp. 536-537, on an upper-class Black suburb that similarly sought to ban games of basketball by Black youth.

<sup>197</sup> Barbara Koh, “Close the U.S. Border, Mayor Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 28, 1991.

<sup>198</sup> Koh, “Close the U.S. Border, Mayor Says” (1991).

<sup>199</sup> Al Martinez, “A New Ethnic Border Between Us and Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1991.

was known officially as Proposition 187 and colloquially as the “Save our State Initiative” – an extremely controversial name that was criticized as offensive to Latinos. The initiative proposed to restrict undocumented immigrants in California from accessing all public services, including education and healthcare.<sup>200</sup> Then-Governor of California Pete Wilson was a strong proponent of Proposition 187 and centered his 1994 re-election campaign largely on the debate surrounding undocumented immigration.

In 1994, another racial controversy sparked local concerns. In 1994, the Culver City Police Department hired one of the four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers who in 1991 were caught on camera striking and kicking Rodney King. The officer was fired from the LAPD for his conduct but was twice acquitted of all criminal charges, a decision that helped fuel the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Uprising. In Culver City, he was hired as a community service officer, a position not considered a sworn police officer and with no authorization to carry a gun. But the fact that such a racially polarizing figure was hired so soon after one of the most violent and politically charged racial incidents in Los Angeles history struck a dissonant chord among critics, who saw his hiring as an existential threat to racial justice and equality.

Speaking to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1994 about this controversial hire, a high-ranking Culver City police officer explained that “the hiring of [the former LAPD officer] had been kept quiet because of the publicity that it was sure to arouse. He would not comment on how the decision to hire [the officer] was made, except to say that he had been screened and was qualified for the job.”<sup>201</sup> The officer’s hiring was defended by members of the Culver City Council, who acknowledged the controversial nature of the hire but framed it as an opportunity for the officer to redeem himself. “I believe these people need a chance to survive too,” explained Culver City’s then-Mayor. “I think they need a chance to make a living.”<sup>202</sup>

Once word got out about the officer’s hiring, community members organized to oppose his employment. A citizens group was organized and protested the hiring decision to the City Council, who acknowledged the questionable optics of the officer’s hiring but ultimately came out in support of it. One Culver City resident condemned the officer’s hiring as “a slap in the city’s face.” Another called it “shoddy.”<sup>203</sup> Nonetheless, the hiring was upheld, and the officer remained on the city’s police force until 2000.<sup>204</sup>

Tensions involving the Culver City Police Department persisted in subsequent years, in spite of the department’s effort to recruit a more diverse police force. In 1998, alternative newspaper the *LA Weekly* published an exposé of the department based on multiple anonymous accounts of former department personnel.<sup>205</sup> The article focused on the leadership of the department’s then-Chief of Police, who was described as a skilled leader with “a healthy respect for competent officers” but also had “an affinity for rogues and rascallions.”<sup>206</sup> Officers who worked under the then-Police Chief, some of whom spoke anonymously, described a culture rife with overt racism and sexism. Several female officers described situations in which the police chief and other male superiors made unwelcomed sexual advances:

One ex-employee who insists on anonymity says she was often called in for ‘talks.’ Once in his office and behind a closed door, the chief would allegedly regale her with descriptions of sexual

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<sup>200</sup> Library of Congress, “A Latinx Research Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States; 1994: California’s Proposition 187,” online, accessed Sept. 2023, <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/california-proposition-187>.

<sup>201</sup> J. Michael Kennedy, “Officer Fired in King Case Gets Job in Culver City,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 26, 1994.

<sup>202</sup> Kennedy, “Officer Fired in King Case Gets Job in Culver City” (1994).

<sup>203</sup> Mary Moore, Culver City Group Protests Hiring of King Case Officer,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 14, 1994.

<sup>204</sup> Jean-Paul Renaud, “Haunting Past, Bitter Present,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 12, 2004.

<sup>205</sup> Adrian Maher, “Culver City Confidential,” *LA Weekly*, Sept. 9, 1998.

<sup>206</sup> Maher, “Culver City Confidential” (1998).



techniques, different women he'd had sex with and graphic sexual experiences. She says he propositioned her – 'Let's do it just once' – and once asked her to undress in front of him.

'We'd go as long as an hour, just sitting there across the desk,' says the woman, still shuddering at the experience. 'I should have walked out, but I'd just sit there and listen...I needed the job. I felt dirty and angry, and guilty because I didn't say anything. It's all him, he sets the tone, he does such crude sexual things and enjoys the power of getting away with it...seeing us squirm.'<sup>207</sup>

Other female employees of the department described situations in which they were “showered with sexual innuendos and crude behavior” by some of their male counterparts and superiors.<sup>208</sup>

The *LA Weekly* report also described questionable tactics that were used by the Culver City Police Department, chief among them hog-tying – a method of restraint by which a suspect's hands and feet are bound together, making it nearly impossible for them to move. (By the 1990s, hog-tying was generally considered to be a cruel tactic that was prohibited by many departments, including the LAPD, because of its potential to inflict serious injury on those who were restrained). In the 1990s, two individuals who were detained by Culver City police officers died after being hog-tied. One was Black; the other Latino.<sup>209</sup>

Tensions between law enforcement officers and people of color continue to resonate in personal accounts and recollections of Culver City residents and stakeholders. Numerous respondents to the public comment form administered as part of this study – and particularly those who identify as non-White – recounted instances in which they felt profiled and harassed by local police officers, typically after being pulled over for minor traffic violations.

Other city agencies were similarly at the center of local controversies involving charges of racism and sexism. In 1995 the Culver City Civil Service Commission upheld the firing of the city Fire Department's former chief mechanic, who was terminated following 23 accusations of sexually and racially charged remarks, directly particularly at a Latina cadet who was his subordinate.<sup>210</sup> In its decision the Civil Service Commission concluded that he “had allowed the open display of sexually explicit material on a public bulletin board in the department,” thereby making it an inhospitable environment for women – and particularly women of color – to work.<sup>211</sup>

## Demographics Overview

Culver City's population has continued to diversify in recent decades, with the most significant demographic changes seen among the Hispanic and Asian communities. Data also show that a growing number of Culver City residents are foreign-born. This is consistent with broader demographic patterns seen across California and elsewhere in the United States, wherein immigration to the United States from Latin American and Asian countries has increased.

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<sup>207</sup> Maher, “Culver City Confidential” (1998).

<sup>208</sup> Maher, “Culver City Confidential” (1998).

<sup>209</sup> Maher, “Culver City Confidential” (1998).

<sup>210</sup> Mary Moore, “Commission Upholds Firing in Sexual Harassment Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jun. 15, 1995.

<sup>211</sup> Moore, “Commission Upholds Firing in Sexual Harassment Case” (1995).

Notably, in 2000, Culver City’s non-Hispanic White population fell below 50 percent, making Whites a plurality – rather than a majority – of the local population.

An overview of demographic data from 1950 to 1980 is included below:

**1990**

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	22,477	57.94%
Black	3,938	10.15%
Hispanic	7,528	19.41%
Asian	4,640	11.96%
Other	210	0.54%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,793</b>	

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Native born	29,672	76.49%
Foreign born	9,121	23.51%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,793</b>	

**2000**

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	18,675	48.11%
Black	4,644	11.96%
Hispanic	9,199	23.70%
Asian	4,667	12.02%
Other	1,631	4.21%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,816</b>	

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Native born	28,487	73.39%
Foreign born	10,329	26.61%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,816</b>	

**2010**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
White (non-Hispanic)	18,649	47.96%
Black	3,587	9.23%
Hispanic	9,025	23.21%
Asian	5,656	14.55%
Other	1,966	5.05%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,883</b>	

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Native born	28,839	74.17%
Foreign born	9,988	25.69%
<b>Total Population:</b>	<b>38,883</b>	

## 5. Conclusion: In Pursuit of a More Inclusive, Equitable Future

There is ample evidence that Culver City has made great strides in confronting and overcoming discrimination and racism. Multiple respondents to the public comment survey remarked that in spite of a handful of bad actors in the police department and other city agencies, Culver City feels like a diverse and inclusive place. Many of these respondents identify as people of color, Jewish, or other groups that have historically been disenfranchised and subjected to discrimination. Many have lived in Culver City for their entire lives.<sup>212</sup>

Culver City's leadership has become increasingly diverse in recent years. In 2018, the first Black member of the Culver City Council was elected to office after 101 years of cityhood.<sup>213</sup> This Councilmember was named Mayor in 2021 as part of a regular reorganization of the City Council, and served on the Council until 2022. Another historic first came in 2020 when the first Black woman was elected to the Culver City Council, another major milestone for the community.<sup>214</sup>

The city has taken decisive, actionable steps to confront its racial and cultural history in recent years. For instance, in 2020, the Culver City Police Department “undertook a comprehensive review and reform of its Use of Force policy”, and adopted “one of the most progressive and accountable Use of Force policies in the nation.”<sup>215</sup> Nodding to the Department's past transgressions, the amended Use of Force Policy notably curtailed the practice of making police stops for minor traffic violations (which disproportionately affected people of color), introduced alternatives to police in response to nonviolent conflict, and supported alternatives to incarceration. The adoption of the amended Use of Force Policy was seen as a major step forward in a community that has long had a tenuous relationship with law enforcement.

Also as noted at the beginning of this report, in 2021 the City Council adopted a resolution which expressed its commitment to making Culver City a welcoming and inclusive community and acknowledged its racial history. The information in this study marks a critical first step in documenting past injustices and working toward a more equitable future for all members of the Culver City community.

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<sup>212</sup> Gleaned from public comment forms and interviews conducted as part of the public outreach component of this project.

<sup>213</sup> “Vice Mayor Daniel Lee Announces Campaign for State Senate Seat,” *Culver City News*, Dec. 20, 2020.

<sup>214</sup> Rayna Reid Reyford, “This Mom Went from the PTA to Politics – Meet the First Black Woman Vice Mayor of Culver City,” *Essence*, Apr. 6, 2023.

<sup>215</sup> City of Culver City, “Police Reform,” online, accessed Aug. 2023, <https://www.culvercity.org/City-Hall/Reports-policies-local-laws/Police-Reform>.

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