

RACIAL DYNAMISM IN LOS ANGELES, 1900–1964: The Role of the *Green Book*

By Frank Norris

ABSTRACT: Between 1900 and 1964 Los Angeles attracted a sizeable influx of African American tourists and new residents. While race relations may have been better than in the regions from which many of them came, they found a geography of racial restrictions on where they could find tourist lodgings and permanent places to live. A number of guidebooks for African American travelers were published, most famously the annual *Green Books*, informing readers of the roadside accommodations that would cater to people of color. An analysis of the guidebooks' entries for Los Angeles, 1930–1964, provides insights on the changing nature of racial discrimination there. Many of the structures they listed are still extant and deserving of commemoration.

Keywords: Los Angeles race restrictions; African American travel guides; Los Angeles hostelries and race; racial discrimination

Between 1900 and the mid-1960s, millions of visitors descended upon Los Angeles and its surrounding communities. Most arrived in the city either by train or via one of several long-distance highways. African Americans, a small but distinctive element among the tourist wave, had the same basic needs as other groups: they sought out hostelries, restaurants, gas stations, stores, and a variety of tourist venues. Similar to whites and other visitors, some African Americans visited for a brief period and returned home, but

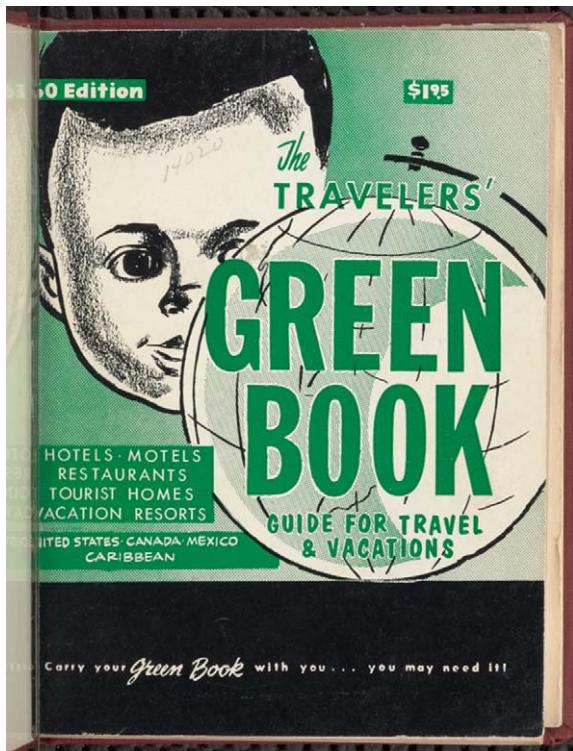
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many others were so pleased by the time they spent in Southern California that they eventually became permanent residents.

How accepting, however, were white Los Angeles-area residents toward these African American newcomers? Those who have written about the history of blacks in Southern California suggest that both black residents and black visitors to that region were not uniformly treated like second-class citizens during this period—unlike in many areas in the northeastern, southern, and midwestern states. Jack Forbes, for example, stated that “Segregation . . . was never complete in the Far West,” and Lawrence De Graaf noted that compared with areas east of the Mississippi River, “Los Angeles was regarded as an area that was relatively free of discrimination during most of the first half of the twentieth century.”¹ Eastern states, by contrast, had a long, entrenched history of separation if not animosity between blacks and whites. South of the Mason-Dixon Line, Jim Crow-style segregation was the state-sanctioned law of the land, and travelers encountered unmistakable signs separating blacks from whites on trains, buses, restaurants, restrooms, and other forms of public accommodation. Northern cities were largely free of the more virulent, external signs of racial separation, but patterns of segregation—enforced by custom and tradition rather than law—were just as obvious. In both northern and southern states, the deep-seated attitudes that whites imposed on African Americans impacted not only public accommodations but also housing, employment, education, and other areas of life.

In Los Angeles, the degree of discrimination, and the consequent level by which segregation was imposed, varied considerably between 1900 and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which made it illegal to bar racial minorities from public accommodations. A goal of this article, therefore, is to ascertain the degree to which discrimination was practiced during this sixty-four-year period. Also of interest is an attempt to define the geography of black Los Angeles that resulted from that discrimination. Given the Forbes and De Graaf statements noted above, and the oft-changing levels of discrimination, a discussion about black guidebooks—specifically the *Negro Motorist Green Book* and its competitors—is presented as a way to illustrate and gauge the nuances of this racial dynamism. Finally, the properties listed

1. Jack Forbes, *Afro-Americans in the Far West: A Handbook for Educators* (Berkeley: Far West Laboratory for Education Research and Development, 1968), 36; Lawrence Brooks De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950: A Dissertation* (University of California, Los Angeles, 1962), 220.



Cover of *The Travelers' Green Book Guide for Travel & Vacations*, 1960 Edition. Beginning in 1936, Victor Green and his wife, Alma, began publishing the Negro Motorist Green Book, a guide to hostelries and restaurants that welcomed African American travelers. This inexpensive guide, available at Standard and Esso gas stations, served the motoring public until 1964, when President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. *Image courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research & Reference Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.*

in the various black guidebooks—many of which still stand today—are described and evaluated as a key component in the cultural heritage that reflects the black experience during this period.

FROM 1900 TO 1920: BLACKS FIGHT FOR RESPECT

During the early twentieth century, relatively few African Americans lived in the West. In 1900, for example, blacks constituted just 0.7 percent of all California residents, and as late as 1940, blacks comprised only 1.2 percent of the population in the eleven western states. (See Table 1.) In the City of Los Angeles, the black population of 2,131 in 1900 constituted 2.1 percent of all city residents. Between then and 1920, the number of African American Angelenos grew

Table 1. Black Population in Los Angeles City, Los Angeles County, and California, 1900–1960

Census Year	Los Angeles City*				Los Angeles County@				California#			
	# of Blacks	Total Population	Blacks as % of Total	# of Blacks	Total Population	Blacks as % of Total	# of Blacks	Total Population	Blacks as % of Total	# of Blacks	Total Population	Blacks as % of Total
1900	2,131	102,479	2.1%	6,323	170,298	3.7%	11,045	1,485,053	0.7%			
1910	7,599	319,198	2.4%	9,424	504,131	1.9%	21,645	2,377,549	0.9%			
1920	15,579	576,673	2.7%	18,738	936,455	2.0%	38,763	3,426,861	1.1%			
1930	38,894	1,238,048	3.1%	46,425	2,208,492	2.1%	81,048	5,677,251	1.4%			
1940	63,774	1,304,277	4.9%	75,209	2,785,643	2.7%	124,306	6,997,387	1.8%			
1950	171,209	1,970,358	8.7%	217,881	4,151,687	5.2%	462,172	10,586,223	4.4%			
1960	334,916	2,479,015	13.5%	461,546	6,039,834	7.6%	883,861	15,717,204	5.6%			

Sources:

* = Raphael Sonenshein, *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform, and Battle for Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 47–50, and Lawrence De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950: A dissertation* (University of California, Los Angeles, 1962), 227.

@ = <http://www.almanac.com/population/po20.htm>

- Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, Population Division Working Paper No. 56 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2002), Table 19.

more than six-fold, and the number in California more than tripled.² By 1920, blacks comprised 2.7 percent of Los Angeles's population but just 1.1 percent of California's population.

Los Angeles and other western cities, being relatively isolated from their counterparts Back East, typically presented a distinct, independent paradigm between white and black residents. Given a common frontier attitude that tended to judge newcomers on their accomplishments and personalities rather than on their economic wherewithal or ethnic background, blacks were often welcomed as equals during this period. In early 1897, for example, Assemblyman Henry Clay Dibble had submitted a civil rights bill at the beginning of the state legislative session, and in March of that year, the so-called Dibble Civil Rights Act was signed into law, which mandated that Californians "of every color or race whatsoever" were "entitled to the full and equal facilities of all places of public accommodation," including "inns, restaurants, hotels, eating houses, barber shops, bath houses, theaters, skating rinks, and all other places of public accommodation or amusement."³

Events in Los Angeles often reflected a sense of racial progress. In 1914, Mrs. Bessie Burke became the city's first black teacher, and in 1918 she was named a school principal. Also in 1918, residents from California's 62nd Assembly District (which encompassed the Central Avenue corridor) voted Frederick Madison Roberts as the first English-speaking African American to serve in the California legislature. No sooner did Roberts begin serving as an assembly member than he submitted a bill that strengthened the 1897 civil rights act. Later in 1919 that bill became law, and it was further strengthened in

2. Between the 1890s and 1915, large groups of blacks migrated to Los Angeles to escape racial violence and bigotry; and in one notable 1903 action, the Southern Pacific Railroad brought almost 2,000 blacks to Los Angeles to break a Mexican-American strike. Eric Brightwell, "A brief (and by no means complete) history of Black Los Angeles," on <http://www.amoeba.com/blog/2012/01/eric-s-blog/a-brief-and-by-no-means-complete-history-of-black-los-angeles-happy-black-history-month.html>; Kelly Simpson, "The Great Migration: Creating a New Black Identity in Los Angeles," February 15, 2012, on <https://www.kcet.org/departures-columns/the-great-migration-creating-a-new-black-identity-in-los-angeles>
3. Henry McClain, "California Carpetbagger: The Career of Henry Dibble," *Quinnipiac Law Review* 28 (2009), 886, 951, 954 at <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/facpubs/660>. McClain noted that no sooner had the bill been signed into law than a spate of lawsuits from aggrieved parties tested its validity. In San Diego, a black couple sued the Fisher Opera House; in Fresno, a young boy's family sued a theater; in Riverside, a local pastor challenged the color bar at the local pool; and a black patron in San Francisco sued for the right to enter the popular Sutro Baths. In each case, the law's provisions were upheld.

1923.⁴ J. Max Bond, writing in 1936 after interviewing longtime black L.A. residents, stated that "Many old settlers report that twenty years ago Negroes were welcomed patrons of many of the downtown establishments; they could receive service at any of the downtown restaurants and hotels," and he further noted that "there were too few negroes in Los Angeles at that time to arouse any great antipathy toward them as an isolated group."⁵ According to R. J. Smith, blacks during this period "lived in assorted neighborhoods, enjoying mobility and relative anonymity."⁶ Most positive of all was the black civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who visited the city in May 1913. Writing in the NAACP⁷ magazine, *The Crisis*, he remarked that "Los Angeles was wonderful. . . . Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high."⁸

The day-to-day reality that blacks faced, however, was not nearly so positive. In the decades that followed the passage of the 1897 civil rights act, the law was largely forgotten, and Roberts' 1919 amendment was rarely enforced because, as one historian has noted, "no effective legal or financial incentives compelled whites to uphold the equal-accommodation statutes."⁹ As Du Bois himself noted, "Los Angeles is not paradise. . . . The color line is there and sharply drawn. Women have had difficulty in having gloves and shoes fitted at the

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4. Forbes, *Afro-Americans in the Far West*, 36; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom; Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 177; *California Session Laws*, 43rd Session (1919), Chapter 210, pp. 309–10, and 45th Session (1923), Chapter 235, pp. 485–86.
 5. J. Max Bond, *The Negro in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1936), 146, 148.
 6. R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way; L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 41.
 7. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909 in New York City, was for many years the country's leading civil rights organization.
 8. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Editorial," *The Crisis* 6:3 (July 1913): 131. The 1910 census revealed that 36.1% of the city's black residents were homeowners, which was a stark contrast to New York City, which had just 2.4% black homeownership, and New Orleans, where only 11% of blacks were homeowners. See Lonnie G. Bunch, "A Past Not Necessarily Prologue; the Afro-American in Los Angeles Since 1900," in Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles; Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1990), 100–30.
 9. Elaine Elinson, "Sutro Baths was test case for blacks' civil rights," SFGate.com, May 27, 2012, at <http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Sutro-Baths-was-test-case-for-blacks-civil-rights-3588731.php>; Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 177. Flamming (p. 84) noted that "under California law, African Americans could bring suit against establishments for practicing such discrimination, and if they did, they usually won. But the recompense, a small cash payment and a moral victory, was seldom worth the effort and expense."

stores, the hotels do not welcome colored people, the restaurants are not for all that hunger.”¹⁰ The efforts of two local residents underscored African Americans’ racial frustration. In 1912—the year before Du Bois’ arrival—Louise McDonald told *The Crisis* that “Civil privileges are here unknown. You can’t bathe at the beaches, eat in any first-class place, nor will the street car and sight-seeing companies sell us tickets if they can possibly help it.” And a year later, a black attorney named Titus Alexander surveyed the city’s saloons, theaters, and nickelodeons to determine their policies on serving African Americans. He reported that only three of the city’s two hundred saloons would serve black customers and that some theaters charged whites a dime and blacks a dollar. “Discrimination in Los Angeles,” he concluded, was “more widespread than many people suspect.” Alexander, in response, demanded that the city council pass an ordinance prohibiting exclusion and unequal prices. But the council refused.¹¹ Many theaters and places of amusement refused to seat blacks with whites, and many restaurants outside the black area either refused to serve blacks or insisted that they use rear entrances and eat on stools rather than sit at tables.¹² But there were signs of improvement. Thanks to black pioneer activists such as Mrs. Sadie Chandler-Cole, local businesses sporting “Negroes not wanted” signs were not seen after 1914, and lynching was conspicuous by its absence.¹³ Generally, social segregation before 1920 stopped short of legalizing Jim Crow. Some African Americans filed successful suits against public accommodations discrimination, but in general, although particular schools were mostly black or mostly white, such segregation was effected not by overt (*de jure*) regulation but by gerrymandering districts to be in accord with exclusionary real estate practices. In other areas of public life, however, white

10. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Colored California,” *The Crisis* 6:4 (August 1913): 194.

11. Flammng, *Bound for Freedom*, 81, 83.

12. Lawrence De Graaf, “City of Black Angels; Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890–1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (August 1970): 341.

13. Rick Moss, “Not Quite Paradise: The Development of the African American Community in Los Angeles through 1950,” *California History* 75 (Fall 1996): 230; Delilah Leontium Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror, 1919), 241. Ken Gonzales-Day, in *Lynching in the West 1850–1935* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 240, notes that there have been 352 documented cases of lynching in California and that lynching (prior to 1880) took place in Los Angeles, but the victims were Latino, Native Americans, and Chinese rather than African Americans.

hostility to racial equality and interracial association was clear and unmistakable.¹⁴

The ever-changing racial dynamics witnessed by Angelenos during the early to mid-twentieth century had obvious geographic ramifications, and many of the events that either stimulated or retarded racial progress had the practical effect of either modifying the city's racial geography or moving the invisible but broadly-recognized boundaries separating white from black residents. Shortly after 1900, for example, these boundaries were etched out in the vicinity of the so-called Brick Block, a cluster of businesses between First and Third streets and between Los Angeles Street and Central Avenue. In this neighborhood were an African Methodist Episcopal church, founded in the 1850s by Bridget "Biddy" Mason, and several black-owned businesses.¹⁵ During this early period, most blacks apparently lived in a relatively small area surrounding these businesses. By the early twentieth century, however, blacks—being a minor element in the city's population—lived (according to R. J. Smith) "in assorted neighborhoods, enjoying mobility and relative anonymity."¹⁶

As the city grew, however, blacks began to move south from downtown. By early 1916, several buildings catering to blacks, including a hotel, theater, newspaper office, and church, had opened along Central Avenue between 8th Street and Pico Boulevard (i.e., 13th Street), and soon afterward the neighborhood extended south to 20th Street. The area had previously been occupied by Mexicans, Anglos, Asians, and others, but given the conscious efforts of several black men of enterprise, newspapers began to proclaim the area as a "Business Section for Colored Men" and the "Black belt of the city."¹⁷ As late as the early 1920s, as Douglas Flaming has noted, "the center of black business along Central Avenue continued to be the ten-block area between 9th Street and Washington Blvd." (i.e., 19th Street).¹⁸

14. De Graaf, "City of Black Angels," 341.

15. <https://www.facebook.com/AfricanAmericanPioneerSocietyOfLosAngeles/posts/1004770456248460>; <https://www.kct.org/history-society/azusa-street-to-bronzeville-the-black-history-of-little-tokyo>.

16. Brightwell, "A Brief...History of Black Los Angeles;" Smith, *Great Black Way*, 38–39.

17. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 122; Teresa Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles MPS," December 2008, page E-4., in <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2010/Cover-AfricanAmericansinLA.pdf>.

18. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 252.



During the first half of the twentieth century, the area just southeast of downtown Los Angeles was a workingman's district that was home to African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups. Just before World War I, a black business district emerged near here on Central Avenue. The Lincoln Hotel (upper), in this area, was a *Green Book* listing from 1939 to 1960, while the nearby Norbo Hotel (lower) was listed from 1950 to 1955. Photos by author.

THE 1920S: THE CURTAIN OF SEGREGATION COMES DOWN

Just before 1920, two major events took place with far-reaching impacts on racial relationships, both in Los Angeles and elsewhere. The first was World War I. Most African Americans saw the war as an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and their place as equal citizens in the nation. Roughly 370,000 black men joined the army, and many of those were shipped off to Europe, where their time on foreign soil raised expectations that civil rights gains might follow. Instead, however, the postwar period witnessed racial retrenchment throughout the country, and between 1919 and 1921 several U.S. cities—Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Tulsa among them—endured catastrophic race riots.¹⁹ The second event was a key U.S. Supreme Court case, *Buchanan v. Warley*, which ruled on the legality of racially restrictive zoning. That decision, in 1917, declared such zoning unconstitutional. But given the racial climate of the time, whites turned instead to racially restrictive covenants, which were private contracts whereby the homeowner pledged not to sell to blacks or other minorities.²⁰ These covenants, which one African American resident characterized as “invisible walls of steel,” quickly spread throughout Los Angeles, and by 1926, 95 percent of the city’s housing stock excluded both blacks and Asians.²¹

During the period between the two world wars, as historian Jack Forbes has observed, Southern California “possessed a society every bit as Jim Crow as any state outside of the Deep South, but a Jim Crow society difficult to change because its forms of discrimination stemmed largely from attitude rather than law.”²² During this period,

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19. Chad Williams, “African Americans and World War I,” at <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-world-war-i.html>; Robert A. Gibson, “The Negro Holocaust: Lynching and Race Riots in the United States, 1880–1950,” at <http://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/1979/2/79.02.04.x.html>; Moss, “Not Quite Paradise,” 229.
 20. R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way*, 41, 236. These covenants were eventually tested in the courts—in 1919 and again during the late 1920s—and were judged legally permissible. Kelly Simpson noted that specific language in the deeds of homes, such as to maintain the “respectability of the home,” was widely recognized as being exclusionary to all but white residents. Kelly Simpson, “A Southern California Dream Deferred: Racial Covenants in Los Angeles,” February 22, 2012, at <https://www.kcet.org/history-society/a-southern-california-dream-deferred-racial-covenants-in-los-angeles>. They were eventually ruled unenforceable in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948).
 21. Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiracial Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 27–28; Ann M. Noel and Phyllis W. Cheng, “Through Struggle to the Stars: A History of California’s Fair Housing Law,” *California Real Property Journal* 27:4 (2009): 3; De Graaf, “City of Black Angels,” 347–48.
 22. Forbes, *Afro-Americans in the Far West*, 35.

battles were fought over access to beachfront acreage, both in Manhattan Beach and Santa Monica, and to municipal pools in Los Angeles, Pasadena, and elsewhere.²³ News articles of the day occasionally cited courageous individuals who successfully opened up individual businesses to a black clientele.²⁴ These were the exception, however; as had been true since 1900, most of the city's hostelries, restaurants, and other public accommodations—particularly of those catering to wealthier patrons—were off-limits to African Americans.²⁵

Despite the increasing gulf between black and white, however, many black migrants during the 1920s felt a sense of freedom and optimism. Verna Deckard, for example, drove from Texas to Los Angeles in 1924. She noted that when she arrived, “we just felt we had a welcome committee waiting for us because the crowd was just hollering, ‘Hello, Texas.’ I came out here and people were so nice that I decided I’m not going back to Texas.”²⁶ Ralph Bunche, in 1927, told the story of a “Texas colored man who had been in a virtual state of slavery to his Southern white ‘boss.’” But during a trip to Los Angeles, he experienced “the freedom and grandeur of the Southland and, more particularly, the pure liberty-inspiring atmosphere of our own Central Avenue.” The *California Eagle*, the city’s African American newspaper, agreed; in a 1928 editorial, it noted that “While Los Angeles has by no means reached ‘the perfect state,’ we believe that Los Angeles has the best opportunity to become that city.”²⁷

The dramatic spread of racially restrictive covenants during the early to mid-1920s had two primary impacts: it effectively prevented the spread of blacks to residential areas outside of the Central Avenue corridor, and it cemented a strong African American stamp on the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to Central Avenue. These

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23. Ryan Reft, “Fighting for Leisure: African Americans, Beaches, and Civil Rights in Early 20th-Century L.A.,” at <https://www.kcet.org/history-society/fighting-for-leisure-african-americans-beaches-and-civil-rights-in-early-20th>, May 16, 2014; Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 274–75; Alison Rose Jefferson, “African American Leisure Space in Santa Monica,” *Southern California Quarterly* 91 (Summer 2009): 155–89; De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 87.
24. As Douglas Flaming noted, local resident Sadie Chandler Cole “would not abide racial restrictions. Once, in the 1920s, when she was refused service in a soda shop, she began throwing cups and plates and trashing the place. The owner changed policies and served blacks after that.” Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 274.
25. De Graaf, “City of Black Angels,” 344.
26. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 259–61.
27. Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, 65–66.

covenants, combined with the explosive growth of the city's black population, caused the black community in the mid to late 1920s to take "a decisive shift southward," and by the end of the decade, black residents were settling along the Central Avenue corridor as far south as Slauson Avenue (near 58th Street). During the mid-1920s, for example, the Second Baptist Church and the Lincoln Theater opened along 23rd Street, and the YMCA erected a stately facility on 28th Street. Shortly afterward John Somerville, a socially and politically prominent black entrepreneur, decided to build the elegant, four-story Hotel Somerville (later called the Dunbar Hotel) at Central and 42nd Place to serve an African American patronage. The success of that hotel, in turn, "ignited a movement that created a new and vibrant center of black life" in the surrounding area. The former (pre-1920) black business center, located closer to downtown, continued to thrive for the time being, but by the end of the 1920s the new commercial focus along Central was clearly between 20th Street and Slauson.²⁸

Black residents lived in the area immediately surrounding the Central Avenue business district. Black neighborhoods east of Central stretched east to Alameda (the city limits) and in a broad band from Olympic (i.e., 9th Street) south to Slauson. West of Central, blacks tended to live in neighborhoods from 27th Street south to 47th Street, and bounded on the west by either Maple Avenue or San Pedro Street.²⁹ Blacks during this period were unable to move much beyond that geographical base because, as Douglas Flamming has noted, there were "firm restrictive covenants covering the Westside and working-class whites east of Alameda Avenue" which "restricted borders to the east and west."³⁰ The area south of Slauson was similarly restricted—brutally so, according to historian R. J. Smith. Along the Central Avenue corridor lived 70 percent of the city's Negro population.³¹ Most of the city's remaining black residents lived in Watts, a mixed-race precinct bounded by Central Avenue, 103rd

28. Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 261, 263, 284; Rick Moss, "Not Quite Paradise," 232.

29. http://uselectionatlas.org/FORUM/GALLERY/6482_07_13_8_54_18.jpeg

30. Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 261–62. Flamming further noted (p. 284) that in 1927, "the Westside was out of bounds, and east of Alameda Avenue was downright dangerous." For these reasons, John Somerville "headed southward [from the previous black commercial area north of 20th St.] and found what he was looking for."

31. De Graaf, "City of Black Angels," 349; Smith, *Great Black Way*, 13–14.



Watts, which served as a separate city from 1907 to 1926, had relatively few black residents during its early days, but due to restrictions elsewhere, they outnumbered all other groups in the area by 1940. The *Green Book* listed Roberson's Motel (now the Crown Motel), located on Imperial Highway, from 1949 to 1956, as well as six other Watts hostleries and an equal number of restaurants. *Photo by author.*

Street, Wilmington Avenue, and Imperial Highway (i.e., 116th Street.). The City of Watts, in 1920, had been 20 percent black. Six years later, city officials in Watts voted to disincorporate and instead annex their municipality to the City of Los Angeles. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Watts area attracted blacks more than other racial groups.³²

Black Los Angeles residents during the 1920s were constantly reminded of their second-class status by where they were (and were not) able to live, work, learn, eat, and play. These restrictions extended to which hotels they were allowed to patronize. Prior to 1920, black visitors in all probability had stayed, for the most part, either in the "Brick Block" area or on Central Avenue between 8th and 20th streets. During the 1920s, hotels catering to blacks doubtless opened farther south along the Central Avenue corridor and, as noted above, the iconic Hotel Somerville had opened by June 1928.

32. "Watts, Los Angeles (1903-)" <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/watts-los-angeles-1903>.

Many blacks, during this period, arrived in Los Angeles at one of the city's three train depots.³³ Others, however, drove to Los Angeles over the growing highway network. Early black travelers had no guidebooks to help them find welcoming accommodations, either in Los Angeles or elsewhere. The year 1930, however, witnessed the publication of the first such guidebook. Called *Hackley & Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers*, it provided listings for 300 cities in the U.S. and Canada. This guide and others published in later years were critically important to black motorists, because possessing one helped blacks avoid unpleasant encounters when searching for places to sleep and eat. In the *Hackley & Harrison* guide, Los Angeles offered eight listings including just one hotel (the Dunbar), four rooming houses located in private homes, and three nonprofit facilities. Four of these eight properties were located on or adjacent to the Central Avenue corridor, but the other four were located well west of Central Avenue, in areas where relatively few blacks lived (see Table 2).

THE 1930S: GROWTH AND CONFINEMENT IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

By 1930, the census counted 38,894 black Los Angeles residents, more than twice the number enumerated ten years earlier. And in the decade that followed, the black population continued to boom, despite the relatively modest gains in the population at large. The result of that growth is that African Americans, who comprised just 2.7 percent of the city's population in 1920, swelled to almost 5 percent of the population in 1940. (See Table 1.) The community, by this time, overshadowed that of any other western city; the 63,774 black residents in Los Angeles compared to just 8,462 in Oakland, 7,836 in Denver, 4,846 in San Francisco, and 3,789 in Seattle.³⁴

The nature of those new residents, however, changed considerably after 1930. As Teresa Grimes has noted, most early migrants had been aspiring members of the black middle class, arriving from Atlanta, New Orleans, Shreveport, and various Texas cities. But during the

33. These included the La Grande Station, at 2nd St. and Santa Fe Ave., for Santa Fe (AT&SF) rail passengers; Central Station, at 5th and Central, for Southern Pacific passengers; and the Commercial Street Depot, north of Chinatown and between North Spring and North Broadway, for Union Pacific (Los Angeles & San Pedro) passengers.

34. Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans," E-2.



Los Angeles has long been distinct from many other cities because of its less-than-ironclad racial attitudes. In 1930, when the first tourist guide for black travelers (*Hackley & Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers*) was published, four of the eight Los Angeles listings (including the 28th Street YMCA, upper photo) were in the Central Avenue corridor, where most of the city's blacks lived. The other four listings, however—including the rooming house of Mrs. J. O. Banks (lower), near Pico and Vermont—were in white neighborhoods well away from Central Avenue. Photos by author.

Table 2. The Physical Legacy of Los Angeles Lodging Places Listed in Black Traveler Guidebooks, 1930–1964*

LOS ANGELES:			
Adams Villa Apartments	900 E. Adams Blvd.	1949	Standing
Alexandria Hotel	210 W. Fifth St.	1962–1963	Standing
Allen Hotel / Kentucky Hotel	1123 Central Ave.	1941–1961	Demolished
Ambassador Hotel	3400 Wilshire Blvd.	1963	Demolished
Arcade Hotel	542 Ceres	1940–1948	Demolished
Aster Motel	2901 S. Flower St.	1962–1963	Standing
Avon Hotel	405 S. Hewitt	1947–1950	Demolished
Mrs. J. O. Banks (rooms)	1235 S. New Hampshire St.	1930	Standing
Biltmore Hotel	506 S. Grand Ave.	1949, 1960–1963	Standing
Californian Hotel	1907 W. 6 th St.	1962–1963	Standing
Casbah Apartments	1189 W. 36 th St.	1956–1961	Demolished
Clark Hotel & Annex / Sheridan Hotel)	1816–24 S. Central Ave.	1939–1960	Standing
Clark Hotel	426 S. Hill St.	1962–1963	Standing
Colonial Motel	1393 E. 15 th St.	1949–1951	Demolished
Cortez Hotel	375 Columbia Ave.	1962–1963	Standing
Cosmopolitan Hotel	360 S. Westlake Ave.	1955–1957	Standing
Digby Hotel	501 E. 1 st St.	1947–1949	Demolished
Downtown House	117 N. San Pedro St.	1949	Demolished
Dunbar Hotel	4225 S. Central Ave.	1941–1961	Standing
EC Eastsider Motel	2133 S. Central Ave.	1962–1963	Standing
EC Motel	3501 S. Western Ave.	1962–1963	Standing
Elite Hotel	1217 S. Central Ave.	1939–1961	Demolished
Garrett's New DeLuxe Motel	1122 E. 57 th St.	1949	Standing
Glacier Hotel	523 Stanford Ave.	1947–1852	Demolished
Mrs. W. D. Grealou Tourist Home	1311 W. 35 th Place	1930–1941	Standing
Mrs. S. H. Grier	1121 E. 22 nd St.	1930	Standing
Harmon Motel	700 W. Florence	1962–1963	Standing
Hay's (Hayes') Motel	960 E. Jefferson Blvd.	1949–1963	Standing
Hide Out Apartments	633 E. Vernon Ave.	1949	Standing
Mrs. Bessie Hoffman Tourist Home	760 W. 17 th St.	1930–1947	Demolished
LaDale Hotel	802 E. Jefferson Blvd.	1949–1963	Standing
Lanakia (Lanakai) Hotel	916 E. 25 th St.	1949–1952	Demolished
Lincoln Hotel	549 Ceres Ave.	1939–1961	Standing
Mack's Manor Hotel	1085 W. Jefferson Blvd.	1952–1961	Demolished
Manchester Motel	800 E. Manchester Blvd.	1962–1963	Standing
Mayfair Hotel	1256 W. 7 th St.	1962–1963	Standing
McAlpin Hotel	648 Stanford Ave.	1947–1961	Demolished
Morris Hotel	809 E. 5 th St.	1947–1949	Standing
Moulin Rouge Motel / Thomas Hotel	2050 W. Jefferson Blvd.	1953–1961	Standing
New Casa Motel	7720 S. Main St.	1962–1963	Standing
Norbo Hotel	526 E. 6 th St.	1950–1955	Standing
Notel Motel	4766 S. Main St.	1962–1963	Standing

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Olympic Hotel	843 S. Central Ave.	1941–1960	Demolished
Palms Wilshire	626 S. Alvarado St.	1949–1952	Standing
Palm-Vue Motel	3922 S. Western Ave.	1960–1963	Demolished
Park Wilshire Apt. Hotel	2424 Wilshire Blvd.	1949–1952	Standing
Raywood Motel	8200 S. Figueroa St.	1962–1963	Standing
Regal Hotel	815 E. 6 th St.	1940–1960	Standing
Santa Barbara Motel	1758 W. Santa Barbara Ave.	1962–1963	Standing
Sky Terrace Motel	1925 W. Washington Blvd.	1961–1963	Standing
Sojourner Truth Industrial Home for Women / Sojourner's Hotel	1119 E. Adams Blvd.	1930, 1940–1949	Standing
Statler Hilton	930 Wilshire Blvd.	1962–1963	Demolished
Mrs. Rose Tizel Tourist Home	2150 Hobart Blvd.	1957–1961	Demolished
Vallee Vista Tourist Home	2408 Cimarron St.	1951–1961	Standing
Watkins Hotel	2022 W. Adams Blvd.	1949–1961	Standing
(Hayes) Western Motel	3700 S. Western Ave.	1949–56, 1961–63	Standing
Williams Motel	8311 S. Central Ave.	1961	Standing
YMCA, 28 th St. Branch	1006 E. 28 th St.	1930	Standing
YWCA, 12 th St. Branch	1108 E. 12 th St.	1930	Demolished
WATTS:			
Hill's Villa Modern Motel	10803 Wilmington Ave.	1949	Standing
Jimmie L. Hardy Tourist Home	13333 McKinley Ave.	1955–1956	Standing
Johnson's Motel	11816 S. Wilmington Ave.	1949–1954	Demolished
Marria Hotel	1505 E. 103 rd St.	1949	Demolished
Hotel Reed	1711½ E. 103 rd St.	1949	Demolished
Roberson's Motel	2111 E. Imperial Blvd.	1949–1956	Standing
Roberson's Annex	1757 Imperial Highway	1949–1951	Standing
HOLLYWOOD:			
Bel Air Hotel	701 Stone Canyon Rd.	1963	Standing
James W. Brown Tourist Home	2881 Seattle Dr.	1948–1952	Standing
Carlton Lodge	2011 N. Highland Ave.	1963	Standing
Hallmark House Motor Hotel	7023 Sunset Blvd.	1963	Demolished
Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel	1714 Ivar Ave.	1957–1961	Standing
Hollywood / Las Palmas Hotel	1738 N. Las Palmas	1949, 1952	Standing
Hollywood Plaza Hotel	1637 N. Vine	1962–1963	Standing
Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel	7000 Hollywood Blvd.	1962–1963	Standing
Hollywood Thunderbird Inn	8300 Sunset Blvd.	1963	Standing
Imperial 400 Motel	6826 W. Sunset Blvd.	1963	Standing
Mark Twain Hotel	1622 Wilcox	1949–1961	Standing
Sands-Sunset Hotel	8775 Sunset Blvd.	1963	Demolished
(Hollywood) Wilcox Hotel	6504 Selma Ave.	1949–1952, 1963	Standing

*A compilation of the data from all the black travelers' guide books accessible in paper or electronic form. These include: Victor H. Green, *Negro Motorist Green Book* (also titled *Negro Travelers' Green Book* and *Travelers' Green Book* in some issues), 1937 to 1963–64; Edwin Henry Hackley, *Hackley and Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers*, 1930 edition; *Grayson's Travel and Business Guide*, 1949 edition; and *Travelguide*, 1949 and 1952 editions.

1930s, most new residents came from Dallas, Houston, and New Orleans “with the economic problems, cultural orientations, and outlooks of the poor and working class.”³⁵

Lawrence De Graaf has noted that during the 1930s, as in previous decades, Negroes were excluded from some restaurants, at least some theaters, and most public parks. (Lincoln Park, northeast of downtown, according to Josh Sides, “was one of the few public spaces open to blacks before World War II.”) These racially-imposed customs, however, were neither rigid nor consistent. In 1936, J. Max Bond noted that “The uncertainty involved in attending even commercialized entertainments is always a deterrent to Negroes. One is never sure that the hotel in which a lecture is given or an exhibit is displayed will admit Negroes or whether the management of the establishment where a public banquet is being held will serve them.”³⁶ Expanding on that theme, R. J. Smith noted that:

There was no law against a restaurant overlooking a black couple; it was just that explicitly refusing service was technically illegal.... An evasive waiter could be ambiguous, while a sign above a water fountain was definitive. Strange as it may sound, racism could be counted on in the South; it was no less real, but far less dependable, graspable, on the West Coast. The restaurant on one side of the street was friendly, and you'd get the boot from the one across the way. This side of the street was restricted, but that one wasn't.... Who belonged where: that was the essence of the race war in the late 1930s Los Angeles.... A newcomer quickly learned the cues and learned how to read them. Those who were going to make it in the new West interpreted the invisible and discerned where they couldn't go, what they couldn't buy, where the other man lived.... A brand new oral tradition floated on the orange-scented breeze, and you learned it bit by bit.³⁷

Despite that second-class if indefinite status, many black residents had the notion “that California is a veritable paradise and all-year-round playground,” and letters from L.A.-area black residents to friends and relatives in southern states promised that they would find greater freedom and more equal rights if they moved west. As a result, “Many Negroes looked upon California as a ‘haven of rest and peace’

35. *Ibid.*, E-1, E-2.

36. De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 87; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 22; Bond, *The Negro in Los Angeles*, 113, 149.

37. Smith, *Great Black Way*, 42–43. In San Francisco, blacks faced similar barriers in employment, but they were free to patronize the city's hotels and restaurants. See the *Kansas City Plaindealer* for October 15, 1937, 3, and March 3, 1939, 2.

and moved there with the hope of obtaining jobs requiring little physical effort.”³⁸ The nature of the new arrivals brought inevitable class tensions between established and newly-arrived blacks. As Josh Sides has noted, many of the newly-arrived migrants, “fresh from the lower strata of Southern life,” had not previously been permitted to enter so-called “white” theaters and restaurants. In Los Angeles, as a result, they exhibited their new-found freedom by being overtly loud in public places and exhibiting an uncommonly aggressive attitude—even a wildness—toward whites.³⁹ Such behavior caused a *California Eagle* editorial to warn, “veteran black citizens of California must take an active part in training incoming Negroes from the South in basic rules of culture.”⁴⁰

The same relative sense of freedom that caused black southerners to move to Los Angeles also resulted, by the 1920s, in the first substantial number of black tourists, both to Los Angeles and other California destinations. As the *California Eagle* noted in 1933, “only in recent years have quite so many Colored tourists been moved with the urge to visit the Golden State. However, year after year more Colored visitors are coming to this state and lots of them leave with the firm resolve to return and make California their permanent home.”⁴¹

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the city’s black population grew even faster than the overall population. Due to housing covenants, however, blacks were still effectively confined to the same small area in 1940 as they had been twenty years earlier; as a result, the Central Avenue corridor, along with adjacent areas along the corridor near downtown and in Watts, became more uniformly black in their racial composition.⁴²

The only new African American residential area to emerge during the 1930s was the West Jefferson district, bounded by Jefferson

38. De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 76, 86. De Graaf (p. 88) noted that “Some migrants from Southern states maintained that they met more severe segregation and social hostility in L.A. than in their former homes, but such feeling did not result in any noticeable return migration, indicating that to most blacks L.A. offered greater freedom and fewer discriminations during the depression.”

39. Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 51, 55–56; *California Eagle*, October 12, 1939, 4B.

40. De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 89.

41. *California Eagle*, July 14, 1933, 12, as noted in De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 86.

42. Some of this lack of residential expansion, perhaps when viewed in retrospect, may have been due to the attitudes of the city’s black leaders. Longtime black newspaper editor Charlotta Bass, for example, wrote that black Los Angeles in the 1930s, was “a sober residential and business settlement”—and neither militant nor pushy. Smith, *Great Black Way*, 29.

Boulevard, Western Avenue, Exposition Boulevard, and Normandie Avenue. Blacks had initially settled in this area in the early 1920s. Then, a decade later, the tony West Adams Heights area, containing large, elegant homes, was being vacated by white homeowners moving to Hollywood or Beverly Hills. In response, black businessman Norman Houston purchased a home in this area. He was soon followed by other prominent black residents, and the neighborhood became known as "Sugar Hill." By 1940, blacks constituted a majority of this district.⁴³ Perhaps in response to that action, the Ku Klux Klan marched through the downtown area, their clear intent being to force blacks back into their traditional neighborhoods. Soon afterward, outraged white neighbors filed suit to remove a number of these new residents; that suit, however, was later dismissed.⁴⁴

During the 1930s, visitors to Los Angeles continued to include both railroad passengers and highway motorists. And, particularly for motorists, visitors sought out lodgings where they would be welcome. White visitors were able to rely on the well-known American Automobile Association guidebooks. The listings in the AAA guides, however, were typically closed to black patrons. A publication that was of enormous benefit to black motorists, however, was the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, which was first issued in 1937 and for most years thereafter until 1964. (Exceptions were the war years of 1942 through 1946, inclusive, when gasoline and tire rationing curbed travel.) This guide, published by New York entrepreneur Victor Green and his wife, Alma, listed hotels, tourist courts, restaurants, and other travel-related businesses that welcomed a black clientele. Published for a national audience, it was available at Esso, Standard, and other gasoline service stations. Over the years, a smattering of competitors vied with Green in publishing guides aimed toward the black motorist; few of those rival publications, however, lasted more than a year or two.⁴⁵

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43. Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans," E-9; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 99.
 44. Susan Anderson, "A City Called Heaven; Black Enchantment and Despair in Los Angeles," in Allen C. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City; Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 343–44; Moss, "Not Quite Paradise," 234.
 45. Victor H. Green and Co., *Negro Motorist Green Book, an International Travel Guide*, 1950 edition, 1; Frank Norris, "Courageous Motorists; African American Pioneers on Route 66," *New Mexico Historical Review* 90 (Summer 2015), 299–300. Besides Hackley & Harrison's guide, noted above, Green Book competitors included *Grayson's Travel and Business Guide* (1937), *Smith's Tourist Guide* (1940), *Travel Guide* (1952), and *Go Guide* (1958).

To judge by the copious Los Angeles-area listings in Green's guide, this publication was quite popular with motorists, who poured into the city after braving the rigors of U.S. Highways 66, 91, 99, or other routes. The first Los Angeles listings appeared in the 1939 edition—offering travelers five hotels and three "tourist homes" (rooming houses). By the late 1940s the inventory had expanded to between fifteen and twenty hostgeries and an equal number of restaurants, along with scattered listings for liquor stores, service stations, garages, drug stores, and sundry other businesses. During the 1950s an increasing number of travelers used the guide, and by 1963 it listed twenty-three hotels in Los Angeles and another eight in Hollywood.⁴⁶

One way to ascertain the degree of racial segregation for any given year is to locate the various *Green Book* listings for that year, and to then compare those locations with the racial composition in that specific part of the city. Doing so helps answer an important question: did the various listed hotels, restaurants, and other businesses serve primarily a black clientele? Or, alternatively, were there *Green Book* listings that were located outside of the black-majority districts, indicating that these businesses reached out to non-white customers?

In 1940, as noted above, a fairly rigid system separated black and white neighborhoods. Therefore, it would be expected that most if not all of the *Green Book* listings from this period would be located in neighborhoods with a primarily black population. The reality, however, was more nuanced. To answer this question, *Green Book* listings for 1939, 1940, and 1941 were compared with a 1940 Los Angeles census-tract map that showed twelve black-majority census tracts: ten in the Central Avenue corridor, one in Watts, and one in the West Jefferson district. For those three years the *Green Book* listed twelve hostgeries. Of these twelve, just three were located in black-majority census tracts, although another five are located immediately adjacent to them. Three additional hostgeries were located in census tracts in which blacks comprised at least one-quarter of the residents. Only one hostelry—Mrs. Bessie Hoffman's Tourist Home, located on West 17th Street, west of Figueroa Street—was located in an area well separated from a black-majority neighborhood and with few black residents.

46. *Negro Motorist Green Book* (1937–1951), various issues. Also known as *Negro Travelers' Green Book* (1952–1959) and *Travelers' Green Book* (1960–1963). See the following URL: <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book#/?tab=about&scroll=18>.

THE 1940S: BUSTLING GROWTH AND A FRIENDLY COURT CASE

During the years just prior to the U.S. entry into World War II, most restaurants refused to seat black patrons, some displaying signs that declared "No Negroes" or worse. Public swimming pools remained off limits to blacks, save those that provided a day of the week when they alone were allowed to swim, and businesses ranging from bowling alleys to boxing matches, ice rinks, and ballrooms; even pet cemeteries were segregated.⁴⁷ This separation hit home to the eminent Swedish social scientist, Gunnar Myrdal, in the spring of 1940, when he and a black Urban League representative, Floyd Covington, were refused a seat at the Biltmore Hotel's restaurant.⁴⁸

Once the country plunged into the war, Los Angeles embarked on a period of unrestrained growth for both blacks and whites. Spurred by burgeoning defense plants and military bases, jobs were plentiful, and workers from throughout the U.S. descended on the region. One response to the job boom was that by the summer of 1943, an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 African Americans arrived in the city each month. The black migration stream was such that, according to historian Teresa Grimes, "the true Great Migration decade [in Los Angeles] was the 1940s." Indeed, the city's black population during the 1940s almost tripled. But large numbers of southern whites descended on the area at the same time, the result being a toxic stew that aggravated the long-established order.⁴⁹

Sporadic wartime incidents reflected that lack of racial amity. Along Central Avenue, a group of blacks were refused service at a white-owned café. In response, the group tore the place apart, after which the aggrieved perpetrators proceeded down the street, walked into other cafés, demanding service and accosting white patrons. In another case, the *L.A. Tribune* reported that a bartender at a downtown café "became angry when [a] Negro asked for service." A sympathetic white patron, in response, offered to buy the man a drink—and when the bartender objected, a group of white servicemen "broke up his place of business, setting off the spark which spread to the street and other cafes." In each case, a white policeman witnessed the incident and,

47. Smith, *Great Black Way*, 41.

48. Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds of Race*, 72. Begging Covington's forgiveness, Myrdal remarked to him, "Let me tell you again, that I did not ask you to come there for an experiment."

49. Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans," E-2; Smith, *Great Black Way*, 86.



In addition to its 79 Los Angeles-area hostelry listings, the *Green Book* also listed about 40 Los Angeles-area restaurants. Perhaps the best known was Clifton's (upper image), a downtown eatery at 648 S. Broadway, founded in the early 1930s.

It advertised that it welcomed everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. More numerous were neighborhood cafes. During the late 1940s, the building at 1427 W. Jefferson (lower), now a tavern and barber shop, housed Woodson's Restaurant, later known as Bradley's Steak House. Photos by author.

remarkably, sided with the black patrons.⁵⁰ Important, if symbolic, progress was made when the iconic Biltmore Hotel—closed to blacks as late as 1940—changed its policies by 1943 and welcomed a black clientele. At other hotels, however, exclusion was the rule; as one black resident noted, “in 1943 or 1944 . . . if people saw you at a hotel, they’d say, ‘what are you doing here?’” And Chinese restaurants during this period, by and large, refused the black trade; one owner did so because, in his opinion, blacks were dirty and used foul language.⁵¹ But the owners of Clifton’s, a popular downtown eatery with locations on both Broadway and Olive, made it known that they welcomed patrons of all races. As one news article noted, “if a colored skin is a passport to death [by a soldier] for our liberties, then it is a passport to Clifton’s.”⁵²

African Americans, in their quest to patronize public accommodations, began to use the legal system to their advantage. As longtime editor Charlotta Bass noted,

When World War II was in its early stages, . . . many owners of cafes and hotels still felt secure in refusing accommodations to Negroes. There was, for instance, the case of screen actor Ben Carter. He and four companions dropped in for a bite to eat at McDonnell’s “Ever Eat Café” . . . in Hollywood, in 1941. The café manager said, “We don’t want Negroes out here” [in Hollywood]—your money is no good.” [So Carter] promptly brought suit in an action involving the Civil Rights Bill. His attorney, Walter Gordon, Jr., asked penal damages of \$100 for each plaintiff plus \$25,000 for mental anguish, humiliation and embarrassment. . . . Such suits as this taught many white restaurant owners the meaning of equality of service in public places.⁵³

Local black leaders, during this period, made themselves heard in newspapers (such as the *California Eagle*, the *L.A. Tribune*, and the *L.A. Sentinel*), the pulpit, and as spokesmen of the NAACP, the Urban League, and similar organizations. In addition, African Americans boasted a member of the Board of Education (Fay Allen) and a municipal court judge (Edwin Jefferson), who had attained their positions in 1939 and 1941, respectively.⁵⁴ And in the state legislature,

50. Smith, *Great Black Way*, 147; *L.A. Tribune*, October 18, 1943, 1.

51. *L.A. Tribune*, issues of December 20, 1943, 20, and March 9, 1946, 12; Frances Williams interview, as noted in Rick Moss, “Not Quite Paradise,” 298.

52. *Kansas City Plaindealer*, August 2, 1946, 11.

53. Charlotta Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles, the author, 1960), 70.

54. *L.A. Tribune*, November 1, 1943, 10; *Cleveland Gazette*, May 13, 1939, 1; *L.A. Times*, August 22, 1989, A-1.

Augustus Hawkins—first elected to represent a Los Angeles district in 1934 and repeatedly re-elected—was lauded as a leader in ending discrimination in public places. Thanks to the efforts of these leaders, Rick Moss has noted, “by the end of the second world war, Los Angeles’s African-American community was, perhaps, the best organized community against discrimination in the country.”⁵⁵

The city’s black population continued to grow significantly during the immediate postwar years. The 1940s—both during the war years and its aftermath—was the initial decade of the “Second Great Migration,” and the African American population almost tripled in both the city and county. (See Table 1.) Los Angeles, during this period, was widely regarded by southern blacks as being relatively free of discrimination, so they flocked to the area in search of better public facilities and schools, as well as less racial discrimination. Climate played a role, too. As Lawrence De Graaf noted,

The image of southern California as a land of sunshine, as well as wealth which such advertisements created, continued to draw white and Negro migrants alike. They also attracted a large number of tourists, some of whom decided to establish residence there. A considerable number responded to hearsay alone; they had never visited the state nor read about it, but they “heard it was great” and so resolved to visit or move to it. Many Negro servicemen who were stationed in the L.A. area during the war were impressed by climatic conditions and returned with their families after being discharged.⁵⁶

The newly-arrived blacks, however, found that progress in racial relationships was halting at best. President Roosevelt’s Fair Employment Practice Committee, established in late 1941 to eliminate discriminatory employment practices in war-related work, had at best modest success in implementing those goals; all too often, blacks were the last to be hired and the first to be fired. And when California voters, in 1946, were asked to approve a Fair Employment Practices Act that would have banned employment discrimination based on race, religion, color, or national origin, the proposition was rejected by more than a 2-to-1 vote.⁵⁷ In the industrial arena, the results during the late

55. Bass, *Forty Years*, 70; Moss, “Not Quite Paradise,” 234.

56. De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 197, 205, 220.

57. William J. Collins. “Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets,” *American Economic Review* 91 (March 2001): 272–86; Bowles Law, “The California Fair Employment and Housing Act,” at <http://www.tbowleslaw.com/resources-employers/employment-law-history/california-fair-employment-housing-act/>

1940s were uneven; blacks were prohibited from being longshoremen, but area steel mills hired both blacks and Mexican-Americans.⁵⁸ Mixed results were found elsewhere, too; by the mid-1940s, the city's public golf courses were open to blacks, but two railroads serving Los Angeles, the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe, battled lawsuits because their train cars remained segregated.⁵⁹

In 1948, racial progress was made on the national level when the Democratic Party, despite its deep roots in white supremacy and southern conservatism, added a civil rights plank to its platform, and shortly afterward, President Truman signed an executive order desegregating the armed forces. In that fall's election, William Byron Rumford (from Berkeley) was elected as the state's second African American state assemblyman, and the following spring, Edward Roybal (a Hispanic from Boyle Heights) was elected as the first minority member of the Los Angeles city council during the twentieth century. Perhaps as a result, journalist Carey McWilliams opined optimistically that California was beginning to "cast aside the outmoded forms of racial discrimination which have so often disgraced its behavior in the past.... Just as America is beginning to fight clear of the pattern of racial discrimination, so California is now moving toward the same goal but, as one might expect, at a somewhat faster pace and with somewhat more assurance."⁶⁰

Although the early to mid-1940s witnessed an economic boom in Southern California, housing trends continued on largely the same course that had defined the 1920s and 1930s. Covenants and other racial prohibitions succeeded, for the most part, in preventing the expansion of traditional black neighborhoods. As a result, housing opportunities in those areas became increasingly scarce and the neighborhoods became crowded, sometimes to an extreme degree.

Many black families, however, fought against the geographical limitations placed on them. At Sugar Hill and elsewhere, a number of upwardly mobile blacks tried to move into white neighborhoods, because, as the black-owned *California Eagle* noted, "there is no

58. Douglas Flamming, *African Americans in the West* (Goleta, Calif., ABC-Clio, 2009), 191.

59. L.A. Tribune, January 10, 1944, 8; Kansas City Plaindealer, January 10, 1947, 1.

60. Quoted in Arkansas State Press, July 29, 1949, 8. See also Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 373; Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds of Race*, 223.

section in the Negro district which can offer [the prospective resident] a home honestly reflecting his economic position and cultural tastes.” These attempts were sometimes successful, either because the property’s racial covenant had expired or because buyers and sellers, acting in concert, ignored the existing covenant. Often, however, the new residents faced consequences in the form of eviction notices, lawsuits, and racial violence.⁶¹

Postwar suburbanization also played a role, albeit indirectly, in opening up housing opportunities to blacks. During World War II, and in its immediate aftermath, there was an acute housing shortage for all racial groups. The hundreds of thousands of new arrivals had few options because civilian housing construction had slowed due to the war effort. But soon afterward, the housing sector rebounded as white flight to new suburban developments left behind vacancies accessible to blacks. As Lawrence De Graaf observed,

Important in opening restricted areas was the construction of new housing for whites which reduced the market for houses in older sections. By 1947, many realtors were glad to admit Negroes to neighborhoods hitherto closed, and over half of the city’s blacks were residing in houses which had race restrictive covenants attached to their titles. However, community resistance continued to prevent Negroes from securing homes in some parts of Los Angeles city and in most suburban areas.”⁶²

Throughout the country, leading black lawyers recognized that the existence of racially-based restrictive housing covenants—which were prevalent in many cities—was a major factor hampering civil rights progress, not only for blacks but for Hispanics, Asians, Jews, and other discriminated groups. As a result, lawyers such as Loren Miller had begun filing lawsuits against these covenants during the late 1930s and continued doing so in the 1940s. (One of his cases had dealt with “Sugar Hill” in L.A.’s West Jefferson neighborhood.) In 1947, Miller teamed with Thurgood Marshall to defend a prospective black home purchaser in St. Louis, J. D. Shelley, whose legal right to purchase the property was challenged by Louis D. Kraemer and his family, who lived nearby. The *Shelley v. Kraemer* case was adjudicated in the U.S. Supreme Court, which in early May 1948 ruled that all

61. Quoted in Anderson, “A City Called Heaven,” 344. See also *Ibid.*, 343–45; Brightwell, “A Brief History of Black Los Angeles;” Moss, “Not Quite Paradise,” 234–35.

62. De Graaf, *Negro Migration to Los Angeles*, 203.

racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable because they violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁶³

On the heels of that ruling, African Americans and other minority groups were legally free to move anywhere that their pocketbooks would allow—although financing the new home purchase still presented institutional barriers. In the Los Angeles area, the effect of the Supreme Court decision was immediate and dramatic. As R. J. Smith noted, the court's edict “dealt a huge blow to housing segregation and was felt instantly on Central Avenue. Almost from that day forth, blacks began moving out of the old enclave,” and a massive push ensued to Baldwin Hills, Culver City, Compton, and the San Fernando Valley.⁶⁴ This dispersal was well underway by 1950. Census tract data and maps compiled that year showed that Los Angeles had twenty-seven black-majority census tracts: fourteen in the Central Avenue corridor, ten in Watts and vicinity, and three in the West Jefferson district. Blacks occupied virtually the entire Central Avenue corridor from Olympic south to Slauson, and from Alameda west to San Pedro and Main streets. In the West Jefferson area, black-majority districts spread incrementally west to Arlington Street and north to 27th Street. And in the Watts neighborhood, blacks dramatically expanded their geographical footprint, to where they formed a majority in an area from 88th Street south to 120th Street and from Alameda west to Central.⁶⁵

One wonders, however, what the impacts of *Shelley v. Kraemer*—and all the other racial or demographic changes that took place during 1940s-era Los Angeles—may have had on the location of the hosteries and restaurants that catered to a black clientele. In order to answer that question, *Green Book* listings for 1949, 1950, and 1951 were compared with a 1950 Los Angeles census-tract map. The *Green Books* for those three years listed thirty-six hosteries. Of these thirty-six, almost half (sixteen) were located in black-majority census tracts, although another five were located immediately adjacent to them. Eight additional hosteries were located in census tracts in which blacks comprised at least one-quarter of the residents. Six hosteries that advertised during the 1949–1951 period—one-sixth of the city's

63. Smith, *Great Black Way*, 244, 251–53.

64. *Ibid.*, 252.

65. http://uselectionatlas.org/FORUM/GALLERY/6482_07_02_13_8_57_27.jpeg



After the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court ruling, blacks began to move out of their former Central Avenue neighborhoods. During the same period, many hostelries in the city's white neighborhoods opened their doors for the first time to African American motorists. The Cosmopolitan Hotel (upper photo), just east of MacArthur Park, was listed in the *Green Book* during the mid-1950s, while the Cortez Hotel (lower), a half-mile to the east, welcomed black travelers during the early 1960s. This was several years before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended racial segregation in public accommodations. Photos by author.



Starting in the late 1940s, the Green Book listed several Hollywood hotels, including the Mark Twain (upper image) and the nearby Wilcox (lower). Several years before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many other Hollywood hotels also opened their doors to an African American clientele. *Photos by author.*

Green Book listings—were located in areas well separated from a black-majority neighborhood and with few black residents. One was the Biltmore Hotel, one of the city's flagship hotels, which (as noted above) had desegregated during the war years. Two other hotels—the Palms Wilshire and Park Wilshire—were located along prestigious Wilshire Boulevard, west of downtown near MacArthur Park. And three hosteries in the Hollywood area, a white enclave in those days, welcomed black patrons. These were the Mark Twain and Wilcox hotels, located near one another close to the iconic corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, and the quixotic James W. Brown Tourist Home, a sprawling estate located high in the Hollywood Hills.

THE 1950S AND BEYOND: GEOGRAPHICAL GROWTH, POLITICAL ACCEPTANCE

During the early to mid-1950s, the city's black community received mixed messages regarding racial progress. In early 1951, for example, progress was witnessed on the housing front when Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron signed into law an ordinance outlawing "segregation or discrimination . . . in any re-development planned by the city of Los Angeles." Perhaps as a result, the city was commended in a New York State committee report "for the outstanding record of the city housing authority, which has quietly made all of its projects interracial without provoking any protests."⁶⁶ But the Southern Pacific Railroad, as it had for years, continued to run segregated trains on its Sunset Limited route between Los Angeles and New Orleans; moreover, it boldly defended the right to do so, citing the burden and expense of "reshuffling its passengers when the train passes through jim-crow territory."⁶⁷

Many area restaurants continued to refuse service to blacks; but in some cases either individuals or groups fought back. For example, when Andrew Murray, who had recently arrived from Louisiana, was denied service in 1952 at a Figueroa and Florence hamburger stand, he piled his friends into a car and staged a sit-down strike at the restaurant. As Murray later recalled, "we just sat down. We told the guy, 'If you don't let us eat, ain't nobody coming to this one.'"⁶⁸

66. Kansas City Plaindealer, issues of February 2, 1951, 1, and April 6, 1951, 7.

67. Kansas City Plaindealer, September 21, 1951, 1. By 1953, fines against the SP were being upheld in court. Even so, the railroad continued to run segregated trains until 1957, and perhaps later. See the Kansas City Plaindealer, January 1, 1954, 4, and Milwaukee Defender, January 17, 1957, 4.

68. Sides, L.A. City Limits, 133.

In May 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students were unconstitutional. The decision, significant as it was for the country's long-term racial relationships, had little immediate impact in the Los Angeles area, primarily because of the Board of Education's "painfully sluggish response" (in the words of one historian) to the spirit of the Warren court's decision.⁶⁹ Incremental progress did, however, take place because the Los Angeles Committee on Human Relations became an important advocate for black equality and desegregation. Headed by its longtime executive secretary, John Buggs, a strong advocate for black equality, the committee methodically pursued the desegregation of public swimming pools, neighborhoods, and public housing units.⁷⁰

Despite that progress, many hotels, stores, and restaurants during the mid-1950s remained off-limits to blacks and other minorities. Business owners who were familiar with California's decades-old civil rights law recognized that for a violation to occur, the customer had to be overtly refused service. Some local businesses, therefore, instructed their employees to use the "tiring out" system, in which Negro customers were neglected for so long that they eventually gave up and left the premises. But in cases where customers were actively refused service, complaints often got results. One black customer, denied service at a local bar, received a \$100 check in lieu of the owner appearing in court, along with the bar's promise to the customer that it would not discriminate in the future.⁷¹

California's civil rights effort received a major boost in June 1958, when the San Francisco-based Democratic attorney general, Edmund "Pat" Brown, won the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. The state, during most of the 1950s, had been a Republican bastion, and Brown

69. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 373; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 132. As late as 1959—five years after the Court's ruling—the *L.A. Tribune* criticized L.A.'s school-district boundaries as being "arranged so that schools are either Negro or non-Negro," (i.e., *de facto* segregation by gerrymandering) and for black teachers being placed only in predominantly black schools. *L.A. Tribune*, April 3, 1959, 5.

70. The county board of supervisors established this committee, first called the Committee for Interracial Progress, in 1944 in the wake of the Zoot Suit riots. It became an official county agency in 1958 and was renamed the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. It remains active today. Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 133–34, 245; <http://amistadresearchcenter.tulane.edu/archon/?p=collections/findingaid&id=32&q=&rootcontentid=17568>; <http://www.lahumanrelations.org/about/index.htm>; http://wdacs.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/HRC_PressRelease_RiseInHateCrimes2.pdf.

71. *Milwaukee Defender*, July 27, 1957, 2; *L.A. Tribune*, September 5, 1958, 6.

had been the only Democratic statewide officeholder. But in August 1958, Brown—running a campaign of “responsible liberalism”—announced that the party would support “the strongest civil rights platform in its history,” and in November Brown was elected governor.⁷² Working with longtime black assemblyman Augustus Hawkins and with white assembly members Phillip Burton and Jesse Unruh, bills were crafted to strengthen the civil rights act, to enable a Fair Employment Practices Commission, and to pass a beefed-up fair housing act.⁷³

Perhaps because Democrats controlled both houses of the California legislature, all of these legislative efforts were successfully passed in 1959. The first to become law, on April 16, the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA), banned employment discrimination; this bill, authored by Byron Rumford, had been proposed since the mid-1940s but had failed to be enacted. Three months later, on July 17, Governor Brown signed into law Augustus F. Hawkins’ bill prohibiting housing discrimination.⁷⁴

A major new civil rights measure known as the Unruh Civil Rights Act became law on September 18, 1959. This law was more sweeping than its predecessors because it applied not just to accommodations but all businesses: hospitals, barber and beauty shops, theaters, housing accommodations, and retail establishments. In addition, it allowed aggrieved parties to sue for restitution plus an additional \$250 in damages.⁷⁵ Later that year, a black couple filed suit under the new law, claiming that they had been refused a room at a Hollywood-area motel. Most businesses, however, complied with the new law, and by 1960, longtime black editor Charlotta Bass stated that “discrimination in public accommodations,” while “common in Los Angeles for many years,” had recently “grown less and less.”⁷⁶

The decade of the 1950s had seen a boom in L.A.’s black population; between 1950 and 1960 it had almost doubled from 171,209 to

72. Roger Rapoport, “The Political Odyssey of Pat Brown,” *California History* 64 (Winter 1985): 2–9; *L.A. Tribune*, August 15, 1958, 1–2.

73. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 373.

74. “California Fair Employment Practices Act (1959),” <http://www.blackpast.org/primarywest/california-fair-employment-practices-act-1959>; Noel and Cheng, “Through Struggle to the Stars,” 3; *L.A. Tribune*, issues of July 17, 1959, 4, and November 6, 1959, 7.

75. *L.A. Tribune*, June 26, 1959, 4; *L.A. Tribune*, July 24, 1959, 3; Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds of Race*, 221; Steven Wyllie, “The Unruh Civil Rights Act: A Weapon to Combat Homophobia in Military On-Campus Recruiting, *Loyola L.A. Law Review* 24 (1991): 1335.

76. *L.A. Tribune*, October 16, 1959, 8; Bass, *Forty Years*, 70.

334,916, while the city's total population had grown just 26 per cent. (See Table 1.) By 1960, Los Angeles had the fifth largest black population of any major city in the United States, larger than any city in the South; African Americans comprised more than one-eighth of the city's residents.⁷⁷

By the early 1960s, the battle for access to public accommodations was an accomplished fact. As Josh Sides has noted,

Africans Americans had significantly transformed their status in Los Angeles. Their protests were widespread, their demands were well known, and their political influence—if still uneven—was undeniable. Most important, African Americans participated in daily urban life in ways that would have been impossible two decades earlier. They shopped in stores, ate in restaurants, and went to public places in record numbers. Long hidden from or ignored by white Los Angeles, blacks had become an integral part of the city's public life.⁷⁸

Many other battles, however, had yet to be won, including issues related to voting, housing, public education, and police-community relationships.⁷⁹ Overcoming housing discrimination proved to be particularly vexing. Because the scope of the 1959 housing act had proven to be relatively modest, the 1963 state legislature passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act. This act sought to address widespread housing discrimination and segregation in California by, among other measures, requiring homeowners to sell to qualified buyers, regardless of race. But some voters, unhappy with the bill's provisions, fashioned a referendum (Proposition 14) to overturn the Fair Housing Act. In the November 1964 election—just five months after Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act—California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 14. Another two years went by before the state's Supreme Court ruled that the proposition was unconstitutional, thus reinstating the Fair Housing Act provisions.⁸⁰

The many civil rights gains accomplished during the 1950s and early 1960s had a significant impact on where the city's blacks lived. In 1950, for example, areas in which blacks comprised a residential

77. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States*, Population Division Working Paper No. 76 (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), Table 5.

78. Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 134.

79. *L.A. Tribune*, January 22, 1960, 2; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 135.

80. <http://jesselatour.blogspot.com/2013/03/californias-history-of-discriminatory.html>; Noel and Cheng, "Through Struggle to the Stars," 4.

majority included several areas beyond the boundaries of their traditional neighborhoods, although the geographical growth had been modest. But given the legal backing provided in the Supreme Court's *Shelley v. Kraemer* case, blacks throughout the 1950s continued their migration into neighborhoods outside of the Central Avenue corridor, Watts, and the West Jefferson area. Specifically, they reacted to the declining quality of life in the crowded Central Avenue corridor by moving to areas to the west and south of the Central Avenue corridor; they also moved into the West Adams district, adjacent to the West Jefferson neighborhood, as well as to the large Westside area.⁸¹ East of downtown, African Americans settled part of Boyle Heights; they occupied the formerly-white neighborhoods between Slauson Avenue and 88th Street; in the Watts vicinity they moved south of the city limits into Compton. By 1960, therefore, the traditional three areas in the city with black population concentrations had coalesced into a single large geographic mass—throughout the South Central area and as far west as Fairfax Avenue—where a large majority of the Los Angeles black community resided.⁸² Blacks constituted almost one-seventh of the city's total population that year.⁸³ The African American population continued to grow, both demographically and geographically, between 1960 and the July 1964 congressional passage of the Civil Rights Act.

By no means did this massive migration go smoothly, however. In many cases, the residents of white neighborhoods resented the black incursion; in a 1952 survey, only 23 percent of "native white American adults" in a typical Southern California suburb reported that they would tolerate living next door to African Americans. This attitude, pervasive throughout the metropolitan area, was reflected in the continued separation—to one degree or another—of schools, workplaces, and public spaces such as theaters, nightclubs, shopping centers, beaches, and parks.⁸⁴ As applied to housing, some white homeowners as well as real-estate agencies flouted court rulings such as *Shelley v. Kraemer* and continued to enforce racially restrictive

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81. Grimes, "Historic Resources Associated with African Americans," E-9; Flammung, *Bound for Freedom*, 373.
 82. This single black bloc includes some census tracts adjacent to the city boundary in unincorporated areas such as the Willowbrook area south of the Los Angeles community of Watts.
 83. http://uselectionatlas.org/FORUM/GALLERY/6482_07_13_8_59_18.jpeg
 84. Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 111, 132.

covenants.⁸⁵ Attempts by some black families to move into neighborhoods south of Slauson resulted in bombings, drive-by gunfire, and cross burnings on the lawns of black-owned homes. Resistance was just as intense in communities just beyond the L.A. city limits. In the white enclaves of Compton, Downey, Huntington Park, South Gate, and Lynwood, some residents either joined, or felt kinship with, anti-black gangs such as the Spook Hunters, who aimed to terrorize blacks into staying out of those areas. In response, however, blacks formed protectionist gangs such as the Devil Hunters, the Slausons, the Businessmen, the Farmers, and the Gladiators to oppose them. The police, for the most part, sided with white residents and did little to quell the unrest.⁸⁶

Given the demographic and geographical growth in the city's black population during the 1950s and early 1960s, what impact did that growth have on the location of businesses that welcomed a black clientele? To shed light on this question, a perusal of the city's *Green Book* listings for 1959, 1960, and 1961 reveals a total listing of twenty-two hosteries. Of these, more than half (twelve) were located in black-majority census tracts, and another five were located immediately adjacent to them. Two additional hosteries were located in census tracts where blacks comprised at least one-quarter of the residents.

Only three *Green Book* hosteries during the 1959–1961 period (approximately one-seventh of all the listed properties) were located in heavily white neighborhoods that were distinctly isolated from majority-black neighborhoods. These properties included the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, along with the Hollywood Knickerbocker and the Mark Twain hotels, both in Hollywood. The composition of the *Green Book* list, however, markedly changed over the next two years; in the 1962 and 1963 editions, this travel guide would advertise more than twenty new hotel listings, and many of these new listings would include the city's most iconic hosteries (the Ambassador, the Mayfair, the Hollywood Roosevelt, the Hotel Bel-Air, and others) that had never before offered a welcome mat to nonwhite patrons. Clearly, a large number of Los Angeles-area

85. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 373; "Spook Hunters (Los Angeles)," <https://unitedgangs.com/2016/09/07/spook-hunters-los-angeles/>

86. Brightwell, "A Brief...History of Black Los Angeles"; Simpson, "A Southern California Dream Deferred."

hostelries chose to integrate in the years immediately preceding the congressional passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.⁸⁷

GREEN BOOK PROPERTIES: A LITTLE-KNOWN HISTORICAL LEGACY

Many books and articles written about the history of African Americans in Los Angeles mention the Dunbar Hotel. This imposing edifice, originally known as the Somerville Hotel, was built by John Somerville in order to be ready for the NAACP's first west-coast national convention, which opened June 27, 1928.⁸⁸ Thereafter, as one retrospective noted, the Dunbar was "renowned in the 1930s, '40s and '50s as the hub of Los Angeles black culture." During this period, the top black entertainers, movie stars, politicians, and other glitterati stayed there, and surrounding the hotel was an entertainment district that included restaurants, bars, night clubs, and other spots frequented by visitors of every racial stripe.⁸⁹

What is less well known, however, is that the Dunbar, while iconic, was just one of many accommodations where blacks who visited Los Angeles could stay during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. As noted above, the *Green Book* advertised twelve hostelries during the 1939–1941 period and thirty-six hostelries during the 1949–1951 period. A decade later (1959–1961), these annual guides advertised twenty-two hostelries, but the 1962 and 1963 editions advertised an additional twenty-three hostelries not previously listed.

At one time or another between 1930 and 1963, inclusive, seventy-nine different hostelries in the Los Angeles area advertised in one or more *Green Book* issues. These included fifty-nine listings in Los Angeles itself, seven in Watts, and thirteen in Hollywood. (See Table 2.) Many of these hostelries were located in or near the city's black-majority neighborhoods. But twenty-five of them—more than 30 percent of the total—were located in white neighborhoods: specifically, in census tracts where blacks constituted less than 10 percent of the population. (As previously noted, *Green Book* properties in white

87. Given the ad hoc, "bootstrap" nature of every *Green Book* issue, it may be inferred that these well-known hotels, both in Los Angeles and Hollywood, decided to accept black patrons shortly after the Unruh Civil Rights Act became law in September 1959. It took several years (until 1962 or 1963), however, before their changed policies were reflected by *Green Book* listings.

88. Flaming, *Bound for Freedom*, 288–89.

89. *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1990; http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-11/local/me-147_1_historic-dunbar-hotel; Smith, *Great Black Way*, 12; *Kansas City Plaindealer*, October 15, 1937, 3.

neighborhoods were a relative rarity in 1940, but by both 1950 and 1960, *Green Book* properties in white neighborhoods had become more common.) In this respect, the Los Angeles area was in stark contrast to other American cities. Tabulations of *Green Book* properties in places such as St. Louis and Springfield, Missouri, and Tulsa and Oklahoma City in Oklahoma, clearly indicate that most or all of the listings were located in black-majority neighborhoods.⁹⁰

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, black motorists who headed to Los Angeles came from a variety of economic circumstances. Some, therefore, sought respectable, comfortable accommodations, while others looked for a thriftier alternative. Los Angeles, in response, offered a broad range of hostelleries. In more eastern locales, however, the accommodations available to black travelers were all too often of marginal quality. Isabel Wilkerson, in the *Warmth of Other Suns*, said that “Some were seedy motels in the red-light district of whatever city they were in. There were a handful of swanky ones . . . but many of them were unkempt rooming houses or merely an extra bedroom in some colored family’s row house in the colored district of a given town.”⁹¹

In many cities across the U.S., once well-known black business districts or entire black neighborhoods have been largely or entirely demolished in order to make way for freeway construction, for sports facilities, to provide land for public housing, or simply to eliminate urban “blight.”⁹² For these and similar reasons, many of the hotels and “tourist homes” frequented by black travelers in an earlier day—those listed in the various *Green Book* volumes—are no longer extant in many American towns. In St. Louis, for example, fifty-eight properties were listed in one or more *Green Book* issues, but only twelve still stand today. In Springfield, Illinois, just two of twenty-one *Green Book*

90. “African American Motorists’ Directory of Hostelries and Restaurants on Route 66,” appendix to Norris, “Courageous Motorists,” 311–26. Data on black-majority neighborhoods is from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1950, Vol. III, Census Tract Statistics*, Chapter 39 (Oklahoma City) and Chapter 47 (St. Louis), both published by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1952. Also U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts*, Final Report PHC(1)-148 (Springfield, Mo.) and PHC(1)-162 (Tulsa, Okla.), both published by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1961.

91. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns; The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010), 203.

92. See Robert P. Groberg, “Urban Renewal Realistically Reappraised,” <http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3052&context=lcp>’ and Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

properties still stand. In Tulsa, just eight of thirty-seven of these properties are still standing, and in Amarillo, Texas, of thirteen *Green Book* listings, just one still stands. In each of these cities, there is little physical heritage to remind either residents or travelers what it was like to be a black motorist in Jim Crow America.⁹³

The Los Angeles area, however, is singularly favored in this regard, because of the seventy-nine hostelries listed in one or more *Green Book* issues, fifty-four of them—more than two-thirds of all listed properties—still stand. (See Table 2.) Not surprisingly, some of these buildings are in excellent condition while others are deplorable in their appearance; some retain their original appearance, while others have been renovated to such a degree that they bear little visual resemblance to what they looked like in the 1940s or 1950s. Los Angeles, similar to other cities, has lost many significant historical properties over the years. But given the sweeping changes that have taken place in Los Angeles since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it is fortunate indeed that there are so many remaining examples of the hostelries that welcomed black travelers during the mid-twentieth century. It is to be hoped, in the not-too-distant future, that efforts might be made—either by property owners, preservation activists, or civic authorities—to protect these historic buildings.

93. "African American Motorists' Directory of Hostelries and Restaurants on Route 66," also the following URL: <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/rt66/route-66-and-the-historic-negro-motorist-green-book/>.