

City of Fontana, CA

Located in San Bernardino County in Southern California, Fontana has a rich history that dates back to 1918. The city started off as a booming agricultural town that produced mainly oranges. However, the city was radically transformed during World War 2 into a prominent industrial city (LOC Newspaper). Behind Fontana's economic success, lies a forgotten history of the establishment of the headquarters of, both, the KKK and Black Panthers in Fontana. In this paper, I will be exploring this forgotten history of Fontana beginning in the early 1940s.

Much like the De Brahm map in "The Black Shoals", the maps of Fontana from the 1920s-1960s did not represent anything North of Baseline Ave. Compared to the De Brahm map, North of Baseline Ave was just empty space, "anospace," which represented the attempt to erase Blackness from Fontana. The De Brahm map reduced Blackness and Black people to no more than just economic means. Furthermore, Indigeneity on the map is represented by a lack of space, "anospace." This lack of space not only depicts something threatening, but as King mentioned it shows the erasure of Indigenous and Black people (King, 2019).

In the 1900's, Fontana was segregated by a street called Baseline Avenue (Allen, 2015). This street ran through Fontana that separated the city from North Fontana and South Fontana. Northern Fontana was where Black people were allowed to reside and stay. Under no circumstances, were Black people allowed South of Baseline Ave. According to the Daily Bulletin, there was a saying, "Baseline is the race line," that circulated around during the 1940s (Allen, 2015).

In 1945, a Black man named O'day H. Short decided to not let the "raceline" stop him from buying "a 5 acre vacant lot on Randall Avenue at Pepper Street, near downtown (South of Baseline), and began building a house"(Dulaney, 2017). In the fall of 1945, O'day got the house

and was able to move his wife and kids into it. Not everyone realized that the light skin family was Black, which was the main reason they were able to buy the property in the first place. In “Pigmentocracies,” Edward Telles states, “Race and ethnicity are not simply a matter of identity and consciousness. They also involve the gaze of the other (Telles, Pigmentocracies: 10). At first, people didn’t notice that O’day was Black, because of his light skin and his straight hair. However, when he moved in his children and wife, neighbors started to notice the texture of his children’s hair. The neighbors realized that the Short family was Black and called law enforcement on the Shorts repeatedly. Law enforcement tried to convince the Shorts to move out of Southern Fontana, but O’day refused.

In early December 1945, the KKK visited O’day and ordered him to move or risk harm to his family; he refused and reported the threats to the local sheriff’s deputy (Madeo, 1950). The Sheriff’s deputies neither listened to O’day’s reports or offered protection to him and his family. Soon after, members of the Fontana Chamber of Commerce visited the home, encouraging O’day to move to Northern Fontana. In addition, they even offered to buy his home; however, O’day refused. Just days later, on December 16, 1945, an explosion destroyed the home with the Short family still inside. Helen Short, O’day’s wife, was seen badly burnt trying to beat out the flames on the clothing of her children. Helen Short, 35 years old, died alongside her children, Barry, 9 years old, and Carol Ann, 7 years old. O’day Short had survived and was immediately taken to the hospital for one month before he suddenly died soon after the local District Attorney informed him of the death of his family (LOC Newspaper).

During the time of Short’s death, in the 1940s, the Klu Klux Klan was an active group in Fontana (LOC Newspaper). They wore the confederate flag as they walked down the streets and attended city meetings. In the 1950s the Black Panthers had set up a headquarters on the corner

of citrus and highland in Northern Fontana. The headquarters was soon burned to the ground by the KKK; however, the Black Panthers did not give up and relocated several times (Madeo, 1950).

In addition to the attacks that Black people had to endure, Black people weren't allowed to vote in Fontana. In "Casta Painting," by Ilona Katzew, it showcases how race and caste played a role in inferiority in different Colonial systems (Katzew, 2004). Similar to the "Casta Painting," race played a role in who were allowed the basic rights of citizenship, i.e., voting. "Bethel AME Church was the first voting poll place where residents of North Fontana could vote, once it became legal for blacks to vote in the 1960s" (Turner, 2016).

In "Beyond Occidentalism," Fernando Coronil argues, "There is no exit from the lived world, only views from different positions within it. It is as if the world were a labyrinth whose exits were entrances into an expanding labyrinth and our maps not only modeled these labyrinths but also created them. Thus, maps embody the imagination of the future, not only that of the past. The destiny of our journey also defines its trajectory" (Coronil 1996: 76). Coronil argues that we should "abandon the pursuit of a complete map" (Coronil 1996: 76). Territories and places are constructed through human relations and historical relations, thus making the construction of a map different depending on the understanding of culture and geography one has. The map of Fontana that I have created is a map that is formed from archives and historical accounts. However, living in Fontana for over 10 years, I constantly passed by sights that were once a big part of the history of Fontana. Using my knowledge of the present day, I was not only able to incorporate the past, but what the imagination of the future was during the 1940s. The map of Fontana depicts a journey and defines the trajectory of where the past would lead Fontana into present times.

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