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THE YEAR 1960

EDWARD THOMPSON famously characterized the 1950s as the ‘apathetic decade’ when people ‘looked to private solutions to public evils’. ‘Private ambitions’, he wrote, ‘have displaced social aspirations. And people have come to feel their grievances as personal to themselves, and, similarly, the grievances of other people are felt to be the affair of other people. If a connection between the two is made, people tend to feel—in the prevailing apathy—that they are impotent to effect any change.’ The year 1960 will always be remembered for the birth of a new social consciousness that repudiated this culture of moral apathy fed by resigned powerlessness. ‘Our political task’, wrote the veteran pacifist A. J. Muste at that time, ‘is precisely, in Martin Buber’s magnificent formulation, “to drive the ploughshare of the normative principle into the hard soil of political reality”.’ The method was direct action—nonviolent and determined.

First behind the plough were Black students in the South, whose movement as it spread to a hundred cities and campuses would name itself the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In North Carolina, the Greensboro lunch-counter February sit-ins began as quiet protests but soon became thunderclaps heralding the arrival of a new, uncompromising generation on the frontline of the battle against segregation. The continuing eruption of student protest across the South reinvigorated the wounded movement led by Martin Luther King and was echoed in the North by picket lines, boycotts and the growth of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).² Separately the Nation of Islam grew rapidly, and the powerful voice of Malcolm X began to be heard across the country. Meanwhile, as the United States continued to install ICBMs in Europe, the growing revolt against nuclear weapons signalled, as Lawrence Wittner put it, ‘an end to the Cold War lockstep among sizable segments of the American population. The peace movement by 1960 had been

reestablished as a significant social movement.’ The same could be said for student activism and radical scholarship at some of the major Cold War universities. Progressive campus organizations such as SLATE at Berkeley—the precursor of the Free Speech Movement—and VOICE at Ann Arbor dramatically broke the ice of student apathy, while Studies on the Left (founded in 1959 in Madison) and New University Thought (1960) gave voice to what everyone was soon calling the New Left.

A young generation was waking up in Southern California as well, despite the stunted character of political and intellectual life in most of the region. If films like *Gidget* (1959) popularized the image of a carefree teenage paradise, life was most definitely not a beach in the ghettos, chinatowns and barrios of Los Angeles. The 1950s boom had bypassed much of the minority population, leaving in its wake frustrated dreams, growing inequality and intransigent exclusion. The year 1960, however, provided a surprisingly panoramic preview of the social forces, ideas and issues that would coalesce into ‘movements’ over the course of the next decade. Focused on Southern California, this piece follows month-by-month the emergence of a new agenda for social change, along with some of its key actors and organizations.

‘Agenda’ in this case meant something more than a simple menu of issues and causes. Events and protests in 1960 also delineated what might be called the issue of issues: the active tectonics of racial segregation. Discrimination was not just an inherited pattern but a dynamic force that was shaping the future of the region. With the benediction of federal lenders and the full complicity of the real-estate and construction industries, racially exclusive suburbanization was creating a monochromatic society from which Blacks were excluded and in which Chicanos had only a marginal place. The legal victories for civil rights won in the late 1940s and early 1950s had yet to yield edible fruit. In a booming

¹ Edward Thompson, ‘At the Point of Decay’, in Thompson, ed., *Out of Apathy*, London 1960, p. 5. This essay is an extract from Mike Davis and Jon Weiner, *Setting the Night On Fire: Los Angeles in the Sixties*, forthcoming from Verso.

² The ground had been prepared by the two Youth Marches for Integrated Schools in Washington, DC in October 1958 and April 1959, both spectacularly successful: the first attracted 10,000 and the second, 25,000 students. Bayard Rustin, the principal organizer, hoped to open a second front for the Southern struggle on Northern campuses and put pressure on liberal Democrats: John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, Chicago 2003, pp. 272–5.

regional economy, irrigated by billions of dollars of military spending, minorities possessed little more than low-skill toe-holds in the three major local industries: aerospace and electronics, motion pictures, construction. Los Angeles schools, meanwhile, segregated more students than any Southern city and, as far as most residents of South Central LA were concerned, the LAPD might as well have had Confederate emblems on its patrol cars. As integral as peace and anti-war activism were to the story of the decade, and as important as feminism and gay rights became at the beginning of the 1970s, the core narrative of Los Angeles in the sixties was the sustained uprising of young Blacks and Chicanos and the alternative futures they passionately envisioned.

JANUARY: COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

In the summer of 1959 a psychologist named Emory Holmes bought a house in the northeastern San Fernando Valley from an engineer known only as 'Mr T'. The transaction would have been utterly unremarkable except that Holmes was Black, Mr T was white, and the home was in a previously all-white neighbourhood in Pacoima. According to an investigation by the NAACP, the Holmes family was welcomed in the following manner:

A life insurance salesman, sent by a neighbour, came to the house to sell a policy. A dairy delivered milk without having received an order. A group of people with spades and shovels started digging up their garden, claiming a local paper had advertized a free plant giveaway. A drinking water company started delivery—though no order had been received for same. A television set repairman called at 11 PM one night without having been sent for. A taxi came to the house at 11:30 PM one night without having been called. An undertaker called at the home to pick up the body of the dead homeowner. Delivery of a Los Angeles newspaper was stopped, without any request from the Holmes'. A veterinary doctor came to the house, saying that he was answering a call for a sick horse. A sink repairman paid an unsolicited home call. A termite exterminator showed up, though not requested. An unsolicited pool company agent called to install a pool. Someone painted on the walls of the house the epithet: 'Black cancer here. Don't let it spread!' Tacks were scattered in the driveway. A window was broken by a pellet from an air gun. Rocks were thrown at the house. A second undertaker showed up . . .

All of this happened during the first two weeks and the harassment—the Holmes' cited one hundred separate incidents—continued relentlessly

for months. However they were luckier than the seller, Mr T, whom white homeowners tracked in vigilante fashion. He was fired from his job as a direct result of the sale, and the LAPD had to be called in when a demonstration in front of his new home in Northridge threatened to turn into a mini-riot. Although 'massive resistance' to integration was not an organized movement as in the South, it was a spontaneous reality everywhere in LA's booming 'Ozzie and Harriet' suburbs. As the NAACP underscored in testimony to the US Commission on Civil Rights on 25–26 January 1960, more than 10,000 people, many of them workers at the new GM Van Nuys Assembly Plant, were squeezed into the segregated Black part of Pacoima. Meanwhile there were fewer than twenty Negro families (presumably all undergoing experiences similar to the Holmes household) in the entire San Fernando Valley, living in so-called 'white neighbourhoods'. Although apartment owners in the Valley groaned about high vacancy rates, only one was found who was willing to rent to Blacks.³

In its Los Angeles hearings, the Commission on Civil Rights, established by Congress in 1957 after the Montgomery bus boycott, focused principally on the housing problems of minorities.⁴ Mayor Norris Poulson welcomed the Commission with the assurance that Los Angeles had an 'excellent record in the treatment of minority groups and in the lack of intergroup tension or friction'. He also patted himself on the back for establishing an advisory committee on human relations whose major priority was to work with minority newcomers 'to raise their appreciation for sanitation'.⁵ After this comic relief, the Commission accepted several hundred pages of dense reports and two days of testimony about housing segregation from the Community Relations Conference of Southern California, an umbrella group that included the NAACP, CORE, the Urban League, the Jewish Labor League, American Friends Service Committee and the LA County Commission on Human Relations.

³ *Hearings before US Commission on Civil Rights: Los Angeles, 25–26 January 1960 and San Francisco 27–28 January 1960*, Washington, DC 1960. (The spades and shovels incident is related in the *California Eagle*, 28 July 1960.) A classic and bone-chilling account of white neighbourhood terrorism in the North is Arnold Hirsch's 'Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953–1966', *Journal of American History*, vol. 82, no. 2, September 1995, pp. 522–50.

⁴ The most prominent member of the Commission, Notre Dame president Father Theodore Hesburgh, bluntly acknowledged that it had been established as 'a substitute for action': Hesburgh, 'The Commission on Civil Rights—and Human Rights', *The Review of Politics*, vol. 34, no. 3, July 1972, pp. 291–2.

⁵ *Hearings*, pp. 6–7.

Assembly member Augustus Hawkins, the sole representative of Black Los Angeles (14 per cent of the city's population) in any elected office, told commissioners that because Blacks were unable to buy FHA or VA-financed homes, growth was accommodated through the widespread construction of rental units or second homes on single family lots, resulting in overcrowding and blight. He also talked about hugely discriminatory fire and car insurance rates, when such policies were even available in inner-city areas. Eloise Kloke, Regional Director of the President's Committee on Government Contracts, testified about the racial consequences of the suburbanization of employment: 'We find where Government contractors are located in geographical areas in which Negroes are unable to obtain housing, Negroes are to be found within the work force not at all or in very small numbers.' In one submission, the Community Relations Conference cited the example of a medium-sized LA manufacturer that relocated to Placentia in Orange County. A single Black employee succeeded in buying a home in the area only to have vandals break into his house, cut up all the carpets and pour cement in the plumbing. This was soon followed by a Molotov cocktail hurled through the front window.⁶

The most authoritative presence at the hearings, however, was Loren Miller, publisher of the *California Eagle* and the nation's leading legal expert on housing discrimination.⁷ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Miller had won a stunning series of legal victories—including (with Thurgood Marshall) the landmark case of *Shelley vs Kraemer* before the Supreme Court—that had overthrown the legality of the restrictive covenants excluding Blacks, but also sometimes Chicanos and Jews, from more than 90 per cent of housing tracts in Los Angeles. But these constitutional victories, Miller emphasized, had so far not opened a single suburb to Black homebuyers or altered the relentlessly discriminatory practices of realtors, developers and savings-and-loan institutions. 'The degree of racial concentration is on the constant increase in the central city; it is greater now than it was in 1948 when the Supreme Court interdicted judicial enforcement of racial restrictive covenants; unless present trends are reversed it will be even greater a decade from now.' He told the Commission of a study by FHA housing analyst Belden

⁶ *Hearings*, pp. 118–20, 335, 426.

⁷ The *Eagle's* statement of principles was concise. 'We oppose: 1. Jim Crow in all forms. 2. Communists and all other enemies of democracy.' With this shrewd disclaimer, Miller consistently published sympathetic articles about the Cuban Revolution throughout the early 1960s.

Morgan in 1954 which found that ‘approximately 3,000 of the 125,000 housing units built from 1950 to 1954 in the Los Angeles area were open to non-Caucasian occupancy.’ Later research by the Los Angeles Urban League concluded that less than 1 per cent of new housing between 1950 and 1956 was occupied by minorities. In addition, ‘most of the housing that is open to non-Caucasian occupancy is located in subdivisions built expressly for Negro occupancy.’ Finally, Miller reminded commissioners that the federal government had been ‘a partner in discrimination’ and that the contemporary ghetto was as much the result of government policies as the organic result of local racism. Since the 1930s the FHA had underwritten exclusive practices and was continuing to subsidize mortgages in racially restricted developments, while allowing lenders to limit loans in minority areas.⁸

Suburban apartheid

The result was the concentration of the African-American population in a single super-ghetto or ‘black belt’, in an otherwise rapidly decentralizing and suburbanizing metropolis. Some 75 per cent of Los Angeles County’s Black population was unwillingly concentrated in the urban core between Olympic Boulevard to the north and Artesia Boulevard to the south.⁹ Alameda Street, the old highway and railroad route to the harbour, was called the ‘cotton curtain’ because Blacks could not live or be seen at night in any of the dozen or so industrial suburbs east of it. A clan of white gangs, the ‘Spookhunters’, patrolled racial boundaries, attacking Blacks with seeming impunity. Meanwhile the western edge of Black residence was roughly Figueroa Street in the south, but northward at Manchester Boulevard it began to bulge westward, ultimately as far as Crenshaw in the latitude of Slauson Avenue. South Central LA also had an internal physical and socio-economic boundary. The Harbor Freeway, parallel to Main Street and finished as far south as 124th Street by 1958, ‘had created a massive structural and symbolic barrier between the Eastside and Westside [Black] communities’.¹⁰ By 1960, the old ‘main stem’ on Central Avenue was in decline, middle-class Blacks were

⁸ *Hearings*, pp. 253, 255, 260–3. For recognition of Miller’s role at the time see R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way: LA in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance*, New York 2006, p. 236.

⁹ *Hearings*, p. 130.

¹⁰ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, Berkeley 2005, p. 378.

moving as far west as Crenshaw, and the new business and entertainment axis of the Black community was Western Avenue.

Thus Black Los Angeles expanded with continuous friction and controversy, through white flight and 'block busting' on its southern and western peripheries where the housing stock dated primarily from the pre-war era. The westside with newer housing and often picturesque neighbourhoods—Leimert Park, for example—was favoured by more affluent Black families, while new arrivals from Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas typically ended up in the overcrowded eastside.¹¹ Meanwhile the chief hot spots of white resistance were the city of Compton, south of Watts, where a racial transition had already begun, and all-white Inglewood, where police and residents were mobilized to defend the city's eastern and northern boundaries against Black homebuyers. Only the Crenshaw area, with its mixture of Jews, Japanese-Americans and Blacks, qualified as a true multi-racial community.

Apart from South Central Los Angeles, there were also historical black neighbourhoods in Pasadena, Santa Monica/Venice, Long Beach and Monrovia, in the San Gabriel Valley—each of which could be accurately described as a ghetto. The rest of the older secondary cities—like Torrance, Hawthorne, Burbank and, above all, Glendale—were zero-Black-population 'sundown towns', where the local police enforced illegal curfews on Black shoppers and commuters. Meanwhile the eastern San Gabriel Valley, where tens of thousands of acres of citrus groves had been bulldozed over a decade before to create huge new commuter dormitories such as West Covina (50,300) and La Puente (25,000), was the mirror image of the segregated San Fernando Valley, as were the hundreds of racially exclusive new home tracts in the southwest and southeast quadrants of LA County.¹² According to John Buggs of the County Commission on Human Relations, segregation was rapidly increasing: between 1950 and 1959, the percentage of non-whites in 34 of the 54 county cities had declined; in 12 cases, the decrease was absolute.¹³

¹¹ Gang culture reflected this divide. Major Eastside (ghetto) gangs of 1960 included the Farmers (Watts area), the Businessmen (Jefferson High area), the Pueblos (Pueblo del Rio project), and, largest of all, the Slausons (Fremont High area). Westside gangs included Boot Hill (Dorsey High area), the Gladiators (Manual Arts High area), Dodge City (Dorsey) and Vineyard (Vineyard playground). For a description of a two-day-long gang battle near Dorsey High, see *Eagle*, 13 October 1960.

¹² *LA Times*, 8 May 1960. West Covina had only nine acres of industry; La Puente, none at all.

¹³ *Hearings*, p. 130.

While realtors and white homeowners inside the city limits confronted the threat—albeit still very small in 1960—that growing minority political clout might eventually pry open housing markets, the county suburbs were building invulnerable walls through home rule. Indeed, as Gregory Weiher illustrated in a 1991 study, after restrictive covenants had lost their formal legality, the separate municipal incorporation of new suburbs (a practice upheld by Californian and federal courts) became the most effective method for excluding minorities.¹⁴ Lakewood was the pioneer. Faced with annexation by Long Beach in 1953, this mega-development of 17,500 new homes—Southern California’s counterpart to the eastern Levittowns—had struck a deal to lease municipal services (police, fire, libraries, water, sewage) from the County. This so-called Lakewood Plan, subsequently reinforced by a law allowing municipalities to keep a portion of locally generated sales taxes, spurred thirty similar incorporations between 1954 and 1970. Through their control over land use, these ‘contract cities’ could ensure residential homogeneity—by excluding apartment construction, for example—while attracting sales-tax generators like malls and auto dealerships that allowed them to eliminate municipal property taxes.

The Lakewood Plan quickly became the utopia of pioneer ‘public choice’ theorists like Charles Tiebout, Robert Warren and Vincent Ostrom who argued that a large number of competing local governments created a ‘quasi-market’ that optimized consumer choice in public goods. Residents, in theory, could ‘vote with their feet’ for the municipality with the best schools, the lowest taxes and the highest likely appreciation of home values. But minorities had no ‘foot vote’ and could rarely use home equity to buy up into preferred housing; thus their capacity for wealth accumulation through homeownership was extremely limited. The political fragmentation of metropolitan Los Angeles, in other words, was an insidious and largely unassailable form of disenfranchisement; one member of a 1959–60 commission studying Southern California’s urban issues aptly called it ‘apartheid’.¹⁵

¹⁴ Gregory Weiher, *The Fractured Metropolis*, Albany, NY 1991, p. 88.

¹⁵ Michan Connor, ‘Public Benefits from Public Choice: Producing Decentralization in Metropolitan Los Angeles, 1954–1973’, *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2013. See also Tom Hogen-Esch, ‘Fragmentation, Fiscal Federalism, and the Ghost of Dillon’s Rule: Municipal Incorporation in Southern California, 1950–2010’, *California Journal of Politics and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2011.

FEBRUARY: DON'T MESS WITH LENA

At the beginning of February, four Black college freshmen reignited a faltering Southern civil-rights movement by sitting at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and politely trying to order coffee and donuts.¹⁶ Two weeks later, as the sit-in protests spread like wildfire across the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia, Lena Horne and her husband Lenny Hayton stopped by the Luau restaurant in Beverly Hills for a late-night meal with Lena's old friend Kay Thompson, a big-band singer. Decorated like a stage set for South Pacific, the Luau on North Rodeo Drive was an 'amusingly unfashionable' but popular hangout for the movie colony.

In the midst of a two-week run at the Cocomanut Grove, the 46-year-old Horne was one of the most famous entertainers in the world. Queen of the nightclub circuit, she moved seamlessly between the Moulin Rouge in Paris and the Sands in Vegas, thrilling audiences with her definitive interpretations of American standards. Since her teenage days in the chorus line at the Cotton Club, moreover, her spectacularly integrated love life—Joe Louis, Orson Welles, Artie Shaw and Frank Sinatra, amongst others—had been the bread and butter of Hollywood gossip columns.

But despite occasional exposés, few white Americans realized that this regal woman—who never forgave Sinatra for once being rude to Eleanor Roosevelt—was also a militant Black progressive whose close friends included Paul Robeson and Harlem Communist leader Ben Davis. Because of her stubborn refusal to disavow these connections, she had been blacklisted by MGM, cheated out of Broadway roles that had been written for her, and only appeared on television because Ed Sullivan, otherwise a noted conservative, had been willing to battle his network bosses. Within the year she would be fundraising for the young Southern activists, now coalesced as the SNCC.

Back at the Luau, Thompson was late, so Hayton went to phone her while Horne waited for the food. On the level a few feet below her table and

¹⁶ Discrimination in public accommodation had been illegal in California since 1905, but it was still common for bars, restaurants, gyms and especially motels to refuse service to Blacks. Glendale was particularly notorious. See *LA Times*, 16 July 1963.

hidden by a screen, a drunken 38-year-old white businessman named Harvey St Vincent was impatient with the service. A waiter explained that he would be back as soon as he had served ‘Miss Horne’s table’. (Her 15-year-old marriage to Hayton, a white arranger, was still something of a public secret.) St Vincent exploded. ‘Where is Lena Horne, anyway? She’s just another nigger.’ When she leaned over the partition and confronted him, he answered, ‘Well, all niggers look alike to me and that includes you.’ According to one account, he also called her a ‘nigger bitch’. Horne promptly hurled an ashtray at him, followed by a storm lamp and various other objects. St Vincent was coldcocked, dazed and bleeding when the police arrived. Horne was fiercely unapologetic, and her defence of black dignity was applauded in some mainstream newspapers as well as the Negro press. A few weeks later, the Reverend King visited LA churches to extol nonviolence as ‘the most potent weapon of oppressed people in a struggle for freedom’, but civil-rights activists may well have wondered if the occasional flying ashtray wasn’t a good idea as well.¹⁷

MARCH: THE JIVE WITH JOBS

Johnny Otis, the ‘godfather of rhythm and blues’, seemed to be everywhere in 1960. He had his own weekly TV and radio shows, a famous band that showcased local talent, and a popular column in the *Sentinel*, the largest of the city’s three Black newspapers. In the early fifties, however, his integrated concerts—he himself was Greek—had become the target of such intense LAPD harassment that he was forced to move them to an obscure venue in the eastern San Gabriel Valley. As an inadvertent result, the El Monte Legion Stadium became legendary as the birthplace of Chicano R&B. In 1958, *Willie and the Hand Jive* hit the Top Ten and introduced Otis to a new generation of teenagers. But he was almost as ubiquitous as a civil-rights activist as he was as a musician, songwriter and R&B impresario. Recently he had picketed a downtown Woolworth’s in solidarity with the Southern lunch-counter sit-ins, and he would soon

¹⁷ I rely here on accounts of the Luau incident in the biographies by Horne’s daughter, Gail Lumet Buckley: *The Hornes: An American Family*, New York 1986, pp. 242–3; and James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*, New York 2009, pp. 295–7. Gavin provides a rich account of her friendships on the Left and her admiration for Malcolm X. For King’s visit to LA, see *LA Times*, 25 February 1960.

file as a candidate in the race for the 63rd Assembly District, with the support of Loren Miller's *Eagle*.¹⁸

On the evening of 14 March, he was at home with his four children, playing chess with a friend. His dog began to bark and then the phone rang. 'Listen, you nigger, if you keep on writing about niggers taking white men's jobs, this is just a sample of what you're going to get. Look out on your lawn.' There was a burning cross, Mississippi-style. Otis grabbed a shotgun. Meanwhile in Compton, fifteen minutes later, rocks shattered the front windows of John T. Williams's home, terrifying his three children. Williams, one of the great unsung heroes of the 1960s, was a Teamster activist who had taken up the cause of Andrew Saunders, a veteran union member and beer-truck driver recently arrived from Newark. Under the Teamster constitution Saunders had the right to transfer into Los Angeles Beer Local 203, and had been assured as much over the phone. But when officials discovered he was black, they sent him home. The Teamsters' beer locals, bottlers as well as drivers, were already notorious for their opposition to Anheuser-Busch's concession, after a nine-month consumer boycott by the NAACP, to allow Blacks to apply for jobs at its huge Van Nuys brewery.¹⁹ Williams, with two other black Teamsters, Richard Morris and Willie Herron, spoke up strongly for Saunders at union hearings that Otis attended and then wrote about in his *Sentinel* column. A few days before the attacks on Otis's and Williams's homes, Saunders received a death threat from the 'White Citizens Council'.²⁰ Although Saunders, unlike Emory Holmes, had the backing of courageous activists, his case demonstrated that resistance to equal-employment opportunity in Los Angeles could become just as violent as opposition to open housing.

The employment battlefield, however, was more complex than in the case of housing. Minorities sometimes had to fight unions as well as employers, and victories often proved hollow, as when Blacks and

¹⁸ *Eagle*, 2 June 1960. Otis emphasized the issue of drug addiction and the need for a state agency to rehabilitate young addicts. Although winning a majority of the Black vote in the district, he lost.

¹⁹ *LA Times*, 25 June 1958.

²⁰ *Eagle*, 11, 14 and 17 March 1960. The 'White Citizens Council' seems to have been a real group, notorious for the racist leaflets it distributed throughout LA County. See *Daily Defender* (Chicago), 30 March 1960.

Chicanos were hired only to be segregated in low-skill and dangerous jobs. For example, there were approximately 1,500 Black autoworkers in LA in 1960, but fewer than forty craftsmen. The only Black film-studio employees were janitors and messengers. Even in factories or firms where minorities held skilled jobs, they were almost never seen in clerical work or as sales representatives—an iron ceiling that especially affected minority women. Likewise in public employment—the Post Office, for example—integration tended to stop at the managerial level. Minority job markets, moreover, were ethnically segmented. Blacks were janitors, Mexicans dishwashers; Mexicans had an important foothold in the freight industry, Blacks none. Although their numbers were roughly equal in auto, rubber, construction, meat-packing and longshoring, Mexicans, who had entered the manufacturing workforce earlier than Blacks, were more likely to hold skilled jobs or belong to craft unions. On the other hand, Blacks constituted a much larger percentage of the civil-service workforce.²¹

Statutory relief was stubbornly elusive. In 1946, after Congress refused to renew the wartime Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), Augustus Hawkins had mobilized CIO councils and NAACP chapters to support a local initiative outlawing job discrimination by both employers and unions. Proposition 11, denounced by business groups, the Farm Bureau and the *Times*, was rejected by a stunning two-thirds majority of white voters.²² (Twenty years later the same proportion of the white vote would strike down the state's new fair-housing law.) Three further attempts to pass a law failed in the state senate. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles City Council in the 1950s repeatedly rejected proposed municipal FEPC ordinances, although a major effort by a coalition of Jewish, Black and Mexican-American groups in 1958 came within one vote of success. They were opposed by the Chamber of Commerce, the Merchants and Manufacturers Association and, again, the *Times*, whose political editor, Kyle Palmer, linked the proposed ordinance with the union shop as minority attacks on majority democracy.²³

²¹ Scott Greer, *Last Man In: Racial Access to Union Power*, Glencoe, IL 1959, pp. 39, 51, 171–3 (table 1); Herbert Northrup, *Negro Employment in Basic Industries*, Philadelphia 1970, pp. 68, 360.

²² Anthony Chen et al., 'Explaining the Contemporary Alignment of Race and Party: Evidence from California's 1946 Ballot Initiative on Fair Employment', *Studies in American Political Development*, vol. 22, no. 2, Fall 2008.

²³ *LA Times*, 8 January and 9 February 1958.

Without government oversight of hiring practices, only unions had the power to keep the door open to workers of colour, but the 1949 national purge of the CIO's left wing was locally disastrous, removing many of Los Angeles's most forceful advocates of fair employment and housing. Although the Packinghouse Workers' large LA local remained a paragon of equality, Jim Crow had undiminished support in major AFL unions such as the Machinists, who represented Lockheed and Vultee aircraft workers, the super-nepotistic motion-picture crafts and the skilled construction trades. The oil workers, for their part, refused to implement their own non-discriminatory constitution.²⁴ Even the San Pedro local of the otherwise leftwing ILWU was accused of systematic discrimination.²⁵ As for the rapidly growing and increasingly powerful Teamsters, A. Philip Randolph, the legendary leader of the Sleeping Car Porters and architect of the wartime March on Washington movement, had told a 1958 conference in Los Angeles that the conduct of its locals made Southern California 'one of the worst spots in the United States for racial discrimination by unions'.

Finally in 1959 there was a dramatic breakthrough in Sacramento, when 'Big Daddy' Jesse Unruh, the Los Angeles Assembly member who chaired the crucial Ways and Means Committee, threw his weight behind FEPC legislation with the full support of recently elected Governor Pat Brown. The bill that Gus Hawkins and his Bay Area counterpart Bryan Rumford had been pushing uphill for fourteen frustrating years finally become law. Unruh, a dirt-poor white Texan who had enrolled in USC after leaving the Navy in 1945, was brilliant, ruthless and genuinely committed to equal rights.²⁶ After passage of the FEPC, he authored a bill in his own name that straightforwardly banned discrimination by 'all business establishments of every kind whatsoever'. The NAACP feared the bill was too radical to have any chance of passage, but Unruh, in a masterful demonstration of how to wield power in Sacramento, won the day. Now

²⁴ Northrup, *Negro Employment*, p. 543.

²⁵ *LA Times*, 29 April 1960.

²⁶ On the other hand, Unruh's chief financial backer was Howard Ahmanson, a moderate Republican whose giant Home Savings was deeply implicated in housing segregation and would be picketed by CORE in 1963. Ahmanson and his cronies provided the financial resources that enabled Unruh to develop his own powerful Democrat faction in Sacramento and Los Angeles: Eric Abrahamson, *Building Home: Howard F. Ahmanson and the Politics of the American Dream*, Berkeley 2013, p. 188.

it remained to be seen whether the new state FEPC could grow the teeth needed to actually enforce the new laws.²⁷

Meanwhile aerospace, the biggest industry in Los Angeles County, was bleeding tens of thousands of semi-skilled jobs. Blue-collar workers everywhere felt the tremors of the so-called Eisenhower recession of 1959–60, but in Southern California the primary reason for layoffs was the advent of the Space Age. The metamorphosis of airframe manufacture, with its Detroit-like assembly lines, into the high-tech aerospace industry created an insatiable demand for engineers and technicians while sharply reducing the need for welders and assemblers. The transition was wrenching. Between 1957 and 1963, 80,000 workers were laid off in aircraft assembly while 90,000 new jobs were created in electronics and missiles. The rapid change in skill sets and required education raised new ‘non-racial’ barriers to minority entry into the industry, as did the seniority system protecting older whites. Although minority engineers and technicians now faced few obstacles to employment (indeed they were migrating into LA from all parts of the country), it was little solace to those who had been fighting so long for a place on a North American or Lockheed assembly line. Black workers found themselves chasing a mirage of jobs about to be restructured, eliminated by automation or moved to segregated suburbs.

APRIL: GAME THEORY

Santa Monica in 1960 was still the three-shift company town of Douglas Aircraft. The huge factory complex at the Santa Monica airport, which at its peak in 1943 had employed 44,000 workers, was the bread and butter of the city where Route 66 met the Pacific. Douglas was also the mother (the Air Force was the father) of ‘Project RAND’, a secret weapons-planning and strategy group that moved out on its own in 1948 to become the RAND Corporation. RAND’s core mission for the Air Force was to make nuclear warfare, including a possible preemptive strike on

²⁷ Mark Brilliant contrasts the success of the NAACP in legislating its agenda to the failure of the Community Service Organization, its Mexican-American counterpart, to win support for a minimum agricultural wage and an end to the *bracero* programme. Farm workers apparently were at the bottom of Brown’s liberal agenda: *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941–1987*, New York 2010, pp. 165–70.

the Soviet Union, feasible. To accomplish this it was given the resources to hire the best minds in mathematics and decision theory, putting them to work in an atmosphere that was casually academic rather than oppressively military or corporate. Indeed Albert Wohlstetter, RAND's *Meister* of nuclear strategy, encouraged his younger colleagues, such as 29-year-old Daniel Ellsberg, to embrace the exhilarating Southern Californian lifestyle. RANDites surfed, listened to jazz, sent their kids to progressive private schools, collected contemporary art and lived in modernist 'case-study' homes in the hills. Many were Kennedy Democrats. At their own Laurel Canyon home, the Wohlstetters regularly entertained such stimulating company as Saul Bellow, Mies van der Rohe and Mary McCarthy.

But these were just the sunny fringe benefits of a RAND job; it was the work itself that provided a unique, addictive and bizarre excitement. The RAND people played Armageddon for weeks and months at a time. These Strangelovian games were organized around actual or probable crises—for instance, a Soviet blockade of Berlin or a Chinese invasion of Taiwan—with the goal of clarifying the criteria for the use of nuclear weapons. New mathematical models were used to explore the logical structure of strategic decision-making. 'By the mid-1950s', writes Alex Abella in his history, 'RAND became the world centre for game theory.' John von Neumann, Kenneth Arrow, John Nash—the giants of 'rational choice' and game theoretics—worked at RAND during the 1950s in the quixotic quest for a solution to the 'Prisoner's Dilemma' (a problem first formulated by RAND researchers in 1950). The essence of the Dilemma was that two rational opponents might choose *not* to cooperate, and thereby fail to avoid nuclear war. Daniel Ellsberg, one of many at RAND struggling with the grim implications of game theory, became so pessimistic about the future that he didn't bother to subscribe to the life insurance offered by the Corporation.²⁸ The Cuban Missile Crisis was just around the corner.

Meanwhile another game, 'The Game' in fact, was being played down the street from RAND in the brick three-storey building at 1351 Ocean Front Avenue that housed the Synanon Foundation. Its founder, Chuck Dederich, a former executive and recovered alcoholic, had been very

²⁸ See Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire*, Boston 2008, p. 54. Paula Dinnerstein, the daughter of a prominent RAND scholar, was a founder of the first high-school SDS chapter (Pacific Palisades High) in 1965.

active in AA, but became disillusioned by its refusal to help drug addicts as well as the formulaic nature of its group sessions. Synanon was a racially integrated therapeutic commune organized around hours-long group confrontations, emotionally explosive and often terrifying to newcomers, that aimed to destroy self-deception while fostering a tough 'intimate honesty' between participants. No hint of violence was tolerated in The Game but participants were otherwise free to use language as a sledgehammer. Dederich, who was 'fair game' like everyone else, was frank about the perils of the process. 'The Game is a big emotional dance and it's like a dream. It's random. Some dreams are nightmares.'²⁹

In the event, Synanon seemed to work, as former addicts successfully helped newcomers through the torture of cold-turkey withdrawal, and hundreds of vulnerable people, ranging from celebrities to San Quentin parolees, managed to live together in some harmony. In the later 1960s, the community would turn to activism, supporting the Farmworkers' Union and the Black Panther breakfast programme. (Cesar Chavez, in the late 1970s, when the union was losing ground and its organizers were becoming discontented, became obsessed with The Game and forced his staff to play it on a marathon basis with ultimately disastrous results.³⁰) But whether seen as therapy or an alternative way of life, Synanon was anathema to civic leaders, who feared that Santa Monica would be deluged with addicts rather than tourists. They prosecuted, sued and then re-sued the foundation for years, with Synanon always winning a last-minute reprieve from eviction, but never exoneration from accusations of being a cult or criminal conspiracy. In contrast, the city council had no qualms about pipe-smoking RANDites sitting around a seminar table and quietly discussing how many millions of casualties would be 'acceptable' in the event of a nuclear exchange.

MAY: THE INDEPENDENT STUDENT UNION

On 2 May, just minutes before his long-delayed appointment in San Quentin's gas chamber, Caryl Chessman's lawyers made a final,

²⁹ Rod Janzen, *The Rise and Fall of Synanon: A California Utopia*, Baltimore 2001, p. 13.

³⁰ For a detailed and disturbing account, see 'The Game' in Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers*, London and New York 2012.

desperate appeal to Federal Judge Louis Goodman in San Francisco to stay the execution. Goodman reluctantly agreed to hear their arguments and asked his secretary to get Warden Fred Dickson on the phone. The secretary dialed the wrong number. By the time he reached the warden, Chessman's face was already contorted and purple from cyanide fumes and Dickson refused to stop the process. The *Los Angeles Times*, which had earlier lauded the gas chamber as a 'sanitary disposal mechanism', termed Chessman's execution a 'breath of fresh air' (a bizarre metaphor given the manner of death), but millions around the world thought it was a miscarriage of justice.³¹

Since his original conviction in 1948 for kidnapping (a capital crime under California's Little Lindbergh Law), Chessman, representing himself, had won a sensational series of last-minute reprieves from the gas chamber and published a bestselling memoir, *Cell 2455, Death Row*, which was made into a 1955 film. Although he protested his innocence to the last breath, the real issue in the case became the barbarous nature of the death penalty itself. After losing a last appeal in 1959, Chessman was supposed to die the following February but Governor Brown, stalked by young protestors—including his own seminarian son Jerry—and inundated with clemency appeals from around the world, blinked at the last moment and stayed the execution for two months. This only unleashed fury from the right as Republican legislators, seeing an opportunity to avenge their epic defeat in 1958, called for the Governor's impeachment. Brown, worried about collateral damage to his proposed Master Plan for the colleges and upcoming State Water System bonds, punted the issue to the Legislature in the form of a bill to abolish the death penalty. He knew it had no chance of passage.

The Chessman protests in February coincided with the Southern sit-ins, while the execution in March was followed within two weeks by the so-called 'HUAC riots' in San Francisco when police used batons and fire hoses to violently disperse Berkeley students (including Albert Einstein's granddaughter) peacefully demonstrating against hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Meanwhile, the Cuban Revolution was turning leftward—in March, Eisenhower had given permission to start training exiles for an invasion—and the international Ban the Bomb movement was burgeoning: over Easter 1960, 100,000

³¹ *LA Times*, editorial, 20 February 1960.

Britons rallied in support of the Aldermaston peace march. Together these events catalyzed the birth of a new student activism on California campuses, with Berkeley, of course, as the nominal capital.³²

In Southern California the foremost example was Los Angeles City College where a spontaneous anti-death penalty rally in the winter, the first protest on campus in years, led to the formation of a multi-issue activist group, the Independent Student Union.³³ While continuing to work on the Chessman case, the LACC students quickly joined the CORE-coordinated demonstrations at local Kress and Woolworth stores and by August were sponsoring three weekly picket lines. On 7 May, after extensive leafleting to unions and on campuses across LA, the ISU led a nine-hour Ban the Bomb march of 300 people from MacArthur Park to the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium—a distance of seventeen miles—where Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling spoke. Meanwhile, a rally of 300 sit-in supporters at Exposition Park in late May led to the formation of the Southern California Committee on Integration, with Walter Davis, who was organizing an ISU group at Cal State LA, as one of its leaders. In late October, still picketing the chain stores every Saturday, the LACC group mobilized 200 protestors outside a tribute dinner for a local member of HUAC.³⁴

This was an impressive record of protest, especially for students on a junior college campus at the end of the 1950s. But LACC was an ethnic salad bowl of inner-city students, and despite a reactionary administration, perhaps the most likely campus for the inauguration of a new generation of protest. A nearby coffee house, Pogo's Swamp, provided a home for freewheeling political debate. The ISU, unlike later student groups, was solidly multiracial and two of its most charismatic leaders, both South

³² SLATE, which had played a leading role in the anti-HUAC demonstrations, sponsored a statewide conference in late July to discuss the coordination of student action.

³³ The students linked up with the local 'Ad Hoc Committee on the Chessman Case' led by Dr Isidore Zifferstein, a UCLA psychiatrist and prominent peace activist; Phil Kerby, publisher of *Frontier* magazine who later moved to the *Times*; and Dr William Graves, a former medic at San Quentin.

³⁴ *Independent Student*, June and September 1960 issues from the files of Ellen (Kleinman) Broms. See also *LA Times*, 1 May and 27 October 1960; *Eagle*, 26 May 1960.

Central locals, were young Communists.³⁵ The ISU was short-lived, but its members continued to play important roles in the growth of CORE as the leading direct-action group in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Some also joined the CP-oriented Youth Action Union, which, in turn, became the Los Angeles Du Bois Clubs in 1964. Youth members of the Southern California Communist Party, notorious for their frequent disregard of the party line and lack of enthusiasm for the USSR, were a stable multi-racial 'cadre', who maintained a high level of activism and movement leadership for the next decade. Whether 'new' or not, they were certainly the first young and multiracial left in Los Angeles in a generation.

JUNE: FIRE RINGS

A spectre haunted Los Angeles in the summer of 1960: beach fire rings. Captain Robert Richards of the Venice Division of the LAPD warned the press that the five rings at Playa Del Rey Beach would 'sooner or later' be the scene of a riot. He cited instances of unsupervised teenagers gathered around beach fires, drinking and necking. When told to leave, 'they become angry and vandalize property'. The County had already taken action against such anarchy by closing its beaches at night. Surf fishermen protested, and sheriffs replied that they would only enforce the law against 'loiterers', that is to say, juveniles and young adults.³⁶ Los Angeles, it seemed, had too many beaches, too many deserted roads, too many spaces where young libidos and imaginations ran wild. Black and Chicano kids, of course, were used to being denied access to public space, but white teenagers were now seen as a comparable problem, not as individual delinquents like those depicted in *Rebel Without a Cause*, but as rowdy defiant crowds.

³⁵ Carl Bloice, a speaker at the first Chessman rally, would move to the Bay Area and become editor of the *People's World*; Franklin Alexander, the ISU President, would become chair of the Che-Lumumba Club that Angela Davis joined in 1968. Three key leaders of the future Black Power movement were also *habitués* of Pogo's Swamp and the ISU milieu: Ron Everett; Ed Bullins, a central figure in the Black Arts Movement; and Tom Reed, the nephew of the great St Louis bluesman Walter Davis, who later became the famed 'Master Blaster' on KGFJ, LA's premier soul station. See George Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse: The Johnny Otis Story*, Minneapolis 2010, p. 76.

³⁶ *LA Times*, 26 June and 28 August 1960.

Captain Richards's warning seemed prescient when, in August 1960, 3,000 young people in San Diego, angry at the closure of the only local drag strip, blocked off a main street to race their '40 Fords and '57 Chevys. The arriving police were greeted with a hail of softdrink bottles and rocks; it took baton charges, tear gas and Highway Patrol reinforcements to finally quell the hot-rodders. Over a hundred were arrested. The city's ultra-conservative daily paper immediately discerned 'a family relationship' between the riot, the Southern sit-ins and the supposed targeting of youth by Communists. According to one syndicated columnist, the Reds were also encouraging kids to organize 'sex clubs' on their high-school campuses. Los Angeles meanwhile braced for its turn, and in 1961 ten so-called 'teen riots' erupted in a six-month period; three of them involving thousands of young people. These were not trivial events. The subsequent political activism and youth culture of the sixties would be built upon this substratum of rebellion against curfews, closed beaches, disciplinary vice-principals, draft boards and racist cops. Indeed spontaneous anti-authoritarianism would define the temper of an entire generation.³⁷

JULY: THE DEMOCRATS COME TO TOWN

The 1960 Democratic Convention at the new Los Angeles Sports Arena is remembered for the battle between Kennedy and Johnson for the nomination, both of whom were almost upstaged by an emotional last-minute rally for Adlai Stevenson. It was also the occasion of a bitter breach between Jesse Unruh, who had already endorsed JFK, and Governor Brown, who was running as a favourite-son candidate.³⁸ It was also a unique opportunity for the nuclear disarmament and civil-rights movements to strut their stuff on television and, for the latter, to directly confront the candidates about their plans to dismantle segregation.

The day before the opening of the Convention, 3,000 supporters of a nuclear-test ban marched from MacArthur Park to Exposition Park, to

³⁷ This thesis is elaborated in 'Bad as the H-Bomb', in Mike Davis, *Dead Cities*, New York 2002, pp. 207–25.

³⁸ 'Brown lost face, and Unruh, who had mostly been a loyal servant to the governor, became the Kennedys' lieutenant in California': Ethan Rarick, *The Life and Times of Pat Brown: California Rising*, Berkeley 2005, p. 202.

hear Linus Pauling, fresh from an interrogation by the Senate Internal Security subcommittee, and General Hugh Hester. Hester had won a Silver Star in the First World War and was a quartermaster to MacArthur in the Second, but the nuclear-arms race, he told the crowd, had turned him into an 'atomic pacifist'. The sponsoring groups included the American Friends Service Committee, which later during the Vietnam War would play a central role in supporting conscientious objectors and draft resisters; SANE, the largest mainstream peace group, internally wracked since May by accusations that it had been infiltrated by Communists; and the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women's Clubs, the reliable old guard in any peace or civil-rights demonstration. A new group also announced itself at the demonstration: the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). The youth wing of the Socialist Workers' Party, the main Trotskyist group in the United States, its members would become indefatigable, if often sectarian, builders of the local and national anti-war movements from 1965 onward.

As usual, it was Bayard Rustin, a master strategist of protest, and A. Philip Randolph, who proposed mass demonstrations to force the 1960s presidential conventions to hear the demands of the civil-rights movement. Accordingly in June, King and Randolph announced a 'March on the Conventions' movement targeting the Democrats in LA and the Republicans in Chicago: 'The 1960 elections will be farce unless more than 10 million Negroes in the South have the opportunity to vote.' Of both parties and the Eisenhower administration they demanded the federal registration of voters in the South, injunctions to prevent violence against demonstrators, an end to discrimination by firms doing business with the federal government, 'an anti-lynch law with teeth in it', enforcement of the Supreme Court's ruling on school integration, and a foreign policy that opposed apartheid and colonialism. Addressing the Democrats specifically, they asked the National Convention to unseat and expel 'white supremacists, racists and Dixiecrats in your ranks'. Although now a forgotten moment in civil-rights history, this was the first attempt in the post-war period to define a broad national platform for equality.³⁹

³⁹ 'Joint Platform Proposals to the 1960 Democratic Party Platform Committee', 7 July 1960, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. 5, pp. 482–5. (Henceforward, *MLK Papers*.) The Democrats predictably adopted a civil-rights plank full of soaring sentiment and totally devoid of concrete pledges.

On 10 July, King led 5,000 demonstrators from the Shrine Auditorium to the Sports Arena where Democratic Party chairman Paul Butler greeted them on behalf of the Convention. 'We dedicate ourselves to the elimination of all discriminatory practices at the earliest possible moment without violence.' The marchers were not pleased and began to chant 'No! No! Now—not later!'⁴⁰ This was exactly the show of force and impatience that King and Randolph had hoped would goad the Democrats. The demonstrators marched back to the Shrine where several thousand others were waiting. Loren Miller, who would know, described it as the largest Negro political gathering since the 1940s. The *Eagle* had polled a sample of the community and found universal opposition to LBJ and some support for Kennedy. Stevenson however remained far and away the most popular choice. When Kennedy arrived at the Shrine, the crowd, which had been jeering the names of Truman and Johnson, continued to boo, very disconcertingly, as he entered the auditorium. Adam Clayton Powell, Harlem's flamboyant outlaw congressman, stole the show as he usually did with urban Black audiences. The enthusiastic crowd, however, was unaware that Powell—egged on by Roy Wilkins of the NAACP—had opposed the convention protests, apparently out of fear that Southern Democrats would retaliate and deny him a committee chairmanship; he was conducting an ugly smear campaign, worthy of Strom Thurmond, against Randolph, accused of taking orders from white socialists, and King, whom he insinuated (absurdly) was in a homosexual relationship with Bayard Rustin.⁴¹ Unable to play a public role in Los Angeles, Rustin had sent Michael Harrington, a 32-year-old white socialist who had been a protégé of Randolph's, to help organize the march as well as a picket vigil for the length of the convention. Two years later, Harrington's searing exposé of forgotten poverty in the United States, *The Other America*, would become not only a bestseller but the catalyst for the War on Poverty. The indispensable Rustin would

⁴⁰ *Daily Defender* (Chicago), 12 July 1960.

⁴¹ Clayborne Carson, 'Introduction', in *MLK Papers*, pp. 31–2. Rustin had the misfortune of being a pacifist, a socialist and gay. Nat Hentoff, the *Village Voice's* political conscience, deplored King's failure to defend Rustin against Powell's calumnies: 'King by temperament is not a fighter. He is appalled at prospects of "division" within "the movement". Accordingly he sometimes will not only not fight for himself, but he will also not support subordinates.' (Nat Hentoff, 'Adam Clayton Powell: What Price Principle?', *Village Voice*, 14 July 1960—cited by Carson in footnote 157, p. 31.)

return to organize the 1963 March on Washington. Black Los Angeles meanwhile saw a reflection of its potential power.

AUGUST: ZONING BY FREEWAY

In August 1960, the California Division of Highways began to excavate the equivalent of the Panama Canal in the Sepulveda Pass between west Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. This segment of the San Diego Freeway—supplanting Sepulveda Boulevard and its infamous ‘Dead Man’s Curve’—would uncork the worst traffic bottleneck in Southern California and humanize (for a few years at least) the drive between the aerospace plants around LAX and the homes of engineers and technicians in Sherman Oaks and Reseda. If the giant Caterpillar earthmovers were symbols of liberation to middle-class commuters, they had more sinister significance for the communities they divided or destroyed. Ground Zero of residential displacement in Southern California was the star-shaped ring of freeways around Downtown which sliced the Eastside into half a dozen pieces, consuming 20 per cent of its land area and forever enshrouding its playgrounds and schools in carcinogenic pollution. The great stacked interchanges, still engineering wonders of the world in the early 1960s, had been sited on residential and park land to avoid any conflict with adjacent railroad classification yards or the huge Sears Roebuck distribution centre in Boyle Heights. The cruellest cut of all, the neighbourhood-devouring Pomona Freeway, was just starting its home-demolition phase. The logic was impeccable: inner-city residential property was easier to condemn, cheaper to buy and risked less of a political backlash.⁴²

Affluent neighbourhoods, on the other hand, had dismaying clout. Although the Division of Highways wanted to construct freeways down Olympic Boulevard, across Beverly Hills, and through Laurel Canyon, wealthy homeowners and celebrities eventually nixed the latter two projects and forced planners to re-route the Santa Monica Freeway southward to avoid country clubs and exclusive white neighbourhoods.

⁴² See Gilbert Estrada, ‘If You Build It, They Will Move: The Los Angeles Freeway System and the Displacement of Mexican East Los Angeles, 1944–1972’, *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 3, Fall 2005, pp. 287–315.

Instead of Cheviot Hills, ‘Sugar Hill’—formally, Berkeley Square—the elite Black neighbourhood on West Adams, was sacrificed to the bulldozers, while angry Black and Chicano residents of Santa Monica’s Pico neighbourhood protested throughout Fall 1960 against a final alignment demolishing most of their homes. (As John T. Williams would point out in 1963, none of the skilled labour employed on the freeway’s construction was Black.)⁴³ By its opening in 1965 the Santa Monica Freeway had displaced 15,000 people; all the freeways, perhaps 150,000.⁴⁴ The priorities of suburban mobility thus translated into housing disasters for segregated inner-city populations, whose own transport situation simultaneously deteriorated with the extinction of metropolitan rail transit. The famous Pacific Electric red cars would trundle down the tracks to Long Beach for a last time in April 1961. The streetcars would disappear a few years later, and their diesel-powered replacements never fully compensated for the loss.

SEPTEMBER: TOXIC BOHEMIA

Stinking, muck-filled canals; tired pumpjacks dribbling oil; abandoned bungalows; semi-derelict arcades, kids shooting heroin in the alleys, ‘hobo jungles’, beatnik coffeehouses, outlaw bikers—in September 1960 Mayor Norris Poulson said it was finally time to clean up Venice, LA’s dilapidated Coney Island. The city would begin by chasing the bums off the beach and scouring the toxic canals. The first goal nicely dovetailed with the LAPD’s war on nocturnal beach parties and non-conformists, while the second—so the street maintenance department told the Mayor—would just require flushing out the canals with seawater. When the ocean gates were opened, however, the reaction of the seawater with the bacteria and organic matter in the stagnant canals produced a ‘vile gas’, ‘peeling paint off of many homes and changing colours of others’. Within a few days, the gas had seeped through kitchen and bathroom vents and was discolouring interior walls and furniture. At least 150

⁴³ *Sentinel*, 27 June 1963. Williams was furious that the state FEPC, despite Unruh’s promises, had taken no significant action to end rampant discrimination on public works.

⁴⁴ *LA Times*, 30 September and 16 October 1955 (fight over routing of Santa Monica Freeway); 11 April 1966 (number displaced). Adding Orange County, David Brodsky estimates more than a quarter of a million people were moved. See *LA Freeway: An Appreciative Essay*, Berkeley 1981.

homes were damaged and stunned residents found it difficult to accept official reassurances that chemicals that dissolved paint would not harm their children and pets. They sued the city.⁴⁵

The gas attack, however, was not an unmitigated disaster. Venice's toxic pollution raised the costs and slowed the pace of redevelopment, thus keeping rents down and making it the most affordable beach community in California until the early 1970s. Lawrence Lipton's *The Holy Barbarians*, published in June 1959, had advertised Venice as the counterpart of North Beach or the Village, a paradise of sexual promiscuity, mind-expanding drugs and stream-of-consciousness poetry. In fact, as John Arthur Maynard shows in his history of the Beats in Southern California, Venice bohemia in the 1950s had never involved more than thirty or forty people, most of whom had passed from the scene by 1960. But Lipton was a superb booster and *The Holy Barbarians* became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁴⁶ In the early sixties the Venice West Coffeehouse, owned by John and Anna Haag, became a hub for a growing radical community of artists, folksingers, communist carpenters, runaways, blacklisted writers, war resisters and, of course, scribblers of all kinds. Police harassment was unremitting, but so was community resistance. Venice's new golden age was still to come.

OCTOBER: THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT

In October, Henry Zivitz, local leader of the American Federation of Teachers, accused the Board of Education of blatant discrimination for refusing to assign or transfer Black teachers to schools in majority-white areas. 'Our present policy helps to perpetuate a *de facto* segregation of teachers to the degree that in vast areas . . . the number of Negro teachers may be counted on the fingers of one hand, while in other areas, the concentration of Negro teachers bears a disturbing relationship to the concentration of Negro students.' His charges echoed those made a year earlier by the Black educator Wilson Riles to the California committee advising the US Commission on Civil Rights. In the midst of an acute teacher shortage, he reported that there were hundreds of fully

⁴⁵ *LA Times*, 18 September, 25 September, 2 October 1960.

⁴⁶ John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California*, New Brunswick, NJ 1991, pp. 107–13.

credentialled Black teachers who could not find jobs. Rather than hiring experienced Blacks to teach in suburban schools, California was giving thousands of provisional credentials to unqualified whites, half of whom had not yet completed college. 'Out of the 108 school districts in Los Angeles County', Riles had reported, 'only 12 employ Negroes'. (One district, Hermosa Beach, also refused to hire Jews.)⁴⁷

As for integration, the School Board insisted that the racial composition of schools was strictly a reflection of housing patterns; in any event, it no longer collected data about such matters. But as historian and integration activist John Caughey would repeatedly point out: 'On the residential set of minorities largely brought on by court-enforced restrictive covenants, the school authorities superimposed its set of enrollment regulations that implacably resulted in segregated schooling.' Although a small minority of schools would meet latter-day standards of 'racial balance', including Dorsey High School in the Crenshaw district, the overall racial isolation of students was extreme: later estimates would suggest that over 90 per cent of Black students and two-thirds of Mexican students were assigned to segregated schools. The quality of education moreover usually reflected the degree of segregation: Jordan High School in Watts, for example, had a chronic 50 per cent dropout rate. 'One of the most tragic sights in the ghetto', one UCLA researcher observed, 'is that of an intelligent and articulate youngster who can barely read or write.'⁴⁸ The campaign for integrated schools in Los Angeles didn't begin until 1962, but the subsequent legal battle continued for decades and precipitated an angry white backlash in the San Fernando Valley that eventually squashed court-ordered busing for racial balance.

NOVEMBER: DOWNTOWN IN QUESTION

Contractors in November began pouring concrete for the 50,000-seat Dodger Stadium in what was once the Chavez Ravine barrio. In February the City Housing Authority, which had originally cleared the area for public housing, had quit-deeded it to the City Council who in turn leased it to Walter O'Malley for 99 years. Epic resistance by residents

⁴⁷ *LA Times*, 21 May 1959 and 21 October 1960; *Hearings*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Paul Bullock, 'Watts: A View from the Outside', in Bullock, ed., *Watts: The Aftermath: An Inside View of the Ghetto*, New York 1969, pp. 238, 246.

had ended the previous year when the Arechiga family, the last hold-outs, were dragged literally kicking and screaming from their home. Meanwhile the 5,000 or so low-income residents of Bunker Hill, LA's famously *noir* slum on a hill, awaited the final court decree that would allow the Community Redevelopment Agency to begin condemnations and evictions. Opponents of the project claimed that the city government had tried by mostly illegal and arbitrary means to keep Bunker Hill as a slum to enable cut-price eminent domain purchases.⁴⁹ Whatever the case, the hope of transforming the neighbourhood and its Victorian cliff-dwellings into a shining acropolis of expensive apartment buildings and modernist office towers had become a cargo cult to the old LA dynasties and institutions (including the University of Southern California), whose fortunes were sunk in declining downtown real estate. Their high command was the notorious 'Committee of Twenty-Five', headed by insurance executive Asa Call and backed to the hilt by Norman Chandler of the *Times*.

But a future 'downtown renaissance' anchored by Bunker Hill redevelopment seemed mortally threatened by the simultaneous ground-breaking on Century City—an immense high-rise office and residential centre being constructed by Manhattan mega-developer William Zeckendorf and ALCOA on the former back lot of 20th Century Fox, just south of Beverly Hills. Despite the *LA Times*-engineered conservative restoration of 1953, economic and cultural power in the eyes of many observers was inexorably shifting away from the Waspish and Republican central city toward the Jewish and more liberal Westside. From the perspective of the old power structure—or at least its reactionary majority—Downtown was becoming dangerously encircled by minority neighbourhoods and any weakening of the colour line, whether by increased minority political clout or residential integration, would only hasten the decline of their power.

DECEMBER: VOICELESS IN EAST LA

Amongst large American cities outside the South, Los Angeles until 1970 had the highest proportion of white Protestants. It was not an accident: Los Angeles industrial boosters in the 1920s did not favour a large

⁴⁹ *LA Times*, 4 November, 15 November 1960.

'trouble-making' labour force of immigrant Slavs, Jews and Italians, as in Eastern cities. Employment preference at the new auto and rubber branch plants, as well as in the skilled trades, went to sober working-class Protestants with a mortgage. The exceptions were sweatshop industries like garments, food-processing and furniture, as well as fishing and casual labour. In the first half of the twentieth century, the city's only truly multi-ethnic districts were San Pedro and Boyle Heights. The latter was LA's 'Brooklyn', with no majority ethnicity. The biggest population groups were Jews and Mexicans, followed by Japanese, Blacks, Armenians, Yugoslavs, Italians, Molokans (a persecuted Russian religious sect) and Okies. In contrast to other parts of LA as well as nearby white suburbs, Boyle Heights and adjacent Eastside neighbourhoods had gloriously integrated schools, playgrounds, swimming pools and even a local cemetery. Edward Roybal, the only Mexican to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council between 1881 and 1985, had been the candidate of a 1949 popular front that included Jews and Blacks as well as Mexicans.

By 1960, however, the Eastside had decanted most of its Jewish population to the Westside, and Boyle Heights, although still surprisingly diverse, was majority-Mexican and would become progressively more so over time. Despite the concerted voter registration efforts over the previous decade of the Community Services Organization, Los Angeles's Mexican population (260,389) possessed only marginal political clout; when Roybal went to Congress in 1962, it would be twenty-three years before it was again represented on the City Council (Richard Alatorre in 1985).⁵⁰ Freeway construction had significantly displaced Mexican voters in Roybal's district, leaving it with a Black political majority who elected Gilbert Lindsay, the future 'Emperor of Downtown', and kept him in office for the next twenty-seven years. Moreover the impact of the Mexican-American vote was sabotaged by political boundaries: 70,000 Eastsiders lived on the other side of Indiana Street (where the *pueblo* street layout became the Jeffersonian grid) in a county enclave called East Los Angeles. Unincorporated, East LA had insignificant influence over a county government administered by five supervisors with huge electoral districts.

⁵⁰ In 1960 there were 629,292 Spanish-surname residents of Los Angeles and Orange Counties versus 461,546 Blacks. But the Black population of the city of Los Angeles, 334,916, was considerably larger than the Mexican, 260,389: *US Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960 Census Tracts Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif* SMSA, Washington, DC 1962.

Incorporated, however, East LA might become a powerbase for Chicano political aspirations. The idea caught fire in the spring and summer of 1960. A prominent advocate of cityhood, Father William Hutson of the Catholic Youth Organization, even suggested that it might aid the United States in the Cold War. 'In a time when *Fidelismo* is making strides among Latin Americans', the incorporation of East Los Angeles 'would make the residents better Americans'.⁵¹ In August, the Committee to Incorporate East Los Angeles, led by attorney Joseph Galea, submitted a petition signed by 7,000 property owners to the Board of Supervisors; in December the supervisors heard contending arguments. The enemies of cityhood included business owners along Atlantic and Whittier boulevards (majority Anglo) who feared higher taxes, and white homeowners from a new tract in the area's northwest corner (West Bella Vista) unwilling to accept Mexican-American dominance.⁵² What blindsided proponents, however, was the decision of labour leaders led by IBEW Local 11 to oppose cityhood without even hearing the arguments for incorporation. 'We state without qualification', Galea and another community leader told a press conference, 'that COPE, as the strategic right arm of political action for the AFL-CIO, has in Southern California consistently supported those interests that have opposed the development of Mexican-American leadership and the expansion of Mexican-American influence. We would like to feel that this is not due to racial bias or prejudice. However, it's a little hard to try to figure otherwise . . .'.⁵³ In the event, cityhood was narrowly defeated in April 1960.

Ruben Salazar, the *Times's* only Chicano journalist, wrote: 'At a time in Southern California when new cities are popping up like toadstools after a rain, East Los Angeles—which perhaps had better reasons to incorporate than other areas because of its supposed homogeneity—turned down incorporation by 340 votes.'⁵⁴ (Over the next half century there would be three more closely fought but failed attempts at incorporation.) In contrast to Los Angeles's Black community with its national civil-rights organizations and incipient alliances with liberals on the Westside, Mexican-Americans had no representation in the Legislature

⁵¹ *LA Times*, 8 January 1961.

⁵² *LA Times*, 2 December 1960, 13 January 1961, 27 April 1961.

⁵³ *LA Times*, 25 March 1960. COPE disingenuously claimed to be 'opposed to all incorporations', when in reality it had made little or no protest against the earlier incorporation of several dozen segregated Lakewood Plan cities.

⁵⁴ *LA Times*, 27 February 1963.

or Congress, few allies, and a solitary representative—young Ruben Salazar, murdered in 1970 by a sheriff's deputy—in the English-language media. After 1965, ethnic competition for War on Poverty funds destroyed what little remained of the Black-Mexican political alliance. Eastsiders, spurned by City Hall and Sacramento, would wander in the political wilderness for the next generation.