

ABC's of Black Los Angeles's Coastal History

Forging modern Black community connection with
Los Angeles area beaches through remembering.



A

Accessibility: Directly defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “the quality of being able to be entered or used by everyone.” The California Constitution first recognized that coastal tidelands belong to the people of the state in 1849. However, 62% of voters in California listed access to the beach as an issue. Primarily driven by California’s Coastal Commission, community groups like Surfrider Foundation and Mujeres de la Tierra seek to bolster efforts to improve coastal access.

B

Bay Street Beach: This historic district in Santa Monica was an important place of recreation for Black Angelenos starting in the Jim Crow era. The 53-acre district provided a safe refuge for Black Americans to enjoy leisure time free of harassment.

Belmar Neighborhood: Santa Monica neighborhood where many Black Americans also settled, as one of the oldest Black American settlements in the California region.

Black Surfers Collective: Non-profit organization committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and empowering space for all people in the outdoors. Focuses on eliminating barriers to coastal accessibility, giving people of color the opportunity to enjoy the rhythmic, vibrant, and powerful experiences that beaches offer.

Black Ornithology: A means of understanding and relating to America’s birds developed by Black American enslaved people and documented in Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project. Black naturalist J. Drew Lanhan has discussed how beliefs and knowledge that different peoples hold through birds, describing his experience learning ornithology from his grandmother in South Carolina as “mystical before it was scientific.” For example, some people view birds as messengers, others metaphysical creatures, and others carrying spirits of the deceased.

Bruce’s Beach: Beachfront resort in Manhattan Beach owned and run by Willa and Charles Bruce, formally called Bruce’s Lodge. The resort held a restaurant, dancehall, changing rooms, and showers and was a lively meeting place for members of the Black community. In 1924, white locals successfully convinced the local government to condemn the property through eminent domain

Picnic at Santa Monica Beach - Sunday July 19, 1931.

UP-SIDE-DOWN



Pearlita Johnson - LaVera



July 17-31

LaVera - Margie



Margurite Robinson - Velma White and LaVera White



From left to right - BEGINNING AT TOP ROW

Edna Moore - Eda Johnson - Margie Johnson - LaVera White - Margurite Robinson - Chapman - Pearlita Johnson - and Wilma White



Velma - Pearlita LaVera - Margie



Clockwise from top: scrapbook of images from Santa Monica Beach in 1931, Willa and David Bruce, Hi Hat Inn Val Verde, Lounging on the beach

C

Corvids: Family of birds including crows, ravens, and rooks. The theme bird for the most recent Black Birders Week.

Cosmos: A social club established in 1946 held outdoor social events in Val Verde and other leisure communities during the Jim Crow era, where Black Americans could enjoy the outdoors.

D

Douglas Aircraft Company: This aerospace company moved to Santa Monica Airport in 1929, employing thousands of Black Americans who moved to Santa Monica in order to be close to their work.



Clockwise from left: Cosmos Social Club meeting, The Liberator, Working at Douglas Aircraft Company

E

Ebony Beach Club: A leisure club founded by Black entrepreneur Silas White in Santa Monica in the 1950's. Intended to serve as a socializing space, the property was ultimately condemned and forced to close.

Jefferson L. Edmonds: publisher of Liberator, a monthly newsletter published from 1900 to 1914 that sought to promote the advancement of Black Americans and allured Southern Black migrants towards the California

F

Cherif Fall: Senegalese surf champion who now lives in San Clemente, California.



Above: Cherif Fall, Below: Nick Gabaldon



G

Nick Gabaldon: The first documented Black American surfer. Gabaldon surfed off of Santa Monica and Malibu beaches, pioneering surf in the Black community.

A Great Day in the Stoke: Annual gathering of Black surfers in Huntington Beach, California.

H

Hi Hat Inn in Val Verde: Black resort town north of Los Angeles, January 1939.

I

Inkwell: Historically Black beach in Santa Monica, formally called Bay Street Beach.



Assorted photos from Inkwell Beach in Santa Monica, circa 1925

J

Alison Rose Jefferson: Historian, researcher, curator of the “Black California Dreamin’: Claiming Space at America’s Leisure Frontier” exhibition at the California African American Museum (CAAM). This exhibition highlights Angelenos who worked to create and nurture leisure spaces for Black Americans, realizing leisure as an inclusive reality in the early twentieth century as Southern California strengthened its position as an embodiment of California Dreams. Jefferson wrote *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites During the Jim Crow Era*.

K

Andrew Kahrl: Historian, who shared: "the development of attractive and accessible Black beaches and leisure sites free from white harassment emerged as a major political issue in the Civil Rights Movement."

L

La Bonita: Black-owned bathhouse and lodge in Belmar, Santa Monica operating from the 1910s to 1950s.

M

Miss Val Verde: Annual pageant contest hosted in the Val Verde resort community.

N

"New Negro": Referred to African Americans who left the southern United States for northern, mid-western, and western cities to escape racial injustice.
New Western History: Approach to historical analysis in the west that takes into consideration the African American experience as it pertains to race, gender, class, environment, and cultural expression.





Phillip Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal congregation, 1914

O

Ocean Frontage Syndicate: Black American investment group organized by Norman O. Houston and Charles S. Darden to fund and develop resorts in Santa Monica.

Opportunity: A core tenet of the California Dream, motivating migration of Black Americans from the American South.

P

Bradley Polk: Winner of Mr. Muscle Man in Val Verde, 1965.

Phillip Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal: Santa Monica's first Black church, which served as a community gathering place for Black Angelenos carving out a social life upon migrating from the Southern United States in the late 1800s. When Black Americans were restricted from enjoying many social places, churches were an important space for cultivating community.

Q

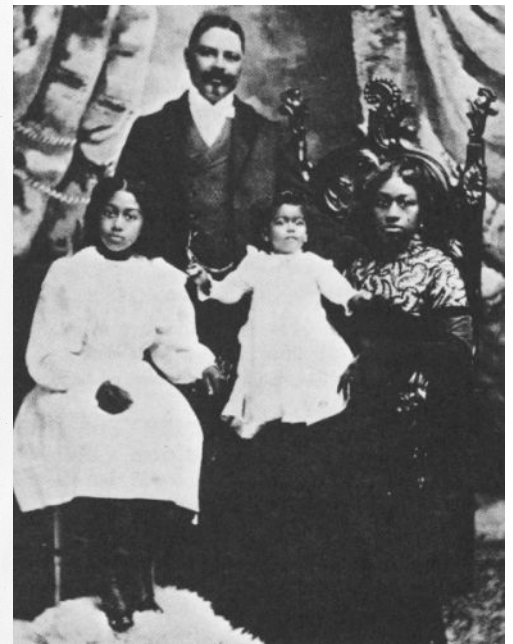
Queen Califia: Mythologized Black warrior queen who ruled the kingdom of Black women on California, an island off the coast of Asia that was filled with gold. The state of California is believed to have been named for her.

R

Recovered memory: The process of unearthing and recognizing past events (i.e. Black leisure history, Bruce's beach); in contrast to selective remembrance and organized forgetting.

S

William T. Shorey: Whaling ship captain who spent most of his life at sea. His ship, John and Winthrop, was the only whaling ship in the world to be manned entirely by an African-American crew. Lived 1859 to 1919.



William T. Shorey, ship, and family

T

Quintard Taylor: Author who published preminent research on the Black experience in California. Taylor explored analysis of whether the west offered Black people migrating from the South an ideal place for improved racial equality.

U

Universal Negro Improvement Organization (UNIA): Black nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914, promoting Black pride, unity between Black Americans, and return to Africa. In 1926, there were 16 UNIA chapters in California, and Marcus Garvey visited Los Angeles in 1922 to speak to 10,000 Black Angelenos.

V

Vamos a la Playa: Current program run by Los Angeles-based environmental non-profit Mujeres de la Tierra to promote coastal access equity by taking families for beach days.



Vamos a la Playa program



Wade-In protest in Biloxi, Mississippi in 1959

W

Wade-Ins: Civil rights protests that consisted of people wading into segregated beaches to protest segregation laws. When Manhattan Beach city government sought to segregate the beach, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held a wade in protest and prevented the city from instituting overt racial separation.

X

Xenophobia: Prejudice against others who are different from oneself; when exercised by white locals in Los Angeles in the early 20th century contributed to racism that diminished Black migrants' attempts at development along the coast.

Y

Mamie Young: Owner of the Nightingale Lunch Room and Delicatessen, a popular hangout for Black Angelenos in the 1950's.

Z

Zenith: Formally defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as the highest point reached by a heavenly body, zenith represents ascension into the sublime. For many Black Americans, pursuing the California Dream meant accomplishing wealth, comfort, and self-actualization free of subjugation and physical harm. The California Dream thus stood in as the zenith of the Black experience, and the leisure of enjoying beaches was integral to that culture.



Young couple at Bruce's Beach

Beach Itineraries



Santa Monica

Getting There

- By car: Map to directions via Google Maps
- By public transit
 - [Big Blue Bus](#): Around Santa Monica, to and from Los Angeles International Airport
 - Metro E Line: Direct route from Downtown LA (Union Station) to Downtown Santa Monica, 46 minute travel time

Free & Low-Cost Parking

- Available Downtown Santa Monica Parking Structures #1-2, 4-8 and the Ken Edwards Center: Free for 90 minutes – [view online](#)
- 1438 9th St Santa Monica: Free for 3 hours

Black Owned Businesses

- [Black Santa Monica Tours and Concierge](#): Tours highlighting Santa Monica's African American history.
- [Tangana Wellness](#)

Landmarks

- Belmar Historic Park
- Bay Street Beach Historic District (Inkwell)

Sites for Black Ornithology (birding hotspots)

- [Santa Monica Pier](#): 34°00'28.8"N 118°29'58.4"W
 - Recent sightings: California gull, western grebe, common raven
- [Tongva Park](#): 34°00'40.2"N 118°29'33.2"W
 - Recent sightings: Black phoebe, bushtit, white-crowned sparrow



Manhattan Beach

Getting There

- By car: Map to directions via Google Maps
- By Public Transit
 - Dial-A-Ride: shared ride, curb-to-curb bus service available to Manhattan Beach residents who are disabled or 55+ years old
 - [View online](#)
 - Call them at (310)545-3500 or (310)802-5162
 - Beach Cities Transit: Two fixed-routes connecting Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, and El Segundo. Provides transit connections with Metro Bus & Rail, Torrance Transit, Gardena Bus Lines and Palos Verdes Peninsula Transit Authority and Lawndale Beat. \$1 cash fare.
 - [View online](#)

Free & Low-Cost Parking

- City of Manhattan Beach public parking lots – [view online](#)
- City of Manhattan Beach Municipal Lot 8 1198 N Ardmore Ave Tree Section Manhattan Beach, CA 90266: Free parking

Black Owned Businesses

- [Barsha Wine and Spirits](#)
- [Nicole Lunan Massage Therapy](#)

Landmarks

- Bruce's Beach

Sites for Black Ornithology (birding hotspots)

- [Sand Dune Park](#): 33°53'55.4"N 118°24'44.5"W
 - Recent sightings Red-tailed hawk, northern house wren, lesser goldfinch, California towhee
- [North Beach](#): 33°53'42.5"N 118°25'07.2"W
 - Recent sightings: snowy plover, rock pigeon, black-bellied plover



Huntington Beach

Getting There

- By Car: Map to directions via Google Maps
- Best address to get to the heart of Huntington Beach is [Duke's Huntington Beach](#), located at the base of the iconic Huntington Beach Pier. 317 Pacific Coast Hwy, Huntington Beach, CA, 92648.
- By Public Transit: View routes and schedules on OCTA website

Free & Low-Cost Parking

- City of Huntington Beach Main Promenade Parking Structure 200 Main Street Huntington Beach, CA 92648: 90 minutes free, \$20 all day
- Beach Promenade Shopping Center, 21190 Beach Blvd Huntington Beach, CA 92648: 2 hours free
- Newland Center 19640-19950 Beach Blvd Seabridge Huntington Beach, CA 92648: 2 hours free

Black Owned Businesses

- [Beale's Texas BBQ](#)
- [AoSA Coffee](#)

Landmarks

- [A Great Day in the Stoke](#) on Huntington Beach Pier

Sites for Black Ornithology (birding hotspots)

- [Bolsa Chica – Walkbridge/Inner Bay](#): 33°41'47.5"N 118°02'42.5"W
 - Recent sightings: Orange-crowned warbler, northern shoveler, Cassin's kingbird
- [Talbert Nature Preserve, Costa Mesa](#): 33°38'55.1"N 117°56'56.2"W
 - Recent sightings: Turkey vulture, white-tailed kite, Canada goose

