

California Diversity History

Pre-Conquest: Tongva, Chumash, and other native peoples coexist in the region now known as the Los Angeles basin for at least 15,000 years.

1769 Spanish occupation of California. "An exploratory group camped by a river....[Father Juan Crespi] named the river El Rio de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula, "The River of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels of Porciuncula."

1771 A company of settlers called "Los Pobladores" is recruited to establish pueblos in California in the name of Spain.

1781 A group of 12 of the pobladore families establish a community named after the river: "[Of the] forty-six founders of Los Angeles, 42 were Native Americans and African Americans." Cecil L. Murray.

1846-1848 U.S. territory. California becomes a part of the United States as a result of the war with Mexico. Many Americans see the new territory as proof of the nation's "manifest destiny," as expressed by a congressman, "This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of republican government under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race."

1849 Writing of the state constitution. Noriega de la Guerra, a native Californian, argues against using skin color to determine citizenship. A Mr. Potts replies that he was willing to use any words as long as they excluded the 'African and Indian races' from citizenship. Ultimately, delegates give full citizenship to 'white male citizens of the United States and Mexico who resided in California.'

1851 In response to the anger of white settlers that most of the land of California was already owned by Mexican-Americans, the state legislature passes a law requiring Mexican landowners to prove that they really own the land. "On average, it took a landowner about 17 years to establish a clear title...while claims were under review, landowners could not sell their property or profit from it." Required nevertheless to pay property taxes and legal fees, many who won their cases still had to sell their property in order to settle accumulated debts. Angry Mexicans banded together to harass the newcomers, and were labelled "bandits." One of them said, "I had numerous fights in defense of what I believed to be my rights and those of my countrymen." White Americans in southern California respond by forming "vigilance committees."

1854` As a result of vigilante violence, by 1854, officials in Los Angeles were reporting a homicide a day with most of the victims Mexicans or Indians.

1871 Vigilantes turn their attention to Chinese immigrants as well, resulting in the first L.A. "race riot." The violence began after a white police officer was shot while investigating a quarrel between two Chinese. Rumors spread that "the Chinese were killing the whites wholesale." In response, an angry mob, led by members of the police force, lynched 19 people, over 10 percent of the Chinese population. A grand jury indicted 150 men for "murderous assault," but only 6 were convicted, and each spent just over a year in prison.

1870-1890 As trains reach Los Angeles, the city's population grows from 11,000 people in 1880 to over 60,000 by 1890. One resident noted, "Here were 40 or 50,000 people suddenly gathered together from all parts of the Union, **in utter ignorance of one another's previous history.**"

1882 The U.S. bans immigration from China.

1920's By the end of the decade, Los Angeles is the largest city in the west and the most racially diverse. It is also the most segregated. Not a matter of law, segregation was written into real estate contracts, e.g. "no part of said premises shall ever, at any time, be sold, conveyed, leased, or rented to any person of African, Mexican, Chinese or Japanese descent." In areas that were not legally bound by deed restrictions, white homeowners often banded together to form "protective associations." To outsiders, only the white neighborhoods were visible.

1924 The U.S. bans immigration from all of Asia; State laws also discriminate. In California, marriages between Asian and white Americans are banned, and "Asian aliens" are not allowed to buy or inherit property.

1929 A worldwide depression slows economic activity. The L.A coordinator for a federal unemployment relief agency volunteers to have some 20,000 foreign nationals living in the area rounded up and deported. Almost immediately between 3000 and 4000 Mexicans, many of them U.S. citizens, are picked up, detained, and then shipped to Mexico. Such raids continued until 1939, when the economy picks up.

1942 During WWII, Executive Order 9066 authorizes the army to designate "military areas from which any persons may be excluded." On March 24, the Western Defense Command begins forcibly removing every person of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. In L. A., the Japanese are herded into the Santa Anita racetrack before

being shipped to Manzanar other "relocation camps."

1942 Just days after the Japanese are sent to internment camps, "the Los Angeles newspapers beg[i]n to play up "'Mexican' crime and 'Mexican' juvenile delinquency," especially targeting teenagers wearing outfits that the police refer to as "zoot suits." On 8/2/42, a young Mexican American is found dead in 'Sleepy Lagoon,' a swimming hole. In response, the police arrest over 3000 young Mexican Americans. Though the autopsy suggested accident, 22 will be charged with conspiracy to commit murder; 12 will be convicted of 1st or 2nd degree murder. The verdict outrages many, and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee is formed to "free these Mexican boys." Even servicemen fighting overseas learn of the trial and send money to help finance a new trial. On 10/4/44, the District Court of Appeals unanimously reverses the conviction of all defendants.

1944 L.A. newspapers continue to portray Mexican Americans as dangerous and disloyal. Many of the young servicemen stationed in L.A. were outraged, and in early June, about 200 sailors decided to teach them "a lesson." They grabbed young Filipinos, African Americans, and Mexicans at theatres, dance halls, and streetcars, sometimes stripping them of their clothing, while police watched. After the sailors left, the police arrested the victims. A special committee of the governor investigates and concludes that "no group has the right to take the law into its own hands," and that "in undertaking to deal with the cause of these outbreaks...the existence of race prejudice cannot be ignored."

1950's The California Eagle, the oldest African American newspaper in the U.S. fights and wins battles against discriminatory hiring practices at the Southern Telephone Company, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Boulder Dam Company, L.A. General Hospital, and the L.A. Rapid Transit Company. In addition, there are new opportunities for suburban workers of color in flourishing aircraft and auto-assembly plants, but the city ignores serious problems within the African American community, such as overcrowding and poverty in Watts and other black neighborhoods, a lack of public transportation, and the loss of industry in the central city, as the lucrative jobs spread to the mostly white suburbs.

1959 California enacts a sweeping civil rights law, five years before the federal government.

1964 Among large cities, L.A. is the only one whose mayor is hostile to the federal antipoverty program. White California voters pass an initiative measure that repeals a fair-housing bill enacted by the State Legislature. Division of wealth among

the races becomes more and more extreme. There are constant complaints regarding police brutality, about which nothing is done.

1965 Watts: Illusions are shattered on a hot summer night in 1965, as young African Americans rock the city with their rage. The violence begins with an arrest at 7 pm on 8/11. In the days that followed, the violence spread from 103rd and Central in Watts to over 40 square miles of the city. When the violence finally ends, 34 people are dead and over 1000 wounded. Property damages are estimated at between \$40 and \$200 million, and nearly 4000 people are under arrest.

1960's-1980's A change in federal immigration law repeals former exclusions, and the law now favors refugees, people with relatives in the U.S., and workers with needed skills. Immigration increases dramatically, including thousands of Koreans and other Asians, previously excluded.

See "Historical Timeline" at the Campus Community Book Project for a continuation detailing the events leading up to and following from the Rodney King verdict.