CHAPTER 10

“BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL”: FROM PORTERS TO PANTHERS IN WEST OAKLAND

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One of West Oakland’s stories is the development, florescence, and decline of a black middle class. Born of the industrial development of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this numerically dominant, sophisticated, and influential group was hard hit by the post-World War II decline in skilled industrial jobs. By the 1960s, the neighborhood had been decimated by unemployment and the government policy of urban redevelopment. The theme of this chapter is neighborhood change and continuity over one century, as seen through the material culture of the people who lived there.

Neighborhood people—porters, barbers, hairdressers, musicians, and others—worked hard to give their children a better life. They created comfortable living spaces and a network of support organizations, religious and secular, that united the community, including the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (see also Chapter 7), the California Federated Colored Women’s Clubs, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. These subjects are covered within this chapter and by essays on “race work,” unionism, music, and barbers. Despite the disruptions of urban redevelopment, we can see continuity in these themes from the 1860s to the present day through archaeological remains—the unintentional testaments to everyday life—as well as through oral accounts of a neighborhood in transition.

BLACK RAILROADERS IN WEST OAKLAND

West Oakland already had a fledgling African American community with a school and church when it became the western terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869. Along with the railroad came the Pullman Palace Car Company (Pullman Company), whose sumptuous dining and sleeping cars catered to well-healed travelers. The Pullman car was a Victorian home on wheels and the context for genteel social interactions. Attended by porters, the Pullman passenger passed through a series of formal and increasingly intimate stages from parlor to dining car to sleeping cubicle, mirroring the structure of the Victorian home. By Pullman Company policy, only African Americans were hired as Pullman porters. These jobs were highly sought after and highly regarded—they paid relatively well and provided travel and the opportunity to wear the symbols of white-color jobs and to interact with the sophisticated. Although these were service positions whose role mimicked in microcosm the racist structure of American society at the time, oral-history interviews with men who held these jobs reflect the pride they took in their work and the emphasis they placed on maintaining personal dignity under difficult circumstances (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:10; Spires 1994:205-207). The West Oakland railyard became a hub in the Pullman system, and many African American porters settled there with their families.
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF BLACK FAMILIES

In 1880 the U.S. Census recorded that Lucinda Tilghman lived in a simple residence at 662 Fifth Street within walking distance of Oakland’s first African American church. Tilghman’s late husband had been a successful barber. An African American widow with three children, including a 22-year-old son who was mentally retarded and living in an asylum, Tilghman took in boarders: Abraham Holland—a Pullman porter—and his college-student son. Holland had been part of a successful African American mining company during the Gold Rush; he and his partners reportedly used some of their earnings to purchase freedom for members of their families from slavery. As an Oakland resident, Holland was socially and politically active. He joined the Literary & Aid Society and an African American lodge of Freemasons, and was an influential member of the community throughout his lifetime (Wheeler 1993:86). The Tilghman family was influential in its own right in the struggle for racial equality in California (see essay this chapter).

The artifact collection from Lucinda Tilghman’s backyard privy complex (933/1112) provides a window on her household’s domestic practices in around 1880 (Figure 10.1). Dining was formal, as was the tea and liquor service. Meals featured high-priced beef loin steaks and roasts, ham, and leg of mutton. Mrs. Tilghman also served cheaper meals of ribs, pork shoulder, soups, stews, spareribs, and pig’s feet. Bones of elk, goat, ground squirrel, and rabbits were also found in their privy, along with those of chicken, duck, northern pintail, and grouse; some of these may have been acquired on hunting trips. Unlike some of their neighbors, however, Mrs. Tilghman served expensive varieties of fish, including sardines, white bass, Chinook salmon, and California barracuda. In contrast, the jacksmelt and rockfish found in the deposit could have been the result of a local angler’s catch. Many personal items also found their way into the refuse, including an elegant toiletry set, cuff link, gold pendant, and gold earring—all of which speak to the refinement of the household. Together, and probably separately, Lucinda Tilghman

Figure 10.1. The Tilghman/Holland collection. When the household abandoned the privies in their backyard to hook up to the city sewer system in about 1880, they threw away an abundance of household items, pictured here (Privy 933/Privy1112).
and Abraham Holland could afford to set a fashionable table, eat expensive meals, and wear stylish clothing.

Some 20 years later and two doors down the street, we find the household of James William Carter, another African American Pullman porter, and his wife Nellie. Although we do not know who lived with the family when the deposit was created in the 1890s, the Carters, it appears, also took in boarders: in 1900, their household included Nellie’s brother (who worked as a railroad mechanic); an insurance agent; a pharmacist, his wife, and daughter; a railroad porter and his wife; and a second railroad porter. The archaeological collection from the Carter household’s backfilled well (953) is remarkable for its quantity, quality, and variety (Figure 10.2). The shoes, clothing, and toys reflect a household containing several workingmen and women, as well as children. The adults—all of whom the U.S. Census reported as literate—held high-status jobs with the railroad or as professionals within the community. They discarded a large quantity of unique teawares, dolls, buttons, and other memorabilia that had been collected and displayed over the years. They ate well, sometimes in a formal setting, and served tea and alcohol in a variety of styles from plain to festive. To generalize from these two assemblages, we might venture that, in keeping with their relatively high social and economic status within the community, African American porter households strove to the best of their ability to replicate in their homes the Victorian formality and opulence found in the Pullman cars where they worked.

Also during the 1890s, but living closer to the railroad yard than the Carters, Irish widow Mary Heaney rented her new, fashionably styled residence to a household composed of various African American Pullman porters, who presumably lived there with their families. The remarkable archaeological collection from these households, deposited in a disused well (7511), provides another glimpse into the sophisticated domestic arrangements of the participants in George Pullman’s widely advertised “miles of smiles,” where porters set the stage for hospitality. Scarlet pimpernel and geranium grew in the yard, and flowers graced the household in matching

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THE TILGHMAN FAMILY AND “RACE WORK” IN WEST OAKLAND

Marta Gutman

Among the sayings of our Race,
Suggestive and inspiring,
That fill a most exalted place
Is, “Tell them we are Rising”
[Tilghman 1916-1917].

In 1916 Charles F. Tilghman, Jr., published this poem in the first Colored Directory of the Leading Cities of Northern California (Colored Directory), which the black teenager produced on a printing press set up in his family home at 1670 Thirteenth Street in Oakland (Beasley 1919:228-229). “Tell them we are Rising,” the poet (perhaps a Tilghman family member) advised, giving voice to the determination of black elites to work for cultural progress and racial justice in northern California (Tilghman 1916-1917:13). Across the United States, middle-class Americans of color shared these aspirations. Confronted with violent racism in Jim Crow America, African American elites endorsed what historian Kevin Gaines calls “uplift ideology” (Gaines 1996), asserting that racial uplift, self-betterment, and social service would ameliorate black-white relations and improve the social conditions of black working-class men, women, and children. Gaines emphasizes that the focus on class distinctions and patriarchal authority in the movement for racial uplift restricted its political effectiveness in the battle to eradicate white racism. To some extent, these observations apply to the northern California uplift movement, although they do not fully explain the complexity of the movement or the achievements of women of color. After the turn of the 20th century, black women rose to prominence in the heretofore male-led movement for racial justice in California and staked a claim on shaping its objectives. Charles’s mother, Hettie Blonde Tilghman, was one such activist; the clubwoman and institution builder established in West Oakland charities for African American women and children at the same time as she worked to expand the political rights of black Californians (Gutman 2002c; Hauser 1985, 1986, 1987-1988).

Other members of the Tilghman family were also no strangers to West Oakland or to the cause of race improvement and justice. In the late 1870s, Lucinda Tilghman, Hettie’s widowed mother-in-law, shared with Abraham Holland a rented dwelling at 662 Fifth Street. The family had been involved in black cultural and political organizations since the Gold Rush. In 1850 Robert Tilghman arrived in northern California along with hundreds of other African Americans, gripped by gold fever and the desire for liberty. The black barber was born in Maryland—he shared a last name with a prominent, white, slaveholding family—and he moved to California during the year the Fugitive Slave Act became law of the land.2 We don’t know if Tilghman was enslaved, free-born, or self-purchased; we don’t know if he escaped from his birthplace to a northern seaport friendly to the anti-slavery

2. The Tilghman family descended from English barons who signed the Magna Carta. The best-known white member of the American branch of the family is Tench Tilghman (1744-1786), who served as aide-de-camp to George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He is included in the Charles Willson Peale portrait of Washington at Yorktown (1784) commissioned by the Maryland State Legislature (for a reproduction of the Peale portrait, see Maryland Commission on Artistic Property 2003). Tench Tilghman’s descendants served in the Confederate Army. Black and white Tilghmans shared the same name in Maryland: the 1870 census reports that Robert T. Tilghman (black, 33 years old) lived in Somerset County and Robert Tilghman (white, 23 years old) lived in Worcester County. Both men were born in Maryland (Maryland State Archives 2003).
movement, and then made his way west by sea, or if he traveled west on an overland route, attached through indenture or bondage to a white family. We do know that following the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act, African Americans in eastern states construed California to be a safe haven, as well as full of economic opportunity. Northern California was “a place of refuge,” as one New England newspaper claimed (Lapp 1977:19).

The men who came in 1849 and went straight to the mines looking for gold encountered a landscape threaded with the effects of racism, as did the black business- and tradesmen who followed in the early 1850s. In 1850, after protracted debate, California joined the Union as a free state, and abolitionists claimed a place in California’s political culture. Even so, in the 1850s the State tolerated slavery, the legislature passed a local Fugitive Slave law, and it contemplated, but did not make law, an anti-immigration bill that would have prohibited free blacks, as well as slaves, from entering the state. Moreover, public schools were racially segregated by statute, and African Americans were denied the right to vote and to offer court testimony in cases where white citizens were parties (Lapp 1977:128-129, 166, 186).

By 1853 Robert Tilghman had probably married (the name of his first wife is not known; Lucinda was his second wife), and the family settled in Marysville, the county seat of Yuba County. Rudolph Lapp reports that the location of the town, at the confluence of the Yuba and Feather rivers and near the north end of the gold mines, made it attractive to black business men and women serving African American miners. Barbers and hairdressers predominated among settlers of color in Marysville, where there was a “moral strictness” in the black population. Lapp writes that “there were at least two thriving black-owned barber shops” in 1853; about 20 percent of the town’s black residents were involved in these trades by the late 1850s (Lapp 1977:111-112, 114). During this period, Robert Tilghman may have met Abraham Holland (Lucinda’s housemate), when both men worked in the gold country, one as a skilled tradesman, the other as a miner. Holland, who was born in Pennsylvania, joined the first wave of black migration to the California gold mines, arriving in 1849. He became part owner of the Sweet Vengeance Mine, a very successful African American mining company in Brown’s Valley (near Marysville). “Judging from the title,” Delilah Beasley wrote, “it would seem ... that they were bent on proving to the world that colored men were capable of conducting successfully a mining business, even in the pioneer days of California” (Beasley 1919:104). At this early date, Holland, who was given the middle name, “Freeman,” made evident his political commitments. He and his partners used some of their considerable profits—as much as $1,200 a week in 1852—to purchase the freedom of enslaved African Americans who subsequently immigrated to California (Wheeler 1993:68-69, 86).

Robert Tilghman’s documented connection with “race work” in California began in 1856, also a year of tragedy for this man. Thieves murdered his first wife during a foiled stagecoach robbery near Marysville (Lapp 1977:84). Probably after his wife’s death, Tilghman moved to Butte County, where, following the rallying cry of the Colored Citizen Conventions (Eterovich 1856:55), he agreed to circulate petitions that sought white support for political reforms. Drawing on East Coast precedents, African American men convened these public political meetings (the first was held in Sacramento in 1855) to secure civil rights for racial minorities. That men dominated the conventions may have been due, in part, to the extreme gender imbalance that characterized black, as well as white, migration to California in the 1850s. To begin with, the organizers focused on securing the right to testify in court, which the legislature agreed to grant to blacks, but not to Asians or Native Americans, during the Civil War (Daniels 1980; Lapp 1977:117, 186, 192-194).

Robert Tilghman did not experience firsthand the fruits of this political victory because he lived in Canada, having joined the exodus of black miners and their families who moved north to Victoria (British Columbia) in 1858 and 1859. The political situation for African Americans worsened in California in the late 1850s, when the State legislature passed a law requiring “all colored men to wear a distinctive badge” (Provincial Association of Social Studies Teachers et al. 1996). In 1858 the U.S. Supreme Court also made clear in the Dred Scott decision that African Americans had “no claim on American law or rights that white men must respect” (Lapp 1977:204). Between 400 and 800 men and women of color emigrated from California to western Canada, where the Fraser River gold rush was underway. By the time he emigrated, Robert had
probably married Lucinda (she, too, was born in Maryland); two children were born in quick succession, Robert, Jr., in 1858 and Selina, in 1860.² After the Civil War the Tilghmans, like many other émigrés, returned to the United States, making their way down the Pacific coast to California. In 1868 Charles Francis was born in Oregon; the family lived in Pescadero in 1870 and moved to Oakland, where they lived on Lydia Street, in the mid-1870s (Lapp 1977:246; Oakland City Directory 1875).

A decade after the Civil War, the political climate in California had improved for African Americans: they had won the demands for civil rights put forth at the Colored Conventions in the 1850s and 1860s. African American men exercised the right to vote (as guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution); slavery had been outlawed; public schools were racially integrated (although racial exclusion continued to be applied to Asian and Native American children); and blacks were allowed to testify in court cases (Lapp 1977). Moreover, Californians of color formed a variety of political and cultural associations. Abraham Holland, who moved to Oakland in 1874 after he became a Central Pacific Railroad porter, took an active role in several of them. He was Grandmaster of the African American Lodge of the California Freemasons from 1878 to 1880; he served as president of the Literary and Aid Society of Oakland in 1886; he addressed the Los Angeles Freemasons in 1888; and he directed Colored Colonization Association of Fresno County in 1891 (Praetzellis 2001:80).

In 1877 Holland lived at the one-and-a-half story, wood-frame dwelling at 662 Fifth Street, owned by Joseph Gillardin—the building that would become Lucinda Tilghman’s home in the next year. When Lucinda joined Holland in 1878 she was widowed, her husband having died at sea, near the Philippine Islands. The 1880 Census describes Abraham Holland as Lucinda Tilghman’s boarder, even though his tenancy preceded hers and he continued to reside at this address after the Tilghmans moved to San Francisco (Oakland City Directory 1877-1878; 1878-1879; 1879-1880; 1880-1881). We don’t know what brought the two people to inhabit the same dwelling for a brief period—both were widowed and both experienced a fair measure of personal hardship. Lucinda’s husband died when she was 45 years old and her oldest child, Robert, was severely disabled. Labeled “idiot” in some documents, he lived in an asylum. Holland’s son, Albert, died of pneumonia when he was 18 years old while attending college in Red Bluff (Praetzellis 2001:80, 86).

Nevertheless, the misfortune and hard luck that shadowed the Tilghman and Holland families in the late 1870s and early 1880s should not blind us to their relative affluence. The 1,200 square foot house on Fifth Street, which is shown on the 1889 Sanborn map with a front porch, a kitchen addition, and a back shed, was larger and more fully appointed than many other dwellings in West Oakland at the time (Groth and Gutman 1997). In addition, the material culture of this African American household replicated that of well-off white neighbors—the Mann family, for example, who came from New England and lived on the same city block in West Oakland—and other fashionable Victorians, who lived in cities and towns across the English-speaking world. Lucinda Tilghman and Abraham Holland lived comfortably and with some style. Even so, the recently widowed 45-year-old woman, described as a mulatto in the 1880 Census, faced considerable expenses. According to the census, her 22-year-old son, Robert, was institutionalized; her 20-year-old daughter, Selina, lived at home, as did her 12-year-old son Charles, also described as a mulatto, who attended school. Lucinda may have taken in boarders, like Holland and Fannie Hopson, another tenant, to augment the legacy left to her by her husband. Hopson may also have been the Tilghmans’ domestic servant (Praetzellis 2001:80-86).

By the early 1880s, Lucinda had moved to San Francisco with Charles, where he finished school and found his first job. He worked as a bellboy at the Baldwin Hotel when he was 14 years old (San Francisco City Directory 1883-1884). By 1889 Charles had stepped up in the world, having secured a job as a clerk in the Southern Pacific Railroad paymaster’s office—respectable work suited to an upwardly mobile young African

³ According to the 1880 census, the Tilghmans’ first child, Robert, Jr., was born in Texas in 1858. This appears to be a mistake. Other evidence establishes that the Tilghmans lived in Canada at this time (Provincial Association of Social Studies Teachers et al. 1996). Additionally, it would have made little sense for a black family from Maryland, with the same last name as well-known slaveholders, to have returned to a slave state in 1858 only to move to Canada, where Selina was born, two years later.
American man in late-19th-century California (Daniels 1980; Wheeler 1993). Charles worked as a clerk or a mail clerk for most of his life, although he would also find employment as a porter, a janitor, and a messenger (San Francisco City Directory 1889). The Tilghmans, who moved frequently in San Francisco, lived at 505 Hyde Street from 1889 to 1892. This put them next door to John Jones—very likely, the John Jones who was the father of Hettie Blonde Jones (soon to be Charles’s wife). In 1890 Hettie Jones married Charles Tilghman, and the young couple moved in with Lucinda. They established a separate household in 1896; Hilda, their first child, had already been born, and Charles Francis, Jr., followed in 1897 (Beasley 1919:228; San Francisco City Directory 1896).

Hettie Tilghman seems to have come from a family with resolutely middle-class aspirations (Tilghman 1929). We don’t know much about Hettie’s parents, Captain John and Rebecca Jones, but their daughter (one of three) lived and went to school in San Francisco and taught English to Chinese boys through a private language school she ran out of her San Francisco home (with her mother’s permission, Beasley assured her readers!). She also volunteered in the Sunday school at the Beth El A.M.E. Church. After her marriage, Mrs. Tilghman severed connections with work (volunteer and otherwise) to give full attention to motherhood. In Beasley’s words, she “retired from active church and club life until the children were quite advanced in life, preferring to consider them as a gift from God which should receive the undivided attention of their mother” (Beasley 1919:228). Waged labor may have loomed large in the lives of most African American women, but the Tilghmans did not depend on monetary contributions from Hettie, either in San Francisco or in Oakland. By 1902 the family had moved across the bay, establishing the household on Thirteenth Street.

The Tilghmans joined the approximately 1,100 African Americans who lived in the East Bay, with by far the vast majority residing in Oakland where “a stratified, complex, and rich black society was in place” by the turn of the 20th century (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:15). The Tilghmans claimed a place among the elites of color in the Oakland community, who were fully aware of the bitter debates between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington about strategies for race improvement. Lawrence Crouchett and the other authors of Visions of Tomorrow: The History of the East Bay Afro-American Community, argue that ideological differences, which divided African American politics on the East Coast, did not resonate as strongly among blacks who lived in northern California. As Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker write, “In California, the black community was not large enough to support an autonomous black-controlled economy, suffrage was a reality [for men only until 1920], and [higher] education was available to those who were willing to endure the loneliness of mostly-white environment” (1989:31). In Oakland black elites ascribed to what Kevin Gaines calls socially conservative “uplift ideology,” endorsing religious faith, technical education (for some), and personal achievement as tools for racial uplift and improvement. At the same time, the political battle for full equality continued, with elites construing it to be a continuation of struggle for civil rights, started during the Colored Convention Movement (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:31). In the 20th century, women, as well as men, were active, bringing gendered claims to the forefront of black cultural organizations and political movements.

After she moved to Oakland, Hettie B. Tilghman returned to public service, winning a reputation for being “a very intense and an untiring worker in anything she undertakes” (Beasley 1919:229). Financially privileged (relatively speaking), she was able to join other middle-class African American women, known as “race women,” in forming a wide range of women’s clubs and developing community-building projects. Her embrace of separatism, by gender, race, and class, was due as much to political circumstance as it was to the effects of patriarchy or the desire to build race pride. For the most part, white women in the San Francisco Bay Area refused to admit black women to social clubs and charitable organizations, a common practice in the United States at the time. Even so, in northern California, white women intensified the overt race prejudice in elite voluntary organizations by expressing preferences for female members with a “pioneer” pedigree.

4. There are many John Joneses in the San Francisco and Oakland directories. In 1890 one of these families lived at 503 Hyde Street when the Tilghmans lived at 505 Hyde (San Francisco City Directory 1890). Beasley states that Hettie Tilghman moved to Oakland when she turned 14, but directory searches indicate Beasley is mistaken.
United States who had established a national federation of black women’s clubs and social service organizations. The dictum of this group, the National Association of Colored Women, was “Lifting as We Climb,” giving clear indication of the interest of black clubwomen in social service, as well as cultural improvement (Davis 1933; Scott 1993).

Hettie Blonde Tilghman plunged into club work after she moved to Oakland. She joined the Fanny Jackson Coppin Club, the Art and Industrial Club—which black women founded in 1906 with the motto, “Deeds, Not Words”—and the Mother’s Charity Club, organized in 1907 (Fanny Wall Children’s Home 1916). This group took its motto, “Lifting as We Climb,” from the national black women’s organization (Tilghman 1916-1917:44). Mrs. Tilghman joined other organizations (including the Phillis Wheatley Young Women’s Club of Oakland) and served on the board of the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People, which black women opened in 1897 near Mills College. She was also elected president of the California State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs in 1917 (Winnacker 1993:895-897).

Tilghman encouraged the state organization, formed from the merger of the Southern and Northern Federation of California Colored Women’s Clubs, to participate in war relief work and pursue its interest in institution building, as suggested by the motto it adopted, “Lifting as We Climb, Service Deeds Not Words” (Winnacker 1993:896). Hettie Tilghman’s son, Charles, alluded to those aspirations, when he described in the Colored Directory the federation’s purpose:

The Women’s Clubs, organized under the high standard of “Lifting as we climb,” and governed by Womanly Instincts and Principles and “Deeds, not words,” are aiding the sick and needy, the fallen and depressed, lifting from the dark sides of life to sunshine and happiness their less fortunate sisters and assisting in large proportions in the Industrial, Educational, Social, and Economic Development of their Race ... such is the California State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs [Tilghman 1916-1917:14].

Delilah Beasley also wrote, “When the California Colored Women’s Federated Clubs decided to federate, they also determined to do some monumental work of interest to the race, in both the northern part of the state and also the southern” (Beasley 1919:228).
In short order, Northern Federation clubwomen opened an orphanage in Oakland, which would be known as the Fannie Wall Children’s Home and Day Nursery (1918); they also helped to found the Linden Street Branch Y.W.C.A. (1920), known as the “Colored Y.” These establishments met the needs of African American women and children who were excluded on the basis of race from other charitable organizations in the city (Gutman 2002c; Hausler 1986, 1987-1988). In the 1920s Hettie Tilghman took a leadership position in both establishments and was elected president of the Alameda County League of Colored Women Voters and to the Board of Directors of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Oakland branch of the NAACP formed in 1910 (Beasley 1933:247-248).

The interest in cultural improvement, social service, and political activism extended to the next generation of the Tilghman family. The two children, described as precocious and talented by Delilah Beasley, completed high school, where they won academic honors. They also learned marketable skills necessary even for men and women with elite aspirations in the African American community (Beasley 1919:228). Hilda, who graduated from Oakland Commercial High School, became a bookkeeper, working first for J. M. Bridges in 1911 and then for the family printing business. In 1931 Hilda became the first black salesclerk hired by Safeway Stores in Oakland (Tilghman Family n.d.). Charles, Jr., whose father gave him a small press as a 10th birthday gift (Fields 1976), worked on the Colored Directory while in high school. In 1919, after his discharge from the Army, he opened a printing business at 725 Market Street; a few years later he moved the press to another family property at 1177 Seventh Street. The location was fortuitous: Seventh Street, west of Market, was the spine for black-owned businesses in the city (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:11, 15; Oakland City Directory 1926).

In 1920 Charles, Jr., married Ione Looney (from Marysville, where his grandfather had worked as a barber in the early 1850s). The young couple and their two children lived with Charles’s parents and his sister, after the family moved to Ashby Street in Berkeley in 1922. When Charles, Sr., died in 1924, the family continued to live on Ashby Street, and Hettie and Hilda remained at this address after Charles, Jr., and Ione moved in 1928 to their own home on Acton Street. Hilda remained in the Ashby Street house after her mother’s death in 1933.

Charles F. Tilghman, Jr., who connected race improvement with commercial success, developed the family printing business into the most prominent black press on the West Coast. He also worked in political organizations, ranging from the NAACP to the American Legion—the latter giving some indication of his social conservatism. The descriptions of his achievements, periodically published in the Oakland press, link his success with his family’s longevity in the northern California black community—“Oakland’s Black Printing Pioneer” is the title of one article (Fields 1976; Hildebrand 1988; Jones 1969; Oakland Branch NAACP 1969). The writings also associate his successes with his mother’s considerable accomplishments, giving some sense of the place women claimed in the racial uplift movement in northern California and the respect for female activism in Oakland’s African American community.


5. Sarah C. Tilghman (widow of John J.) resided at 1177 Seventh Street in 1912 (Oakland City Directory 1912).

6. Charles F. Tilghman, Jr., invented a device called “expandable furniture,” which became standard in the printing business. He sold the Tilghman Press in the mid-1970s (after the death of his grandson, Charles F. Tilghman IV), but the press continued to operate under the Tilghman name (and to employ Charles F. Tilghman III) until at least the late 1980s.
vases; the caged bird was well-cared for and was fed a mix including marijuana seeds to encourage it to sing; even the spittoon was of fancy porcelain (Figure 10.3). Food bones in the collection represent an astonishing 1,700 lbs. of meat. These portions were primarily from moderately priced cuts; intensive kitchen butchering is reflected in the high number of ax/cleaver marks and by the number of elements that fit together. According to a contemporary cookbook (Whitehead 1893:148), the average American ate 0.9 lb. of meat per day. Assuming a household of five adults, the assemblage may represent a record of the household’s meat consumption over approximately one year.

The backfilling of this well appears to straddle a difficult period in West Oakland that included the depression of 1893 and the American Railway Union strike against the Pullman Company in 1894. Nevertheless, the households in Mrs. Heaney’s rental property who were employed by the Pullman Company and the Southern Pacific Railroad managed to maintain a high standard of living. In spite of the social upheaval around them and the difficult economic times, they ate a varied diet of fresh foods intensively prepared by the cook. Archaeological evidence shows that meals were served in a formal, fashionable setting that included expensive pieces for use when entertaining with tea and alcohol. Fresh flowers and bric-a-brac graced the parlor. The residents dressed well and possessed the necessities to maintain contemporary standards of personal hygiene.

It seems reasonable to suggest that these porters translated the elegance of the Pullman cars where they worked into the domestic surroundings where they lived; that the aesthetic of Pullman’s cars influenced the taste of those who worked in this sumptuous environment, and even some of their social practices. Purchasing goods above their ascribed status may be thought of as a form of resistance among African Americans at this time, since being well dressed and furnishing one’s home with genteel artifacts contradicted contemporary racist assumptions. It may be that the meaning of the decorative artifacts in the collection lies not in their conventional meanings but rather as symbols of civility and personal dignity, qualities for which the families who used them were striving against the odds.

**WAR, PEACE, JAZZ, AND THE UNION**

By the year 1900, the black population of Oakland had swelled to more than 1,000 from just under 600 residents in 1880. An African American business district had begun to take shape along Seventh Street, serving the “stratified, complex, and rich” community that blossomed there (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:15). The great earthquake of 1906 accelerated development in the East Bay as many businesses and families moved from the devastation that was San Francisco, and the port of Oakland developed rapidly. Businesses owned by African Americans benefited from this rapid growth and, as mobilization for World War I took men out of civilian life in 1917, jobs that had previously been closed to blacks began to open up.
Hold the Fort

CHORUS

Hold the fort for we are coming Union men be strong.

We meet today to freedom’s cause and raise our voices high. Well
just our hands in Union strong to battle or to die.

Look, my comrades, see the union
Banners waving high,
Reinforcements now appearing,
Victory is nigh. [Chorus 1]

See our numbers still increasing
Hear the bugles blow
By our union we shall triumph
Over every foe. [Chorus 1]

Fierce and long the battle rages,
But we will not fear
Help will come where it is needed,
Cheat, my comrades, cheer. [Chorus 1]

“HOLD THE FORT”

The history of African Americans in West Oakland is permanently tied to railroading and the struggle to establish the union of black porters known as the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The Brotherhood’s anthem was “Hold the Fort.” Based upon a Civil War hymn, versions of this piece have been adopted by unionists, suffragettes, socialists, and prohibitionists the world over.

Music and lyrics from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters’ anthem.

Sadly, civil liberties did not keep in step with these economic advances during the early 20th century. W.E.B. DuBois and other African American leaders had long encouraged homeownership as a means of acquiring economic independence from white landlords, and black Oaklanders’ improved financial condition would surely have led to a surge of purchases. The City of Oakland’s response to the threat of residential integration in traditionally white, middle-class neighborhoods, however, led to the passage of ordinances that prohibited blacks from buying property in certain neighborhoods. Although African American homeownership was allowed in West Oakland, it did not develop into a homogeneous ghetto, but continued to be inhabited by a multi-ethnic mix of middle- and working-class families and individuals. As was the practice in the 19th century, many homeowners and tenants took in boarders, thereby increasing the area’s African American population (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:15-22).

Music and unionism were important and linked themes in the West Oakland of the 1920s. Black-owned businesses flourished as Seventh Street developed into a hub of African American culture in general and as a social center for jazz lovers. The connection between this part of town and jazz music was fostered by widely traveled black railroad workers, who brought with them and distributed what were then known as “race records” — commercial recordings aimed specifically at the African American market (Collins 1997b:285). Porters were also instrumental in politicizing this community, in which one-third of all workers were with the railroad. In 1925 Pullman porters formed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters [BSCP] as a militant labor union, with an office on Seventh Street and C.L. Dellums as the local leader (for more information on the BSCP, see ‘The Quest for “Dad” Moore’ in Chapter 7).

(continued on page 294)
THE TRAIN STOPPED WHERE THE MUSIC BEGAN:
THE FERTILE BLACK AND TAN VENUES
OF WEST OAKLAND’S SEVENTH STREET AND BEYOND

Willie R. Collins

Oakland was the place where the transcontinental railroad ended and the music of a black world began. A small colony of Pullman porters began casting down their buckets and planting the roots for a thriving black community in West Oakland (Bagwell 1982:82). The railroad’s economic base fueled and sustained the growth of an urban black enclave—a kind of black world—that nurtured jazz and blues music and musicians. Hustling, vice, gambling, prostitution, violence, as well as legitimate businesses, also operated in West Oakland, with Seventh Street as its center. Seventh Street was known as “hell’s half acre” to some and heaven to others, and its nightlife attracted black and white audiences along with local and traveling musicians, creating an environment that now would be characterized as multicultural. “Black and Tan” was a term used to describe a club that catered to a mixed audience. Black and Tan clubs, as well as some bands, capitalized on the phrase and used it as a marketing tool to draw a white clientele (Watkins 1995). For example, clarinetist/bandleader Wade Whaley advertised his group as Wade Whaley’s Black and Tan Orchestra in the 1920s.

Across the Bay on San Francisco’s Barbary Coast, two ex-porters founded “one of the most famous Negro dance halls in the country” (Stoddard 1982:10), known alternately as Purcell’s and the 50 Different. Two other Barbary Coast establishments—the Ivy and the Dixie—were “colored” clubs featuring black entertainment. Beginning in the 1920s, jazz performances were captured on “race records,” that is, commercial recordings aimed specifically at black consumers. Porters and other black railroad men purchased quantities of these records in Eastern cities and distributed them in Oakland and other black California communities. While the Great Migration of Blacks, from the South to the East, numbered almost a million in the 1920s and 1930s, thousands also migrated west to California. There were 5,439 blacks in Oakland in 1920 and 7,503 in 1930. In both of those years, Oakland’s African American population was second only to Los Angeles among California cities (U.S. Census 1935). In the 1940s Oakland witnessed its largest wave of black migration.

Most jazz histories assert that, with the demise of San Francisco’s Barbary Coast in 1921, the music moved south to Los Angeles (Bakan 1998; Eckland 1986; Gioia 1992; Tercinet 1986). While Los Angeles did become the largest center in California for jazz performances and recordings, a vibrant and significant jazz nightlife existed in West Oakland from 1918 through the 1940s. The jazz meccas of the East Coast and Midwest, such as Harlem and Chicago, concurrently had their counterparts in the West, albeit to a lesser extent. Following the end of the Barbary Coast, the jazz scene on West Oakland’s Seventh Street began in earnest, as did that of Los Angeles’ Central Avenue. Since the late teens and the 1920s through the 1940s, venues on Seventh Street and other parts of West Oakland presented a variety of jazz styles to black and mixed audiences. The Fillmore District in San Francisco emerged in the 1940s as a center for jazz.

West Oakland was a multi-ethnic neighborhood where African Americans lived and worked alongside other ethnic communities. Yet external forces, including segregation, racism, and police intimidation, fostered an insular black social life in West Oakland and along Seventh Street. African American musicians were not free to play in certain areas and clubs. San Francisco-based Local 6 of the American Federation of Musicians did not admit African American
musicians. In 1924 black musicians were granted a charter to do business as Local 648 and later Local 669, headquartered in Oakland. It was an unwritten law, not found in the bylaws of the union’s constitution, that all of downtown Oakland was off-limits for African American musicians. However, exceptions to this rule sometimes occurred.

Non-black communities in West Oakland in the 1920s and 1930s—before the “white flight” of the 1940s—stayed to themselves and had little to do with African American social life. The exception was “slumming,” or visiting the Black and Tan clubs that catered to a mixed clientele who came for a taste of black entertainment. A number of dance halls, theaters, and cafés sprang up in West Oakland. The Oakland Police were sympathetic to the Local 6 practice of discrimination and, while looking the other way at some illegal activities, would “beat your butt if you were a black man within an inch of your life back in the late ’30s and all through the ’40s,” recalls Bay Area drummer Earl Watkins (1995). Seventh Street nightlife thus developed as a result of segregation and the union proscriptions on where African American musicians could play. In the face of racism, segregation, and police brutality, blacks who “knew their place” still could have a good time on Seventh Street. A roster of important jazz musicians played various jazz styles—New Orleans, swing, bebop, and the blues—on Seventh Street and other parts of West Oakland.

Musical diversity was the order of the day in West Oakland. Pre-jazz forms of black music were heard there prior to 1920. Oakland native Royal Towns (born in 1899) recalled that vocalist, pianist, drummer, and songwriter Shelton Brooks (1886-1975) performed in West Oakland in 1912 (Hildebrand 1979:2).

The majority of West Oakland jazz clubs (numbering more than 15 at any one time between the teens and the 1940s) were located on Seventh Street. Additional performance places were found in other parts of West Oakland, as well as downtown at the Oakland Auditorium, the four Sweets ballrooms, the Persian Gardens, and other nightclubs, cabarets, bars, speakeasies, theaters, and dance halls. Over time, venues opened or closed down, and the work available for musicians varied. In addition to venue owners who hired bands, voluntary associations and unions affiliated with the railroad also employed musicians for their events.

There were four categories of jazz musicians that played on Seventh Street and other parts of Oakland: Oakland natives who remained in the Bay Area; transplants from other areas who remained in Oakland; those who spent their formative years in Oakland before launching professional careers nationally; and touring musicians who played “one-nighters” or extended residencies.

Native pianist and bandleader Sidney LePretti was Oakland’s earliest jazz musician.
Born on 25 November 1886, LeProtti led several bands including the Crescent Orchestra, the So Different Jazz Band (probably named after the So Different or Purcell’s club on the Barbary Coast), and the LeProtti’s Paramount 10. In addition to playing on the Barbary Coast, LeProtti frequently performed at Oakland functions in the 1920s and 1930s. The Red Cap Porters’ Benevolent Association’s annual banquet, held at St. Augustine’s Church, hired LeProtti’s band in November 1926 (Western American 1926:4). Another Oakland-born musician was pianist/ bandleader Henry Starr, who appeared with his Café Richards Syncopators. Starr left Oakland in the 1920s to work in Los Angeles and other places. After returning home to Oakland in the 1940s, he was the first black musician to have a radio show on KAKA, KFRC, and KRE (Atkinson 1993:7). Starr also recorded for Curtis Mosby’s Blue Blowers for the Columbia label.

There were several transplanted musicians who spent their formative years in Oakland and became successful. Singer and guitarist Saunders King first sang on the radio with the Southern Harmony Four and then made his solo debut in Oakland with the Les Hite Band. His 1945 recording “S.K. Blues” became the first Bay Area blues hit. King played at the North Pole and downtown at Sweets Ballroom on the corner of Fourteenth and Franklin among other places. Other successful musicians who spent formative years in Oakland were cornetist (and future record company owner) Vernon “Jake” Porter and alto saxophonist Jerome Richardson. Pianist/arranger Wilbert Barano played at a number of local clubs and recorded with Ernie Andrews, Charles Mingus, and Dinah Washington, among others.

The two most celebrated jazz orchestras in Oakland were led by clarinetists and bandleaders Wade Whaley and Clem Raymond. Whaley hailed from New Orleans and played with Jelly Roll Morton in Los Angeles and in 1920 at West Oakland’s Creole Café, among many other places. His Black and Tan Jazz Hounds achieved much success in the late 1920s (Chilton 1978:349). Clem Raymond and His Jazz Hounds played at a number of local clubs, as well the local 1927 Mardi Gras; the Jazz Hounds could produce a stately sound.

Whaley, Raymond, and Sidney LeProtti were disciples of the New Orleans jazz in the style of King Oliver. This style was surely a part of the local jazz scene in the 1920s and 1930s given the number of New Orleans people who migrated to Oakland, both before and after World War I, and because the style was popular at the time.

Jelly Roll Morton—the New Orleans-born composer, pianist, and self-proclaimed inventor of jazz—came to Los Angeles in 1917 and traveled to the Bay Area, playing at the Creole Café at 1740 Seventh Street in West Oakland. Owned by Sid Deering, the Creole Café was a Black and Tan club that existed from around 1918 to 1921. Musician Reb Spikes recalled that King Oliver played at the Creole Café, while Charlie “Duke” Turner remembered trombonist Kid Ory performing there (Stoddard 1982:78,91). The Creole Café also was associated with prostitution (Solari 1997:291, citing Oakland Enquirer 20 December 1920; Oakland Tribune 22 April 1920, 29 May 1920). Another Black and Tan club was the Bluebird Cabaret, located at 708 Pine. It opened in 1927 with a group called the Louisiana High Browns furnishing dance music for more than 300 guests. “There were as many white parties present as there was of our own race,” a local black newspaper reported (Western American 1927:8).

The landmark establishment for jazz and blues was Jenkins’ Corner, later known as Slim Jenkins’, a Black and Tan club located at 1748 Seventh Street. Jenkins featured jazz and blues bands and Harlemesque revues. After becoming established, Jenkins booked name entertainers such as the Ink Spots, Dinah Washington, Earl “Fatha” Hines, and Lou Rawls, among many others. William J. Denahy, whose Irish father ran the Snug Harbor Bar at Seventh and Adeline, described Jenkins’ club as the “Harlem of Oakland” (Denahy 1981:24). John Singer was another jazz club owner who booked first-rate touring performers.

In the 1920s, Oakland, not unlike other cities in the United States, was addicted to social dancing. The largest venue was the Oakland Auditorium, which opened on 15 August 1915; with a Beaux Arts civic architectural style, the complex included an arena and theater that could accommodate up to 13,000 people. Beginning in the 1920s, a continuous stream of jazz bands played at the Oakland Auditorium. It was the scene of a number of events featuring top touring jazz bands.

One such event was a New Orleans Mardi Gras. Louisiana culture with New Orleans in the
forefront was influential in Oakland. In addition to Louisiana voluntary associations, cuisine, and music, Louisiana Creoles and African Americans continued the celebration of Mardi Gras. The Louisiana Commercial Association sponsored an annual carnival that included a Grand Ball at the Oakland Auditorium from 1920 to 1929. The 1922 celebration featured music by King Oliver’s and Kid Ory’s celebrated Creole bands (Oakland Sunshine 1922). Native Oakland jazz historian, critic, and producer Herb Wong remembers seeing jazz shows at the auditorium as a kid in the 1940s, including one featuring a zoot-suitied Louis Jordan and His Typanny Five playing for jitterbug contests.

Los Angeles-based vocalist Ernie Andrews, accompanied by pianist Ernie Lewis, made his show-business debut in 1946 at the Villa, up Seventh Street from Slim Jenkins’ and next to Rex’s Bar. “It was a great street, gambling houses, bars, mixed audiences,” Andrews recalled. “Across the street from the Villa was the Rhythm Club that featured big bands such as Billy Eckstine, Lucky Millinder, and Duke Ellington. The Clef Club on Seventh Street and the North Pole were good clubs. There was some of everything” (Andrews 1995).

In Oakland, brothers William and Eugene Sweets ran the Sweets’ Ballrooms and were the principal promoters of ballroom dancing in Oakland. There were four Sweets Ballrooms over the course of 45 years, which featured “Benny Goodman, Fletcher Henderson, Lionel Hampton, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Gene Krupa, Harry James, Les Brown, Jimmy Dorsey, and a host of others” (Harmon 1995:9).

West Oakland in the late 1930s became the site of a thriving blues scene. Oakland was receptive to the gutsy piano of Count Otis Matheus, with whom future rhythm-and-blues bandleader Johnny Otis played drums, as well as to the jazz/blues synthesis of guitarist/vocalist Aaron “T-Bone” Walker, guitarist/vocalist/bandleader Saunders King, and pianist/vocalist Ivory Joe Hunter (who penned “Seventh Street Boogie” in the mid ’40s), to mention only a few. Songwriter/producer Bob Geddins, called the “Father of Oakland Blues,” began pressing records in the mid-1940s and forged an Oakland blues style with the help of session guitarist Lafayette “Thang” Thomas.

Oakland venues, particularly those on Seventh Street, afforded a place where various jazz styles were played. Clubs on Seventh Street and other parts of West Oakland were important places for jazz and later blues music performances. The period from the 1920s through the 1940s can be viewed as the heyday of a thriving black social life, with diverse musical styles. Oakland cannot be omitted when one discusses jazz and blues in California. While West Oakland and Seventh Street were known for much more than music, the residents and national jazz artists who appeared there, and the local and tourist audiences who attended their performances, give the area a significant place in California’s musical heritage.
Other national African American organizations also found a place in West Oakland. In 1925 the international Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) purchased a commercial building on the corner of Eighth and Chester streets. Under the leadership of Marcus Garvey, the UNIA espoused self-help through the independent ownership of black businesses and the establishment of an African republic. Named “Liberty Hall” after the UNIA’s large Harlem auditorium, the West Oakland building was used for political meetings and frequent social events, with a local membership of over 500. By the mid-1930s, followers of Harlem’s renowned evangelical minister Father Devine operated a Peace Mission out of the building. The mission served cheap, filling meals to local people during the Depression (Allen 1994:6, 9; Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989: 32).

The BSCP leadership was instrumental in lobbying President Franklin Roosevelt to require fair employment practices in the defense industry during World War II. Labor recruiters for Oakland’s Moore shipyard traveled throughout the post-Depression South offering various inducements for African Americans to come work in California. As a result, between 1940 and 1950 Oakland’s African American community grew from around 8,400 to nearly 50,000 people (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:45-46; Spires 1994). Yet with prohibitive ordinances still in place, the housing market for these new arrivals was extremely tight. Already in poor repair, a West Oakland house built for families in the railroad boom of the previous century provided shelter for as many as 50 men, who would often sleep in shifts in so-called “hot beds” (Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker 1989:49). Predictably, at the end of World War II black workers were the first laid off at the shipyards. The well-paid, skilled and semi-skilled jobs that were the foundation on which the prosperity of the black community had rested for the last 70 years began to disappear.

“BLIGHT” AND REDEVELOPMENT

Although West Oakland was designated a “blighted” district in 1949, New Deal progressives had been busy in the neighborhood since the late 1930s, when several blocks of eclectic but decaying Victorian-era residences were declared a slum, condemned, and replaced with rows of austere, concrete, International-style apartment buildings. Peralta Villa, one of the first public-housing projects in California, was completed in 1942. The project replaced 150 19th-century wood-framed homes on traditional small-scale city blocks with 35 multifamily residential structures on “super blocks,” designed to change the character of the entire neighborhood (Figures 10.4 and 10.5). In accord with the social ideas and planning concepts of the New Deal era, there were no private outer spaces. The uniformity and openness rows of concrete block houses provided a clear line for surveillance. Privacy was a thing of the past. Ironically, the first occupants of Peralta Villa were not from the neighborhood, but newly arrived armament workers (Olmsted and Olmsted 1994:169-171; Solari 2001).

In the 1950s the double-deck Cypress Freeway was built, bisecting West Oakland with a massive physical and visual barrier. Again, despite neighborhood opposition, homes were destroyed and families relocated (Solari 2001). In 1958 the Oakland Redevelopment Agency concluded that over half of West Oakland was blighted and should be cleared. As a result of this designation and because its poor residents lacked political influence, large-scale public projects that might have faced opposition elsewhere began to be sited in West Oakland. When the Federal government chose West Oakland as the site for a massive new postal facility, called Project
Figure 10.4. End of a neighborhood, 1941. These homes on the corner of Cypress and Eighth streets were removed in 1941 for Peralta Villa. C.L. Dellums recalled the neighborhood’s sense of bafflement at what was happening: “The houses that were torn down weren’t necessarily dilapidated. The people who were living in their homes... couldn’t understand why they wanted to take over their homes for that price when there were places over on Pine and Wood and Cedar in much worse condition. The people had kept their homes up... . Their homes were always presentable. But that was the Housing Authority’s decision on it, so there was nothing to be done about it” (Henderson 1973:72). (Photo courtesy Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room)

Figure 10.5. Peralta Villa, 1942. As the largest USHA slum-clearance project in the East Bay, Peralta Villa appears eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as an “outstanding example of Depression Era housing . . . a clear physical expression of design and social planning theories of the New Deal” (Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey 1990 [3] A-228: 11). (Photo courtesy Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room)
Gateway, the Postmaster General opined, “We’re doing this area a favor” (San Francisco Chronicle 1960). Although local residents disagreed, in 1960 300 families lost their homes on 12 city blocks. Giving a new poignancy to the term “war on poverty,” an enterprising former racecar driver made quick work of the demolition with a World War II surplus Sherman Tank, which could level a residence in 10 minutes flat (Oakland Tribune 1959a, 1959b, 1960a, 1960b; San Francisco Chronicle 1960). There was no relocation plan for the displaced residents and few could afford to purchase a replacement home elsewhere in town with their settlement payment. Local realtor Robert Valva worked as a middleman between the State Division of Highways, as Caltrans was then known, and homeowners displaced by the Cypress freeway:

See the biggest problem we’re having is these little people that were earning too much money, whether it was Post Office or Nimitz Freeway, when they got $7,000 for their house that they paid $1800 for, that was a lot of money. But, the cheapest house that they could go find, better up, was ten or fifteen [thousand dollars]. And four or five thousand dollar difference was a lot of money to them. How to make those [mortgage] payments? I mean, they were $25, $50 a month, [which] was a lot of money for them [Valva 1995:6-7].

Many of the displaced had been homeowners in the neighborhood for generations. One woman who lived on Myrtle Street in a “beautiful three-story Victorian” since 1917, simply gave up when they took her home for the freeway: “She quit walking. She said I can’t walk anymore. And she had walked all those stairs every day, three and four times a day. She just gave up. They actually killed her when they took her home” (Blake 1995:31).

Despite the haste with which the old houses on these 12 blocks were razed, construction on the postal facility did not begin until 1966, with completion three years later. In the intervening years, the vacant lots became a “dumping ground” in the now “deserted and desolate West Oakland site” (Hope 1963; Oakland Tribune 1968).

**Archaeology of the “Dumping Ground”**

Archaeological remains have a serendipitous quality: the artifacts and features that represent years of occupation will be swept away, while some unplanned and apparently trivial action may leave evidence that survives by pure chance. This was the case with a collection of artifacts at 1726 William Street on Cypress Project Block 3. Dumped unceremoniously on a vacant lot by some anonymous West Oaklanders in the early 1960s, these artifacts make for an interesting comparison with materials from the previous century (Figure 10.6 and 10.7).

The same classes of artifacts are present in the 20th-century collection, sometimes with different representations: electrical parts substitute for lamp chimneys, and among the toys is a model airplane. There are also unexpectedly few alcohol bottles in the community dump of the 1960s compared with the household assemblages of the previous century. Some of the latter contained dozens of beer and spirit containers in spite of the fact that these bottles could be sold for cash to junk dealers. Large-scale bottle collection and reuse was a thing of the past by the mid-20th century, while domestic recycling had yet to establish itself. Several milk bottles were found in the 1960s collection, despite the fact that the manufacturers intended these to be returned and reused. Conversely, the 1960s assemblage contains a proportionally larger quantity of cleaning products (including Clorox, Pinex, and car wax) in comparison to the earlier collections. The 19th-century assemblages also contain many items in the health and grooming
categories, such as pomade and perfume as well as artifacts used in the hope of preventing or treating disease. With a century’s worth of advancements in medicine, decline might be predicted in the use of home medicines for treatment. Yet, both personal beautification products and proprietary medicines are as plentiful in the 20th-century assemblage as in those from the previous century, perhaps reflecting the poor access to health care in 1960s West Oakland.

The food preparation and serving items are very diverse in age, decorative types, and quality. The English blue Willow pattern, brown late-19th-century-transfer prints, and turn-of-the-century printed Japanese bowl sherds sit together with brightly colored sherds of Fiestaware from the 1930s and later. High-quality glassware and porcelain vessels co-occur with cheap mugs and molded tumblers. Since the 1960s dump does not mark the kind of household demographic transition that sometimes results in the rapid disposal of the contents of a family’s entire kitchen stock, the lack of duplication of decorative patterns is not surprising. Nevertheless, the assemblage shows that materials spanning a century of manufacture were in use, in startling contrast to the earlier Cypress collections, which rarely contained such heirloom items. It was not uncommon even for working-class households in the mid- and late 19th century to dispose of unfashionable sets at a stroke, presumably with the intention of replacing them with a more up-to-date pattern.

While the food preparation and serving items are diverse in age, decoration, and quality, they are relatively homogeneous in function. Typically, the 19th-century collections from West Oakland contain a dizzying range of table and serving vessels: plates, bowls, cups, covered tureens, and jugs of various sizes and shapes according to their function. This variety reflects the formal dining practices that were so important in mid- and late-19th-century family homes.
boardinghouses, and hotels. Dining was far more than simply the process of ingesting nutrition. It was a highly ritualized activity that reaffirmed one’s place in society and relation to genteel culture. In their uniformity, matched sets of dinnerware embodied that formality. A century later, dining had lost much of its symbolism. Although a community dump may not be the most controlled source of data, these materials suggest that achieving the aesthetic of the matched dining set was no longer important and that this aspect of formal dining was much reduced.

These participants in the “culture of poverty,” as it was known to anthropologists of the era, appear to have been as concerned with personal appearance, cleanliness, and impression management as their 19th-century predecessors. Normative ritual had certainly changed, and there may have been less self-conscious emulation of some of the aesthetics of white America. And West Oaklanders were certainly poorer than they had been. The material record, however, does not support the image of a “blighted” neighborhood that could only be redeemed through its destruction.

**Politics and Paranoia**

Increasingly marginalized, the residents of West Oakland began to protest, sometimes violently, the continued devastation of their neighborhood by what they perceived as an unresponsive and distant authority. Housing and local control were the rallying issues. While Federal planners had conceived of public housing as set in an open public landscape, the people who actually lived in places like Peralta Villa preferred a traditional landscape (Figure 10.8). As in the old neighborhood, they built backyard fences to divide up the featureless expanses between residential buildings and convert them into family spaces. In 1965 as part of the Federal government’s “ Beautify America” program, the Oakland Housing Authority began to tear down these backyard fences. The response was immediate, and predictive of future events: outraged tenants formed a grass-roots organization, the Peralta Improvement League, and with help from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), staged a protest that resulted in the abandonment of the Housing Authority’s plan (Solari 2001).

The following year, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was born in West Oakland. The Party fought for self-determination for the black community. Panthers preached the politics of revolution within the community and to radical whites on university campuses throughout the Bay Area and eventually the nation. They armed themselves and their followers and shadowed the Oakland police on their rounds of West Oakland (Figure 10.9). They also provided free breakfasts for school children, free shoes, clothing, and medical

![Figure 10.8. Officials visit Peralta Villa while children play. (Photo courtesy Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room)]
care; they re-engendered a sense of pride in the community and an awakening that “Black is Beautiful!”

The Black Power movement may be said to have originated, in part, in the powerlessness of West Oaklanders to save their homes, businesses, and vibrant culture from what were seen as the arbitrary ravages of a distant bureaucracy. The Black Panther Party itself had deep roots in the area and its social issues. In 1970 Party headquarters was located on Peralta Street, not far from the Project Gateway postal facility. The infamous October 1967 shoot-out between the Oakland police and Black Panther co-founder Huey Newton occurred across the street from Project Gateway at the construction site of the new post office. Huey Newton was murdered on Center Street in West Oakland in 1989.

Figure 10.9. Black Panthers at State capitol. The Black Panthers made a lasting impression when they visited the State capitol fully armed in May 1967. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Bee collection, Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center)

BLACK PANTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

To affirm the community’s independence, and out of frustration with neglectful and overly bureaucratic government social programs, the Panthers operated several free community services, including clinics, clothing giveaways, buses, and an award-winning elementary school. The well-known Children’s Breakfast program was supported by donations of food from West Oakland businesses and served at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church.

Bobby Seale described it as a “survival program—survival pending revolution...” that emerged out of “our desire to show the community we do something more than shoot it out with cops” (1971:212).

Empty boxes and leftover items from Black Panther food program, circa 1967. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Bee collection, Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center)
The boyhood home of Huey Newton (at 500 Brush) had been removed for the original Cypress Freeway in the 1950s:

The first house that I remember was on the corner of Fifth and Brush streets in a rundown section of Oakland. It was a two-bedroom basement apartment, and much too small to hold all of us comfortably. The floor was either dirt or cement, I cannot remember exactly; it did not seem to be the kind of floor that “regular” people had in their homes. My parents slept in one bedroom and my sisters, brothers, and I in the other [Newton 1972:16].

The fourth plank of the Black Panther Party program was: “We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.” By this they meant an end to all urban-renewal programs designed for corporate profit that forced poor and working people out of their communities. Furthermore, decent low-cost housing should be built under community control in such a way that existing communities would not be leveled or disrupted (Heath 1976:7).

The leveling of West Oakland contributed to rampant paranoia within the African American community in the late 1960s. “Urban renewal” was seen as a ploy to further disenfranchise the poor. Many black nationalists fervently believed that the U.S. government had genocidal, Nazi-like intentions, and there was widespread belief in a secret scheme known as the “King Alfred Plan.” According to some, a cabal of powerful government and industry leaders had been formed with the purpose of renovating and expanding the Japanese American internment camps, wherein rebellious blacks would be confined and exterminated. That many formerly independent African American homeowners had been forced onto public assistance in the prisonlike confines of the housing projects was convincing evidence of such a plan for the Panther revolutionaries (Figure 10.10). Others found proof of this Machiavellian scheme in the use of their neighborhood for freeways, mass-transit projects, and urban renewal (Heath 1976:71).

Figure 10.10. Local commentary. This undated line drawing of Peralta Villa “Concentration Camp” was found in the “Peralta Improvement League” file at the Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library.
LOMA PRIETA TEMBLOR SHAKES UP THE COMMUNITY

The collapsed freeway sandwiched vehicles and their passengers within the tangled ruins of the concrete Cypress structure. The black residents of the neighborhood were the first on the scene. They searched the debris and lowered survivors to safety, defying the very real possibility that they themselves might become victims. Already damaged by the earthquake, the neighborhood also suffered from the demolition of the freeway structure—noise and dust from wrecking crews and dump trucks working nonstop for several weeks. When Caltrans announced that it would rebuild the freeway, neighborhood activists saw an opportunity to influence the process in a way that they had been unable to do decades previously. The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s had transformed Oakland politics, resulting in greater representation in City government and on powerful planning agencies by African Americans (Self 2000). Soon after the earthquake, community leaders formed the Citizens’ Emergency Response Team (CERT) and demanded that the Cypress Freeway not be built along its original alignment. The Oakland City Council voted to oppose rebuilding the freeway, and a County supervisor proposed an alternative route along the edge of West Oakland (Hausler 1990). This time, the neighborhood won.

AFRICAN AMERICAN BARBERS IN OAKLAND:
DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE, ECONOMIC SECURITY, AND SOCIAL STATUS

Willie R. Collins

In the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, African American barbers (or “tonsorial artists” as they were called) who opened barbershops were financially well-rewarded and garnered significant social status within the black community. Nationally, perhaps the wealthiest African American barber was William Johnson, a free man who lived in Natchez, Mississippi, during the 19th century. Johnson accumulated 750 acres of farmland, a number of barbershops, rental properties, and two-dozen slaves (Prætzellis and Prætzellis 1992b). It is likely that most black-owned barbershops during this period served a white clientele—it was a matter of “bread-and-butter” income. “The more prosperous Negro-owned shops catered to ‘whites only.’” In Illinois, a black man could get his hair cut only after hours when the shops were closed (Merrifield 1997)—a practice that was probably standard in other parts of the country as well. In addition to shearing beards and hair, giving shaves, and shampooing, some barbershops also offered baths and bootblack services.

In Oakland, California, a number of black barbers created stable and successful enterprises. The Central Pacific railroad created a major hub in Oakland, and the policy of the Pullman Company to exclusively hire blacks created a favorable environment for black-owned barbershops. In 1866 C. F. Sloan may have operated the East Bay’s first black-owned barber shop and bathing house. The shop was located on the south side of Seventh Street between Broadway and Washington, opposite the Central Pacific Railroad. On 13 May 1871, a notice appeared in the Pacific Appeal announcing the sale of Sloan’s shop, calling it “the oldest Barbershop and Bathing House in Oakland” (Collins 1997a). This barbershop probably served a white clientele.

In 1873 Oscar Jackson opened a shaving parlor and baths, and in the following year a barbershop, in East Oakland. Jackson then opened a hairdressing salon on Railroad Avenue (which later became Seventh Street) in West Oakland. Jackson acquired still another barbershop on Broadway. In 1876 he sold his two barbershops to William H. Stewart, who operated a shop until the turn of the century (Hausler 1998). Lucinda Tilghman, who lived at 662 Fifth Street in West Oakland, had been married to a barber who died at sea in 1875 and probably left her some real and personal property. Many barbers and hairdressers made their homes on Cypress Project blocks. Oscar Jackson and his wife, Mary Ellen
Scott, lived in a small cottage at 860 Pine Street (now 714 Pine) in the 1870s. Besides being a barber, Oscar Jackson performed around the world as a tenor in a minstrel troupe. Although no archaeological deposits were found at this address on Block 25, the residence was thoroughly recorded by the Cypress architectural team (Groth and Gutman 1997:35-38) and eventually moved by Caltrans to a new location. Archaeologists found deposits associated with the William Stewart family on Block 2 (Privy 1452 and Pits 1404 and 1461); these are described in the BTR and throughout this volume.

The central role that black barbers played in the economic and social life of the West Oakland black community can be seen clearly in the success of the William H. Stewart family, who lived at 713 Sixth Street. The Stewart family was an example of an African American family that used barbersing and hairdressing as a means to achieve a stable income, investments, and a level of financial security unobtainable in many other occupations. Barbering and hairdressing was, in a sense, economic freedom for the Stewart family.

Born in Maryland, William H. Stewart and his family moved to West Oakland in 1876 and opened a barbershop and bathhouse at 470 Ninth Street. This was one of several barbershops owned and operated by Stewart and his son, William Jr., Stewart’s wife, Emily, and daughter Georgiana worked as hairdressers.

The elder Stewart was not only a successful businessman, but he was also an active community leader. In 1879 he was president of the Immigration Bureau and operated an employment agency out of his home and shop. Stewart also was an agent for the Pacific Appeal newspaper, an officer of the African American-run Pacific Coast Stock Raising and Farming Company, vice president of the Literary and Aid Society, and an executive committee member of the Republican party-affiliated Colored Citizens of Oakland and Alameda County.

In 1888 William Stewart, Jr., operated the Ne Plus Ultra Tonsorial Parlor at 964 Broadway, specializing in ladies and children’s hair. In the same year, William Jr. died, leaving his estate to his father. From 1889 to 1901, William H. Stewart operated the Broadway barbershop. In 1901 Stewart died at the age of 71. He had operated a successful business in Oakland for 25 years (Hausler 1998).
After William H. Stewart’s death, his barbershop at 964 Broadway was operated and perhaps purchased by William A. Towns, who ran the business under the name of the Mint Barbershop. This became a well-known African American establishment at the center of commerce in Oakland, serving a white clientele.

The pattern of independent African American-owned barbershops serving an exclusively white clientele declined and for the most part ended in the early 20th century. In 1900, 18 black barbers worked in Oakland. By 1910, this number had grown to 44. But by 1930, only about 16 black-owned barbershops were in the East Bay (Thompson 1930).

Competition from other ethnic groups, the exclusionary policies of white labor unions, and the greater influence of capitalist enterprises all contributed to the decline. Eventually, however, African American independently owned shops began to reappear, as the stigma of race and the necessity of adhering to a color line to operate a barbershop had been eradicated. Additionally, the increase in the African American population created a need for barbershops that served African Americans, so black barbershops could be successful serving a predominantly black clientele.

Young Oakland barber with “natural” hairstyle, circa 1960. (Photo courtesy of Carrie M. Rich)

CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT

More than a century has passed since West Oakland experienced the florescence of its skilled working class. For the first 60 years, this had been a multi-ethnic neighborhood. For black Oaklanders of that era, we believe that individuals’ sense of dignity was reinforced by their use of genteel material culture appropriated from wider society but given new meanings based on community values and aesthetics. Later, a massive population increase, government-sanctioned policies of discrimination, the loss of the traditional employment base, and concepts of “blight” and unsightliness were used to rationalize re-engineering the neighborhood.

Archaeological remains show this process in their structure as well as their content: recent escapees from the horrors of slavery, the residents of Lucinda Tilghman’s home were socially active, entrepreneurial, and sophisticated. Her parlor items suggest a proudly genteel household. Significantly, the objects themselves were discarded into an outdoor privy that had been made redundant by the installation of City services. One is left with an impression of the optimism of this era, whose material progress had been tremendous, and for whom social advancement could not be far behind. Eighty years later, the ad hoc mounds of refuse left by chronically unemployed people in the early 1960s are both physical evidence and a metaphor of the change that had swept the area. Optimism had retreated before the hard reality of continued racial injustice. Self-determination, as symbolized by homeownership, had been in reach of the skilled
workers of Lucinda Tilghman’s day. By the 1970s, it was impossible for most, whose homes were likely replaced by concrete blockhouses. The material plenty of the post-World War II era was nowhere to be seen in the West Oakland of the 1970s.

Nevertheless, community activists continued to work for change. Just 10 days after the 1989 earthquake, a restored Liberty Hall reopened as a community center for neighborhood activities, with a permanent photo exhibit on the history of West Oakland in the main hall. Jubilee West, a local non-profit organization, had stepped in to save the historic United Negro Improvement Association building from demolition. Today, the organization purchases and renovates dilapidated Victorian houses throughout West Oakland to provide affordable housing to the community (Allen 1994:6, 9).

West Oakland activists and politicians used the Cypress Freeway Replacement to focus attention on the area’s problems. It was hoped that the earthquake would prove to be a turning point in the area’s rebirth (Hausler 1990:3). Instead of construction with bricks and mortar, neighborhood activists are concerned with revitalizing the community for the people who live there. “Redevelopment usually means black removal,” according to Charles Martin, director of Jubilee West, as he strove to reverse these changes (Donnelly 1993:26).

It is too soon to tell if West Oakland will “create a brighter future by harnessing the spirit that moved the Cypress freeway” (Nakao 1995). It is hoped, however, that the neighborhood has indeed received an “unexpected gift” that “pulls together the history and the present of Oakland’s first neighborhood” and that “can inspire future generations looking for ways to get along” (Lavoie 1995; Payton 1995).