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Mobilizing African-Americans against the "Peddlers of Bigotry": The "NO ON PROPOSITION 14" Campaign in Los Angeles

Tracy Sullivan

Introduction

During the first half of the twentieth century, California represented a safe haven for African-Americans living in the southern region of the United States. Fleeing the "Jim Crow" South, thousands of southern blacks relocated to California in pursuit of social and economic equality. However, once they arrived in their new home, African-Americans soon discovered that life in California was not as they had hoped. While rioting in the streets of Los Angeles in August 1965, an individual voiced the general disappointment of those living in the city's black districts:

Everywhere they say, 'Go to California! California's the great pot o' gold at the end of the rainbow.' Well, now we're here in California, and there ain't no place else to go, and the only pot is the kind they peddle at Sixteenth and Avalon.¹

Nine months prior to this statement, voters in California passed Proposition (Prop) 14, a constitutional

¹ Quoted in K.G. May, *Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Image, 1955-1966* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 164.

initiative written to prohibit the existence of fair housing legislation in California. In the months leading up to the proposition's passage, opponents launched a mighty campaign against what they considered to be "the forces of bigotry."² This paper documents the debates and controversy surrounding Prop 14 in Los Angeles prior to the proposition's passage. The *California Eagle* and *Los Angeles Sentinel*, two popular L.A.-based black newspapers, reveal an active "No on 14" presence in L.A. that placed value on the African-American vote.

Historiography

Time magazine called Prop 14 "the most bitterly fought issue in the nation's most populous state," and claimed that it attracted intense interest both inside and outside of California, overshadowing "that of such piddling contests as the one between Johnson and Goldwater."³ However, after the Supreme Court overturned the electorate's decision in 1967, Prop 14 faded from public memory as though it had never happened. Since then, few historians have unearthed Prop 14 from the depths of history. In *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, Josh Sides provides a minimal, one-paragraph synopsis of Prop 14 as a segue into the Watts Riots.⁴

² Dr. Christopher L. Taylor, President of the L.A. NAACP Branch, quoted in "No on 14 Crusade Starts Its 'Operation Westside'," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 1, 1964.

³ "Proposition 14." *Time* 84, no. 13 (September 25, 1964), 41.

⁴ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African-American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 168.

Recently, Prop 14 has figured more prominently in scholarly research. In *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1948*, Prop 14 receives more scholarly attention. The author, Mark Brilliant, explains the “ideological schizophrenia” manifested in the 1964 election when California voters “cast ballots in the same overwhelmingly numbers *against* Goldwater as they did *for* Prop 14.”⁵ Brilliant goes on to explore the consequences of the election, arguing that the ongoing housing debate won Ronald Reagan the governor’s chair in 1967. The same year Brilliant released his book, the University of California Press published *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*, a selective study of California’s most controversial ballot measures. Devoting an entire chapter to the issue of fair housing, Daniel Martinez HoSang details both the campaigns for and against Prop 14.⁶ California’s “No on Prop 14” campaign adds to the growing body of literature that challenges the notion that the civil rights movement was an enterprise exclusive to the American South.⁷

⁵ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of American Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 191.

⁶ Daniel Martinez HoSang, “Get Your Rights Back!?: Fair Housing and the Right to Discriminate, 1960-1972,” in *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 53-90.

⁷ See Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

The controversy around Prop 14 reveals that the “race problem” existed outside of the South, thereby broadening the scope of the civil rights struggle. This paper places Prop 14 in the broader context of the civil rights movement in order to examine the influences driving California’s fair housing advocates. While Prop 14 affected all ethnic minorities in California, this paper focuses on African-Americans, the main victims of the initiative’s attack. Louis Lomax, a renowned journalist and major African-American figure, described Prop 14 as a direct attack on black people living in California. In September 1964, he told the *Sentinel*, “We are moved by information which proves that the peddlers of bigotry will unleash an all-out campaign against black people in this state during the last two weeks in October.”⁸ Prop 14 especially impacted African-Americans because they experienced more housing discrimination than any other ethnic minority at the time. Mark Brilliant cites a 1961 United States Civil Rights Commission report in which the California advisory committee concludes, “There is a far greater degree of housing mobility for Orientals and Mexican-Americans in California than exists for Negroes.”⁹

This paper adds to the existing research by focusing specifically on the “NO” campaign in Los Angeles County rather than the state at large in order to reveal

⁸ Louis Lomax, quoted in “Leaders Map New Strategy to Defeat Racist Legislation,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 3, 1964. See “Louis E. Lomax,” *Contemporary Black Biography* 90, (Detroit: Gale, 2011), *Biography in Context*, <http://0-ic.galegroup.com.sculib.scu.edu/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?failOverType> (accessed December 2, 2013).

⁹ Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 171-172.

campaign nuances specific to the area. It shows that anti-14 forces in L.A. directed energy toward reaching the city's African-American population. In order to reach this conclusion, I relied on articles published in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *California Eagle*, two leading black newspapers of the time.

Destination California

World War II created job opportunities on the United States home front for all members of society, including women and ethnic minorities. Demand for ammunitions, planes, ships, weaponry, and tanks skyrocketed when France and Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. As a result, employment figures in the U.S. defense industry rose dramatically. At the helm, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt set lofty production goals for the country, emphasizing the necessity to out-produce the enemies "overwhelmingly."¹⁰ Under immense pressure by the NAACP and A. Philip Randolph, Roosevelt reluctantly issued Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941 to avoid a massive civil rights march. The order banned discrimination in the war industry and established the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to temporarily oversee hiring practices.¹¹ Seizing the newfound job

¹⁰ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Annual Budget Message" (speech, Washington, DC, January 5, 1942), in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woodley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16231> (accessed November 27, 2013).

¹¹ John H. Bracey Jr. and August Meier, "Allies or Adversaries?: The NAACP, A. Philip Randolph and the 1941 March on Washington," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (spring 1991), 1-17, <http://0->

opportunities, five million African-Americans migrated from the South between 1940 and 1970.¹² During the war, 85 percent of the one million African-Americans who left the South settled in California.¹³ Los Angeles, one of the country's largest wartime production centers, was a major destination for African-Americans seeking employment. During the war years, 340,000 job seeking African-Americans moved to L.A., home to a defense industry of over half a million workers in 1943.¹⁴ The largest wave of African-American migration into L.A. occurred in 1943 when over 6,000 newcomers inundated the city every month.¹⁵

Fooled into thinking California offered a new life ripe with opportunity for all, African-American arrivals quickly discovered the Golden State was not the Promised Land they had envisioned. The use of restrictive housing covenants and block agreements confined African-Americans to the south central section of L.A.¹⁶ Used in California since the 1920s, restrictive covenants were binding legal contracts whereby the signers vowed to sell their property only to white buyers.¹⁷ Trapped within the boundaries of Slauson Ave., Broadway, and Alameda St., African-Americans did not

www.jstor.org/sculib.scu.edu/stable/40582270 (accessed December 5, 2013).

¹² Laurie Lanzen Harris, *Defining Moments: The Great Migration North, 1910-1970* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2012), 49.

¹³ Lauren Coodley, ed., *California: A Multicultural Documentary History* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 224.

¹⁴ May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*, 11; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 37.

¹⁵ May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*, 11.

¹⁶ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 98.

¹⁷ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 55.

have access to the "beautiful beaches," "attractive residential districts" and "spacious lawns" advertised in the NAACP's May 1942 issue of *The Crisis*.¹⁸ Although South Central L.A. provided inhabitants with a better quality of life than the slums of other major cities, living conditions were far from ideal for African-Americans who relocated to L.A. The McCone Commission, a group of "distinguished Californians" appointed by Governor "Pat" Brown to study the L.A. riots in 1965, addressed the "serious deterioration" of the city's black districts. Barred from suburbia, African-Americans had no other housing options but the overcrowded and decrepit apartments described in the commission's report.¹⁹

In 1948, the Supreme Court of the United States delivered a blow to segregationists nationwide. In *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), the Court majority declared that the enforcement of racially restrictive housing covenants was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁰ In *The Petitioners: The Story of the Supreme Court of the United States and the Negro* (1965), Supe-

¹⁸ "California Calls," *The Crisis* 49, no. 5, May 1942, 155, <http://books.google.com/books?id=4FoEAAAAMBAAJ&printsec=frontcover> (accessed November 27, 2013); Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 98.

¹⁹ California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?: A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965*, December 2, 1965, under "Neither Slums nor Urban Gems," <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/cityinstress/mccone/contents.html> (accessed November 27, 2013).

²⁰ Joe T. Darden, "Black Residential Segregation Since the 1948 Shelley v. Kraemer Decision," *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 6 (July 1995), 680, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784759> (accessed November 27, 2013).

rior Court Justice Loren Miller, a leader in the crusade against racially restrictive covenants, translates the Court's opinion in laypeople's terms: "Covenants were not void; they were unenforcible [sic]."²¹ Finally, in *Barrows v. Jackson* (1953), the Supreme Court officially abolished racially restrictive housing covenants.²²

Despite the new opportunities the Supreme Court rulings opened for the black community, the color line in L.A. County remained largely intact. Historian Josh Sides argues that the postwar period "brought a crushing wave of virulent anti-black racism the likes of which the city had never known."²³ The Court's abolition of racially restrictive covenants triggered more overt acts of racism against African-Americans seeking entrance to historically all-white neighborhoods than ever. On many occasions, segregationists vandalized, planted bombs, and formed mobs outside the new homes of African-Americans.²⁴ Sides notes a Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations record which "reported six bombings and four incidents of arson against black homes in Los Angeles County [between 1950 and 1959]."²⁵ William Brady, a member of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, and his family were the victims of one such incident. Shortly after

²¹ Loren Miller, "Scotching Restrictive Covenants," in *Los Angeles: Biography of a City*, ed. John Caughey and Laree Caughey (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 389.

²² Miller, "Scotching Restrictive Covenants," in *Los Angeles*, 388-91.

²³ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 101.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101-2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

Brady moved his family into a suburb outside the City of L.A., vigilantes bombed his home in the early morning of March 16, 1952. The real estate agent who sold Brady the home woke up to find a heap of trash piled on top of her car and her gas tank filled with sand.²⁶ Despite such effort and aggression, the color line became increasingly difficult to maintain as black migrants continued to settle in L.A. throughout the 1950s and 60s.

Civil Rights Reform: 1959-1963

The election of Edmund Gerald “Pat” Brown as California Governor in 1958 restored hope in the African-American community. Sympathetic to the plight of the African-American community, Governor Brown immediately began to push his liberal agenda through the California state legislature in the hopes of opening access to employment and housing for black citizens. On April 16, 1959, a mere four months after taking the oath of office, Governor Brown signed the California Fair Employment Act into law. For enforcement, Brown selected five appointees to head the new Fair Employment Practice Commission (FEPC).²⁷ After tackling job discrimination, Brown directed his energy toward ending discrimination in housing—an unpopular project among the majority of voters. Risking his chances for reelection, Brown endorsed a string of fair housing bills that passed through the state legislature between 1959 and 1963. The first in the series, the Hawkins Fair Housing Act, banned discrimination in

²⁶ Wendell Green, “Bombed Street a Beehive,” *California Eagle*, March 20, 1952.

²⁷ Brilliant, *The Color of America*, 161.

publicly assisted housing.²⁸ On July 15, 1959, the legislature passed the Unruh Civil Rights Act which historian Mark Brilliant argues “placed California at the forefront of the nationwide fight against housing discrimination.”²⁹ A huge victory for civil rights, the Unruh Act declared:

All persons within the jurisdiction of this State are free and equal, and no matter what ~~their~~ race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind whatsoever.³⁰

While civil rights victories occurred within a legislative framework on the West Coast, the movement in the East and South involved more grassroots participation. Following on the heels of the Unruh Civil Rights Act, the “sit-in” movement caught fire east of the Mississippi River after a highly publicized demonstration in Greensboro, North Carolina. Masterminded by four students at North Carolina A & T State University, the demonstration involved black students occupying an all-white lunch counter in downtown Greensboro and

²⁸ Ibid., 163.

²⁹ Ibid., 162.

³⁰ “Unruh Civil Rights Act (Civil Code),” *State of California Laws Regarding Equality of Opportunity in Housing*, folder 2, “No on Proposition 14: California Fair Housing Initiative Collection,” GTU 94-7-01, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, CA (hereafter cited as folder no., “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives).

refusing to move until they received service.³¹ Two weeks after the events in Greensboro hit the news, students in the neighboring towns of Durham and Winston-Salem began to stage sit-ins of their own.³² Within a year, two hundred cities in twenty-eight states integrated lunch counters and theatres as a result of the sit-ins.³³

After the highly successful sit-in movement, the desegregation of interstate public buses became the new rallying cry of civil rights activists. On May 4, 1961, under the leadership of the Director of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) James Farmer, a biracial group of thirteen freedom riders boarded two interstate buses scheduled to arrive in New Orleans within two weeks. Starting in Washington, DC, the route passed directly through the Deep South, an area occupied by the nation’s most hostile white supremacists. On May 14, ten days into the journey, the world watched as a mob in Anniston, Alabama firebombed the first bus of freedom riders. Recognizing the importance that the freedom rides continue to New Orleans, Diane Nash assumed leadership, recruiting twenty-one new riders. David Halberstam, a staff writer for the *New York Times*, remembers Nash as “a Fisk student, bright, focused, utterly fearless, with an unerring instinct for the correct tactical move at each increment of crisis”—qualities that contributed greatly to her

³¹ Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-In Movement of 1960* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

³³ Anthony Hazard, *Civil Rights and Anti-Colonial Movements* (class lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, February 12, 2013).

success as a leader.³⁴ In all, 430 freedom riders, both black and white, risked their lives to end racial segregation. Finally, on September 22, after suffering months of brutality, the freedom riders celebrated victory. Under pressure from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the Interstate Commerce Commission desegregated interstate bus travel beginning on November 1, 1961.³⁵

The freedom rides received widespread media coverage, revealing a nation entrenched in racial segregation. Marches initiated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in early 1963 called attention to the most staunchly segregated city in the U.S.—Birmingham, Alabama. Their police Chief Eugene “Bull” Connor ordered the use of brutal force to wipe civil rights protesters off his streets. News cameras caught footage of uniformed officers aiming high-pressure fire hoses and unleashing attack dogs on citizens, some of them school aged children.³⁶

After the Birmingham confrontation, President John F. Kennedy could no longer avoid the realities of U.S. race relations. On June 11, 1963, two and a half

³⁴ David Halberstam, “Nashville Revisited: Lunch-Counter Days,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1995. See Lynne Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Touchstone, 2001).

³⁵ Stanley Nelson, Tess Gadwa, and Max George, *American Experience: Freedom Riders*, directed by Stanley Nelson, PBS documentary, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/watch> (accessed November 27, 2013).

³⁶ Anthony Hazard, Civil Rights and Anti-Colonial Movements (class lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, Feb 20, 2013).

years after taking office, Kennedy finally appeared in front of television audiences to address the nation’s crippling “race problem.” Becoming the first president to pressure Congress to pass a comprehensive civil rights bill, President Kennedy delivered a message that reverberated around the world: “This nation, for all its hope and all its boasts, will not fully be free until all of its citizens are fully free.”³⁷ With the Oval Office as the backdrop, the president announced his plan to propose federal legislation that would end segregation nationwide. A call to action on national, state, and personal levels, the speech is significant to the civil rights movement because, for the first time, civil rights activists could claim the support of the president of the United States.³⁸

Answering the call of the president, Governor Brown tirelessly lobbied to expand the existing laws on fair housing to encompass private property. Brown teamed up with Assemblyman Byron Rumford to push a more expansive fair housing bill through the legislature. Together, they produced Assembly Bill (AB) 1240, better known as the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which Mark Brilliant argues became “the year’s most contentious and significant piece of legislation.”³⁹ As can be expected with any highly controversial piece of legisla-

³⁷ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, “Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights,” (speech, The Oval Office, June 11, 1963), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9271> (accessed November 27, 2013).

³⁸ Anthony Hazard, Civil Rights and Anti-Colonial Movements (class lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, Feb 26, 2013).

³⁹ Brilliant, *The Color of America*, 179.

tion, a fierce opposition assembled to try and block its passage. However, AB 1240 carried the support of political powerhouses such as the Speaker of the Assembly and Senator Edward Regan who were able to push consideration of the bill to the floor. In the final hour of the 1963 legislative session, AB 1240 passed through both the Senate and Assembly. Governor Brown eagerly signed the bill into law on September 20, 1963.⁴⁰ The bill reads as follows:

The practice of discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry in housing accommodations is declared to be against public policy.⁴¹

The bill defines the term “housing accommodations” to include non-publicly-assisted residences of five or more units. Even though the provisions applied to only one-third of dwellings in California, segregationists feared the state’s eventual incursion into all areas of real estate.⁴² Nonetheless, California joined ten other states where similar laws regulated the rentals and sales of private property. They included New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Oregon, Alaska, Colorado, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 182-3.

⁴¹“Rumford Fair Housing Act (Health and Safety Code),” *State of California Laws Regarding Equality of Opportunity in Housing*, folder 2, “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives.

⁴² Brilliant, *The Color of America*, 92.

⁴³ Milton G. Gordon, “What are the Obligations of Government to Resolve such Conflicts as Exist in this Area? (Property and Civil Rights),” November 22, 1963, folder 10, “No

The Resistance Movement: 1959-1963

Celebration over the passage of the Rumford Act quickly turned to fear over the California Real Estate Association's (CREA) mighty wrath. In November 1964, the CREA convinced two-thirds of the electorate to vote in favor of a property owner's right to discriminate.⁴⁴ In order to understand the election's outcome, it is important to trace the proposition's history back to its creation. Efforts to repeal the Rumford Fair Housing Act began before news of its passage even became public. A small Berkeley-based drive to repeal the Rumford Act by referendum fell short of the necessary signatures needed to qualify for the ballot. The CREA and the California Apartment Owners' Association (AOA) reached for more property rights than a referendum would create. Uniting under the banner of a property owner's right to discriminate, the CREA and AOA formed the Committee for Home Protection (CHP).⁴⁵ As opposed to the small movement in Berkeley that challenged the Rumford Act by referendum, the CHP crafted a constitutional initiative, later known as Proposition 14, that would amend the state constitution to include the following:

Neither the State nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall deny, limit, or abridge, directly or indirectly, the right of any person, who is willing or desires to sell, lease or rent any part or all of his real property, to decline to sell, lease, or

on Prop 14," GTU Archives.

⁴⁴ Casstevens, *Politics, Housing and Race Relations: California's Rumford Act and Proposition 14*, (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1967), 68.

⁴⁵ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 63-64.

rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses.⁴⁶

The amendment defines “person” to include all individuals and corporations as long as they are not a part of the State. The term “real property” includes all dwellings “irrespective of how obtained or financed.” In comparison to the Rumford Act which exclusively covers residences of five or more units, the only restrictions in this initiative consisted of “property owned by the State or its subdivisions; property acquired by eminent domain; or transient lodging accommodations by hotels, motels and similar public places.”⁴⁷ In addition to nullifying the existing state laws which protected property seekers from discrimination, the amendment prevented the legislature from enacting any future fair housing legislation.

For the most part, segregationists in California were much more disguised than like-minded individuals in the Deep South. The language of the CHP’s initiative reveals the tact and manipulation of racist California realtors. Making no reference to “race,” “discrimination,” or “color,” the CHP strategically buried its intent in flowery language borrowed from the Fourteenth Amendment. The initiative’s opening clause bears an uncanny resemblance to the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee that “[n]o State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United

⁴⁶ “Initiative Measure to be Submitted Directly to Electors,” folder 2, “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

States.”⁴⁸ The CHP championed the protection of property rights—a concern dating back to the American revolutionary period. The patriotic appeal of Prop 14 lured many voters. Unfortunately, the initiative’s implicit aims greatly restricted African-Americans.

Reflecting on the CHP nearly twenty years later, Marnesba Tackett, a minister’s wife who assumed leadership positions in local civil rights projects after moving to L.A. in 1952, remembered, “They did not put it [the initiative] in such words that the layman could clearly understand what they were about.”⁴⁹ In order to “clearly understand” Prop 14, it is necessary to read in between the lines—an exercise which requires time as well as a grasp of legal jargon. The September 25, 1964 issue of *Time* magazine presents findings from California’s Opinion Research Inc. that serve to illustrate the confusion surrounding Prop 14. During the early stages of the campaign, California’s Opinion Research Inc. polled African-Americans about Prop 14. Initially, when asked if they approved of the initiative, 59.3% of participants answered that it “was just what they had been wanting all along.” However, *Time* magazine reported, “[W]hen the same pollsters told the same Negroes what the practical effects of the amendment would be, 89% were against it.”⁵⁰

By late March, six months after Governor Brown

⁴⁸ U.S. Constitution, amend. 14, sec. 2.

⁴⁹ Marnesba Tackett, interview by Michael S. Balter, Los Angeles, CA, Tape V, Side 1, April 4, 1984, in Online Archive of California, under “Black Leadership in Los Angeles: Marnesba Tackett,” <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb8n39p5jk/> (accessed November 27, 2013).

⁵⁰ “Proposition 14.” *Time* 84, no. 13 (September 25, 1964), 41.

signed the Rumford Act into law, the CHP had already collected well over the 500,000 signatures needed to qualify for the ballot. Secretary of State Frank Jordan swiftly approved the petition and assigned it a proposition number.⁵¹

While Californians took to the polls to express their dissent, resistance efforts in other parts of the country were not as civil. The Supreme Court's unanimous decision in 1954 to outlaw school segregation instigated a level of ethnic violence unprecedented in the country's history. Between January 1, 1956 and June 1, 1963, Southern regions of the U.S. reported a staggering 138 bombings.⁵² Local police looked away as vigilantes used terror to keep civil rights from disrupting the Southern, segregated way of life. Hours after President Kennedy's famous civil rights address on June 11, 1963, a member of the Ku Klux Klan assassinated Medgar Evers, Mississippi field secretary for the NAACP. Two months later, a group of Klansmen bombed 16th Street Baptist Church, the main meeting place for civil rights activists in Birmingham, Alabama. Four young girls were killed in the explosion.⁵³ Still reeling from all of the bloodshed in the South, the nation experienced the tragic loss of its leader on November 22, 1963. A mere four months after earning his reputation as a moral leader, President Kennedy was assassinated, leaving behind a legacy of hope for

⁵¹ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 66.

⁵² David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 37.

racial equality.⁵⁴

Civil Rights Activism Continues: 1964

In his first public address as president, Lyndon Baines Johnson hurried Congress to act on civil rights, claiming that “no memorial, oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President’s Kennedy’s memory.”⁵⁵ Despite the determined southern Democrats who organized a lengthy filibuster to delay passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Senate secured cloture and approved the legislation with a vote of 73-27.⁵⁶ Bypassing the conference on the bill, the House approved the Senate version on July 2, 1964. That same day, after the bill passed through the House, President Johnson, in a nationally televised

⁵⁴ Anthony Hazard, *Civil Rights and Anti-Colonial Movements* (class lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, February 26, 2013).

⁵⁵ Lyndon Baines Johnson, “President Johnson’s Address Before Congress,” (speech, Washington, DC, November 27, 1963), in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64* 1, entry II, 8-10 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/kennedy/Joint%20Congress%20Speech/speech.htm> (accessed November 27, 2013).

⁵⁶ “The Civil Rights Act of 1964,” in The United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary website, under “Recess Reading: An Occasional Feature From the Judiciary Committee,” <http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/about/history/CivilRightsAct.cfm> (accessed November 28, 2013). Cloture is a motion to end lengthy debate, also known as a filibuster. At the time, support from two-thirds of all senators “present and voting” was necessary in order to end a filibuster. In 1975, the Senate voted to change the necessary supermajority to three-fifths.

news broadcast, proudly signed it into law.⁵⁷ A victory in many regards, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked the first meaningful federal civil rights legislation since the constitutional amendments ratified during the Reconstruction Era.⁵⁸ The act officially overturned “Jim Crow” laws by banning discrimination in “public accommodations” and employment.⁵⁹

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 signified a tremendous victory for civil rights, it did not completely solve the “race problem” in the U.S. The Mississippi Freedom Summer drew media attention to the shortcomings of the Civil Rights Act, namely the lack of voting protections. The Council of Federated Organization (COFO) enlisted an army of volunteers from SNCC, CORE and the NAACP to equip African-Americans with the tools necessary to better their lives in the Deep South.⁶⁰ The COFO’s vehicles for change included voter registration drives, freedom schools, and community centers. Robert Moses, a major leader

⁵⁷ Allen Fisher and Ted Gittinger, “LBJ Champions the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Part 2,” *Prologue Magazine* 36, no. 2 (summer 2004), in the National Archives online, <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/summer/civil-rights-act-2.html> (accessed November 28, 2013).

⁵⁸ See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1988).

⁵⁹ *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Public Law 88-352, 88th Congress, (July 2, 1964), Title II and VII, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=97&page=transcript> (accessed November 28, 2013).

⁶⁰ Lucia Guest, “Their Dream is Not to be Nervous,” in *Mississippi Freedom Summer*, ed. John F. McClymer (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, a division of Thomson Learning, Inc., 2004), 195.

of SNCC, headed the voter registration campaign in Mississippi, the most publicized subsection of the Freedom Summer.⁶¹ Tirelessly canvassing black neighborhoods, volunteers hammered the importance of the vote to anyone who would listen. While it may seem like a minor request, registering to vote was a dangerous endeavor for blacks living in the South. By walking up the steps of the courthouse to register, African-Americans risked their jobs, safety, and futures. Of the 17,000 African-Americans who braved the Mississippi courthouses, only 1,600 successfully registered.⁶²

Approximately 1,000 college-aged students, many against their parent’s will, volunteered for the Freedom Summer. Before they began their assignments, volunteers attended a week-long orientation in Oxford, Ohio aimed to prepare them for life in the South—a first time experience for most. Sally Belfrage, a Freedom School teacher from California, described the volunteers as “eighty-five percent white, one hundred percent middle class.”⁶³ The strategy to recruit upper to middle-class, white college students triggered a media frenzy. News agencies hailed the volunteers as heroes who risked their lives to bring justice to the Deep South. Everywhere the volunteers went, reporters followed closely behind. One volunteer recalls, “[F]our of us took the long ride from Oxford to Memphis in a small Corvette which was rigged with a mike so a CBS sound car behind us could record our

⁶¹ McClymer, ed., *Mississippi Freedom Summer*, 24.

⁶² Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 80-81.

⁶³ Sally Belfrage, “Basic Training,” in *Mississippi Freedom Summer*, ed. McClymer, 150.

profound thoughts as we went into battle.”⁶⁴ In his book, *Freedom Summer*, sociologist Doug McAdam writes, “In a very real sense, the entire country had visited Mississippi courtesy of the national news media.”⁶⁵

Meanwhile, on the West Coast, Californians were debating a constitutional amendment that critics warned would place the state in the same category as Mississippi.⁶⁶ When the state legislature passed the Rumford Act, supporters immediately began to prepare for the CREA-driven backlash. The California Committee for Fair Practices (CCFP) convened in December 1963 to devise a strategy to protect California’s fair housing laws.⁶⁷ The CCFP published its strategy on February 5, 1964 in the form of a fifteen page manual. In the cover letter, CCFP Chairman C. I. Dellums and Secretary Max Mont, report that “a groundswell of public opinion has arisen against the constitutional amendment proposal.”⁶⁸ In one of the earliest published critiques of the initiative, the *Sacramento Bee*, on February 23, 1964, labeled the CREA “the peddlers of hate, fear, distortion, and intimidation.” Accompanying the article is a cartoon depicting two men marching: one in civilian clothing carrying a picket sign that reads “Fair Housing! CORE” while the other is dressed in a Nazi uniform holding a sign that reads “Repeal the

⁶⁴ McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 73.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁶ See Californians Against Proposition 14, “NO MISSISSIPPI HERE!,” folder 21, “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives.

⁶⁷ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 74.

⁶⁸ California Committee For Fair Practices, “A Manual for the Constitutional Amendment—No! Campaign,” folder 7, “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives.

Rumford Act!" with a swastika in the corner.⁶⁹

As evidenced in the aforementioned *Sacramento Bee* article, fair housing advocates voiced their opposition to the initiative throughout the signature collection process. However, in June 1964, when Secretary Jordan assigned the initiative a proposition number on the November ballot, the opposition intensified, instituting a massive, statewide campaign against what it termed the "Hate Amendment."⁷⁰ The main organ of the "No on Prop 14" campaign was Californians against Prop 14 (CAP 14), an umbrella organization that received endorsements from a wide range of civic, labor, civil rights, and religious groups. Recognizing the need to reach every eligible voter in the state, CAP 14 orchestrated a two-front campaign with dual headquarters strategically located in L.A. and San Francisco. In order to help CAP 14 launch successful campaigns in both the northern and southern parts of the state, Governor Brown lent some of his expert staff members to the organization such as Richard Kline, Max Mont, Lucien Haas, Marvin Holden and William Becker.⁷¹

Under the leadership of Governor Brown's former staff members, CAP 14 gained visibility throughout the state. Determined to expose the deceit of the Committee for Home Protection, CAP 14 used printed materials to raise awareness of the malicious intent behind Prop 14. A CAP 14 flier denounces the proposition as

⁶⁹ Richard Rodda, "Rumford Housing Fight Generates More Heat Than Light," *Sacramento Bee*, February 23, 1964, folder 18, "No on Prop 14," GTU Archives.

⁷⁰ Californians Against Proposition 14, "YOU ARE THE TARGET!," folder 21, "No on Prop 14," GTU Archives.

⁷¹ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 74.

“a scheme by giant real estate interests to cripple the California Constitution.” After citing five tragedies that Prop 14 would create if passed, CAP 14 cautioned the reader not to “fall into the real estate lobby’s trap!”⁷² In another publication, CAP 14 pled, “We need your help to advertise the truth about Proposition 14.”⁷³ Other organizations and individuals joined CAP 14 in the effort to inform the public of the “real” meaning behind the proposed amendment. In its September 1964 bulletin, the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church accused the CREA of “deliberately fostering a hoax.”⁷⁴ Governor Brown added hype in a public statement where he accused real estate interests of “denying that Proposition 14 is aimed against Negroes, Mexican-Americans and other minorities.”⁷⁵ In a lengthy article, Gene Blake of the *LA Times* recognized the opposition’s mounting influence: “[A]nyone who thinks this [Prop 14] doesn’t have anything to do with the racial issue just hasn’t been paying attention.”⁷⁶

CAP 14 used its impressive list of endorsements to build legitimacy. The committee boasted on a bumper sticker that “[v]irtually every organization has taken a stand against Proposition 14.” It includes over fifty organizations on its “Partial List” of allies, including

⁷² Californians Against Proposition 14, “YOU ARE THE TARGET!,” folder 21, “No on Prop 14,” GTU Archives.

⁷³ Californians Against Proposition 14, display Ad 26, *LA Times*, Oct. 26, 1964.

⁷⁴ “California Test Case: The Church and Fair Housing,” *Church and Race* 2, no. 2 (New York: Episcopal Church Center, September 1964), 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁶ Gene Blake, “Proposition 14: The Cases for and Against: Arguments Focus on Constitutionality of Housing Issue,” *LA Times*, September 20, 1964.

religious groups from ten different denominations. In addition to the list of high-standing, respectable organizations that opposed Prop 14, the bumper sticker includes a short list of the proposition's supporters: the CREA, John Birch Society, White Citizens Council and American Nazi Party.⁷⁷

As evidenced by the bumper sticker, CAP 14 capitalized on Cold War anxieties, using patriotism as its primary campaign tool. At the time, many Americans believed patriotism protected against communist infiltration. Many Americans, regardless of race, religion, political affiliation, or socioeconomic status felt pressure to embody patriotism. CAP 14 utilized this common sentiment to break the barriers of race, religion, and politics. Using a sketch of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy as its logo, CAP 14 attempted to awaken opposition and spur people to protest the CREA's "un-American attack."⁷⁸ Patriotism served as the greatest mechanism to draw broad-based support. CAP 14 strategically adjusted its message to target specific audiences while still maintaining strong, patriotic pathos. For example, CAP 14 made a direct appeal to Republicans in an advertisement for the *LA Times*. In the ad, the committee argued that Republicans should cast their ballots in honor of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and other party members who "proudly championed the cause of equal rights for all."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Californians Against Proposition 14, "No on 14" bumper sticker, folder 21, "No on Prop 14," GTU Archives.

⁷⁸ Californians Against Proposition 14, "These Californians Urge NO on 14," folder 21, "No on Prop 14," GTU Archives.

⁷⁹ Californians Against Proposition 14, display Ad 26, *LA Times*, Oct. 26, 1964.

“No on Prop 14” affiliates garnered a substantial amount of donations during the 1964 election season. In total, anti-14 forces outspent their opponents by over \$120,000.⁸⁰ However, even with a hefty treasury, the “No on 14” campaign failed to convince the majority of voters to cast “no” ballots. Polling data shows that public opinion on Prop 14 stayed fairly consistent from March 1964 up until Election Day.⁸¹

“No on Prop 14” Activity in South Central L.A.

L.A. County’s unique demographics in the 1960s made the area a hotbed of controversy regarding fair housing. According to data from the 1960 U.S. Census, L.A. County housed the largest non-white population in California. Of the county’s non-white population, most were African-Americans who remained trapped in the south central part of the city.⁸² Martin Schiesl, an Emeritus Professor of History at California State University at Los Angeles, notes in an essay that 94% of the county’s black population resided in South Central L.A. in 1960.⁸³ Expanding on Schiesl’s statis-

⁸⁰ Casstevens, *Politics, Housing and Race Relations*, 66. “No on Prop 14” affiliates spent over \$500,000 in total.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population: 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population*, p. 1, *California* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 5-56 and 5-57.

⁸³ Martin Schiesl, “Residential Opportunity for All Californians: Governor Edmund G. ‘Pat’ Brown and the Struggle for Fair Housing Legislation, 1959-1963,” *The Edmund G. ‘Pat’ Brown Institute of Public Affairs*, (August 2013), 1. <http://www.patbrowninstitute.org/publications/documents/HistoricalEssayFairHousingOpportunities.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2013).

tic, historian Josh Sides attributes the "highest levels of segregation in the state" to L.A.⁸⁴ In such an environment, the idea of integrated housing ignited strong passions among the populace. As a result, Prop 14 aroused a noteworthy amount of controversy which printed media helped fuel. The city's most widely distributed newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, publicly announced its support of the initiative in a February 1964 editorial.⁸⁵ In the editorial, the *Times* condemned laws, such as the Rumford Act, which serve to legislate morality, claiming that "[d]iscrimination will disappear only when human prejudice succumbs to human decency."⁸⁶ The *Times* maintained its position throughout the debate on Prop 14, informing readers that "it will neither be intimidated, nor swayed from its carefully chosen course."⁸⁷

Like the *LA Times*, black newspaper such as the *California Eagle* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* took a stand on Prop 14. The *Sentinel* described the initiative as "vicious," "biased," and backed by "greedy realtors."⁸⁸ In his weekly column, Loren Miller, publisher of the *California Eagle* from 1951 to 1964, wrote on behalf of the paper: "The truth is that the November vote is not

⁸⁴ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 130; Casstevens, *Politics, Housing and Race Relations*, 69.

⁸⁵ "The Los Angeles Time's History," *Los Angeles Times* online, September 21, 2012. <http://www.latimes.com/la-mediagroup-times-history,0,2679122.htmlstory#axzz2k6aedmiS> (accessed November 11, 2013).

⁸⁶ "Decision on Housing Initiative," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1964.

⁸⁷ "TIMES EDITORIALS: Inflammatory Talk on Prop. 14," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1964.

⁸⁸ "No Vote on 14 Group Opens in Compton Sat.," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 22, 1964.

a ballot on repeal of the Rumford Act at all. It is something far different and far more sweeping and dangerous.”⁸⁹ Josh Sides acknowledges the significance of the black press in L.A., noting, “More than simply conveying newsworthy information, the *California Eagle* and *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the city’s two most influential black newspapers, prodded their readerships to challenge racial discrimination.”⁹⁰

Both the *Eagle* and *Sentinel* stressed the importance of challenging discrimination by means of electoral participation. In an urgent plea, the *Sentinel* begged readers, “For the sake of your future in the United States, vote ‘NO’ on Proposition 14.”⁹¹ In its February 20, 1964 issue, the *Eagle* asked readers, “Are You Registered?” Underneath the heading, it reads, “If not, run, don’t walk, to the nearest registrar and get your name on the rolls.”⁹² Shortly after Secretary Jordan assigned the initiative a ballot number, an advertisement urging readers to “VOTE NO ON PROPOSITION 14” appeared on the front page of the *California Eagle*.⁹³ The political cartoons of artist Nick Greene featured in the *Eagle* also reveal hope in the democratic process. Greene’s cartoon printed in the June 25, 1964 editorial section shows a black voter who has kicked a white man, representative of the proposed

⁸⁹ Loren Miller, “Initiative Does More Than Repeal Rumford Housing Act,” *California Eagle*, June 11, 1964.

⁹⁰ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 30.

⁹¹ “CRG Lists Dangers Hidden In Prop. 14,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 6, 1964.

⁹² “Are You Registered?,” *California Eagle*, February 20, 1964.

⁹³ “Vote NO on Proposition 14,” advertisement, *California Eagle*, June 25, 1964.

amendment, to the sky. Accompanying the forceful kick is a speech bubble that reads: "NO!! THIS INITIATIVE MEASURE MEANS SEGREGATION"⁹⁴

Writing to a primarily black audience, the *Eagle* and *Sentinel* focused on Prop 14 hype within the black community. While the black press did sometimes report on the anti-14 activity in play throughout the greater L.A. community, by and large, it focused on anti-14 forces active within L.A.'s black ghettos. The *Eagle* and *Sentinel* kept readers apprised of local anti-Prop 14 functions, providing location, time, contact numbers and ticket information.

The *California Eagle* underwent significant change in July 1964 when its publisher, Loren Miller, left the paper to become a justice on the California Superior Court.⁹⁵ James L. Tolbert and A.S. "Doc" Young replaced the fiery Miller and on July 2, 1964, announced, "[T]he *Eagle* is born again. It's all new, robust and healthy."⁹⁶ The new leadership shifted the paper's focus from local to national news. As a result, Prop 14 figured less prominently in the *California Eagle* after Miller left in July 1964. After the *Eagle* changed hands, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* became the chief source of information regarding the "No on Prop 14" campaign in L.A.

Articles from the *Sentinel* show an effort made by multiple organizations in L.A. to get every eligible

⁹⁴ Nick Greene, "NO!! THIS INITIATIVE MEASURES MEANS SEGREGATION...", political cartoon, *California Eagle*, June 4, 1964.

⁹⁵ Loren Miller, "Saying Goodbye is Hard when Columnist Quits," in "Loren Miller Says," *California Eagle*, June 25, 1964.

⁹⁶ A.S. "Doc" Young and James L. Tolbert, "Our Statement," *California Eagle*, July 2, 1964.

African-American in the area to vote against Prop 14. Civil rights organizations figure most prominently in the *Sentinel's* coverage of “No on Prop 14” activity. The local chapter of the NAACP funneled resources in the fight against Prop 14, opening a No on Proposition 14 Headquarters located at 2903 ½ S. Western Ave.⁹⁷ The headquarters served as an operational base for the NAACP’s voter registration and education drives.⁹⁸ Wendell Green, coordinator of the NAACP’s “No on 14” campaign, communicated the goals of the campaign to *Sentinel* reporters: “It is necessary that we knock again on every door to clear up any late confusion and to insure a maximum vote against the segregation proposition 14.”⁹⁹ In October 1964, the NAACP launched “Operation Westside” in an attempt to reverse the “apathy and confusion” about Prop 14 in West L.A.—an area forgotten by most other organizations. The *Sentinel* described the operation as “[a]n intensive voter education and get-out-the-vote campaign.”¹⁰⁰

The L.A. Urban League echoed the ambitions of the NAACP. Speaking on behalf of the Urban League, Housing Committee Chairman Sheldon C. Mays told the *Sentinel* that “[h]undreds of additional volunteers are needed in the drive to get every registered Negro

⁹⁷ “Photo Standalone 53—No Title,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 8, 1964.

⁹⁸ “No on 14 Crusade Starts Its ‘Operation Westside,’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 1, 1964.

⁹⁹ “NAACP In Final Drive Against 14,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 29, 1964.

¹⁰⁰ “No on 14 Crusade Starts Its ‘Operation Westside,’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 1, 1964.

voter to cast his ballot NO on 14.”¹⁰¹ Out of its eight field offices, the Urban League organized a massive get-out-the-vote drive. The *Sentinel* described the work involved: “Volunteers, who are being trained in special classes, are being asked to go door-to-door and talk with voters. Others are being used to help people get to the polls on Nov. 3 or to help with office work.”¹⁰²

In an August article, the *Sentinel* credited the United Civil Rights Council (UCRC) with “a registration drive that is second only to Mississippi in the entire United States.”¹⁰³ The volunteer corps, largely comprised of high school and college-aged students, exhibited, according to the *Sentinel*, “an enthusiasm never seen before in a political campaign.”¹⁰⁴ Formed in 1963, the short-lived UCRC was an umbrella organization, including in its membership a wide array of religious views, racial backgrounds and political affiliations. Both the L.A. chapters of the NAACP and CORE belonged to the UCRC.¹⁰⁵ Activist Marnesba Tackett reflected, “That [the UCRC] was the most effective coalition that I have known of since I have been in Los Angeles because we had people from all ethnic groups and religions who participated.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ “Urban League Speeds Drive to Defeat Proposition 14,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 8, 1964.

¹⁰² “No on 14 Crusade Starts Its ‘Operation Westside,’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 1, 1964.

¹⁰³ “UCRC Registers 2,000 on Weekend,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 6, 1964.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Tackett, interview by Butler, Tape IV, Side 2, March 26, 1984. To gain a better understanding of Tackett’s involvement in L.A.’s civil rights activity, see her employment history in section vii and the list of her community affiliations in section viii.

During the summer of 1964, the UCRC launched the Summer Registration Project, sending hundreds of young volunteers to “more than 1,000 precincts in central Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁷ In August 1964, the *Sentinel* announced the UCRC’s plans to “conduct two special weekend registration drives in response to urgent requests from Watts and Compton.”¹⁰⁸ As part of the “special weekend registration drives,” the UCRC asked residents to stay at home and answer their doors when volunteers came knocking. News cameras from channels 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9 planned to “be on spot.”¹⁰⁹ Before the September 10 registration deadline, the UCRC aimed to add 110,000 previously disenfranchised African-Americans to the voter roll. The *Sentinel* reported that in one weekend alone, the UCRC managed to register 2,000 African-Americans.¹¹⁰

The “Vote No on Prop 14” campaign in L.A.’s black communities mirrored the COFO’s much larger scaled Freedom Summer. Both campaigns relied upon volunteers to canvass black neighborhoods and convince inhabitants to register. Activists hoped that an increase in voter turnout among the black community would clinch the number of votes needed to defeat discriminatory laws. The get-out-the-vote drive in L.A. faced different hurdles than registration drives in the South. African-Americans in California were not

¹⁰⁷ “UCRC Appeals for Volunteers,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 20, 1964; “Local Registration Drive Getting Widespread Life,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 6, 1964.

¹⁰⁸ “UCRC Plans Two, Big Registration Drives,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 13, 1964.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ “UCRC Registers 2,000 on Weekend,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 6, 1964.

barred from the polls like their brethren in Mississippi who were silenced via poll taxes, literacy tests and threats. However, the two campaigns shared the same central task. Volunteers had to convince African-Americans that their votes mattered.

Max Mont, executive director of CAP 14, expressed the necessity of targeting L.A.’s large African-American population in the “Vote No on Prop 14” campaign. The *Sentinel* quoted Mont on September 3, 1964: “[I]t [Prop 14] cannot be defeated unless almost all Negroes vote against it.”¹¹¹ Mont’s statement echoes one of Malcolm X’s most famous speeches titled “The Ballot or the Bullet.” In his speech, delivered on April 3, 1964 in Cleveland, Ohio, Malcolm X maintained that the power to stop the “segrationalist conspiracy” lies in “the ballot or the bullet.”¹¹² Contrary to the public memory of Malcolm, in the speech, he held hope in the democratic process, asserting that “the ballot is most important.”¹¹³ He describe the African-American community as a “bloc of votes” large enough to alter the outcome of an election.¹¹⁴ He called upon African-Americans to “wake up” and realize that they ultimately “determine who’s going to sit in the White House and who’s going to be in the dog house.”¹¹⁵ Although Malcolm X was largely referring to voter participation in presidential

¹¹¹ Max Mont, quoted in “Leaders Map New Strategy to Defeat Racist Legislation,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 3, 1964.

¹¹² Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed, George Breitman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), 28 and 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 26.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

races, the same sentiment can be applied to local and state politics.

Recognizing that the black community could possibly clinch the number of votes needed to defeat Prop 14, Governor Brown invited 500 black leaders to a “unity meeting” on August 29, 1964 at the Second Baptist Church in L.A.¹¹⁶ On its front page, the *Sentinel* lauded the “unprecedented move to unify major civil rights organizations in L.A. County.” Spokesperson for the event, Louis Lomax, told the *Sentinel*, “We are determined to set aside thoughts of who will be credited with success in this fight.”¹¹⁷ Even though 67.4% of L.A. County voters supported Prop 14 at the ballot box, the resistance movement led by L.A. organizations was not a complete failure.¹¹⁸ On October 15, 1964, with less than a month until “D-Day,” the *Sentinel* reported, “Coordinated efforts by civic, civil rights and political organizations resulted in more than 40,000 people being registered for the vote in central Los Angeles.”¹¹⁹ As shown in the report, Prop 14 inspired thousands of African-Americans to register to vote—an important stepping stone on the road towards equality.

¹¹⁶ “Brown Plans Unity Meeting to Defeat Proposition 14,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 27, 1964.

¹¹⁷ Louis Lomax, quoted in “Leaders Map New Strategy to Defeat Racist Legislation,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 3, 1964. See “Louis E. Lomax,” *Contemporary Black Biography* 90, (Detroit: Gale, 2011), *Biography in Context*, <http://0-ic.galegroup.com/sculib.scu.edu/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?failOverType> (accessed December 2, 2013).

¹¹⁸ Casstevens, *Politics, Housing and Race Relations*

¹¹⁹ “UCRC Begins Final Phase of 14 Struggle,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 15, 1964.

Conclusion

Threatened by the growing presence of African-Americans in California after World War II, realtors crafted Prop 14 in an effort to prevent African-Americans from overflowing into white suburbia. Although fair housing advocates failed to defeat Prop 14 in November 1964, the groundswell of opposition reveals the widespread influence of the civil rights movement. This was especially apparent in Los Angeles where local organizations sought to harness the voting power of the city’s large African-American population. Mirroring the strategies employed by national civil rights organizations during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, like-minded organizations in L.A. encouraged African-Americans to become electorally active. Even though Prop 14 disappeared from discussion after the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in 1967, the “Vote No on Prop 14” campaign had a lasting impact on South Central L.A. It inspired thousands of African-Americans to engage in the political process in an effort to shape their futures.

Tracy Sullivan is a History major and Political Science minor. Tracy’s dual interests in public policy and California History inspired her senior capstone. The topic of her research, Proposition 14, figures prominently in her family’s history as both sets of her grandparents voted in the 1964 general election. Additionally, her family’s hometown of Sierra Madre, CA lies within the borders of Los Angeles County which prompted her regional focus. In the fall, Tracy is moving to Sacramento where she will continue to fuel her passion for California state politics as a Jesse M. Unruh Assembly Fellow.