

ABSTRACT

FRESNO'S LONG HOT SUMMER OF 1967: AN EXAMINATION OF HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

Although ironically remembered as the Summer of Love, 1967 proved to be one of the most violent in American History. And while previous summers also witnessed serious rioting, 1967 dwarfed earlier levels of violence and would alternately enter the lexicon of Civil Rights as “The Long Hot Summer.” In that year alone, one hundred and fifty-nine cities experienced what were then termed racial disturbances, prompting Lyndon B. Johnson to create the Kerner Riot Commission. This work examines the causes and consequences of one site of one those riots: Fresno, California. This thesis contends that the dual forces of housing segregation and employment discrimination served as a conduit for prevailing racial attitudes which led to a starkly different existence for Fresno’s residents of color in comparison to its white residents. These factors, combined with the closing of a summer program, fueled a riot which lasted for three days and momentarily awakened white America’s conscience to the plight of urban minorities in places like Fresno. Longstanding racial attitudes in Fresno manifested in a concerted effort to maintain segregation. This was achieved through federal housing legislation, restrictive racial covenants, and at times, terroristic acts from white residents. Moreover, the segregated sections of west Fresno provided stark few opportunities for young people of color, a fact echoed by census data, personal interviews, and advertisements from the *Fresno Bee*.

Uziel B. Jimenez
August 2017

FRESNO'S LONG HOT SUMMER OF 1967:
AN EXAMINATION OF HOUSING AND
EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

by
Uziel B. Jimenez

A thesis
submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History
in the College of Social Sciences
California State University, Fresno
August 2017

APPROVED

For the Department of History:

We, the undersigned, certify that the thesis of the following student meets the required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student's graduate degree program for the awarding of the master's degree.

Uziel B. Jimenez
Thesis Author

Daniel Cady (Chair) History

Lori Clune History

Romeo Guzman History

For the University Graduate Committee:

Dean, Division of Graduate Studies

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank, firstly, my wife Jovon, whose patient encouragement has inspired and sustained me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my friends and family who understood when I could not see them until the workload subsided. I am also grateful to Dr. Lopez, Dr. Skuban, Dr. Kytlye, and Dr. Roberts, and any others who vastly improved my scholarship and writing. I owe special thanks to my thesis committee, who guided and grounded me while I muddled through many dead ends and frantic ruminations. I thank Dr. Cady for continually reminding me of the worth of my story and Dr. Clune for her attention to detail and general pleasant demeanor. I also thank them both for letting me corrupt the future teachers in their credential classes with the promise of a meaningful and rewarding life in public education. I also want to thank Dr. Guzman for his critiques and time. Lastly, to my AVID Class of 2018 (known internally as RAA) and family at Sunnyside High, I want to impart my heartfelt thanks and the knowledge that hard work is always rewarded and that things will eventually break your way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER 1: HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	1
CHAPTER 2: FRESNO’S LONG HOT SUMMER OF 1967.....	11
Short Racial History of the Central Valley	12
The Riot: July 15, 1967.....	25
Housing Discrimination: Segregated Fresno	33
Restrictive Covenants.....	34
Homeowner’s Bill of Rights and Proposition 14.....	40
Employment Discrimination	48
Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	58
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	69

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: “San Joaquin Memorial Plans Minstrel Show” <i>Fresno Bee</i> , January 21, 1948.....	20
Figure 2: Advertisement <i>Fresno Bee</i> January 17, 1933	21
Figure 3: Fresno City Map	36
Figure 4: Advertisement, <i>The Fresno Bee</i> , May 12, 1963.	41
Figure 5: Martin Luther King at Ratcliffe Stadium, <i>Fresno Bee</i> , June 2, 1964. King pictured far left.....	47

CHAPTER 1: HISTORIOGRAPHY

The summer of 1967 would prove to be one of the most violent and tumultuous in American History. Those hot summer months were foreshadowed years earlier by more isolated rioting in the segregated urban sections of Watts, Harlem and the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland. However, the unprecedented scale of rioting and rebellion in 1967 dwarfed earlier levels of violence and would eventually enter the lexicon of Civil Rights as “The Long Hot Summer.”¹ In that year alone, one hundred and fifty-nine cities experienced what were termed racial disturbances.² These events were the impetus for President Lyndon B. Johnson to create the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission. In plain, unadorned language, President Johnson tasked Governor of Illinois Otto Kerner and the rest of the commission with the following mandate: “We need to know the answers to three basic questions about these riots: What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?”³

This work will explore these same questions as they relate to three days of rioting in mid-July of 1967 in Fresno, California—an event which the vast majority of locals, and seeming all white residents old enough to remember, have no recollection of ever having occurred. Fresno’s Long Hot Summer was a contemporary of the significantly more destructive rioting in Newark, New Jersey

¹ Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

² Seymour Spilerman, “The Causes of Racial Disturbances: A Comparison of the Alternative Explanations,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (August 1970), pp. 627-649.

³ *Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), 16. Hereafter cited as *Kerner Commission*.

which left 26 people dead. In fact, the rioting in Fresno from July 15 through 17 coincided with the last three days of rioting in Newark, whose violence started on July 12th. Moreover, Fresno's riot would be followed in less than a week by the summer's most destructive and far reaching event, the Twelfth street riot in Detroit. Riot historian Malcolm McLaughlin describes how "Entire blocks of the Motor City were in ruins. The fire-gutted district near the epicenter looked as though it had been bombed. It was like Berlin in 1945, an anguished Mayor Jerome Cavanagh said when he saw it. Forty-three people were dead, or lay dying in hospital."⁴ Eight thousand National Guardsmen and 4,700 paratroopers were dispatched to quell the disturbance. Despite not being on the same scale as Detroit or Newark, the timing of Fresno's civil and racial disturbance was part of a wave of summer events in 1967 which momentarily awakened white America's conscience to the plight of urban minorities and led to the creation of the Kerner Commission. As McLaughlin argues, largely because of widespread violence in big segregated cities and smaller ones like Fresno, racism was, in the minds of most Americans, no longer just a southern problem.⁵

Despite numerous rankings labeling Fresno one of the most forgettable places in America, Fresno's Long Hot Summer, at least, is worth remembering for several reasons.⁶ Firstly, it exemplifies the degree to which state, federal, and local stakeholders overlooked segregation's effects in the north and west. Secondly, Fresno's case lends credence to James Baldwin and other urban commentators' unheeded protestations that almost any city "with a big Negro population is on the

⁴ McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, vii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶ Carl Bialik, "San Jose Is the Most Forgettable Major American City" March 11, 2016. Fresno is in the top ten. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/san-jose-is-the-most-forgettable-major-american-city/> (accessed April 1, 2017).

edge of disaster” and “sitting on a powder keg.”⁷ Moreover, while riots in Watts, Detroit, and Newark have been more closely studied, the more than 150 other towns and cities that rioted in 1967 have stood mostly unexamined. An analysis of these ‘smaller’ riots might reveal the lived experiences of local actors and the racial tensions and conditions inherent therein, as my work hopes to do.

I will contend that the dual forces of housing segregation and employment discrimination served as a conduit for prevailing racial attitudes which led to a starkly different existence for Fresno’s residents of color in comparison to its white residents. The riot was a bubbling over of frustrations and violent discontent and the targets of this anger were neither chaotic nor inarticulate. Additionally, this work will highlight the racial history in Fresno up to 1967.

Several monographs were instrumental in helping me understand the varying strands of historical thought needed to properly write this story.⁸ Chief amongst these is Malcolm McLaughlin’s *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, the only full-length study dedicated solely to the events of that summer. This book contextualized the riot, but also spoke specifically, albeit briefly, about Fresno which allowed me to find a crucial primary source from LBJ’s archives. McLaughlin chooses 1967 as a starting point specifically because it was that summer’s boiling over of long pent up frustrations that legitimized, if not the causes, the importance of urban black discontentment. It was also the widespread nature of 1967’s rioting which led to the landmark Kerner Commission report and its conclusions which jarred white class America, at least momentarily, from their stupor. McLaughlin contends that the prevailing liberal

⁷ “Negro Warns Other Cities Face Disaster,” *Fresno Bee*, May 8, 1963.

⁸ Since the vast majority of my research rests on primary sources, I have provided a Methodology chapter at the end of this work that details my sources and what they revealed.

ideologies of the day were wrong in concluding simplistically that poverty caused riots. “Although this argument made sense within the terms of the political consensus of the day and appeared to underline the need for their Great Society reforms, it rested on an essentially elitist view, one that narrowed the space for debate about American democracy.”⁹ In short, the Great Society did not go far enough in expanding the opportunities of democracy to its most downtrodden citizens. Support for this argument can be found in the fact that urban America is still largely segregated or gentrifying, and that little has improved for residents of most inner cities where riots occurred.¹⁰ Building on these ideas, my work highlights the ways in which Fresno’s youth advocated for employment and social services in their westside enclave. Disturbingly, McLaughlin also points out that in popular memory a dangerous counter narrative has emerged. “LBJ’s vision of the Great Society is defined as liberal hubris, as efforts to codify racial equality” and marked the “point at which the nation broke with liberalism, and a new era of conservative ascendancy began.”¹¹

The details of this conservative rise are elucidated in Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. McGirr analyses the beginnings of the New Right by looking specifically at Orange County. McGirr focuses less on Reagan Democrats who disagreed with a welfare system they thought gave unseemly advantages to racial minorities and instead gives “more attention to social forces, to regionalism, to enduring political traditions outside the liberal consensus and to the political movements that ordinary men and women

⁹ McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, xi.

¹⁰ Virginia Postrel, “The Consequences of the 1960’s Race Riots Come Into View.” *New York Times*, December 30, 2004.

¹¹ McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, x.

create.”¹² This grassroots conservatism was held together by anticommunism. Ordinary Americans succeeded in confounding “conservative concerns with American liberalism—fears of federal government centralization and apprehensions over the penetration of liberal ideas into the nation's schools, churches, and communities -- under an overarching discourse of 'communist subversion.’”¹³ Similarly, my research analyzes how ordinary Fresnoans, with help from powerful local realtors, held community meetings in nearby halls and living rooms to push forward a homeowners Bill of Rights. This was the embryo of what would later be called Proposition 13, an attempt to legalize housing discrimination in the state under the guise of individual freedom and property rights.

The subject of California’s flirtations with direct democracy through its proposition system is detailed in Daniel M. HoSang’s *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*. HoSang convincingly argues that these initiatives have “proven to be a reliable bulwark against many leading civil rights and antidiscrimination issues: California voters rejected fair employment protections in 1946, repealed antidiscrimination legislation in housing in 1964, overturned school desegregation mandates in 1972 and 1979, and adopted ‘English Only’ policies in 1984 and 1986.”¹⁴ The profound contrast between this reality and the nation’s perception of California as a liberal bastion was stark. My work adopts HoSang’s ideological framework by viewing racism as a “dynamic and evolving force” which has ironically been “nourished, rather than

¹² Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

¹⁴ Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

attenuated by notions of progress and political development.”¹⁵ My research also highlights something most residents of west Fresno know all too well: that simply agreeing that racism is wrong does nothing to alleviate its effects. Moreover, this soothing and self-congratulatory admission can have the unintended consequence of fostering complacency to Fresno’s inequalities. Of specific interest to my own work is the overwhelming local support for Proposition 14, a law which explicitly accepted urban segregation as normal and unproblematic for both black and white Fresnoans. As later chapters will show, this miscalculation would have dire consequences.

For a racial history of California, I turn to Tomas Almaguer’s *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* which postulates that race-based hierarchy and status was “typically exacted through contentious, racialized struggles with Mexicans, Native Americans, and Asian immigrants over land ownership or labor-market position.”¹⁶ Almaguer argues that race relations in California developed in a uniquely different manner than in other parts of the United States. I similarly argue that Fresno followed the pattern described by Almaguer, in which the Chinese received significant pushback from the white labor market unwilling to compete with the low wages offered by Chinese labor. “These concerns, plus widespread anxiety over the Chinese immigrant’s ostensible ‘heathenism’ and ‘savagery,’ rapidly ignited virulent anti-Chinese sentiment throughout California during the last half of the century.”¹⁷ As such, west Fresno became a kind of perverse Ellis Island, an enclave of immigrants in which some

¹⁵ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 2.

¹⁶ Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 154.

groups “graduated” into whiteness and were allowed to leave while the Chinese, and later blacks, would remain far longer.

The process of becoming white is detailed in David R. Roediger’s *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White; The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. Roediger begins with Matthew Frye Jacobsen’s premise that “the oppression and exclusion suffered by people of color was of an entirely different order than what the European new immigrant experienced.”¹⁸ He argues that new European immigrants were not “white on arrival” but were included into the American political system in ways that people of color never were. In a fashion similar to Almaguer, Roediger contends that this process occurred largely through the conduit of free labor and using black Americans as a negative referent. When whites expound, rightly, on how great America is and harken back to a time of their own ancestor’s suffering, they err in ascribing judgement to those who haven’t ‘made it.’ “Among other things, such a view keeps us from understanding a deep tragedy with important lessons for today: that proximity to oppression could also lead new immigrants to distance themselves from black Americans.”¹⁹ In short, for new immigrants, white flight does not happen without first becoming white. And if whiteness bizarrely and unfairly connotes success, then sadly, both have eluded west Fresno—as later chapters hope to show.²⁰

¹⁸ David Roediger. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 32.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ This is not to say that whiteness should be desired or is better. However, it is revealing that according to the latest census in the immediate adjoining neighborhoods near Fresno and B streets there is not a single white resident. <http://www.city-data.com/zipmaps/Fresno-California.html> (accessed July 26, 2016).

While books about Fresno's history are few and far between Charles W. Clough's *Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980's* is the only thing close to being a modern history of the timeframe I analyze.²¹ While the book does not even mention the riot in Fresno and makes very few references to racial strife or uplift with the exception of token minority firsts, it does provide important background information about Fresno as a whole. It is a multifaceted collection of essays encompassing such topics as education, law enforcement, media, sports and governmental history. Two chapters do stand out, however. One is a labor history of Fresno and the other chronicles the role of Japanese internment at the processing centers at the Fresno Fair Grounds and nearby Pinedale.

To gain a deeper interdisciplinary insight into the causes of urban rebellion in general, two monographs are particularly instructive. The first is *Ghetto Revolts: The Politics of Violence* by Joe R. Feagin and Harlan Hahn. Feagin and Hahn postulate that amongst the mass of interpretations proposed in the aftermath of the riots, the most likely is that which they term the 'political violence theory.'²² Unlike the most popular contemporary explanation, which they term 'riff raff theory' a political violence explanation does not simply cast the people involved as mostly "hoodlums, vandals and other criminal elements."²³ Rioters were not a monolithic entity bent on mindless destruction but "politically meaningful acts in a

²¹ Charles W. Clough, ed., *Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980s* (Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1986).

²² Joe R. Feagin, and Harlan Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts; the Politics of Violence in American Cities* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 8.

²³ Ibid.

struggle between powerholding groups and powerless blacks on the urban scene.”²⁴

The second work focusing exclusively on black urban rebellion is Robert Fogelson’s *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos*. Fogelson analyzes the riots of the late 1960s collectively and considers them the “greatest threat to public order since the dreadful industrial disputes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”²⁵ Fogelson also shares the same basic framework as Feagin and Hahn in considering the rioting meaningful “articulate protests... because they were attempts to call the attention of white society to the blacks widespread dissatisfaction with racial subordination and segregation.”²⁶ Fogelson also tackles two questions foremost on the minds of contemporary observers: timing and location. This work echoes both monographs and treats violence as a political act and not mindless destruction.

For a more contemporary analysis of rioting, I consulted Susan Rosegrant and Arnold Howitt’s *Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots*. This report—which was prepared for the Executive Sessions on Domestic Preparedness convened by Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government—highlights the structural causes of the Los Angeles Riots. Besides providing an extensive overview of the acquittal of the officers who savagely beat Rodney King, it details the ways in which racial tensions were inflamed and ignored by the Los Angeles Police Department and Los Angeles County Sherriff’s Department and how both failed to plan for the possibility of acquittal and reprisal. While Fresno and Los Angeles are distinct cases, important parallels between the two can be drawn. For

²⁴ Feagin, and Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts*, vii.

²⁵ Robert Michael Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 5.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

instance, both experienced significant cuts in federal spending and worsening employment opportunities for its black residents.²⁷ Moreover both communities were heavily segregated along racial lines, a fact ignored by many whites in both cities. In words reminiscent of those used by Fresnoans in the mid 60's too many white Angelinos felt that "There was no way that something like that, particularly racially motivated, could occur in Los Angeles in the 90's."²⁸

That the prevalence of urban rioting by racial minorities often coincides with a rise in legal rights—and thus expectations—speaks to the fact that instances of rioting are often not unique in geography or causality. As such, it is important to view historical events not as standalone occurrences, but rather as indicative of the prevailing culture. Conversely, this work will attempt to contextualize the events of July 1967 not simply as an oddity but as a response to the longstanding racial attitudes present in California's Central Valley. The unfortunate truth is that Fresno's past has been cloaked with the stain of racial prejudice since well before this city's incorporation in 1885.²⁹ The origins, effects, and manifestations of this racism help to partly explain the violent response of west Fresnoans to the significant setbacks of 1967's momentous summer.

²⁷ Susan Rosegrant and Arnold Howitt, *The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots*. (Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, 2000), 3.

²⁸ Quoted in Susan Rosegrant and Arnold Howitt, *The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots*. (Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, 2000), 12.

²⁹ Clough, *Fresno County in the 20th Century*, 9.

CHAPTER 2: FRESNO'S LONG HOT SUMMER OF 1967

A confluence of once unthinkable events—job security and a disastrous economic crash chief amongst them—led to my entry into the American Dream of middle class status and homeownership. My house in the desirable neighborhood of Fresno High School was part of a post-World War II subdivision known as “Terrace Gardens No.2” and I always suspected that it had a history of racial restrictions. These suspicions were aroused upon purchase in 2010 when I discovered that there were exactly two other families of minorities on my street: one black, one Hispanic. Racially, the entire surrounding neighborhood looks remarkably similar. In retrospect, this makes perfect sense given the context of the restrictions listed the “following conditions” legally adhered to when my neighborhood was constructed in 1947: “Said property shall not be used or occupied by any person or persons of Negro or Mongolian origin, nor by any Armenian or Syrian, nor by any subject or former subject of the Turkish Empire, nor by any lineal descendants of such persons, except when living as a servant with the occupant thereof.”¹

Such previously normalized and accepted discrimination led to a curiosity to uncover Fresno's racial past and to explore the summer riots in my hometown through the lens of that same past. The overwhelming conclusion of my research was that, in general, Fresno was much more discriminatory towards people of color than most residents realize. Specifically, the significant discrimination in both housing and employment created conditions which combined to provoke a riot in 1967 and whose effects can be seen to this day, block by block, and neighborhood by neighborhood. The following pages will illuminate Fresno's

¹ Restrictive Covenant, Terrace Gardens No 2.

history by analyzing our racial past diachronically as well as highlighting housing and employment in Fresno's highly contentious arena of Civil Rights in the 1960s.

Short Racial History of the Central Valley

The first opportunity for white residents of the Central Valley to express disdain for communities of color in California occurred with the meeting of American emigrants and the indigenous population. By the time of Pedro Fages expedition into these lands in 1772, a diverse set of twenty 'tribelets' occupied land spanning and covering the current sites of Fresno, Firebaugh, Sanger, Coalinga and the Foothills. These twenty tribelets were grouped by two major tribal groups, the Yokuts, who resided on the valley floor and more mountainous regions and the Monache, who lived on the upper San Joaquin and Kings Rivers.² Both groups were faced with new strangers who coveted their land.

Newspapers detailed how "Indians became the object of brute domination or even potential annihilation if they threatened the white population's personal safety or property."³ Historian of early California James M. Guin, writing in 1905, describes how Central California's natives "were hunted down and shot like wild beasts."⁴ Later, however, Guin coldly rationalizes that white progress meant "death to the Indian, but it was beneficial to the country at large."⁵ That the recent white population considered itself wholly different from previous inhabitants is

² Charles W. Clough, ed. *Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980s*. (Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1986), 6.

³ Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 108.

⁴ James M. Guin, *History of the State of California and Biographical Record of the San Joaquin Valley, California: An Historical Story of the State's Marvelous Growth from its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, (Chicago: Chapman Publishing, 1905), 101.

⁵ Ibid.

further evidenced in the words of western frontier ranger Horace Bell. Bell's *Reminiscences of a Ranger*, written in 1881, alliteratively declares how whites would "let those rascally redskins know that they have no longer to deal with the Spaniards or the Mexicans, but with the invincible race of the American backwoodsmen, which has driven the savages from Plymouth Rock to the Rocky Mountains..."⁶

This hegemonic arrogance is also expressed in the American attitudes towards indigenous women. Tomas Almaguer described the prevailing white male view of native women as "mere 'squaws'" that "they could freely have their way with... even if the latter were married."⁷ An extensive traffic in native women developed which included a hierarchical ranking system into categories such as "fair," "middling," "inferior" and "refuse," based physical appearance and sexual proclivities.⁸ White treatment of Native Americans in the Central Valley has been summarized as exploitative 'slavery' which would eventually lead to "the final stages of extinction."⁹ The popular movement to relocate, and thus sweep aside, indigenous people took firm grip in California. The California legislature instituted a system of debt peonage in Central California in which "intoxicated or delinquent native persons unable to pay their fines were imprisoned, placed on auction blocks, and sold to the highest bidder."¹⁰ Ironically, it was the Central Valley which in 1851 were slated for the Golden State's version of Indian

⁶ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 121.

⁷ Ibid, 120.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 50.

¹⁰ Richard Street, *Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farm Workers* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 126.

Removal.¹¹ The plan was tabled when the land which John C. Fremont once considered “worthless and barren waste, over which roamed wretched Indians” proved to be wildly productive for agriculture.¹²

Indigenous Californians were easily pushed aside to make room for farming, but soon new groups emigrated to threaten white hegemony in the Central Valley. Reacting to these new threats, residential segregation was first initiated on Fresno’s Chinese population. In fact, their precarious legal condition created a willingness to work for much lower wages than what was acceptable for white residents, making them a target of discriminatory legislation. As early as 1874, a petition began to “circulate an agreement no to sell, lease, or rent to Chinese any property on the east side of the railroad track” which received the “signature of nearly every resident.”¹³ Without a hint of irony or complicity from whites, the dwellings Chinese residents were forced to live in were hyperbolically derided as similar to “every other Chinatown distinguished for squalor, crowding of human beings into narrow confines with all the characteristic bad smells and grime, and sublime indifference to sanitary measures that marks the oriental’s [sic] quarters.”¹⁴

It did not help matters that the overwhelming majority of early immigrants from China were men.¹⁵ White employers often used Chinese men as strikebreakers because they were legally unable to negotiate for better wages,

¹¹ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 144,

¹² Fresno City and County Historical Society, *Imperial Fresno* (Fresno, California: Fresno Republican Publication Co., 1979), 8.

¹³ Paul E. Vandor, *History of Fresno County, California*. (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1919), 330.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 156.

putting them at great odds with white workers. According to the *Fresno Weekly Expositor*, by 1870, local white men clearly felt they needed to “protect themselves from the ravages of the infamous hoard of Mongolians” in their midst.¹⁶ In twelve years, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 would not only bar entry from China but make Chinese Americans ineligible for citizenship. According to legal and political historian Mae Ngai, this was the first law in American history that explicitly forbade admission by race, but its effects would reverberate beyond the Chinese community and into enclaves of Japanese, Asian Indians, Armenians, Syrians and Mexicans among others.¹⁷ In essence, while the Chinese were the first “illegal aliens,” they were far from the last.¹⁸ Fear of minority entry into the dream of middle class America would lead prominent Fresno attorney, Alexander M. Drew—who would later gain national renown for his anti-Asian sentiment—to promote an alien land law in 1909 to deny landownership to Japanese residents.¹⁹ Around the same time the city council declared Chinatown a nuisance and voted for its abatement.²⁰

Years earlier, in 1905, an effort was made to rescind the liquor licenses of business owners. While this was ostensibly done in the name of Reverend Irving B. Bristol’s more general Anti-Saloon League, only those specific licenses granted to Fresno’s Chinese and Japanese ‘aliens’ were rescinded and prohibited.²¹ The

¹⁶ “The Chinese Question,” *Fresno Weekly Expositor*, June 1, 1870

¹⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 38.

¹⁸ Sarah D. Wald, *The Nature of California: Race, Citizenship, and Farming since the Dust Bowl* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2016), 10.

¹⁹ Vandor, *History of Fresno County*, 451.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 501.

²¹ *Ibid*, 503.

two most progressive minds of California's early 20th century—*Fresno Bee* editor Chester Rowell and Governor Hiram Johnson—displayed typical anti-Japanese xenophobia. Rowell wrote to Johnson that he seriously feared Japanese annexation and that “by peacefully overrunning the land they could... Orientalize” American culture.²² In the 1920s, the Central Valley became a hotbed of Ku Klux Klan activity a fact which compelled “prominent negroes of Fresno county” to request that the governor to begin a statewide investigation on Klan infiltration of local government.²³

Racial tension in the Central Valley's was again on full display during World War II.²⁴ In events that would be replayed up and down the west coast, Japanese Americans were processed in two nearby locations later to be interned for the duration of the war. At both Pinedale and the Fresno Fair Grounds, Japanese citizens and residents were housed for eventual removal to Tule Lake and Manzanar.²⁵ While some Central Valley residents felt the evacuation order was unnecessary, many felt otherwise. The Kingsburg Recorder reported that their Defense Council “supported the restrictions upon Japanese-Americans for the protection of the Japanese people themselves. We think there can be no objection to abridging the rights of a few citizens for the general good.”²⁶ A similar argument was raised by future Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, then California Attorney General. Warren felt that even movement into newer Valley

²² Roger Daniels, *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 61.

²³ “No Ku Klux Klan In Fresno Is Report,” *Fresno Bee*, July 26, 1921.

²⁴ While this may seem like an abrupt jump, or omission. The period of the 1930's is discussed in more detail in future pages analyzing advertisements and popular culture.

²⁵ Clough, *Fresno County in the 20th Century*, 99.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 97.

communities led to problems with white locals. Mentioning the community of Tulare specifically, he testified that “When they go there they find a hostile situation. We are very much afraid that it will cause trouble unless there is a very prompt solution of the problem.” Franklin D. Roosevelt’s executive order 9066, which interned ten thousand Japanese Americans from the Central Valley, was that solution.²⁷

Studies of Europeans have dominated the historiography of immigration to the United States, many of whom began the American portion of their lives in segregated ethnic enclaves.²⁸ Consequently, the setbacks faced by European immigrants to the Central Valley are very familiar. In west Fresno, white residents overcame discrimination through hard work and many now nostalgically remember visiting ostracized friends in the westside enclaves of Germantown, Italiantown and Armeniantown.²⁹ It is certainly true that groups like Germans, Italians, Russians and especially Armenians faced tough times in Fresno, however, according to a state report on immigration, by 1918, “because of their industry,” most were no longer in poverty.³⁰ In Fresno, as the rest of America, their whiteness would confer benefits which were passed to future generations. It was, as David Roediger points out, a conditional whiteness, for they were not “white on arrival.”³¹ It was precisely through being allowed to work certain jobs that this

²⁷ Justice Earl Warren later “deeply regretted the removal order and my own testimony advocating it, because it was not in keeping with our American concept of freedom and the rights of citizens.” Earl Warren, *The Memoirs of Earl Warren* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 149.

²⁸ Romeo Guzman, “The Transnational Life and Letters of the Venegas Family, 1920s to 1950s,” *The History of the Family*, June 2016, 2.

²⁹ John Carey, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

³⁰ “Report on Fresno’s Immigration Problem With Particular Reference to Educational Facilities and Requirements,” State Commission on Immigration and Housing of California, 1918. 11.

³¹ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 12.

process of becoming white occurred and allowed European immigrants to distance themselves from residents of color. According to Toni Morrison, becoming real Americans asked the new immigrant to “buy into the notion of American blacks as the real aliens.”³² As more white immigrants achieved middle class status and moved east, west Fresno became home to more and more black residents, whose own history in Fresno is wrought with strife.

The Central Valley’s history of white discrimination towards free blacks—to say nothing of those enslaved—began in the middle of the 19th century. As early as 1851, black residents were prohibited from testifying in court, restricted from homesteading on open lands and were forced into segregated schools.³³ Moreover, while seemingly progressive, California’s opposition to slavery “was not based on lofty abolitionist convictions, but rather on the belief that slavery would inevitably degrade white labor.”³⁴ Black Californians would not be granted the nominal rights of whites until 1870, with the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. Ten years later segregated schools for black and indigenous residents were outlawed, although in truth most of Fresno’s black students to this day attend schools with very few white students.³⁵

Fresno’s black population was never very sizable until an influx initiated by World War II tripled the percentage of black Fresnans by the time of the 1967

³² Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 34.

³³ Arnolde De Leon. *Racial Frontiers: Africans, Chinese, and Mexicans in Western America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 38.

³⁴ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 35.

³⁵ Mackenzie Mays, “Report Says Fresno-area Schools Among Most Economically Segregated in U.S.,” *Fresno Bee*, August 26, 2016. <http://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/education/article98189552.html> (accessed April 15, 2017).

riot.³⁶ Many emigrants were ex-servicemen and employees of shut down defense industries from the Bay Area.³⁷ By the end of the war, in fact, nearly 100% of black residents lived west of the railroad tracks.³⁸ If the experiences of traveling black celebrities is any indication, then life for even the most prosperous and accomplished residents was not always free of racism. When heavyweight champion boxer Joe Louis came to stay at the luxurious Hotel Fresno, for instance, he was met with a sign reading “We Will Not Accept Negroes in This Hotel.”³⁹ Louis reportedly told them he would not fight until the sign was removed. The management of the hotel reluctantly acquiesced. According to a bus boy named Jack Kelley—future all-American and Fresno police officer and founder of Fresno’s African American Museum and Cultural Center—it was put back up immediately after he left.⁴⁰

Kelley recounts a similar experience when Jesse Owens stayed at the Hotel Fresno. Owens’ response was “If I’m going to stay here, I want every negro who wants to stay here to stay here. And if they can’t stay here, I’ll leave. Take your sign down.” Kelley claims that management “took it down that day.”⁴¹ It was unusual to be treated with respect by whites staying at the hotel. Kelley remembers that black hotel staff viewed Al Capone quite favorably because he tipped well

³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. “California – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990,” 2005.

³⁷ Ramon D. Chacon “A Case Study of Ghettoization and Segregation: West Fresno’s Black and Chicano Community during the 1970s. “(Palo Alto: Working Paper Series No. 12, Stanford Center for Chicano Research, 1986), 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jack Kelley, interview. “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005” Fresno Historical Society.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and “he always called them by their name. If your name was Johnson, he’d say ‘Mr. Johnson.’ The other white guys would say ‘hey boy!’ ‘hey nigger!’”⁴² Even as late as 1948 racial tension was present in Fresno’s hospitality industry.

Fresno’s other luxury hotel, the Hotel Californian—reputed to be the best hotel between Los Angeles and San Francisco— “admitted it asked that negro members of the Independent Progressive Party eat in their own rooms” in violation of “state civil code which prohibits discrimination against minority groups.”⁴³

Popular culture also revealed white Fresno’s belief in racist stereotypes. In particular, blackface minstrelsy proved to be very popular in the Central Valley. Lifestyle articles in the *Fresno Bee* showed pictures of High Schoolers from San Joaquin Memorial High School in blackface as late as 1948 (Figure 1). They were fundraising and thought at minstrel show might be a good way to raise money for the student body.⁴⁴



Figure 1: “San Joaquin Memorial Plans Minstrel Show” *Fresno Bee*, January 21, 1948

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Hotel Californian Has Race Problem,” *Madera Tribune*, June 9, 1948.

⁴⁴ “San Joaquin Memorial Plans Minstrel Show,” *Fresno Bee*, January 21, 1948.

Fresno's advertisements were also quite racially backwards. In 1932, a black faced cartoon character playing a banjo took up half a page of the October 5th *Fresno Bee*. A year later an advertisement for Mack's Electric Lunch at 2033 Fresno Street proudly declared their discriminatory labor practices (Figure 2). At the bottom of the advertisement it read in all caps "ALL WHITE HELP"⁴⁵



Figure 2: Advertisement *Fresno Bee* January 17, 1933

Perhaps more understandably, but no less discriminatory, a couple wishing to adopt a boy specified their desire for a “baby boy; aged, birth to 2 years; Caucasian race.”⁴⁶ Throughout the 1930's, people wishing to enjoy a minstrel show without the blackface could tune their radio stations to KMJ at 10:30 every morning to “Hear Lazy Dan” the “famous minstrel man”⁴⁷ In the later 30's audiences could tune at 6:45 to the “Minstrel Memories” of the south again on

⁴⁵ *Fresno Bee*, January 17, 1933.

⁴⁶ “Special Notices,” *Fresno Bee*, May 31, 1933.

⁴⁷ “Bee Hear Lazy Dan,” *Fresno Bee*, March 13, 1934.

KMJ. They could entertain themselves with the antics of characters such as Bones, Topsy, Hotcha, and Rufus.⁴⁸

Mexican Americans in the Central Valley have also faced severe discrimination. “Once it became a United States territory, Hispanics, for the most part, became unwanted outsiders in the San Joaquin Valley.”⁴⁹ In a case similar to the Chinese, Mexican job competition led to discriminatory laws. In 1850 California passed the Foreign Miners License Act which required a twenty-dollar tax only of foreigners engaged in mining. In turn, Mexicans were one of the beneficiaries of Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement cutting off immigration from China and Japan. “Suddenly the supply of cheap labor for the country’s agricultural needs was gone and Mexican workers were in demand.”⁵⁰

An influx of Mexican immigration followed the Mexican revolution of 1910, many of them working in valley fields. “At first they were regarded as inferior workers” and “continued to receive lower wages than other workers.”⁵¹ Later on, those workers who only resided in Fresno for the grape harvest found it more convenient to remain after the increase of Central Valley cotton production in the 1920s and 30s. Nearly all stayed on Fresno’s west side, a pattern which would not change until the 1970s.⁵² The building of Highway 99 in 1960 further segregated Fresno from its brown and black residents, who were attracted to “El

⁴⁸ “Bordens Sundae Sing,” *Fresno Bee*, May 23, 1937.

⁴⁹ Clough, *Fresno County in the 20th Century*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Ramon Chacon, “A Case Study of Ghettoization and Segregation,” 7.

Barrio Chino” which had “dance halls, gambling dens, pool halls, bars, restaurants, barbershops and prostitutes.”⁵³

The solidifying of Fresno’s racial separation combined with deplorable conditions for agricultural workers which led to an increase in Mexican American political activity. In 1960, Bert Corona, Edward Roybal, Eduardo Quevedo and approximately 150 other delegates met in Fresno to form the Mexican American Political Organization (MAPA), an organization whose influence would soon spread throughout the southwest.⁵⁴ In 1962, similar motivations prompted Cesar Chavez to convene the first meeting of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in Fresno, where they adopted the black eagle logo as well as red, white and black as their official colors.⁵⁵ The NFWA would later merge with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to form the United Farm Workers of America (UFW).⁵⁶ The UFW negotiated for the first contract between growers and farmworkers in American history after a pivotal march from Delano to Sacramento which later grew into an international boycott.⁵⁷ Cesar Chavez himself addressed a crowd inside the Azteca Theatre in Chinatown during the middle of the march.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ramon Chacon, “A Case Study of Ghettoization and Segregation,” 9.

⁵⁴ F. Arturo Rosales. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1997), 108.

⁵⁵ Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2012), 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

⁵⁷ Andrea Castillo, “United Farm Workers Commemorates 50th Anniversary of March from Delano to Sacramento,” *Fresno Bee*, March 15th, 2016.

⁵⁸ Advertisement, *Fresno Bee*, March 23, 1966.

As alluded to earlier, the lives of agricultural workers and their families living on the segregated west side was difficult.⁵⁹ *The Fresno Bee* described typical housing for its poorest residents as “a crumbling agri [sic] slum equal in decay to any Gotham tenement” with “pit privies, no bath, no water, no sinks, no garbage or sewer disposal systems.”⁶⁰ Joe Trejo recalls that he would “find coffee cans and bring them home because that would be your dishes. And my mother would make soup and put it in there...Also we used to grow a garden in our yard. All the *mexicanos* in that area were growing their own gardens”⁶¹ It was common also for black and brown residents to be denied basic services based on their race. Albert Ramirez recalls how his own mother was told a restaurant on Blackstone “didn’t have any room” despite the fact that “there couldn’t have been more than four or five people in that restaurant. That thing is burning in my mind like it happened this instant, I have never forgotten it.”⁶²

Unfortunately, Fresno’s treatment of minorities did not improve in the postwar years, a fact which coincided with a rise in expectations caused by both World War II and a push for Civil Rights. Based on this almost continuous history of racism, segregation and degradation it is no wonder that by 1967 a certain bubbling over of frustrations was long in coming. This is not meant to deterministically argue that given certain conditions violence will automatically

⁵⁹ While it may appear that Mexican influence in Fresno is downplayed in this section, little evidence exists that large numbers of Mexican youth rioted. In fact, the *Fresno Bee* from the day after the first day of rioting only names one Mexican person arrested. No arrest records were saved, per Fresno Police Department and the records department at Fresno Superior Court.

⁶⁰ Ron Taylor, “Water Is Big Need In Three Rocks Area,” *Fresno Bee*, April 16, 1963.

⁶¹ Antonio and Obdulia Huerta, interview by Alex Saragoza, September 9, 1980, Hispanic Oral History Collection, Fresno County Library.

⁶² Albert Ramirez, interview by Jesus Luna, March 25, 1980. Hispanic Oral History Collection. Fresno County Library.

happen, but instead to highlight the fact that the in the nearly 160 cities which rioted, most encountered very similar conditions. Since white society's entry into the Central Valley a portion of its members have forced their domination over black, brown and Asian residents. And while in many Americans' eyes violence is seldom justified, it was not simply an aberrant act with no purpose as instances of civil strife are too often portrayed. The Long Hot Summer of 1967 was a reaction to generations of frustrations which manifested in more immediate job concerns and the seeming failure of non-violence to alleviate them. While different cities rioted for different reasons the severity of discrimination in housing and employment were so pronounced in Fresno—as the following pages hope to prove—that many could no longer take it.

The Riot: July 15, 1967

A palpable anger filled the black and brown teenagers who sped along Fresno Street a brief distance from their homes in Fresno's intensely segregated west side. That night their destination was the Fulton Mall, which had been built a mere three years earlier and proudly stood as a symbol for an economic progress which had largely passed them by. Crossing Broadway and Congo Alley, they would have reached the gateway to a shining downtown: Masten Towers to the left and the Crest Theatre to the right. Perhaps unbeknownst to those angry youth, one of the office spaces inside the Crest was leased to the Household Finance Corporation, one of many financial institutions which in previous decades had denied home loans to residents of redlined west Fresno.⁶³

⁶³ James Helming, "Report of a Survey in Fresno, California for the Division of Research and Statistics, *Home Owners Loan Corporation*, p. Section I: Explanation," 1936.

The Molotov Cocktails they gripped in their hands on that 95-degree night would not help them overcome years of discrimination or alleviate the impact of two devastating recent hits to their community: the closing of an all-purpose social services center and cuts to a summer job program on which many poor black and brown youths relied. Both programs were victims of Governor Ronald Reagan's fondness for small government and line item vetoes.⁶⁴ At minimum, however, they would succeed in waking up their more prosperous white neighbors to the radical desperation felt by many in west Fresno, young and old alike. Federal investigators commissioned by President Lyndon Baines Johnson would later describe their actions in a terse one-page summary of events: "Negro teen-agers in automobiles...drove through the streets using 'hit-and-run' tactics setting fires. Twelve fires were started in business establishments. There was some minor looting."⁶⁵ After decades of discrimination in housing and employment, west Fresno's youth felt they could take no more. Perhaps encouraged by urban America's turn away from non-violence, these young people opted for the drama of destruction.

According to the Kerner Commission, most "Riots erupted after a 'triggering' incident—very often, police brutality—but their intensity came from longstanding resentment."⁶⁶ While Fresno's triggering incident did not involve a case of police brutality, it was indicative of entrenched resentment stemming primarily from the urgent unavailability of jobs. Fresno's trigger came in the form of the closing of a youth job program called the Youth Opportunity Center which

⁶⁴ "Service Center Closing," *Fresno Bee*, January 19, 1967.

⁶⁵ "Cities in Which Racial Disturbances Have Occurred This Year" Volume II. *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, August 1, 1967, 29.

⁶⁶ McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 22.

galvanized students of west Fresno’s Edison High School into non-violent political action. *The Fresno Bee* reported that a meeting of the Fresno County Equal Opportunities Commission (FCEOC) was faced with a “confrontation with more than 300 jobless youths who turned the commission’s regular monthly meeting into a session of heated shouting and acrimonious debate.”⁶⁷ Along with light castigation, the article sympathetically describes “youthful impatience coupled with genuine frustration over wanting jobs and not finding them. And it was apparent that they relished the chance, for a change, to tell those in authority directly in loud and clear language how they felt about things.”⁶⁸ The actions of west Fresno’s youth were portrayed as a good faith effort to work within the system to let their grievances be heard.

The local newspaper was not alone in its sympathy of west Fresno’s unemployment problem. Fresno’s leadership also appeared to be on board to provide help and prevent the type of violence that summer spawned in other places. In fact, Fresno Mayor Floyd Hyde proactively “invited himself” to a meeting with a group of young people of the Fresno Tenant’s Council.⁶⁹ Details from this meeting were described on the front page of the next day’s *Fresno Bee*. Ironically, the article was printed underneath ominous images from a smoldering Newark as National Guardsmen “collar[ed] looters.”⁷⁰ At the meeting, Mayor Hyde surprised the council and many jobless residents by admitting that “People are prejudiced. It’s a long hard tough thing to break through, but we’re trying.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ “West Fresno Youths Disrupt EOC Meeting,” *Fresno Bee*, July 13, 1967.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Action to Avert Strife: Hyde Will Ask US Job-Hike Aid To Ease West Fresno Tensions,” *Fresno Bee*, July 14, 1967.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Hyde went on to say that “Many companies have unjust rules—rules that don’t make sense. They must consider the individual as an individual. I don’t know how to get this through to people. We have to open our hearts—then the eyes will open.”⁷² Hyde’s comments put him firmly on the side of west Fresno’s youth and the Fresno Tenant’s Council. Furthermore, Hyde distanced himself from fellow Republicans and Governor Reagan when he pledged to travel to Washington D.C to seek federal funds for jobs and to reopen the all-purpose Fresno Service Center. The meeting was viewed as a great step forward and his comments were met with enthusiastic cheers and applause from west Fresno’s residents.⁷³

The Kerner Commission’s Federal investigators also pointed to the employment strife and the job rally as the triggering event. The report describes that during this rally “Reverend Roosevelt Keel, a Baptist minister and employee of the Fresno Tenant’s Council...agitated the youths by stating that that they were not eating but white kids were.”⁷⁴ It is also evident that prevailing fears of violence stood at the forefront of Fresno’s leadership. A separate *Fresno Bee* article from July 16th asked “How real is the Threat?” and warned about the possibility of “racial violence, of the kind that this far has come no closer to Fresno than Watts or Hunter’s Point.”⁷⁵ The article details how Hyde further ingratiated himself to residents of west Fresno by acknowledging the difficulties faced by residents of that community in contrast to the prosperity enjoyed by Fresno’s white residents.

⁷² “Action to Avert Strife: Hyde Will Ask US Job-Hike Aid To Ease West Fresno Tensions,” *Fresno Bee*, July 14, 1967.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Cities in Which Racial Disturbances Have Occurred This Year” Volume II. *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, August 1, 1967, 29.

⁷⁵ “Jobs and How to Find Them—Fresnans Dig At the Roots of Strife” *Fresno Bee*, July 16, 1967.

Hyde noted that both the rates of unemployment and the rate of uninhabitable housing hovered at twenty percent. Mayor Hyde, a Republican, further stated that most Fresnoans mistakenly think poverty is “brought about by a complete lack of effort by the persons living in poverty...But Oh! How different it really is!” Surprisingly, Hyde also made the ominous statement that if he thought the city’s establishment did not care that he would “hand you the match myself.”⁷⁶

If Mayor Hyde hoped his enthusiasm and hubris would prevent Fresno’s youth from rioting, it would prove irrelevant. No amount of governmental sympathy could take the place of tangible action and most crucially, jobs. No one would need to hand rioters any matches. Perhaps emboldened by the destruction of Newark dominating media coverage that July, west Fresno’s youth decisively took matters into their own hands. Few should have been surprised. Besides the Mayor’s comment about personally handing angry youth matches, three months earlier the *Bee* published statements from Martin Luther King in which he singled out cities in California as particularly primed for racial violence. King wrote “I’m sorry to have to say this, but the intolerable conditions which brought about racial violence last summer still exist.”⁷⁷ Dr. King would soon be proven tragically correct.

The violence began, somewhat ironically, at the current site of west Fresno’s only supermarket and main shopping district on the corner of Fresno and B streets.⁷⁸ According to the *Fresno Bee*, at eleven o’ clock at night “more than 100 youths had congregated at a service station. Someone hurled a bottle through

⁷⁶ “Jobs and How to Find Them—Fresnoans Dig At the Roots of Strife” *Fresno Bee*, July 16, 1967.

⁷⁷ “King Warns Of Racial Violence in LA, Oakland, Other Cities,” *Fresno Bee*, April 17, 1967.

⁷⁸ Ironic because West Fresnoans fought for decades for a significant shopping center anchored by a major grocery store and this was the exact same site where Fresno’s riot began.

the window of the Regal Dairy Drive Inn...”⁷⁹ After which, according to Kerner Commission federal officials, a “special officer” not of the Fresno Police Department, Fresno County Sheriff’s Office, or the California Highway Patrol—all of whom were on hand in case Fresno turned into Watts—fired one round near the crowd which ricocheted into the arm of 28-year-old Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) official Dennis Mathis, who was only there trying to calm the situation. The shooting at the Regal Drive Inn proved to be the only major confrontation between large groups of youth and law enforcement. “Some 30 policemen and about 20 deputies armed with shotguns and nightsticks faced the mob” of about 100 youth.⁸⁰ To the credit of all participants involved, no violence was exchanged between young people and licensed police despite the provocations of teenagers who jeered and taunted police officers.

The riot in Fresno very closely aligned with many of the generalizations from the Kerner Commission’s report on that summer’s events. Fresno’s civil disturbance “involved action within negro neighborhoods against symbols of white American society—authority and property—rather than against white persons.”⁸¹ Wagner’s Wood Yard and Countryside Building Material as well as another, unnamed lumber yard in west Fresno were targeted with firebombs and were the locations of major fires. Other locations targeted for firebombs were the Louie Kee Market and Dan’s Liquors, both of which served west Fresno’s residents until very recently. Gong’s Market, Bill’s Home and Appliance Center had vandalism but not fire. Curiously, Tony’s Market was hit with a Molotov Cocktail that ended up causing only minimal damage, despite owners marking the

⁷⁹ “Rampaging Negro Gangs Fire Seven Stores In Fresno,” *Fresno Bee*, July 17, 1967.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Kerner Commission*, 64.

property with the words “Soul Brother,” a phrase meant to inform rioters that the establishment was black owned.⁸² Besides that specific attack the rest of the three day’s events conformed to the description of “pitched members of black communities against police or National Guardsmen and involved damage to the fabric of the ghetto, to the buildings and, in particular, stores.”⁸³ Another of the Kerner Commission’s generalizations evident in Fresno was the presence of “counterrioters” who “walked the streets urging rioters to ‘cool it’”⁸⁴ *The Fresno Bee* detailed the efforts of black leadership in west Fresno, including the cities’ first black Human Relations director Jim Aldredge circulating “among the youths telling them, ‘Play it cool, baby.’ One father looking for his son said, ‘If he’s out here in this mess I’ll break his neck!’”⁸⁵

Personal interviews from participants and aides also describe numerous incidents of people helping each other out. One of Fresno’s most successful Chefs, Paul Pearson, came to the defense of an elderly white couple shopping for wares oblivious to recent events and their personal safety. Pearson and others ushered them into the safety of the store moments before their De Soto was flipped over in the parking lot.⁸⁶ Community organizers, civic leaders, and lifelong friends Joe Lee and Joe Williams worked feverishly, night and day, in local community centers throughout the duration of the riots trying to keep kids from joining in the destruction. In a recent interview, Joe Williams detailed the lengths they went to: “We focused on the Hinton Center and North Avenue Center. You

⁸² “Rampaging Negro Gangs Fire Seven Stores In Fresno,” *Fresno Bee*, July 17, 1967.

⁸³ McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 13.

⁸⁴ *Kerner Commission*, 64.

⁸⁵ “Silent Police Face Tense Crowd of 100,” *Fresno Bee*, July 17, 1967.

⁸⁶ Paul Pearson, interview by author, July 26, 2016.

name it we did it—everything. Opened early and set up...anything we could do to keep kids busy. We didn't want kids to get involved in rioting."⁸⁷ In fact, Mayor Floyd Hyde personally called Joe Lee to head downtown to help him quell the violence. Lee never got there. A police officer from the Fresno Police Department threw Lee on top of his squad car and warned him, "You're not going downtown!"⁸⁸ He explained that when there is "any kind of turmoil, color becomes the most distinguishing factor. It's the same as when anyone with a turban is thought of as a terrorist. I've been fighting that in Fresno all my life."⁸⁹ Mayor Hyde issued a formal statement expressing his "sincere appreciation and gratitude to the residents of West Fresno for their constructive efforts in re-establishing peace and stability. I am proud of the West Fresno community and I really feel the calm which prevails is because of the hard work preceding these incidents."⁹⁰

While most of Fresno's local leadership expressed support for the beleaguered residents of west Fresno, California's leaders in Sacramento were more in line with the thinking of Democratic Senator from North Carolina Sam Ervin, who considered that summer's rioting as "massive, mindless destruction" without reasonable cause.⁹¹ Governor Ronald Reagan, already held responsible by many Fresnoans for creating the immediate conditions that triggered the rioting, worsened matters by fanning the flames of intolerance with tone deaf comments. Reagan appealed to what he termed "law-abiding Negroes" to separate themselves

⁸⁷ Joe Williams, interview by author, August 6, 2016.

⁸⁸ Joe Lee, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Hyde Has Confidence Calm Now Reigns In Stricken Area," *Fresno Bee*, July 18, 1967.

⁹¹ McLaughlin, *Long Hot Summer*, 12.

from “law breakers and mad dogs” who participated in the rioting.⁹² While he expressed praise for those parents and civic leaders who helped patrol the streets during the riots, he never acknowledged or examined the conditions faced by west Fresnoans for being angry and desperate to the point of violence.

Moreover, citing the fact that a small number of its members were involved in racial violence, the Governor vetoed a \$26,000 federal grant to the Fresno Tenants Council, marking the third time that year alone that west Fresno was specifically targeted for closing or budget cuts for job programs—the federally acknowledged reason for rioting. This jarring lack of acknowledgement of west Fresno’s problems at the state level, even after the fact, leaves little wonder why only black residents seem to remember Fresno’s long hot summer. The vast majority of those who do remember it are quick to elucidate the reasons for their absolute certainty that Fresno will again have riots. In the words of Joe Williams “I tell you it’s gonna happen again. You can’t deny people opportunity and just say be happy.”⁹³

Housing Discrimination: Segregated Fresno

The media coverage in the days before Fresno’s rioting were dominated by discussions about job availability, but the underlying cause for their absence stood before all in plain sight. As Ramon D. Chacon has convincingly argued, the structures affecting housing in Fresno created an essentially segregated city by 1967, with most commerce occurring on the whiter eastside of the railroad tracks.⁹⁴ In turn, the more impoverished west side held scarce opportunities for its

⁹² “Gov Reagan: Condemn ‘Mad Dogs’” *The Argus* (Fremont, CA) July 26, 1967.

⁹³ Joe Williams, interview by author, August 6, 2016.

⁹⁴ Ramon D. Chacon “A Case Study of Ghettoization and Segregation,” 2.

young people. Thus, nearly all public officials employed phrases like “residents of west Fresno” and “negro youth” almost interchangeably—tacit admission that Fresno’s long held desire for the racial exclusion of its black and brown residents had largely been achieved. Examples of this can be gleaned from the *Fresno Bee*’s coverage of the contentious but peaceful confrontation between EOC officials and black students over disparities in job availabilities. In an article describing the overall difficulty of finding jobs for all young people, the *Fresno Bee* opined “the critical difference between situations of a white teenager from the Bullard High area and a Negro student from West Fresno...is that the white student may need the job for extra spending money, whereas the Negro may need it for basic essentials, like eating.”⁹⁵ The article did two important things: it accurately conflated west Fresno with black students and simultaneously rejected an ‘all-jobs-matter’ narrative in which the plight of white and black youth were seen as equally worrisome. While newspaper coverage might at first seem progressive, the story of how ‘west Fresno’ became a pseudonym for ‘black’ is decidedly regressive.

Restrictive Covenants

Segregation in Fresno was codified in the 1874 agreement to keep Chinese Americans in west Fresno. Furthermore, it was crystalized and expanded block by block through the racially restrictive covenants contained in the escrow papers of home purchases. In essence, this served as a blueprint for the exclusion of nearly all black, brown, Asian and undesirable white people. Residential segregation became so pronounced that six years after the riot, in 1973, the Fresno City Council’s Analysis report described Fresno as “a tale of two cities” and cited

⁹⁵ “Jobs and How to Find Them—Fresnans Dig At Roots Of Strife,” *Fresno Bee* July 16, 1967.

McKinley Avenue as the “Mason-Dixon Line” separating white and affluent north Fresno from racially mixed, poorer south Fresno. The Mason-Dixon Line has, in the convening years, pushed further and further northward. In fact, as former Mayor Ashley Swearingen pointed out in a speech to a convocation of all Fresno Unified School District employees, the 2030 city plan will be the first since 1888 not to expand northward or eastward.⁹⁶

Racially restrictive covenants in Fresno also reveal the extent to which, as Daniel HoSang has pointed out, racism is not simply static but a “dynamic and evolving force.”⁹⁷ Essentially, racism does not simply die out with new legislation it morphs into a different manifestation. For instance, while later (post-war) racial covenants are less specific and more inclusive on paper, they have the same effects. This is largely the reason for the segregated nature of the many pockets in the Fresno High/Tower District neighborhoods (Figure 3). Before World War II, the Terrace Gardens lot had not yet been re-subdivided and was known then as the Montpelier subdivision. It contained many of the exclusive neighborhoods around the Tower District, Fresno High and Fresno City College

The earlier Montpelier tract excluded with much greater specificity “Negro, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Armenian, Malayan, Asiatic or native of the Turkish Empire or any person not of the Caucasian race, or descendant of such of above

⁹⁶ Ashley Swearingen, Public speech attended by the author. While the thought of a more cohesive, centralized and racially heterogeneous Fresno is a net positive, my optimism is dampened by the reality of white Fresnoans likely fleeing eastward to Sanger or northward to Clovis. Affluent north Fresnoans, like councilman Steve Brandau insinuate as such when they oppose low cost housing in what they term ‘their neighborhood’ by dog-whistling that “this is the social engineers at work again. This rule is definitely going to be transformative. It’s going to transform north Fresno in the wrong direction.” “Public policy vs. private property: Housing fight looms in Fresno,” *Fresno Bee*, July 25, 2015.

⁹⁷ Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 2

named persons” unless they were live-in housekeepers.⁹⁸ The language used is almost identical to that of Fresno’s most prestigious pre-war neighborhood, Huntington Boulevard near Roosevelt High, which was covered by the Alta Vista tract (Figure 3). The Alta Vista tract’s covenant differs slightly from Montpelier’s in that Armenians (and the redundantly stated native of the Turkish Empire) are not explicitly excluded from home ownership. On paper, Armenians were good enough for Huntington Boulevard, but not Van Ness Avenue—then central Fresno’s most prestigious neighborhood.⁹⁹



Figure 3: Fresno City Map

⁹⁸ Restrictive Covenant, Montpelier Tract. Malayan is the antiquated phrase for Filipino people.

⁹⁹ Restrictive Covenant, Alta Vista Tract. This depends of the Huntington Boulevard home seller and realtors using their discretion not to view Armenians as ‘Asiatic.’

This earlier specificity is largely the same for other exclusive neighborhoods in southeast Fresno covered in pre-war covenants. The Easterby tract which covers Butler Avenue and the area around Sunnyside Country Club excluded the same large number of groups as Montpelier in the Old Fresno High neighborhood but opted for truncated wording. Instead of naming the Chinese and Japanese explicitly, it states only “Asiatics” and “Mongolians” are prohibited from home ownership there. Ironically, when it was again subdivided into smaller plots as the Sunnyside Estates, the wording became *more* specific, again excluding Chinese and Japanese residents by name as well as blacks, “Hindus” and Armenians, all of whom were barred from residence in southeast Fresno’s best neighborhoods through both pre-war and post-war covenants.¹⁰⁰

The titular loosening of racial restrictions presented Fresno’s working-class baby boomers with an exceptional opportunity to integrate its new neighborhoods. This unkept promise rested in the highly-lauded Mayfair district, near McLane High School, dubbed as “Fresno’s greatest development for the future...”¹⁰¹ It was the first major subdivision after World War II and included a shopping center which “eventually spelled the end of downtown as the marketing hub of the San Joaquin Valley.”¹⁰² Like the postwar Terrace Gardens neighborhood, the Mayfair District’s Salinger tract was limited by a racially restrictive covenant. Explicitly excluded were “Asiatics or Negroes” and members of the Turkish Empire or any of that groups descendants unless employed as “servants by residents of said premises”¹⁰³ Unlike Terrace Gardens near Fresno High, however, the Salinger

¹⁰⁰ Restrictive Covenant, Sunnyside Estates.

¹⁰¹ *Fresno Bee*, December 1, 1947.

¹⁰² Clough, *Fresno County in the 20th Century*, 14.

¹⁰³ Restrictive Covenant, Salinger Tract.

tract specified that only “members of the Caucasian Race” could live there. This likely allowed home sellers to discern who is entitled to the title of ‘Caucasian.’ These restrictions, including those against outhouses and shacks, were legally enforceable until January 1, 1963, their date of expiration. In time, as specific restrictions (Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Malayan) gave way to more nebulous terms open to homeowner interpretation like “Asiatic,” the one group which was always explicitly excluded from Fresno’s prewar and postwar American dream was black people. And although certain groups of white people also faced significant discrimination, it was never “the hard, exclusionary, and often color-based racism of Jim Crow segregation.”¹⁰⁴

When a covenant was no longer enough to keep a person out, the white residents of that neighborhood showed intense racial vitriol towards those few black and brown residents privileged enough to attain housing in all white neighborhoods. Local football hero Jack Kelley, personal witness to white Fresnoans’ discrimination against black athletic heroes Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, recalls how he “would sit on his front porch with a ‘loaded shotgun’ because of the racial harassment of his family by angry neighbors” in a neighborhood which was “once called ‘German town’ and barred African-Americans, Mexicans and other ethnicities.”¹⁰⁵ Kelley recounted that white kids would take dead dogs and cats and throw them over his fence which stopped when he would shoot at the cars they rode in. “I put a board up to the fence so the guys couldn’t see me. They stopped messing with me. Shit! After I blow out about 15-20 car’s [tires]...”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ “Local Black History Missing from Books,” *California Advocate*, February 18-28, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Jack Kelley interview, “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005” Fresno Historical Society.

In 1965, two years before the riots, Charles Mattlin, a black man who purchased a house near Ashlan and Fresno and became the first black resident of his street. Mattlin “reported that the letters KKK were sprayed on his garage door with a paint spray can. He said the letters are about four inches high and each is underlined.”¹⁰⁷ Eight years earlier, a similar event occurred in the driveway of the Phillips family whom had recently segregated an all-white neighborhood in Fresno. Three high school aged boys told authorities that they did not like “Negros” and wanted to “put a scare into them” by burning “KKK” into their property.¹⁰⁸ Like their white counterparts in the south, white Fresnans violently and vehemently resisted black intrusion into what they considered their space and their rights as homeowners.

Longtime realtor John Carey, who started in the real estate business in 1969, vividly recalls selling a house on Richert, ironically, only a few short blocks away from the residence of hate crime victim Charles Mattlin. Carey remembers in his first year selling to Elbert Brownley, a black man, and receiving a belligerent phone call two weeks later from someone he describes as “some redneck type” who objected to Brownley’s purchase. Carey coolly replied, “I take it your white. Well, he’s ‘whiter’ than you are...he goes out every day and makes a living. Takes care of this kids and is well dressed. He’s much better than most of your white neighbors.”¹⁰⁹ This event solidified his belief in the justness of non-discriminatory house sales. “In this area, there are so many different people that you deal with” that it makes no sense not to sell if “somebody qualified and they

¹⁰⁷ *Fresno Bee*, November 3, 1965.

¹⁰⁸ “Three juveniles face Charges in Racial Incident,” *Fresno Bee*, November 4, 1958.

¹⁰⁹ John Carey, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

had the money”¹¹⁰ John Carey’s belief is that most of his colleagues by 1969 felt the same way he did.

Homeowner’s Bill of Rights and Proposition 14

While Fresno’s realtors in 1969—after federal legislation made the matter a moot point—likely had a greater interest in claiming commissions than discriminating against buyers, the previous decade witnessed their top leadership doing everything they could to discriminate against Fresnans of color under the oft-cited guise of property rights. Eventually their efforts would earn enough door to door signatures in Fresno and other places to secure a statewide vote for would later be called Proposition 14. The discriminatory proposition’s first incarnation was known as the Homeowners Bill of Rights and made its first public appearance in the big Sunday edition of the *Fresno Bee* on May 12, 1963. The giant full-page advertisement was endorsed by the Fresno Realty Board, the Apartment House Owners Association of Fresno and the Home Builders Association of the San Joaquin Valley. It was authored by Lawrence H. “Spike” Wilson, prominent Fresno realtor and president of the powerful California Real Estate Association (CREA). The document appropriates the images of the American Revolution—eagles, tri-corner hats, stars and bell ringing—and was written in direct response to black state representative Byron Rumford’s introduction of A.B. 1240. The bill, which would later be called the Rumford Act, was written to prevent racial discrimination in public and private residences.¹¹¹

In an additional appropriation later employed by anti-welfare, anti-tax and anti-immigration groups, the advertisement romanticizes the Bill of Rights and

¹¹⁰ John Carey, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

¹¹¹ Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 62.

descendants of slaves. Without apparent irony, the advertisement makes the intensely problematic presupposition that freedom is the sole right of the white, male property owning “majority”¹¹³ Regardless, the 40,000 members of the CREA voted unanimously to ratify the Homeowners Bill of Rights.¹¹⁴ To the great chagrin of the CREA, the Rumford Fair Housing Act finally passed on September 20th, 1963, four months after the advertisement was placed and three weeks after Martin Luther King’s March on Washington.

The battle lines were now firmly drawn, and in Fresno’s hotly contested spaces, both sides began the grassroots work of winning over the hearts and minds of potential signatories and voters. Between the summer of 1963 and the final vote for Proposition 14 in November of 1964, there was almost daily coverage of both sides’ arguments. In a series of moves similar to those documented in Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors* in Orange County, the CREA and their satellites diligently and patiently convinced small, intimate groups of people to continue a pattern of denying homeownership to minorities. Unless, of course, those homes should lie within geographically circumscribed limits imposed by white Fresnans. CREA President Lawrence H. “Spike” Wilson made use of this relative celebrity in Fresno and went on a veritable speaking tour of private homes and benevolent societies.

On July 7th of 1963 he spoke to a meeting of the Rotary Club held the Hotel Californian which was once the site of significant racial discrimination. The topic of Wilson’s speech was “The New Forgotten Man” and the need for a bill of rights for property owners. It was the same rousing speech which he gave to a state

¹¹³ Jennifer Burke. “The National Association of REALTORS and the Fair Housing Mandate, 1961-1991” Doctoral Dissertation, 2016, UC Santa Cruz, 43.

¹¹⁴ “CREA Head Raps Rising State Taxes,” *Fresno Bee*, April 14, 1963.

meeting of realtors and which led to the CREA's unanimous ratification of the Homeowner's Bill as well as the inspiration for the huge advertisement.¹¹⁵ The following month a group was formed which billed itself the "Citizens League for Individual Freedom" which explicitly sought to repeal the fair housing legislation that in their view unfairly bound white homeowners. CREA President Wilson agreed with the tenor of this council of white citizens, but felt they did not go far enough. Only a constitutional amendment would ensure their narrowly defined freedoms in perpetuity.¹¹⁶

To further this aim Wilson led the CREA in fundraising ten thousand dollars and allied his association with the California Homebuilders Council and the California Apartment Owners Association which collectively would be called the Americans For Individual Freedom.¹¹⁷ Their communal efforts would be needed if the reality of nearly a half a million signatures was to materialize for the possible passage of what would later be known as Proposition 14. Fresno's 'forced housing' opponents hoped to tap into the reservoir of racism of its segregated neighborhoods. They hoped to mobilize citizens like Bob Oakes who wrote into the *Fresno Bee* to deride the California Legislature for denying his sacred right to vote according to his conscience on housing. Oakes was moved to write into the *Fresno Bee* and argue that "never in history has mongrelization been other than a slow process of retrogression."¹¹⁸

While voices like Oakes' took up much of the media attention and those who agreed with at least part of his views were a clear majority, a healthy debate

¹¹⁵ "Wilson Will Speak," *Fresno Bee*, July 7, 1963.

¹¹⁶ *Fresno Bee*, August 2, 1966.

¹¹⁷ "Realtors Put Up 10000 for Fight on Rumford Act," *Fresno Bee*, September 9, 1963.

¹¹⁸ "Mongrelization," *Fresno Bee*, December 12, 1963.

raged in Fresno by supporters of fair housing. Responding to the formation of alliances among realtors and other fair housing opponents, Fresno's clergy came out strongly in favor of integration beyond housing in the spirit of what they considered Christian love. A multi-faith group calling itself the "Interfaith Social Action Council of Fresno" took out a full-page ad in the *Bee* displaying the names of over 500 Fresnans who signed a document pleading for a "Good Neighbor" policy for our community."¹¹⁹ They asked signatories to make a personal commitment in the spirit of the "brotherhood of man" that regardless of color, creed or national origin they promise to be a good neighbor, "employ him or work side by side with him" and "teach my children to want to know, understand and respect his characteristics when they differ from ours."¹²⁰ Above all else, in contrast to many on the contemporary religious right, being a good neighbor asks of the faithful to "support his civil rights as well as my own."¹²¹ The College Community Congressional Church, not acting in concert with the Interfaith Social Action Council, offered a more placid olive branch to the CREA and Fresno Realty Board. The church penned a letter stating that "both groups (those favoring and those opposing the fair housing law) have a common goal to secure equal justice for all within the field of housing" and sought a meeting with then mayor Arthur L. Selland and other stakeholders to make fair housing the "first order of business."¹²²

When CREA President Wilson took his speech on the road outside Fresno he was met with resistance. Speaking to the 59th annual convention of California

¹¹⁹ *Fresno Bee*, June 16, 1963

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² "Fresno Church Group Seeks Meeting On Fair Housing Law," *Fresno Bee*, August 6, 1963.

Realtors in Los Angeles he was picketed by 500 people. The protesters represented the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the United Civil Rights Committee. Wilson assured the attendees inside the convention that “The property owner needs a defender, and we are willing to play this role.”¹²³ On the other hand, ordinary citizens had to play the role of early defenders for minorities being denied fair access to housing. R. A. Phillips of the West Fresno Citizens Committee On Redevelopment wrote an editorial in response Homeowners Bill of Rights expressing that it was “appalling to think that such a group or groups existed in our midst” when “so many Americans, white, black, yellow, and brown have fought for and lost their lives to preserve.”¹²⁴ As 1963 was coming to a close CORE delegations from 11 western states held a sit in at the capitol then travelled southward to Fresno to meet at the Hotel Californian. Their chief aim was “how to combat the proposed initiative, initiated by the California Real Estate Association, to do away with the fair housing law.”¹²⁵

The once unanimous CREA seemed to be showing signs of dissention. In December of 1963, a group broke off to form the California Realtors for Fair Housing and elected Fresno realtor Perry Hill as the head of its Northern California division. Hill told the *Bee* that “it is morally wrong to legislate against a minority because it is a minority” and that he hoped other realtors would oppose CREA’s stand. He concluded, “I want to display my realtor’s button proudly.”¹²⁶ Hill and other fair housing advocates would soon have some star power to gain

123 “State Realtor Chief Hits Housing Law,” *Fresno Bee*, September 23, 1963.

124 “Housing Segregation,” *Fresno Bee*, May 24, 1963.

125 “Core Will Push Fight On Housing,” *Fresno Bee*, December, 7, 1963.

126 “Fair Housing Group Names Fresno Aide,” *Fresno Bee*, December 3, 1963.

traction for their cause. In March of 1964 a show called the Easter Freedom Festival was held in Fresno sponsored by the Stars For Freedom organization and was held at the Fresno Memorial Auditorium. It was headlined by comedian Dick Gregory, musician Count Basie and singer June Christy. All proceeds from the show were donated to “oppose the initiative sponsored by the California Real Estate Association.”¹²⁷

Even state Assembly member Byron Rumford—African American author of the fair housing act—himself visited Fresno in May of the same year to strongly denounce CREA’s proposed constitutional amendment which he argued is not simply a repeal of the law he authored but “prohibits any government—state, city or county—from ever passing any law against racial or religious discrimination in housing.” Rumford called the movement “evil and deceitful” and adding that, “we are positive it is unconstitutional.”¹²⁸ The culminating event of that contentious summer in 1964 was when Martin Luther King held a march from Fresno High School to Ratcliffe Stadium in what was termed the Witness of Faith for Freedom Rally (Figure 5). It was attended by then Mayor Wallace Henderson who wanted to show “the nation we really believe in fair housing, desegregation and the Rumford Housing Act.”¹²⁹

Dr. King addressed the crowd and expressed concern “about you in California. If this initiative passes it will defeat all we have been struggling to win in the south. It will put off again realization of the dream of the nation where all of God’s children will live together as brothers.”¹³⁰ In the end, Fresno’s white

127 “Special Show Will Feature Dick Gregory,” *Fresno Bee*, March 17, 1964.

128 “Rumford Attacks ‘Real Purpose’ of Try to Nullify Housing Act,” *Fresno Bee*, May 30, 1964.

129 “Rights Walked Is Hailed As Success” *Fresno Bee*, June 2, 1964.

130 “Rights Walked Is Hailed As Success” *Fresno Bee*, June 2, 1964.



Figure 5: Martin Luther King at Ratcliffe Stadium, *Fresno Bee*, June 2, 1964. King pictured far left.

homeowners chose personal freedom over universal justice and fair housing. On the official ballot, “Spike” Wilson—the Fresno realtor largely responsible for this momentous pushback against what he termed ‘forced housing’—was given the task of authoring one final defense of what was now called Proposition 14: Sales and Rentals of Residential Real Property, Initiative Constitutional Amendment.¹³¹ Regrettably, the vote in Fresno was not even close. In what must have felt like a slap in the face to its residents of color 86,513 voted no while 45,694 voted yes.¹³² That two out of every three Fresnans were willing to live with segregation in their midst was bad enough for residents of west Fresno. That the place they were forced to live in had few job opportunities only worsened racial tensions.

¹³¹ “California Ballot Propositions and Initiatives: Sales and Rentals of Residential Real Property, 1964.”

¹³² “How Fresno Area Voted,” *Fresno Bee*, November 4, 1964.

Employment Discrimination

While structural reasons for this lack of jobs were largely to blame, intentional discrimination by employers in Fresno compounded an already contentious situation and created a powder keg of resentment which exploded in the summer of 1967. This discrimination did not begin in the mid-1960s. From Fresno's municipal inception white employment was protected from above to ensure lack of competition from below. In the days just before of the riots, west Fresnoans were remarkably candid in naming its causes. Black unemployed persons and black leaders were mostly in agreement with the unnamed minister who complained of extreme apathy from white employers. He chided, "Most of them don't give a damn. They hire one black man, the biggest, blackest one they can find and put him out in front and that's integration. Until this year the largest store in town had only one full-time male Negro"¹³³

This notion stands in stark contrast to the accepted white narrative in Fresno. Many then, as now, agreed with the *Fresno Bee* article that opined "the blunt fact is that lack of job ambition is one reason Negro unemployment" was close to double the national average.¹³⁴ By 1967 residents of west Fresno were never fully welcomed into the fray of mainstream working society in the Central Valley. Said another way, they violently refuted the *Fresno Bee*'s view of them as vocationally unambitious by rioting for the very right too often denied to them. The official Kerner Commission's report admitted to the unequal opportunities for black Americans in a section which poetically lists the Long Hot Summer's "Basic Causes." The report labeled the causes of rioting as "bitter fruits" and argued that

¹³³ "Jobs and How to Find Them—Fresnoans Dig At Roots of Strife," *Fresno Bee*, July 16, 1967.

¹³⁴ "Your Money's Worth: Companies See Value Of Negro Ad Models," *Fresno Bee*, June 3, 1967.

the tree which created them was “white racism.”¹³⁵ The first fruit listed was “the continuing exclusion of great numbers of Negroes from the benefits of economic progress through discrimination in employment and education and the enforced confinement of Negroes in segregated housing and schools.”¹³⁶ The other fruits were the “growing concentration of impoverished Negroes into major cities” and the destruction of opportunity and hope.¹³⁷

The great numbers excluded from the American Dream referenced by the Kerner Commission are painfully evident in the cold and declarative numbers of the Federal Census for 1960. In 1960, the total population of Fresno was 133,929 and of those 10,485 (7.83 percent) were designated as “Negro” and 2,638 listed under the title “Other Races.” More than half (5,169) of those black Fresnoans resided in just two census tracts on the west side: numbers two and nine. In those tracts, the median household income was \$2,971, less than half of the average for the city of Fresno as a whole.¹³⁸ Besides being much poorer, non-white Fresnoans were much younger than their white counterparts. The median age for white residents in 1960 was 29.2, compared to 23.6 for non-white residents.¹³⁹ Moreover, unemployment was much more pronounced for tracts two and nine. While Fresno’s total unemployment hovered in the six percent range, tracts two and nine sat at 16.6 and 13.3 percent, respectively.¹⁴⁰ *The Fresno Bee* reported that

¹³⁵ *Kerner Commission*, 64.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 66.

¹³⁸ US Census Bureau. (1960). “Table P-1—General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts: 1960,” 13.

¹³⁹ US Census Bureau (1960). “Table P-2—Age, Color, and Marital Status of the Population, By Census Tracts: 1960,” 25.

¹⁴⁰ US Census Bureau (1960). “Table P-3—Labor Force Characteristics of the Population, by Census tracts: 1960,” 48.

on the west side “Thousands of the county’s residents live in squalor, go hungry, lack steady jobs and little hope of bettering their lot or that of their children.”¹⁴¹

For residents living on the west side of the railroad tracks, professional employment must have seemed like an unattainable dream. Of the 7,530 government workers living in Fresno, only 2.3 percent were from west Fresno’s census tracts two and nine. Even worse, those same tracts made up less than one percent (.00963) of those employed in “educational services.”¹⁴² This near exclusion from jobs in education was echoed several times in the stories told by black west Fresnoans testing the upward mobility of their home town. What they found instead was rampant discrimination for people of color. This was most pronounced by those people of color hoping to teach in Fresno Unified School District.

Nadar Ali, who would one day be the future Minister of Commerce and Minister of Education for the Nation of Islam, remembers seeing that all of his less talented white classmates at what was then named Fresno State University were landing jobs with Fresno Unified School District. “They were discriminating here in Fresno against high school teachers.” Under the guise of needing to “go and get experience” Ali had to travel “all the way to Oakland to get a job.” Ali says that despite this alleged stipulation for experience, “all my Caucasian friends that were coming out were getting hired right and left.” Ali also remembers that once he was hired as Bullard High School’s first black teacher he was plagued with racialized

¹⁴¹ Gene Kuhn, “Hunger, Despair Blight Nation’s Farm Heartland,” *Fresno Bee*, July 26, 1964.

¹⁴² US Census Bureau (1960). “Table P-3—Labor Force Characteristics of the Population, by Census tracts: 1960,” 48.

sexual suspicions from white parents. “They would tell us that some of the male teachers would be out there and might be flirting with white girls.”¹⁴³

The experiences of Joe Lee are strikingly similar to those of Nadar Ali. After guiding west Fresno’s youth as the director of the North Avenue Community Center during the riots, but before becoming Fresno Unified’s first black Assistant Superintendent, Joe Lee was just trying to find a teaching job. According to Lee, Fresno Unified’s acting Director of Human Relations at the time Arnold Finch, whom he describes as an “out and out racist” told him that Fresno Unified had reached their quota of new teachers. Undeterred, Lee asked Finch what that quota was and shockingly Finch responded, “One black, one Armenian, one Mexican.” Finch’s racism did not subside once Lee got retribution and “took his job in 1972.” Coincidentally the state superintendent at the time, Wilson Lyles, was also black. According to Lee, Finch derisively referred to their black titular superior for the state as “your buddy,” a reference to their shared black ancestry and his own disdain for black leadership.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, when Finch and the other white members of Fresno Unified’s top leadership seemed unseemly astounded at board meetings that Lee could outperform or outthink them in any respect, he would defiantly give them his best impression of Stepin Fetchit by scratching his head and saying “I’m just lucky I guess.”¹⁴⁵

Other oral histories, like those conducted in 2004 by Nancy Whittle, reveal the difficulties faced by minorities seeking employment in Fresno. John

¹⁴³ Nadar Ali, interview by Nancy Whittle, December 12, 2006. “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005,” Fresno Historical Society.

¹⁴⁴ Joe Lee, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Roy Hurst, “Stepin Fetchit, Hollywood's First Black Film Star,” *NPR*. March 6, 2006. Fetchit was characterized as shiftless and imbecilic. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5245089> (accessed August 15, 2016).

Abarnathy, for instance, vividly recalls the difficulties faced by his daughter Dolores when seeking a job as a Home Economics teacher. She was never hired “once they found out she was colored. She found plenty of prejudice, so education doesn’t always make a place for you.”¹⁴⁶ Rudy Bigby Pierro, whose family left Georgia in 1895 when the Ku Klux Klan shot out her grandmother’s windows, remembers her father and brother’s difficulties finding masonry work. When asked why she felt this was the case she nearly shouted: “Because he was black! They didn’t give blacks any kind of work here. That was why.”¹⁴⁷ Her brother William remembers “I didn’t have steady work, just odd jobs” like custodial and chauffeur work.¹⁴⁸ One wonders given Fresno’s housing explosion in the 20th century how many white men with experience laying brick had to settle for custodial or driving jobs. While information for other trades was difficult to uncover in Fresno, in the 1960s high wage union work in all of California was “almost exclusively white; a Jim Crow regime in the land of sunshine.”¹⁴⁹

The want ads and editorial pages of the *Fresno Bee* also served as a witness to the employment discrimination in the Central Valley. Employers sometimes specified the race of the person they wished to hire and conversely, employees seeking work specified their race to make themselves more desirable for hire. A want ad from 1952 purchased by an orphanage seeking help specified that they sought a “Middle aged Catholic lady (Caucasian), unencumbered.”¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁶ John Abarnathy, interview. “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005,” Fresno Historical Society.

¹⁴⁷ Rudy Bigby Pierro, interview. “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005,” Fresno Historical Society.

¹⁴⁸ William Bigby interview. “Oral History Collections: African American Voices in the Central Valley, 2004-2005,” Fresno Historical Society.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Fresno Bee*, October 20, 1952.

advertisement likely wished to exclude Hispanic Catholics by specifying the race of the help they wanted. That same year Nu Way Cleaners was seeking pressers and was willing to pay top wages. The company's two specifications were that potential employees "Must be good" and "White only."¹⁵¹ In the mid-60s a seemingly desperate white man seeking work billed himself a "CAPABLE WHITE MAN" who was willing to work in "hauling, moving trash—Anything, any time."¹⁵² A woman asking for live in help specified that she wanted a "Middleaged Christian Caucasian woman."¹⁵³ Ironically, a black person seeking work might make themselves more marketable by implying that they was more docile, like the man who described himself as a "SOUTHERN Christian Negro man" willing to do painting, lawn work or minor repairs.¹⁵⁴ Even as late as 1967 in the months leading into that summer's rioting advertisements could still be found stating "EXP. white lady wants housework"¹⁵⁵

In the decades before the riot, the *Fresno Bee*'s editorial pages printed remarkable and heartbreaking letters from Fresno's residents of color. In 1948, a Mexican American high school student who signed the bottom of her letter "Miss E. M. Soto" was seething with frustration. Soto's editorial describes her experiences in answering a help wanted advertisement which made no stipulation about the race of potential applicants. Soto fumed "Why do they not just save time and say 'your skin is brown and we cannot hire you to work for us.'" Soto then admonishes Fresno's white employers by reminding them that during the

¹⁵¹ *Fresno Bee*, August 1, 1952.

¹⁵² *Fresno Bee*, February 14, 1964.

¹⁵³ *Fresno Bee*, September 11, 1963.

¹⁵⁴ *Fresno Bee*, March 27, 1964.

¹⁵⁵ *Fresno Bee*, April 21, 1964.

World War II America “drafted black, brown, yellow, and white alike.” She then references the “lie” sold to Fresno’s students that an education will improve their employment chances. “There are many of my friends who are Mexicans and who intend to finish high school, so it will be easier to get job. But I can tell you they are mistaken. The diploma does not change their color, and I guess that is what the employer notices first. This is not the first time I have been turned down.”¹⁵⁶

Another postwar editorial by a minority resident conveys a similar desire for the double V’s of domestic and foreign democracy. Voicing similar concerns an exasperated T. Nealy exclaims “all I can say is ‘God Bless America!’ The Negroes of Fresno will remain loyal Americans but will be fighting and insisting on first class citizenship and not second class.”¹⁵⁷

Employment discrimination in Fresno became so pronounced that by 1963 a group of concerned citizens banded together and created the Biracial Committee on Human Relations to begin an “intensive fact finding survey on discrimination against negroes.”¹⁵⁸ The Biracial Committee voted unanimously that there existed “discrimination in most areas of employment.” The Committee did succeed in cataloging a list of indignations against Fresno’s black residents including “Hiring at the lower level jobs only, limiting promotional opportunities after a Negro is on the job, telling a Negro the ‘job is filled’ once the prospective employer learns the race of the applicant.”¹⁵⁹

In the mid-60s the NAACP became more active locally in advocating for west Fresno residents. In the months before July’s rioting, the NAACP seemed to

¹⁵⁶ *Fresno Bee*, February 17, 1948.

¹⁵⁷ *Fresno Bee*, February 29, 1948.

¹⁵⁸ “Bias,” *Fresno Bee*, September 18, 1963.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

intensify their efforts in pushing for fairer employment practices. State Senator Mervyn Dymally of Los Angeles addressed Fresno's local NAACP chapter and remarked "In civil rights, we have come to a standstill in this area."¹⁶⁰ His speech also foreshadowed future battles. Dymally lamented that in Ronald Reagan's closing of multiservice centers "Fresno lost...a new, very good experiment in bringing government to the people."¹⁶¹

Conclusion

In the end neither the Herculean effort of Fresno's talented black tenth, nor the Biracial Committee or NAACP could change the job situation in the Central Valley. West Fresnans had been pushed too far for too long. In fact, the riot occurred at the helm of Fresno's most racially sympathetic leader to date, Floyd Hyde, as he was working to reopen the closed service centers and convince business owners to hire more black people. Fifty years after working around the clock to keep kids from joining in the riots, Joe Williams wistfully lamented that once cut "it became really difficult... summer youth employment was a big thing, the county hired 3,000 kids. In Fresno, kids worked for minimum wage and that was money used for school. Clothing and supplies for 6 to 8 weeks of work." The more Williams spoke the more bitter his words became remembering how "Reagan screwed up the best training program the government and west Fresno ever had!"¹⁶²

Eventually the politics of reform gave way to the politics of revolution, a point hammered home in the radical periodical *The Movement*. The article "Where

¹⁶⁰ "Dymally Pleads For New Effort In Civil Rights," *Fresno Bee*, April 17, 1967

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Joe Williams, interview by author, August 5, 2016.

Would We Be Without a Handful of Rocks,” points out the abject failure of democracy and the efficacy of a handful of rocks in “trying to find a way to stop the white man from cheating us and beating us and making us pay high rents to live in his run down houses...and demand that his police stop beating and shooting our innocent black people. Who would have ever dreamed that a handful of rocks might be one of the most valuable things we have, at present, in our black communities.”¹⁶³ Even so, Fresno’s black and brown youth opted for a handful of rocks reluctantly. At the job rally mentioned by later federal investigators, a prescient youngster spoke with a wisdom beyond his high school years when he shouted: “We want jobs, we don’t wanna go to jail!”¹⁶⁴ At every step along the road which would eventually lead to violence west Fresnoans resisted indignation, segregation and discrimination without violence. And while violence was happening it seemed to occupy a portion of Fresno’s consciousness, it very soon faded into memory.

By 2017 Fresno’s Long Hot Summer was all but forgotten, except by older black residents who still see too few opportunities around them. They insist that in the future, if Fresnoans remember rioting at all it will likely be because they were begun anew and not because any history lesson had been learned. Chef Paul Pearson told me as such within a minute of meeting me and my project. Pearson vividly described two recent attacks on homeless men by police officers outside his restaurant in Chinatown. Both men did not comply quickly enough to an order to get off the sidewalk. Both were knocked unconscious as they moved backward, one by an open hand slap to the face and the other by being tackled and driven into

¹⁶³ “Where Would We Be Without a Handful of Rocks,” *The Movement*, Vol. 3, no 9. (September 1967).

¹⁶⁴ “West Fresno Youths Disrupt EOC Meeting,” *Fresno Bee*, July 13, 1967.

the concrete. Pearson, who nearly fifty years ago helped an elderly couple escape danger as their car was overturned, seemed much less dovish in 2017. Today, relationships between law enforcement and west Fresno are more frayed and many of the inequalities present in 1967 still exist. For instance, black Fresnoans comprise only eight percent of the population but account for 24 percent of “discretionary field interviews”—those in which no crime is committed but are simply judgement calls by officers.¹⁶⁵ Sadly, fighting a War on Poverty is no longer considered a noble goal. Echoing the language of previous generations, many today view “equal rights” as “special privileges” in disguise.¹⁶⁶ One doubts if they remember the words of Lyndon B. Johnson: “What did you expect? I don't know why we're so surprised. When you put your foot on a man's neck and hold him down for three hundred years, and then you let him up, what's he going to do? He's going to knock your block off.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ “Fresno Police Data: Blacks More Likely to Be Detained than Other Races,” *Fresno Bee*, July 26, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ “Homeowners Bill of Rights,” *Fresno Bee*, May 12, 1963.

¹⁶⁷ Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws that Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 417.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

My historical journey began nearly two decades ago when I was a young man. Despite not having a driver's license I would often drive out of town to visit cousins in Pomona. As the overpass linking the 41 to the 99 South craned upward I would see houses nearly a century old, often boarded up, but many with people living in them. Nearly all were in remarkable disrepair. I would learn later that this neighborhood, which now eerily resembled the Tijuana of my birth, was once a downtown enclave for recent immigrants and currently housed people of color almost exclusively. On every drive, I felt the same empathy as when my history teacher showed me Dorothea Lange's photographs of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. The overwhelming sentiment in my heart which I could not articulate with data or evidence at the time was and remains this: These people have been abandoned. I started with a vague idea that even when civil rights were granted that an economic force prevented the upward mobility of those in poverty. I needed to know the details of how this happened and if people resisted it.

I was accustomed to viewing Fresno as a place where nothing would change. I was accustomed to an apathy and despair fostered by a half century of inaction or well meaning, but largely ineffective, piecemeal measures. When local families went without heat and hot water for months, my more affluent friends were shocked. Having gone through that experience personally in Fresno, I did not even consider it newsworthy. In our town's rougher neighborhoods, only unusual occurrences are actual news. Sadly, in the Fresno of 2017 uninhabitable squalor is not unusual, in 1967 its very normalcy was cause for violence.

My straightforward proposition is that years of segregation and job discrimination created the conditions which impelled a riot which almost no one in

my hometown even remembers. I did not begin with so narrow a focus. I began broadly looking at economic and social forces during an era of great promise. An era which witnessed the heights of Civil Rights and the possibility of a Great Society. I sought the voices of historical actors who struggled nobly to better the existences for their local community as well as those who struggled less nobly out of anger, frustration and despair. As all proper historical research must, I began with a very open mind.

My research tree had myriad branches of secondary and primary sources, Early on I focused on economics, partly because for our less affluent residents the present situation is so dire. I teach for Fresno Unified and their training center is on E Street, just one street from the westside. A cursory survey of the area brings you to the overwhelming realization that much of downtown Fresno was at one point industrialized. There are quite a few factories, but most have been abandoned. I was looking for a connection between those closings and trying to connect the dots chronologically. My instinct was that much of this deindustrialization occurred after nominal equality—although not actual equality—was granted to minorities in Fresno through the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of the sources I was finding were from places like Youngstown, Ohio which had less of an agricultural influence. However, I did not wish to study a different place and just compare it to Fresno, I wanted to write a history of Fresno.

Sources that weren't about deindustrialization talked about poverty in general terms but treated unemployment as almost natural. The fact that Fresno's unemployment has been twice the national average for my entire lifetime is often treated as if that is the natural course of history and not the consequence of individual decisions by policymakers that ignore communities of color,

intentionally or not. A third source that I mistakenly considered more promising than it really was urban sprawl, leading to the downfall of Fresno core. Fresno keeps moving northward and eastward in a textbook case of white flight, or perhaps more fairly, green flight. All these avenues turned out to be dead ends but did help me to see Fresno in broader context. In Fresno, nothing is really new. This understanding helped me view my hometown diachronically in terms of our connections to the past. That Fresno's leaders have done little to help west Fresno in the intervening 50 years since the riot reveals the degree to which Fresno sees its residents—overwhelmingly minorities—as less worthy. Because of the complexity and scale of Fresno's problems I spent quite a while mining with little purpose before any substantial nuggets were found.

While still meandering google for Fresno during the Civil Rights Movement, I discovered one source that best funneled my thoughts. It was a simple list of Civil Disturbances of the Rockefeller Commission on violence in America.¹ Mindlessly skimming this source, I happened upon the name of my hometown as the site one of the many summer riots which impelled the creation of the Kerner Commission. As my eyes reset a few times and my heart raced, I had the same surprised reaction that most Fresnoans have when I tell them about Fresno's riot: I had no idea we had a riot in Fresno. My project was no longer a series of nebulous musings about the hypocrisy of having civil rights on paper while being abandoned by your community, it was an event with dates. July 15-17, 1967 would be my jumping off point and I would expand outward from there.

¹ *Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States*. "Appendix V: Highlights of Civil Disturbances and Other Disorders in the United States—January 1966 through January 1973," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975).

The works listed in my historiography illuminated different aspects of my work and help contextualize Fresno's tumultuous riot, but they neither mentioned the event nor narrowed my research with possible causes. After briefly consulting the actual riot report analyzing the Long Hot Summer, I listed seven different general causes and looked for their prevalence in 1960's Fresno. For those in which information could be found, I created files which I labeled education, police, housing and jobs. Two of these files were disproportionately larger than the others: housing and jobs. As such they comprised the bulk of my argument. In a twist of irony, if I were to carry this story into the present day, the police and education files would equal the jobs and housing files. Lack of equal educational opportunities and the poor relationships between the community and law enforcement have become an unfortunate mainstay in Fresno. This is not to say that anything substantive has been done to change the fact that most whites residents of Fresno do not live near black people or that the job situation has improved either. I have found that if anyone were to write a racial history of Fresno, they would be met with a wealth of primary sources telling an almost continuous story of at worst, racism and at best inequality.

My reliance on extant primary sources is due to a lack of secondary material. For instance, McLaughlin's *Long Hot Summer of 1967* analyzes the riots and Clough's *Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980's* memorializes Fresno, but they do not 'talk to each other.' This context must be filled in different ways. I have discovered almost a thousand newspaper clippings which directly relate to parts of my topic. These periodicals provide a day by day account of the event itself as well as an analysis and chronology of its causes. I lean heavily on accounts from the *Fresno Bee* and the *Madera Tribune*, but also papers in southern California, as well.

Beyond the articles themselves, what was often just as illuminating were the editorials and advertisements. Not only were many explicitly racist, when not, they revealed racial attitudes from the timeframe I studied. Sometimes they helped fill in specific gaps which give the story more liveliness and detail. From these sources you can determine what shows or songs played on the radio and television, what concerts came to Fresno, and what movies were playing on what screens. Some of these things might be germane to your research. Advertisements tell you which businesses set up where and you can dig further into their discriminatory practices, some of which are listed on the advertisement, and some must be gleaned from other sources. Things that might seem extraneous or unnecessary are actually well worth the effort. For instance, if you have ever experienced a summer in Fresno without air conditioning and you are writing about the Long Hot Summer, the exact temperature can be found if you care enough to look for it. I would strongly advise any one writing a local history to look through the seemingly innocuous backmatter of the newspapers carefully, if only to craft a more enjoyable narrative for their reader.

Other periodicals, like *The Argus* from Fremont, California, were at times more helpful in detailing the lack of empathy from Ronald Reagan in his dealings with black Californians. A local black newspaper, *The California Advocate* published mini biographies of prominent black Fresnans, which led me to more successfully mine their source of their biographies— the Ethnic Oral Histories Collection housed at the Fresno Historical Society at Kearney Park. This work also makes use of more radical publications such as *The Black Panther* and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's *The Movement*. These publications provide evidence of a Fresno much more segregated and elitist than anticipated.

This is echoed by the cold, declarative data of the pre-riot 1960 Federal census which tellingly breaks down Fresno's census tracts by race, gender and occupation. The census shows the full extent of the disparate job opportunities for residents of west Fresno. To borrow a phrase from modern Conservatives, Fresno evidenced neither equality of outcome, nor equality of opportunity.² I also relied on more modern census information. And while little of the information I found made it to my thesis, the website city-data graphically displays census information by tract and neighborhood which highlighted the permanence of the problems I was writing about.

Malcolm McLaughlin's *Long Hot Summer of 1967* pointed me in the direction of a document set I had no idea existed. McLaughlin quoted from a Kerner Commission series of one-page riot summaries titled "Cities in Which Racial Disturbances Have Occurred." Finding this source would prove more difficult than I anticipated. They are housed at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. However, the specific source I needed was recently digitized according a document called "Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration: 1963-1969. Part V: Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission)" Because this source was on ProQuest History Vault, Fresno State does not yet have access to it. Thankfully UC Merced and Stanford both did. Once I analyzed this vital source—a one page summary of Fresno's riot—this gave me an immediate cause for rioting: Jobs. Interestingly, this was distinct from most other cities in that the spark was not police brutality. This allowed me to effectively de-emphasize the role of the

² Ezra Klein, "No One Really Believes in 'Equality of Opportunity,'" *The Washington Post*, May 29, 2013. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/05/29/no-one-really-believes-in-equality-of-opportunity/?utm_term=.4fb2349e9d67 (accessed April 15, 2017).

Fresno Police Department as a major cause of rioting. This proved helpful because I was finding many sources about infighting within Fresno PD, but almost nothing about discriminatory policing in west Fresno.

Besides allowing me to compare the Federal version of events to those in the *Fresno Bee*, "Cities in Which Racial Disturbances Have Occurred" showed the government's unfounded preoccupation with the possibility of outside agitators stirring up local youth. Every city studied contained the same final sentence in their respective report: "No information concerning subversive or outside influence in the disturbance has been reported." This is especially revealing because if provoked, then their resentments toward Fresno's dominant white society were baseless. This lack of outside interference is seconded by interviews I conducted myself with then prominent members of the west Fresno Community such as Joe Lee and Joe Williams as well as Paul Pearson. All three have experienced remarkable success for themselves but still see a world of troubles for the foreseeable future of the community they love. For a view of the real estate market in the 1960's I met with and interviewed local philanthropist and businessman John Carey Sr. I am deeply indebted to all these men for agreeing to talk to me when I quite simply cold called them or dropped in on their place of business.

Being businessmen made Pearson and Carey relatively easy to find. Lee and Williams were much more elusive. Thankfully Fresnoans who played prominent roles in the summer of 1967 still have house phones that they regularly answer. However, finding the correct number or address for people who have lived in many different places is difficult. Google was helpful in attaining basic information, although the contact information listed was spotty at best. I sleuthed through the free websites and kept a running tally of the people and contact

information. These lists proved substantial. I spent several days just making phone calls. I would recommend making a script for yourself since most people don't get random calls from researchers or historians looking to interview them or someone they know. I would also advise not to give away your entire argument over the phone depending on how the person might feel about your subject. This confuses and overwhelms the potential interviewee and once off put they may hide what they really think. I made this mistake with a realtor who thought I was engaged in a hunt for racist realtors. Phrases like "civil rights," "the late 60's" "the real estate business" were more fruitful for white Fresnoans. I generally didn't use the word "riot" over the phone unless I knew the person at the other end of the phone knew it had happened. This meant that I very seldom used the word in front of white people.

Along with the people I personally spoke to, I also consulted previously recorded oral histories to better understand Fresno's racial past. I was very pleased with the Fresno Historical Society's Ethnic Oral Histories Collection. While some were typed, most are contained in the original cassette tapes in which they were recorded and have handwritten outlines to guide the listener. Museum rules do not allow for taking pictures of documents so I handwrote, transcribed and typed feverishly in my limited time there. The sound quality of the tapes often made this work quite difficult. The interviews of Nadar Ali and Joe Kelley were especially helpful in helping understand the day to day toll of racism on the black man's psyche. The specific case of Jack Kelley, for instance, just has an incredible cool factor. Kelley was a larger than life All-American at Fresno State, one of our first black police officers, founder of the African American museum who just happened to work at a racist hotel. His vantage point is remarkable since he was able to witness acts of individual courage from athletic heroes like Jesse Owens and Joe

Louis. Perhaps more important to my thesis were the many manifestations of job discrimination in Fresno's early history. Nearly every tape I listened to describes either a personal instance of being denied work or a family member being denied work. It helps to consider that those people chosen for oral histories were the most prominent residents or former residents of west Fresno and even they had to contend with being viewed as inferior. To borrow a phrase from opponents of affirmative action, these were not instances of unqualified minorities taking jobs from deserving whites but of overly qualified minorities denied employment in favor of whites.³

I was taken aback by the wealth of information about residential segregation I uncovered, although the process of looking for the names of various tracts and subdivisions in Fresno was incredibly painstaking. I was thrilled to find the original racially restrictive covenants for the many neighborhoods which excluded people of color, and in many instances, Armenians. Most of the secondary literature summarizes or speculates about the exact wording of these covenants, leading me to believe that the process was too cumbersome for some previous researchers to mine successfully. I was unable to find them also until I made friends with some of the second-floor employees at the Hall of Records, who patiently walked me through the process. This handholding lasted two days until I was able to research independently. Thankfully, these documents were digitized and available in Fresno's Hall of Records yet had to be accessed by sifting through three separate log books, also digitized, to find a page number for the covenant in question. I went through many rolls of quarters—and when on an obsessive

³ Roland Martin "What's A 'Qualified' Woman or Minority?" *CNN*, May 14, 2009. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/14/martin.qualified/index.html?iref=24hours> (accessed September 15, 2016).

streak, pretended to patronize establishments where I could park for free—but eventually found racially restrictive covenants geographically representative of most of 1967 Fresno, including ironically, west Fresno. While the Westside was my focus, more helpful were the places they were barred from.

In southeast Fresno's more affluent subdivisions I found the Easterby and Sunnyside Estate covenants as well as an earlier one for the Altavista Tract which served early Fresno's most desired neighborhood, Huntington Avenue. More indicative of segregation in the postwar WWII period were the Terrace Gardens subdivision on Clinton and Palm in the Fresno High area and the Salinger Tract in what would later become the very popular Mayfair District. Both catered to young families and returning GI's and both excluded Asians and blacks as well as anyone "not of the Caucasian race"⁴ What is most fascinating about the covenants is their lack of uniformity. The pre-World War II covenants are more exclusive while the later ones are less exclusive.

The original blueprint for this residential segregation is contained in a 1936 report of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) for Fresno. This document shows the "redlined" areas where no loans were to be given to Asians, blacks or Mexicans as well as uneducated white ethnic groups residing there. Fresno's segregation should come as little surprise, since between 1934 and 1962 for 98% of Federal Housing Authority (FHA) loans issued in the United States were given to whites.⁵ It should come as no surprise that the areas in red have the highest concentration of poor people of color in Fresno to this day. Eighty years ago, the Federal government audaciously described the incomes of the these "laborers and

⁴ Restrictive Covenant, Salinger Tract, Fresno, CA.

⁵George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 107.

small wage earners making from \$900 to \$1500 per year” while still maligning them for living in “mere shacks” which “reflect little pride of ownership.”⁶ Subsequently, loans were denied to those wishing to pridefully improve upon their shacks for many generations.

The process of tracking down these sources was painstaking and at times disheartening, yet I could not rely on conjecture and assume that these things happened in Fresno simply because they were happening in other parts of California, especially given the lack of secondary source material for central California. This represents my most honest effort to uncover Fresno’s racialized past and elucidate the discriminatory practices which led to Fresno’s Long Hot Summer.

⁶ James Helming, “Report of a Survey in Fresno, California for the Division of Research and Statistics,” *Home Owners Loan Corporation, Explanation*, 1936, D-3.

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