

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

IN 1996, *CALIFORNIA HISTORY* published its first special issue on the history of African Americans in the state, presented by consulting editor Shirley Ann Wilson Moore. In her introduction to the issue, she wrote that her goal was to examine “the nature, scope, and significance of the African American presence in California.” To her, “the African Americans who helped shape California’s history were not passive, helpless victims, but active, determined men and women” who insisted on and achieved “self-determination and self-definition in California.” The current issue, long overdue, offers another glimpse into the history of Black California.

We release this issue in a moment of profound reckoning on racial injustice broadly, from police violence to institutionalized poverty to the free-form bigotry that is still alive and well in America. Surveying these articles, we see that themes present in Wilson’s issue remain open wounds in California and the nation. Severe inequality has roots in this country that predate its founding. If we compare the 1996 articles to this issue, it seems that distressingly little has changed. Protesters today march against the same brutalities that stalked headlines in 1996. As historians, we have a duty to reveal past mistakes in hopes that we do not repeat them, even when it seems that ours are voices in the wilderness.

But although the 1996 issue and this one share painful histories, they are not histories of despair. More than grief and loss, the strongest themes that emerge in both are resilience, hope, and agency. For all the darkness in California’s racial past, many who came to the state in search of America’s promise found at least some of it here. Every article in this issue touches on the agency and resistance of Black communities against their oppression, and they often achieved victories, even if only partial ones.

In “When San Francisco Met Tennessee,” Pierce Gissler McDonnell analyzes the ways that Black San Franciscans resisted the Jim Crow racism of a visiting Tennessee military unit as it awaited deployment to the Philippines. In the tensions they expose, both between white and Black Americans and among whites who were still counting the costs of the Civil War, we find a complex analysis of white supremacy in the Far West, from the perspectives of those who would maintain it and those determined to resist. In “Bringing Home the News,” Wendy M. Thompson analyzes a small newspaper in Marin City, California, the World War II production boomtown where her grandparents lived. She

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finds glimpses of a past obscured by the passage of time and the loss of those who lived through it; she also discovers painful details about those lives, raising questions about the historian's duty to reveal the truth, no matter the costs. Asking "When Do You Stop Arriving?," Caroline Collins reports on a public history project that examines the hidden histories of the African Americans who shaped California's food and farming culture from early statehood to the present. Finally, in "Watts Teach-In: 'Restorative Histories' through Activist-Led Scholarship," Lani Cupchoy and Dawn A. Dennis discuss a public history project that puts marginalized voices first, telling how they found partners among Black Angelenos to reveal the history of Watts.

We close on the same note that Wilson sounded in 1996: "All the works in this volume of *California History* provide insight into the nature and scope of African American history in California," highlighting "a long-established tradition of activism and accomplishment." The work presented here, as in 1996, underscores "the agency and determination of African Americans who lived, worked, and built communities in a state that bristled with racial hostility." At the same time, *California History* explores the elusive promise that, then and now, has brought millions of Black men and women to our state, "looking for their piece of the California Dream."

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