

When Do You Stop Arriving? The Project “We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California”

ABSTRACT This article highlights a new public history project, “We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Rural Histories in California,” which examines hidden histories of African Americans who have shaped California’s food and farming culture from early statehood to the present. I detail the project’s archival content, including an overview of its methodological framework and the stories featured in its public components. I also pay special attention to the design of the project’s public engagement, including its recently launched traveling banner exhibit, accompanying podcast, and in-development digital exhibit. This essay thus illustrates the dynamic opportunities that public humanities projects like this one present in amplifying important, under-told state histories. **KEYWORDS:** African Americans, agriculture, public history, settlement, civil rights

We are not foreigners in the natural world. . . . At some point, the terms *urban* and *black* became interchangeable. Such terminology would have us believe that our history began in cities, and that we are a people of concrete and bricks, far removed from the oaks, rivers, and low country.

—Ravi Howard

HIDDEN HISTORIES

IN 1853, GABRIEL Moore traveled by wagon train from Austin, Texas, to Millerton, California. It was not his first journey across state lines. Though born in Alabama, on July 2, 1812, historical records indicate that Moore was living in Arkansas by at least 1850.¹ We are not sure how or when he migrated hundreds of miles, but we can easily imagine that it was not under voluntary circumstances, because Gabriel Moore—like some three million African Americans in 1850—was enslaved.²

In the 1850 Slave Schedule, Moore is listed as an unnamed thirty-nine-year-old Black man and the human property of his enslaver, Margaret Glenn, age fifty-one, of Sugar Loaf, Crawford County, Arkansas.³ The 1850 Census also tells us that Margaret Glenn was the mother of William Glenn, age twenty. Her other son, Richard Glenn, twenty-two, lived two houses over. By 1853, when Moore would have been about forty-two, the Glenn brothers left the small township of Sugar Loaf and joined a group of emigrants headed to the new state of California. Despite the fact that California had entered the union as a free state and its constitution contained explicit language banning slavery, it was not uncommon for southern enslavers to bring enslaved individuals with them to the state. In fact, archival evidence in California shows that slavery was practiced openly across the state. So, Gabriel Moore, who was enslaved by William and Richard Glenn's mother, made the nearly two-thousand-mile journey to California with the Glenns—joining the thousands of African Americans, both enslaved and free, who trekked to California during the nineteenth century.⁴

The three men joined the Akers family wagon train, a sizable traveling party that included two hundred ox-drawn covered wagons departing from Austin, Texas.⁵ The Akers family itself consisted of five brothers, whom one source described as “tough and rowdy,” four sisters, and their respective families.⁶ The party intended to follow the southern route to California, which snaked through west Texas and the desert country of present-day New Mexico and Arizona before entering California, where they would then head north to the state's Central Valley. Like most overland trails of its time, it was a grueling route. In fact, in 1849, just a few years before the departure of the Akers wagon train, pioneer travel correspondent Bayard Taylor described the terrain of the southern route's network of interconnected trails as “scorching and sterile—a country of burning salt plains and shifting hills of sand, whose only signs of human visitation are the bones of animals and men scattered along the trails that cross it.”⁷

The trip proved daunting. Food and water were scarce for both humans and pack animals. Violence from Native Americans defending their lands against encroaching settlers was a possible reality of the journey, and historical accounts reveal that its probability unsettled the travelers.⁸ Illness also presented a major concern for members of the party, young and old—a worry that unfortunately came to fruition when the two-year-old daughter of Malvina Akers Lewis, one of the four Akers sisters, succumbed to an ailment on the trip. Her family buried her on the trail, and—in what is described as an attempt to conceal her burial place so that “Indians would not find the grave”—they repeatedly ran the wagons over the disrupted earth before continuing their journey.⁹

Grueling as the trip west was in the best of circumstances, it was likely an even harder one for enslaved people. Although Gabriel Moore did not leave behind a written record of his travels, the African American pioneer Alvin Aaron Coffey chronicled his own first overland journey in 1849 from Missouri to California, embarked upon during the height of the gold rush, while he was still enslaved. He describes leaving a muddy and rainy Missouri in early May—just weeks before his wife was due to deliver their fourth child.¹⁰ In addition to Coffey's account, another forty-niner in his party, Titus Hale, also noted Coffey's various contributions to their wagon train in his own writing. In recalling their trip across the California-Oregon trail, he chronicles Coffey's suggestion to flee a surge of cholera, how he shouldered his rifle to defend the wagon train, and the time he jumped into the "icy" Missouri River to save another traveler from drowning.¹¹ Alvin Coffey's tenacity, however, was not attributable to the gold fever that compelled so many to head to California in the hopes of "getting rich quick." Instead, he was traveling for his freedom and the eventual freedom of his wife and children. We cannot know if Gabriel Moore was contemplating, hoping for, or planning a similar future in California when he traveled west. But the historical record shows that when Moore obtained his freedom, he built a life in California that carries impacts to this day in Central Valley agriculture.

However, despite his eventual agricultural significance to the region, the story of Gabriel Moore and his family, lands, and ranch remains generally under-told in most official California histories—as do the stories of many African Americans who helped shape the state's rural landscape ecologically, politically, and socioculturally. This neglect carries critical implications, because the majority of what people come to understand about the origin of California in public contexts comes from ubiquitous stories about hardy pioneers who panned for gold or settled land, folks who manipulated waterways, grew crops, created communities, and forged innovations—activities constituting the cultural facts that continue to define understandings of the Golden State. An examination of these iconic narratives, which shape public perceptions of California history, reveals two important threads within the fabric of public memory across the state: many of these stories take place in rural areas, and many of them ignore the long-standing presence of Black settlers. Therefore, such an omission reminds us that histories of California's rural communities, and thus histories of California, are incomplete if they do not acknowledge the contributions of African Americans.

This article highlights a new public history project that seeks to amplify this under-told history by offering the public an immersive experience via three dynamic formats (traveling exhibit, podcast, and digital exhibit). Produced in collaboration with research and nonprofit partners and funded by California Humanities and the 11th Hour Project at the Schmidt Family Foundation, the project "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California" examines hidden histories of African Americans who have shaped California's food and farming culture from early statehood to the present. The following sections (1) describe the project's methodological framework and the design of its public engagement, including a traveling banner exhibit and a podcast; (2) outline the project's archival content, including an overview of the stories featured in its public components; and (3) briefly discuss the public launch of, and response to, the project, including plans for future public engagement through an in-development digital exhibit.

“WE ARE NOT STRANGERS HERE: AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIES IN RURAL CALIFORNIA”

The history of Black people in California is often told through a framework of migration, and particularly the Great Migration: between 1915 and 1970, approximately six million Black Americans left the South for points north and west.¹² While the Great Migration is certainly an important part of state history and accounts for the arrival of hundreds of thousands of African Americans to the state, it does not fully represent the historical presence of Black folks in California.¹³ Black people have been in what is now U.S. California since the eighteenth century (and in Spanish Mexico since the sixteenth), when African soldiers, sailors, navigators, and interpreters—both enslaved and free—first arrived in the Americas with Spanish colonial parties.¹⁴ They eventually helped establish settlements that became cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, Monterey, and San Jose.¹⁵ Half of the original settlers, or *pobladores*, that founded the present-day city of Los Angeles in 1781, for instance, were of African descent, and some were of full Black ancestry.¹⁶ By 1790, one in five California residents was Afro-Latina/o, and by “the eve of the Civil War, California’s African Americans constituted 75 percent of the free black population of the West” (Figure 1).¹⁷

In addition to being present and active in the state well in advance of the migratory trends of the twentieth century, Black people are also *not strangers* to rural California.



Figure 1. Don Pío Pico and family.

Courtesy of the C. C. Pierce Collection of Photographs, photCL Pierce 08406, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

While many certainly migrated to city centers, and many still reside in urban areas, African American settlers have also shaped life in the state's agricultural regions: farming, ranching, and establishing rural settlements and communities. Yet, whether it's the history of occupation and theft of native lands or the history of the cultivation of lands, Black people are typically excluded from the iconic land-based stories that so often publicly tell the origins of California history. Thus, in its attention to representations of Blackness and land, including the Black rural imaginary, "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California," complicates popular understandings of environmental histories of race and received canons of state history that so often neglect Black relationships to the land in California.

This project builds from and contributes to important scholarship regarding the early Black presence in California led by a cadre of scholars, including but not limited to Delilah Beasley, Lawrence B. de Graaf, Rudolph Lapp, Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor.¹⁸ Central to the project is a set of questions related to notions of legitimacy, identity, and belonging articulated by the project's primary history advisor, Susan D. Anderson, history curator and program manager of the California African American Museum. Discussing the cultural prevalence of the Great Migration master narrative in histories of African Americans in California, Anderson asked: "At a certain point, the question is, when do you stop arriving? When are you actually there? And when can you look at the world from the point of view of someone who is rooted in a place like California?"¹⁹ "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California" responds to these queries by inviting visitors and listeners to reimagine Black folks' relationships to land in rural California while also asking the public to rethink the significance and cultural work of the historical *suppression* of these stories.

PROJECT DESIGN

"We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California" is a collaboration between Susan Anderson, who wrote the content for the traveling exhibit banners; the California Institute for Rural Studies, in particular its *Cal Ag Roots* podcast and its executive director, Ildi Carlisle-Cummins, who originally brought the idea of the project to Anderson; and myself. I joined the collaboration to do archival research for the exhibit banners and podcast, conduct interviews with scholars and culture bearers, and write and produce the project's accompanying podcast series. The project team also collaborated with Exhibit Envoy (and its executive director, Amy Cohen) to fabricate and tour the project's banner exhibit.

These collaborations were central to the project's commitment to tell important, but often under-told, African American history within the state. Specifically, much of the project's methodological framework scaffolded the design of a project that would be able to travel not only to traditional exhibition sites such as museums, but also to other community spaces, including libraries and public parks, affordably and easily. We also granted primacy to creating a publicly accessible media component that could reach audiences beyond those who were able to physically visit the exhibit and offer public programming around the project through lectures, storytelling sessions, and other

community activities. These commitments informed the project's two initial channels of public engagement: the banner exhibit and the podcast series. The former includes seven colorful banners, each measuring five feet high by seven feet wide, displaying content that includes archival images and didactic text, installed in free-standing banner stands to facilitate their mobility and use. Supplementing the physical exhibit are a cell phone audio tour featuring the voices of scholars and descendants of rural Black Californians; a print representation of the full exhibit with Spanish translation; and programming suggestions, a resource list, and press kits with digital images. For the podcast effort, I wrote and produced six "We Are Not Strangers Here" episodes for *Cal Ag Roots*. As a research *and* community-driven storytelling podcast, *Cal Ag Roots* seeks to put historical roots under current California food and farming change movements by telling stories of California agricultural development in innovative, useful, and relevant ways.

These partnerships with Exhibit Envoy and *Cal Ag Roots* produced modes of project delivery that were not just meant for unidirectional public consumption. Instead, the "We Are Not Strangers Here" project team explicitly hoped to create an ecosystem that fosters public *discussion*. In other words, the project team was committed to creating a variety of accessible storytelling resources in ways that would not only engage the public at large, but also open new lines of communication between researchers and people engaged in agricultural or other forms of sociocultural advocacy work. However, before the project team worked to nurture such discussions, much of the "We Are Not Strangers Here" methodology first began in the archives.

SPEAKING FROM THE ARCHIVES

When discussing this project in a recent panel with California State Parks, I was asked by the moderator if it was difficult to identify archival materials for the exhibit. What actually proved most challenging, I answered, was narrowing down our materials for the exhibit, because "there's just so much that's out there."²⁰ Such a statement was not intended to diminish the often painstaking labor of archival study or the work of scores of archivists, librarians, and collections managers who helped us bring this project to fruition. In fact, archival methods were central to the project's development, and as the project's archival researcher, I spent months physically and digitally consulting archives across the state and nation. Instead, my comment was meant to highlight a common misconception regarding the dearth of African American stories within public accounts of early California histories: these stories are not hidden because Black settlers themselves were, they are scarce because the histories of early African American settlers have been suppressed. As Susan Anderson states within the project's podcast when comparing accounts of early state history to the archival documentation of the time, "if we're looking at California from 1850 to 1900, the first fifty years of statehood, those accounts don't include the African American presence by and large in rural California. [But] if you go back and read newspapers or you read court documents or primary source materials from those times, you will find Black people in the record because they lived in rural California."²¹

Our archival and interpretative efforts also included concerted attention to expanding how we *defined* archives. In other words, we joined efforts that seek to "reimagine the



Figure 2. Homemade family tree created by Michele Thompson, great-great granddaughter of Alvin A. Coffey.

Photo by author

politics of the archive” when considering the roles such collections often play in knowledge (re)production and the maintenance of hegemonic power relations.²² Specifically, in capturing the stories that ground the exhibit and podcast, we not only relied on traditionally held material in institutions and other formalized repositories, including photographs, newspaper articles, government records, and various ephemera, but also consulted descendants of Black homesteaders to gather oral histories and view community-held archival materials such as scrapbooks and homemade family trees (Figure 2). Materials collected through these diverse archival methods—including the gathering of what I call *interstitial evidence* across dispersed archival collections and community-based sources—informed the traveling exhibit’s three narrative sections: (1) “Farmers and Ranchers: Here from the Start”; (2) “Independent Settlements”; and (3) “Into the Modern Age.”

Farmers and Ranchers: Here from the Start” chronicles how, from the inception of the state, Black farmers and ranchers settled in and contributed to rural communities across U.S. California, growing crops, raising livestock, and running successful farms and businesses. This narrative section includes settlers like the aforementioned Gabriel Moore, whose story provides a microcosm of the complex, yet often hidden, impacts of Black settlers upon the land in California. After traversing the perilous southern route to California, Moore and the Akers wagon train finally arrived in what is now the city of Tulare,

an area that was nearly three hundred miles from their final destination of Millerton. When they arrived in Tulare, their provisions were depleted and they were close to starvation.²³ They were near the Kings River, a large waterway that begins hundreds of miles away from the Central Valley in glacial lakes nestled atop the Sierra Nevada. From there, the river dramatically plummets through deep canyons and waterfalls, becoming a corridor of whitewater rapids before finally making its way to the Central Valley, where its North Fork joins the San Joaquin River and its South Fork ends at the Tulare Lake Basin. Its currents can be dangerous, and given these conditions the starving wagon train came upon the sight of multiple cattle, bogged down in the Kings River. The cattle had previously belonged to a well-stocked party, who ended up leaving the stranded beasts behind. Viewing the animals' distress as their good fortune, the party pulled the cattle from the mud, slaughtered them, and gained the necessary provisions to complete their journey.²⁴

While the historical record indicates that Gabriel Moore eventually settled in Centerville, a little less than forty miles from Millerton, it does not reveal how he gained free status after arriving in California. But archival evidence does tell us that by 1857, just four years after his arrival in the state, records list Moore as a Fresno County taxpayer who was beginning to establish a lucrative homestead.²⁵ He eventually married a woman named Mary, who according to the 1880 census had been born in West Virginia. This census also tells us that their son Ephraim was born in Arkansas—perhaps indicative that Gabriel and Mary had been married while enslaved in Arkansas and that, in the way of some African American matrimonial unions of the time, they had been separated and later reunited via the ramifications of enslavement and subsequent freedom.

These speculations aside, historical sources document that in Centerville, the Moores established a forty- to fifty-acre ranch along the Kings River and are credited as the first farmers to plant apple and fig orchards in the county—a significant agricultural contribution, given that 90 percent of American figs are currently grown in California, and mainly in the Central Valley.²⁶ Gabriel Moore is also described as the first African American cattle rancher in the Valley, and his stock trade was successful enough to impact others in the area.²⁷ For example, as the 1870 census shows, the Moores opened their home to at least two African American boarders, providing them with a place to work and live (Figure 3).²⁸ They also employed white ex-southerners as their herd drivers, and, when a group of local white residents wanted to open a dairy, it was the Moores who sold them their first cattle.²⁹ Gabriel Moore's cattle operation was also well known enough in the region that in 1874, when an "epidemic disease" was spreading among cattle of the Upper Kings River area, Stockton's *Daily Evening Herald* reported that "Gabe Moore has lost about thirty head."³⁰

California, however, did not present a racial oasis for Moore. In 1870, for example, given the recent passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, he went to Millerton, the county seat at the time, and attempted to register to vote at the courthouse. He was summarily turned away by the county clerk of Fresno County, an ex-Confederate soldier named Harry St. John Dixon, who, with community support, vehemently argued against Moore's registration, given that California had not yet ratified the amendment.³¹ Although he was denied the vote, Moore's name does appear on county jury lists after 1869.³²

Page No. 2; Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as follows.

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Lowas Twp No 3, in the County of Fresno, State of California, enumerated by me on the August day of 1870.

Post Office: King River — Chas. A. Hart, Ass't Marshal.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | 7 | 8 | | 10 | 11 | | | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
|-------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|--|-------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 4 | 5 | 6 | | 8 | 9 | | 11 | 12 | 13 | | | | | | | |
| Description | | Age, Sex, Race, Color, and Marital Status | | | Profession, Occupation, or Trade | Value of Real Estate | Value of Personal Estate | Place of Birth | Parents | Education | Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic | Consanguineal Relations | | | | | | | |
| 16 | Rich ^d W. Key | 56 | W | W | Stock Raiser | 1000 | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | 8 Claude L. Taylor | 43 | W | W | Lumber | 2000 | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | London | 38 | W | W | Keeps House | | | Iowa | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Mary Bacon | 10 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | Wm. Hercules | 24 | W | W | Laborer | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | Wm. W. Thomson | 21 | W | W | Laborer | | | Iowa | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | 9 Jot J. Rodriguez | 47 | W | W | Lumber | 2500 | 2000 | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Leontine | 39 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Ellen | 15 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Sara | 13 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | Mary J. | 6 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | Rich ^d C. J. | 4 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | Wm. J. | 5 1/2 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | 21 Wm. R. Perry | 27 | W | W | Lumber | 1000 | 500 | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | Mary L. | 19 | F | W | Keeps House | | | Iowa | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | Robt. C. | 2 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | Ann J. | 4 1/2 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | 22 Wm. W. Bennett | 30 | W | W | Laborer | | | W. Va. | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | Mary J. | 60 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | 29 Chas. L. Leach | 50 | W | W | Boydstoner | | | England | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | 24 John W. Taylor | 25 | W | W | Laborer | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 22 | 25 Leonard Taylor | 48 | W | W | Laborer/Keeps | 2000 | 2000 | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | 26 John Lewis | 44 | W | W | Lumber | 2000 | 800 | Ireland | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 24 | 27 Wm. Moore | 52 | W | W | Lumber | 2000 | 2000 | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | Mary | 42 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 26 | 28 Wm. Moore | 71 | W | W | Stock Raiser | 1700 | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 27 | Caroline | 60 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | Elizabeth | 16 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 29 | Wm. | 83 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 30 | 29 Wm. Moore | 43 | W | W | Lumber | 1000 | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | Sarah A. | 59 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 32 | John W. | 7 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | Wm. A. | 5 | W | W | Home | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | Wm. J. | 1 | W | W | Home | | | Cal. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 35 | John C. Smith | 29 | W | W | Laborer | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 36 | Joseph Hays | 23 | W | W | Laborer | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 37 | 32 Wm. Moore | 42 | W | W | Laborer | | | Ireland | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 38 | Ann C. | 37 | F | W | Keeps House | | | W. Va. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | Ellen | 4 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 | Mary A. | 1 | F | W | Home | | | Cal. | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |

Figure 3. 1870 U.S. Census data, Fresno County, California. Courtesy of the Fresno Historical Society

Despite such challenges, the Moores carved out a life in the Central Valley, and in a region where economic success often depends on the manipulation of water, their contributions to local irrigation practices may be their most lasting legacy. The Moores'

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homestead was located in a long, narrow belt of land in the Valley, along the Kings River bottom.³³ Despite the river's size and strength, in the late 1850s, when they first settled in the area, large-scale irrigation methods were not in place. They began farming there decades before the 1887 Wright Act, which allowed small groups of farmers to band together to create their own irrigation districts.³⁴ Together, these groups of farmers then took water from major tributaries in the Central Valley like the Merced, San Joaquin, and Kings Rivers. However, before that act, farmers in the region could not rely upon institutional measures when determining how to irrigate their crops. It was in this pre-Wright Act environment that Gabriel Moore became one of the first settlers to divert water from the Kings River.³⁵ He engineered and built the river's first rock dam, an effort that most likely involved moving large rocks, gravel, and earth in order to redirect the waterway.³⁶ This innovation carried water into a small canal that he used to irrigate acres of corn and potatoes on his family's homestead.

Due to these efforts, the Kings River changed the life of the Moore family. Their rock dam helped sustain their lands, crops, and livelihood. We can therefore imagine that Gabriel Moore felt a particular affinity with the river that maintained his homestead, and a familiarity with a waterway he regularly crossed by horse with his cattle. But, just as the river provided for the Moore family, it also took. Nearly three decades after he settled along the river bottom in the Central Valley, it was the Kings River that claimed Moore's life, at the age of sixty-seven, when he attempted to lead his cattle across its waters while on horseback. On that day in late May of 1880, heavy rains had bloated the river, and Moore was swept off his horse and is believed to have become entangled in its bridle, impeding his ability to swim to shore.³⁷ He was found drowned in the river, still clutching a bush.³⁸

Although the river took Moore's life, his engagement with it carried a lasting impact. His rock dam—the first of its kind along the Kings River—bears significance, and not only because it is a generally unknown historical “first.” His manipulation of a major Fresno County waterway is an important milestone in California history, given the critical role irrigation would come to play in the development of the nation's largest agricultural county, within a state that now bears some fifteen hundred dams, most of which are major construction efforts meant to perform a variety of infrastructural functions, from delivery of water and electricity to flood control and opportunities for recreation.³⁹ Given these implications, it is important to note that Moore's intervention upon the natural world also highlights the complex history of many Black settlers who were part of incipient settler activity that continues to impact Native claims to land and waterways through an ongoing legacy of ecological manipulation and dispossession.

Thus, Moore is not the only African American agriculturalist to be featured in “We Are Not Strangers Here.” The project's first narrative section, “Farmers and Ranchers,” also highlights Alvin Aaron Coffey, a forty-niner who made the overland trip to California from Missouri *three times* in pursuit of freedom for himself and his family before eventually settling in Red Bluff, in Tehama County, where he and his wife Mahala established a turkey and hay farm and were active in community and philanthropic activities (Figure 4).⁴⁰ In 1887, Coffey became a member of the Society of California Pioneers, an organization established in San Francisco in 1850 for men who had resided in California

Red Bluff Nov 19th 1892.

Mr Marcellus.

Kind Friends

I heard from
 Mr Titus Hale. the day he was to meet me at
 the Pioneer's Hall his wife suddenly dropped dead
 that put a gloom over his intentions. she was in
 perfect health. I never have heard the particulars
 I sent you a box today by express it is a stuffed
 Badger skin to put in your Magazine he dis-
 troyed a good many turkeys for me mostly
 setting hens in the brush. so I finally captured
 him and stuffed his hide. I have had it several
 years being that eagle on exhibition it put me
 in mind of it. please except the same.

I hope these few lines will find
 you as well as they have me.

No more at present

I remain yours
 A. A. Coffey Jr.

Figure 4. An 1892 letter from Alvin A. Coffey to the Society of California Pioneers.
 Courtesy of Alvin Aaron Coffey Papers, C057883, Society of California Pioneers

before statehood and who were interested in social bonding, preserving California history, and perpetuating the public memory of early pioneers. In 1903, Titus Hale—an original member of the society as well as a member of the 1849 wagon train of which Coffey was also a part—wrote an official obituary notice honoring Coffey, the organization’s only African American member, which was formally adopted by the institution. Within it he lavishes praise upon Coffey, describing him as a “noble man, ever generous to his

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unfortunate neighbor [and] [p]erfectly honest.”⁴¹ Yet accolades such as these did not counteract statewide systemic inequities. For instance, in response to the fact that charitable institutions across the state, from retirement homes to nursery schools, often refused to accept Black people, Coffey helped found one of the state’s first African American retirement homes, the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People in Beulah, in Alameda County. Coffey himself became one of the home’s first residents, and it was where he died in October 1902.⁴²

Given such social conditions, in addition to the agricultural pursuits of early African American settlers, this narrative section also highlights how these settlers often fought against discrimination within their communities. For example, homesteaders Wiley and Lucy Hinds not only owned a sprawling enterprise of more than one thousand acres in Farmersville (near Visalia, in Tulare County) where they raised cattle and hogs (see Figures 5, 6, and 7).⁴³ They also helped found, in the 1870s, what came to be known as the Visalia Colored School, which educated Black, Native, and Mexican children who were barred from attending local educational institutions, as original California law left the question of integration up to individual school districts.⁴⁴



Figure 5. Wiley Hinds, ca. 1915.

Courtesy of Roberts Family Papers, Box 4:6, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA



Figure 6. Wiley Hinds with pumpkins.

Courtesy of Roberts Family Papers, Box 6:2, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA

The exhibit also examines another Visalia homesteader, the previously enslaved Edmond Edward Wysinger, who—before he ran a small family farm with his wife, Penecia, née Wilson—traveled overland from South Carolina to Grass Valley, California, where he toiled in the Mother Lode Gold Belt with more than a hundred other Black miners.⁴⁵ Wysinger not only eventually purchased his freedom from his enslaver and built a life in rural California; he also helped change the legal framework of the state, through the 1890 landmark California Supreme Court case *Wysinger v. Crookshank*, which ultimately banned school segregation in California (sixty years before *Brown v. Board of Education*) and enabled his son Arthur Wysinger to become the first African American to be admitted to Visalia’s only public high school at the time (see Figures 8, 9, and 10).⁴⁶ In the years following the case, branches of Wysinger’s family grew peaches and grapes in the Black settlement of Fowler, near Fresno, for four generations.⁴⁷

Settlements like Fowler, where some of the Wysingers eventually farmed, highlight the ways in which making a life in rural California often meant going about the work of building communities. These social networks were especially important for many Black settlers, who, while seeking opportunity in California, often faced structural inequality (see Figures 11 and 12). The project’s second narrative section, “Independent Settlements,”



Figure 7. Portrait of Lucy Hinds with infant, Ernest L. Hinds, ca. 1886.

Courtesy of Roberts Family Papers, Box 5:5, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA

highlights this important history, chronicling how some Black settlers established roots in rural California by forming communities *with one another*. The most well known of these settlements is probably Allensworth, a Black town founded in 1908 in Tulare County. However, despite Allensworth's significance, "We Are Not Strangers Here" specifically aims to make clear to visitors and listeners that Allensworth was not California's only Black settlement. In fact, archival records indicate that, starting as early as the nineteenth century, Black communities—large and small, loosely organized and formal—took shape across California.

These settlements in which Black folks lived with one another were sometimes established by Black people themselves, often in rural California. But they differed in size and location and had varying degrees of intentionality. Some were small enclaves loosely formed by settler preference, like what became the San Diego County mountain town of Julian, where a cluster of Black pioneers settled in one general area, including rancher A. E. "Fred" Coleman, whose discovery of gold sparked a local rush in 1870.⁴⁸ Soon after



Figure 8. Edmond Wysinger as a young man.
Courtesy of Annie R. Mitchell History Room, Tulare County Library, Visalia, California

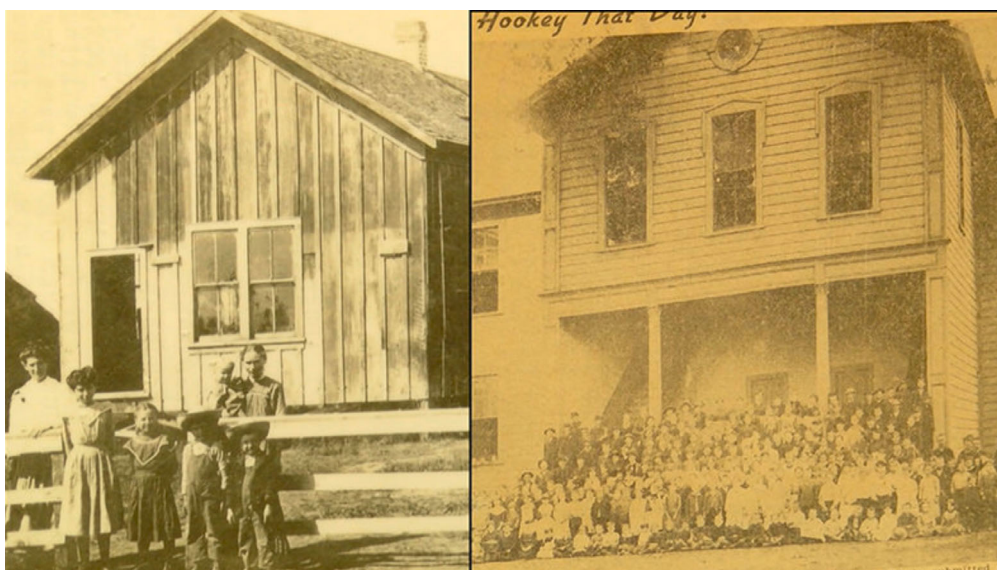


Figure 9. Visalia's colored school (left) and the school for whites (right).
Courtesy of Annie R. Mitchell History Room, Tulare County Library, Visalia, CA

that discovery, 60 percent of San Diego County's Black residents lived in Julian, including Margaret and Albert Robinson, whose Hotel Robinson (built in 1897) became one of the first establishments in the county to be owned and operated by African Americans, and



Figure 10. Arthur Edgar Wysinger, the first African American student to enroll at Visalia’s public high school.

Courtesy of Annie R. Mitchell History Room, Tulare County Library, Visalia, CA

which today is recognized as the longest continuously operating hotel in the state (Figure 13).⁴⁹

Other Black settlements grew out of exclusion from white areas or proximity to rural employment as large-scale growers in the Central and Imperial Valleys began recruiting Black workers from the South to harvest fruits, vegetables, and cotton in the late 1880s.⁵⁰ For instance, a colony of farmworkers created near the cotton fields of Kern County in 1907 grew into a Black community in Wasco.⁵¹ Some African American communities also sprung up around other rural trades, like the lumber industry. In the 1920s, for example, a small labor camp for the Long-Bell Lumber Company in Siskiyou County, near the Oregon border, eventually grew into the community of Lincoln Heights in Weed, which had its own homes, churches, businesses, and even a cemetery—a predominantly Black community in California’s far north that still exists today (Figure 14).⁵²

Many of these Black communities, however, were not self-sufficient and were still dependent on the resources and infrastructures of neighboring white communities.⁵³ For example, beginning in the Great Depression and into the 1960s, up to 50,000 Black “Okies” joined the exodus to California from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas along with their white counterparts whose “Okie” experiences are overwhelmingly memorialized in public history and popular culture—in stark contrast to the comparative invisibility of African Americans who also took part in this iconic migration.⁵⁴ Many Black “Okies” settled in the Central Valley, in African American communities like Teviston and South Dos Palos, and worked in the surrounding area’s cotton, grape, and almond fields (Figure 15).⁵⁵ Both Teviston (which borders the white town of Pixley) and South Dos Palos (adjacent to the city of Dos Palos) were less resourced than the neighboring white towns,



Figure 11. An African American family poses in front of their home in Fowler, California (date unknown).
Courtesy of the Fresno Historical Society

which subjected the Black communities to social, cultural, and legal restrictions through practices such as covenants, redlining, and, at times, threats of racial violence.⁵⁶

Within this diverse landscape of rural African American communities, some Black settlements *were* established with specific aims of self-reliance, in alignment with the nationwide “Black town” movement. Allensworth, founded in 1908 forty miles north of Bakersfield and named after one of the town’s cofounders, a retired Buffalo Soldier named Colonel Allen Allensworth, represents one such effort (Figure 16).⁵⁷ Guided by principles that linked land ownership to Black independence, Allensworth settlers established farms and started businesses, including a hotel, general store, blacksmith shop, and barber-shop.⁵⁸ They founded social institutions, such as a Baptist church and a schoolhouse; established a post office, a justice of the peace, and other governmental entities; and launched art and culture initiatives, including an orchestra, glee club, brass band, and the first branch of the Tulare County Library (Figure 17).⁵⁹

Yet, as with other Black towns established before them, it was often white resentment toward these communities’ intentional independence that made them targets for the very discrimination their residents were attempting to flee in the first place.⁶⁰ Allensworth, for



Figure 12. St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, Fowler, California (date unknown).
Courtesy of the Fresno Historical Society



Figure 13. Hotel Robinson in Julian, California (date unknown).
Courtesy of San Diego History Center

instance, faced myriad challenges, including systemic threats to its water supply when, in 1913—just five years into the town’s founding—the Pacific Farming Company acquired the region’s water supply from the previous welling company and attempted to refuse



Figure 14. Cabins in a Weed, California, lumber camp, ca. 1920s.
Courtesy of Weed Historic Lumber Town Museum

selling water to the Black residents of Allensworth.⁶¹ The town also lost critical access to its depot station when white farmers, upset by the necessity of dealing with the town's Black businesspeople in order to move their goods to market from the Allensworth station, appealed to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, which ultimately created a spur line to bypass the town of Allensworth—an action that negatively impacted the town's previous economic potential.⁶² These discriminatory onslaughts, in tandem with Colonel Allensworth's unexpected death and eventual national trends of migration from rural areas to urban centers, helped lead to the deterioration of the town, though it was never completely abandoned.⁶³ In 1974, Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park was established on its 240 acres to commemorate its history.⁶⁴

Some intentional Black towns never reached fruition at all, such as the planned town of Little Liberia, envisioned by African American residents of Southern California led by attorney Hugh Macbeth, who viewed Baja California, Mexico, as a possible haven from U.S. discriminatory practices.⁶⁵ Yet, whether a settlement was eventually developed or not, "We Are Not Strangers Here" actively highlights a common thread that binds these intentional projects: while the economic and political relevance of Black towns cannot be overstated, it is also important that we reflect upon, and take seriously, their *imaginative* significance. In other words, the imaginative work in planning these settlements around the promise of rural life shines a light on Black people's long-standing relationships to "back to the land" movements, which are often viewed within the public consciousness as



Figure 15. Handpicking cotton in a field near Pixley, 1961. Photograph by Ernest Lowe.
Courtesy of Ernest Lowe, ernestlowe.com

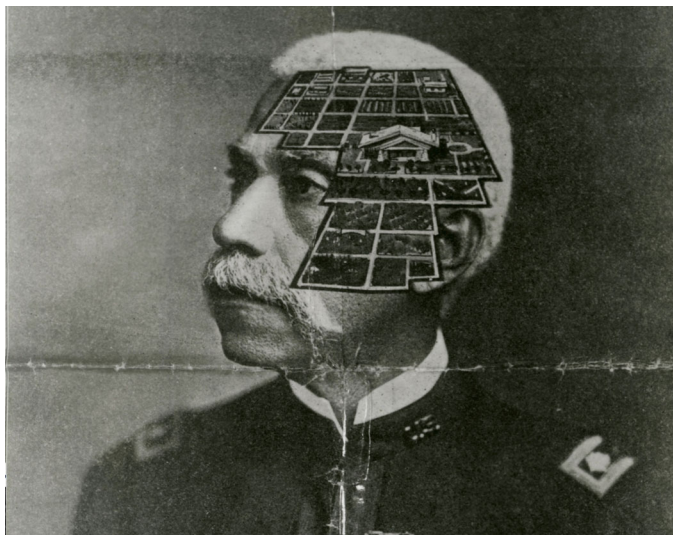


Figure 16. Promotional handbill advertising the town of Allensworth, California, ca. 1912.
Courtesy of Miriam Matthews Photograph Collection, Box 1:1, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA



Figure 17. Teachers at the Allensworth school.
Courtesy of California State Parks

very recent and very white. In explicitly acknowledging the cultural work of these imaginative processes, “We Are Not Strangers Here” reminds visitors and listeners of the power of the *Black imaginary*—even in the midst of structural inequality.

The legacy of Black “back to the land” movements in California continued throughout the twentieth century, right up to our contemporary moment, a history told in the project’s third narrative section, “Into the Modern Age.” Despite migrating to urban areas, many African Americans across the state brought agricultural traditions to the cities where they settled, keeping kitchen gardens and even raising chickens and eggs in some urban and suburban spaces.⁶⁶ This activity also included engaging in social forms of gardening. Twentieth-century garden clubs, for example, were derivative of African American women’s clubs and components of Progressive Era–inspired city beautification movements (Figure 18).⁶⁷ Taken together, the legacy of these Black city gardeners continues today. Across the state, urban farms like Sacramento’s Yisrael Family Urban Farm, Oakland’s Acta Non Verba, and the Ron Finley Project in Los Angeles all continue this legacy by connecting city residents with the natural world and providing people affordable, fresh, and nutritious produce through community cooperation.⁶⁸

In addition to examining suburban and urban gardening, the final narrative section of “We Are Not Strangers Here” also highlights the ways in which African Americans continue to farm in *rural* communities across California, working to carry out the legacy of generations of Black agriculturalists who worked the land for centuries. As such, it examines the work of organizations like the Fresno-based African American Farmers of



Figure 18. Members of the Carver Garden Club, 1960.

Courtesy of Photograph Collection, Box 10:2, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA

California (AAFC), led by Will Scott Jr. of Scott Family Farms, which actively supports Black ranchers and farmers (Figure 19).⁶⁹ Despite this section's attention to contemporary engagements with the earth, this narrative segment of the project also works to make plain the ways in which these extant activities also illustrate African Americans' deeply rooted and long-standing relationships to the land. For example, "We Are Not Strangers Here" reminds visitors and listeners of Black folks' connections to a set of long-held ancestral practices, including the cultural remnants of traditions based on sowing and reaping that were carried across the Middle Passage; the cultivation of small patches of land, even in enslavement, as a source of sustenance, contemplation, and healing; and the prevalent reliance upon nature in fleeing slavery—practices that highlight the ways in which many significant parts of African American life historically revolved around communing with the natural world.⁷⁰

PUBLIC RESPONSE AND FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

I conclude this article with a brief discussion of the public launch and response to "We Are Not Strangers Here," including plans for future public engagement. After a significant delay due to COVID-19 restrictions, the banner exhibit finally reached an audience when



Figure 19. Will Scott Jr.
Courtesy of Alice Daniel/KQED

cultural institutions began reopening in the spring of 2021, beginning its tour at the Sutter County Museum in Yuba City. Other stops have included Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park in Earlimart, the San Luis Obispo Coast District of California State Parks, and the Tulare County Museum in Visalia.

Thus far, the exhibit has provided opportunities for rich community engagement. For instance, during the exhibit’s tour stop at Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park around Juneteenth of 2021, one Los Angeles resident, who had traveled approximately 150 miles with her family in order to visit Allensworth for the first time, remarked upon the significance of the exhibit’s display of under-seen archival images: “The images just [are] striking . . . just to see the people and some of the buildings that kind of take you back in a time capsule to see how people might have lived.”⁷¹ And another visitor, summing up the overall importance of the exhibit, stated that “Black history is American history, and it’s important to know where we came from.”⁷² Venue partners have also added valuable contributions to the project beyond their exhibition of the banners—for instance, by supplementing the exhibit with physical objects and archival materials, school tours, and other related programming. The Society of California Pioneers in San Francisco, for example, which hosted the exhibit from January through August 2022, complemented



Figure 20. “We Are Not Strangers Here” exhibit banners.
Courtesy of the Society of California Pioneers

the banners within their main gallery by installing agricultural artifacts from the San Joaquin Historical Society and Museum, images of the rural landscape by Andrew Putnam Hill, a selection of portraits from the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, and physical copies of images of Allensworth from the California State Parks archives (Figure 20).⁷³ They also hosted a series of school tours for elementary schoolchildren engaged in California history curriculum units. And the San Diego Public Library’s downtown branch, which hosted the banners from August through October 2022, created a series of public programs organized around the exhibit.

Furthermore, the “We Are Not Strangers Here” podcast series, which debuted in 2021, has been critical to the project’s ability to reach various audiences despite the project’s release during a global pandemic. It was originally intended to be a three-part series, but as I wrote and produced the episodes, it became increasingly evident that the stories—and the listening experience—would benefit from more narrative space. Thus, I grew the narrative arc into six episodes to better accommodate the rich stories we had uncovered in various archives and the interviews we had collected. These are (1) “Freedom Chasers: Early Black Settlers and the California Dream”; (2) “Hidden Roots: Uncovering the Legacies of African American Homesteaders in California”; (3) “Cultivating Change: African American Homesteaders, Innovators, and Civic Leaders”; (4) “Independent Settlements: Building Black Communities in Rural California”; (5) “Back to the Land: Allensworth and

the Black Utopian Dream”; and (6) “Still Here: Black Farmers and Agricultural Stewardship in the Modern Age.”

Originally, we expected our story series to be listened to at least a thousand times. However, at the time of this writing, the podcast episodes and trailers have received over six thousand listens on the *Cal Ag Roots* Soundcloud account and over a thousand listens on Apple Podcasts (with other listeners accessing the series on additional platforms, including Stitcher, iHeart Radio, and Podchaser; for access, follow endnote link to Audio Clip 1).⁷⁴ Viewing the series as an important “digital artifact” of sorts, we expect the podcast to experience a particularly extended life, continuing to reach future listeners in ways that transcend the physical, geographic, and temporal limitations of the more ephemeral traveling banner exhibit (despite the latter’s equal significance to the project).⁷⁵

These digital listens have also informed further mobilizations of the podcast, including the ways in which it has been shared and discussed in public forums and academic settings beyond the project team’s initial dissemination. For example, Valley Public Radio aired an episode of the podcast and interviewed me to discuss the series and its significance to the Central Valley and the state at large (thus disseminating the work beyond the podcast’s digital platforms, extending its accessibility beyond internet-reliant modes).⁷⁶ University professors in departments of communication, environmental studies, African American and African studies, and American studies have also assigned the series in their course syllabi and/or are citing the series in their own upcoming scholarship. Project team members have been invited to discuss the podcast (via Zoom and in person) for schools, government agencies, and organizations including UC San Diego, UC Davis, the UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, Central Valley Scholars, California State Parks, and the 2021 Fresno Black Progressive Summit. We intend to continue giving public talks and presentations on the series.

Finally, both the pandemic-related limitations (which presented challenges to our original plans for in-person project launches and initial storytelling sessions) and the eventual mobility of the podcast’s extended digital reach are informing the design of the next iteration of “We Are Not Strangers Here”: a digital StoryMap utilizing ArcGIS capabilities and an ESRI platform. I am currently in the process of codesigning this digital version of the exhibit with California Institute for Rural Studies research and storytelling associate Li Schmidt, including its eventual user interface and experience, which will feature archival materials beyond those displayed on the traveling banners, such as newly produced media, animated maps, and interactive features that allow the StoryMap’s visitors to contribute their own stories to the collection. Taken together, the various moving parts of “We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California” represent the dynamic opportunities that public humanities projects such as these present for amplifying important, under-told state histories.

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NOTES

The epigraph is quoted from Ravi Howard, "We Are Not Strangers Here," in Camille T. Dungy, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 37.

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 1850 Slave Schedule for Crawford County, Arkansas. Special thanks to archivist Katy Hogue of the Fresno Historical Society for scans of the Sugar Loaf, Arkansas, and Fresno, California, census materials.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, Slave Population of the United States, Table LXXI, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850c/1850c-04.pdf>.
3. U.S. Census Bureau, 1850 Federal Census, Crawford County, Arkansas, p. 270A—Sugar Loaf Township, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/ar/crawford/census/1850/pg0270a.txt>.
4. Lawrence Brooks de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (eds.), *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
5. For reference to Moore's travel with the Akers wagon train, see Eleanor M. Ramsey and Janice S. Lewis, "Black Americans in California," in *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California* (Sacramento: California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, 1988). For the size of the train, see Catherine Morison Rehart, *The Valley's Legends & Legacies* (Fresno, CA: Quill Driver Books, 1996).
6. William B. Secrest, *California Feuds: Vengeance, Vendettas & Violence on the Old West Coast* (Fresno, CA: Quill Driver Books, 2005), 64; Paul E. Vandor, *History of Fresno County, California: With Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who Have Been Identified with Its Growth and Development from the Early Days to the Present*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Historic Record Co., 1919).
7. Bayard Taylor, *El Dorado: Or Adventures in the Path of Empire*, 8th ed. (New York: G. Putnam & Son, 1859), 47.
8. Rehart, *Valley's Legends & Legacies*, 274.
9. Ibid.
10. Alvin Aaron Coffey, *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Alvin Aaron Coffey* (Mills Seminary P.O., 1901). Coffey's great-great granddaughter, Jeannette L. Molson, also recounts his tale in her self-published work with researcher Eual D. Blansett Jr. For more on her recounted story, see Jeannette L. Molson and Eual D. Blansett Jr., *The Tortuous Road to Freedom: The Life of Alvin Aaron Coffey* (self-published, 2009).
11. Institutional Records, "In Memoriam, a Biographical Sketch of Alvin A. Coffey," *Society of California Pioneer Obituary Notices* (San Francisco: Society of California Pioneers, 1903), vol. 9, 135.
12. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010).
13. James Gregory, "Mapping the Great Migration (African American)," America's Great Migration Project, University of Washington, https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/map_Black_migration.shtml (retrieved February 8, 2022).
14. For more on Africans within Spanish America, see Alex Borucki, David Eltis, and David Wheat, "Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015), 433–461; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013); Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *Americas* 57, no. 2 (2000): 171–205. For more on Africans' presence in early colonial activity in California, see de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*; Jack D. Forbes, "The Early African Heritage of California," in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*; and Jack D. Forbes, "Black Pioneers: The Spanish-Speaking Afroamericans of the Southwest," *Phylon* (1960–) 27, no. 3 (1966): 233–246.
15. Damany M. Fisher, *Discovering Early California Afro-Latino Presence* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2010).

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.; de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 8.
18. For over eight years, self-taught historian and African American journalist and activist Delilah Beasley meticulously researched archives across the state and conducted interviews with early settlers to capture and preserve the history of California's early African American presence. For more information, see Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1919). Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor coedited a seminal anthology titled *Seeking El Dorado* (already cited several times above) that takes a "sweeping" and "holistic" approach, seeking to study the story of African Americans in California from the earliest colonial beginnings (with the arrival of Spanish-speaking Black individuals within colonial parties) to the anthology's time of publication (2001) (p. xi). For significant African American history during California's gold rush, see Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, vol. 29 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). In addition to scholarship that examines African American women in the American West and in specific locations such as Richmond, California, Shirley Ann Wilson Moore's work also chronicles the nineteenth-century westward migration of African Americans. For more information, see Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails, 1841–1869*, vol. 12 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).
19. Interview, Susan D. Anderson (Public Historian) in discussion with Ildi Carlisle-Cummins, California Institute for Rural Studies Executive Director, January 2020.
20. Interview, Caroline Collins, "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California Panel Discussion," interview by Lori Wear, *Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park*, July 29, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tcl2b6Fi7Y8&t=581s>.
21. Susan D. Anderson, "Freedom Chasers: Early Black Settlers and the California Dream," February 9, 2021, in "We Are Not Strangers Here," produced by Caroline Collins, *Cal Ag Roots* podcast, 24:50, <https://cirsinc.org/cal-ag-roots/>.
22. Susan Pell, "Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive: An Ethnographic Reading of an Activist Archive," *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 33–57, 34.
23. Vandor, *History of Fresno County*.
24. Ibid.
25. By 1870, the Moores' real estate was valued at \$3,000. For more on their holdings, see Felix Shielim Nwaeke Enunwa, "African American Entrepreneurship: Narratives of Fresno County, California, African American Entrepreneurs" (PhD diss., University of San Francisco, 2012). When Moore passed in 1880, he was said to have been "the possessor of quite a fortune"; see Wallace W. Elliott, *History of Fresno County California, with Illustrations, Descriptive of Its Scenery, Farms, Residences, Public Buildings, Factories, Hotels, Business Houses, Schools, Churches, and Mines, from Original Drawings, with Biographical Sketches* (San Francisco: William W. Elliot, 1882), 99.
26. Ramsey and Lewis, "Black Americans in California." A 1975 Fresno historical preservation publication credits the Moores with planting the first apple and fig orchards near Centerville. For more on their recording of the Moores in the context of Fresno history, see *Heritage Fresno: Homes and People* (American Association of University Women, Fresno Branch, Historic Homes Committee, 1975). Another source indicates that, in 1866, they were the first to plant such orchards in the entire county; see Enunwa, "African American Entrepreneurship." On California-grown figs, see Alastair Bland, "Should Figs Go the Way of Apples and Become a Year-Round Fruit?," National Public Radio, April 24, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/04/24/306248108/california-farmers-finagle-a-fig-for-all-seasons>. On fig growing in Fresno County, see "Commodities," <http://www.fcfb.org/Fresno-Ag/Commodities.php> (accessed January 21, 2021).
27. Local historical sources described Moore as "Fresno County's earliest, permanent, Negro pioneer stockman." For further reference, see June English, "Leaves from the Past: Fresno County's Black Pioneers," *Ash Tree Echo* 4, no. 1 (1969): 20. He has also been referred to as the first African American rancher in the Central Valley; see Paula Lloyd, "Moore First Black Rancher in Valley," *Fresno Bee* (Fresno, CA), February 1, 2010.
28. The 1880 census lists two Black laborers, Frank Hinds and John Wiley, as Moore's boarders; see Ramsey and Lewis, "Black Americans in California."
29. Gabriel Moore employed "[s]ons of Southern white families" to herd for him in the Valley and, in the summer, drive his cattle to local mountain ranges. For more about his cattle operation, see English, "Leaves from the Past." In 1874, the Moores sold forty head of milk cows to "some young White people" who wanted to start a dairy. For further reference, see Enunwa, "African American Entrepreneurship," 52. For records regarding the sale, see G. H. Marcussen, *History and Social Study of Black Population of Fresno County, California* (Fresno County, CA: Coalinga Library, 2009).
30. [No title], *Daily Evening Herald* (Stockton, CA), August 29, 1874, 2.

31. Elected county clerk of Fresno County in 1869, Harry St. John Dixon apparently carried racist ideologies into his new position, where, according to a *Madera Tribune* article, he was once labeled “an unreconstructed Rebel County Clerk” by an Oakland newspaper. For further accounting of Dixon’s past and the incident at the Millerton Courthouse, see Bill Coate, “No Vote for African-Americans in Fresno County,” *Madera Tribune* (Madera, CA), December 17, 2016, B1. Although I have not located the referenced Oakland newspaper article in my initial archival searches, archival evidence exists regarding Dixon’s personal opinions about the inferiority of African Americans, which most likely informed his encounter with Moore—most notably his “Civil War Diaries: Recollections of a Rebel Private,” a series of short articles published in several issues of his fraternity’s *Sigma Chi Quarterly* and archived among his papers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (collection no. 02375). Within these personal “recollections,” amid other paternalistic and racist rhetoric, Dixon describes the loyal “plantation boys” who fought to accompany him to war and regales his readers with the tale of “My Boy Dick,” a “faithful servant” who always knew to stand “three paces to the rear.” See Harry St. John Dixon, “Civil War Diaries: Recollections of a Rebel Private,” *Sigma Chi Quarterly* 5 (1886): 15–20, 71–77, 145–154, 195–207; see also https://sigmachicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/constantine-chapter_recollections.pdf. Other secondary sources of the time use similar paternalistic language when discussing Gabriel Moore’s involvement in a sexual assault trial against a local Native American woman. Moore was “unanimously acquitted by the jury,” but particular chronicles of the event, in their levity toward both Moore and the alleged victim, illustrate racist and patriarchal frameworks that also socioculturally informed the Valley at the time. For an example of this levity, see Elliott, *History of Fresno County*, 100.
32. English, “Leaves from the Past.”
33. Ramsey and Lewis, “Black Americans in California.”
34. Lloyd J. Mercer and W. Douglas Morgan, “Irrigation, Drainage, and Agricultural Development in the San Joaquin Valley,” in Ariel Dina and David Zilberman (eds.), *The Economics and Management of Water and Drainage in Agriculture* (Boston: Springer, 1991), 9–27.
35. Ramsey and Lewis, “Black Americans in California.”
36. *Ibid.* For more on the construction of rock dams, see Heloisa Yang, Matt Haynes, Stephen Winzenread, and Kevin Okada, “The History of Dams,” Center for Watershed Sciences, UC Davis, 1999, https://watershed.ucdavis.edu/shed/lund/dams/Dam_History_Page/History.htm#:~:text=In%20California%2C%20the%20Jesuit%20of%20fathers,made%20of%20masonry%20and%20mortar.
37. “Drowned,” *Fresno Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 29, 1880, 3; Fresno County, “The Pioneer Years, from the Beginnings to 1900” (Fresno, CA: Panorama West Books, 1984).
38. For reference to Moore’s clutching of a bush, see Fresno County, “Pioneer Years.”
39. George Skelton, “Dams Are Not the Answer,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 2019, B1; Yang et al., “History of Dams.”
40. In 1858, the Coffeys cofounded a school for African American and Native American children in Shasta County. For more on their philanthropic work, see Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, “Sweet Freedom’s Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails 1841–1869” (prepared for the National Park Service, National Trails Intermountain Region, Salt Lake City & Santa Fe, January 31, 2012). On Coffey’s hay enterprise, see Guy Washington, “California Pioneers of African Descent” (prepared for National Park Service, December 17, 2010).
41. Institutional Records, “In Memoriam, a Biographical Sketch of Alvin A. Coffey,” *Society of California Pioneer Obituary Notices*, vol. 9 (San Francisco: Society of California Pioneers, 1903), 135.
42. Jeannette L. Molson and Eual D. Blansett Jr., *The Tortuous Road to Freedom: The Life of Alvin Aaron Coffey* (self-published, 2009).
43. Jonathan Waltmire, “Cultivating Change: African American Homesteaders, Innovators, and Civic Leaders,” February 23, 2021, in “We Are Not Strangers Here,” produced by Caroline Collins, *Cal Ag Roots* podcast, 27:07, <https://cirsinc.org/cal-ag-roots/>. For more on the Hinds’ homesteading, their home life, and their impact on other local African American settlers, see Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers of California*.
44. For more on the Visalia Colored School and its teacher, an African American man named Daniel Scott who had previously been hired as a private tutor for the Hinds family, see Ramsey and Lewis, “Black Americans in California.” Before 1890’s landmark *Wysinger v. Crookshank* decision, California law “provided for somewhat integrated schools [though] many school districts had held to the earlier pattern and kept whites and minorities in separate facilities.” For more on these legal conditions, see “Wysinger v. Crookshank (1890),” *Oxford African American Studies Center*, September 30, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.33728> (retrieved February 8, 2022).
45. Some accounts spell Edmond’s wife’s name “Pernessa”; see Anthony Bailey, “Hidden History Edmond Wysinger,” KSEE, yourcentralvalley.com, February 14, 2017, <https://www.yourcentralvalley.com/feature-edmond-wysinger/> (retrieved February 9, 2022). In the 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Merced, Township 2, Dwelling 271, Family 234, she is listed as “P. Wilson,” the fifteen-year-old daughter of farmer Alfred Wilson (whose real and personal property was valued at \$3,800). She is listed as “Pernesa” in the 1880 U.

- S. Federal Census for Visalia, Tulare County, 098. For more on Edmond Wysinger's mining activity, see Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers of California*.
46. For more about the case, see "Wysinger v. Crookshank (1890)." On Arthur Wysinger being the first African American admitted to Visalia's high school, see Alicia Rivera, "Wysinger v. Crookshank, 1888," *Black Past*, January 26, 2007, <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/wysinger-v-crookshank-1888/> (retrieved February 9, 2022).
 47. For information on Reuben Wysinger, oldest son of Edmond and Penecia Wysinger, and his family branch's farming in Fowler, California, see Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers of California*; Anna Moreno Keithley, "Securing Satisfaction: African American Community Building in Fowler, California from 1890–1930" (master's thesis, California State University Fresno, 2015); and descendent Myra Wysinger's accounting in "Cornelia Young Wysinger," Find a Grave Memorial 36813472, May 6, 2009, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/36813472/cornelia-wysinger> (retrieved February 9, 2022).
 48. Robert L. Carlton, "Blacks in San Diego County: A Social Profile, 1850–1880," *Journal of San Diego History* 21, no. 4 (1975).
 49. For more on early Black settlers of Julian, California, and the Hotel Robinson, which is now the Julian Gold Rush Hotel, see Robert L. Carlton, "Blacks in San Diego County: A Social Profile, 1850–1880"; Kathryn A. Jordan, "Life beyond Gold: A New Look at the History of Julian, California," *Journal of San Diego History* 54, no. 2 (2008): 101–112; David Cortes, "Hotel Robinson (1897–1921)," *Black Past*, July 15, 2017, <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/hotel-robinson-1897-1921/> (retrieved February 9, 2022).
 50. After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 resulted in a decrease in Chinese agricultural labor, "some growers' organizations arranged with railroad companies to import several hundred African Americans from the South and built cabins for them." For more on the recruitment of Black labor in California and its relationship to rural settlement, see Delores Nason McBroome, "Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia," in de Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 152; Michael Allan Eissinger, "Re-collecting the Past: An Examination of Rural Historically African American Settlements across the San Joaquin Valley" (PhD diss., University of California, Merced, 2017); Susan D. Anderson, "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California," exhibition banners (Exhibit Envoy, 2021).
 51. Michael Eissinger discusses the African American community in Wasco and the area's racial tensions in "Kern County: California's Deep South," presented at CESA 2011: Critical Ethnic Studies and the Future of Genocide: Settler Colonialism/Heteropatriarchy/White Supremacy, University of California, Riverside, March 10–12, 2011. See also Walter Goldschmidt, "2001 Malinowski Award Lecture: Notes toward a Theory of Applied Anthropology," *Human Organization* 60, no. 4 (2001): 423–429.
 52. For more on the history of African Americans in what came to be "The Quarters/Lincoln Heights" in Weed, California, see Ramsey and Lewis, "Black Americans in California." For a cartographic analysis of Weed's racial segregation, see Linda E. Freeman, "Using Historical GIS to Map Segregation in the Company Town of Weed, Siskiyou County, California during the 1930 United States Census" (master's thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 2012).
 53. Eissinger, "Re-collecting the Past."
 54. Susan D. Anderson, public historian and project historical advisor, estimates that as many as 50,000 Black "Okies" eventually joined this migration; see Susan D. Anderson, "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California," exhibition banners (Exhibit Envoy, 2021). Another source estimates the number of Black "Okie" migrants to California at 30,000–40,000; see Mark Arax, "A Lost Tribe's Journey to a Land of Broken Promises," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2022, A1, A24, A25.
 55. Eissinger, "Re-collecting the Past."
 56. Ibid. For recollections of these racial conditions from Black residents of Teviston and South Dos Palos, see Alexandra Hall, "Black Farmworkers in the Central Valley: Escaping Jim Crow for a Subtler Kind of Racism," February 22, 2019, in *The California Report*, produced by Alexandra Hall, KQED, 17:05 (podcast and news story), <https://www.kqed.org/news/11727455/Black-farmworkers-in-the-central-valley-escaping-jim-crow-for-a-subtler-kind-of-racism> (retrieved September 9, 2020).
 57. For discussions of Allensworth in the context of other "efforts to establish racial agricultural colonies in the Midwest and Southeast," see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold." For more information on the broader historical and political context of Black (or "All-Black") towns, defined as "separate communit[ies] containing a population at least 90 percent black in which the residents attempted to determine their own political destiny," see Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), xiii.
 58. This philosophy was rooted in an agrarian ideal dating back to advocates such as Thomas Jefferson who linked lofty goals like independence, morality, and equality to notions of land ownership and agriculture. For more on Jefferson's role in U.S. agricultural history, see Milburn Lincoln Wilson, "Thomas Jefferson—Farmer," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 87, no. 3 (1943): 216–222. For more on the historical context, legacy, and erosion of the agrarian ideal within national public imagination, see

- Matthew J. Mariola, "Losing Ground: Farmland Preservation, Economic Utilitarianism, and the Erosion of the Agrarian Ideal," *Agriculture and Human Values* 22, no. 2 (2005): 209–223. For more on the agrarian ideal in relation to Allensworth's promotional materials and boosterism, see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold." For more on Allensworth's infrastructure, including its hotel, store, blacksmith, and barbershop, see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold"; Robert Mikell, "The History of Allensworth, California (1908–)", *Black Past*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/history-allensworth-california-1908/> (retrieved February 11, 2022); Beatrice Cox, "The Archaeology of the Allensworth Hotel: Negotiating the System in Jim Crow America" (PhD diss., Sonoma State University, 2008).
59. For more on the role of education in Allensworth, see Kathleen Weiler, "The School at Allensworth," *Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 9–38. The colony elected settler Oscar Overr as Allensworth's justice of the peace, making him the "first African American justice west of the Rocky Mountains"; see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold," 156. For more on Allensworth's early art and culture institutions, including its debating society, library, and glee and theater clubs, see Robert Mikell, "The History of Allensworth, California (1908–)"; Steve Ptomey, "Back to the Land: Allensworth and the Black Utopian Dream," March 9, 2021, in "We Are Not Strangers Here," produced by Caroline Collins, *Cal Ag Roots* podcast, 30:35, <https://cirsinc.org/cal-ag-roots/>.
 60. For more on the colony of Allensworth and its fate's (perhaps inadvertent) relationship to "African American skepticism about entrepreneurial activities" and the presumption that "outside forces would undo them," see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold," 173. For another example of white resentment within one of the most significant incidents of racial violence in American history involving an attack on a Black settlement by nearby white residents, see James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002).
 61. McBroome, "Harvests of Gold."
 62. *Ibid.* For more on the racial motivation of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad's decision to bypass Allensworth, see Beth Behnam, "Allensworth: Realization and Resurrection of an African American Dream" (digital exhibit, California State Archives, 2018), <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/allensworth-california-state-archives/CwXhVfAd-6y4JA?hl=en> (retrieved February 12, 2022); Lonnie Bunch, "Celebrating the Allensworth Legacy 100 Years Later," NPR, October 13, 2008, in *News and Notes* podcast, produced by Farai Chideya, 17:09, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/95605909>.
 63. *Ibid.*
 64. Sam Skow, "Guide to the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photograph Collection" (Sacramento: California State Parks, 2016).
 65. In addition to envisioning what the *Los Angeles Times* dubbed Little Liberia, attorney and civil rights activist Hugh Macbeth was also a fierce advocate for incarcerated Japanese Americans during and after World War II. For more about his prominent role in the planning of Little Liberia, see McBroome, "Harvests of Gold." For more on his advocacy for Japanese Americans, see Daniel Widener, "Perhaps the Japanese Are to Be Thanked? Asia, Asian America, and the Construction of Black California," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11, no. 1 (2003): 135–181.
 66. Lorn S. Foster, "Still Here: Black Farmers and Agricultural Stewardship in the Modern Age," March 16, 2021, in "We Are Not Strangers Here," produced by Caroline Collins, *Cal Ag Roots* podcast, 32:04, <https://cirsinc.org/cal-ag-roots/>. For a broader gesture to these activities, including keeping home gardens and raising chickens and goats—elements typical of the garden city aesthetic—see Robert O. Self's critique of the general absence of Black folks' experiences in histories that chronicle suburban history in the modern era in Robert O. Self, "California and the New Suburban History," *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 1 (2003): 127–134.
 67. For more regarding Progressive-inspired gardening in relation to African Americans within a broader context, see Dianne D. Glave, "A Garden So Brilliant with Colors, So Original in Its Design': Rural African American Women, Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of an African American Environmental Perspective," *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003): 395–411. For more regarding these practices in (sub)urban California in the early to mid-twentieth century, see Susan D. Anderson and Eugenia King Bickerstaff, "Still Here: Black Farmers and Agricultural Stewardship in the Modern Age," March 16, 2021, in "We Are Not Strangers Here," produced by Caroline Collins, *Cal Ag Roots* podcast, 32:04, <https://cirsinc.org/cal-ag-roots/>.
 68. Susan D. Anderson, "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California," exhibition banners (Exhibit Envoy, 2021).
 69. Alison Hope Alkon, "Growing Resistance: Food, Culture and the Mo' Better Foods Farmers' Market," *Gastronomica* 7, no. 3 (2007): 93–99.
 70. For more information regarding ancestral agricultural practices carried into the Americas, see Jessica B. Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). For more on the complex role of gardening in the lives of enslaved African Americans, see Geri Augusto, "The Disarray of Nature: Expressive Forms and Symbolism in the CSSJ Slave Garden," Center for the Study of

- Slavery and Justice (CSSJ), Brown University, October 8, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJXT5wKgZnc> (retrieved January 16, 2021). For more on the relationship between environmental imagination and self-emancipation, see Stephanie LeMenager, "Marginal Landscapes: Revolutionary Abolitionists and Environmental Imagination," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 49–56.
71. Recording of exhibit visitors in discussion with California Institute for Rural Studies staff member Cristel Jensen, June 19, 2021.
 72. Ibid.
 73. For more about this particular tour stop, see "We Are Not Strangers Here: African American Histories in Rural California—An Exhibition, Podcast, and Education Program," Society of California Pioneers Museum and Library, 2022, <https://www.californiapioneers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WANSH.pdf> (retrieved February 12, 2022).
 74. Caroline Collins and Ildi Carlisle-Cummins, "We Are Not Strangers Here Final Report" (prepared for California Humanities, a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, 2021), Audio Clip 1 at <https://soundcloud.com/cal-ag-roots/coming-in-february-we-are-not-strangers-here-series>.
 75. Marija Dalbello, "A Genealogy of Digital Humanities," *Journal of Documentation* 67, no. 3 (2011): 480–506, 480.
 76. Kathleen Schock, "Scholar Caroline Collins Explores the Contributions of Blacks in Rural California in New Podcast," Valley Public Radio, April 30, 2021, <https://www.kvpr.org/news/2021-04-30/scholar-caroline-collins-explores-the-contributions-of-Blacks-in-rural-california-in-new-podcast> (retrieved May 26, 2021).