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Title

East Bay Revolution: Urban Spaces of Protest and Counterculture Practice | Spring 2020
Studio Course

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AMERICAN STUDIES 102 /
ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN 109

EAST BAY REVOLUTION: URBAN SPACES OF PROTEST AND COUNTERCULTURE PRACTICE

**GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES
INTERDISCIPLINARY
GRADUATE METHODS COURSE
CASE STUDY**



WHY READ THIS CASE STUDY?

Cities of the East Bay, such as Oakland and Berkeley, were well-known as centers of political, social, and cultural activism in the 1960s. But less well known is the fact that the East Bay continued to be a site of radical movements throughout 1970s.

The undergraduate studio, East Bay Revolution, was led by Professor of English Scott Saul and Professor of Architecture Greg Castillo, both experts on local social, political, and countercultural movements in the Bay Area and beyond. They immersed students in archival place-based research related to the history of East Bay activism of the 1960s and 1970s. These students came from diverse fields of study - American Studies, Urban Studies, History, Music, Architecture, Geography, Art Practice, and Conservation and Resource Studies.

Drawing on rich community-based archives in Berkeley, Emeryville, and Oakland, as well as archival materials from institutional archives such as Berkeley's Public Library, students worked together in teams to undertake

archival story-telling projects. These projects focused on particular social, cultural, and design movements that gained traction and altered the political consciousness of the Bay Area and beyond. The students began their work in a studio setting, but when the COVID-19 pandemic shifted in-person instruction and studio work online, students adjusted quickly. Learning from each other as well as their professors, students gained expertise in a range of methods: how to analyze print, audio, and visual archives; contextualize archival materials by drawing on other historical sources; and build digital archives. With remarkable creativity, and unwavering determination to track down ephemeral historical materials, they produced powerful multimedia stories about the East Bay's mid-20th century activist movements.

Keywords:

Project-based learning, urban humanities, humanities studio, studio pedagogy, humanities lab

This case study is part of an archive of the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative and its Future Histories Lab, supported by the Mellon Foundation. The entire archive, including course case studies, faculty and student reflections, digital projects, symposia, exhibitions, and publications, is available at https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_guh_fhl.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

EAST BAY REVOLUTION: URBAN SPACES OF PROTEST AND COUNTERCULTURE PRACTICE



Photo: Bob Fitch Archive

A GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES RESEARCH STUDIO

American Studies 102 / Environmental Design 109

Spring 2020, 4 Units

Instructors:

Greg Castillo (Architecture)

Scott Saul (English)

This course delved into the history of the East Bay in the 1960s and 1970s, with particular attention to the emergence of countercultural and social-movement communities. In this project-oriented course, students worked in teams as they reconstruct and analyze particular sites of protest and culture-making across the East Bay, from Berkeley to Emeryville and Oakland. Students developed their own multi-media digital history projects, which added significant new dimensions to the platform ([The Berkeley Revolution](#)) built by previous Cal undergraduates.

The Berkeley Revolution website presents histories and previously unavailable archival materials from the disabled people's movement, LGBTQ organizations, the Black Panthers, and more. Students in Scott Saul's and Greg Castillo's course East Bay Revolution (American Studies 102/Environmental Design 109) contributed articles and ephemera to this ongoing project, which has been cited by New York Times reporters and others in researching stories including profiles of Kamala Harris.

THE INSTRUCTORS



Greg Castillo

Greg Castillo is professor of Architecture at the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley, and an honorary associate professor of architectural history and theory at the School of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Sydney. He has received fellowships from the German-American Fulbright Commission, the Getty Research Institute, the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, the Canadian Centre for Architecture and the Form Foundation. His publications include *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), *Design Radicals: Spaces of Bay Area Counterculture* (co-edited with Lee Stickells; University of Minnesota Press, 2023), and numerous essays in journals, anthologies, and museum catalogues. He was the guest curator of *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* at the Berkeley art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 2017, and a contributor to the exhibition catalogue.



Scott Saul

Scott Saul is a professor of English at UC Berkeley, where he teaches courses in American literature and history. His research focuses on 20th century American literature and culture, with a focus on postwar developments in performance, poetry, music, and film. Saul's books include *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Harvard University Press, 2005), and *Becoming Richard Pryor* (HarperCollins, 2014), which featured an extensive digital companion, *Richard Pryor's Peoria*. He has also written for the *New York Times*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *Bookforum* and other publications.



Students in History Room at the Berkeley Public Library, looking through clipping files.

COURSE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

In the spring of 2020, this course was offered under the aegis of the Global Urban Humanities Initiative as an expansion of Scott Saul's 2017 course Humanities 110, "The Bay Area in the Seventies." The 16-person seminar was co-taught in 2020 by Saul and the Greg Castillo from the Department of Architecture, with support from graduate student Natalie Koski-Karell. In this version, the course took on projects focused on Oakland's history as well as Berkeley's. Because the COVID-19 pandemic meant that brick-and-mortar archives were shuttered, this team of students had to look beyond the primary-source collections housed in traditional archives. Their research projects, as a result, tended to rely more on digital archives and on oral history (or what, alternatively, might be called the kindness of strangers). The coursework the students participated in aided the expansive, curated archive—with 700 documents organized across sixteen main projects, delving into the East Bay's political and cultural revolutions and their aftershocks—found on the the Berkeley Revolution website: a digital archive of the East Bay's transformation in the late 1960s & 1970s.

This project-based course was essentially three courses rolled into one.

First, it delved into the history of the East Bay in the 1960s and 1970s, with particular attention to the emergence of countercultural and social-movement communities. The East Bay was an unusually fertile cultural and political seedbed: so many features of contemporary life — from the cappuccinos we drink to the laptop computers we use to write and think — were incubated in it. The region was ground-zero for new forms of spiritual practice and religious organization; for a strain of technological utopianism that led to the development of the first desktop computer; for the turn to organic foods and the creation of alternative food networks; for new approaches to the built environment (the project of redesigning cities with "People's Architecture"); and, not least, for large-scale social movements such as women's liberation, black liberation, gay liberation, the disability rights movement, and the environmental movement, which spurred enormous cultural and political changes that reverberate to this day.

Second, the course offered students an introduction to the practice of archival research—the discovery and drawing-together of primary sources to construct new historical narratives. Our course readings often featured primary sources from the time, and will often derive from specific archives at Cal, such as the Environmental Design Archives and the Disability Rights and Defense Fund Collection, or from digital archives like the invaluable Independent Voices archive. In developing their research projects, students pulled together their own smaller 'archive' of primary sources, and were invited to draw upon both official archives (the Bancroft, other Cal libraries, the Berkeley Public Library) and less official archives (e.g. the papers of an individual or community organization). Students approached these collections with the open eyes of historians looking at fresh documents, and with the goal of plumbing these documents for the insights and stories that they yield.

Third, the course gave students the experience of developing their own East Bay-oriented multi-media digital history projects, which extended the platform built in previous versions of the course ("[The Berkeley Revolution](#)"). Students worked, collaboratively, to create both digital exhibitions and multi-media essays that sprung out of the primary research they do.

LEARNING GOALS

This course helped students:

- Understand the cultural, social, and political undercurrents of the 1970s Bay Area.
- Sharpen historical research skills (navigating databases of primary materials; exploring and annotating primary archival sources; curating your own set of primary sources).
- Identify and acknowledge multiple points of view in primary and secondary materials.
- Improve digital literacy and multimedia skills, through both individual work and collaborative activity.
- Develop the art of digital storytelling.

STUDENT WORK EXPECTATIONS

Students were prepared for their final projects through participating in four assignments through the course:

(1) The art of annotation: Students were asked to annotate a single, meaty document (a news article, editorial, advertisement, photograph) from an archival collection related to Berkeley in the 1970s, or from a 1970s issue of the Berkeley Barb, the Berkeley Tribe, the Berkeley Gazette, The East Bay Voice, or some other East Bay source. In their annotations, they were asked to identify important actors and/or organizations, draw attention to notable features of the document, and identify the significance of these features.

(2) Building a digital archive through digitization and annotation: Each student was responsible for digitizing and annotating 10-20 documents over the course of the term. The annotated documents students completed were intended to provide a foundation — the building blocks of evidence — for the digital storytelling project that students were working on concurrently through the semester. Altogether, students added 160 new documents related to the history of the East Bay in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

(3) Digital storytelling through a collaborative digital history project: Students worked in groups on a larger project of their mutual choosing, which would then be featured through a ‘digital exhibition’ on “[The Berkeley Revolution](#).” It was anticipated that some, but definitely not all, of the larger digital projects would grow out of subjects featured on the syllabus (e.g. the People’s Architecture collective, the disability rights movement, the sanctuary movement, “venture socialism” communes). These projects had a larger framing essay to go along with the digital project, but students were also encouraged to opt for another format of their liking (e.g. podcast, digital video, and so on) to frame their project for a larger audience.

(4) Leading of a class discussion-workshop: each research group chose a sampling of primary and secondary materials so that the full class could discuss their project and help the respective group parse those documents, and refine the stories they wished to weave and the arguments they wished to develop out of them.

The Berkeley Revolution Platform can be seen on page 9.

THE BERKELEY REVOLUTION

A digital archive of the East Bay's transformation in the late-1960s & 1970s

PROJECTS

PEOPLE

PLACES

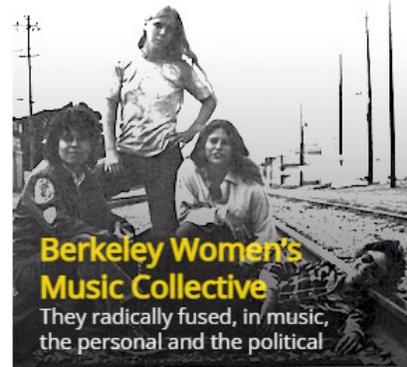
SEARCH

ABOUT



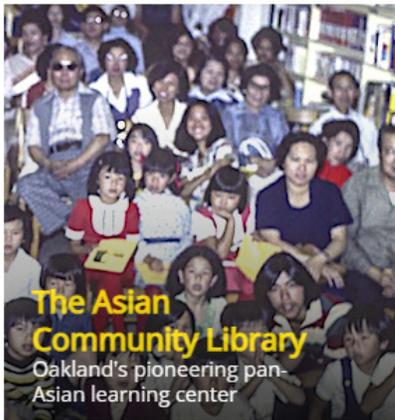
The Flatlands' War on Poverty

A crusading Oakland newspaper, The Flatlands gave voice to the city's most struggling citizens



Berkeley Women's Music Collective

They radically fused, in music, the personal and the political



The Asian Community Library

Oakland's pioneering pan-Asian learning center



The Black Panthers' Education Revolution

The innovative schools that were part of the Black Panther Party's deepest legacy



The Integral Urban House

A "model home" for ecologically sustainable, self-reliant living in the city



The Countercultural Kitchen

Out of a new way of cooking, a new way of living



A Place for Every Body

How, by design, Berkeley became the US "crip capital"



The Secret History of Recycling

Ecology Action and the roots of Berkeley's ecological revolution

SEMESTER MAP

ARC OF THE SEMESTER

PART ONE: EXPLORING THE BAY AREA IN THE 1960S & 1970S

WEEK 1- ORIENTING OURSELVES TO “THE EAST BAY REVOLUTION”—THE COURSE

- Methods and Methodologies

WEEK 2- ORIENTING OURSELVES TO “BERKELEY IN THE '60S,” AS MYTH AND HISTORY

- Getting familiar with Berkeley’s legacies

WEEK 3- INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES: VENTURE SOCIALISM IN THE EAST BAY

- Communes and communalism in practice
- The People’s Architecture Collective

WEEK 4- DIGITAL AND ANALOG ARCHIVES: MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Institutional archives and community archives, in theory and practice. Primary source in-class activity: the East Bay Voice
- Field trip to Berkeley Public Library, Central Branch, local history room. ‘Archive boot camp’ presentation: best practices for working in archives

WEEK 5- MAPPING AND COUNTERMAPPING

- Discussing selections of countermapping projects

WEEK 6- PATIENT NO MORE: THE BAY AREA AND THE RISE OF THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

- Viewing: Rights of Passage (1981)

WEEK 7- CITIES OF SANCTUARY AND CARE: CANYON, FRUITVALE, AND BERKELEY

- Special guest: Liam O’Donoghue, host of East Bay Yesterday
- Special guest: Liam O’Donoghue, host of East Bay Yesterday

WEEK 8- THE ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION: INTEGRAL LIVING AND ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

- Reviewing readings on the food systems in the Bay Area.

WEEK 9- GIFT ECONOMIES AND OCCUPIED SPACES: TELEGRAPH AVENUE TO ALCATRAZ ISLAND

- Reviewing archives and past news sources on occupied Ohlone territory and Native American resistance on Alcatraz.

PART TWO: FINDING YOUR STORY, CREATING A DIGITAL ARCHIVE

WEEK 10- RESEARCH WORKSHOPS: WORDPRESS AND ORAL HISTORY

- Workshop #1: creating a digital post (Wordpress)
- Workshop #2: the craft of oral history (special guest from the Berkeley Oral History Center)

WEEK 11- DEFINING COLLECTIVE PROJECTS AND INDIVIDUAL ROLES

- In-class research workshop
- Pitching your projects to the group; collective brainstorming
- Students hunkered down more into their archives and start creating and annotating their digital posts

WEEK 12- STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION-WORKSHOPS (1)

- Discussion of a set of primary and secondary readings, selected by the project-groups that you form

WEEK 13- STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION-WORKSHOPS (2)

- Discussion of a set of primary and secondary readings, selected by the project-groups that you form

WEEK 14- DIGITAL STORYTELLING WORKSHOP AND STUDIO CRITIQUE

- Progress reports, brainstorming, and debugging with the various research groups
- Studio critique—presentation of projects to a panel

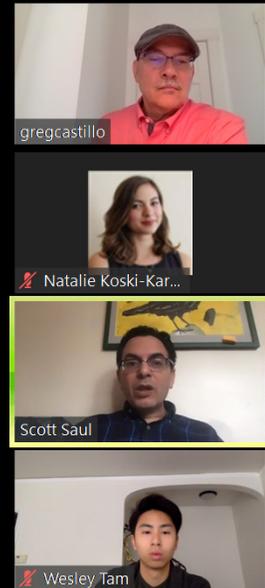
WEEK 15- CLASS PARTY

- Celebration of the launching of your projects on the [Berkeley Revolution!](#)



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL revolution.berkeley.edu/?s=Kathy+Delacour. The page title is "The Berkeley Revolution: A digital archive of one city's transformation in the late-1960s & 1970s". The navigation menu includes "PROJECTS", "PEOPLE", "PLACES", "SEARCH", and "ABOUT". The search results for "Kathy Delacour" are displayed, showing three entries:

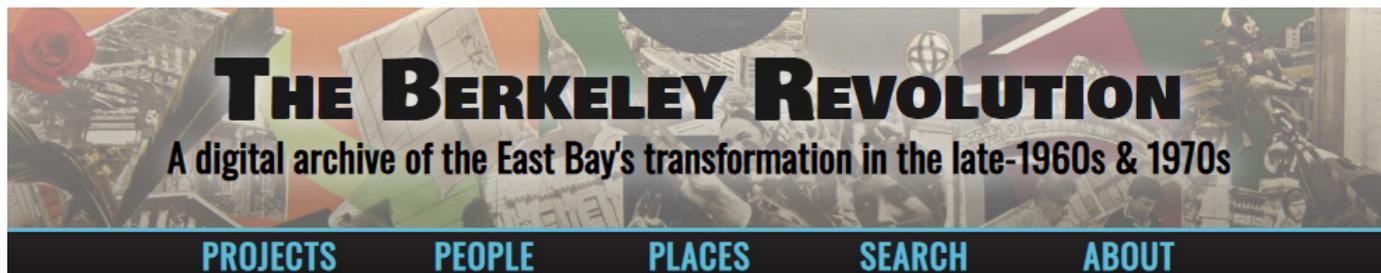
- Kathy Delacour's Funeral Program**
ARCHIVE ENTRY DATE: 6/12/88
A life cut short on the Avenue
- Kathy Delacour's Diary**
ARCHIVE ENTRY DATE: 1979
"Wasted time.. Wasted memories"
- Kathy Delacour Hanging Out on the Ave**



The COVID-19 pandemic meant that brick-and-mortar archives were shuttered, so this team of students had to look beyond the primary-source collections housed in traditional archives. Their research projects, as a result, tended to rely more on digital archives and on oral history (or what, alternatively, might be called the kindness of strangers).

STUDENT WORK

The Flatlands' War on Poverty



The Flatlands' War on Poverty

IN THE SPRING OF 1966, A NEW newspaper, driven by the spirit of community organizing, sprang up in Oakland. Its barebones layout, stark black-and-white photography and hard-charging editorial line placed it firmly in the American tradition of no-nonsense, muck-raking journalism.

"Welcome to Oakland, the all-American city; welcome to Oakland, the 'city of pain'."

— The first lines of *The Flatlands'* first issue

Tellingly, the inaugural issue called out Oakland's municipal establishment by printing the names and addresses of each member of the city council, Board of Education, and Housing Authority. An accompanying cartoon mapped their distribution within the city and revealed the spatial segregation that structured Oakland — how its elite, by and large, inhabited tony suburban neighborhoods in the hills. To signify an alliance with the Oakland's working-class neighborhoods, overlooked literally and figuratively by those in the hills, the paper called itself *The Flatlands*.

» MORE »

WHERE YOUR LEADERS LIVE

BAY

Your "leaders" live in the hills where they can keep an eye on you. But far enough away so they can't hear you. This is a key to your "leaders" point of view.

CITY COUNCILMEN

Dist.	Member	Address
1	Felix F. Chialvo	168 Cross Road
2	Joshua R. Rose	856 - 32nd St.
3	Howard E. Rilea	1474 - 12th St.
4	Robert L. Osborne	6861 Estates Dr.
5	Fred Maggiera	390 Radnor Road
6	Paul A. Brom	4548 Fairbairn Ave.
7	Mayor John H. Reading	4735 Sequoyah Rd.
8	Don Marovich	714 - E. 24th St.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS

9	Melvin Caughell	10950 Lochard Ave.
10	Carl Munck	3940 Zins Dr.
11	Lorenzo N. Hoopes	45 Mott Place
12	Barney Hilburn	789 - 61 st St.
13	Alan Lindsay	21 Humphrey Place
14	Mrs. Ann Corneille	1064 Hubert Rd.
15	Seymour Riese	45 Hillwood Place
16	Dr. Stuart Phillips Supt. of Schools	5720 Buena Vista Ave.

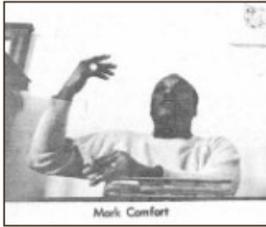
HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS

17	T.W. Anderson	478 - 12th St.
18	Paul B. Godkin	6150 Estates Dr.
19	Leon R. Riese	1843 Brentwood Rd.
20	James A. McHenry	2070 Mountain Blvd.
21	John J. Kruenberg	626 Caldwell Road
22	Police Chief Robert J. Preston	3618 Dorris Ave.

The Flatlands was in the business of making Oakland's leaders, who lived in the hills, accountable to those who lived below them

Click through the catalog on the following pages.

← 1. *The People of The Flatlands: In Their Own Voices and in the Minds of Their Antagonists* →



**The Flatlands Profiles
Mark Comfort
-3/12/66-**

In their first issue, *The Flatlands* profiled an experienced Civil Rights organizer (and future Black Panther)



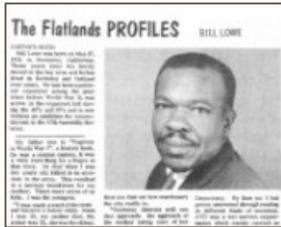
**The Poor Speak Out
-4/9/66-**

A chorus of voices — black, white, Mexican-American — on their interactions with Oakland's welfare department and their landlords



**Weird Warriors in War on Poverty
-05/1966-**

Campus "peaceniks, beatniks and smutniks" had infiltrated the War on Poverty, the US Chamber of Congress declared



**The Flatlands Profiles
Bill Lowe
-5/7/1966-**

Disillusioned by Berkeley's failed promises, Bill Lowe devoted his life to organizing workers and the poor



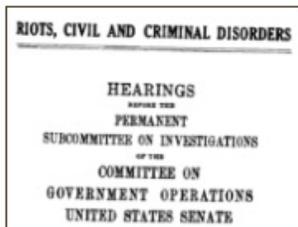
**The Flatlands Profiles
Mr. Bill Goetz
-7/2/1966-**

A member of the *Flatlands* editorial board, Bill Goetz had gone from orphan and vagabond to community organizer



**The Flatlands Profiles
Agnes Woods
-8/27/1966-**

Agnes Woods went from PTA President to community organizer, leader of the boycott of Oakland schools, and chairman of *The Flatlands* editorial board



**Reagan Aide Testifies to US Congress about The Flatlands
-7/16/1969-**

The Governor's office saw *The Flatlands* as a case study in the terrible synergy between on-campus and off-campus radicalism

2. Tell It Like It Is: The Battle Between Anti-Poverty Workers and the Poverty Program



Flatlands Says (editorial on the TAAC walkout)
-3/26/66-

The Flatlands stood in solidarity with those who demanded 'maximum feasible participation' by the poor



Oakland Baby, The Time Has Come
-4/9/66-

A San Francisco anti-poverty warrior cheered on the Flatlands-sponsored plan for community control



OEDC's New Power Base
-6/5/66-

The flatlands, as a region, were successfully demanding to be represented in the planning of the local War on Poverty



Welfare Recipients Revolt
-7/10/66-

Oakland's welfare rights activists joined a national fight for decent benefits



Paper Organizations: Sham Committee on Full Opportunity
-7/16/1966-

Oakland community leaders skewered Mayor Houlihan's stalling of anti-discrimination initiatives



Corporation of the Poor: Chance for Unity
-11/5/66-

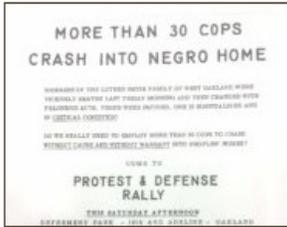
Flatlands organizers rejuvenate, strategize at wooded retreat



TRAP: New Leader in Oakland?
-1/1/1967-

The Flatlands was pushing, with impressive success, for real "maximal participation of the poor" in anti-poverty programs

3. Before the Panthers: The Battle for Community Control of the Police



Luther Smith protest rally flyer
-04/67-

Flatlands contributors joined with the Robert Scheer campaign in protesting a scandalous case of police brutality



Flatlands editorial on the Luther Smith case
-04/23/1966-

Hard-hitting coverage of a brutal beating of a black Oaklander in his home, and an editorial response



Luther Smith vs the DA
-5/7/1966-

A radical Oakland attorney provides insights into a case of police brutality in Oakland



Statements to the California Advisory Commission of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission
-6/5/66-

In the wake of Watts, Flatlands contributors spoke on police abuses to a Civil Rights Commission



S.F. Blows
-10/8/66-

The Flatlands offered extensive on-the-ground coverage of the 1966 Hunters Point uprising



The Spark
-10/22/66-

The 'spark' of unrest at Castlemont High was police beating of a black female teen, The Flatlands reported



Summer: Where Does the Trouble Begin
-6/15/1967-

As the Black Panther Party mobilized against police brutality, The Flatlands assessed fears of a "long hot summer" in Richmond

Nowhere to Go

NOWHERE TO GO

To lose your home at eighty means a great change. Mrs. Stenyard and Mr. Tatum have lived in their houses for over 20 years. Many of the houses in their block are already torn down. Large open spaces stretch between the few remaining houses. There is an emptiness, a kind of sadness, about their streets.

Not a hint of all the living—the homes and families, the people and the buildings — remains, only little pieces of glass, and tin folded into the bare ground.

Those people more acutely aware of the transit problems in the bay area perhaps do not stop and feel this sadness. Many people will benefit from the new system. Nothing lasts forever anyway.

Mrs. Stenyard and Mr. Tatum have worked hard and accepted the responsibility for their own lives. They are property owners and taxpayers and have been financially responsible citizens of Oakland.

Statements have been made that Oakland has a relocation program for the people BART displaces from their homes. Neither Mrs. Stenyard nor Mr. Tatum

Continued on Page 3

photos by Lynn Phipps

Continued from Page 1

have been contacted by any relocation agency.

BART and the city of Oakland both refuse to accept responsibility for these people. The money offered them by BART is inadequate; it cannot begin to replace their homes. They are too old to get loans, they cannot afford to make house payments with their incomes. It is frightening to think of working hard all your life and then to lose what you have gained—without adequate compensation. This is the kind of problem that only grows bigger and snowballs.

Mrs. Sneed, a neighbor of Mrs. Stenyard and Mr. Tatum said "This block here — most everyone owned their house before they started demolishing. Some of our friends got very little for their property and now they're having a hard time trying to maintain the property. They paid such high prices for what they're buying, that now they don't have the money to care for it." Mrs. Sneed also pointed out, "They call this the slum or the ghetto, but they don't have a special tax that's cut. It's only recently that we started to get anything around here for our tax dollar. At least in their old age they should be given another house."

Most of the houses still standing are owned by people who refuse to sell, because they know there are no houses in Oakland available for the money BART is offering.

Mrs. Betty Stenyard
Age 85

"I moved into this house in 1946, January the 18th. Twenty years in the same house. . . and I sure hate to get out of it. I was born in 1881 about 90 miles from Greenville, then moved to Green-

Date: 11/18/66

Citation:

Carol Brown, "Nowhere to Go: Two Flatlands Residents Face 'Progress' as BART Moves to Take Their Homes." *The Flatlands*, Nov. 18, 1966, 1, 3.

Additional Notes:

Click on the link below to read the full article, with photographs.

[View the Full Document](#)

Sample Document Page from "The Flatlands' War on Poverty" Project, with Annotation.

West Oakland was on the losing end of more than one urban renewal plan, but the construction of BART posed nearly an existential threat to the neighborhood.

Plans for the neighborhood's station proposed to destroy the viability of the city's black entertainment and business district centered on 7th St, with the residential areas along its fringes on the chopping block as well. The Flatlands sought at every opportunity to dramatize and publicize the victims of the city's structural injustices, and the subjects of this piece are manifestly sympathetic: Barclay Tatum and Betty Stenyard, elderly West Oakland residents of long standing whose houses have been targeted by BART.

Reflecting larger migratory patterns, Tatum and Stenyard both moved to their current homes in West Oakland during World War II, when black Americans from all over the country were migrating to the East Bay for jobs in the booming war industries. Stenyard had left an agricultural job in the Central Valley in 1946 to join her husband in Oakland, taking a job as a nurse at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital; Tatum, a 43-year veteran of the Naval Supply Center, Oakland, had been living on his pension for over a decade by the time his house was condemned.

As was typical for residents affected by BART construction, they were forced back into the rental market; neither Stenyard nor Tatum were offered market-rate compensation for the loss of their homes.

This piece from *The Flatlands* offers another example of how the newspaper used the power of photojournalism (here the work of Lynn Phipps) to capture the lives threatened by BART's use of eminent domain.



LIKE OTHER OAKLAND RESIDENTS, MR. TATUM KNOWS BART IS GOING TO TAKE HIS HOME.



Mrs. Stenyard in her West Oakland home.

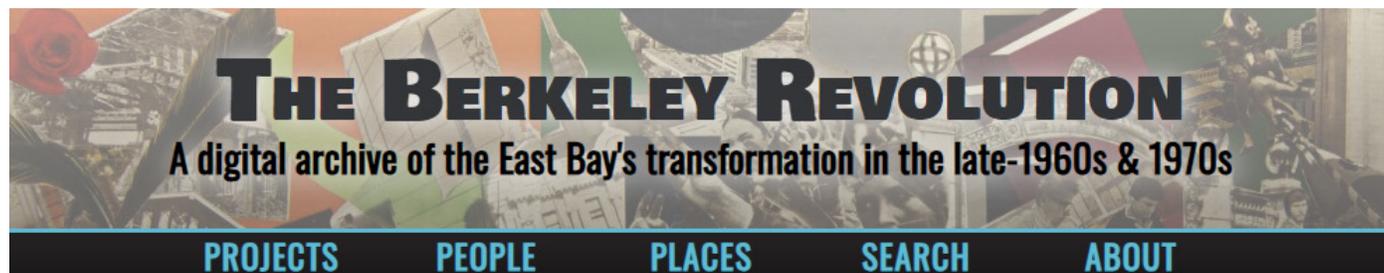
Categories:

The Flatlands' War on Poverty

Tags:

*Barclay Tatum, Bay Area
Rapid Transit (BART), Betty
Stenyard, eviction, Lynn
Phipps, The Flatlands
(Oakland newspaper)*

Berkeley Women's Music Collective



Berkeley Women's Music Collective

WHEN DEBBIE LEMPKE POSTED A flier at the Berkeley Co-op around 1973, inviting women to play music together, she didn't know how thoroughly her flier would change four lives. Although none of the participants realized it at the time, the Berkeley Women's Music Collective held its first meeting the following week.

Members of the Collective, all lesbian feminists, soon began writing songs about the personal experience and shared struggle of finding freedom from patriarchy. With the women's liberation movement in full swing, a passionate audience was ready and waiting.

The music of sisterhood spread its demands for equity across the country, bringing like-minded women together to celebrate at festivals and concerts. Within this newfound community, women experienced acceptance, freedom from societal expectations, and new ways to express gender and sexuality. A novel genre of popular music, made by and for feminists, encouraged women to change the way they lived their life.

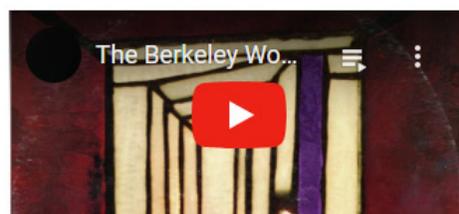
[» MORE »](#)

"Every breath was a challenge. Every day was a challenge. Finding every note was a challenge. Driving every mile was a challenge."

— Suzanne Shanbaum



Suzanne Shanbaum performs "Fury" with other members of the Berkeley Women's Music Collective (1975)



A playlist featuring the Berkeley Women's Music Collective's first, self-titled album (1976)

Click through the catalog on the following pages.

1. The Birth of the Band: The Collective Tells Its Own Story



1500 Women at UCLA Hold Lesbian Conference -4/20/1973-

The 1973 National Lesbian Conference was a consciousness-raising event for three of the BWMC's founders



How the Berkeley Women's Music Collective Came Together -c. 1974-

Three original BWMC members recount the origins of the band



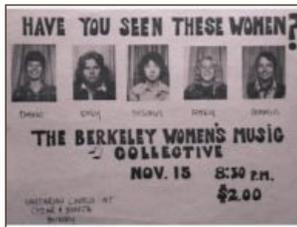
Bay Area Women -04/74-

The BWMC discusses the importance of the women's music community and the shelter from the male-dominated industry it provided



Berkeley Women's Music Collective -08/75-

The band on its relationship with the women's movement -- in its mid-70s moment and in retrospect



Have You Seen These Women? -c. 1976-

A flier for the BWMC suggests how they upended gender roles



Berkeley Women's Music Collective -07/79-

Debbie and Suzanne discuss the band's musicianship and songwriting process.



San Francisco Women's Musicians -02/1981-

The Bay Area women's music community was coalescing, but being a female musician still had its challenges

2. The Collective's Music:
Performances, Recordings,
Sheet Music



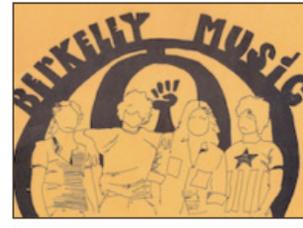
The Berkeley Women's Music Collective (self-titled first album)
-1976-

The BWMC mixed folk, gospel, blues and rock as they powerfully gave voice to lesbian-feminist liberation



"Fury" Performed Live on KQED's "Open Studio"
-c. 1975-

A video of the Collective performing "Fury" on KQED's "Open Studio" program



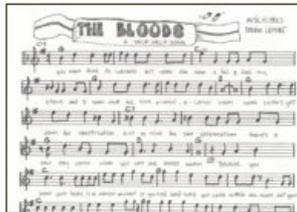
The Berkeley Music Collective Songbook
-1975-

A powerfully illustrated document of DIY feminist-lesbian liberation



Tryin' To Survive (the BWMC's second album)
-1978-

The Collective's broadened their musical palette on their second album



The Bloods
-1975-

Lesbians had "natural rhythm," the BWMC proclaimed in this "self-help" song about menstruation



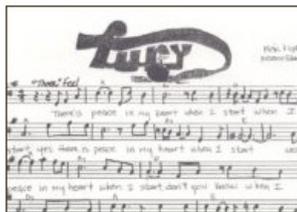
Mercy Me, I'm Lonely Tonight
-1975-

Nancy Vogl explored how the personal was the political on this track from the BWMC's first album



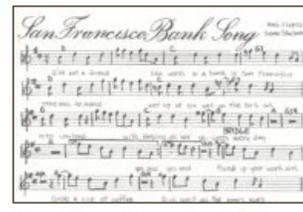
"No Thanks Mister"
-1975-

Nancy Henderson said "no thanks" to the bad "trips" of men she'd known



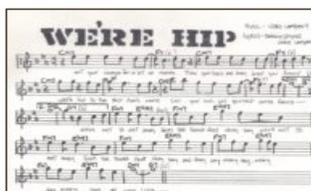
Fury
-1975-

A song about women's built-up rage, and how it led to a tense border stop



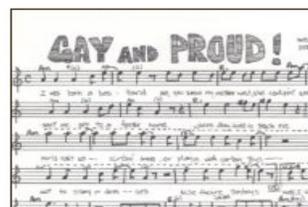
San Francisco Bank Song
-1975-

A portrait, in music, of a bank worker and her aspirations to broaden herself and the world



We're Hip
-1975-

Finding inspiration in incarcerated women, the BWMC were skeptical of "the bossman's game"



Gay and Proud
-1975/1976-

The song that profoundly affected the BWMC's audience — the uplifting but hard-edged "Gay and Proud"

3. The Collective's Audience:
Reviews, Reportage, Reflections



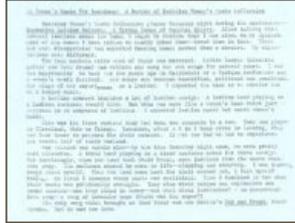
**Redwoods, Lovely
Women, New Culture:
Amazon Music Project
-10/74-**

The Collective lent their music to a politically charged, clothing-optional feminist festival in the Santa Cruz mountains



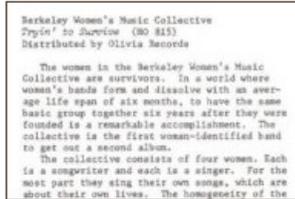
**Record Review
-06/77-**

The band's first album is an "affirmation of the power of women together"



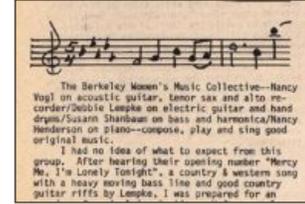
**Is Women's Music for
Lesbians: A Review of
Berkeley Women's Music
Collective
-05/75-**

In "Lesbian Connection," a listener faulted the Collective for playing music for women, not lesbians



**Tryin' To Survive
-07/79-**

The Collective's music unifies women and fuels their struggle for liberation.



**Sound Not Unsound
Concert Review
-05/1975-**

A concert critique reveals the challenges of the DIY nature of the women's music movement.

How the Berkeley Women's Music Collective Came Together



Date: c. 1974

Citation:

Maida Seawoman, "Untitled," 1975, In *Berkeley Music Collective Songbook* (Oakland, The Women's Press Collective), 1.

Interview with Nancy Vogl, conducted by Lily Ramus, edited by Nancy Vogl, April 13 2020.

Interview with Suzanne Shanbaum, conducted by Lily Ramus, edited by Suzanne Shanbaum, April 11 2020.

Interview with Debbie Lempke, conducted by Lily Ramus, April 24 2020.

[View the Full Document](#)

Sample Document Page from "Berkeley Women's Music Collective" Project, with Annotation.

In separate recent interviews, Debbie Lempke, Suzanne Shanbaum, and Nancy Vogl look back on the band's beginnings — how they met up in mid-1970s Berkeley, through a posting on the bulletin board of the Berkeley Co-Op and a significant softball game, and through the larger social dynamics of the Berkeley lesbian community.

Debbie: There was a house where a group of really successful activists, people who were older than me. They were already in the workforce and really smart and could really speak about politics and articulate them. And they took an interest in me and they brought me and Suzanne together.

At some party at their house they brought Suzanne in and me. And then I would sing a song, and then Suzanne

would, and I'd go and then she'd go. Back and forth it was like, Oh my God this woman is great.

Meanwhile I found a house to live in that was really cheap. It was \$75 a month and that was cheap then. There was two other people living there and one of them was Jake, who was the drummer. I think I found Nancy Henderson. I had a softball game; I had made a hit and I landed at first base and I was just talking to her, and she's like "Oh I play piano," and I'm like "Oh, you want to play in a group?"

And there was another house where Nancy (Vogl) was living, and people were like, "Oh yeah, Nancy (Vogl) she's great we've got to get her." And I was like, okay.

And then we had a shift later on, right? For when, Henderson left. 'Cause she wanted to finish her college degree and she couldn't commit to the tour, so we needed somebody. And then I remembered Bonnie Lockhart. I don't know if we'd met, I might have spoken to her, but her group had come and performed at Reed when I was there, The Red Star Singers, and I was really blown away, and she was living down there so she ended up, coming in later.

Suzanne: So I met Debbie Lempke through the people who lived in a collective lesbian house with this guy. And that was the formation of the Berkeley Women's Music Collective, Lempke and I, and then I think she started to play with Nancy Henderson. And so, they invited me over and I played them some of my songs.

Nancy: I moved into a collective dyke house on College and Derby Street in Berkeley. It was the governor's mansion from the eighteen hundreds and had been taken over by a collective of women. There were, I think 13 or 14 of us and only the pantry was available, so I got to move in for \$40 a month. It was maybe eight feet by 15 feet with a closet but it was everything I needed. I had a bed and a dresser. Everybody shared cooking, and it was a really handsome house with a baby grand piano in the sitting room. One day I was practicing in my room and Nancy Henderson heard me and said, "Hey, you play really well. We're starting a band."

A few days later was the first meeting of the Berkeley Women's Music Collective. Debbie had moved down from Oregon and put up a posting at the food co-op, so that next Wednesday we all met and just started playing music once a week. We were the only ones who showed up regularly, so we just formed a band.

The above photo appears on the first page of the Berkeley Music Collective Songbook. The photo was taken circa 1975 and shows, from left to right, Susann (now Suzanne) Shanbaum, Nancy Vogl, Nancy Henderson, and Debbie Lempke.

The Black Panthers' Education Revolution



The Black Panthers' Education Revolution

IN SCHOOLS, NEWSPAPERS, AND popular culture, the Black Panthers are often presented as armed Black radicals.

Images of the 65 community survival programs that the Panthers created in Oakland—among them a free clinic, vibrant community learning center, and busing for seniors program—are less prevalent. One of the most impactful and long-lasting of these programs was the Oakland Community School (OCS), an elementary school in the Fruitvale neighborhood of East Oakland.

At the OCS, students were nourished in body and mind. They were provided with three meals a day, encouraged by teachers who were fellow people of color, and taught to become critical thinkers who were engaged with their community and its history.

The materials we have gathered provide valuable insight into the evolution of the Panthers' schools, from the Children's House into the Intercommunal Youth Institute and later into the Oakland Community School.

» MORE »

"If we want to change things the best way to begin is to educate our children."

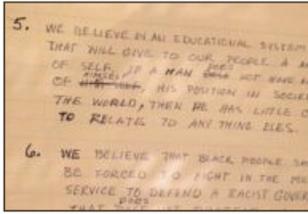
— Ericka Huggins



Radical joy: scenes from the Oakland Community School (photographs by Bob Fitch)

Click through the catalog on the following pages.

← 1. *The Black Panther Party and Education: Overviews and Interviews* →



Original Draft of Black Panther Party's 10 Point Program (excerpt)
-10/15/1966-

From the beginning, the Panthers believed in the power of education to liberate



Rebop program on the OCS, with Huey Newton interviewed by a student
-1978-

Rare footage of OCS shows youth empowerment and joy, spiritual nourishment and critical thinking



An Oral History With Ericka Huggins
-2007-

Ericka Huggins's rich oral history spans the timelines of this project and describes the culture, curriculum, and structure of OCS.



Radical Commitments: The Revolutionary Vow of Ericka Huggins
-3/2020-

A wide-ranging and deep interview — on gender roles, coalition politics, and high points of the OCS — with the Black Panther leader at the center of the OCS story



Interview with Rodney Gillead
-4/1/2020-

An OCS teacher and longtime educator reflects on what made the school so unique



Interview with Mary Williams
-04/09/2020-

Mary Williams, one of the first students at Panther-sponsored schools, recalls the power of her education there

2. The Children's House and the Intercommunal Youth Institute: "Youth Make the Revolution"



Youth Make the Revolution
-1969-
The Children's House sought liberation through revolutionary education



The Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute
-1971-
Students at the IYI were encouraged to criticize the school and help plan curriculum



Huey P. Newton Intercommunal Youth Institute
-03/27/1971-
An eight-page newspaper spread on the IYI, with the message "our hope is placed on you"



A Talk With the Students of the Huey P. Newton Intercommunal Youth Institute
-05/08/71-
Students of the newly founded IYI talk Panther ideology and history.



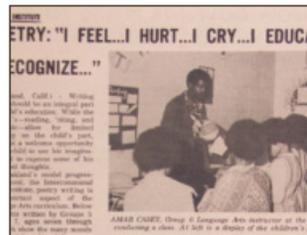
Community Learning Center
-c. 1973-
The Community Learning Center aimed to be a model for communal education



Bobby Seale Dedicates New Youth Institute and Son of Man Temple to Community
-10/27/73-
Community members gather to celebrate the IYI's new space



Political Education Class Studies African Liberation Movement
-06/01/74-
Dr. Bill Moore, History of Consciousness expert, joins the IYI faculty



Poetry: "I feel...I hurt...I cry...I educate... I recognize..."
-06/15/74-
Poems by IYI students showcase creativity and passion.



New Curriculum Coordinator at Intercommunal Youth Institute
-09/14/74-
Dr. Bill Moore, History of Consciousness expert, joins the IYI faculty

3. Education as a Tool for Liberation at the Oakland Community School: "I Want to Help My People Be Free"



Photos from Oakland Community School, Set 1
-6/24/74-

From a noted Movement photographer, images of teachers and students playing games outside together



Photos from Oakland Community School, Set 2
-6/1974-

From a noted Movement photographer, resonant images of music and joy at OCS



Photos from Oakland Community School, Set 3
-6/1974-

From a noted Movement photographer, indelible images of playing together and cooking together at OCS



Oakland Community School Begins Fifth Year
-9/22/1975-

An in-depth look at the OCS's curriculum and culture



"I Want to Help My People Be Free"
-6/19/1976-

1976 OCS graduates reflect on the past and future, and highlight the importance of Black liberation



Oakland Community School Expands Services to Youth
-9/18/1976-

The OCS expands and grows more popular



"We want to set examples for the little children"
-6/18/1977-

1977 OCS graduates share fond memories of school and hopes for the future



200 Demonstrators Chant 'Free Huey'
-6/30/1977-

Family and students of OCS, along with others, protest Newton's detainment in Canada on his way back from Cuba.



Community Pressure Wins Funding for Chicano School
-2/19/1979-

Solidarity--and the coalition building that came with it -- were integral to the OCS's philosophy

Rebop program on the OCS, with Huey Newton interviewed by a student



Date: 1978

Citation:

Oakland Community School segment, *Rebop* (WGBH, Boston), 1978.

Sample Document Page from “The Black Panthers’ Education Revolution” Project, with Annotation.

In 1978, the Boston-based public television show *Rebop* (hosted by Levar Burton) devoted its program to the Oakland Community School. In the first of its two segments on the OCS, Kellita Smith, an OCS student, conducted a revealing interview with Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton.

Newton offered that when he was growing up in the Oakland Public School system, he was taught mostly “about white people... the school wasn’t teaching us anything about ourselves.” This statement is in close alignment with the fifth point of the BPP’s 10 Point Program, which begins: “We believe in an educational system that will give our people a knowledge of self.” He also says that when he was in school, his questions were discouraged, whereas at OCS, students are encouraged to constantly ask questions and never accept what they hear as the full truth.



Kellita discusses the Justice Board, a student committee that delivers “methods of correction” to students that break the rules. In one classroom, young children learn about Native American history, white settler colonialism in the U.S., and the Revolutionary War. Kellita says that students are served three meals a day (often by teachers) because parents may not have enough food at home to provide for everyone in the family.

In the last part of this segment, Newton says that he believes the children are the future, and encourages Kellita to always continue to ask questions.

A second segment focuses on an older student, Fred Morehead, and his involvement with the OCS as both a student and a teacher. It captures Fred playing with others on a field trip to the Oakland redwoods, learning to read, speaking with his father (who is not a member of the Black Panther Party) at the dinner table, teaching Tae Kwan Do, and performing his volunteer work with the Safe Transportation Program, which shuttles seniors to medical appointment and facilitates their daily life.



The Asian Community Library



The Asian Community Library

IN OAKLAND'S CHINATOWN RESIDES a busy, buzzing community center—an often unquiet space that is, in fact, a historic Asian library. The Asian Community Library, later renamed the Asian Branch of the Oakland Public Library, was the first Pan-Asian public library in the United States.

It emerged out of a moment of **activism on the part of radical librarians**, who called for the reimagination of the role of the library and sought to liberate the library in the spirit of the other movements—for Third World liberation, women's liberation, and gay liberation—that had inspired them.

Judy Yung, the Asian Community Library's first head librarian, spearheaded its development and shaped it in tune with the Asian-American movement of the 1970s. From 1975 to 1981, she attracted a culturally fluent and multilingual staff, built up collections, and organized programs to serve a local demographic—Oakland's Pan-Asian community—that had been critically under-served and rendered invisible.

» [MORE](#) »

"The library now has an added responsibility to the disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, illiterate and semiliterate, the institutionalized, and the aged."

— Judy Yung



Judy Yung, the librarian of the Asian Community Library at its founding, in 1976

Click through the catalog on the following pages.

← 1. Reimagining the Library:
Judy Yung and the Birth of the
Asian Community Library →



**Libraries to the People
-1972-**

Radical librarians argued that libraries needed to serve the liberation movements of their moment



**Serving Chinatown—Judy
Yung
-05/73-**

Judy Yung on her upbringing, her frustrations with conventional library science, and her vision for future libraries



**Judy Yung Brings a
Wealth of Experience
(English)
-2/11/76-**

East/West profiled its former editor Judy Yung as she launched the new Asian Community Library



**Judy Yung and the Asian
Community Library (in
Chinese)
-2/18/76-**

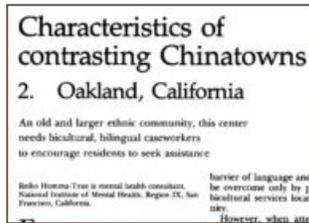
East/West publicized the opening of the Asian Community Library to its Chinese-speaking readers



**Oakland Public Library
Gets Woman Director
-06/76-**

After a campaign for female representation in the Oakland Public Library, Leila White was appointed as its new director

2. Developing the Collection, Outreach, and Programs



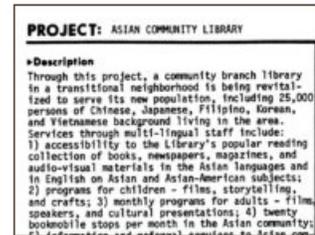
Characteristics of Contrasting Chinatowns -1976-

A portrait of Oakland's Chinatown community, by a mental health worker looking to improve outreach



Asian American Poetry Reading -10/28/1976-

SF's Kearny Street Workshop brought Asian-American poetry to the Asian Community Library



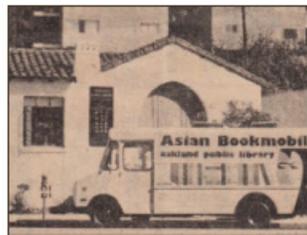
Project: Asian Community Library -1977-

Just a year after its opening, the Asian Community Library was already a model



Asian Community Library: First in the U.S. -03/1978-

Judy Yung described the ACL's services in its first year of operation and its vision for the future



Asian Community Library Bookmobile -c. 1977-

The ACL used its Bookmobile to serve the larger Asian community in the East Bay

ASIAN BOOKMOBILE SCHEDULE	
WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
11:30 AUCB 1617 University, Berk.) 4:5-12:15 EBNA 1905 Berkeley Way, Berk.) 6-14:5 AMS 477-15th St.) 7:30 PGIB 1307 Harrison)	
	4-1:30 LINCOLN CHILD, OFR (354 E. 10th.)

Asian Bookmobile Schedule -1970s-

The Asian Bookmobile enlarged the reach of the ACL by stopping at nonprofits in Berkeley and Oakland

Oakland Public Library Gets Woman Director

The Month in Review

Oakland PL gets woman director

A woman has been named director of the Oakland (Calif.) PL after a determined campaign by the Bay Area Chapter of Women Library Workers to convince the city manager to observe affirmative action principles, a resolution passed at the 1975 conference of the California LA, and a report on the selection procedure in *WLB* (February, p.443, 445).

Although the city manager has the power of appointment, the March 2nd meeting of the city council was addressed by WLW's Sonja Morris and CLA President Gil McNamee, who adroitly managed to read the entire CLA statement into the city council record. Fay Blake



Sonja Morris urging the Oakland city council to persuade the city manager to appoint a highly qualified woman librarian as director.

(UC/Berkeley st.) had introduced the resolution calling for a nationwide search for a director and adherence to affirmative action guidelines.

Morris added arguments to support appointing a woman to the post, noting that it had been 102 years since a woman had headed the Oakland PL. She added, "As evidenced by an article in the February 1976 issue of *Wilson Library Bulletin* . . . national attention is focused on the selection of Oakland's Director of Library Services."

On April 15th the Oakland city manager announced the appointment of Leila White, who has been with the Oakland PL since 1970. Her

A.B. and M.L.S. degrees are from UC/Berkeley, where she was an instructor, reference librarian, and bibliographer before coming to Oakland. In 1974 White became supervising librarian for the central district, which includes the Latin American Library and the recently opened Asian Community Library.

Dateline: Washington

Ed. Note—The following accounts were written for WLB by W. Dale Nelson, a Washington, D.C., journalist who also holds an M.L.S. degree from the University of Washington.

ALA files Supreme Court brief in Smith case
On behalf of the Freedom to Read Foundation, the American Library Association has asked the Supreme Court to say which prevails when federal and state obscenity standards come into conflict.

The ALA filed an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief April 10th in support of an Iowa man's bid for review of his September 1975 conviction on a federal obscenity charge. Jerry Lee Smith was found guilty on seven counts of distributing obscene material through the mails by a federal court jury. He received an effective sentence of six months and was placed on probation for three years.

Smith appealed his conviction, noting that the Iowa legislature has decriminalized the distribution of allegedly obscene material to adults. The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, however, upheld the initial verdict on Feb. 13, 1976, saying that in a federal prosecution "state policy was not controlling, since the determination was for the jury, not the state."

In asking the Supreme Court to review his case, Smith said New Mexico, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia have passed laws similar to Iowa's. In addition Hawaii has repealed its obscenity law and Alaska regulates only the distribution, exhibition, and sale of "objectionable" comic books.

The ALA and the Iowa LA said in their brief that conflicts similar to that in Iowa are likely, because more states are expected to choose deregulation. The ALA argued that the lower courts allowed the jurors to substitute their

Date: 06/76

Citation:

"Oakland PL gets woman director," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Vol. 50 (1976), 767.

[View the Full Document](#)

The article provides insight into the internal processes of the Oakland Public Library and its shifts to increase diversity in its leadership.

Sample Document Page from "The Asian Community Library" Project, with Annotation.

The article provides insight into the internal processes of the Oakland Public Library and its shifts to increase diversity in its leadership.

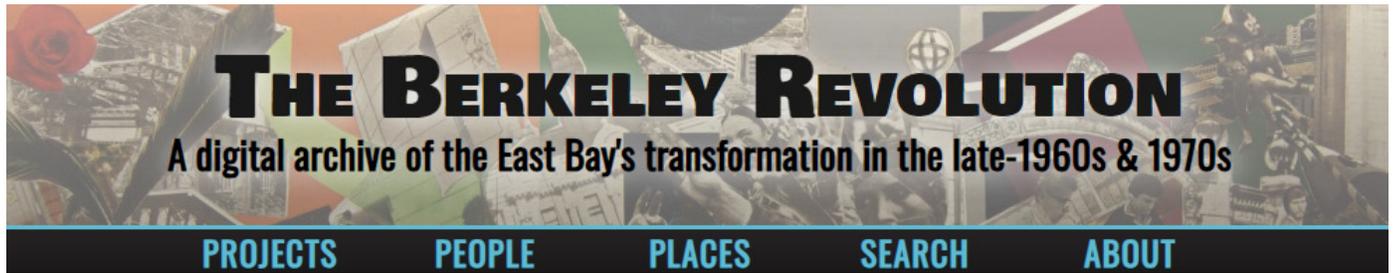
Following the Civil Rights Movement and the executive order for affirmative action by President Kennedy in the 1960s, the Bay Area Chapter of Women Library Workers campaigned for the appointment of a woman director in adherence to affirmative action guidelines. With their push for greater gender diversity, they aimed to shift Oakland's library administration in a progressive direction.

This event follows the momentum of radical librarians that sought to uplift minority narratives and representation in libraries.

Leila White (also known as Lee White) the woman appointed as director, played a significant role in the development of the Asian Community Library, as she supported its growth and funding.

In an interview conducted by the Chinatown Oral History Project, Judy Yung praises Lee White for that support: "Lee White was the city librarian then and she was always so good to work under because she was very pro-Asian branch library and she was always giving us to 200% of her support."

The Integral Urban House



The Integral Urban House

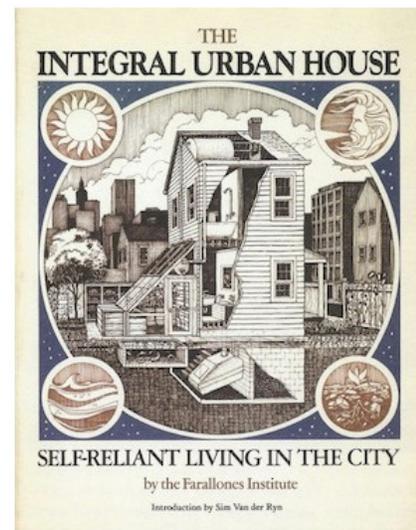
FOUNDED IN BERKELEY IN 1974, the Integral Urban House (IUH) was an experiment in domestic self-reliance and production-centered city living. It addressed increasing American frustration with environmental pollution and industrialized food production. From its composting toilet and solar-powered water heater to its bee hives, rabbit pens, and vegetable gardens, the IUH offered an ecologically sustainable model of “urban homesteading” and an alternative to the middle-class dream home.

For three decades, suburban single-family homes — built on former agricultural lands at the city’s edge — had served as engines of a postwar consumer economy and as symbols of prosperity and comfort.

» MORE »

“Most environmental ‘education’ consists of an afternoon at the zoo or a wildflower walk. Here, environmental education is geared toward getting people to apply sound ecological concepts to their own lives.”

— IUH manager Tom Javits



The Integral Urban House served as a prototype for a revolution in urban-ecological design and living

Click through the catalog on the following pages.

1. An Organic House Grows in Berkeley: The Eco-centered Model Home



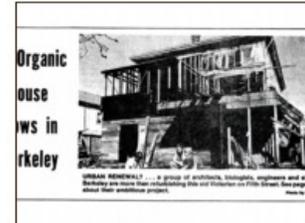
Abstract of Proposal to Build an Ecotectural House
-11/30/1972-

The origins of the IUH — Sim Van der Ryn's proposal for an "ecotectural" house



The Integral Urban House under construction
-c. 1975-

A view of the lush backyard garden and half-finished Integral Urban House



An Organic House Grows in Berkeley
-3/4/1975-

The Daily Cal chronicled, skeptically, the construction of the Integral Urban House



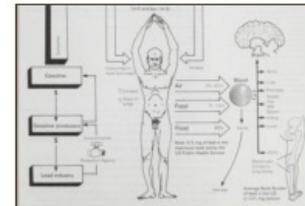
Berkeley's Model Home: Urban Self-Sufficiency
-09/19/1975-

The Berkeley Barb brought the reader on a mini-tour of the IUH's solar collector and fish pond



Back to the City
-3/17/78-

The Berkeley Barb devoted four pages to the new "Back to the City", or urban homesteading, movement — of which the IUH was a perfect exemplar



Beginnings: why an integral urban house?
-c. 1979-

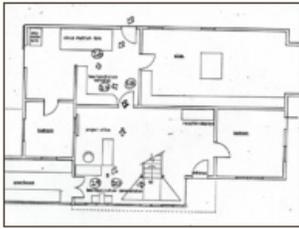
Amidst a polluted and industrialized world, a new form of ecological living emerged



Introduction to The Integral Urban House
-c. 1979-

Sim Van der Ryn's introduction to the instruction manual and guide to the Integral Urban House

← **2. Practical Pedagogy: Do-it-yourself Urban Homesteading** →



**Self-Guided Tour to the Integral Urban House
-c. 1973-**

Helga Olkowski's self-guided tour booklet for the curious urban homesteader



**Public tour in front of the house's entrance
-c. 1975-**

Crowds came from far and wide to learn about the impressive IUH



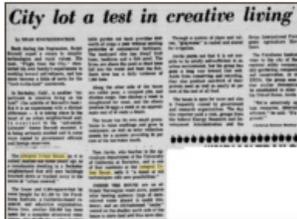
**Public tour at the chicken coops
-c. 1975-**

People of all ages flocked to see the resident chickens and rabbits at the IUH



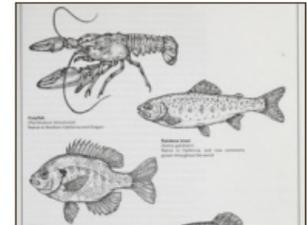
**Urban Homesteading: the Integral Urban House
-11/1976-**

Mother Earth News offered sympathetic and detailed coverage of the IUH



**City Lot a Test in Creative Living
-12/08/1977-**

A local Illinois paper reported on the Integral Urban House, 2,000 miles away from Berkeley



**Some Other Animals for Urban Backyards
-c. 1979-**

A book excerpt teaches the burgeoning homesteader how to raise bees and fish in their backyard

← 3. *The Trojan House: What Laid Beyond the Victorian* →



Color photos of the Integral Urban House, December 1973
-12/1973-

Beautiful photos paint a vivid picture of the IUH's quaint appearance



The shop in the former garage
-c. 1975-

A look inside the shop, full of industrial machinery and power tools



People around a table, watching a wood-carving demonstration
-c. 1975-

Men and women dressed in everyday clothes, ready to learn new skills



An Exploration of the Integral Urban House
-c. 1975-1980-

Video from a tour of the Integral Urban House in its heyday



The Ultimate City Garden
-1978-

The Time-Life Gardening Yearbook covered daily life at the IUH in glowing color

Introduction to The Integral Urban House

Date: c. 1979

Citation:

Sim Van der Ryn,
"Introduction," from Helga
Olkowski, Bill Olkowski, Tom
Javits, and the Farallones
Institute, *The Integral Urban
House: Self-Reliant Living in
the City* (San Francisco: Sierra
Books, 1979), viii - x.

[View the Full Document](#)

In late 1972 a group of architects, engineers, and biologists in the San Francisco Bay Area began meeting with the aim of joining our professional skills to create dwellings that would translate into physical form the central principles of the emerging environmental movement. Each of us—often feeling isolated by the narrow perspective of our specialties—was looking for ways to extend and integrate ideas and practice, to teach others, and continue his or her own learning. We saw the potential of integrating principles of biology, food and energy production, and the design of living space and community to create places where one might function without total dependence on an “artificial,” centralized technology; at the same time, we saw the need for a center where people could combine theoretical and philosophical learning with practical experience in our areas of expertise: agriculture, architecture, building, engineering, biology and natural systems. Our immediate goal became the combination of all of our skills toward the design and construction of a place that would test experimental, ecologically stable and resource-conserving living systems.

Many people at that time seemed to be giving up on cities, attempting to reconnect to the earth by moving to rural areas. I was one of these. In our group Bill and Helga Olkowski argued persuasively for another approach. “Cities are where people are,” they said. “Everyone can’t move to the country or there won’t be a country any more, and besides, if people move to the country with their urban consciousness, the country will be transformed into the city just as happened with the suburbs. The challenge is to make cities ecologically stable and healthy places to live.”

Sample Document Page from “The Integral Urban House” Project, with Annotation.

When reflecting upon the experience of constructing and running the Integral Urban House, architect Sim Van der Ryn recalls the constant conflicts between members. Each person was an expert in their respective fields, so collaboration often caused disagreements. Van der Ryn describes an altercation between house manager Tom Javits and builder Jim Campe over how the concrete floor would be laid down:

Jim wanted to bring a concrete truck down the driveway for the pour and Tom vowed to lay his body in front of the wheels before he would allow the precious soil to be compressed by the giant truck. So we wheelbarrowed in many yards by hand.

Other conflicts, such as whether to cut down a tree for more sunlight to reach the solar collector, or how big the wooden stove should be, were key questions the house builders asked themselves constantly. In a way, this was an early prototype of a truly interdisciplinary project.

Again, this house was a new, unprecedented project in self-reliant living. Nothing had ever been accomplished at this scale like this. It was as much a learning experience for the ecologists as it was for the neighbors next door.

Like any other project, this was not without its conflicts. Although Sim Van der Ryn wrote the introduction and contributed a lot of theory to this book, it was a still a collaborative effort by multiple people. Helga and Bill Olkowski wrote the bulk of the chapters on food-growing, while Tom Javits wrote about the water conservation

Figure 1-4 Habitat & Life Support System of an Integral Urban House

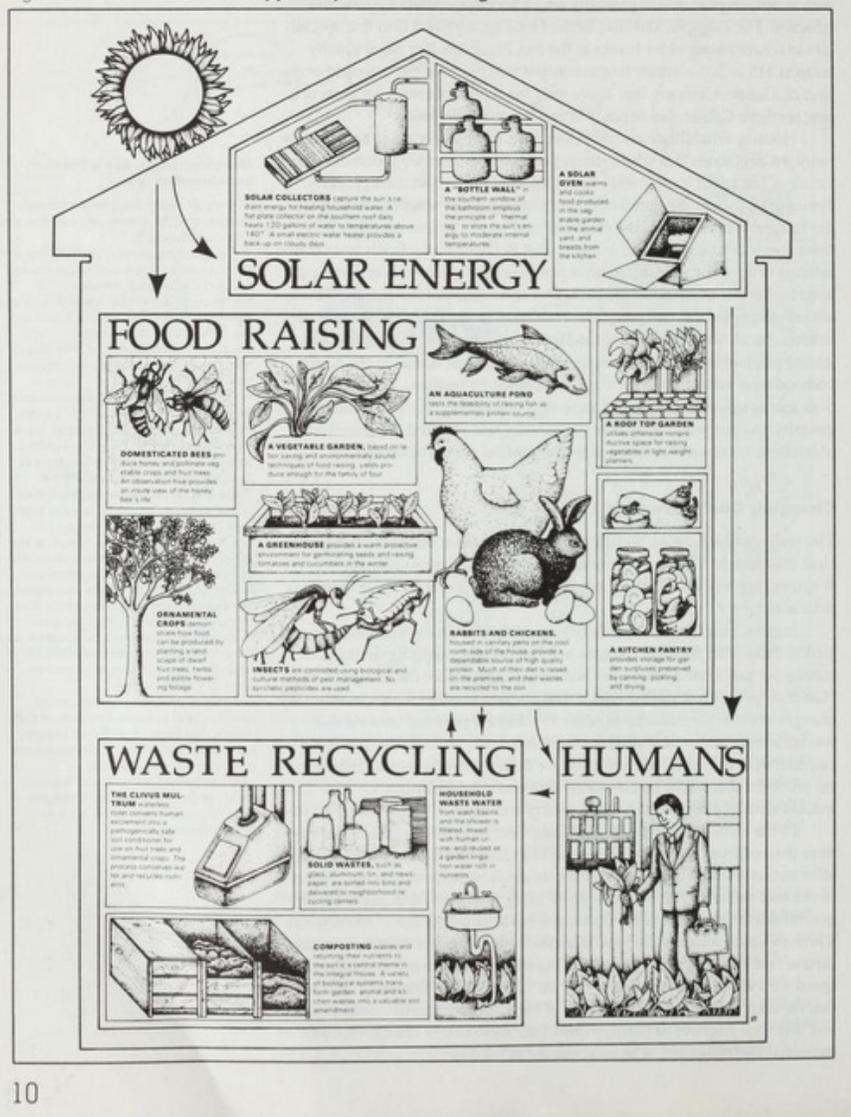


Illustration courtesy of Andie Thrans

systems and raising chickens and rabbits. When the book was first published in 1979, it had erroneously labelled Van der Ryn as the author of the entire book, which was not the case. After some consultation with the publisher, subsequent editions of the book gave more credit to the Olkowskis as the primary authors, and Tom Javits as a co-author.

This illustration of the "Life Support System of an Integral Urban House" shows the various systems working together in the IUH. It uses the structure of the house to create an outline of how they interact with one another. The sun is depicted outside the house, but its importance is highlighted by arrows showing the collection of solar energy for heating and growing food. At the bottom of the diagram is the "Humans" box, with a man in a business suit and briefcase harvesting lettuce from an urban garden. Although this was not what the residents of the Integral Urban House wore, it represents the integration of these "Whole Systems Design" ideas into the daily lifestyles of people. In this way, it also appeals to more people; normalizing urban gardening meant anyone could participate and strive towards these healthier ways of living.

The Countercultural Kitchen



The Countercultural Kitchen



"It's easy to fall into despair, overwhelmed at the picture of Yankee know-how run amok, chomping up mountains and rivers to produce Barbie Dolls and Screaming Yellow Zonkers. But before you crumple up in a heap, notice the critical link in this awesome chain of industrialism. The reason for overconsumption is overconsumers."

— Carol Flinders, *Laurel's Kitchen* (1976)

Click through the catalog on the following page.

Living through a pandemic has turned many lives upside-down. Some people are deemed essential employees and continue to work under stressful circumstances, while others are out of a job and confined to their homes. News of food shortages and purchase limits has caused many to consider alternative modes of acquiring food.

As self-isolation became the norm, I began to notice an interesting trend: Given the topsy-turvy, confusing, and uncertain state of the world, many people turned to making bread and planting gardens both as a source of food and a distraction. This return to the earth, return to the kitchen, and return to the basics of food preparation reminded me of the introduction of the 1970s cookbook, *Laurel's Kitchen*. Carol Flinders, the author of the introduction, describes how her disillusionment with society and mainstream food sources inspired her to find the joy and release of natural foods and cooking. I felt that this paralleled the sudden increase in people making bread; when things are not going to plan, we return to food as a comfort.

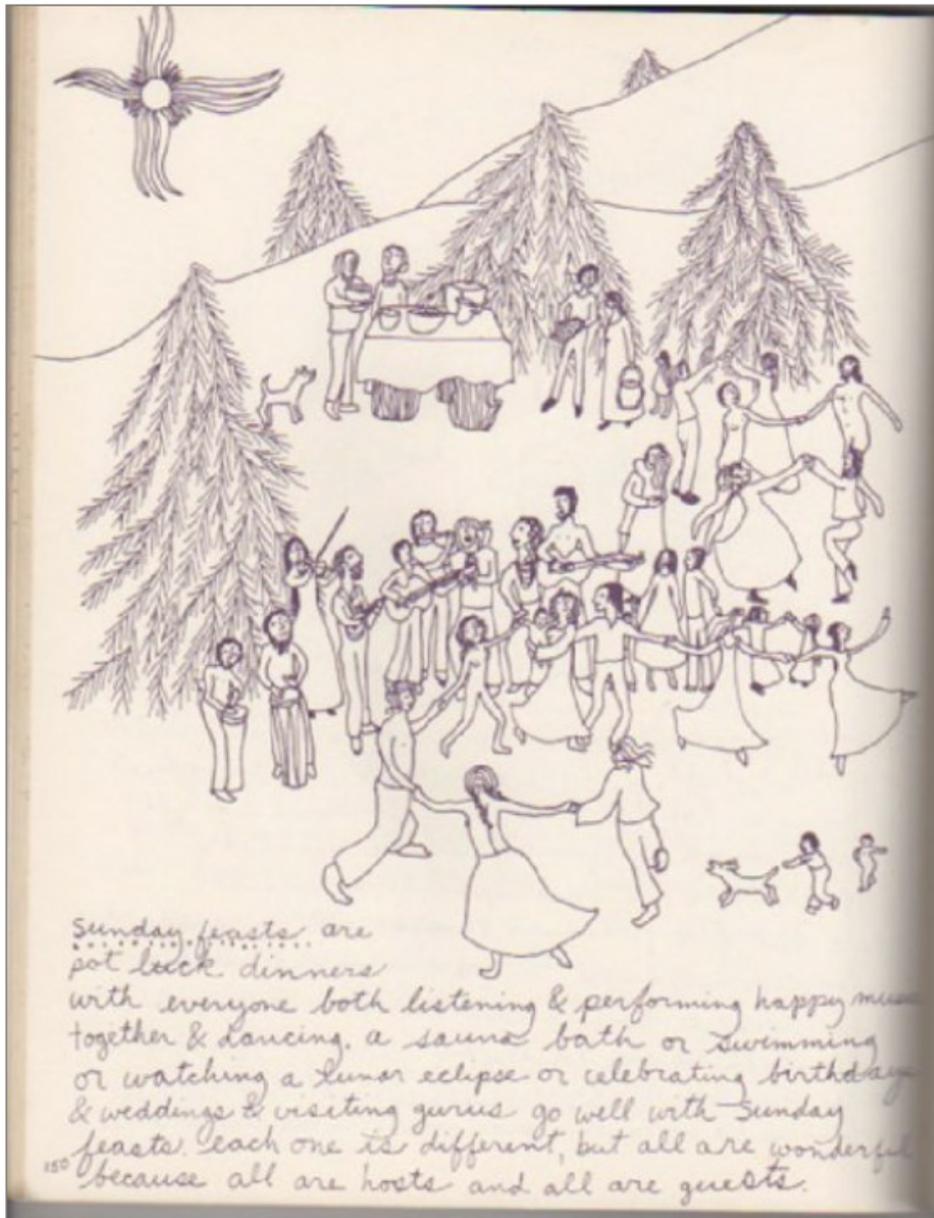
This is what inspired me to explore the countercultural kitchen. What did it look like to cook and eat outside of the mainstream? How did different people embrace the ideals of the countercultural kitchen? What legacies did the countercultural food movement leave? These are all questions I explored when creating this video as a way to find where the joy of kneading bread and growing carrots comes from and why.

— Emily Lempko, May 2020

Emily Lempko (Cal '20) is a recent graduate with a Bachelor's degree in History and a certificate in Global Urban Humanities.



Living on the Earth



Date: 3/1/1971

Citation:

Alicia Bay Laurel, *Living on the Earth* (Random House, 1971).

Alicia Bay Laurel, *Being of the Sun* (Harper & Row 1973).

Images reproduced by courtesy of Alicia Bay Laurel.

Additional Notes:

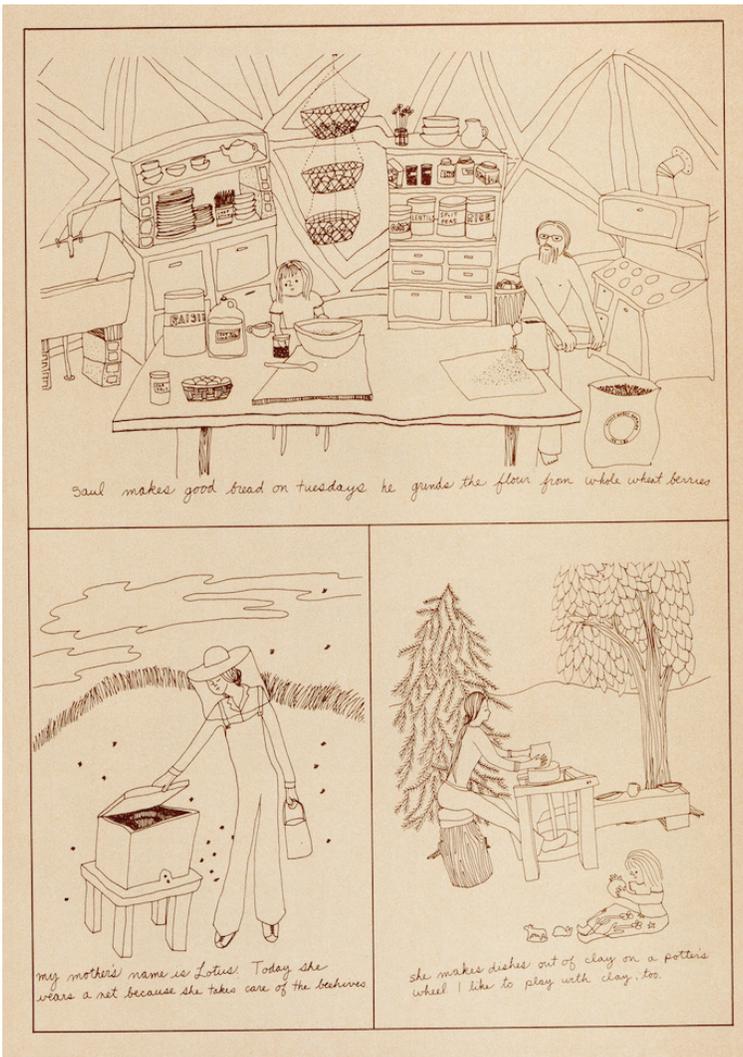
Click on the link below for four images from *Living on the Earth* and one from *Being of the Sun*.

[View the Full Document](#)

Sample Document Page from “The Countercultural Kitchen” Project, with Annotation.

Just as the counterculture food movement varied from person to person and kitchen to kitchen, the presumed role of women within the movement also varied, depending on the source. In the popular vegetarian cookbook Laurel’s Kitchen, for instance, women were asked to be the central figures of the movement since they were the traditional “keepers of the keys” to the household. For others, however, the movement was less focused on the “who”, and more focused on the “how”. This is where Alicia Bay Laurel and her manual *Living on the Earth* come in.

Bay Laurel’s *Living on the Earth*, a manual for successful communal living, is much more than a traditional cookbook. It contains, in addition to recipes, directions for building stoves and keeping food cold without a refrigerator, as well as many other tips on how to become self-sustaining. Many of the images that accompany these how-to guides associate feminine women with traditionally masculine work, breaking down the stereotype



that women belong only to the cooking process; instead, Bay Laurel stresses that they are actors in the whole process.

Returning to this image, we can see that women are not Bay Laurel's main focus. Here, the husband is the one in the kitchen preparing food, a traditionally feminine role, while the wife is outside doing traditionally masculine work. This image reminds readers that Bay Laurel's focus for the counterculture food movement is the idea that the work must be shared, and there is no one person that is better or worse equipped to do the work. Rather than focusing on the "who" of the process, Bay Laurel focuses on how the work will get done, and how to do it efficiently.

STUDENT REFLECTION

Student Wesley Tam reflects on what they valued most about their experience putting together their project.

I really enjoyed the research and organizational aspects of the project in particular. Putting together a digital project that continued a legacy of other Berkeley Revolution posts was super engaging and helped me feel as though I had a greater stake in the work I was doing. I didn't have too much exposure to archival work prior to this project, so getting that experience was very helpful too.

It really gave me a sense of the tangible, mundane reality behind it all. I always had an appreciation for the 60s and 70s, but never really got a good sense of it beyond clips from movies or music videos, which were never representative of real/everyday life. It also helped that our work was hyper-local. I got to visit the site where the original Integral Urban House was and stood on the sidewalk outside, knowing that this site was where history was being made many years ago. I was trained as a geographer and urban historian, so space and place have always been really important to me. Seeing the history in front of you and learning about the community you're in is something I've grown to really appreciate.

FACULTY REFLECTION

“FOR THE LOVE OF PEOPLE” BERKELEY’S RAINBOW SIGN AND THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

by Scott Saul and GUH student Tessa Rissacher.

Current Research in Digital history,
Volume: 2 (2019) August 23

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Abstract:

With its all-female leadership and its balance of black nationalism, experimental art, and the politics of respectability, the Berkeley cultural center Rainbow Sign suggests some of the hidden complexities of the Black Arts Movement as it translated itself into the 1970s. Reflecting on their digital curation of the Rainbow Sign archive, the authors suggest that, while a computation-driven strain of digital history has broken much new methodological ground, another strain of digital history-oriented to a larger public and interested in dramatizing the complexities of primary sources through the affordances of digital media-can also yield fresh arguments through the pressure it puts on primary sources to speak to one another. We suggest that the work of digital curation is especially suited for dramatizing the often invisible curatorial work performed by black women such as Mary Ann Pollar, the founder of Rainbow Sign.

1. Hidden Figures: Mary Ann Pollar and the Black Female Leadership of Rainbow Sign

On the weekend of August 21, 1971, on a street that long had served as a dividing line between white and black Berkeley, a formerly dilapidated mortuary was reborn as Rainbow Sign, a black cultural center that, tellingly perhaps, has largely disappeared from histories of the Black Arts Movement.¹



Figure 1. Photographs from the Rainbow Sign archive. (Clockwise) A Rainbow Sign dance class, led by Halifu Osumare, in 1973; James Baldwin with Mary Ann Pollar at the center in May 1976; artist Herman Kofi Bailey shaking Mary Ann Pollar’s hand at Rainbow Sign’s first anniversary in September 1972, beneath his portrait of prisoner George Jackson; Shirley Chisholm at a Rainbow Sign campaign stop in October 1971. Courtesy of Odette Pollar.

Brainstormed into existence by music promoter Mary Ann Pollar, with help from a group of black female professionals, Rainbow Sign sought simultaneously to

“showcase the best there is of the Black experience” and to “set a Black table at which everyone is welcome to eat.”² As art gallery, performance venue, lecture hall, rentable community meeting space, soul food restaurant and private membership club, Rainbow Sign projected a broad ethic of intercultural care—one which made the richness of black culture available for all committed to the struggle without compromising the centrality of the black community and its needs.

In its five-plus years of existence, Rainbow Sign often featured luminaries such as Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Catlett, Odetta, Nina Simone, and James Baldwin; equally, it nurtured emerging artists such as Terry McMillan, Ntozake Shange, and Betye Saar (whose *Liberation of Aunt Jemima*—an artwork that Angela Davis has named as the origin point of the modern black women’s movement—was created for an exhibition there).³ All the while, it hosted a wide range of political figures—from African dignitaries to African-American leaders such as presidential candidate Shirley Chisholm; Warren Widener, Berkeley’s first black mayor; and Black Panther Huey Newton.⁴ The openness of Rainbow Sign’s programming meant that, at different moments, it took on different coloration. At times it looked like a social club for the emerging black middle class of the East Bay, as it sought to realize the 1970s form of the black clubwomen’s motto of “lifting as we climb.”⁵ At others, it served as a hospitable staging ground for the more transformative visions articulated by radical artists like Jayne Cortez, Bob Kaufman, Catlett, and Simone.

Despite the resurgence of historical work on black politics and art in the 1970s Bay Area, Rainbow Sign has yet to receive much critical attention.⁶ Whether because of its location (in Berkeley rather than Oakland), or because of its difficult-to-pin-down politics, or because of its multifaceted blend of politics and culture, it falls outside the scope of pioneering works on East Bay black politics in the 1970s such as Robert Self’s *American Babylon* and Donna Murch’s *Living for the City*.⁷ Meanwhile, the broader history of the Black Arts Movement has largely been told via figures who fit a particular profile: young, male, and militantly identified with the black working class—figures who speak to and for, as the language of the Black Panther Party would have it, the “brothers on the block.”⁸ Yet, as historians such as Brittney Cooper, Ashley Farmer and others have suggested, this period was also deeply enriched by the work of black women, who provided their own understanding of what the project of political and cultural liberation entailed.⁹

Rainbow Sign opens onto another front of black women’s activism in the age of Black Power—a front led by professionally successful black women, of

a slightly older generation, who sought at once to elevate black culture, transform American politics, and provide mentorship to younger artists so that, rather than scuffling forever, they might build a career of art-making.¹⁰ In the Rainbow Sign, older strains of respectability politics were synthesized with an embrace of grassroots Black Nationalist organizing and Afrocentric aesthetics. We might see this fusion in the aesthetic of Rainbow Sign’s promotional materials: for the club’s opening, guests were “soulfully invited” to the event by an image of a dapper black man in turn-of-the-century coat, tie, and high collar. The club’s motto was “for the love of people”—not “for the love of the people” (which might contrast “the people” with “the elites,” in the manner that the Black Panther Party elevated “the lumpen”), and not “for the love of black people” (which would have underlined the center’s orientation toward the black community). With “for the love of people,” Rainbow Sign intimated that its founding principle was an all-accepting ethos of care and love.¹¹



Figure 2. “Invitation to the Opening of Rainbow Sign,” Aug. 1971. Courtesy of Odetta Pollar.

This ethos led Mary Ann Pollar to embrace the role of curator: Pollar was at once central to everything that transpired at her center and also a hidden structuring presence, orchestrating a community without seeming to wield the conductor’s baton. This was hidden work, performed by a now-hidden figure. Yet it’s also true that Pollar, with impressive self-awareness, gave an account of what she imagined that such curation could achieve. In Rainbow Sign’s “Background and Philosophy,” she meditated on how the design of the center could lead the black community to become “involved and

enriched,” describing how its artist showcases would set in motion a virtuous cycle:

By providing this “showcase” we would fill several needs in this community. (1) The need of artists to show their works or talents and, most importantly, to do so outside the usual commercial setting...(2) We fill the need of a controlled situation wherein the promising artist could interact with the professional on a one to one basis. Third, and to us most important, we would have a place where young children could come and be influenced by people they regard as heroes.¹²

Pollar envisioned a neat multi-generational model of art in the black community—one that would bind children to their artist-heroes, the “promising artist” to the established “professional,” and all artists to an audience that would come together “outside the usual,” and often white- dominated, “commercial setting.” Rainbow Sign put that model into practice with aplomb over its five-year run, helping to launch the careers of an impressive number of figures while consolidating the careers of many others.

Recently, literary historian Margo Natalie Crawford has powerfully suggested that the “second wave” of the Black Arts Movement in the 1970s opened up the categories of black art-making in a manner that in our current moment feels particularly prophetic. Anything but hamstrung by a narrow sense of racial identity, BAM artists troubled blackness without worrying about the loss of blackness; celebrated and investigated what it felt like to “be” black as well as “become” black; and experimented with techniques of mixed-media, abstraction, and parody that tie them to contemporary writers ranging from Claudia Rankine and Harryette Mullen to Mat Johnson and Terrance Hayes. The work produced through Rainbow Sign—the artworks hung on its walls, and the music, dance and drama that unfolded on its stage—resonates strongly with Crawford’s characterization of the Black Arts Movement’s second wave. It brought together pride and irony, open-ended exploration and pointed critique. Meanwhile the social history of Rainbow Sign suggests the organizational energy and the curatorial spirit of care that rested at the foundation of this second wave, at least in the Bay Area and perhaps elsewhere. As more cultural historians come to appreciate the “long history of the Black Arts movement,” it is crucial that we acknowledge the women who birthed new organizational forms and helped give the Black Arts Movement its new surge of life in the 1970s.¹³

II. Beyond Figures: Digital Curation and the Promise of Non-Computational Methods within Digital History

If we have gauged our own efforts appropriately, the first section of this essay should be legible as history, in that it presents an argument about Rainbow Sign using the methods—narrative, citation of evidence, references to the relevant historiography—that are conventional in the profession. Less conventional, however, was the method by which we arrived at this argument: a blend of old-fashioned archival digging and of curation techniques tied to the affordances of digital media. If, as Cameron Blevins has proposed, digital history “has over-promised and under-delivered” in the realm of argument-driven scholarship because of its “love affair with methodology,” we would suggest that the problem lies, in part, with how we have tended to define the methodological tools specific to digital history.¹⁴

“We are infatuated with the power of digital tools and techniques to do things that humans cannot, such as dynamically mapping thousands of geo-historical data points,” Blevins continues. What is lost, we wonder, when digital history is largely defined through data-driven methods of computational analysis, mapping, and visualization? Our experience suggests that digital history would be wise to consider how other methods—less computation-driven but tied to digital media—can lay the foundation for fresh historical arguments. In our case, the method was the act of building a well-annotated, highly structured multimedia exhibition around a set of some fifty-plus primary sources, selected from many more.

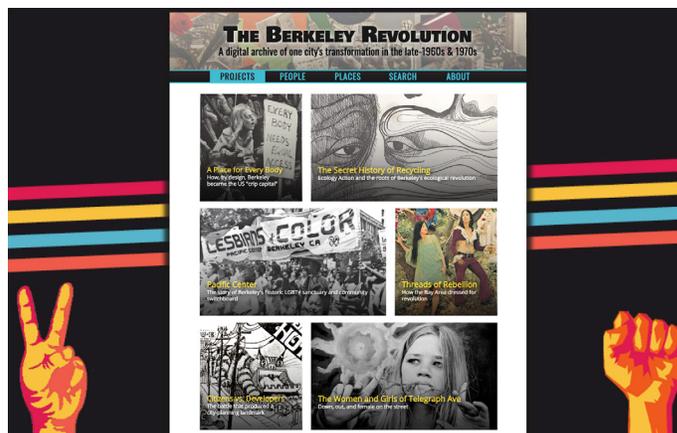


Figure 3. Homepage of The Berkeley Revolution, featuring (visibly) six of the eleven projects generated by twenty students across two UC Berkeley American Studies undergraduate seminars.

THE BERKELEY REVOLUTION

A digital archive of one city's transformation in the late-1960s & 1970s

PROJECTS
PEOPLE
PLACES
SEARCH
ABOUT

The Rainbow Sign

THE RAINBOW SIGN, A BERKELEY BLACK CULTURAL center active between 1971 and 1978, was capacious in every sense of the word. On a typical visit, one might take in the latest sculptures by radical expatriate artist [Elizabeth Catlett](#), run into [Maya Angelou](#) reading on the sofa with a glass of wine, and see a group of folks—from, say, a Jewish organization or Oakland's Black Muslim Bakery—streaming into a meeting in the club's rentable conference room. Over it all would waft the aroma of soul food, served seven days a week from the on-site restaurant. Amid the clink of dishes in the program hall, there would be the clamor of concert preparations—tables and chairs being moved to make way for microphone stands and drum sets. And bustling throughout would be a dynamic woman in a bold-patterned dress—the charismatic [Mary Ann Pollar](#)—smiling, smoking, and orchestrating her vision.

“A Black Table at Which Everyone Is Welcome to Eat”

In values and practice, Rainbow Sign was somewhere between a Black Nationalist headquarters and middle class social club, allowing it to make comrades of a wide spectrum of individuals, including members of the [Black Panther Party](#) and [Warren Widener](#), Berkeley's first black mayor. It wasn't simply a stylish lounge and it expressly was *not* a juke joint.

[» MORE »](#)



KPIX coverage of an Elizabeth Catlett art opening at Rainbow Sign in 1972 ([transcript here](#))



A playlist of music performed at Rainbow Sign

← [1. A New Kind of Black Arts Venue Opens \(1971\)](#) →

Figure 4. Homepage of the Rainbow Sign project, featuring the beginning of a framing essay supplemented by video footage of the center and a Spotify playlist of artists who performed there.

Photographs of Dance Class at Rainbow Sign



Date: 1973

Citation:

Photographs of Dance Class at Rainbow Sign. Photo credit Leonard L. White. 1973. Rainbow Sign Archive. Courtesy of Odette Pollar.

“Four Women at Rainbow Sign in Berkeley,” *Oakland Post*. 13 Oct. 1973. p. 20.

Henry Blackwell, “Interview with Ntozake Shange” *Black American Literature Forum* 13, 134-138.

Additional Notes:
To view all six photos of this dance class, click the link below

[View the Full Document](#)

In addition to classes in Swahili, photography, batik making and grant writing, Rainbow Sign held dance classes. The teacher in these photographs appears to be a young Halifu Osumare, then Just Halifu, a professional dancer, choreographer and educator who frequented Rainbow Sign and often lectured, performed and, as we can see, held classes.

In 1973, Halifu had recently returned to the Bay Area after spending several years in North Africa and Europe, where she choreographed for Swedish television, as well as for her own company in Copenhagen. While on the faculty at San Francisco State, her work “Four Women” premiered at Rainbow Sign in October of 1973. As described in the *Oakland Post*, the show, “integrates the many roles of Black women, covering the Gay Thirties of the Billie Holiday era slavery, the traditional church, Africa and today’s Black woman, as well as articulating the interdependency of these roles...She has assembled for this production four women who display an array of talents — Ota, a singer; Stephanie Jack, an actress; Nashira, a musician; and Ntozake Shange, a poetess.”

Of the four, Ntozake Shange went on to become a very well-known literary figure and prominent black feminist, first garnering acclaim with her 1975 Obie-award winning play, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*. While the “rainbow” here is not a direct reference to the Rainbow Sign, Shange has been quoted talking about the difference of feeling in the California Black Arts movement:

“There’s not a California style, but there are certain feelings and a certain

Figure 5. An example of an annotated document: “Photographs of a Dance Class at Rainbow Sign.”

1. A New Kind of Black Arts Venue Opens (1971)



Membership Brochure
-1973-
A sixteen-page guide to this "multi-dimensional club where beautiful people meet, greet and eat"



A Look Inside the Rainbow Sign
-May 2017-
A glimpse inside the building today



Rainbow Sign Pin
-1970s-
Even in its swag, Rainbow Sign had style



First Anniversary Brochure
-8/9/72-
Rainbow Sign's greatest hits (Maya Angelou, Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln) from its first year



Rainbow Sign Contact Sheet
-1970s-
A glimpse inside the building back in the day



Invitation to the Opening of the Rainbow Sign
-1970s-
An invitation that connected the era of Soul back to the turn-of-the-century



Temporary Membership Card
-September 1971-
Just after Rainbow Sign opened, it used a promotion to get people in the door



Rainbow Sign Floor Plan
-1970s-
The layout

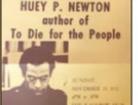


Tuesday Menu
-1974-1975-
Rainbow Sign served food for the body as well as the soul

3. My Dungeon Shook and My Chains Fell Off: Literature and Liberation



See Maya Angelou at Rainbow Sign
-4/20/72-
The singer-dancer-poet-memoirist, promoting her new book "Just Give Me a Cool Glass of Water 'Fore I Die"



Invitation to Huey P. Newton's Book Party
-11/19/1972-
The Rainbow Sign positioned itself somewhere between assimilation and revolution—but it was all black power



Rainbow Sign Presents Alice Walker
-4/09/1973-
Rainbow Sign was, like Alice Walker's real and imagined worlds, populated by uncompromising black women



A Rainbow of Poetry: The Berkeley Marathon
-7/1/1975-
Rainbow Sign sponsored the longest poetry marathon ever, according to the Guinness Book of World Records



Jayne Cortez at the Rainbow Sign: Berkeley '75
-1976-
A tribute, in Yardbird, to Rainbow Sign's "sisterly feeling" and Jayne Cortez's poetic wit and power

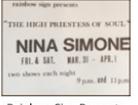


James Baldwin Contact Sheet
-5/3/76-
Mary Ann Pollar and Baldwin appear here as comrades and co-authors of the Rainbow Sign

2. Ain't that Bad, Ain't that Black, Ain't that Fine: Performing Arts



Nina Simone Photographs
-3/31/72-
Two entrancing photos used to publicize her Rainbow Sign appearance



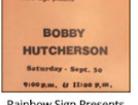
Rainbow Sign Presents Nina Simone
-3/31/72-
"The high priestesses of soul" visits the Rainbow Sign



Nina Simone Contact Sheet
-3/31/72-
Thirty rare images of the incomparable Ms. Simone



Rainbow Sign Presents the John Handy Sextet
-6/4/72-
Handy and friends jazz up the place



Rainbow Sign Presents Bobby Hutcherson
-9/30/72-
Electric vibes at the sign



Invitation to Black Mime Show
-4/20/74-
"a black face, which portrays through corporal silence the spirit of all human experience"



Photograph of Mardi Gras Indian
-c. 1970s-
New Orleans comes to Rainbow Sign



Odetta and Liberian Tribal Dance Company
-4/15/75-
A folk legend sings for the Rainbow cause



Jazz Festival After-Party
-6/22/76-
Music from midnight until breakfast, courtesy of the Rainbow Sign's afterparty

4. Aunt Jemimas and Jazz Masks: A Fresh Vision for Black Art



E.J. Montgomery
-1970s-
Black Art consultant extraordinaire



Invitation to Artist Reception for Rosalind Jeffries
-10/25/71-
From West Africa to the West Coast



Invitation to Artist Reception for Herman Kofi Bailey
-12/5/71-
"The essence of Black folk the world over"



Invitation to Artists Reception for "Black Contributors"
-1/29/72-
Calling black artists near and far



The Liberation of Aunt Jemima
-1972-
The assemblage that, according to Angela Davis, marked the start of the black women's movement



Invitation to Artist's Reception for Dr. Samella Sanders Lewis
-4/2/72-
Prints, films and lectures from a Black arts icon



Invitation to Artists Reception for Africobra Creators
-6/4/1972-
The first exhibition on the West Coast for the "African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists"



Invitation to Artists Reception for "IMP Dolls" Creators
-8/6/1972-
"Framed doll-like figures for the young at heart"



KPIX coverage of Rainbow Sign
-9/9/1972-
Invaluable footage of the club as it celebrated Black Arts Day with an Elizabeth Catlett exhibition

Figure 6. The organizational work of curation: screenshots of the first four of seven clusters of primary sources within the Rainbow Sign project.

51

In order to reconstruct the cultural work of Rainbow Sign's Mary Ann Pollar, we needed in our case to become digital curators, which in turn meant sticking very close to our primary documents, keying into the spirit of Pollar's enterprise, and modeling her own curatorial ethos anew.¹⁵

This digital archive was built through an honors undergraduate seminar in American Studies at UC Berkeley ("The Bay Area in the Seventies"), in which one of us (Scott) was the teacher and another one of us (Tessa) was a student, working with a fellow student (Max Lopez) on Rainbow Sign. The Rainbow Sign project was one of eleven such student-generated (and professor-guided) projects, spanning topics from the ecology movement and the disability rights movement to the desegregation of Berkeley's public schools and the history of a pioneering queer resource center, incubated through two iterations of this small research seminar in 2017 and 2018.

Methodologically, the course asked students, first, to do the conventional work of a history research seminar: find a fresh set of primary sources and, through secondary reading, ask informed questions of those sources.¹⁶ Instead of producing the typical undergraduate research essay—a slimmed-down version of a scholarly article—students proceeded to build curated digital exhibitions, working in stages and from the primary sources outward. The site architecture enforced a certain scrupulousness. First came the annotation of primary sources, with each represented by a well-chosen thumbnail and tag line that encapsulated its point of interest.¹⁷ Next came the sorting of the larger set of primary sources into clusters of usually between three and nine—clusters which themselves needed to be ordered and also given a telegraphic but explanatory title. This clustering operation often proved quite difficult—and forced students to grapple with the fact that primary documents do not speak to one another until the historian puts them in dialogue. Last came the crafting of the framing essay, which built upon the narrative structured by the "clusters." Our experience confirmed Michael Kramer's insight about the productive strictures of the digital: rather than use computation to speed up analysis, the course used its tailored WordPress site to slow down thinking and to force attention toward the level of granular detail and to put pressure on the relation between evidence and argument.¹⁸

While abiding by the protocols of the historian, we have also sought, in our digital curation of the Rainbow Sign archive, to work in the spirit of Mary Ann Pollar. Just as she advertised Rainbow Sign as a "unique multi-dimensional club where beautiful people meet, greet and eat," a center that was "open to all who are

sympathetic to our Black orientation, cognizant of our vast diversity, and dedicated to quality achievement," so we tried to create a convivial digital space that would be sharp in its design and unwavering in its hospitality to all. Alongside our presentation of primary documents, we aimed to offer analysis that was straightforward and precise. Our design aimed not to emphasize our own authority as gatekeepers of knowledge but to illuminate the process and even the delight of building a collective history. By bringing the original documents into the spotlight, we strove to equip site visitors to become curator-historians themselves—to meet us in the archive, as it were. Our format hopes, in the spirit of Rainbow Sign, to kindle curiosity, prompt diverse interpretations, and spur conversation rather than conversion.¹⁹

It is easy to downplay the analytical work of curation since it is the sort of "care work" that is often considered menial and gendered female. Curation, write the authors of *Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* (2009), involves "custodial responsibilities with respect to the remains of the past as well as interpretative, meaning-making responsibilities with respect to the present and future."²⁰ Clearly they mean to praise curation, not bury it, but the phrase "custodial responsibilities" typically attaches to those pushing brooms, not tapping keyboards. In this context, we find the curatorial labor of Mary Ann Pollar particularly inspiring as a model of egalitarian and necessary cultural work. History easily forgets those who set the stage, invite the artists, welcome the public, and literally keep the lights on, but it is useful to recall that without them there is no stage, no public, and no lights. Digital history could well borrow some of the humility associated with the curator's role, while learning better to draw from its considerable power.

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Notes:

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1. The building that Mary Ann Pollar rented to house Rainbow Sign had a telling history, as did the immediately surrounding area. 2640 Grove Street had been built in 1925 as the "Ivory Chapel" of funeral director Edward E. Niehaus, likely the son of Edward F. Niehaus, a West German immigrant, lumber magnate and Berkeley stalwart. The Niehaus mortuary featured a Spanish Colonial Revival design by architect James W. Plachek, who also designed important Berkeley civic buildings such as the city's Central Library and North Branch Public Library.

In the 1940s, when large numbers of African-Americans were drawn to Berkeley because of jobs in East Bay war industries, Grove Street became an even sharper boundary separating white and non-white Berkeley, with blacks made aware through the 1950s, at least, that they were not welcome to buy real estate above Grove Street.

In an important reversal of the process of segregation, it was at a storefront office at 2554 Grove Street—less than a block from Rainbow Sign's soon-to-be location—that the Berkeley Unified School District drew up its 1968 plan to desegregate the city's elementary schools through organized busing. (Berkeley remains the only city that voluntarily drew up and embraced its own busing plan.) Just afterward, this storefront office hosted educational innovator Herb Kohl, who devised the paradigmatic "open school" (alternative

high school) called Other Ways. Mary Ann Pollar appreciated that her Grove Street location placed her close to five local schools, including an elementary school, middle school and high school: "We want those children to short-cut through Rainbow Sign," she said. Thus did the boundary between white and black Berkeley become the creative borderlands where projects of desegregation, especially at the youth level, were incubated and put into practice. Campus Planning Office, *Development Plan*, 10; Advertisement for Niehaus Co. Ivory Chapel, 13; Thompson, "Edward F. Niehaus"; Barber, "Redlining"; Kohl, "Berkeley Experimental Schools" panel; McCurdy, "Integration Program"; Ramella, "Rainbow Sign Can Use Some Help."

2. "Membership Brochure, Rainbow Sign."

3. Smallwood, "See Maya Angelou," 18; Ross, "Depicting Black Struggle," 17; "Odetta" flyer; Eubanks, "Contact sheet from Nina Simone"; "Contact sheet, photographs of James Baldwin"; Saar, "Aunt Jemima." For Rainbow Sign sources, see Max Lopez and Tessa Rissacher, "[Rainbow Sign](#)" [digital project](#), a component of [The Berkeley Revolution](#).

4. Eubanks, "Contact sheet from Shirley Chisholm"; City of Berkeley, "Nina Simone Day"; "Invitation, book party for Huey P. Newton."

5. On the activism and "politics of respectability" of the black club women's movement, see Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*.

6. While we detail below the lack of attention paid to Rainbow Sign by historians and literary critics, we are also happy to note that, since the publication of the "Rainbow Sign" digital project on the Berkeley Revolution site in the summer of 2017, there has been snowballing attention to the center. In May of 2018, LA Times art critic Christopher Knight mentioned it as a key context for New York-based artist Rashid Johnson's acclaimed "Rainbow Sign" exhibition (Knight, "Rashid Johnson"). In February of 2019, the Oakland Museum of California opened a re-designed "Black Power" installation that featured the center, and currently the de Young Museum in San Francisco is looking to spotlight Rainbow Sign as they customize the exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (opening November 2019) around the arts of the Bay Area. In the realm of politics, US Senator Kamala Harris drew upon the primary documents in the digital project and made the Rainbow Sign central to the first chapter of her memoir *The Truths We Hold*, published in January 2019. Observing that her time there as a child shaped her sense of cultural and political possibility, the Berkeley-raised politician noted that Rainbow Sign "was where I learned that artistic expression, ambition, and intelligence were cool. It was where I came to understand that there is no better way to feed someone's brain than by bringing together food, poetry, politics, music, dance, and art." Harris, *The Truths We Hold*, 16–19.

7. Self, *American Babylon*; Murch, *Living for the City*.
8. In his groundbreaking *The Black Arts Movement*, literary historian James Smethurst nicely sketches how the campuses of UC Berkeley, San Francisco State, and Merritt College became hotbeds of activism and black cultural production. Yet when he turns his attention off-campus, Smethurst focuses his narrative on cultural centers such as San Francisco's Black House, the short-lived and contentious project that brought together Black Panther scribe Eldridge Cleaver and the radical playwrights Ed Bullins and Marvin X.
9. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*; Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*; Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*; Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*.
10. Pollar and the ten women who served on Rainbow Sign's board were from a middle generation—younger than race radicals such as Ella Baker (b. 1903) and Angelo Herndon (b. 1913) whose perspectives were centrally shaped by the labor struggles of the Great Depression, and older than Baby Boomer figures like Huey Newton (b. 1942) and Angela Davis (b. 1944). A descendant of a line of Baptist preachers, Mary Ann Pollar herself was born in a Texas border town in 1927, and took a degree in labor education from Roosevelt College in Chicago in the late 1940s; through the 1950s and 1960s she worked for the Bay Area Urban League while establishing herself as music promoter through her work with acts from Bob Dylan and Odetta to Curtis Mayfield and Simon and Garfunkel. The Rainbow Sign board was populated by black women who had broken professional barriers, including TV newscaster Belva Davis, and East Bay education leaders Mary Jane Johnson and [Electra Price](#).
11. This fusion between radical and respectable can also be read in the aspirational and care-oriented language that its founders used to evoke its project. Rainbow Sign board member Electra Price described the center as "a model. It said: this is what it would look like if people got their act together." Price Interview.
12. "Rainbow Sign Background and Philosophy."
13. Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness*, 1-17.
14. Blevins, "Perpetual Sunrise of Methodology."
15. The larger place of archival curation within digital history is well-sketched in the white paper which emerged from the 2017 Arguing with Digital History working group: "Digital History and Argument."
16. The Rainbow Sign project drew upon an archive of six dusty boxes, stashed in the basement of the Oakland home of Mary Ann Pollar's daughter Odette—boxes that had never before been opened by her. Time constraints limited the amount of material we were able to scan for the project, so we opted to include ephemera with striking visual appeal, such as the invitations to art exhibits, or items with rich informational content, such as the brochures.
17. Once readers navigate to the page for a primary source, they are presented with a longer caption—anywhere between a few sentences and a few paragraphs—placing the item in context with other documents or relevant historical material. Research for the content of these captions often involved cross-referencing the periodical record, oral histories and secondary sources.
18. Kramer, "Writing on the Past."
19. Just as the multiplicity of Rainbow Sign's rooms and functions invited cross-pollination—those there for lunch might take in an art show; concert attendees might browse through a chapbook of poetry—the diverse "rooms" of our site work to inspire dialogue between the art objects, and between the performers. Our framing commentary exists to enrich context, but seeks as well to set itself clearly in the space of the frame. The formal affordances of the website, meanwhile, allow us to offer a layered experience of exploration. Music once performed at Rainbow Sign can play over the speakers while one browses; images of rooms then and now can fill in the mental picture of a poetry reading described in an article.
20. Presner, Schnapp, et al. "The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0."

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