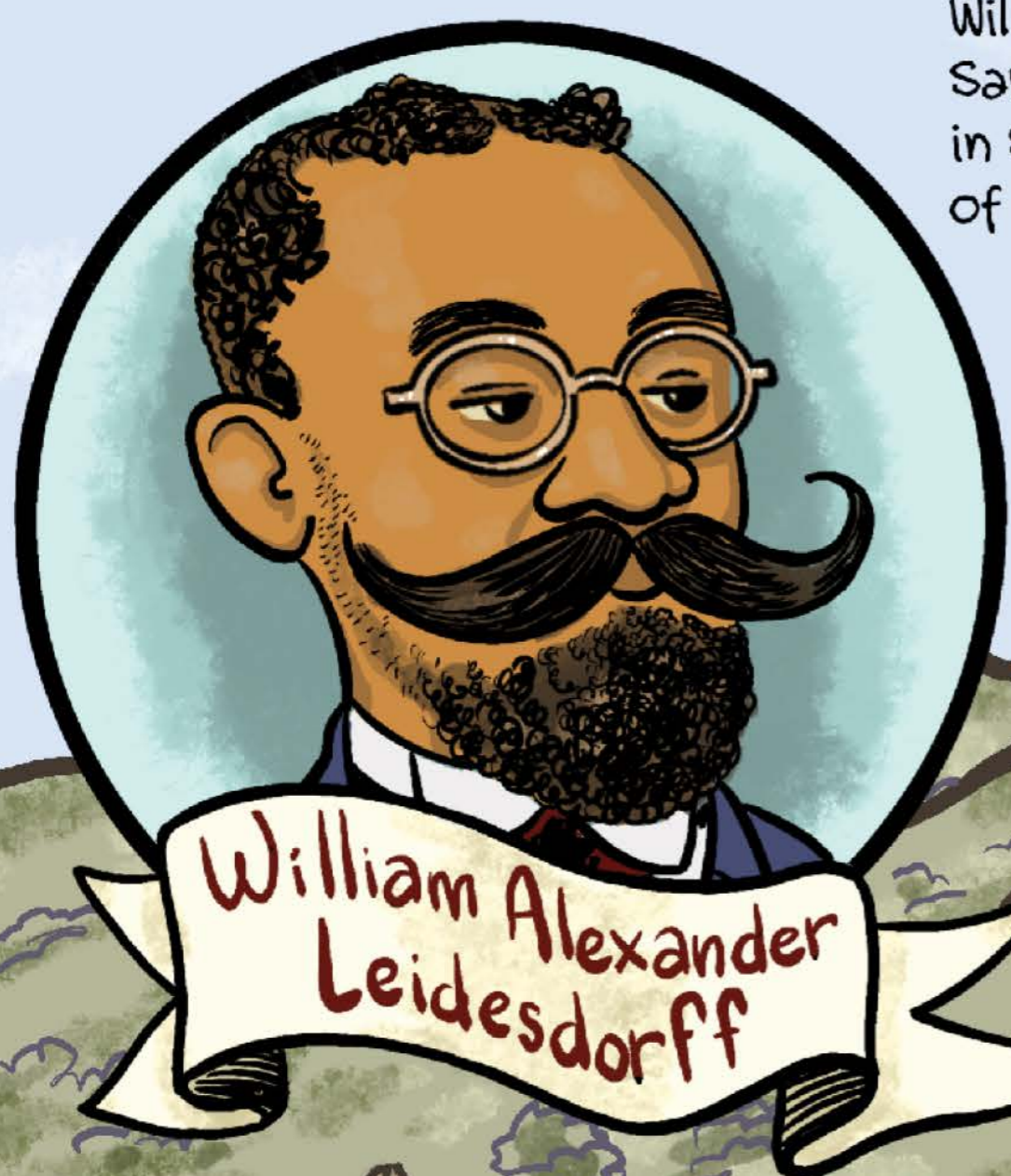
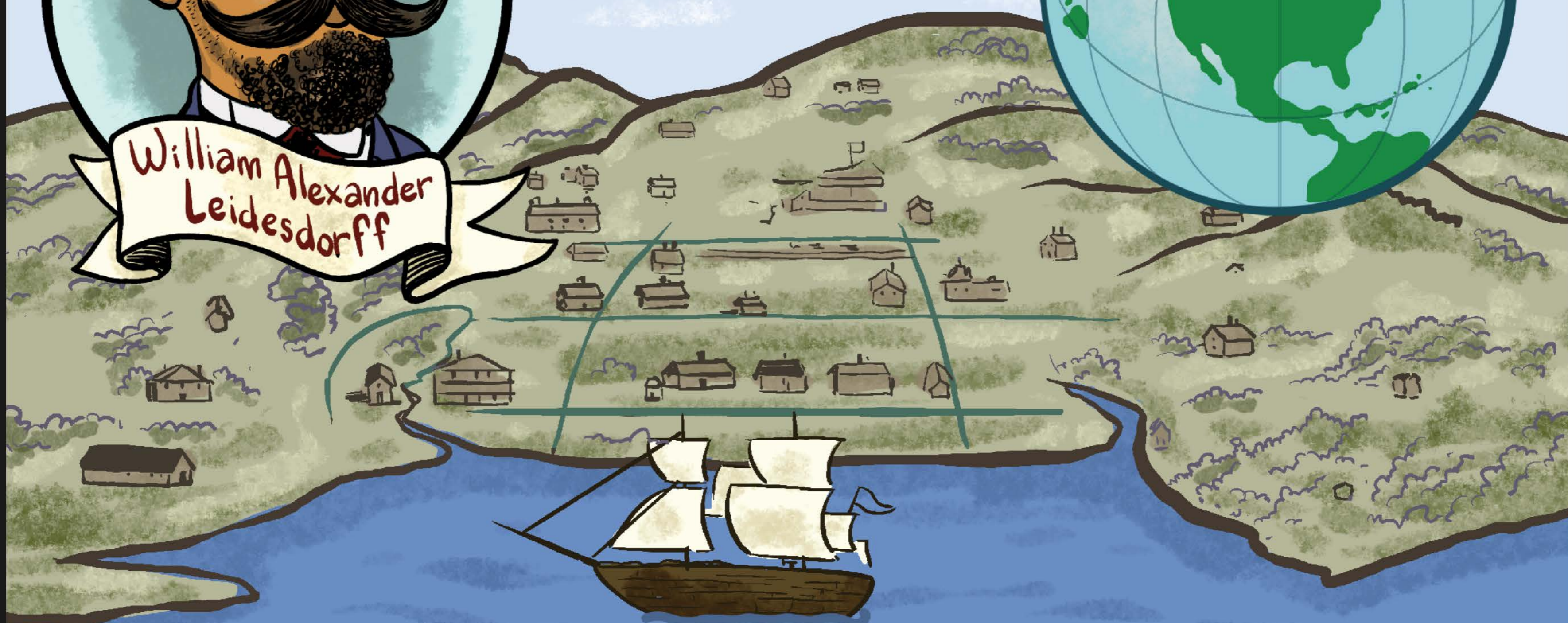


San Francisco Black History



William Alexander Leidesdorff is one of San Francisco's Founding Fathers. Born 1810 in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, Leidesdorff was of Dutch, Native Carib and African descent.

Leidesdorff began his seafaring career in New Orleans, eventually rising to Ship Captain before the Negro Seaman Acts prohibited Blacks from that position.



As Captain of the Julia Ann, he sailed from New York to San Francisco. He traveled via Panama, St. Croix, Brazil, Chile, Hawaii and Alaska, making numerous connections along the way. Leidesdorff arrived in San Francisco in 1841. "Yerba Buena," as it was then known, was still part of Mexico and was home to 30 Mexican and European families.

He wasted no time racking up a number of firsts. He launched the first steamboat serving the Bay. He built San Francisco's first hotel, commercial shipping warehouse, lumberyard and horse racing track.



His holdings grew to include Ranch Rio de Los Americanos, a 35,000 acre land grant on the American River.

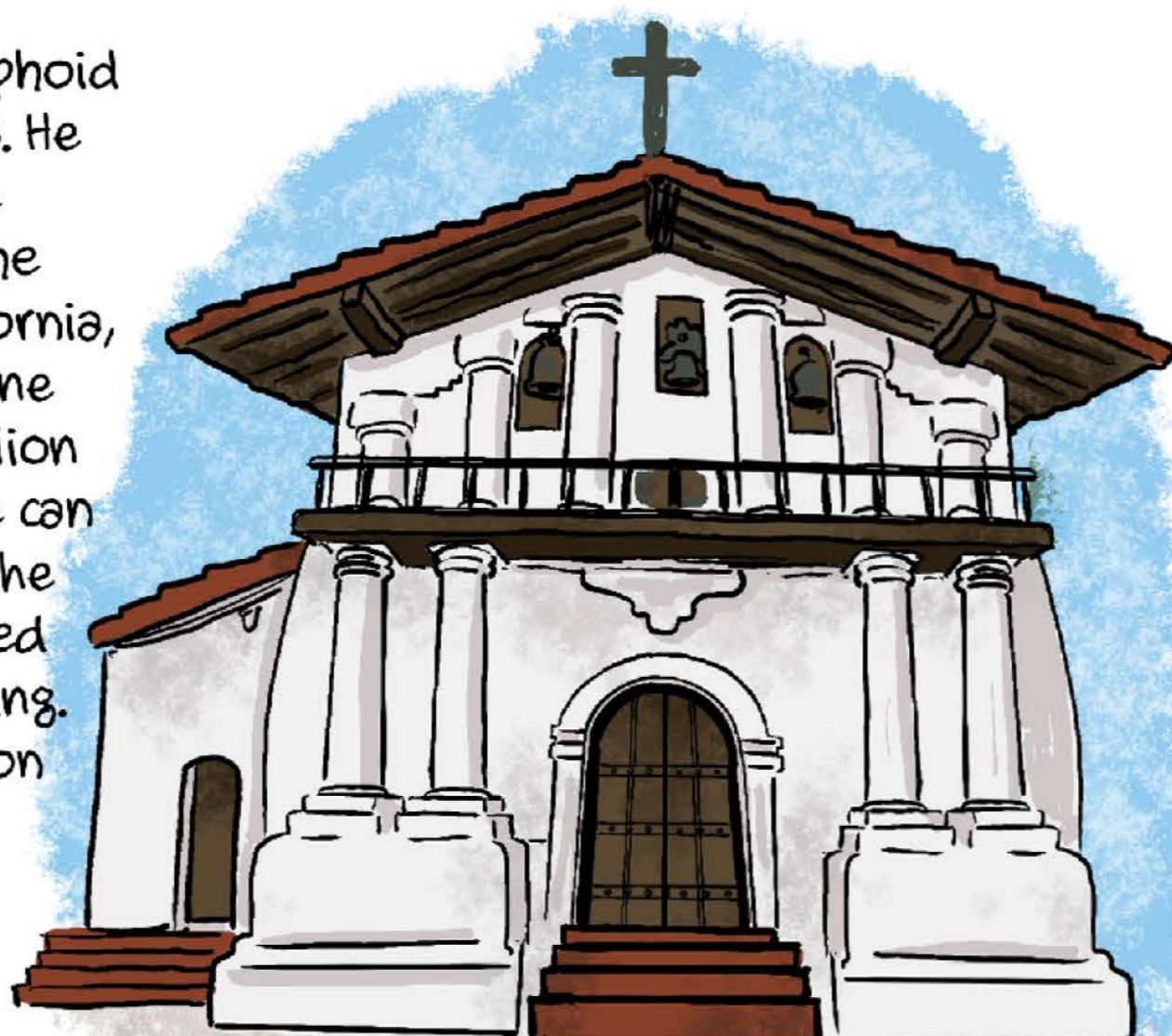


In addition to his business interests, Leidesdorff was active in civil and state matters. He was on San Francisco's city council and school board. He also served as the city's Treasurer.



In 1845 he was appointed Vice Consul to Mexico, becoming America's first Black diplomat.

Leidesdorff died of Typhoid Fever on May 18th, 1848. He was just 37 at the time of his death and was the wealthiest man in California, having amassed a fortune of \$1.5 million (\$30 million in today's dollars). One can only imagine what else he might have accomplished had he not died so young. He was interred at Mission Dolores. Leidesdorff Street is named in his honor.



In 1848 gold was discovered on Ranch Rio de Los Americanos, ushering in the Gold Rush.



San Francisco Black History

Mary Ellen Pleasant was one of the leading conductors of the Underground Railroad. For years, she managed to stay one step ahead of the authorities. In 1850 she fled from the East Coast to Gold Rush era San Francisco as her pursuers were closing in.



At that time only one out of every ten California pioneers were women. She was an experienced domestic, cook and household manager. In San Francisco, she could offer her services at a premium.



She used this position to gain access to the most powerful and influential men in the city. Pleasant got inside knowledge on investments, political secrets and business opportunities. She established several commercial laundries, restaurants and boarding houses. She also invested in property and co-founded the Bank of California.



Pleasant remained devoted to the edification of her people. She staffed her businesses with ex-slaves and helped others establish their own. Her home was known as "Black City Hall". She was a one woman social agency and continued her work aiding in the liberation of enslaved Blacks. She risked it all, traveling back East to support and finance John Brown's ill-fated slave revolt.



In 1866 she was ejected from a San Francisco street car as blacks were not allowed to ride. She successfully sued and segregation on city transit was outlawed. She was the Mother of Civil Rights in California, using her money and influence to establish Black schools and repeal racist Jim Crow laws.



In her last years, some former allies turned against her. Her race, sex and success made her a popular target of the press. Pleasant continued to contribute to the betterment of Blacks and women, donating money to help St. Mary's College of California get off the ground.

She considered her efforts to liberate Blacks from servitude her most important work. "She was a friend of John Brown" is inscribed on her Tombstone. Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park, at Bush and Octavia, is located on the former site of her 30 room mansion.

San Francisco Black History

San Francisco's Barbary Coast was not for the faint of heart. It was renowned for its brothels, opium dens, dive bars and dance halls.



In those early days of electricity, you could see its lights from across the Bay. It attracted premier entertainers of the Jazz Age who performed in "Black and Tans," establishments that served both Black and White clientele.

One such place was Purcell's So Different Cafe, founded by former Pullman porters, Sam King and Lew Purcell.

Purcell's had a notoriously low ceiling. Patrons paid per song to dance with ladies. To maximize profit, these songs were played at double time. The house band was led by Sid Le Protti, a prodigy from a musical family. Church performances by "Blind Tom" Wiggins and John William "Blind" Boone peaked his interest. Hearing ragtime music at an early age "corrupted" Le Protti and inspired him to pursue a career in secular music. His band was christened the So Different Jazz Band. They were possibly the first act to use the word "jazz," as the genre was in its infancy.



San Francisco was a creative cauldron, with artists sharing ideas, sounds and personnel (sometimes unwillingly). The legendary "Jelly Roll" Morton would steal the scene's best musicians for himself during his stay in the city. One of Le Protti's original compositions "inspired" the hit "CANADIAN CAPERS". He received no credit or compensation.

Patrons of Purcell's originated risqué (at the time) dances like the Texas Tommy and the Turkey Trot.



But the good times wouldn't last forever.

The one-two punch of the vice squad and Prohibition eventually shut The Barbary Coast down.



THE BARBARY COAST IS GONE, BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE ME WITH IT.

Le Protti reflected on the times and music in a recorded interview over thirty years later. The legend and the music lives on.



San Francisco Black History

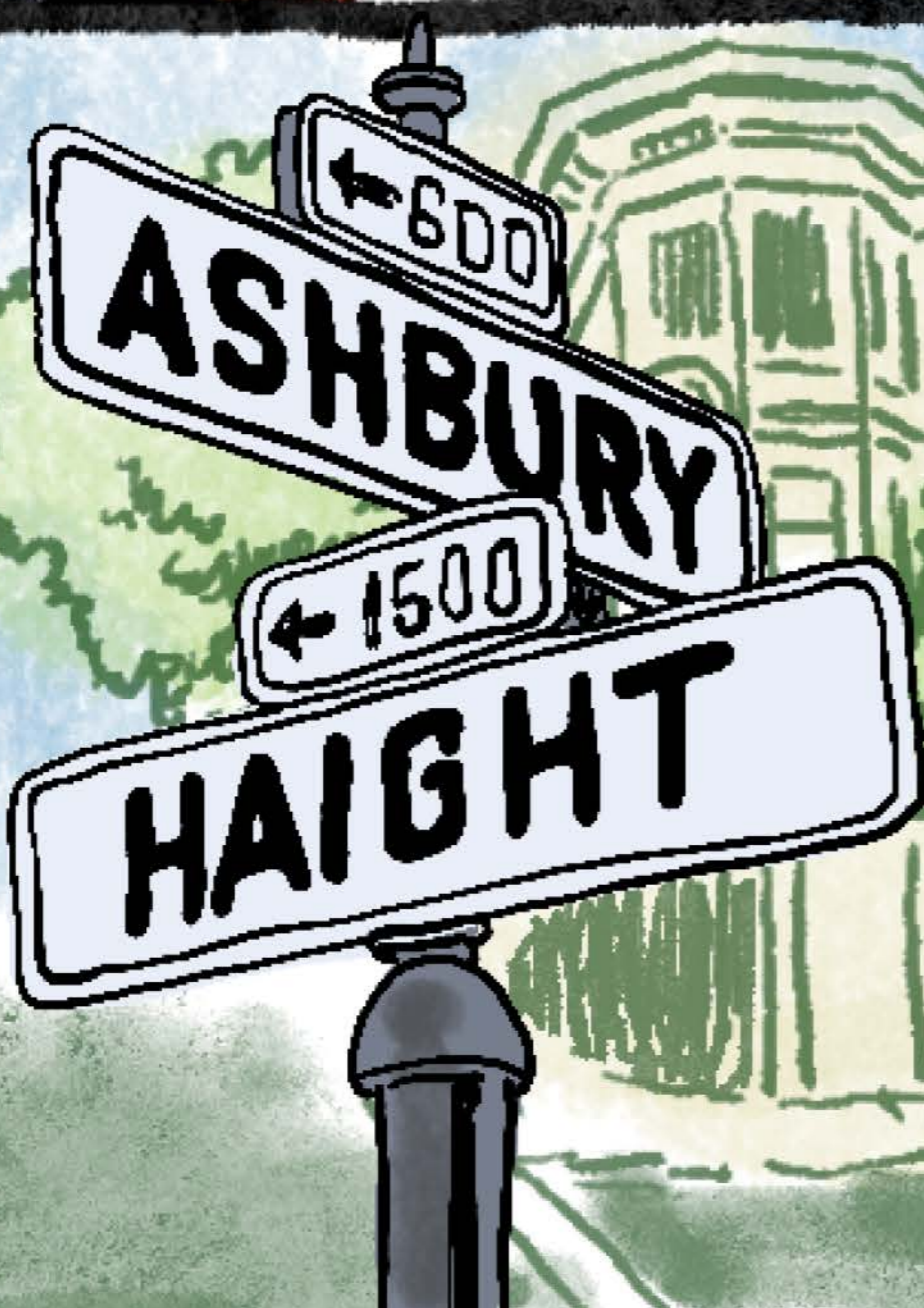
SUMMER OF LOVE

With its multi-racial make-up, seamless blend of Rock & Soul and good time vibes, Sly and The Family Stone perfectly encapsulated the spirit of the Sixties counter culture.



Band leader Sly Stone had been a D.J. at San Francisco's legendary KSOL. He was known for his eclectic taste, eccentricity and charisma.

He also worked as a record producer, leaving his mark on the music of Bay Area legends such as the Beau Brummels and The Great Society.



Sly and The Family Stone name-checked the Summer of Love epicenter in their song "LUV N' HAIGHT."

The Age of Aquarius is long over, but the vibes remain. On a clear night you can tune in to a certain frequency at the corner of Haight and Ashbury.

San Francisco Black History

The Big Five of Bayview were community activists who advocated for their neighborhood.



ELOISE WESTBROOK



BERTHA FREEMAN



JULIA COMMER

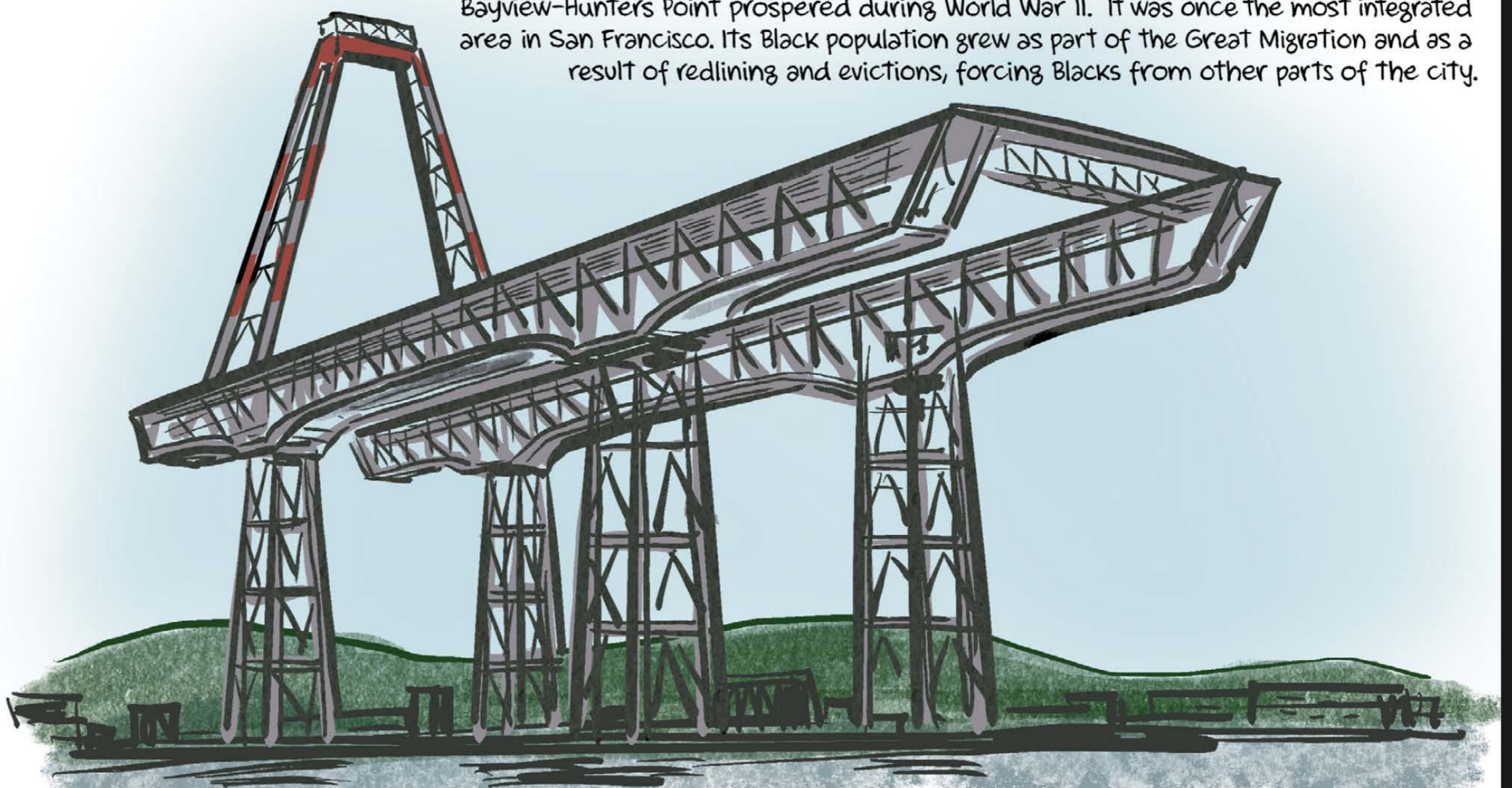


OSCEOLA WASHINGTON



RUTH WILLIAMS

Bayview-Hunters Point prospered during World War II. It was once the most integrated area in San Francisco. Its Black population grew as part of the Great Migration and as a result of redlining and evictions, forcing Blacks from other parts of the city.



By the 1960s the area was increasingly isolated, blighted and subject to oppressive and racist police presence.



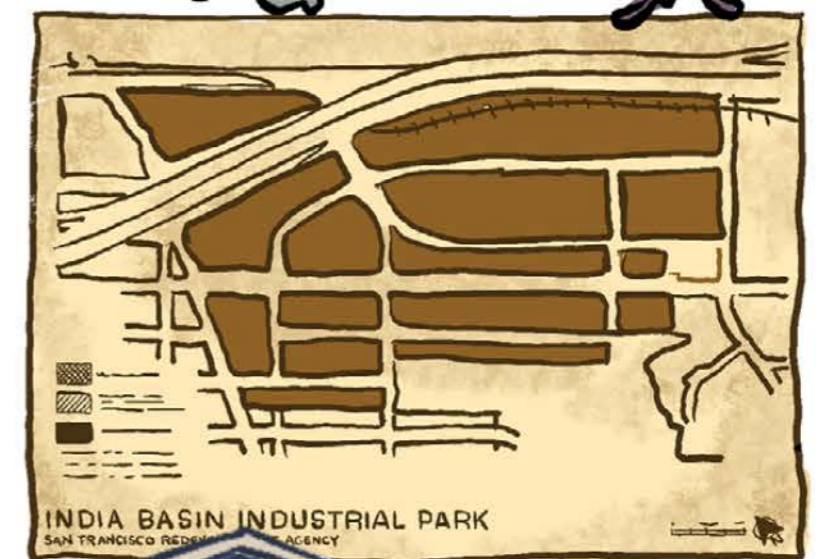
The Big Five went to work righting the wrongs that plagued their community. They overturned wrongful evictions and picketed businesses that refused to hire Blacks.



They teamed up with the Black Students Union and Third World Liberation Front in a hard-fought, 115-day struggle to establish the San Francisco State College of Ethnic Studies.



Their signature achievement was the India Basin Redevelopment Project. It transformed Butchertown, an area filled with junkyards, slaughterhouses and dilapidated WWII-era infrastructure, into a modern industrial park, much needed housing, childcare centers, and parks. Then-president Richard Nixon slashed India Basin's \$34 million budget in half. Undaunted, the Big Five traveled to Washington D.C.



I'M NOT A SENATOR, BUT I AM ONLY!

↳ Eloise Westbrook



They were a force to be reckoned with and successfully lobbied for restoration.

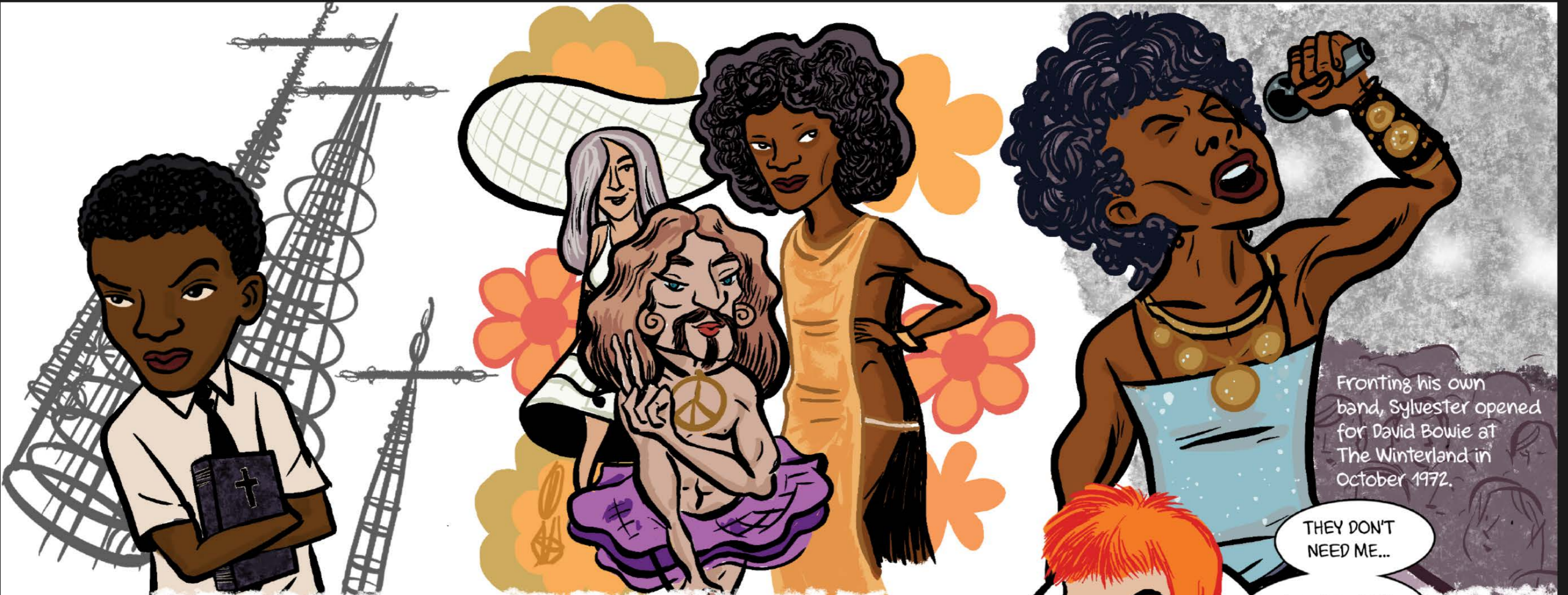


I AM FROM THE GHETTO COMMUNITY. AND AT THE SOUND OF MY VOICE, THE MASSES OF HUNTERS POINT RISE UP TOO!

↳ Ruth Williams

The Bayview Opera House, Ruth Williams Memorial Theater is named in her honor. There are numerous other landmarks in Bayview-Hunters Point named in honor of the Big Five. They left their mark on the landscape and inspired others following their example.

San Francisco Black History



Sylvester James Jr. was born in Watts, September 6, 1947. He began singing in his Pentecostal Church choir as a child. He was aware and unashamed of his homosexuality from a very early age. Unfortunately his church and family weren't accepting, leaving him to fend for himself.

By 1970 he found his way to San Francisco and fell in with The Cockettes, a psychedelic, avant-garde drag troupe. He grew into a feature performer, then outgrew the group altogether. He was a star in the making, he just needed to find his way.

Fronting his own band, Sylvester opened for David Bowie at The Winterland in October 1972.

THEY DON'T NEED ME...

...THEY'VE GOT SYLVESTER.



He teamed up Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes, later known as the Weather Girls. It wasn't raining men yet. The weather called for lightning. They put it in a bottle. With its irresistible groove, his powerful, Gospel-tinged vocals and arriving as it did at the pinnacle of Disco's popularity, his signature tune "YOU MAKE ME FEEL (MIGHTY REAL)" was destined to conquer the charts. It was a world-wide hit!



Sylvester moved effortlessly past gender norms in life and on-stage. Decades before it became more accepted, he appeared on mainstream talk shows in his full, queer glory. Joan River's made the mistake of referring to him as a drag queen and was promptly corrected. "I'm NOT a drag queen! I'm Sylvester!"

By the mid-80s AIDS had ravaged the gay community. Friends, peers and lovers fell around him. By 1988 Sylvester was suffering from the disease as well. He was too sick to walk but still attended Castro's Gay Freedom Parade. That year's Castro Street Fair was named "A Tribute to Sylvester." He passed soon after.

Sylvester arranged for his future royalties to go to two AIDS charities, Project Open Hand and The AIDS Emergency Fund, continuing to give back to the community he loved.

"There's greater and greater recognition of queer culture, a lot more room and less shame and embarrassment..." according to biographer Joshua Gamson "it's like the world caught up."

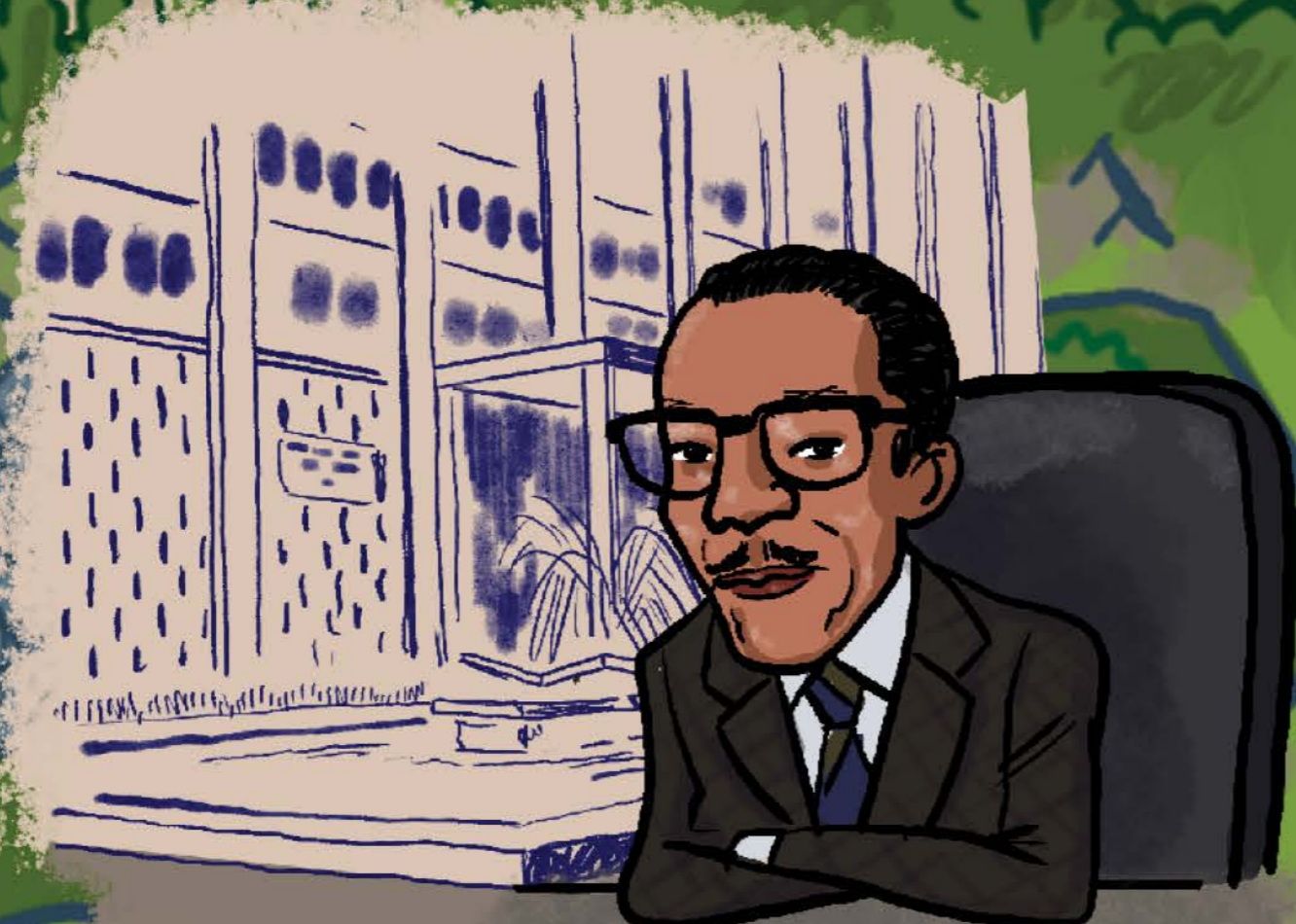
San Francisco Black History



WILLIAM COBB
San Francisco Unified
District's first
Black principal



JOSEPHINE COLE
San Francisco Unified School
District's first Black teacher



CECIL F. POOLE
first Black United States Attorney



DORIS WARD
first Black woman to
lead San Francisco's
Board of Supervisors



SARGENT JOHNSON
first Black artist to achieve a
national reputation. His sculpture
"Forever Free" has been at the
SFMOMA since its inception



AUDLEY COLE
San Francisco's first
Black MUNI motorman



MAYA ANGELOU
San Francisco's first Black and first
female streetcar conductor



CLEO "GLENN" BONNER
first Black woman to lead a
national LGBTQ rights organization