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Sunnyhills
Race and Working Class Politics in Postwar Silicon Valley, 1945-1968
Herbert G. Ruffin, II

The effort by the United Auto Workers' (UAW) to maintain worker solidarity through the racial integration of its Milpitas assembly plant and housing development known as Sunnyhills represents unusual chapters of African American, U.S. West and labor histories. This happened in a region, the Santa Clara Valley, which has proven to be just as resistant to racial integration as pre-1970s San Leandro in the East Bay Area and Orange County in Southern California. The central theme confronting most twentieth century labor historians concerns the relative weakness of organized labor and its lack of political influence in the U.S. The weakness of labor has been the strength of capitalism, which has systematically fragmented the labor movement by creating mostly non-manufacturing jobs, raising the standard of living, and encouraging an acceptance of individualism, middle class values and corporate power. White worker racism and privilege have most often excluded Blacks, Latinos/as and Asians from accessing union jobs, a tactic that consistently damaged working-class solidarity.

Following the Second World War, the federal government’s support shifted away from industrial trade unions and towards big businesses. This reversed the government’s previous position that encouraged and supported unions during the years 1933 to 1945. In response to the economic devastation of the Great Depression, government looked favorably on unions during that period and regarded labor’s right to organize as a way to get people back to work with fair wages. An unprecedented shift in federal government legislation that ushered in the New Deal favored social welfare in addition to labor’s right to organize. This adjustment made the labor movement more appealing to a new generation of trade unionists that included European immigrants, Blacks, and Mexicans, who were grassroots-based...
with radical leanings to the inclusive elements of socialism, communism, civil rights activism, and industrial unionism. Their involvement in trade unions led to a wave of strikes in the 1930s on water fronts, steel mills, and agribusiness farms. These strikes were often led by upstart unions like the Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO). According to labor historians Kevin Boyle, Mike Davis and Leon Fink, most industrial labor unions moved from the political Left to moderate Center. Special interest groups uncommitted to racial equality while protecting the rising living standards of their members quickly became “lily-white” — following the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and red-baiting purges that connected civil rights activism and its participants to communism. From 1945 to 1968, the UAW in Northern California was one of the few unions to keep its Black workforce at full strength and keep its promise of relocating them from central cities such as Richmond to postwar suburbs like Milpitas.

**African Americans, UAW and the Prospects of Ford Moving to the South Bay**

African Americans first full inclusion into industrial labor within the Santa Clara County occurred from 1955 to 1957 when several hundred Black UAW members working at Ford Motor Company moved to Milpitas from Richmond and established an open occupancy subdivision called Sunnyhills. The development of this housing tract brought national attention to newly incorporated Milpitas and its Black inhabitants. From 1955 to 1983, African American access and integration into the South Bay’s automotive workforce had been minimal with Whites being the preferential hires, and the top people of color hires being local Mexican Americans. However, this was not initially the case in Ford’s first decade in the Santa Clara County. Between fourteen and twenty-five percent of Milpitas Ford’s 1,400 person workforce were relocated senior workers of African descent from Richmond’s declining Ford assembly center fifty one miles north, near Berkeley.

This unique history of racial and working class liberalism in the Bay Area automotive industry traces back to 1946, the year Walter P. Reuther became UAW president. Prior to 1946, World War II temporarily made Richmond into a thriving boomtown; however, after the war, Black Richmond was negatively impacted by deindustrialization, residential segregation, capital flight, and White flight. The few fortunate Blacks able to find factory employment during shipyard downsizing in the immediate postwar period found work at Ford, which reconverted its lines from military to automotive production and had an open policy in hiring Black labor after 1943.

Going into the 1950s, Ford leaders began planning for long-term capitalization on the postwar economic boom and the relatively inexpensive urbanization of dense rural land. Central to their vision of industrial
growth was new assembly plants and equipment on extensive yet inexpensive land acreage on the outskirts of central cities nationwide. Twenty of these factories were part of a nationwide expansion program schedule to either open or relocate after 1955. The first of these plants to open were in Milpitas, California, Louisville, Kentucky and Mahwah, New Jersey. Milpitas was a strategic location on the West Coast for Ford to enhance its sales in western states which included Alaska and Hawai’i. As an unincorporated entity, Ford initially pushed for Milpitas to become an “industrial unit of government,” like nearby Emeryville in the East Bay, where the land base would favor industry over residential, and taxes would be kept low through maintaining minimal services that would be predominantly used by industry. Milpitas founders wanted balanced residential and industrial zoning, adequate services for its residents, and its residents not shouldering the burden of taxes.

After negotiations, Ford publicly announced its plans to relocate its operations from its outdated Richmond factory to a fifty million dollar state-of-the-art assembly plant in Milpitas. Billed “The Miracle at Milpitas,” the Ford assembly plant functioned from 1955-1983 with over seven miles of production lines producing almost five million vehicles. Its lines made Falcons, Fairlanes, Cougars, Pintos, Comets, Escorts, E-Series pickup trucks, Edsels, and Mustangs. In 1961, during the plant’s peak production, it employed between 3,500 and 5,000 workers on two eight-hour shifts with a daily output of 700 passenger cars and 180 commercial vehicles. Prior to the Santa Clara Valley being renamed the “Silicon Valley” in the 1970s, Ford dominated Milpitas’s economy and was a major catalyst for phenomenal urban and industrial growth within the proximity of the city and the California auto industry.

Ford predominance also impacted Milpitas’s social and residential patterns in an unprecedented manner. Prior to Ford and incorporation, Milpitas was an exclusively White rural town and the butt of jokes throughout the Bay Area to the mid-1970s; it was the scenic area one drove through on the way to either San Jose or Oakland. From a racial standpoint, this soon changed primarily through the efforts of the International UAW and an emerging group of people progressive on racial issues in UAW Local 560, as several hundred well paid Blacks were imported into the Valley in the mid-1950s.

Blacks in the Santa Clara Valley

The South Bay of the 1950’s had a rapidly growing African American population. In 1950, 1,718 Blacks lived in the Santa Clara County. They were clustered around the downtown areas of San Jose, Palo Alto, and were beginning to expand into East San Jose and East Palo Alto by the time the Ford assembly plant in Milpitas opened in 1955. Fifteen years later (1970) 18,090 Blacks were settled in the Valley. Compared to postwar communities in San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond, the Black presence in South Bay was minuscule and even today is still inconspicuous in most parts of the county. Segregation in the Santa Clara Valley was a regional phenomenon that transcended county borders and began on the Peninsula (West Santa Clara County) at the Palo Alto-East Palo Alto border, and along the Highway 680 and 17 East Bay corridors as far north as the San Leandro-Oakland border in Alameda County. Within the county, Blacks were excluded from communities west of downtown San Jose (around Meridian Avenue) or West Santa Clara County, and south of downtown San Jose (around Tully Road) which comprised the southern half of the county. Unlike the pre-1970 U.S. South where de jure segregation was legally prescribed, in the Santa Clara Valley de facto segregation was arranged by custom and clustering.
particular racial and ethnic groups into specific communities. Before the National Housing Act of 1968 and housing barriers customarily breaking down in the mid-1970s, de facto segregation prevented Blacks and other non-whites from fully participating in the Valley’s phenomenal economic and residential growth. The 1950s and 1960s was a period when homes in the South Bay were abundant, big, and inexpensive. Electronic industry jobs that required an educated workforce were plentiful, yet many Blacks with college degrees who applied were turned away. From an economic perspective, segregation in the South Bay functioned in a manner in which poverty trumped discriminatory policy and served the purpose of reinforcing the economics of the local industries. For example, most of the manufacturing and canning factories were located in low-income areas such as East San Jose, and the more lucrative high-tech production was located in White homogenous, high-income communities heading towards Palo Alto. Servicing many of these affluent households as domestics and manual laborers were recent Black emigrants from San Francisco and Oakland, who moved to the nearby deteriorating community, East Palo Alto.

The introduction of Ford Motor Company into the Santa Clara County political economy disrupted traditional and establishing patterns of racial exclusion in the local economy and housing market. Fueled by Black workers with seniority and the principle of solidarity in the workplace, Local 560 negotiated and secured a guarantee from Ford “that its members would retain their seniority rights in the new location as an incentive to move to the new plant.” Otherwise, most Black workers would fall victim to residential apartheid and be forced to commute fifty miles to work for jobs that their White relocated co-workers commuted, at maximum, three miles. According to The Milpitas Post editors “African American Ford workers ran into evasions and deed restrictions and some outright snubs as they sought to look over the housing opportunities.” To win Ford’s bid, an incorporating Milpitas agreed to cooperate in the development of Sunnyhills one of the first planned racially integrated subdivisions in the U.S. Sunnyhills was a unique community that dispelled many popular beliefs about what constituted the postwar suburb: as a spatially pleasant homogenous White area with expanded economic opportunities that go beyond industrial and manual labor. For example, the community was developed in a period when “less than 1% of new housing built between 1935 in 1952 went to nonwhite families,” and the lion’s share of this new housing was built in suburbia. The community was also a suburb dominated by working class families employed by Ford or what sociologist Bennett M. Berger called the “working-class suburb.” He described it as a space in which industrialized laborers predominated. Living in such communities grounded the suburban proletariat consciousnesses more towards working class and collective standards than middle class and individualistic values. According to Berger, early-Milpitanians were in the early transition of inculcating middle-class values and mores. They lived more comfortably than their Richmond counterparts and were able to become homeowners; however, their neighbors and co-workers were the same people.
who resided in their working class communities such as the bayshore flatlands in the East Bay. It took about a generation for most relocated Ford workers to acculturate into suburbia. Ultimately, “racial liberals” within Local 560 or, more accurately, people progressive on racial issues and the Sunnyhills community forced Milpitas to make race relations and open housing central to the city’s core development from its inception in the early-1950s.

**Sunnyhills and its Socio-Political Impact on Milpitas**

Sunnyhills began when members Local 560 elicited a guarantee from Ford that their seniority rights would be retained and nice affordable housing would be built for its members as incentives to relocate from Richmond to Milpitas. Already in the late 1940s, the UAW had, under the leadership of Reuther, taken a progressive stand on race. One of the departments which emerged after Reuther’s election was the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department at UAW International in Detroit. Through this office, its African American national director William “Bill” Oliver started the quest for affordable integrated housing within the proximity of the Milpitas plant. This was followed by Local 560 president, Vincent McKenna, persuading the UAW’s Fair Practices Department to acquire the necessary autonomy to create policy and develop affordable housing specific to Local 560 needs.

To carry out this plan he appointed Benjamin Franklin “Ben” Gross to chair Local 560’s special housing subcommittee and teamed him with International UAW representative Arnold Callan to design a strategy. In his capacity as special housing subcommittee chair, Gross made the ultimate decision for Local 560 housing to be built in North Milpitas. The plan Gross, Callan and Oliver designed called for the construction of a racially integrated cooperative housing development that was both affordable and free of “ghetto” conditions in North Milpitas, which was three miles away from the new plant. According to Gross,

> It was my insistence that we did not want discrimination in housing for workers. We get the same wages. We worked on the lines together.

After this plan was drawn up, Gross and McKenna, representing Local 560, brought the issue to the attention of UAW president Walter Reuther. Reuther supported the project by issuing an “order banning union support for any segregated housing developments” and an unprecedented maneuver, appointing a Black person — Ben Gross — to develop an integrated housing plan with Milpitas that, up to Ford’s moving to the city in 1955, had no African American presence.

In March 1954, the housing plan started with Santa Clara County businessmen, Milpitas politicians, the county’s Council of Churches, and the UAW commissioning the American Friends Service Committee of the Quakers (AFSC) to put together a report for agencies and groups concerned about problems that may stem from integration and rapid industrialization. Questions emerging from the report asked: How does Milpitas integrate the rapid influx of Blacks guaranteed to arrive in the upcoming years and prevent racial problems? Was it possible to construct comfortable suburban multiple housing units (a rarity in this period) at an affordable price to the factory worker? And how could Milpitas bring a practical intersection between race and affordable housing to blue collared workers? Crucial to answering these questions was the knowledge that no hard color-line in the Northeast South Bay was ever constructed, Milpitas was underdeveloped and eager to do business with Ford, and the UAW under Reuther principled itself within the rubric of worker rights and racial equality. Consequently, there was a probability that the housing which the UAW sought could be built. However, the UAW-led coalition had a hard time finding a tract of land in the proximity of Milpitas, start-up financing and long-term funding for the project, and builders willing to construct integrated housing with a sound plan.

Early efforts to find a land tract in the proximity of Milpitas for the UAW-led coalition were frustrated by systematic obstruction from those opposed to the project. The first obstacle arose when Milpitas abruptly rezoned a proposed site from residential to industrial use. At another site, an eight thousand square foot building space was rezoned from residential use to commercial use only. On yet another site the builder ran out of options on where to build after a combination of governmental and customary roadblocks.

A partial breakthrough for the coalition occurred when a meat packer named Joseph Kaufman offered to sell fifty-five acres of Rancho Agua Caliente (now Warm Springs, Fremont) to the FHA regional office in San Francisco during the summer of 1954 when he heard of the UAW effort. Initially the plan was for Kaufman to be the developer and provide the start-up funding for a multiple housing development with Black occupancy in 268 homes. This was over twenty five percent of the units scheduled to be built and was considered to be a fair representation of Local 560’s Black members. Immediately, local finance companies that were supposed to provide long-term financing started backing out when they heard of the open occupancy policy, or they wanted premium arrangements ranging from 4.5 to 9 percentage points. This would have made the housing unaffordable to most union members. After several frustrating months that included many delays because of flooding, and building codes and ordinances designed to stop the project, Kaufman couldn’t financially maintain the property and outright sold Rancho Agua Caliente to UAW International.
During the latter half of 1954, financing the housing project became a central issue confronting the UAW-led coalition. This quest to find financing for open occupancy housing started with the AFSC.\textsuperscript{28} In January 1955 they found financing from Quaker-owned Metropolitan Life Insurance Company to cover the start-up costs with the agreement that any housing constructed had to be interracial and UAW’s sponsorship had to be publicly mentioned. On January 26, 1955, the loan was approved and the integrated housing project went public. Simultaneously, “UAW Local 560 collaborated with Ford to use its pension fund” and assume responsibility on being the builders and obtaining the long-term mortgage.\textsuperscript{29} This occurred after Local 560’s Executive Committee rejected a construction firm proposing to build the housing if they could develop two tracts under union sponsorship: one all-White and the other integrated, with White workers given the choice to live in either complex.\textsuperscript{30}

In addition, following several frustrating months of the Local 560 and Ford dealing with the FHA, a long-term mortgage was obtained from the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) through a rarely used special co-op ownership program administered by the FHA’s Cooperative Development office.\textsuperscript{31} While parts of the agreement had to be created, enough of it fell under Section 213 of the Federal Housing Act of 1950.\textsuperscript{32} Under this law, “each section of housing was organized legally as a cooperative with somewhat more liberal financing terms than were available under Section 203, the program under which most of the FHA ... [single family] housing had been built.”\textsuperscript{33} For example, instead of a thirty-year mortgage and making a five-to-ten percent down payment, which was standard for single family homes, under the co-op ownership program the mortgage was for forty years with a down payment of three percent. This unique arrangement opened FHA supported housing to blue-collar hourly wage workers unable to qualify for and/or afford single family housing under Section 203. It also temporarily broke a pattern established by the federal government which used residential segregation to manipulate the housing market for the greatest financial returns and further perpetuate social inequities tracing back to the U.S. Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). According to historian Robert Self:

In the 1950s, before changes in Federal housing policy and the civil rights act of 1968, desegregation threatened the financial foundation of home building, because FHA and VA programs had virtually eliminated lending for mixed-race developments. Further, the universally accepted rationalization for segregation — that mixed-race communities depressed property values — circulated within the industry as an unchallenged truism.\textsuperscript{34}

Despite finding a sizeable tract and advantageous financing, the UAW-led coalition needed more acreage to build more integrated and affordable housing, or find a way to place their workers in an adjacent housing tract also called “Sunnyhills.” This was the original Sunnyhills built in 1954. It was separated from the Agua Caliente development by Dixon Landing Road. Sunnyhills was developed by the San Lorenzo Homes Company, a major East Bay real estate developer and architect of all-White neighborhoods throughout Alameda County which in the mid-1950s was attempting to bring its segregationist operations and vision into the South Bay. Ironically, the original Sunnyhills was meant to be built exclusively for White occupancy.

Sunnyhills was a fledgling enterprise for San Lorenzo Homes Company because it had a problem filling vacancies. In addition, housing construction throughout the Greater San Jose area was fiercely competitive and builders had been overbuilding since the early-1950s. When the UAW went public with its proposed housing project, it immediately represented further financial loss for Sunnyhills both as increased competition and by creating the possibility that Blacks moving in would drive down its property values and trigger White flight.
According to Ben Gross, this never happened because anybody in the Bay Area could become a co-op member and purchase a brand new three-bedroom home for $179 down, with monthly payments as low as $79 versus monthly house payments in the general region ranging from $300 to $500 dollars in the early-1960s. Moreover, the open-occupancy housing project directly attacked widespread practices in the real estate industry that used segregation to maximize profits and/or shape the sensibilities of buyers and the excluded along the lines of White supremacy and People-of-Color inferiority.

The San Lorenzo Homes Company, motivated by its principle of maintaining residential segregation for fear of possible financial loss, tried to prevent the construction of the UAW housing development. By creating opposition to that development among local developers, they made it nearly impossible to find builders willing to construct integrated housing with a sound plan. Even when builders were willing to develop the Agua Caliente property, municipal codes and ordinances became roadblocks that drove up the costs of building to local and state code. Agua Caliente was also denied building permits and access to existing infrastructural systems such as water and sewage, which were necessary for a community to function.

The UAW led a coalition of racial liberals. They responded to the San Lorenzo Homes threat by having California investigators Milpitas for institutional discrimination. They also formed coalitions to strengthen their political base, and enacted litigation over expanding the sewage lines. On the charge of institutional discrimination, California investigators could not determine whether Milpitas was guilty or innocent. Nonetheless, the city became more cooperative with the UAW after the investigation. As for coalition building, the media coverage during the sewage controversy created enough sympathy to generate support from organizations, individuals and builders positioned to help the effort. Included in the coalition were the AFSC, San Jose Council for Civic Unity, and San Jose Council of Churches; the liberal wing of the California Democratic Party led by State Attorney and future Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women; the AFL Building Trades Council, and other unions nationwide.

This coalition accomplished two huge feats. First, they forced the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to approve the UAW’s open housing plan: the consequences for Milpitas and the county losing the tax revenue and business stimulated by Ford and its workers would have profoundly affected its future. Second, they forced Ford to take a stand either in support of Local 560’s seniority rights and its African American workforce, or, for expediency purposes, to oppose open housing which would satisfy their short-term bottom line. Coercing Ford to take a stand on housing came about in 1955, when Local 560 member and Housing Committee chairman Ben Gross led part of this coalition in a two-day boycott of San Lorenzo Homes, “asking Ford not to make purchases in the all-White development.” Ford’s refusal to make purchases in San Lorenzo Homes immediately resulted in an alarming number of vacancies that threatened to become even greater. More important, Ford’s participation would have undermined Agua Caliente, strengthened Sunnyhills under San Lorenzo Homes, and undermined their financial interests and working relationship with the UAW. Wisely, Ford chose the UAW coalition which contributed heavily to San Lorenzo Homes losing this battle in the Santa Clara Valley housing market by the summer of 1955: Agua Caliente’s development proceeded according to schedule; and Sunnyhills sales hit a severe slump because of the high rent for co-op housing, bad publicity over attempts to block an open occupancy tract from being built, and efforts of the UAW coalition. San Lorenzo Homes eventually sold Sunnyhills to the UAW in 1956, which cancelled its litigation over sewage lines and extended their tract to 100 acres — 55 of which were under construction. Ironically, they also adopted the Sunnyhills name to assume a fresh beginning. In 1957, Sunnyhills opened and became the first planned interracial community west of the Mississippi.
ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
AND BY-LAWS
OF
Sunnyhills Cooperative No. 1 Inc.

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
OF
SUNNYHILLS COOPERATIVE NO. 1, INC.

This is to certify as follows:

That we, the subscribers, BEN GROSS, WELDON AUTREY, V. A. MCKENNA, ARNOLD CALLAN and EDWARD E. HARTE, all being of legal age, do, under and by virtue of 'Part 2, Division 3, Title 3' of the Corporation Code of the State of California, dealing with Cooperative Corporations, associate ourselves with the intention of forming a cooperative pursuant to the following:

ARTICLE I — NAME

The name of this corporation is SUNNYHILLS COOPERATIVE NO. 1 INC.

ARTICLE II — PURPOSES

The purpose for which the corporation is formed and the business and objects to be carried on and promoted by it are as follows:

(a) To create a corporation to provide housing for rent on a cooperative basis, or for sale, to be regulated by the FEDERAL HOUSING COMMISSIONER as to sales, charges, capital structure, and methods of operation, in the manner and for the purposes provided in Section 219 of Title 11 of the National Housing Act and the Administrative Rules and Regulations thereunder to enable the financing of the construction of such housing to be obtained with necessary services and except at such rate as is fair and reasonable in the locality for similar services; nor, except with the prior written approval of the holders of the Preferred Memberships, shall any compensation be paid by the Corporation to its officers, directors or Members, or to any person, or corporation, for supervisory or managerial services; nor shall any compensation be paid by the Corporation to any employee in excess of $4,000.00 per annum, except with such prior written approval. No officer, director, Ordinary Member, agent, or employee of the Corporation shall in any manner become indebted to the Corporation, except on account of approved occupancy charges.

Section 4. Maintenance Requirements

The Corporation shall maintain its project, the grounds, buildings and equipment appurtenant thereto, in good repair and in such condition as will preserve the health and safety of its tenants.

Section 5. Requirements as to Corporate Property and Records

The Corporation, its property, equipment, buildings, plans, office, apparatus, devices, books, contracts, records, documents and papers shall be subject to inspection and examination by the holders of the Preferred Memberships or their duly authorized agent at all reasonable times.

Section 6. Uniform Record System Required

The books and accounts of the Corporation shall be kept in accordance with the Uniform System of Accounting prescribed by the holders of the Preferred Memberships. The Corporation shall file with the holders of the Preferred Memberships and the Mortgagors the following reports verified by the signature of such officers of the Corporation as may be designated and in such form as may be prescribed by the holders of the Preferred Memberships:

(c) monthly or quarterly operating reports when required by the holders of the Preferred Memberships;

(b) semi-annual financial statement within sixty days after the semi-annual period when required by the holders of the Preferred Memberships;

(c) annual reports prepared by a certified public accountant or other person acceptable to the holders of the Preferred Memberships, within sixty days after the end of each fiscal year;

(d) specific answers to questions upon which information is desired from time to time relative to the operation and condition of the property and the status of the Mortgages;

(e) copies of minutes of all Membership meetings certificated to by the secretary of the Corporation within thirty days after such meetings, when required by the holders of the Preferred Memberships, copies of minutes of directors' meetings.

ARTICLE VIII — CONTRACTUAL POWERS

No contract or other transaction between this Corporation and one or more

*Sunnyhills Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws: Section 7. Limitations Against Racial Restrictions; ca. 1956; Source: "Sunnyhills Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws." (WOC)
Sunnyhills, 1960-1972

In the 1950s and '60s, Sunnyhills represented an alternative notion of democracy grounded in cultural differences that found common ground in union solidarity, homeownership and middle class consumption in the latest form of American urbanization, the suburbs. From its inception, Sunnyhills projected itself as a model working-class community with a standard of open housing imbued with middle class values. It boasted of diverse demographic and spacious living accommodations accessible by cost and affinity.

However, by 1962 only fifteen percent of the five hundred-plus Sunnyhills residences were occupied by Blacks, and "it never climbed much higher, even as Ford’s workforce grew." Virtually all of the Black occupants were well-paid senior members of Local 560 who were hard-core Reuther supporters and were within a few years of retirement at Ford. Outside of Sunnyhills, Blacks remained residually locked out of most parts of the Santa Clara Valley. For the few Blacks working at Ford with lower seniority, living in the Santa Clara Valley was too expensive and racially restrictive because of homeowner prejudice, state and federal government policies, and real estate and bank lending practices.

Throughout the 1960s, Blacks suffered from customary and institutionalized forms of residential apartheid: for the most part they were generally limited to living in deteriorating housing in East Palo Alto, North Richmond, East Oakland, and northern and eastern parts of downtown San Jose. Most Sunnyhills occupants following the initial wave in the late-1950s were White workers with and without seniority. Most of these latter workers never fully embraced the concept of living in an integrated community; rather it was something they tolerated because of convenience and inexpensive housing.

What kept Sunnyhills together in its early years was its core of race and working-class liberals. Many of these individuals were senior members of Local 560 who were fiercely unyielding about making Milpitas into a "model community." Many were opposed to what historian Thomas Sugrue calls "the politics of home" or what historian Robert Self calls "White Power in the suburbs." Crucial to Sunnyhills unity were its activists and institutions. In 1957, progressive alliances evolved into lifelong commitments to race and class diversity at UAW functions at both its Union Hall and the Sunnyhills United Methodist Church (SUMC). Good will between the UAW and SUMC was constantly expressed through members of both organizations attending one another’s functions. Walter Reuther and Bill Oliver attended whenever they were in town and twenty three UAW members including Ben Gross became SUMC members. The church also had the support of UAW management and quickly grew as a consequence.

In his capacity, Ben Gross and his wife Clara co-organized SUMC’s Women’s Group. Within the same period the Grosses became counselors to SUMC’s Youth Fellowship group. Finally, Ben was instrumental in forming a Men’s Club serving as its chairman during its period of growth from 1960 to 1961. Once this group became established, its members founded a neighborhood association and what became its locally famous institutions, the Democratic Club and the Sunnyhills Community Breakfast (1966), both of which continue to function today as vital organizations in Milpitas’ political economy.

Finally, Black participation in the UAW and SUMC also brought Milpitas’s African American community closer in to the city — especially, after Sunnyhills became central to Milpitas defeating San Jose’s attempts to annex it in their attempt to acquire Ford and its tax base in 1960. Success in Milpitas’ independence movement propelled Ben Gross into city politics as a five-term city councilman (1962-70), two-term mayor (1966-70) and vice-mayor (1970-72). The political career of Gross is historically significant because he is one of only a handful of Black mayors in the U.S. who have held the reins of a city with a White majority, and was the first Black mayor in California. These feats, along with Sunnyhill’s open occupancy and UAW’s open shop, positively impacted race relations during a turbulent period fueled by urgency for social change and competing visions of democracy and freedom. For instance, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), Milpitas was one of the few Bay Area communities to easily diffuse high tensions with an open dialogue on race and to publicly mourn his passing — an event that was held at Sunnyhills United Methodist Church.

NOTES


14. See *East San Jose SUN*, Jan 5 1966, 14; Great Mall of the Bay Area: History; and Devincenzi, *Milpitas, 37*.


16. See Devincenzi, *Milpitas, 26*; Great Mall, *Great Mall of the Bay Area: History; and Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, *Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 3*.


22. Ibid., 205.

23. Interviewed in Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, *Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 3*; and Ben Gross, interviewed by the author.


32. Quoted from Tanisha Davis-Perez, “DC’s African Americans Build a Network for Success” (UAW-DaimlerChrysler National Training Center Communications: URL: http://www.udscx.com/resources/newd.cfm?NewsID=309).
33. Devincenzi, Milpitas, 26; and Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 3.
34. Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 5.
35. Ben Gross, interviewed by the author.
36. See Devincenzi, Milpitas, 26; Sunnyhills Brochure (WOC); and Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 7.
37. See Devincenzi, Milpitas, 25-26; and Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 10.
38. Ben Gross, interviewed by the author.
39. Tanisha Davis-Perez, “DC’s African Americans Build a Network for Success.”
40. Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 5-7.
41. Ben Gross, interviewed by the author.
44. Also see “Housing Act of 1950, Sections 203 and 213,” 2035-2037.
44. Self, American Babylon, 115.
45. Ben Gross, interviewed by the author; and Sunnyhills Brochure.
46. See Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 8-9; and Self American Babylon, 114.
47. Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 10-11.
48. Oakland Tribune, August 30, 1959; and “Cablegram to Nikita Khrushchev” (UAW Fair Practices Collection, William P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit).
49. Quoted in Self, American Babylon, 116; and Oakland Tribune, August 30, 1959.
51. Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, Sunnyhills United Methodist Church, 14-19.
53. Ben Gross, interviewed by the author.

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