Growing up in Oakland Point/Prescott

When I was growing up in West Oakland, California, a constant part of our environment was the sound of the freight and passenger trains rolling along the nearby railroad line. The heavy rumble of the freight uprooted the industrial character of our neighborhood. The more elegantly pitched noise of the passenger trains promised that there would be a brighterworld beyond.


Ron Dellums became the 47th Mayor of Oakland on January 1, 2007. Born in Oakland in 1935, he grew up in an 1849 Victorian house near 10th and Wood Street, still standing, only three blocks from where Mayor Dellums attended two schools in West Oakland, St. Patrick’s School and McAlmont’s High School, and graduated from Oakland Technical High School in North Oakland. He later worked as an after-school recreation director at Lytton Elementary School in West Oakland. Dellums graduated from U.C. Berkeley with a masters degree in social welfare and directed youth and employment programs in Hunters Point.

Many residents of West Oakland had also worked in transportation of goods and people because of the proximity to shipping and rail services. Dellums’ father, Veney Dellums, was a longshoreman and his uncle, C.L. Dellums, was one of the leaders and organizers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Dellums served on the Berkeley City Council from 1967 to 1970. He was the first African-American from Northern California elected to Congress in 1978. As a member of this U.S. House of Representatives, he represented California’s 9th Congressional District for 27 years. He is known for his anti-Vietnam War and anti-apartheid stance, among other important legislation.

Dellums grew up in the racially mixed working class neighborhood surrounding Bertha Point Park, which was hard hit by the Depression. War industries, including shipyard, factory housing, and workers’ job dislocations during World War II, African Americans, many of them from the South, were attracted to the West Coast. Most of these newcomers arrived by train at 18th and Wood Street and settled nearby.

Housing segregation made it difficult for African Americans to move out of West Oakland and three and four families were often crowded into what had been single-family homes. Many families even lived in garages and streets can remember hearing “the sounds of families engaging in’、“cut-and-take” by the caretakers’ and scouring the street to find “down home cooking passing through the cracks of garage doors.”

The didn’t allow the families to move out of West Oakland through his friends and relatives. The health and well-being of black residents have benefited from his leadership.

West Oakland neighborhoods: What’s in a Name?

Oakland Point/Prescott is the area bounded by 7th Street, West Grand Avenue, Mandela Parkway and the former Oakland Army Base. One of the oldest and most intact twentieth century neighborhoods in California, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area was known as Oakland Point. The name Prescott came from the local school, named after William H. Prescott, eminent 19th century historian the town of Prescott, Arizona is also named after him.

South Prescott, the area between 7th and 9th, Perola and Mandela Parkway is the remaining remnant of a segregated neighborhood of workers’ cottages below the tracks near the Southern Pacific yards and shops.

In recent times, the area acquired the nickname “Lower Bottoms” from an African American community in New Orleans’ Ninth Ward, also located at a low elevation close to the waterfront. A local effort, the Bottoms Cultural District, seeks to retain and promote Black culture in the neighborhood.

“Dogtown” is another nickname for the area bounded by Mandela and Holies near 32nd and 34th Streets. In both names, Black homes and buildings were razed, warehouses connected to Artworks spaces, and industrial sites redeveloped with new life.

“Chinatown” is another nickname, this one for the area roughly south of the MacArthur Maze, bounded by MacArthur, Martin Luther King, and San Pablo. The area is also called Haven for those after local schools.

McAlmont and Closson also take their names from neighborhoods south of West Oakland.

Oakland Point is the neighborhood between 10th and 18th Streets and Union and the 495 Freeway. Several City Landmark Districts located in Oakland Point, which is a designated historic district.

More Oakland History

To learn more about Oakland Point, see the reverse side of this marker and check out the other listed below. Look for wayfinding signs at the northeast corner of 18th Street and Mandela Parkway.

- C.L. Dellums and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in front of the Alameda Station at 2nd and Alice Streets
- Early railroad and military employment centers for Oakland Point/Prescott residents on south side of 7th Street, east of MacArthur Street
- African American musical influences and the 7th Street nights scene on 7th Street and Mandela Parkway in the Bart parking lot

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For more information on the history of Oakland’s waterfront, visit the Oakland Main Library History Room and the Oakland Museum of California.