

# Black Angelenos with the “Courage to Do and Dare”

African American Community Organizers in Lower California

B . C. ROBESON, a preacher in the Zionist Church and brother of actor and activist Paul Robeson, wrote in 1919 that “Lower California, rich, healthy, and alluring, calls for tillers of the soil. Independence stands with open arms beckoning to those who possess the courage to do and dare.”<sup>1</sup> African Americans in the early 1900s looking to Lower California, now known as Baja California, used their skills and experience, as well as their courage, to create opportunities aimed at achieving freedom and independence. In 1917, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company was formed to create an African American agricultural community in Mexico, relying on its prominent members for support and knowledge. These Black elites, during the community’s eleven-year existence, used their community organizing experience and networks, connections in Mexico, and wide range of business backgrounds to give the community a fighting chance to survive and enact social change.

Theodore Troy, James Littlejohn, Hugh Macbeth, Charlotta Bass, and other prominent African American businesspeople from Los Angeles in the early 1900s looked to Mexico as a land of opportunity and promise. In the words of Leona Ellis and Eugene Robers, members of the community, “the Mexican people and the colored people are brothers. They will always stand shoulder to shoulder in fair and square treatment to all men and will always oppose race prejudice wherever found.”<sup>3</sup> The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company strove to create an agricultural community in Lower California where African Americans could grow and thrive. The creators of this community, nicknamed “Little Liberia” by the *Los Angeles Times*, focused on the Guadalupe Valley near Ensenada, an agricultural region roughly fifty-five miles south of San Diego, because the combination of

---

*California History*, Vol. 94, Number 1, pp. 43–54, ISSN 0162-2897, electronic ISSN 2327-1485. © 2017 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/CH201794143>

favorable weather, closeness to the border, and underground streams for irrigation seemed ideal for the project.<sup>4,5</sup>

These leaders intended to create an agricultural powerhouse tended by African Americans with both agricultural experience and capital to invest in the land. Little Liberia's creators proposed to then sell their goods, primarily crops like wheat and citrus and some livestock products, across the border to markets in California.<sup>6</sup> They believed these exports could potentially alter the agricultural sectors of California's economy and showcase Lower California and African American ingenuity and success. Theoretically, this impact on California's agricultural sector would prove to the people of California—and, later, the entire country—that African Americans could achieve greater success outside the grasp of the social, economic, political, and institutional racism in the state and the country. The American West, especially California, maintained a reputation in the United States as a land of opportunity and freedom. However, African Americans and other people of color, including the affluent members of the Little Liberia community, faced limits and opposition to their business, political, and social aspirations based on their race. Little Liberia creators imagined the community as an opportunity to challenge the long-held notion, backed by scientific racism, that African Americans could not succeed on the same level as White Americans due to racial deficiencies. Ideally, Little Liberia organizers hoped the community would expose the inherent racism that existed throughout the country, including in states like California that were considered more racially progressive. Little Liberia creators believed that Mexico was ideal for this because, as one colonist claimed, in Mexico “a man breathes the atmosphere of tolerance, where his ambitions and dreams lie within himself for realization, and not within his COLOR.”<sup>7</sup> For wealthy African Americans like Troy, Bass, Macbeth, and Littlejohn, racial prejudice in the United States formed a palpable barrier to greater success and equality, and Lower California might hold the key to breaking down that barrier.

Unlike other Black agricultural communities throughout the United States at this time, Little Liberia was not meant to be a haven for persecuted or out-of-work African Americans.<sup>8</sup> Nor was this a utopian community committed to remaining isolated from the surrounding world. In some respects, the community fell in line with W. E. B. Du Bois's Talented Tenth idea<sup>9</sup> because the main financial and organizational support stemmed from the Los Angeles Black elite, some of whom were well educated. However, the community also needed members with agricultural knowledge to live and work on the land to fully achieve its goals. Little Liberia creators deliberately created a community bridge from Los Angeles to the Guadalupe Valley and connected African Americans with local Mexican residents from northern Lower California. The goal of social change in California was directly tied to the Los Angeles community from which Little Liberia sprung, and the community could not succeed without support from Black Angelenos.

Little Liberia's story is unique, and so are the African American leaders who formed and supported the community. Little Liberia's cross-border and interracial aspects were most likely influenced by the multiracial history of Los Angeles; the quality and strength of its leadership stemmed from and contributed to the rich history of Black organizing in Los Angeles and California.<sup>10</sup> Lower California's own history of diversity, including the presence of Chinese, Russians, Spanish, Native peoples, and other Blacks, set a precedent for the possibilities of a multiracial endeavor that included African Americans and local residents.<sup>11</sup>

However, the troubled past of American businessmen in Mexico and the effects of the Mexican Revolution also meant possible challenges for the African American leaders of this community.<sup>12</sup> These Black community organizers proved pivotal to the early success of the community because their prominence and trustworthiness lent credibility to the community, and their skills and connections stimulated the community's growth.

For James Littlejohn, his past travels, employment, and experiences in Spanish-speaking countries made him an asset to the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. Littlejohn was born in Mississippi but began traveling throughout North America at an early age. For instance, at age sixteen, he worked on the Northern Guatemala Railroad, where he learned to speak Spanish.<sup>13</sup> From there he traveled to every region of the United States working as a Pullman porter, cook, express wagon helper, and dining car waiter. He finally stopped moving to settle in Los Angeles, where he became a contractor who built sewers. In 1916 and 1917 he worked on a project with Lower California governor Esteban Cantú to build a highway from Ensenada to Calexico; it is likely that this business connection with Cantú led to conversations that initiated the creation of the Little Liberia community.<sup>14</sup> Without Littlejohn's fluency in Spanish and connections to Cantú, the community might never have begun.

Littlejohn's wealth of experience made him invaluable to the success of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company. He moved to the community shortly after its creation and directed activities pivotal to the community's initial growth. As a member of the board of directors living and working on community land, he brought firsthand accounts of life in Lower California to the members of the board that remained in Los Angeles. In addition, Littlejohn spearheaded the recruiting efforts throughout California. The company was looking for "the best colored farmers the South has produced" to join the community, particularly because most of the founding members of the community were not, in fact, farmers.<sup>15</sup> Community leaders looked to southern-trained farmers for their agricultural expertise and knowledge of planting practices and machinery. Littlejohn provided key support to recruitment efforts by visiting African Americans and speaking about the community's goals and his firsthand experiences there. He specifically focused some of his efforts on engaging with Black farmers in California's Imperial Valley, since growing fruit and wheat there often paralleled efforts in the Guadalupe Valley. For example, Littlejohn recruited R. M. Massey and Dewey Massey, a father and son team from Rivers, California, who became top producers in the community in 1920.<sup>16</sup>

Littlejohn farmed alongside the Masseys and took part in activities in the community in addition to his recruitment and board duties. The Little Liberia community, by 1918, lived and worked on two adjacent ranches with over 25,000 acres of land, distributed into smaller plots for each individual worker or family. The growers like Littlejohn and the Masseys focused their effort on growing wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, nuts, and citrus, particularly lemons. In addition, there was an abundance of grass to raise cattle, hogs, goats, chickens, turkeys, and other livestock. Early on, wheat and livestock were the primary output for the community that also created connections to local businesses and people. For instance, in 1920 a local flour mill in Ensenada offered to buy all the wheat the community produced that year, up to \$100,000.00. That same year, Littlejohn organized a local pork carnival that not

only sold hundreds of pounds of fresh pork, an important early source of revenue, but created an avenue for connecting with local people and businesses in the Ensenada area, which was vital to the early economic and social survival of the community.<sup>17</sup> Without Littlejohn's knowledge, recruitment, and organizing, the community would not have functioned as well, and may not have survived for more than a few years.

Theodore Troy, the first president of the board of directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, moved to the Guadalupe Valley around the same time as James Littlejohn.<sup>18</sup> Troy, hailed as a "highly respected citizen" from a "distinguished and highly respected family," grew up in Cincinnati, where his father was a bank messenger and a founder of the Zion Baptist Church of Cincinnati. Troy made his way west and became the first African American letter carrier in Los Angeles. He then ran his own secondhand furniture store before investing in real estate and mining stock.<sup>19</sup> It is likely that his knowledge of real estate and mining proved useful when creating the community and investigating possibilities outside of agriculture and raising livestock. Although land ownership often held an important significance to African American agricultural communities, Little Liberia creators focused on the output, rather than the land itself. People in the Black community often spoke of land ownership as an avenue for economic advancement; for many African Americans, particularly in the South, land ownership, freedom, and financial independence were synonymous.<sup>20</sup> However, in Mexico, non-citizens could not own land because Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution forbade foreign ownership of any Mexican land.<sup>21</sup> Troy's previous real estate dealings were focused on profit gained from the output on the property. The possibilities for social change for Little Liberia lay in selling products across the border, not on any social or economic advancement that the land itself could provide, since the land company bought the property through a third party to stay in compliance with Mexican law. Little Liberia workers primarily focused on crops and livestock, but at one point organizers also investigated the possibilities of beginning a mining operation on the land and even brought a prospector to assess the area.<sup>22</sup> The mining never materialized, but Troy's mining expertise doubtlessly proved beneficial in evaluating the possibilities, or lack thereof, and in bringing experts to the community to assess the land.<sup>23</sup>

Troy was no stranger to community organizing. In the early 1900s, he represented African Americans in court and led the Forum Club of Los Angeles. In his words, the Forum Club's purpose included "encouraging united effort on the part of Negroes for their advancement and to strengthen them along lines of moral, social, intellectual, financial and Christian ethics."<sup>24</sup> In line with the politics of respectability and uplift, much of the forum's goals revolved around advancement through moral and ethics-driven activities.<sup>25</sup> However, even though the Little Liberia community did not primarily focus on the moral and ethical changes akin to the Forum Club, like the Forum Club, Little Liberia's premise involved African American advancement. Troy's position in the Forum Club gave him experience in organizing and credibility as a known and trustworthy figure in Black Los Angeles, a pivotal distinction for the president of the board of directors and therefore the face of the community.

The public may have viewed Theodore Troy as the face of the community, but Charlotta Bass was its voice. Bass was the editor of the *California Eagle*, the biggest African American newspaper in the West.<sup>26</sup> Based out of Los Angeles, the *Eagle* reigned as the primary source

for Black news in California, and by this time Bass had already cemented her position as a trusted information and organizing source for the West Coast. Bass most likely started writing about Little Liberia and became connected to the community through her connections with Theodore Troy. In her memoirs, Charlotta Bass mentioned that Troy was one of a group of “noble pioneers” whose “spirits, too, were dedicated to the ideals of true freedom and brotherhood,” and she shared her “hopes and ambitions to build a great city in which they had a stake for themselves and posterity.”<sup>27</sup> This “great city” to which she referred was undoubtedly Los Angeles, although the ideas of “true freedom and brotherhood” and the equality that she sought for the larger African American community was a shared passion that included the ideals that the Little Liberia community supported.

Bass’s expertise dwarfed Troy’s in community organizing. She worked tirelessly as the primary organizer for the Black community in Los Angeles and the entire state of California. Born in South Carolina, she moved to Rhode Island at age twenty and worked for a newspaper there for about a decade.<sup>28</sup> She moved to Los Angeles due to her health and began working at the *California Eagle*. She replaced the editor, publisher, and founder of the newspaper, John James Neimore, by his request after his death in 1912 and remained the editor and publisher until 1951. She and her husband, Joseph Bass, ran the newspaper, and she wrote many of the articles that appeared within its pages. As Rodger Streitmatter mentions in *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*, “as a vehicle for Bass’s demands, the *Eagle* became a lightning rod for protest.” She used this lightning rod to take on issues of outright racism, like attacking the Ku Klux Klan in print, but also focused on institutional racism, such as restrictive covenants that kept people of color from moving into all-White neighborhoods.<sup>29</sup> Although some African Americans in Los Angeles already knew Bass through her newspaper, she stepped into the limelight as a community activist and organizer in 1915 when she attempted to block the production of D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, first through attracting support through her newspaper, and later by fighting Griffith in court. Although she lost the court case, her actions solidified her reputation as a leader in the Black community and, in conjunction with other organizing efforts, expanded the *California Eagle*’s readership.

During the life of the Little Liberia community, Bass attended the 1919 Pan-African Conference in Paris, served as president of the Los Angeles branch of Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), fought for the hiring of Black workers in Los Angeles county hospitals, exposed Klan activities against Black organizers in Los Angeles, and fought to desegregate schools.<sup>30</sup> She published advertisements and favorable articles about Little Liberia in the *California Eagle*, including articles that spanned the entire front page and enticed readers with photographs, introduced Mexico as an unbelievable opportunity, praised the quick production of wheat by 1919, marveled at the creation of new buildings and purchase of new machinery, announced visits by well-known African Americans, and spoke of cooperation between African Americans and local residents near Ensenada. In addition, Bass purchased company stock when it was made available, traveled to see the community, reported back to garner support, and collaborated with Hugh Macbeth to solidify relationships with other wealthy African Americans in the community’s middle years.<sup>31</sup> She even spoke of Little Liberia’s early success as an impetus for other race movements, including larger immigration to Africa in organizations like the UNIA.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to her relationship with Troy, Bass was also connected with the secretary of the board of directors for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, Hugh Macbeth. Unlike Troy and Littlejohn, Macbeth primarily supported community efforts while living in the United States and operating out of his law offices in Los Angeles. Born in South Carolina, Macbeth remained in South Carolina through his early college years at the Avery Institute in Charleston. He later attended Fisk University in Nashville and received his law degree from Harvard University. Macbeth and Bass also shared a common interest in newspaper editing, since Macbeth lived in Baltimore for five years where he was the founding editor of *The Baltimore Times* newspaper. However, he moved to Los Angeles in 1913 to begin his law practice and quickly became involved with Black organizing, including the Black-run Los Angeles Forum, whose purpose was to find new entrepreneurs and connect them with the Los Angeles community. In 1914 Macbeth, along with two colleagues, attempted to start a column in the *Los Angeles Times* specifically to applaud worthwhile African American achievements in the city. Macbeth joined, and later led, the All-American League, a group that claimed to combine the teachings of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, a melding of philosophy and industrialism. Under Macbeth's leadership, the group promoted interracial cooperation, as well as an end to lynch law and racial intolerance.<sup>33</sup> It was possible his connections with the All-American League, as well as his business dealings with the wide variety of people living in Los Angeles, influenced Macbeth to create and support a community that, to succeed, needed to embody the interracial cooperation that he also pushed with the All-American League.<sup>34</sup>

One of Hugh Macbeth's duties in the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company included connecting with organizations and people outside of Los Angeles, especially after the community's initial years. Like Charlotta Bass, Hugh Macbeth had membership in the UNIA, a Black nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey that pledged Black uplift on multiple fronts, arguably the largest Black social movement of its time. This connection to the UNIA had the possibility of bringing in additional attention and funds for the organization, and Macbeth wrote to the UNIA offices in New York in 1921 seeking this support. However, leading members of the UNIA denied support to Macbeth and the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, although they viewed the community favorably. Garvey's aides asserted that they envisioned Little Liberia and UNIA as parallel movements.<sup>35</sup> In the early 1920s Macbeth connected with and gained support from other affluent African Americans throughout the country who supported Little Liberia's cause. The most notable group consisted of African American businesspeople from Oklahoma's Black Wall Street, one of the most influential Black business areas in the country. Eleven new elite members joined the community in 1922 after visiting Macbeth in Los Angeles and community members and government officials in Mexico. Charlotta Bass met the newcomers when they visited Los Angeles and accompanied them to their initial visit of the community as well.<sup>36</sup> This influx of new membership, in addition to a more national notoriety, brought new organizational and business changes to the community.

One of these businesspeople from Oklahoma, J. B. Key, replaced Theodore Troy when he stepped down as president of the board of directors in 1922 due to ill health.<sup>37</sup> Although some other members of the board also changed, Littlejohn and Macbeth remained and Owen A. Troy, Theodore Troy's son who had already been living in Mexico, also joined.<sup>38</sup>

Charlotta Bass remained involved with Little Liberia and continued to write about its activities. The community, although still maintaining its initial plan of agricultural growth, also added new goals of establishing an African American and Mexican co-owned bank, opening a sanitarium, and attracting Black tourists through building additional roads and a hotel, all in Ensenada. Considering his belief in interracial cooperation, it is unsurprising that Hugh Macbeth was one of the Little Liberia leaders at the planning meeting in Mexicali with local Mexican officials.<sup>39</sup> These plans also allowed for greater connections back to Los Angeles, since the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company planned for some of the funding for the bank and sanitarium to come from fundraisers in Los Angeles, paired with promised funds from the Mexican government and fundraising in Mexico.<sup>40</sup>

Little Liberia's Los Angeles leaders are important not just for understanding the community's growth and aspirations, but also its demise. There are many compounding reasons why Little Liberia only survived a decade, including mismanagement, financial difficulties, and infighting. A telling clue is an advertisement that appeared numerous times in newspapers in 1921, offering a one-hundred-dollar reward to anyone who "can prove that this company has ever defrauded or deceived anyone out of anything."<sup>41</sup> Ironically, Hugh Macbeth was charged with collecting this information on fraud, even though he would later be labeled as the primary culprit of fraud and deception.<sup>42</sup> In February 1927, directors and stockholders of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company called for an audit. In the process of releasing the audit, as well as a series of articles in the *California Eagle* authored by community members including James Littlejohn, J. H. Stevens, and Theodore Troy's brother, Claudius, various parties claimed a lack of proper investigation before making major decisions, misspent and stolen funds, and inflation of reports of the community's productivity meant to deceive the public and the board of directors.<sup>43</sup> Macbeth was further accused of stealing the car raffle funds through his membership and involvement with the International Community Welfare League, a new organization that appears to have been created to unite the members of the Little Liberia community throughout the United States and Mexico. Claudius Troy, Littlejohn, and others also accused Macbeth of misusing company funds for his law firm and to settle a lawsuit unrelated to Little Liberia.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the articles accused Macbeth of lying to the board of directors when he claimed he had solved the financial problems when instead they deteriorated further. Although Theodore Troy defended Macbeth to some degree, the tone of the *California Eagle* articles was one of disgust and anger, particularly at Macbeth. By 1927 the community had acquired roughly \$78,000 in debt and had filed for bankruptcy.<sup>45</sup>

Little Liberia's ultimate undoing occurred when the Mexican government informed the company's representatives that they had no right to rent out the land because the land was incorrectly purchased. Since a Mexican land title could not be held by a foreigner, the company had used a Mexican trustee to make the purchase legal. However, the trustee purchased the land for the individual members of the board of directors, rather than for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company as a whole or for the board as an entity. Therefore, the seven men on the board of directors, rather than the company, owned the land. These men never made an agreement with the company to transfer the land from the individual men to the larger company entity. This meant that the company did not have the legal authority to distribute and rent out the land, and the Lower California Mexican Land

and Development Company collected money for land it did not technically own. Shortly after this revelation, the company disbanded. J. H. Stevens, Claudius Troy, and Littlejohn filed complaints with the Los Angeles Grand Jury, the Los Angeles Bar Association, and the California State Corporation Commissioner, and even attempted to have Macbeth disbarred from the Los Angeles Bar Association for fraud.<sup>46</sup> The Bar Association appears not to have taken action, the State Corporation Commissioner sent back a letter acknowledging the complaint but took no action,<sup>47</sup> and the Grand Jury was dismissed before it could decide on the case.<sup>48</sup>

The story, however, did not end here. For most members of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, their time in Lower California appears as a tiny speck on a larger picture of their lives in community organizing. Theodore Troy moved back to Los Angeles, stayed connected with Charlotta Bass, and remained active in organizing in Black Los Angeles. Charlotta Bass became the most active and accomplished Black Angeleno on a national scale. She continued publishing the *California Eagle* for decades, and often brought national movements and issues to light in Los Angeles by using the paper as a vehicle in her activism. She fought against job discrimination including by lobbying for unemployed African American workers during the Great Depression and sitting on and leading labor councils, as well as larger groups like the Los Angeles NAACP. In the 1930s, she brought Chicago's "Don't Spend Where You Can't Work" movement to Los Angeles, insisting that Blacks boycott businesses that refused to hire African Americans. She was propelled into the national spotlight in her continuing fight against restrictive housing covenants when, after local organizing had not enacted significant change, she took the issue to the California Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 1948 ruled the restrictive covenants unconstitutional. In 1951 Bass sold the *Eagle* because she began her campaign as the vice presidential nominee of the Progressive Party. Although she did not win the election and no longer ran the *Eagle*, she continued to speak publicly and fight for African American and labor rights for the rest of her life.<sup>49</sup>

Like Bass, Hugh Macbeth continued his activism after Little Liberia in a visible way. As a lawyer, he fought for African American rights through his struggle with the American Legion to include Black boxers in fights at Hollywood Legion Stadium and, like Charlotta Bass, he challenged segregation and restrictive covenants.<sup>50</sup> Although he remained involved in some African American-specific movements outside of his law practice, he focused his efforts on interracial activism. He founded the Society of Truth and Justice and United Races of the World and the Association for International Good Will, the latter of which he planned to create a main center in the Santa Clara Valley where Little Liberia once stood.<sup>51</sup> He fought for the rights of Japanese American citizens during internment in World War II and organized support in Los Angeles in an effort to end internment and fight for reparations; counseled Japanese American draft resisters; and fought for Japanese Americans nationally in his attempts to meet with President Franklin Roosevelt to advocate for an end to all internment. He joined the Japanese American Citizens League and was an author of one of the briefs on *Korematsu v. United States*. He was the primary lawyer behind the lower court case that later became the Supreme Court case *Oyama v. California*, which ended the enforcement of the Alien Land Act and set the precedent later used to strike down racial segregation. His impact on the Japanese American community led to his commemoration at the 2013 Manzanar

Pilgrimage.<sup>52</sup> Although Little Liberia was not Macbeth's only attempt at interracial organizing, it was perhaps an early indication of what would be a long career of fighting for rights of people of color.

James Littlejohn and his wife Elizabeth, unlike Troy, Bass, and Macbeth, remained in Lower California. In 1952, Littlejohn mentioned that he liked living in the United States but preferred to live in Mexico because he never had trouble there because of his race.<sup>53</sup> Littlejohn had obtained Mexican citizenship prior to the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's collapse, so he negotiated ownership of much of the community's lands once the company disbanded.<sup>54</sup> He continued to work the land, aided by local residents he hired as farmhands. He created, owned, and operated the James Littlejohn Motel in Ensenada that catered to African American tourists, as well as an associated restaurant, continuing the community's dream of attracting Black tourists to Lower California.<sup>55</sup> In addition, he became a civic leader in Ensenada, including joining the city's chamber of commerce. Although he remained connected to Los Angeles culture and politics by reading American newspapers and taking regular trips there, including attending and becoming an elder of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, he lived the rest of his life in Lower California, Mexico.<sup>56</sup> He had such a profound impact on life in the Ensenada area that he was named Citizen of the Year in Ensenada in 1952.<sup>57</sup> Littlejohn found a space where he could still live within the basic premise that Little Liberia had tried to follow.

It is true that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company did not achieve its social or economic goals. James and Elizabeth Littlejohn were the sole members of the community to make Mexico their home. They were able to remain in Lower California while keeping their connection with Los Angeles and maintaining their identity as African Americans, yet they could avoid the racism their African American identity prompted in the United States by living in Ensenada.<sup>58</sup> For Little Liberia organizers, though, their "courage to do and dare," organizing experience, business connections, and other skills contributed to the forming of the community and the possibilities it offered, even if those possibilities were not fully realized. Their time organizing and supporting Little Liberia was a small but significant piece of a much larger life of community organizing.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES

1. B. C. Robeson, "Economic Independence," *California Eagle*, October 25, 1919, 4.
2. A few historians have discussed African Americans in Mexico, most notably Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) and Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016).
3. "Lower California Organization No Joke," *California Eagle*, February 7, 1920, 1.
4. Delores Nason McBroom, "Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia," in Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 156.
5. A few other historians and Black studies scholars have written about Little Liberia, and the community has briefly appeared either by name or by subject in several histories of Baja California, Los Angeles, and African American migration and social movements. The two pieces that focus directly on the community are McBroom, "Harvests of Gold," and Ted Vincent, "Black Hopes in Baja California: Black American and Mexican Cooperation, 1917–1926," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 204–213. McBroom draws comparisons between Little Liberia and the Allensworth colony in California. Although her article is useful and a wonderful starting point to understand the history of the Little Liberia community and its ties with Los Angeles, she primarily looks at Hugh Macbeth and focuses on the aspects of the community that allow for a comparison with Allensworth. Vincent also focuses on Macbeth's role, and places the fall of the community

- solely on Macbeth's shoulders. This piece, although acknowledging Macbeth's importance in the community, also highlights other organizers in the community, while still recognizing the importance of Black organizing in California that McBroom discusses. My chapter on Little Liberia in *Farming across Borders: Transnational Agricultural History in the North American West*, ed. Sterling Evans (Texas A&M University Press, forthcoming), as well as my forthcoming dissertation and eventual book, will build on this material, and the interpretive differences between these three different stories of Little Liberia, in more detail.
6. The name "Little Liberia" is a bit misleading, and many of the sources about the community use the longer company title. I use the nickname in this article primarily for the reader's ease, but with some reservations. Although some members of the community were involved with Marcus Garvey's UNIA, as explained later in the piece, Little Liberia was not directly connected to or invested in Garvey's Back to Africa movement. It was not created to become a smaller version of Liberia, and it did not have the same goals and aspirations. It could be that a writer or editor at the *Los Angeles Times* saw some sort of connection, and the name stuck.
  7. "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," *California Eagle*, October 12, 1921, 1. Note that this is not necessarily the case in Mexico at the time—often Blacks there too, whether Mexican or African American, encountered racism, although it had different roots than the racism in the United States.
  8. Agricultural communities like these appeared throughout the country starting during Reconstruction. The most famous of these communities is the Exodusters, which was covered in Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992). However, other communities besides the Exodusters appeared throughout the Midwest. For more information, see Stephen A. Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). The most notable Black agricultural community in California at this time was the community in Allensworth, California. For more information on this community, see Alice C. Royal, *Allensworth, The Freedom Colony: A California African American Township* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2016) or Delores McBroom's comparison between Allensworth and Little Liberia, "Harvests of Gold."
  9. For more information on Du Bois and the Talented Tenth, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1961) and W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in Booker T. Washington, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: J. Pott, 1903).
  10. For more information on the history of Black Los Angeles, see Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
  11. Recent scholarship on Chinese Mexicans and Chinese in Mexico includes Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Grace Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); and Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012). For Russians in Mexico, see William Harrison Richardson, *Mexico through Russian Eyes, 1806–1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).
  12. For more on filibusters in Mexico, see Joseph Allen Stout, *Schemers and Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848–1921* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002). For broader histories of Americans in Mexico that also offer information on the Mexican Revolution, see John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
  13. "Rancher Likes America but Prefers to Live in Mexico," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 88.
  14. "Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour," *California Eagle*, May 12, 1917, 1. The primary contractor for the Baja highway system was another African American, Heraclio Ochoa. Mr. Ochoa was one of Hugh Macbeth's clients.
  15. "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico," *California Eagle*, October 22, 1921, 1.
  16. *Ibid.*; "Santa Clara Land Campaign to Open in Imperial Valley," *California Eagle*, February 14, 1920, 1.
  17. "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara," *California Eagle*, January 3, 1920, 1.
  18. "Colored Millionaires En Route to Mexico City," *California Eagle*, May 27, 1922, 1.
  19. Delilah L. Beasley and Bancroft Library, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California: A Compilation of Records from the California Archives in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, in Berkeley; and from the Diaries, Old Papers, and Conversations of Old Pioneers in the State of California* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 133.
  20. Some historians and Black studies scholars trace this rhetoric back to the idea that enslaved peoples would receive forty acres and a mule when emancipated, and others have found roots in Reconstruction and other aspects of society and politics, including the importance of land ownership to the greater power and economics

- in the U.S. South. For more information, see Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014) and Loren Schwening, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
21. Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution states, “Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican companies have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, and their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions for the exploitation of mines or of waters. The State may grant the same right to foreigners, provided they agree before the Ministry of Foreign Relations to consider themselves as nationals in respect to such property, and bind themselves not to invoke the protection of their governments in matters relating thereto; under penalty, in case of noncompliance with this agreement, of forfeiture of the property acquired to the Nation.”
  22. “Turning the Soil in Santa Clara,” 1. Mining was a common economic activity in Lower California, and there were multiple mines in the area in the early 1900s, so this was a legitimate economic prospect.
  23. One important aspect of the new Mexican Constitution in 1917 is that all parts of the subsoil remained the property of the Mexican government and its people, meaning that any foreign entity could not profit from material pulled from the soil. This was primarily used to prevent U.S. industrialists from extracting oil in Mexico, but this most likely also would have applied to mining efforts in Little Liberia. Currently, there is no evidence as to why the community ceased investigations into mining, but it likely would have proved problematic with the local and national Mexican government authorities.
  24. Beasley and Bancroft Library, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 138.
  25. For more information on the politics of respectability and uplift at this time, including its importance in social movements and organizations, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
  26. The importance of Charlotta Bass and the *California Eagle* to Black Los Angeles and Black California cannot be overstated. In this piece, I rely heavily on the *California Eagle* as a primary newspaper source, in part because it was the main source of news for African Americans in Los Angeles.
  27. Charlotta A Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C.A. Bass, 1960), 197–198.
  28. Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 96.
  29. *Ibid.*, 95.
  30. *Ibid.*, 97.
  31. “Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles,” *California Eagle*, May 20, 1922, 1.
  32. “In the Name of All that’s Good and Brave in Us Let’s Try It,” *California Eagle*, October 18, 1919, 4.
  33. McBroome, “Harvests of Gold,” 157–158.
  34. Given the time frame, the Mexican Revolution provided a background narrative that also supported this type of movement.
  35. Marcus Garvey et al., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 3, *September 1920–August 1921*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 321–322.
  36. “Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles,” 1.
  37. “Colored Millionaires En Route to Mexico City,” 1.
  38. Owen A. Troy, “Invades Lower California,” *California Eagle*, November 11, 1922, 1.
  39. “\$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico,” *California Eagle*, May 12, 1923, 8; “Net Results Thus Far of Record Making Trip to Real Accomplishments,” *California Eagle*, July 1, 1922, 1. Fundraising efforts in Los Angeles included a benefit and raffling off a car. Bricks were sold in Los Angeles and Mexico as an additional fundraiser. Mexicans paid 50 cents per brick; Americans paid one dollar per brick.
  40. “\$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico,” 8; “To Have Benefit for Lower California Sanitarium,” *California Eagle*, August 17, 1923, 1.
  41. “\$100.00 Reward,” *California Eagle*, October 8, 1921, 2. Interestingly, these advertisements sometimes appeared on the same page as articles about Little Liberia or advertisements for the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company stock.
  42. *Ibid.*
  43. These series of articles all appeared in the *California Eagle* between March and June 1927, and were all titled “War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company,” or with an abbreviation of a few of the words for space. Only some of the articles have an author labeled, but the ones that do cite J. H. Stevens, Claudius Troy, and James Littlejohn.
  44. J. H. Stevens, “War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company,” *California Eagle*, March 11, 1927, 6.
  45. McBroome, “Harvests of Gold,” 170.
  46. J. H. Stevens et. al., “War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company,” *California Eagle*, March 17, 1927, 3.

47. "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, June 17, 1927.
48. J. H. Stevens et. al., "War Declared on Lower Calif. Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 25, 1927, 2.
49. Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, 103–106.
50. Greg Robinson, *The Great Unknown: Japanese American Sketches* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 143.
51. "Death Claims Veteran Atty. Hugh Macbeth," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 25, 1956, A1.
52. Robinson, *The Great Unknown*, 146–147.
53. "Rancher Likes America but Prefers to Live in Mexico," 88.
54. "Mexican Citizenship Gives Littlejohn Right to Ranch," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 87.
55. "Mexican Rancher: Ensenada's Lone Negro Male Is Hamlet's Leading Citizen," *Ebony Magazine*, October 1952, 84.
56. "Former L.A. Contractor Ensenada Businessman," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 11, 1963, C1.
57. "Rancher Likes America but Prefers to Live in Mexico," 88.
58. At this point, no documents have been found in which Littlejohn claims to be Mexican. He held Mexican citizenship and felt a connection to people in Mexico, but self-identified as American and African American.
59. Robeson, "Economic Independence," 4.