



Uninvited Neighbors: African Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990 (Race and Culture in the American West Series)

Herbert G. Ruffin

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In the late 1960s, African American protests and Black Power demonstrations in California's Santa Clara County—including what's now called Silicon Valley—took many observers by surprise. After all, as far back as the 1890s, the California constitution had legally abolished most forms of racial discrimination, and subsequent legal reform had surely taken care of the rest. White Americans might even have wondered where the black activists in the late sixties were coming from—because, beginning with the writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, the most influential histories of the American West simply left out African Americans or, later, portrayed them as a passive and insignificant presence.

Uninvited Neighbors puts black people back into the picture and dispels cherished myths about California's racial history. Reaching from the Spanish era to the valley's emergence as a center of the high-tech industry, this is the first comprehensive history of the African American experience in the Santa Clara Valley.

Author Herbert G. Ruffin II's study presents the black experience in a new way, with a focus on how, despite their smaller numbers and obscure presence, African Americans in the South Bay forged communities that had a regional and national impact disproportionate to their population. As the region industrialized and spawned suburbs during and after World War II, its black citizens built institutions such as churches, social clubs, and civil rights organizations and challenged socioeconomic restrictions. Ruffin explores the quest of the area's black people for the postwar American Dream. The book also addresses the scattering of the black community during the region's late yet rapid urban growth after 1950, which led to the creation of several distinct black suburban communities clustered in metropolitan San Jose.

Ruffin treats people of color as agents of their own development and survival in a region that was always multiracial and where slavery and Jim Crow did not predominate, but where the white embrace of racial justice and equality was often insincere. The result offers a new view of the intersection of African American history and the history of the American West.

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