

Inquiry Question

In what ways does having access to public pools impact a community?

**Relevancy
& History** PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
UC RIVERSIDE PUBLIC HISTORY

HGP history-geography
project

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

UNIVERSITY OF
Redlands

In what ways does having access to public pools impact a community?

Author

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Content Standards

11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

CCSS Standards:

Reading, Grades 11–12

- RH.11–12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- RH.11–12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Writing, Grades 11–12

- WHST.11–12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- WHST.11–12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject.
- WHST.11–12.9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Speaking and Listening, Grades 11–12

- CCSS.ELA–Literacy.SL.11–12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

ELA Literacy Connections:

- CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.11–12.7; Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually,

quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Ethnic Studies Principles

- **CONNECT** ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice and an equitable and democratic society; and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic racism society that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

Overview of Lesson

Students will learn about the creation of public pools and the challenges presented to equal access by exploring historic access to pools in three Inland Empire cities: the Fairmount Park Plunge in Riverside during the 1920s, the Sylvan Plunge in Redlands in the 1930s, and the Perris Hill Plunge in San Bernardino during the 1940s. Students will identify why having access to a public pool was important then and now – and how it impacts individuals and the community. Finally, students will research and map access to public pools in their own community to analyze current needs.

Sources

The included sources are provided for students to research specific events related to public pool access in three Inland Empire cities. The sources are grouped by city and include a brief historical explanation to help teachers quickly familiarize themselves with the information students will be exploring.

RIVERSIDE SOURCES

- Source A: Excerpts on NAACP Plunge Cast
- Source B: Excerpt from Autobiography of Frank Hannibal Johnson, 1940
- Source C: “Colored Race Seek Plunge,” Riverside Daily Press article, 1922
- Source D: Images of Fairmount and Lincoln Parks and Pools, 1915–1950s

REDLANDS SOURCES

- Source E: Photo of Sylvan Plunge brings back many memories for readers, 2007
- Source F: Excerpts from Segregation of Public Places in Redlands, 2021
- Source G: Images of the Sylvan Plunge and Floral Plunge in Redlands
- Source H: Oral Histories of Sylvan Plunge Integration

SAN BERNARDINO SOURCES

- Source I: Lopez v. Seccombe Case Reenactment Video
- Source J: San Bernardino Sun article excerpts, 1943

- Source K: Excerpts from “Sol y Sombra: San Bernardino’s Mexican Community, 1880-1960.”
- Source L: Excerpts from History of Perris Hill Park and Images of Perris Hill Plunge, past and present

DIGITAL/PHYSICAL STUDENT HANDOUTS

- Think About It Google Form Survey
- Student Document: Public Pools

Procedures

Key Vocabulary: "Third Places – (referred to in Slide#7 of the presentation) informal, public gathering spots, such as cafes, libraries, and parks, where people can socialize, exchange ideas, and build community outside of their homes (the "first place") and workplaces (the "second place"). Coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, these spaces foster social connection, a sense of belonging, and even provide support for individuals facing stress and isolation.

Be sure to set up the **Think About It** survey before the lesson. To do this, click [here](#) -> Make a Copy -> Share Responder Link with your students

DAY 1 [Access to Public Pools Slides](#)

1. Introduce the [Student Document](#), where students will record independent work in this lesson. (Slide #2). Teachers can also make a copy of this document (**Handout 1**)
2. Engage students in the HOOK (10-15 minutes):
 - a. Slideshow Slide #3: Introduce the 5 requirements the American Red Cross uses to determine whether or not a person can swim safely.
 - b. Share the **Think About It** Google Form with students to share their answers. Reveal the results to the class, calling upon a few students willing to volunteer their experiences with swimming. Be sure to discuss where most people swim.
 - c. Slide #4: Review the statistics with students. Then ask: Why does being able to swim matter? Is it important?
 - d. Slide #5: Share data from recent CDC reports about swimming and drowning deaths. To prompt discussion as a whole class, ask volunteers to share which statistic resonated in particular with them and why. To prompt discussion in small groups, ask students to consider which statistic resonates the most with them and why – then have them share with their group.
3. Review the objectives of the lesson. (Slide #6)
 - a. Introduce the inquiry question: **In what ways does access to a public pool impact a community?**
4. Provide a brief history of public pools in the U.S. while student record in their document – Slides #7-10. (10 minutes)

- a. Slide #7: Before playing the video excerpt, discuss the term “Third Places” with students and have them share some they can think of. Answers may include virtual spaces like social media, chat rooms, group chats/texts. Encourage students to think of some physical places like churches, parks, gyms, and even Starbucks. Explain that public pools were once popular third places in communities across the U.S.
5. Divide students into small groups and assign each group a city in the Inland Empire to explore discrimination in access to the public pools. (20 minutes)
 - a. Within each group, students will individually explore a document using the guiding questions. (documents, or “**Sources**,” are attached to this lesson)
 - b. As a group, students will design a slide to use as a tool to teach their classmates about this history.
 - c. Each group will select a spokesperson to present the slide to the class on the group’s behalf. They will have 2 minutes to present their key findings.

DAY 2 [Access to Public Pools Group Slide Template](#)

6. To transition back into the lesson, ask students to think of something they learned in the previous lesson that stuck with them. Ask them to share with a partner or small group. Ask for a few volunteers or share some of your observations as you walked around and listened to the conversations. (5 minutes)
7. Groups present on the history of public pool access in a specific Inland Empire city. If more than one group researched a given city, call on one group and then ask the other to come up and build on that information afterwards, working not to repeat the same information. (15 minutes)
 - a. As groups present, students will fill in notes in the provided document.
8. Present details about what happened to Public Pools after integration in many communities. (5 minutes)
9. Using [Google Maps](#), students research public pools in their community.
 - a. STEP 1: Have students search for “public pools near me.” Note: You may also want students to examine which schools in your area have pools, and whether those are accessible to the community.

- b. STEP 2: Ask students to click on some of the pools listed and learn more about them. Instruct students to scroll down to “public comments” and read what community members have to say and how they rate the pool.
- c. STEP 3: Either assign different groups within the class to explore different pools in the community and report out to compare them, OR ask students to select two pools in different socioeconomic areas of the community to compare.

Assessment

Evaluate access to public pools and the ability to swim in their own community. Do all members of your community have access to public parks and recreation today?

Reflection

What will you remember from this lesson? How can you use what you've learned to improve your community?

Extension (optional)

Students read about actions taken in other communities to improve swimming skills, then propose an action plan for their own community. This could be done in groups or individually as a potential project that could meet your district's criteria for the California State Seal of Civic Engagement.

- [Swim Lessons Save Lives. Should Schools Provide Them?](#) (2023) – Maryland bill proposal
- [SOMA Justice's Learn to Swim Program Is Changing Lives—and Local Pool Culture](#) (2023) – New Jersey program
- [Can Cities Fill the Swimming Pool Equity Gap?](#) (2021 – Long Beach, CA)

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RIVERSIDE

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 **RIVERSIDE Source A:** [Excerpts on NAACP Plunge Cast](#), “Structural Racism in Riverside County: A History,” Catherine Gudis (Professor of History, University of California, Riverside), Jennifer Tilton (Professor, Program in Race & Ethnic Studies, University of Redlands), 2024

Background: This account describes how a teenage Black girl was turned away from Fairmount pool in 1920, sparking a lawsuit against the city by the Riverside NAACP chapter that resulted in a compromise of building a separate pool on the Eastside. This reveals the entrenched commitment in Riverside toward segregation and the determination by the Black community to have access to a public pool.

Frank Johnson was a minister, the owner of Riverside Carriage Exchange, and had broken the color line in 1892 as the first Black clerk at a downtown store. In 1920, he was also the president of the newly founded NAACP. His wife, Alice Rowan Johnson, was the first certified Black teacher in the state. In 1911, the Johnsons had joined others in the community to help build Fairmount Park. On a hot day in August 1920, their daughter, high school student Alice Johnson, went to Fairmount Park to go swimming. Refused entry, she went home to wait until Tuesday. That was the day she would be allowed in, because she was Black. Afterwards, the water from the pool would be emptied and refilled before whites arrived the next day. Alice wasn't the first or only Black youth to be ejected from Fairmount pool while her white classmates were let in. The Black community's previous efforts to challenge the exclusions with visits to the Park Board and the Mayor had failed. So, with L.A. civil rights attorney Burton Ceruti and the new local NAACP, Johnson sued the city of Riverside, the Park board (heavily composed of white southerners), and its Superintendent.

The city settled the lawsuit a year later, paying the NAACP costs and claiming to open up Fairmount Park to all citizens, though in practice exclusions remained.... When NAACP members and children continued to test the supposedly open pool in the summer of 1922, they were sometimes refused, and one time a young man was thrown in the pool in his clothes. The ongoing threats and pressure destroyed the NAACP branch and inhibited organizing efforts through the late 1930s according to ongoing reports from the few remaining members. Black residents had little choice but to accept the compromise of building a separate pool and recreation center on the Eastside.

What inequalities existed in the 1920s with access to the Fairmount Park pool?

How were these inequalities addressed?

How did the city settle the lawsuit?

Why did Black residents accept the compromise?

 **RIVERSIDE Source B:** Excerpt from Autobiography of Frank Hannibal Johnson, 1940, p. 16

Background: This recollection is from Frank Johnson, father of the teen girl denied access to Fairmount pool in 1920 that sparked the NAACP lawsuit, as transmitted through his daughter in 1940. His description details how Monday was reserved for Black community members. Johnson (the president of the NAACP at the time) admits to instigating the lawsuit and describes the harassment he and others in the Black community faced. It was their willingness to stand up for their rights that brought Lincoln Park into existence.

The city had put a swimming pool in Fairmount Park which had been given by one of the wealthy citizens, but put in usable condition by many colored citizens, who had volunteered their labor or gave money for its improvements. The pool in the park was used by whites six day and one day (Monday) was to be given to Negroes. This plan had been copied from the rule in Denver, Colorado. I had previously protested this action to the mayor as being unlawful, unfair, and un-American. I knew the 51st and 52nd sections of the civil code of California forbading such action on the part of the city or the park board composed partly of southern whites.

"He who would be free, must strike the blow". One evening when I came home I was told by my daughter that she and some other colored children had been refused the privilege of bathing in the pool. Taking my daughter and two others, I went to the park that night, tended a five dollar bill to the keeper and asked for three bathing tickets, which would cost seventy-five cents. I was informed by the keeper that Monday was colored people's day and he could not sell me the tickets. I told him very well, you will hear from me again. He sneeringly replied, he would not worry about that.

I was president of the local branch of the **National Association for Colored People** and promptly referred the matter to that body for action. A committee was appointed to contact the mayor and council regarding the matter. They referred us to the park board. We met this body one night in the city Hall to air the matter and in my remarks I asked that in the light of the sacrifice and suffering that our colored boys had made overseas, if we as a race were not entitled to all the rights of any other American citizens. The curt reply from one of the members was we were if we could get them. We employed one of the most noted colored lawyers in Los Angeles and sued the city of Riverside, the park board collectively and individually. We sued the superintendent of the park, the keeper at the pool for \$5000.00 damages. I, as instigator of the suit was charged with being a radical, a trouble maker. I was threatened by anonymous letters to be run out of town, but none of those things moved me.

Some faint-hearted Negroes lined up against me and tried to play into the hands of the whites. I was adroitly tried to be bribed to drop

the suit. A campaign by the white Chamber of Commerce started to have all Negroes discharged from private jobs. The secretary and myself as president of the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** were both forced to give up our jobs, but the fight went on and we won by a compromise in which the city paid for the institution of the suit and opened up the park. The time came for an election of new officers in the N.A.A.C.P. The appeasers merely had a majority of the membership. I refused to run for re-election for the presidency. A new one was elected and later a compromise was made with the city if it would build a proper park playground with pool and other accommodations.--The colored people while not agreeing to sacrifice their rights in any of the park facilities near their community. Thus it was Lincoln Park in the city of Riverside was brought into being by citizens who dared to stand up for their rights.

Transcription

The city had put a swimming pool in Fairmount Park which had been given by one of the wealthy citizens, but put in usable condition by many colored citizens, who had volunteered their labor or gave money for its improvements. The pool in the park was used by whites six day and one day (Monday) was to be given to Negroes. This plan had been copied from the rule in Denver, Colorado. I had previously protested this action to the mayor as being unlawful, unfair, and un-American. I knew the 51st and 52nd sections of the civil code of California forbidding such action on the part of the city or the park board composed partly of southern whites.

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What inequalities existed in the 1920s with access to the Fairmount Park pool?

What arguments are used to justify integrating the Fairmount pool?

How was Lincoln Park brought into being?

RIVERSIDE Source C: "Colored Race Seek Plunge", Riverside Daily Press, May 23, 1922

Background: This article reports the outcome of the Riverside council meeting, where committee members representing the Black community seek a peaceful resolution to the pool access issue: build a swimming pool on the Eastside. The group's spokesperson, Robert Boyd, explains that Black community members cannot accept having just one day a week access to a pool because they are citizens and deserve the full rights of citizens.

**COLORED RACE
SEEK PLUNGE**

**COMMITTEE PRESENT PETITION
TO COUNCIL FOR BATHING PRIVI-
LEGE ON EASTSIDE**

**Brockton Avenue Improvement as Pro-
posed Discussed in Letter from
Mayor—Ordinance Against Closed
Booths**

Asking that the racial question in Riverside be peacefully solved, a committee headed by Robert J. Boyd appeared before the common council this morning during which the suggestion was made that a swimming pool be installed on the Eastside for the use of the colored folk. On the committee active with Mr. Boyd are C. H. Daugherty, Mrs. L. Keys, J. B. Culpepper and D. Stokes.

A petition presented asked that a plunge be arranged for, mention being made of the meeting held in Mercantile hall May 19, at which time plans were discussed in the way of "relieving the unpleasant situation that exists at Fairmount park and the use of the plunge."

At the session held in Mercantile hall it was voted unanimously to petition the council for the improvement sought. The committee, according to the petition, seeks a man of their own race, presumably, to superintend the plunge on the Eastside, "one who will keep the park in a sanitary condition, and above all, one who will maintain good morals."

Mr. Boyd, acting as spokesman, explained that the colored people here want to heal the wounds caused by the recent unpleasantness at Fairmount park when he said a number of negro boys were tossed into the pool with their clothes on. "A plunge on the Eastside will be instrumental in healing whatever friction now exists," he said. When asked if the colored people would use the Eastside plunge exclusively provided one was arranged for, Mr. Boyd declared that no one has a right to order that the colored race should accept anyone day at the Fairmount plunge, but that the negroes here will be instructed to use discretion. "Negroes cannot forfeit their citizenship rights," Mr. Boyd explained. "We have the right to exercise our citizenship but we are looking for peace, not trouble in the matter of a place in which to bathe."

Transcription

COLORED RACE SEEK PLUNGE

Committee Present Petition to Council for Bathing Privilege on Eastside

Brockton Avenue Improvement as Proposed Discussed in Letter from Mayor – Ordinance Against Closed Booths

Asking that the racial question in Riverside be peacefully solved, a committee headed by Robert J. Boyd appeared before the common council this morning during which the suggestion was made that a swimming pool be installed on the Eastside for the use of the colored folk. On the committee active with Mr. Boyd are C. H. Daugherty, Mrs. L. Keys, J. B. Culpepper and D. Stokes.

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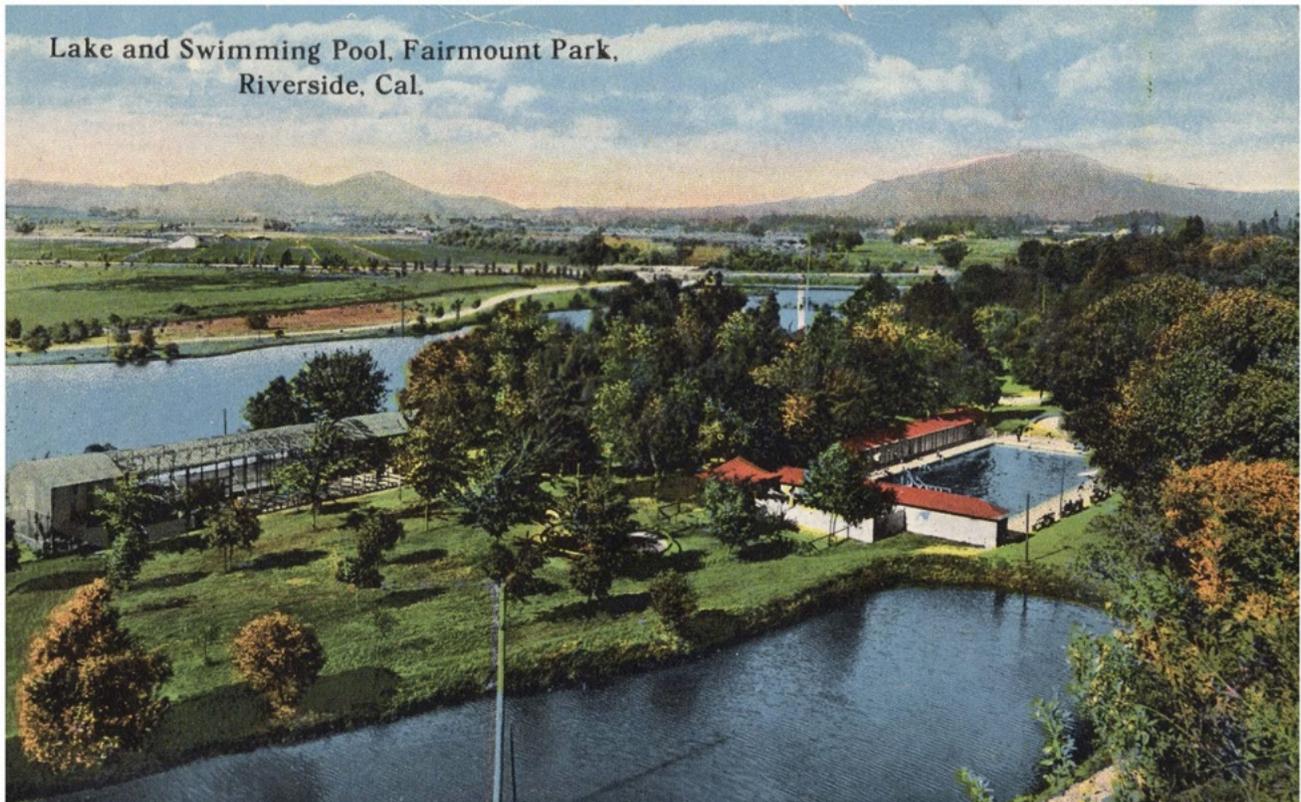
What did the Black community ask the city council for in May of 1922?

Why did the community want this?

RIVERSIDE Source D: Images of Fairmount and Lincoln Parks & Pools

Background: Although the Lincoln pool and park were not as large as Fairmount's, the location provided valuable space for community gathering and opportunities.

Image 1



Colored postcard of aerial view of Fairmount Park showing plunge pool with sylvan pool below it and Fairmount Lake above (From the Glenn Wenzel collection).

Source: [The Raincross Gazette](#)

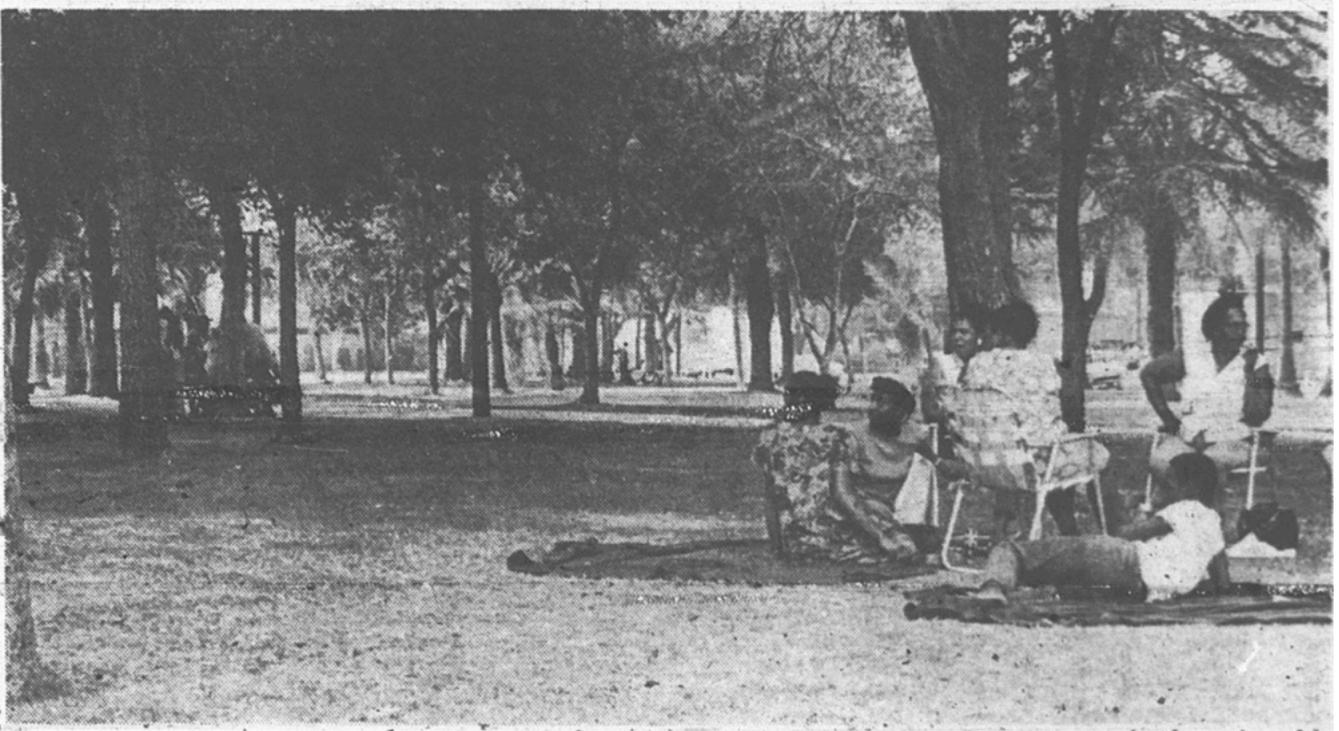
Image 2



Postcard of plunge pool with slide and high dive (Courtesy of Steve Lech), approximately 1915.

Source: [The Raincross Gazette](#)

Image 3



A family takes advantage of the shade at Lincoln Park to escape the hot late afternoon sun. 1950s

Source: [Claiming Our Space](#), Dr. Catherine Gudis, 2022

Image 4



Lincoln Park Pool in the 1930s. (Courtesy of Dell Roberts)

Source: [Claiming Our Space](#), Dr. Catherine Gudis, 2022

Image 5



Hula Hoop Contest at Lincoln Park, 1957.

Source: Riversider website

[Lincoln] Park opened with the Plunge in 1924, and grew to include a sheltered baseball diamond, tennis courts, covered pergolas surrounded by plants and trees, and a children's playground... Lincoln Park Recreation Center hosted everything from picnics and parades, pie-eating and hula hoop contests, to race relations rallies and the Rhythmettes girls drill team... The Rec Center was a hub, too, for lessons in civil rights.

-Source: [Claiming Our Space](#), Dr. Catherine Gudis, 2022

In what ways are these facilities similar?

What differences do you notice?



REDLANDS



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UNIVERSITY OF
Redlands

REDLANDS Source E: "Photo of Sylvan Plunge brings back many memories for readers." Redlands Daily Facts - August 13, 2007.

"Construction of the pool was authorized by the city in 1922, and ...it was officially opened on June 16, 1923... The large pool was surrounded by dressing rooms, bleachers and a snack bar, and was drained on Monday afternoons. Sadly, there was discrimination at the pool, and Latinos were not always allowed to swim there."



Community Members' Recollections of the Sylvan Plunge

"I'm sure many will recognize this picture as the Sylvan Plunge at Sylvan Park, but perhaps I can add some details," wrote Scott Klemm of Highland. "During my childhood in the 1950s, I took American Red Cross swimming lessons every summer. I began with the beginners' class and worked up to the life-saving class as I got older."

"Swimming lessons were in the morning. I remember it being quite chilly when there was June gloom. In the afternoon, the plunge opened for the general public. It cost only 10 cents for children under 12."

"Do I remember? You bet!" wrote Paul A. Castanedo of Redlands. "My brothers and sisters spent nearly every summer day at the Sylvan Plunge, from 1953 until the early '60s. Our parents usually drove us on weekends and they also swam. We rode our bikes during the summer week days. Also, while attending Redlands High from '61 to '63, for gym class we would walk from RHS first thing in the morning to the Plunge. I recall in October the water was very cold in the morning, particularly if you had gym first period. We also learned to swim there, and each year we would progress through the Red Cross swimming program. The goal was to be a life guard."

"At the far end, you can see what was called the wading pool.' Not shown, was the high dive, to dive off this one was to prove you made it.' At that time there was no filters. The water was drained twice per week. The lifeguards would daily pour in large quantities of chlorine."

What did the pool provide for local children, based on the memories shared?

 **REDLANDS Source F:** “Segregation of Public Places in Redlands: Mexican American Stories of Segregation from 1920–1950s,” Collin O’Connor, Isabella Jacobs, and Jennifer Tilton, a project of REST University of Redlands, April 13, 2021.

<p>MONDAYS AT SYLVAN PLUNGE</p> <p>The Sylvan Plunge, located in Sylvan Park, is perhaps the most well-known symbol of segregation in Redlands. It was only open to people of color one day a week – on Monday. Many painfully remembered the story that the pool was cleaned the next day, as if their day of fun somehow dirtied the water more than white kids did.</p> <p>Some families resisted that insult and refused to let their kids go to the Sylvan pool. Carl Sepulveda used to beg his mother to go swimming on Mondays at Sylvan Plunge... but his mother told him, “If you’re not good enough to go swimming anytime of the week that you want, you’re not going to go on Monday.” (Carl Sepulveda Oral history, pg. 45)</p>	<p>FLORAL or MEXICAN PLUNGE</p> <p>Mexican American families and other families of color were left with the much smaller pool in the industrial area near the railroad tracks, completed in 1938 (Redlands Historical Timeline Storymap). Though officially named the Floral Plunge, this small pool was often simply called the “Mexican Plunge.” Built by the WPA, this pool shows how local and federal government practices supported segregation (Alvarez 2019). Carl Sepulveda said many Mexican families just went along with these segregated rules, even though they owned homes and paid taxes and resented the exclusions. “In those days you didn’t fight. They would have run you out of town.” He added, “You couldn’t say, ‘I’m going to get an attorney. I’m going to fight these things.’ Nobody had the money to go to court to fight prejudice to fight segregation at Sylvan Park of the theater. So people used to just accept it” (Carl Sepulveda Oral history, p. 45-46).</p>
<p>EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW OF ALFRED ARMENDARIZ CONDUCTED BY ROBERT GONZALES, JULY 11, 2000.</p> <p>Interviewer: What were some of the things that you did when you were young in your free time? Were you involved in any athletics? Or were you, I know we’ll talk a little bit later about your being a musician, but tell me about that.</p>	

Alfred: Well, since we lived on Stuart Street, West Stuart Street, The House of Neighborly Service was kind of our babysitter, because that was the only place around we could actually go where they had lights and they had games, baseball, football, basketball court. Maybe not up to standard but the court was there, and the field was there, and the lights were there. And they had boxing and they had weight lifting and another good thing was that they had showers for us, so if you wanted to shower, it was available there, especially on Saturdays. And they had other classes we could play indoors were Monopoly, or ring toss, and other games and they had programs for arts and crafts and so forth. This is the only place in the area that I remember now that was close to home and we were allowed to go there five days a week.

Interviewer: That's one of the things that I've run across people that have talked about it and, is the issue of segregation, where people were allowed to go and what they were allowed to do at a certain time. What was your experience with that here?

Alfred: Well, I remember the Redlands Sylvan plunge where we were allowed to go there on Mondays and that was the last day before they emptied out the water and that was the only day. I don't recall any signs being put up, but it was word-of-mouth and it was known that that was our day.

What did Mexican American families do in response to the discrimination they faced at the Sylvan Plunge?

How was the discrimination at Sylvan Plunge enforced?

REDLANDS Source G: Images of the Sylvan Plunge and Floral Plunge of Redlands

Image 1



Sylvan Plunge

Source: [Redlands Historical Society](#)

Image 2



"That is the Sylvan Plunge which was located in the southwest corner of Sylvan Park," said David Atchley of Redlands. "The photo appears to be in the late '50s or early '60s. It is shown in the photo exactly as I remember. The pool on the left was a deeper pool in which you were required to show and test your swimming capabilities before you were allowed to swim there. It was indicated by a red patch on your swim suit. The other pool to the right was shallow and a lot of fun. The building in the rear was the locker room and shower room with the snack bar on the end."

*Source: Redlands Daily Facts Archive - August 13, 2007.
"Photo Of Sylvan Plunge Brings Back Many Memories For Readers."*

Image 3



Image of the Floral Plunge

This is one of the only known photographs of the Redlands Floral Plunge. Located on Oriental Avenue, the "Mexican Plunge" was built and run by the House of Neighborly Service, a Presbyterian community service organization that provided everything from cultural enrichment to after school programs, childcare, and laundry facilities. Located a short distance up the railroad tracks was the Sylvan Plunge, a much larger and better-equipped facility open to Mexicans one day a week - the day the pool was cleaned. Although the Floral Plunge was used by many in the Mexican community, some parents refused to allow their children to patronize segregated facilities in a town where they "paid taxes, worked hard, and owned homes," as noted by Carl Sepulveda. In the photo is Richard Alvarez, the lifeguard who is standing with arms crossed.

SOURCE: [A People's History of the Inland Empire Digital Archive](#) contributed by Inland Mexican Heritage, Courtesy of Armando Lopez

In what ways are these images similar?

What differences do you notice?

 **REDLANDS Source H: Oral Histories of Sylvan Plunge Integration**

Background: In the 1960s, the aging Sylvan Plunge was desegregated, and the Mexican Plunge was turned into a private swim club for Anglo youth.

Clarence Butler about Mr. Bullard integrating Sylvan Plunge:

Click to listen: [Clarence Butler Clip #10 Mr Bullard.mp3](#)

Scan to list:



Source: Dr. Jennifer Tilton

According to Tom Atchley:

The Sylvan Plunge was not desegregated until 1961, when a Redlands high school teacher working there one summer began to ask why it was segregated except for one day a week. He wondered if there was a law on the books, but there wasn't. It was just how things were done. And few with the power to change it ever questioned the status quo. Without much fanfare, the teacher changed the rule.

Source: "Segregation Of Public Places In Redlands: Mexican American Stories Of Segregation From 1920-1950s," Collin O'Connor, Isabella Jacobs, And Jennifer Tilton, A Project Of Rest University Of Redlands, April 13, 2021.

According to the accounts above, why was the Sylvan Plunge finally desegregated?

Due to more and more people having private pools at their homes, the Sylvan Plunge was closed in the late 1970s, and was filled with soil and covered by grass. The buildings and bleachers that surrounded it were dismantled, and Redlands no longer had a public community pool. By the 1980s, both pools had been demolished.

Source: Redlands Daily Facts, August 13, 2007. "Photo Of Sylvan Plunge Brings Back Many Memories For Readers."

When and why did the Sylvan pool close?





SAN BERNARDINO

**Relevancy
& History** PROJECT

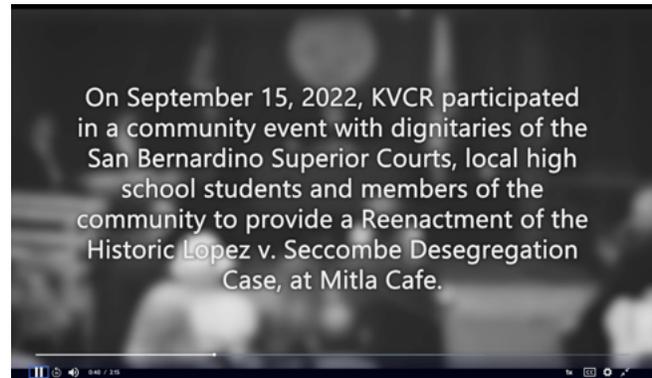
UC RIVERSIDE PUBLIC HISTORY

history-geography project

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

UNIVERSITY OF
Redlands

SAN BERNARDINO Source I: "Lopez v. Seccombe (Case Reenactment)." KVCR, 21 Dec. 2022, [Lopez V Seccombe](https://www.kvcr.org/education/lopez-v-seccombe/)



<https://www.kvcr.org/education/lopez-v-seccombe/>

Watch the smaller Preview Video on the right-hand side [2:12].

What does the case of Lopez v. Seccombe decide? What did it lead to?

Watch the Case Reenactment [from 1:40–5:38].

What injustice does the attorney for the plaintiffs, David C. Marcus, argue has occurred? How was what happened in San Bernardino a violation of the "separate but equal" clause of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling by the Supreme Court in 1896?

Watch the Case Reenactment from [25:30–28:04].

According to Justice Manuel A. Ramirez, why is the case of Lopez v. Seccombe an important landmark case that the community should understand?

SAN BERNARDINO Source J: "City's Mexican Residents Ask Use of Plunge," San Bernardino County Sun, August 19, 1943, and "Meeting Called on Use of City Plunge by Mexican Residents," San Bernardino County Sun, August 22, 1943.

City's Mexican Residents Ask Use of Plunge
Council Studying Request Submitted By Committee

Under advisement by the mayor and city council is a request from members of the Mexican-American Defense committee of San Bernardino that citizens of Mexican descent be permitted "to enjoy their privileges of using the municipal plunge at Ferris Hill park."

In a letter addressed to Mayor W. C. Secombe, the executive committee of the organization stated that the request was authorized by "American citizens and fathers and mothers of American citizens, gathered in public assembly on Sunday, Aug. 1, at the San Jose hall in San Bernardino.

"We appeal to you again that as mayor of the City of San Bernardino and presiding member of the city council, you exercise your duty as such and lift the restriction against our citizens of Mexican descent to enjoy their privileges of using the municipal plunge at Ferris Hill park.

"In the past, Mr. Mayor, we have been informed by you and by other members of your official family that if the doors of the municipal plunge were opened freely to all, repercussions of protest and discord would emanate from the so-called 'white element' of the community. It is beyond belief that in our friendly city we should, voluntarily or otherwise, deprive citizens of their legal rights for the only reason that they don't look the way we want them to look."

The letter was signed by Eugenio Norguerra, Gonzalo Valles, the Rev. Fr. J. B. Nunez, M. J. Ciriza, Eligio Romo and Ignacio L. Lopez.

Source: San Bernardino County Sun, August 19, 1943, Published By Newspapers.com

This committee recently asked the mayor and city council to permit the use of the plunge by American citizens of Mexican descent. In the letter, the committee stated:

"We do so base this appeal on the principles of true democracy, on the demarcations of section 51 and 53 of the civil code of California, on the distinctive fact that we are all good Americans, citizens and residents of a truly friendly city, on the belief that Mexican-American boys are serving honorably and patriotically on the different battlefronts . . .

"Rights and privileges of our citizens go hand in hand with duties and obligations. The citizens of our city and of our country are doing their duty, enlisting in the armed forces, paying their share of taxes, buying bonds, serving as nurses, working in defense units, participating in community drives, and helping in the election of public officials . . .

"It is beyond belief that in our friendly city we should, voluntarily or otherwise, deprive citizens of their legal rights for the only reason that they don't look the way we want them to look."

Source: "Meeting Called On Use Of City Plunge By Mexican Residents," San Bernardino County Sun, August 22, 1943, Published By Newspapers.com

Transcription

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Source: "Meeting Called On Use Of City Plunge By Mexican Residents," San Bernardino County Sun, August 22, 1943, Published By Newspapers.com

What reason did the committee claim the mayor provided in the past for not allowing Mexican-Americans to freely use the Perris Hill pool?

What reasons does the committee provide to justify their equal access to the Perris Hill pool?

 **SAN BERNARDINO Source K:** Excerpts from “Sol y Sombra: San Bernardino’s Mexican Community, 1880–1960,” Mark Ocegueda, UC Irvine, 2017.

Reacting to the mayor’s assertions that the plunge did not segregate based on race; the MADC [Mexican American Defense Council] conducted an experiment with Father Nuñez and several Mexican children. The committee made sure that the children were neatly dressed and clean before arriving to the pool in order to negate a possible rejection based on claims of cleanliness. Predictably, park officials refused the children entry into the pool and made no reference to the children’s **hygiene** as the basis for non-admission.

[Latino journalist Ignacio] López witnessed the incident and reported, “Last Tuesday afternoon Reverend J.R. Nuñez and three of the Mexican children of his parish were refused admittance to the San Bernardino **Municipal** Plunge because they were Mexicans. They were refused the use of a swimming pool which displays a bronze plaque that says ‘no one is to be refused admittance because of race or color,’ and which was built with WPA money.”

Through this test, the MADC effectively dismantled Mayor Seccombe’s “**hygiene**” reasoning for admission... In October, federal judge León Yankwich issued a temporary **injunction** restraining city officials from barring Mexican Americans from **municipal** recreational facilities and, on December 28, 1943, the MADC tasted victory as Judge Yankwich issued the **injunction** permanently.

hygiene:
cleanliness,
especially to
prevent disease

injunction:
judicial order
that prohibits an
action

municipal:
related to a city
or town

How did the Mexican community dismantle Mayor Seccombe’s argument that Mexicans were turned away from using the Perris Hill pool for hygiene purposes?

Shortly after Judge Yankwich’s injunction, the city anticipated the MADC’s next step of targeting restaurants that refused service to Mexicans. As a result, the city council passed an **ordinance** as a **preemptive** measure against the MADC, requiring businesses to remove “White Trade Only” signs from storefronts. The city also received pressure from military officials to take action on this issue as local cafes and bars frequently denied service to African American servicemen at Norton Air Force Base... The council approved ordinance no. 1704 on December 17, 1943, stipulating that any business discriminating along lines of “color or race” would be subject to a \$100 fine and/or imprisonment. The following summer when the plunge opened its doors, the Mexican community enjoyed the cool water without incident.

ordinance: a city law

preemptive: an effort to prevent an attack by the opposition by disabling them

What other discriminatory practices did the city of San Bernardino put a stop to after the judge’s injunction against barring Mexican Americans from city recreational facilities?

SAN BERNARDINO Source L: Excerpts from “History of Perris Hill Park,”
Pickleball San Bernardino, and Images of Perris Hills pool, past & present

Image 1



Source: *Perris Hill Park Plunge With Summersnational Archives And Records Administration, Neg 8556-C, With Permission Of [The Living New Deal](#)*

Image 2



Source: The Plunge with Swimmers & Sunbathers. National Archives and Records Administration, Neg 8563-C, with permission of [The Living New Deal](#)

“The outdoor pool first opened Summer of 1936... By the mid 1930s, ‘Perris Hill Park’ had become a favorite playground for families in San Bernardino.”

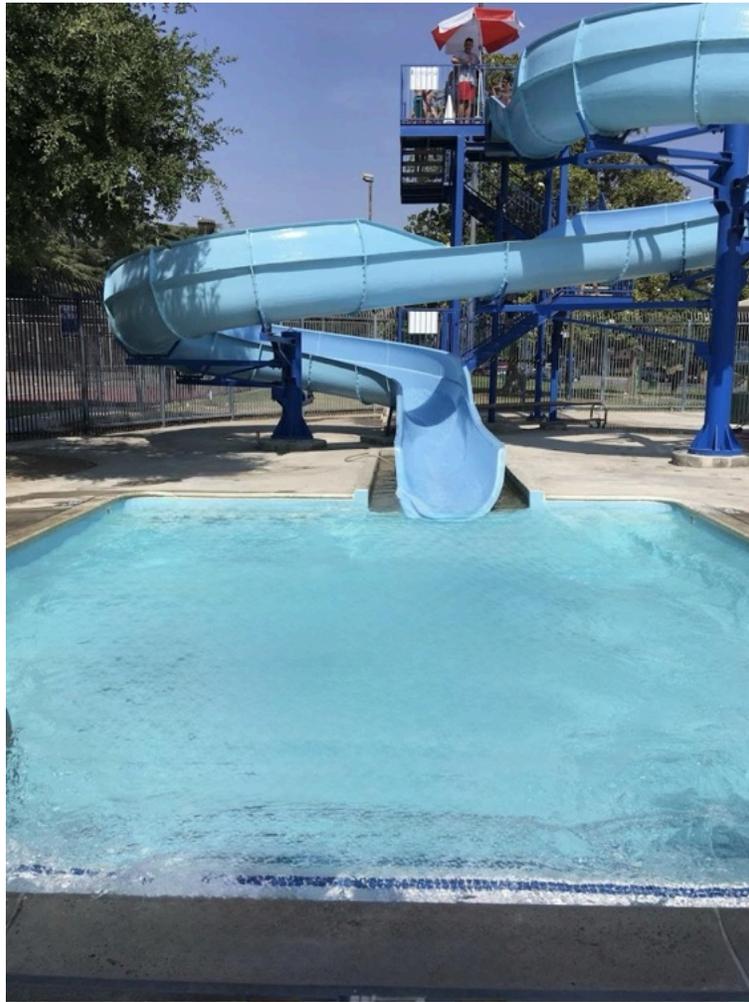
Source: Pickleball San Bernardino

Image 3



Source: Recent Image Of What Was Once The Perris Hill Plunge, Now Referred To As The Jerry Lewis Swim Center, Posted June 27, 2025. [Jerry Lewis Family Swim Center Facebook Page](#)

Image 4



Source: Modern Images of what was once the Perris Hill Plunge, now referred to as the Jerry Lewis Swim Center, June 2025

“...the Perris Hill Plunge Now The Jerry Lewis Family Swim Center Has Always Been The Place To Be On A Hot Summer Day.”

Source: [Pickleball San Bernardino](#)

After examining the images and descriptions of the Perris Hill pool in the 1930s (THEN) and 2020s (NOW), how does the pool today compare with the pool of the past? How has the ruling to integrate appeared to impact this facility?



Community Swimming Pools A Question of Access & Equity

Essential Question: How does access to a public pool impact a community?

DIRECTIONS: Use this document to reflect and take notes on the lesson/slides guided by your teacher

PART 1: Why does swimming matter?

Type response here

Adjust your response as needed based on the data presented. Which statistic most alarms you? Be sure to include it.

PART 2:

THIRD PLACES

What are popular third places that exist today?

Type response here

Vocabulary to know:

Third Places: places where people spend time between home and work. Locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships.

An Early History of Public Swimming Pools in the U.S.

Late 1800s

1913

1920-1930s

Type notes here

Type notes here

Type notes here

PART 3: Swimming in the I.E.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH

Which city are you researching about?

Which Document are you examining?

Type response here	Type letter of document here
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GROUP PRESENTATIONS

RIVERSIDE - 1920s

REDLANDS - 1930s

SAN BERNARDINO - 1940s

Type notes here	Type notes here	Type notes here
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In what ways did community members enact the changes to allow pool access in these examples?

Type response here

PART 4: The Decline of Public Pools

What happened in the majority of communities after public pools became integrated?

Type response here

PART 5: Analyzing Access to Pools in My Community

What did you learn about access to public pools in your community? Is it equitable? Explain.

Type response here

EXIT TICKET

What will stick with you from this lesson? How can you use this knowledge to improve your community?

Type response here
