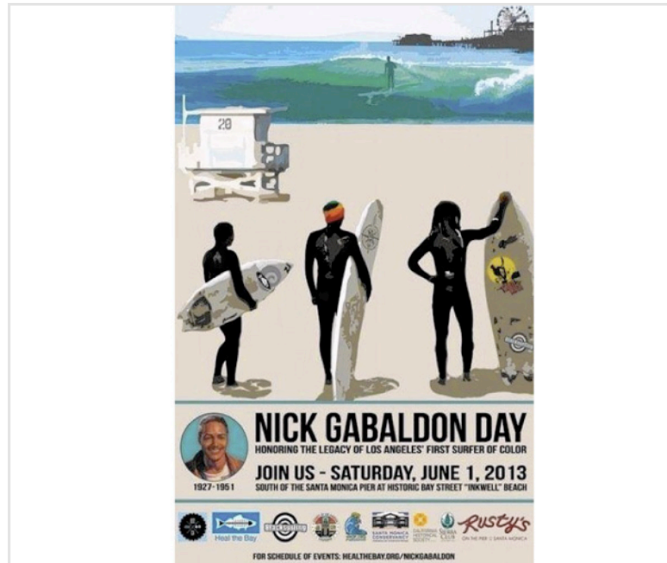


SANTA MONICA/VENICE

Nick Gabaldon: Surfer made sport more accessible

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A poster advertises Nick Gabaldon Day festivities in Santa Monica. (Heal The Bay)

While many were fighting for equality on land, Nick Gabaldon took the fight offshore.

For Gabaldon, surfing in 1940s Southern California became a political act. At a time when African Americans were not welcome on most public beaches, “the Inkwel” — a slice of sand at the end of Bay Street in Santa Monica — became a gathering spot for many, including Gabaldon.

The first documented black surfer in California (he was actually half-Latino), Gabaldon never joined the professional ranks. Self-taught, he would paddle 12-miles to Malibu to challenge himself on larger waves.

“And because he was good at surfing,” said Alison Rose Jefferson, a historian of black Angeleno history, “he overcame with many people ... He was making a contestation by being in these identified white spaces.”

Gabaldon died in a surfing accident in Malibu in 1951. He was 24.

In 2008, the city of Santa Monica dedicated a plaque to the young surfer. The Black Surfers Collective holds an annual remembrance of Gabaldon and offers free surfing classes to many children who otherwise may not have been exposed to the sport.

“That’s why we’re trying to hold up his legacy,” said Damien Baskette, a member of the collective. “I’ve seen kids get hooked right away. You have to show there’s more than just the parking lot around the house.”

—Steve Saldivar

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