

2070

1958 EBONY BEACH CLUB
2020 EBONY BEACH CLUB
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2020 Workshop with Santa Monica High School
Zine Design: April Banks
Cover: Based on the 1958 Logo for Ebony Beach Club

santamonica.gov/arts/belmar

BELMAR
HISTORY
+ART



THERE ARE BLACK PEOPLE IN THE FUTURE

—Alisha Wormsley

There Are Black People In The Future rang like a manifesto, and a lullaby for 2020. Shouted in the streets after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and whispered into the ears of those dying from a misunderstood virus. A declaration and a meditation for a year of plague, a year of reckoning. The turmoil of racial injustice, a global pandemic and economic crisis, positioned us to tear it all down, question history, remember the erased, celebrate what *was* accomplished, **build a better future for all marginalized people.**

Just a few months before the world bowed its head in collective grief, a dedicated group set about the task of remembering. I was commissioned to facilitate community engagement and create permanent art to honor **Belmar—the area where African Americans first settled in Santa Monica in the late 1800s.** They came in search of the California Dream and freedom from racial oppression. By the 1950s, this ‘community by the sea’ was destroyed and displaced through eminent domain.

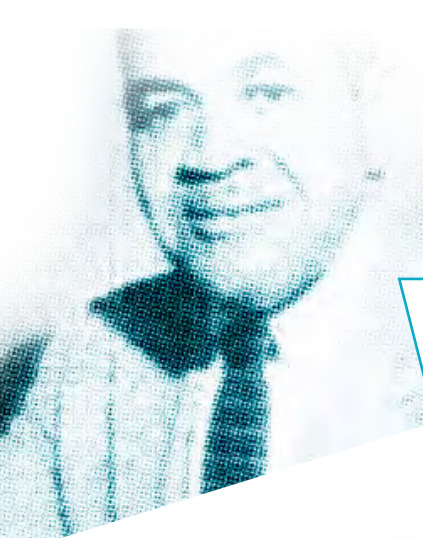
One business in particular caught hold of me. As I flipped through a set of concept drawings from 1958 for the **Ebony Beach Club**, I wondered what it would be like today. It was planned for a prime location just a short walk from the beach. [This unfulfilled dream became the seed for Santa Monica High School \(SAMOHI\) students to imagine Black people in the future, in the year 2070.](#)

2020 was a difficult year. We protested, we pivoted, we persevered. This zine is a collective imagining, a gift to the future. It holds the ideas of our youth, who will be our elders when the Belmar History + Art time capsule is opened in 2070.

A special thank you to workshop instructors: Susu Attar and Natalie Patterson; historian: Alison Rose Jefferson; Constance White, daughter of Silas White, President of Ebony Beach Club; SAMOHI teachers: Ms. Amy Bouse and Mr. Nathan Fulcher; students: Justin Best, Maya Lauer, Kaelen Song, Breanna Vallejos, and all the students who participated before the corona virus shut down the world.

April Banks

Artist, Belmar History + Art



SILAS WHITE

1958
Concept Drawing



Excerpts, Courtesy of the Constance White Collection

Dear Friends:

It is with pride and great pleasure that I present to you our beach club, one of the finest of it's type in America. My most earnest desire is that your affiliation with this project will be a happy and memorable one.

I have spent the greater part of my life in Santa Monica and have very frequently observed the total lack of facilities for the accommodations and comfort of my people.

I have seen thousands come to the beach and be compelled to dress and undress in their cars or in the public restrooms. **How often have I repeated to myself, why should we not have a nice beach club.** Fully realizing that wishing would not make this a reality I finally started to act.

First where could a suitable location be secured? Secondly, what could I do after finding such a place? My next question was the sixty four thousand dollar one, where would the money to finance such a venture come from?

Through the Grace of God I was able to contact the right people and sell to them my idea of a beach club. We there upon secured the building situated at **1811 Ocean Avenue, Santa Monica, California** which is just a short block from the ocean and King Neptune's Playground.

The purpose of this club is for the pleasure, social enjoyment, recreation and entertainment of it's members and to foster and perpetuate social relations. Sponsored hunting trips for those who like to hunt. Fishing trips in chartered boats for the fisherman. Amateur golf tournaments for the golfers and numerous other activities, such as Amateur TV shows for our talented members.

All membership subscriptions to be impounded in a trust fund. Don't miss the boat. Our membership is limited. So long, **we'll be seeing you, where the Ebony Beach Club meets the sea.**

Silas C. White,
President, Ebony Beach Club

1959

Eminent Domain

1811
OCEAN
AVE

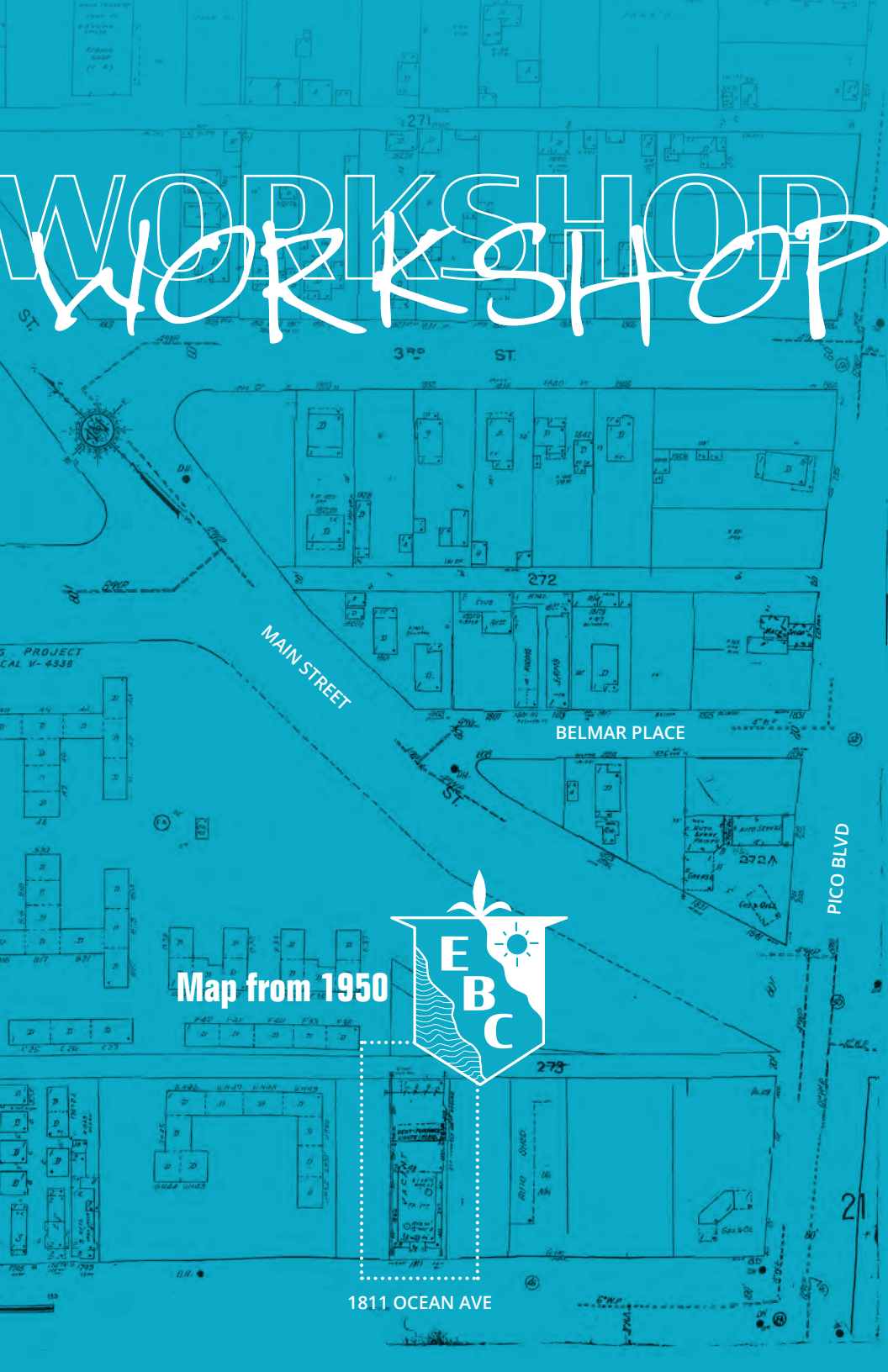


Santa Monica History Museum. Gilmore Family Collection

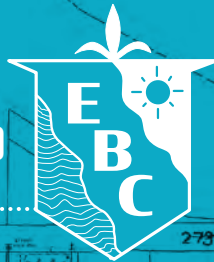
A DREAM DEFERRED

This abandoned building at 1811 Ocean Avenue was to be the **Ebony Beach Club**. When city officials seized the land in 1959, Black entrepreneur, Silas A. White, put up a sign of protest across the front of the building. The sign charged: S.M. CITY OFFICIALS USED EMINENT DOMAIN CONDEMNATION FOR RACIAL DISCRIMINATION. In 2020, this location is the site of the Viceroy Hotel.

WORKSHOP



Map from 1950



1811 OCEAN AVE

At the start of 2020, sixteen SAMOHI art and writing students came together to imagine their city fifty years in the future. In this future, Black people reclaim erased neighborhoods and restore hidden American histories. Using worldbuilding as methodology, the students designed the city of Santa Monica in 2070 by combining the best and worst possible outcomes of the present. Worldbuilding is a meticulous process of constructing a fictional yet coherent world using reality as a starting point. The process illuminates the structures in the world as they are and shifts the imagination to how we build new structures, new realities.

The group workshoped big questions about the future on a weekly basis. How will climate change affect food consumption? How will community relationships strengthen and weaken? What will fashion look like? Students then began looking back to the 1950's Black community of Belmar. We took inspiration from the blueprint of the past and posed the question: what if descendants of Belmar residents return and execute the vision for The Ebony Beach Club in 2070? How do we architect that reality?

As the pandemic spread, students struggled with school closures and unprecedented times. The conversations and ideas they had been engaging became even more relevant as life suddenly changed. Anti-blackness became a central topic across the nation, as police violence continued to go unchecked. The group of sixteen became a group of four: Justin Best, Maya Lauer, Kaelen Song, and Breanna Vallejos. These four took the larger group's worldbuild and carried the group vision amid a world in disarray. The students had been examining the violence of a past that was ever present, a continuous thread. Their ability to hold all of that heavy reality, to see the mechanisms at play, and to pull the thread towards an unlimited future is presented here.

This zine is worldbuilding at its finest from the minds and hearts of SAMOHI students.

It has been our absolute honor to help guide these young minds.

Susu Attar + Natalie Patterson
Teaching Artists, Belmar History + Art

2020

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Join us for the Grand Opening of:

FINISH

**EBONY
BEACH**

BUSINESS

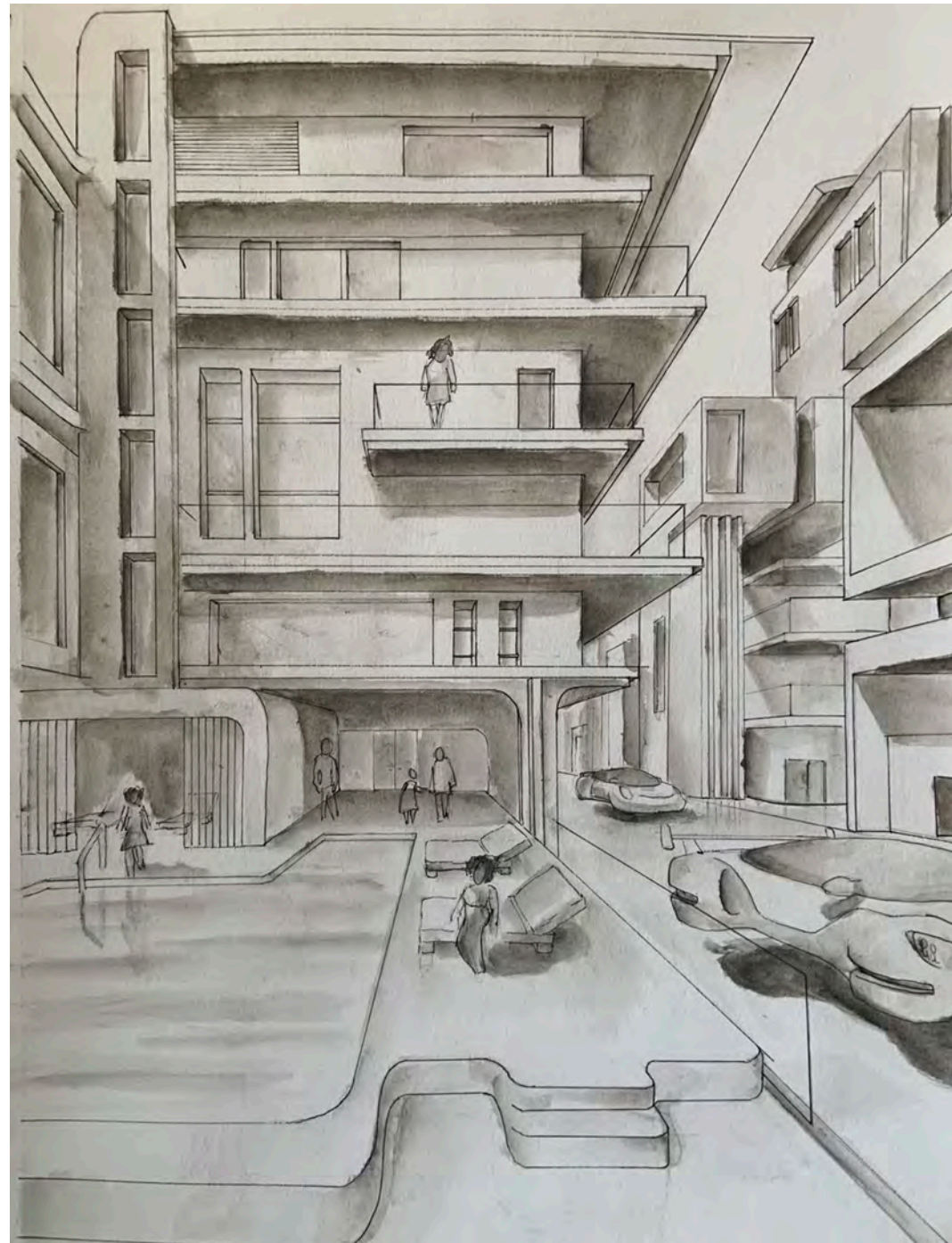
CLUB!!

JUSTIN BEST BEST

“Ocean Ave. 2070”

The main subject of my drawing is the exterior of the Ebony Beach Club, consisting of most of the building and the pool area. Very important parts of the drawing are also the buildings across from it, and the low hovering cars on the street. I believe these components helped set the futuristic tone I was aiming towards.

Medium: pen, waterbrush, and ink.



MAYA LAUER

“Letters to Dr. Angelou”

I chose the medium of writing, specifically diary entries in the forms of letters. I created the character of a young black girl living in 2070, who is a descendant of the original creators of the Ebony Beach Club. It was really important to me that I did justice to the character I created, Ella, because I wanted it to seem as though Ella could be real. I was definitely nervous about writing in the perspective of Ella, as a person who is not black and doesn't live in the year 2070, and I'm probably still nervous to get my letters out there, but Natalie helped me realize that I don't have to be apologetic when I am writing, of course if something's off or it doesn't make sense, I should reach out and ask for help, but I can't be so afraid to do something wrong because then I won't even start. I am always open to learning new things, but I have to remember that in order to do that I just have to go for it.

Diary Entry #1

Hello Dr. Angelou, it's me, Ella again! Today's the Grand Opening of the Ebony Beach Club, and I am ecstatic. For as long as I can remember, my mother and grandfather have been talking about it, a beautiful, relaxing beach front club, designed with elegance, grace, and a nod to the past. My whole family has been raving about it, considering it was their ancestors who first came up with the idea, which I guess are my ancestors too, during a time called "Segregation." I've read that you lived and fought hard through that time, and it's made me understand how strong you really were, and are. I know that you aren't physically alive anymore, but your spirit's still around, I can feel your warm presence when I write and sing, and it makes me feel safe. My grandmother told me that she has been waiting a long time for a place like the EBC. My mother tells me that it's a better time now and that my future will be brighter because of those who came before me and who fought for everything I have. Honestly, it's a bit crazy for me to think of a time when black people were treated less than others because all I've ever known is black love.

Anyway, I know that the EBC is going to be amazing. I've seen the outlines and blueprints and I can't wait to see what my family has built. Even though I could, I haven't stepped inside because I want to be able to see my family's dream fully realized and with the rest of the people I've grown up with. I've heard that it's a six-story ebony modern building with lots of big glass windows and that the ceiling is covered with glittering stars that only pop up when it's dark. The EBC will be magical.

Monday, Feb 1st, 2070



KAELEN SONG

“Founder and Owner of the Ebony Beach Club”

I chose to paint the future owner of the Ebony Beach Club. She has a calm, but large presence and knows how to get things done. She is a descendant of one of the past residents of the Belmar community, so in a way, she is reclaiming her family's former home. This is important, because I hope that in the future, people of color can continue to reclaim and grow what once was theirs.

The mediums used are watercolor on paper, with some digital painting and layering done in Photoshop.

Diary Entry #2

Wow! I couldn't wait to write to you. It was stunning! Walking into the building was like walking into a heaven that I never thought that I would know, until I was gone from this world. Is that how it felt when you got to heaven? I had this feeling in my stomach, one that I've never truly felt before. I felt a deep sense of pride. I walked into the bright colored main lounge and I saw dozens of smiling people strolling around the room, in awe of its majestic glory. I scanned the room to see the purple velvet long sofa.

The floor continued to fill, as more and more happy people walked in through its gigantic, detailed doors. I saw my friends from school sit at the newly finished, neon-colored bar on its glistening, blue stools that hung from the ceiling. Then I saw it, the most exquisite part of it all. The jazz stage. I knew the minute I laid my dark brown eyes on it, that this would be my place. I'm going to sing tomorrow at the club after a sunny day at the Nick Gabaldón Beach, I couldn't be more nervous and excited all at the same time. I've been told that I began to sing when I was two, which is not that long

considering I am only sixteen years old, but I'm hoping to keep singing for a very long time. For some reason, my parents knew that I would sing, because they named me Ella, after the jazz legend herself, Ella Fitzgerald. I wish I could have met her, because I hear so many stories about how she paved the way for me and other singers, and I've always hoped to thank her somehow. And maybe it's why I write to you because Dr. Angelou, you have inspired me to be proud of who I am and your words have always made me feel empowered.

Maya Lauer

Tuesday, Feb 2nd, 2010

BREANA Vallejos

“THE LOUNGE”

The place I chose to draw was the interior of the Ebony Beach Club. More specifically it was a lounge like area. This was important to me because I saw it as the place where everybody could come together in a singular place and just enjoy themselves without any outside influences.

It is a digital piece done on Procreate on an iPad Pro.



The Lounge

Diary Entry #3

Hello Dr. Angelou! Last night, my mother came into my lit-up room and at first, she was a bit mad that it was past midnight, but then she came to my bed, knowing immediately how I was feeling with sheet music scattered everywhere. She told me, "Remember what Dr. Angelou affirms: 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'" What you said made me realize that what I sing doesn't need to be perfect, I just need to focus on expressing what I feel the songs mean, and try to connect with those watching me.

It has only been a few short hours since I finished my performance at the EBC and I'm still in a daze. Even though I was scared to go up to the blue and purple neon stage, I marched on up with all the confidence I could muster and decided that I was ready to sing my heart out. The hall truly glowed in a way that I hadn't noticed until I got up there. As my eyes began to adjust to the spotlight, the faces of the adults who always seemed to be there for me appeared in view. Their proud smiles calmed me. As the band got their glittering silver and gold instruments ready, I closed my eyes and breathed in and out. In and out.

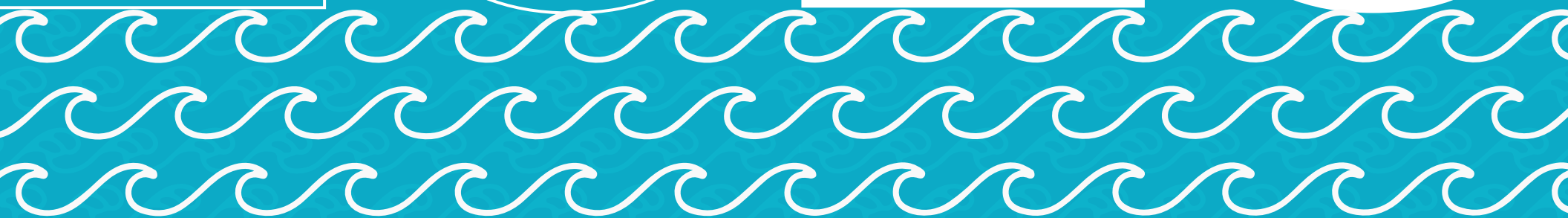
Then, I sang. And it felt good. Singing on that stage made me feel like I could fly. Is that how you feel when you sing, Dr. Angelou? I understood then that this stage was meant for me. I have become the gracious butterfly that my ancestors allowed me to become. I remembered something that Ms. Oprah once said that we are wearing the crown that our ancestors made for us. Singing on that stage made it real for me. It felt so great to be up there knowing that the stage I was standing on was built by my own family, that because of them, I can do whatever I set out to do and be whoever I want to be.

I hope you don't mind, but I am going to spend the rest of the night with my family and friends, but I'll make sure to write to you tomorrow. Good night Dr. Angelou.

Maya Lauer

Wednesday, Feb 3rd, 2010

2020



Justin Best Artist, Class of 2020

Residents lived about a street away from our high school, and close to other places we constantly visit. However, we did not hear or learn about it from teachers, classmates, or others who live in Santa Monica. Many people do not even know that there was a place like this in our city. This increases the importance of informing others about its past.

Worldbuilding is very interesting to me because there are no limits to your creativity. Many of the limitations and regulations that are seen in the real world when trying to create structures and design objects do not exist in worldbuilding. It inspires us to push to new heights and innovate in our world, and to figure out ways to work around these limitations.

Kaelen Song Artist, Class of 2021

What happened in Belmar was not at all unique, however it still makes me say, "Really? In Santa Monica?" It is wild to think that Belmar was a thriving community, right next to where I go to high school now. However, what is even more astounding, is the fact that in my high school I had never even heard the name Belmar. So many communities of color have been wiped off the map and never heard from again. This history, the history that happens in our own cities, to people of color, is never taught or even acknowledged in our American schools.

Worldbuilding is a fun and imaginative way to think about what the world could be. Worldbuilding resonates with me, because right now, we are at a turning point in history with the Black Lives Matter movement. We are worldbuilding in real life. I am young enough to be a part of the change, and to hopefully see the change happen, and I am old enough to somewhat understand what is causing this upheaval of American society.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS HISTORY ?

Maya Lauer Writer, Class of 2020

I didn't know about it, even though I've lived in Santa Monica my whole life. It's frustrating to think that the Belmar community might still stand today if not for the people in the community being pushed out. That's why this project is bittersweet to me because while it's a really interesting and powerful thing to worldbuild a place that was essentially broken apart, we cannot fully bring back the place that was once here. It's no surprise that I couldn't really grasp the concept of worldbuilding at first, and it was quite frustrating to me to even think about it because I was so stuck in "history" and how I saw it to be. However, actually writing my piece helped with that and seeing the art that everyone created because it is so important for us to use our imagination to show what could be, so that we can try to remember not to do certain things again.

Worldbuilding ended up being a really fun, but deep project for me to understand that as young people we can change how society looks like now because we have the power of imagination, which includes the agency to fight and work for a better future for everyone.

Breanna Vallejos Artist, Class of 2021

It is virtually unknown to many. Also the fact that this was a place designed for African American people which I think is amazing seeing as there weren't a lot of spaces like that in the past.

The thing that stands out about world building is how connected it can be to real life. I always saw world building as something done for video games of made up places, but now I see that it can be used to develop a place or community that can then be translated into reality.



EBONY

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