

Project Aims to Preserve Black History in Inland Empire or Bridges that Continue to Carry Us Over

Civil Rights Activists [Fannie Lou Hamer](#) once said, “Never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over.” In 2007 [Wilmer Amina Carter](#) and her late husband, [William Henry “Ratibu” Jacocks](#), brought this quote to life through the “[Bridges that Carried Us Over](#)” project. At the core, is a commitment to honoring the history of African American people in the Inland Empire and their personal stories of struggle and triumph through video recorded interviews.

As a native of Westside San Bernardino this project is a lifeline. After my mother’s death in 2016, I was searching for a sense of connectedness and found it in my childhood memories of my old neighborhood. I wanted to read about my hometown only to find that there were but brief paragraphs in a book or two. I was stunned. Businesses that I was familiar with were no longer standing. The area I grew up in had completely changed. It seemed as though part of the story of my past was erased and I was at a loss. Serendipitously, as I was researching information for my writing, I met Professor Tilton, who was on a quest to map a more diverse history of the Inland Empire.

[Dr. Jennifer Tilton](#), Associate Professor of Race and Ethnic Studies at the University of Redlands from the University of Redlands has been working on the Bridges that Carried Us Over project for two years. There have also been eight student interns working across the CSUSB, UofR and UCR campuses on the archive. At times it can be a race against time with many of the interviewees being in their late 80’s to late 90’s. Since our meeting, I have had the opportunity to talk with Mrs. Amina Carter and have been fortunate enough to also be included in the project and interviews.

Thankfully, the archives include the following people whose stories we were able to record. Former SBCUSD Board of Education President, consummate educator and well-loved leader, [Dr. Margaret Hill](#). We also recently lost community advocate, [Jennifer Vaughn-Blakely](#); and photojournalist, [Henry Hooks](#). One person that I am particularly grateful to have been able to interview was [Lois Carson](#), who was the first African American to be elected to the San Bernardino Community College Board of Trustees. Through Carson’s story I could see how her advice influenced decisions my mother made that directly impacted my life.

These interviews include an array of Black people with prestigious careers and positions. Most recently Tilton and I interviewed [Bobby Bivens](#), current President of the Stockton branch of the NAACP, and former member of WAG - Westside Action Group. It was a delight when he said he remembered my mother from [Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company](#). It was an honor to meet Assemblywoman and current Commissioner on Aging, [Cheryl Brown](#). So far, the Bridges Project has collected over a hundred oral stories.

[Marc A. Robinson, PhD](#) Assistant Professor of History at California State University San Bernardino said he was drawn to the project when he saw the 2021 Tilton article.

Robinson stated, “As a professor of African American History, Bridges has clear connections to my research and teaching.” Currently there are two student interns from CSUSB assisting on the project. The digital archives are located on the CSUSB website [Bridges that Carried Us Over](#).

Throughout the year, to continue the bridge building process of documenting local Black history, there will be planned “community photo share” events. You are invited to bring photos that can be scanned. As the owner, you would keep the original and get digital copies to share with friends and family. The scanned photos would also be maintained and made available online to the public through the CSUSB Pfau Library. Some of the photos of interest would be historic events like Black History Parades, Civil rights protests, family gatherings, social clubs, churches, and black businesses.

At the time of publication the first event will have already taken place, but hopefully it will be archived on [The Bridges That Carried Us Over](#) website.

Building Bridges: Panel Discussion of Black History in the IE to honor the Bridges Project, and other efforts to preserve the story of African Americans in this region.
Sat., January 29, 10:30am-12:30pm