

POOL

A SOCIAL HISTORY *of* SEGREGATION





1964

A bi-racial group of civil rights activists stage a swim-in at the Monson Motor Lodge in St. Augustine, Florida. In an attempt to terrorize the protesters out of the pool, the motel manager pours muriatic acid into the water. Photos of this incident are credited with helping to persuade undecided legislators to vote a few days later in favor of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

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Cover: Simone Manuel, the first Black woman in Olympic history to win an individual gold medal in swimming (2016)

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE LEWIS



A Black swim club meets at the Christian Street YMCA in Philadelphia during the 1950s. Although some YMCA branches allowed Black members, others were used by communities throughout the U.S. to create segregated recreation facilities under the guise of "private clubs." City governments funneled money that should have been spent on public recreation facilities to these private facilities through tax exemptions, free utilities, cheap land, and other benefits.

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POOL

A SOCIAL HISTORY of SEGREGATION

BY VICTORIA PRIZZIA, POOL CREATOR

In 2015, I stumbled upon a book by Dr. Jeff Wiltse called *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. At the time I was reading everything I could about water, as inspiration and knowledge-building in support of the various water related exhibition and installation projects I was working on throughout Philadelphia and the Delaware River watershed. By the time I discovered Dr. Wiltse's work, I had already wondered to myself, what IS the future of water?

It had become clear to me that issues of equality and social justice are all central to contemporary regional, national and global concerns around water. This is true for drinking water, bathing water, water that supports agricultural production and all of the water that's vitally intrinsic to our planet's dynamic and vital ecosystems—the systems each and every one of us rely on to live. This is true in the United States and in every corner of the rest of the world, too, a truth that is only going to be amplified in the coming years and decades.

But what about swimming? The wondrous joy of swimming? My safe place.

I was a water baby after all, learning to swim at 6 months old long before I could walk. I would start swimming competitively by age 7—traveling across the Mid-Hudson River to a club pool, as my small rural school district did not have a pool in the 1980s and still doesn't today. I would go on to become a lifeguard and water safety instructor by 16, which would provide a much-needed means of employment for me from then on and throughout undergraduate school, where I would gravitate towards helping people get back into the water who had experienced trauma.

For me, water was always pure healing, freedom and grace, and I wanted to share these feelings with others. But all of these years later, *Contested Waters* required me to look back at the act and joy of swimming through a different lens.



A young Victoria in her safe place—the backyard pool. Today, Victoria’s work brings together artists and scientists to demonstrate how we can build a more just and sustainable future for all living things. Using beauty as a threshold, Victoria creates invitations for the exploration of challenging ideas and complex or unfamiliar stories. This work grows from her strongly held beliefs that change happens through progressive ideas, thoughtful innovations, and emotional connections that build lifelong enthusiasm and empathy for the natural world.

We had an above-ground backyard pool growing up. My sister, brother and I spent most of the summers of our youth playing in it. And although I was born in March, once or twice my parents let me wait until summer to celebrate my birthday with a pool party. I was turning ten and convened my closest friends to spend the afternoon floating in the pool, eating snacks and later playing tag and chasing fireflies.

For my family, birthdays, holidays and Sunday afternoons were times for everyone to gather, to act out family rituals around sharing meals and backyard recreation as our primary expressions of love. So the usual suspects, including multiple generations of aunts, uncles, cousins and close family friends, were present for my pool party, too.

This birthday is one of the few that I distinctly remember from my childhood. And it is Albert who stands out to me. He and I would later be crowned as Highland High School’s first bi-racial Homecoming King (African American) and Queen (Caucasian American). We would also both go on to study education among other disciplines, with Albert becoming an esteemed principal of a local high school.

But at age ten, I loved Albert simply because he was my trusted friend. Smart and funny and handsome—he’d have me in hysterics imitating television characters who were popular at the time. And throughout the party, he had my full attention, well, most of my attention. I was also uncomfortably aware that Albert had also caught

the notice of some of my family members. It was clear to me that Albert was receiving some silent vibes of not being welcome. Later I asked my parents about it—why didn’t everyone like Albert as much as I did? They brushed it off, said I was being too sensitive and tried to refocus my thoughts on the fun.

But what I witnessed did not feel right or good or like fun. And it has stayed with me, that memory. *But how could that be? My family had an open-door policy. Everyone was welcome at the dinner table. So why not at the pool?*

Flash forward to 2016. I am sitting at a restaurant on 4th Street in Philadelphia watching the presidential election results come in, to my great disbelief and distress. Shortly thereafter, you might remember that some hideous floodgate had opened. Racially motivated harassment in public spaces, one account after another... in subways, at parks, and in public pools! I thought to myself, what’s going on?

It was then that I remembered a fictional museum exhibition I created after reading *Contested Waters*. I used this made-up case study as the content of a session I co-facilitated at a museum conference in 2015 in Pittsburgh. The thought persisted, so I dug out an old computer and found the description and sent it to Bill Adair at The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with a note asking, *Does this project have legs?* His immediate response, “Come in to see me!”

Four years and two proposals later, the *POOL: A Social History of Segregation* exhibition was awarded an

69% OF BLACK CHILDREN HAVE LITTLE TO NO SWIMMING ABILITY, COMPARED WITH 42% OF WHITE CHILDREN

exhibition grant from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage that has been matched by on-going support from the Philadelphia Water Department and the herculean efforts of project partner Karen Young, Executive Director of the Fairmount Water Works Interpretive Center.

A 4,700 square-foot, multi-disciplinary museum exhibition set in the Fairmount Water Works Pool (known as the “Aquarium Pool” by those who swam there), provides an immersive platform for exploration of the role of public pools in our communities, with the goal of deepening understanding of the connection between water, social justice and public health.

POOL weaves together history, site-specific artwork, storytelling, scholarship and place-based learning. The exhibit installations build on one another to illuminate a history of segregated swimming in America and its connection to present-day drowning issues affecting Black communities.

Through an inspiring collective of artists, swimming champions, aquatic activists, researchers and scholars, POOL invites visitors to challenge personal assumptions about the act of swimming together. It encourages the examination of the role of public space in civic life today and in the building of healthy communities and individuals—illuminating the ongoing failures of democracy—as ordinary people continue to push and pull towards a more just world.

POOL brings to life additional new work by artists Homer Jackson, Calo Rosa, Azikiwe Mohammed, James Ijames, Dylan Caleho, Lowell Boston, Modupeola Fadugba, Ed Accura, Cathleen Dean, and Liz Corman that springboards from the historical context to expand the depth and breadth of POOL, while providing multiple, and unexpected, lenses to reconsider swimming together.

For more than 100 years, pools across the United States have provided a stage for brutal acts of both conformity and social change, as people, ideas and beliefs intersected, clashed and shifted through public recreation. Even before the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, federal

judges had already issued rulings declaring swimming pool segregation unconstitutional and injunctions forcing cities to desegregate public pools.

But this is just the beginning of the story, really.

Past racial discrimination at swimming pools, coupled with a general shift of funds away from public pools to private swimming and recreational opportunities, have had a significant and lasting impact on Black communities—an impact that continues today.

- According to reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black children and teenagers are almost six times as likely as white children to drown in a swimming pool.
- USA Swimming reports that 69% of Black children have little to no swimming ability, compared with 42% of white children.

For many Black individuals and families, the answer to these growing disparities has been to avoid the water altogether or to stay in the shallow end or to pretend to be able to swim when forced into the water. But these self-protections fall short when the unexpected, and sometimes tragic, happens.

To change this cycle, people such as swimming champions Cullen Jones, Maritza Correia McClendon, Simone Manuel and Sabir Muhammad, and aquatic activists, researchers and scholars such as Ed Accura, Naji Ali, Dr. Angela Beale-Tawfeeq, Kevin Colquitt, Malachi and Olivia Cunningham, Dr. Kevin Dawson, Coach Jim Ellis, Rhonda Harper, Dr. Miriam Lynch, Anthony Patterson, Sr., Bruce Wigo, Dr. Jeff Wiltse, and Diversity in Aquatics, Inc. (our featured swimming voices) believe the answer to correcting these disparities can be found in making the lifesaving skill of swimming available to all.

These are the voices that POOL sets out to amplify. And these are the people I send a heartfelt thank you to.



The John B. Kelly Foundation operated the FWW pool towards the end of the nation's public pool era. Philadelphia newspaper clippings reveal immense public support for the pool at a time when there was a lack of access to swimming lessons for children. Today, Philadelphia is home to more public pools per resident than any major American city.

SWIMMERS AT THE KELLY POOL, FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS, PHILADELPHIA, PA, 1962
FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

I know that the products of collaboration can sometimes be disappointing and, at the worst of times, can add insult to injury. But POOL is positioned to foster the kind of transformation all of our featured swimming voices are working towards. Philadelphia has done it before with the landmark and impactful Swim to Live Program (1954 to 1977) that made swimming lessons available to elementary school children free of charge. Philadelphia can do it again. And the time is now!

Today, many of us live in a digitally curated world where our “likes,” our “friends,” our purchase histories and zip codes guide us to “connections” with more like-minded people, possibly leaving us with a very specific, and perhaps narrowing, world view. But social change depends on creating a fertile ground for the exchange of diverse ideas and experiences so that inequalities can be illuminated and corrected, and common ground can be found. The intersections that can naturally occur in public spaces help to move the imperfect democratic state closer to realizing its ideal principles for all. This also requires a conscious decision for each one of us to move beyond the ease and comfort of preaching to our own choir, and to purposefully seek engagement with a broader network of collaborators and audience.

At this moment in time, the persistence of institutional

racism has fueled a movement that has touched every major city and small town in America. The messages and experiential goals for POOL connect the FWW to this landmark time in American history. These current events validate how important shared social and public spaces are to fostering social change. I feel now more than ever that POOL can contribute to a better understanding of the roots and complexities of present-day racial and social inequality and the persistence of structural racism through the exhibit experiences we have created, and the voices included throughout the exhibition and this magazine.

In many of my water-awareness building projects, it has been the plants and animals (our greatest allies in the clean water movement) that have created pathways for deeper connection to the natural world. But with POOL, it is the people working in this space of aquatic justice that are leading the way to a greater understanding of humanity—a deeper connection to our shared experience of the world and vision of the future that we must build together.

So, please, dive in to the content of this magazine and the POOL exhibition at www.poolphl.com. And please support our public pools (and learn to swim programs) with greater funding and your appreciation. They, like many of our vibrant public spaces, matter.

Thank you,
VICTORIA PRIZZIA
Pool Creator and Founder of Habithèque, Inc.

POOL was made possible by generous support from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and the Philadelphia Water Department. We would also like to thank leadership of the FUND for the Fairmount Water Works and Philadelphia Parks and Recreation for their ongoing support for this project.

Much of the historic content of POOL was provided by and/or written in collaboration with Dr. Jeff Wiltse, who generously made his extensive research available to the makers of POOL.

Simone Manuel



A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Hey mom, where are all the people who look like me? I was 12 years old. And for the first time in my young life, I had begun to realize I was different.

I advanced quickly as a swimmer. So I was placed in training groups with kids much older than me. The more I excelled, the more I noticed a pattern developing in my interactions with others. At a time when I should have felt excited about my progress in the pool, I was instead weighed down by doubt. Today, I can say I'm an Olympic champion, the first Black woman to win an individual gold medal in swimming. But my success at the 2016 Rio Games, where I earned two golds and two silvers, never would have happened if I had listened to that nagging voice in my head when I was 12, the one that told me I should give up swimming.

I was a tall Black girl with muscles and athletic build. You must play basketball, people would say, or I bet you run track, right? Wow. You're a swimmer. Really? Why do you like it so much? These questions were constant, dominating conversations about me and eroding my confidence. It's unsettling when you're always having to defend what you love. It's hard to feel different as a kid. Like you're the only one, as I often was when it came to swimming. It's especially hard when you know exactly why people are asking these questions, why they seem so surprised in the first place, because of stereotypes rooted in racism, ignorance, and the refusal to acknowledge social barriers. Maybe I couldn't express it like



that at age 12, but I understood it in my gut. You learn these lessons early. I'll never forget the time when I was six and a little boy told me he didn't want to play with me after swim practice because I'm Black.

Thankfully, my parents never doubted me. And that fateful day, when I asked my mother for help making sense of it all, she sat with me as we scrolled through the Internet reading profiles of high achieving Black swimmers. They had succeeded despite incredible odds, often in the face of overt discrimination. Their triumphs inspired me. When I felt like quitting, I thought about Cullen Jones, Tanica Jamison, Sabir Muhammad, and Maritza Correia McClendon, who is now a good friend of mine. Their stories taught me that my own success was bigger than me. That my dream should never be limited by the assumptions of others. I was here to carve my own path to widen the lane for others. I am not here to apologize for my ambition.

During and after the Rio Games, there were moments when resolve was tested. When the doubts crept in again. Winning on the sport's biggest stage has a way of eliciting strong reactions from the public, good and bad. On social media, people applauded my job in history. They also talked about my hair a lot. They called me the Black swimmer, while commenting on my body in ways that felt minimizing to the effort, dedication, and sacrifices it took for me to even arrive on that stage. I had to summon the strength I borrowed from those who came before me. I thought about Serena Williams and the ferocity she

brings to being a champion, the empowering confidence she has in herself.

People don't always like different, and it often scares them the most when it's wrapped in excellence. Sometimes I feel like I'm alone on an island. Reporters ask me questions that other swimmers, white swimmers, are never asked. They want me to talk about social justice issues, Colin Kaepernick, athlete protest. I want to contribute to the conversation and lead, but I am not the voice of Black America. And when people single me out like that, they're reducing me to a label. The Black swimmer. When I know I am so much more.

There's a part of me that feels like I was born to do this, to live a unique and audacious life. Aren't we all? But there is no limit on Black excellence. There were others before me, elite American swimmers who happened to be Black. And I can promise you, there are more to come. Hopefully, many more. Representation matters. People, especially kids, need to see it to believe it can be done. If I could go back in time, I would encourage twelve-year-old Simone to embrace the boldest part of herself, the desire and confidence it took to get in the water and stay in, because it felt like home. I would tell her to honor her passion, letting it fuel her journey while inspiring others. Celebrate what you love. It may be the thing that makes you different, but sometimes those dreams are the very best kind.

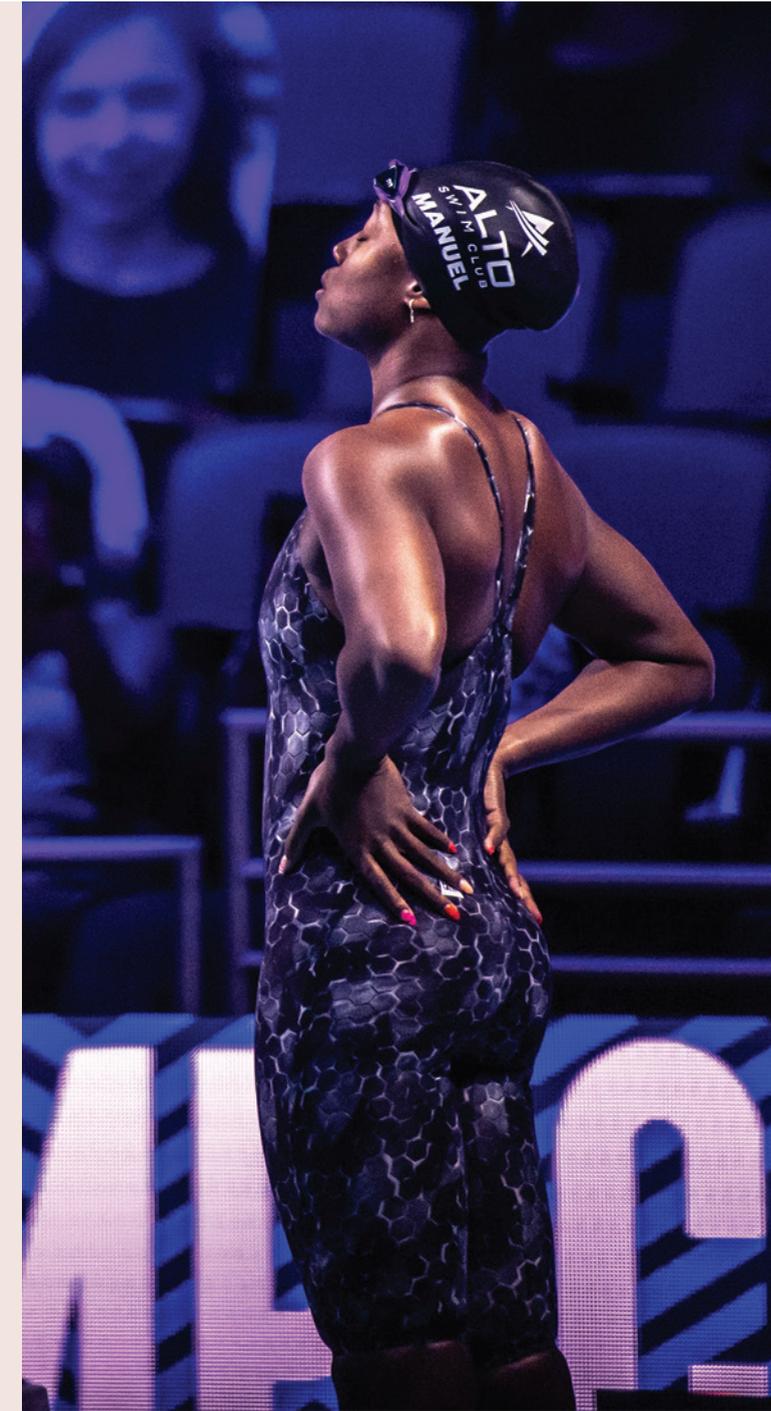
With love,

Who is Simone Manuel?

In 2016, Simone Manuel became the first Black woman to win an individual Olympic gold medal in swimming when she won the 100-meter freestyle in Rio. Being first and all that comes with it is not lost on Manuel: "My existence in the sport of swimming and the success that I've had in the sport of swimming is a protest in itself, because I'm successful in a sport that, in some ways, people think that I shouldn't be successful in."

The four-time Olympic medalist continues to push the envelope, winning the most medals by a woman at the FINA World Championships (four gold, three silver) in 2019, and becoming the first American woman to win the 50-meter free at the World Championships since Amy Van Dyken in 1998. She is also the only American woman to win both the 50- and 100-meter freestyle at the World Championships. She was named 2019 Female Athlete of the Year at the Golden Goggle Awards. During her collegiate career at Stanford, Manuel won six individual NCAA titles in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle and helped the Cardinals win eight relays and back-to-back NCAA team titles in 2017 and 2018.

Born on August 2, 1996, in Sugarland, Texas, Simone Manuel is a champion for diversity in swimming, and became a USA Swimming Foundation ambassador to ensure more minorities have an opportunity to learn to swim and get involved in the sport she loves.





Fleishhacker Pool in San Francisco was one of many large, leisure-resort pools opened in American cities during the 1920s and 1930s.

Swimming Pools as Contested Community Spaces

BY DR. JEFF WILTSE

Swimming pools have long been contested spaces where Americans define the social boundaries of community life. Americans have fought over where pools should be built, who should be allowed to use them, and how they should be used. How these questions have been answered over the past 150 years reveals much about the power of social prejudices in American society and the persistence of racial inequality.

The earliest public pools were built in large northern cities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They served mostly poor and working-class boys—both Black and white—and reveal the class prejudices of the time. In 1910, for example, the proposal to build a large municipal pool in New York’s Central Park generated intense opposition from the city’s middle and upper classes, because it would attract large numbers of immigrant and working-class kids into their oasis of genteel recreation. “I should consider it disastrous if the only swimming pool belonging to the city was put [in Central Park],” one critic told the *New York Times*. “It would attract all sorts of undesirable people.” The paper agreed and recommended that municipal pools be located underneath the Manhattan and Queensboro bridges. These locations would have effectively secluded working-class swimmers, thereby protecting the city’s class-segregated social geography.

The design of pools and the social composition of swimmers fundamentally changed during the 1920s and 1930s, when cities across the country built large, resort-

like swimming pools and allowed males and females to use them together for the first time. In northern cities such as Chicago, New York and Pittsburgh, this gender integration brought about racial segregation. Public officials and white swimmers now objected to the presence of Black Americans, because they did not want Black men interacting with white women at such visually and physically intimate spaces. At the same time, the first wave of the Great Black Migration intensified other racist prejudices. Northern whites generally perceived the Black southern migrants settling in northern cities as physically unclean and likely to be infected with communicable diseases. This made them unwilling to share an enclosed body of water with Black Americans for fear of contracting a communicable disease from them or being contaminated by their supposed dirtiness. And so, throughout the North, public pools became racially segregated during the interwar years.

In some cases, white swimmers imposed de facto segregation through violence and intimidation. At Pittsburgh’s Highland Park Pool, white swimmers attacked Black swimmers—sometimes with rocks and clubs—to prevent them from entering the pool. Police officers encouraged these attacks and even arrested the Black victims, charging them with “inciting to riot.” In attempting to explain why Black swimmers were being attacked at Highland Park Pool, the *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote: “The whole trouble seems to be due to the way Highland Park Pool is operated. It is the only city pool



One of several African Americans who were beaten and bloodied by a white mob outside Fairground Park Pool in St. Louis on the night of June 21, 1949.

where men and women, girls and boys swim together. This brings the sex question into the pool and trouble is bound to arise between the races.”

The same type of trouble had no chance to arise at public swimming pools in the South and in border-state cities such as St. Louis and Baltimore, because public officials mandated racial segregation, explicitly barring Blacks from entering “whites-only” pools. St. Louis, for example, opened seven municipal pools between 1913 and 1935, two of which were giant leisure resorts with circular pools measuring several hundred feet in diameter. All seven of these pools were for whites only. Finally, in 1936, the city opened a pool for Black residents. Unlike the ones available to whites, the Jim Crow pool was small and lacked leisure space. Not surprisingly, it attracted comparatively few swimmers.

Across the country, public swimming pools were racially desegregated after World War II, but that was met with widespread opposition from whites that again exposed their social prejudices. Southern cities typically shut down their public pools rather than allow mixed-race swimming. In the North, whites generally abandoned pools that became accessible to Blacks and retreated to ones located in thoroughly white neighborhoods or established private club pools, where racial discrimination was still legal.

Warren, Ohio, for example, was forced by a pending court order to desegregate its municipal pool in 1948. The local newspaper covered the first day of interracial swimming by printing a front-page photo showing a dozen children waiting to enter. The last two children in line were Black; the caption read: “Last one in the

WHY HAVE SWIMMING POOLS IN THE UNITED STATES BEEN SUCH CONTENTIOUS AND CONTESTED COMMUNITY SPACES?

water is a monkey.” The racial antipathy expressed in the newspaper was shared by many local whites, who stopped using the pool when they realized Black residents intended to use it. Similarly, in 1962, several years after Pittsburgh’s municipal pools were desegregated, a sign posted outside a city pool still used exclusively by whites read, “No dogs or niggers allowed.”

In some cases, whites violently resisted desegregation. The day after St. Louis officials announced in 1949 that the city would no longer enforce racial segregation at its municipal pools, a white mob numbering in the thousands gathered outside Fairground Park Pool and viciously attacked each identifiably Black person who came near. A local newspaper described one of the assaults: “At 7:50 pm a Negro was seen on the east side of Spring Street, and another chase was underway. He ran, stumbled, and fell about 100 feet west of Grand Avenue. Members of the crowd pounced on the Negro, beating him severely.” When Black residents finally gained safe access to Fairground Park Pool a year later, white swimmers abandoned it en masse. The city closed the enormous pool a few years later.

Public officials briefly prioritized the recreational needs of Black Americans during the late 1960s. In response to the violent protests that erupted in New York, Watts, Newark, Detroit, Chicago, and many other Americans cities between 1964 and 1968, the federal government funded hundreds of swimming pools for inner-city residents of “troubled neighborhoods.” Providing summer recreation for urban Blacks suddenly became a national priority. And yet, most of the

municipal pools opened during this building spree were “mini-pools,” measuring only 20 by 40 feet and uniformly 3 feet deep. They did not provide viable recreation or encourage actual swimming. Children mostly stood in the water splashing. Nor did the mini-pools provide any leisure space. The tanks were surrounded by a narrow concrete perimeter and enclosed by a chain-link fence. Most did not even have changing rooms, so swimmers traveled to and from the pools in their swimsuits. Children in one New York neighborhood dubbed them “giant-sized urinals.”

The “mini-pool” building spree of the late 1960s was short lived. Whereas urban public pools had briefly been a national priority, pool building stalled during the next several decades. The primary reasons were economic. Ballooning budget deficits and the threat of bankruptcy forced many cities to abandon plans for new pools and put off costly maintenance and repairs on existing pools. A wave of pool closures followed. Youngstown, Ohio, closed 6 of its 8 municipal pools between 1985 and 1991. Pittsburgh closed 20 of its 32 municipal pools between 1996 and 2004. The remnants of these empty pools exemplified the urban crisis of poverty and public neglect. As the Detroit News described the state of McCabe Pool in 1989, “Boards have replaced broken windows. The water fountain is broken. Walls are smeared with graffiti. The ground is littered and a burned car sits in the parking lot.”

In recent times, many swimming pools continue to be racially divided and contested spaces. In 2009, 65 Black and Latino campers from the Creative Steps Day Camp in North Philadelphia arrived at the Valley



Sterling Playground Pool in New York City was one of many “mini-pools” funded by the federal government and located in predominantly Black neighborhoods during the late 1960s.



Detroit's McCabe Pool, photographed here in 1989, exemplified the decline of urban public swimming pools during the late twentieth century.

Swim Club in suburban Montgomery County to play for an hour and a half. Camp director Althea Wright had paid the private club \$1,950 to use the facility Monday afternoons throughout the summer. As the campers entered the water, some club members reportedly pulled their children from the pool and wondered aloud what all these Black and Latino kids were doing there. A few days later, the Valley Swim Club canceled the lease agreement. When pressed to explain, the club president stated, “There was concern [among the members] that a lot of kids would change the complexion ... and the atmosphere of the club.”

Several racially charged confrontations occurred at swimming pools during the summer of 2018. In one instance, a white woman physically assaulted a 15-year-old Black boy at a private community pool in Summerville, South Carolina, claiming he and his friends “didn’t belong” there, then exclaiming, “Get out,

little punks!” A couple weeks later in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a white man singled out the only Black family at a crowded community pool and demanded to see the mother’s “identification.” When she refused, the man called the police. That same day, 555 miles away in Memphis, Tennessee, the manager of a large apartment complex engaged in a similar act of racial profiling. Even though several other people were wearing prohibited clothing in the pool area, the manager only confronted the lone group of Black swimmers. She reprimanded 25-year-old Kevin Yates for dipping his sock-clad feet in the water and eventually demanded that he and his party leave the pool. When they refused, she, too, called the police. The common thread in all three of these confrontations was a white person’s assumption Black people do not belong at swimming pools, at least not the same pools that whites use.

Why have swimming pools in the United States been

such contentious and contested community spaces?

Part of the answer has to do with the uniqueness of swimming pools as physical spaces. They are visually and socially intimate. Swimmers gaze upon one another’s nearly naked bodies, lie in the sun next to one another, navigate through crowded water, and flirt. This type of contact and interaction piques social anxieties and exposes the lack of trust and understanding between people of different social groups.

Swimming pools have also been intensely contested because they are places at which people build community and define the social boundaries of community life. Swimming pools are primary summertime gathering places, where many people come together (often for several hours), socialize, and share a common space. Swimming with others in a pool means accepting them as part of the same community precisely because the interaction is so intimate and sociable. Conversely,

excluding someone or some group from a pool effectively defines them as social others—as excluded from the community.

For these reasons, swimming pools serve as useful barometers of social relations. If we as a nation want to know how we relate to one another across social lines, how we structure our communities socially, and how we think about people who are socially different from ourselves, just look at our swimming pools. The answers will be obvious.

Jeff Wiltse is a professor of history at the University of Montana, Missoula. He has written extensively about the history of swimming pools in the United States, including the award-winning book *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*.

Cullen Jones and Maritza Correia McClendon

INTERVIEW WITH KAREN YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS



Let's dive in!

KAREN YOUNG:

So, question number one is really about origin. We all have a story about how we got here, how we figured out what to do with our own selves. Sometimes the things that happened in our lives are good and sometimes not so good. So, I want to start off by asking what attracted you to swimming as an athlete, academic, activist? Was there a water-related defining moment that put you on your life's path?

MARITZA CORREIA MCCLENDON:

I first got involved with swimming because I was diagnosed with scoliosis. My doctor actually recommended that I either get involved with swimming or gymnastics, and I've always loved the water, so I started swimming lessons and by the end of the summer, I was like, I want to do this all the time!

I actually started swimming when we lived in San Juan, Puerto Rico. So, a lot of families looked like me and there's more racial diversity down there. Our family moved to the U.S. when I was about nine years old and when I immediately walked on the pool deck, it was just me and my brother and one or two families of color. The team was about 150 swimmers strong, so we had quite a few participants, but for me and my family to be one of the few of color, it was different, definitely very different for us.

Throughout my career, I've definitely had a couple of people make sideways comments about why I'm swimming because of the color of my skin, and wondering why I'm not dedicated to a predominantly Black sport, but at the end of the day, swimming was what I love to do. And I will say, as I moved up the rankings and broke barriers as the first African American woman to make a U.S. Olympic team, it opened my eyes and really introduced me to a passion and I really wanted to make a difference.

When I made the team back in 2004, approximately 70% of African American children didn't know how to swim. That was a problem and I immediately knew I wanted to do something about it. So that's how my journey started and I haven't looked back since.



“I was blessed enough to be an Olympian, and I was blessed enough to earn a world record.”

CULLEN JONES

CULLEN JONES:

You started the question with how you got to your grown self and I'm pretty sure I'm not a grown-up yet. I feel like I'm still a kid. To answer your question about what got me on the path—at the age of five I almost drowned. I was actually at Dorney Park. I think many in Philadelphians will know of Dorney Park! My parents and I wanted to get on a ride. I was a very tall, slim five-year-old. As I was going down the ride, I flipped upside-down, and the important part about this story is that I was fully supervised with both parents and lifeguards there, yet I was still able to go under water and, ultimately, I had to be pulled out. A child can develop brain damage after being under water for 30 seconds and I was under for about 35. When I woke up, the first thing out of my mouth was, what's the next ride we're getting on? After all, I was at a water park and I was a five-year-old kid. It didn't phase me, but I would've hated to be my dad that night. He had talked my mom into it and they kind of made the decision for me. They said never again, you're going to start swimming lessons. It was rough in the beginning. It didn't hit me that day. It hit me the first time that I had to go to an organized swim lesson. I was terrified! I went through five different teachers before I started feeling comfortable.

Coach Brad, I'll never forget his name, made me feel comfortable around the water again and after that lesson, it was like, okay, I like this, this is fun. And much like Maritza, I grew up in the New Jersey-New York area, and it's a melting pot. So, I swam on the newer swimmers team. Most of the swimmers looked like me, talked like me and lived around where I was from. So I didn't have the big culture shock until I was 15 and started swimming for a Jewish community center. That's when I was the first and only Black swimmer to swim for that club. And it still hits me to this day when I go on the deck and I see the lack of diversity in swimming. That's why I know that there's going to be a change.

When I look at my family, I have family members that

say, you know us and that water, we don't do that. I know that there's a need for change. And in 2008 I was blessed enough to be an Olympian, and I was blessed enough to earn a world record. And a friend of mine says, do you know what you did for the sport of swimming? And I had no idea what he meant, but it wasn't until I came back and I had my friends come back to me and say, yeah, that's amazing what you do, but you know, I don't touch the water, I don't do that. That's when you know there's got to be a change.

KY:

Yeah, yeah. I was nine and went on vacation with my family and almost drowned—a similar story to yours, Cullen. I could swim, we grew up swimming. We were the Black family that could swim. When we go on vacation, I get on one of these slides, and I'm showing off as my aunts are watching, and I almost drowned! I was underwater for probably 40 seconds and I was never able to swim again after that. I tried, I had teacher after teacher, I went to those classes for adults-who-almost-drowned, but I cannot do it.

KY:

Question number two and I'm going to ask Mr. Jones to respond first. And this is about community and community spaces and the value they can have in our lives if we're allowed to access those spaces. So the question is, regarding our public pools and the act of swimming, is access important to the health of an individual, a community, a culture? If yes, how so and why?

CJ:

Maritza and I both do a lot of work with teaching kids how to swim. And every time we are with a group of kids, I ask the same question, how many of you would like to get into the water? And there's not one hand that's not raised. Once it starts getting warm, public

pools are the lifeblood of the summer. That's where kids want to go, and it is important as parents to understand that when your child wants to be around water, you need to teach them the importance of learning how to swim. You wouldn't allow your child to be in a car without a safety belt or go play football without pads. But a lot of parents allow their children to be near water without having safety and swimming lessons to be safer around the water.

CJ:

So when you talk about community pools, again, it's the lifeblood. For myself, I used to ride three buses just to get into the pool during the summer, because I knew my friends were going to be there. So I've done work with lobbying on Capitol Hill and talking about the importance of learning to swim, at the same time where there were people talking about how we need to close pools, and I think that's the wrong way of looking at this.

Kids are going to get in the water no matter what. We can't change the fact that kids are going to want to get near community pools and that's where they're going to start to learn and take lessons. If you want to lobby something, lobby for swim lessons, lobby to teach our children to be safe around the water, rather than trying to shut down these pools because these kids are going to get in your water. And the only thing is, parents and guardians and friends of these children understand, the only way we can save their lives is to teach them how to be safer on the water, and then they can take notes on my career path and try to become Olympians!

KY:

Yes, kids really look up to the both of you, are inspired by all that you have both accomplished. Thank you for that. Mrs. McClendon?

MCM:

I echo everything Cullen said. I think public pools are a major component and it brings so much joy to everybody. You walk into a public pool and all you hear are the screams left and right and splashing. Everybody's having a good time, but like Cullen said, we've got to make sure that everybody's safe in and around the water. And I would even take it a little bit further to say, too, that we definitely want to make sure

**“Swimming
is the only
sport that
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skill.”**

**MARITZA CORREIA
MCCLENDON**



PUBLIC POOLS CAN BE THAT BEACON TO BRING A COMMUNITY TOGETHER, NO MATTER WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE, WHERE YOU'RE FROM.

our kids know how to swim, but we also want to make sure the adults know how to swim as well. Because the worst thing that can happen is, and I've said this in many of my talks before, if you're a parent who doesn't know how to swim and you're watching a child who's playing in the water, and who unfortunately gets into some trouble and needs help, what are you going to do? What if there's nobody around? As a parent who doesn't know how to swim, are you going to sit there and watch your child drown? We don't want that. And then we also don't want you jumping in because that could be two drowning victims right there. So we want to make sure that we know everybody in the entire family knows how. It's a family activity to go to the public pool. It should be a family activity to learn how to swim.

KY:

So the next question is almost the inverse of it. So what is the impact on an individual or community culture if excluded from swimming?

MCM:

When you think about a lot of our Black communities and you hear about pools being shut down, a lot of our Black members don't even have pools. I grew up in a neighborhood where we didn't have a pool anywhere nearby. My parents had to drive me to go to a pool. My husband talks about how he did the same thing Cullen did, would hop on the bus, on several buses just to get to the YMCA so that he could go to a pool. It would be awesome if every community had pool access because it's so important to learn to swim.

We also need to make sure everybody knows how to swim once there's that public pool. And then when you think about swimming, there are so many benefits, especially health and wellness benefits. Maybe you have joints that can't handle running. Water is like the next best thing—to hop in and have a little less stress and

impact on your joints. It's a lifetime skill that everybody should know. Swimming can also open the door to jobs like being a lifeguard. There are just so many benefits to having a pool in your neighborhood or having public access to pools—and to have it excluded means you're missing out. You're missing out on so many good opportunities to get a college scholarship, to get a job at a young age, to be safe in and around the water, to be active in the water. There are so many benefits when it comes to thinking about what pools can bring to individuals, to communities. I'd love it if we had one in every single location possible. It would be great.

KY:

Yeah. Maybe we need to bring back the old Poolmobile that they had in New York. They would drive around this Poolmobile and bring pools into neighborhood communities. Have you heard about that?

MCM:

I have not heard about that. But I'll tell you really quick, my dad in Puerto Rico, we had a truck and we actually used that as a pool. We'd take the back of it and put a tarp inside and fill it with water just so that we could play in the water. Like, it was our little pool.

CJ:

Innovative. Innovative, yes!

MCM:

Hey, when you ain't got a ride, you got to get creative.

CJ:

You're absolutely right.

KY:

That's the thing I love about our people. We always find a way to do the things that we want to do.

CJ:

Even if we have to take three buses or put a tarp in a truck, which is why it's so important that we get our kids and our adults to learn to swim, because that draw does not go away. It only gets worse when it gets warmer, so we need to make sure everyone learns how to swim.

When it comes to exclusion I've put a lot of thought into this, and we can talk about the history and I'm sure we will talk about some of the history of exclusion when it comes to Black Americans. For us, as Maritza said, having that space to be able to learn to swim, having that space to be able to practice wellness. If your joints are hurting, the first thing we tell our patients to do is to go into the water. It's a community building asset and it's vital for good health. Like Maritza said, we'd love to have a pool in every community. But when you talk about exclusion, it is a deep, deep problem for Black Americans. And it's so deep that we actually believe that we (people of color) don't swim—Black folks don't do that. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

And it started back from slavery days. Bruce Wigo, who was the head of the International Swimming Hall of Fame, invited me down there in 2008. He showed me a book about slaves when they first came to the US, actual beautiful pictures of slaves in the water, trying to swim, just swimming as a pastime. And as you read on some of the passages, the slaves were being beaten and told that they don't swim, told not to swim because the thought process was, if they know how to swim, they may swim away.

So that mantra has been put into our heads so much that you're telling me in the year 2021, I can still go to a family member and say to them, hey, you want to go swimming? Oh no, well, you know we don't do that. That's still going on in our minds and that's why we need to change it. That's why it's so important to have a fixture in the community, like a pool to have lessons, to have those lifeguards so that we can break this narrative.

KY:

That's very powerful. Here is where I'd like to discuss the disparity between Black and white children, and we all know that gap is pretty wide. So according to the CDC, Black Americans are less than half as likely to know how to swim as white Americans and Black children are about six times more likely to drown than white children are. This is a significant disparity in both swimming and drowning rates across social lines. What do you think it'll take? What do you think it'll take to correct that disparity?

CJ:

I think we need to take a holistic view. I think we have to hit this issue from every angle we possibly can, and as leaders in our sport, I think we are doing as much as we can to do that. Working with our national governing body, trying to be the beacons that they look up to. I remember in the early 2000s, because of Tiger Woods, I picked up a golf club. I wasn't very good, but I was interested. Venus and Serena Williams influenced tennis in that way, and it inspired me to pick up a racket too. I wasn't very good at that either, but I saw them doing it and I wanted to do it too. And I think as pillars in our community we are actively trying to do that as role models. Of course, people like Simone Manuel, Shane Casas, Lia Neal—I can keep going—are influential in this way, as well.

Now we have so many Black American swimmers that are really showing that this is something that we can do. From that perspective we're doing really well. But we need to get to the grassroots. Now that you've learned to swim, now we're going to put you on a team. Now we're going to teach that team to go from that youth team to the high school team, from that high school to college, from that college to a professional. There's that road that needs to be illuminated for this next generation to understand that there is a future in swimming.

And for those older adults who could be in Masters Swimming, my mother included, they need to learn how

WHEN YOU HEAR CURRENT DAY STORIES, AND STORIES FROM TWO, THREE YEARS AGO, IT'S AS IF WE'RE DOING A LOT OF THE HARD WORK, BUT A LOT OF HARD WORK HAS TO STILL HAPPEN.

to swim as well. And they need to break this narrative because we can teach our children. When our parents don't know, our children don't know how to swim. There's 88% chance that the child will not know how to swim if their parent does not swim. So as a holistic view, we need to hit it from grassroots. We need to hit it from the competitive side, not necessarily meaning that they have to go to the Olympics.

MCM:

I think Cullen hit the nail on the head. The things that we're doing now, we need to continue if we are to correct that disparity. There's still a lot of work to be done. In 2004, the numbers were 70% of Black children didn't know how to swim. Here we are in 2021, now it's 64%. And a lot of people are like, oh, that's only 6%, but that translates to millions of kids who now know how to swim, who would not have even thought of this as something they would need or want to do.

So the things that we're doing are working where, like Cullen said, we're out in front of everybody showing that representation matters there. We're showing the success track, but we're also involved with the grassroots level of making sure that we're not just on TV saying you need to learn how to swim. We're in the water in our communities saying, let's learn how to swim, and I'm going to teach you some tips, I'm going to get you in the water. Beyond that, we're working with the local states and colleges and high schools, and really having them be the vehicle to continue that education.

Our goal is definitely to continue to reduce those drowning statistics, especially since they hit our communities so hard. There's definitely something that

needs to be done and like Cullen said, it's not just kids, we've got to get everybody involved. We've got to make sure that this continues to be part of the conversation for every single family, every single Black family.

CJ:

I noticed you didn't use the word Masters. Is that just going to be me?

MCM:

I am not using master, don't play me.

KY:

I want to discuss how you see swimming in public pools in relation to the ongoing civil rights movement? How have things changed in your lifetime, and how have they stayed the same?

CJ:

The year was 1963, we all have seen the image of the hotel owner throwing bleach in the pool while Black folks are in the pool, because they think that Black people in the pool will make it dirty. Not two years ago, there was a Marriott where the owner of the Marriott did, essentially, but without the bleach, the same thing by kicking out Black teens, because he felt that they were being rowdy and that they were unclean. It's still a problem and when we talk about awareness, it was something that obviously was covered on the news, but it's something that people probably don't still remember.

We are still fighting this fight and it hits home for both Maritza and I, because this is our fight personally. This is something that we have taken on intimately within our

sport of trying to be pillars, to try to fight against this and to see stories that like knock us back to one of the moments, pivotal moments that started the civil rights movement, this image of this owner throwing bleach into a pool, and we're still seeing it in 2018. It's a gentle and not so gentle reminder that we still have a lot of growth ahead. As Maritza said, the numbers [of Black kids who can't swim] dropped 6%. I know when we started out, we probably were sitting back, I know I was. There's no way we're going to see this number drop in our lifetime, but to see it, to actually see movement in that direction is impact. We have to celebrate those little wins because we keep finding these gentle reminders and not so gentle reminders that there's still so much work to be done on both sides.

MCM:

Yeah, and I even think about like some of the stories that I've heard from swim coaches, even. They're getting discriminated against on the pool deck. Some people are questioning them, oh, you're a swim coach? I actually have an example of one of my son's coaching friends here in Atlanta, when we were at a major meet at Georgia Tech. She was on the pool deck with her swimmers dressed like a typical coach, polo shirt, khakis. And some lady came up to her and said, "Oh, the nannies stand up there." Like, that's crazy and this happened just two years ago. It's crazy that stuff like this still continues to happen! And like Cullen said, it is a reminder that we still have a long way to go.

Even in competitive swim, I can't tell you how many countless stories both Cullen and I have been a part of, and when we continue to hear about this from others and other coaches, we know a lot of work still has to be done. But, I think what's going on now is that I think people are finally willing to listen to those stories. I know for when I was swimming coming up the ranks, if I swam great, everybody was super excited, but the minute I had like one bad race, that was like, oh, Maritza, is this going to just fall off at this point, versus a white swimmer, who would have just had a bad swim. They would be treated like, it's okay, we'll figure out what work needs to be done.

By contrast, I would just sit there and head back to the pool, work really hard and make sure my next swim

was on point. So I think there's this level of, for so many years, we've had to be perfect. Now we're able to share the stories that have happened to us. We're able to relate a little bit more. We have a stronger voice and Cullen and myself, Simone, Lia, where we're all at the forefront, being that beacon to continue to move that needle forward, and making swimming a more inclusive sport from the ground up.

KY:

I'm not surprised, yet I'm still surprised. When you hear current day stories, and stories from two, three years ago, it's as if we're doing a lot of the hard work, but a lot of hard work has to still happen. In accepting those stories, as you intimated, Maritza, like we've held the stories and we know the stories, and now people are starting to listen to the stories in a lot of different landscapes. In general, you're starting to hear more of the social justice issues. For me, environmental justice issues come to mind. People are starting to listen, and I'm hoping that we can build on it with this exhibition.

What stands out most for you when reflecting on the history of swimming? Is it a story about structural racism and exclusion, social class, elitism, or water and social justice?

MCM:

When you think about the history of swimming, Black people have known how to swim for years, we've always been able to know how to swim. But there's been many points along that have taught us like, oh no, no, we need to stay away from the water. No, we're not allowed to go to the water, we're not allowed to be in a pool. We only can swim in the shallow end, there's just a lot of that.

And then when you think about the social class, you typically think about those underrepresented communities as, like, the poor Black communities who don't have access to the pool. Like, that's not the case, everybody can learn how to swim. We just need to provide the right tools, give everybody access and get those things in place. When you think about reflecting back on the history of swimming, there's just so much that has happened and continues to happen, that I don't



know if there's really any one moment that we can reflect on that's most important. I think it's all very important to be part of the story, of the journey that we're on right now that make things different and makes it better for the next generation, for the kids that are going to be born today. We want it to be way better than what we had to go through, what our ancestors had to go through.

CJ:

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's interesting. The question is like, what should we focus on? And to Maritza's point, I think it's all of those issues. You have the structural racism that leads to the exclusion of Black Americans, which leads into the elitism, which makes it more focused on a white dominated sport, which keeps us away from the water. Now we have these recent moments of social justice. And as Maritza ended her comment, which was perfect to kind of tee this up for that next generation. The next generation gives us so much hope because of how they stood up after George Floyd was killed. So as pillars in the sport, it is our job to make it so that when they are sitting in this seat, they don't have to stand for the issues we are. The social justice piece is on us to make it so that they don't have to deal with all of these other pieces.

It's kind of hard to focus on one moment. But I think the pivotal moment right now, and I hate that word because it's overused, but the moment right now is to make that shift while people are listening to our stories. While we have the mic, young folks especially are listening and saying like wait, gender, race, environment, these are important issues. When in the past, so many people weren't telling that story. We weren't telling that story, we were quiet. This next generation wants to hear it and wants to change it. So it's our job to stand up and, at this moment, before those stories are lost, to tell those stories to this next generation.

MCM:

And I think that's the key thing that Cullen just said, this generation is ready to change. They're very interested in hearing our stories and what has been going on. And some of them aren't even part of the story, but they're also wanting to say, okay, here's what's happened, here's

what's happening, here's what I'm going to do to make it better—like what that little girl or that little boy that is born today is going to do, to be in a better place than we are. And it's not just the Black people that have to make the change. Everybody needs to get their hands dirty and get moving.

KY:

Absolutely. These last two questions are like looking out into the future. In an ideal world in the future, what role will public pools play in civic and community life?

CJ:

So kind of go back to what we were saying before. I still feel like the pool is such a life, it's the lifeblood of the summer. It's the lifeblood for so many kids. They love to get near the pool, if their community has a pool. I know that when you look at the suburbs, many of them have the pools. And when we look at a lot of the other races that naturally teach their children to swim, where Black Americans don't do that, swimming is a very big piece. There's swimming leagues, there's all of these things that their kids, their parents think immediately, hey, go to swim, go to swim, go to swim. For Black Americans many times that's not the case, it's go play ball, go play football, etc. So the communities that do not have pools, it is so important that guardians and parents make it a mission to have their children learn to swim because those children will get near a body of water at some point. And unfortunately in our role, Maritza and I, as pillars in this sport, have unfortunately had to hear those terrible stories of children who have lost their lives because their parents thought, oh, no, they'll just stay on the shallow end. That's not always what happens.

So if you are in a community that doesn't have a pool, parents, guardians, teach your children to swim. If you are blessed to have a pool in your area, you still need to get your kids to learn to swim and make sure that you teach them the importance of being safe around the water. Because again, it is the lifeblood of many communities—Black, Latino, Asian, doesn't matter. Kids like getting near the water, so it is our job to teach them to learn to swim.



The future of community pools is no different than what it was in the past. Except now we need to really double down our efforts because we are starting to see, as Maritza said, those numbers starting to dip down. This is not the time to let up. It's time to build upon this momentum, to get these kids to learn to swim.

MCM:

To add to that, I would just say in an ideal world, in the future, I would love to walk on a pool deck and see a melting pot of everybody enjoying the pool, having a good time. And nobody looking to the side and being like, who's this little Black girl that just walked on the pool deck, can she swim? None of those questions should be coming up. It should be like, all right, come on, join us, we're having so much fun over here, why don't you come in?

Public pools can be that beacon to bring a community together, no matter what you look like, where you're from. To Cullen's point, no matter what community you live in, bring somebody in. You might be in a more affluent community, go bring all your friends from all over the place and have them come enjoy the freshness of cool pool water on a hot summer day.

CJ:

I mean, that's what got us, right?

MCM:

Exactly right. Exactly. I don't like to sweat, so swimming was for me.

KY:

Circling back to the beginning of our conversation, Maritza, it was recommended that you go to swimming because you had scoliosis. So my last question about an ideal world in the future, what role will water education play in life safety and public health?

MCM:

I'm going to start out with saying, swimming is the only sport that is also a life-saving skill. So when you think about water education, you need to learn how to be safe in and around the water, and it also can lead to all these health benefits of a stronger heart. I'm going to

tell you, when you think about the college kids and the teams that are encompassed by the athletic association for colleges, the swim teams tend to have the highest grade point averages on campus. Yes, I was part of one at Georgia, Cullen was at NC State. I'm telling you, there's just something about swimming that can really develop a person's life skills that will go beyond the water. I use those skills today. I learned how to be determined, be organized, to multitask, so I can do a million different things all at once right now. I'm a mom. I'm a corporate working woman. I'm a wife. I continue to be an advocate and a pillar for water safety and swimming. And I'm able to do all of that because this is the opportunity that water has brought. My life became such a major vehicle. I had no idea swimming would have such an impact on my life. I got introduced to water because of a medical remedy and it turned into something that's going to be a part of my life forever, and I hope that it will be passed down to my kids as well.

CJ:

I mean, it's hard to go after that. So here's where I'll go, I'll hit it from a slightly different side, because everything that Maritza said is absolutely right. And I think what's cool about what she said is I feel the same way as a father, as a businessman, as a husband, as all of the above. That ability to multitask and be able to feel cool, calm and collected during doing it all, that came from swimming.

But I think when we talk about swimming, and we've talked about race quite a bit in this conversation, it's important to bring up other places. Like Australia for example, where swimming is a national pastime for people living there. To not know how to swim is like to not know how to drive here. I want that to settle in. Because when you start looking at our numbers, nearly 10 people drown a day in the U.S. It's the second leading cause of accidental death under the age of 14 for children next to car crashes.

We typically don't see those numbers. We don't think about those numbers, but that is what we need to change. And it's not just by race; that stat includes everybody. That's a U.S. statistic that we need to change. Now, when you talk about religion, I said that I swam for a Jewish community center. In the Jewish faith, to be a good parent, you have to learn, and teach your children how

to walk, to talk and to swim. So we need to change the narrative when we talk about education in our culture, in Black American culture, to understand that to be a good guardian, learning to swim needs to be a part of that rule. Learning to swim needs to be built into our education. We need to have our kids exposed to the water and have positive experiences around the water. They don't have to be Maritza Correia. They don't have to go to that level, but they need to be safer around the water. And I challenge all parents and guardians to add—please, please, please—add water safety and swim lessons to your development, your development of your children, or your development of that niece, or nephew, or child. It's vital to add that to the education of our people, in our culture.

KY:

Yes! Excellent, both of you. Is there anything that you really want to share with our audience, when we get our exhibition together, that we didn't touch on?

CJ:

I would say one thing. I would say in everything that we do, we should highlight that we're in a digital age and there's going to be a ten-year-old that's listening to this in the museum, or reading about our conversation in POOL magazine. They should be able to follow us on some kind of social media so they can see what we're up to and what we're doing, and ask us questions, because we are very, very responsive when it comes to those types of things. So whether it be Lia Neal or Simone Manuel, or one of us on Team Black, it's important that you follow to see what's happening. I can see a child sitting there and being like, okay, but what do I do next? And being able to at least interact with us in some way via social would be important. So, I'm @CullenJones across all platforms and Maritza is @ritzyswims04 on Twitter and @ritzyswims on most other platforms.

KY:

I thank you both for what you're doing for the community and for this exhibition!



“Small Boats and Cape Coast Castle and Forts William, Victoria, and McCarthy, Gold Coast, mid-19th century”
 The “English boat” depicts a Western shipboat, or longboat, while the other three represent Gold Coast, probably Fante, surf-canoes. The larger “Lighter” would have been used for transporting cargo and people between ship and shore and it contains a traditional Akan stool for “high class passengers.” The bows of the smaller “surf boat” and “surf canoe” were elevated with splashboards to keep water out as these vessels carried people and goods between ship and shore. The two trident-shaped paddles, identified as “oars,” were unique to surf-canoes as their shape provided less resistance if they hit surf while canoeists brought them forward between strokes.



Surfing in Africa and the Diaspora

BY DR. KEVIN DAWSON

Popular histories of surfing tell us that Polynesians were the only people to develop surfing, that the first account of surfing was written in Hawai'i in 1778, and that California surfers Bruce Brown, Robert August, and Mike Hynson introduced surfing to West Africa when they traveled there to film the 1966 movie “The Endless Summer.” All these claims are incorrect.

The modern surf cultures currently developing along Africa’s long shoreline are not something new and introduced; they are a rebirth, the remembering and re-imagining of 1,000-year-old traditions. The first known account of surfing was written during the 1640s in what is now Ghana. Surfing was independently developed from Senegal to Angola. Africa possesses thousands of miles of warm, surf-filled waters and populations of strong swimmers and sea-going fishermen and merchants who knew surf patterns and crewed surf-canoes capable of catching and riding waves upwards of ten feet high.

Africans surfed on three- to five-foot-long wooden surfboards in a prone, sitting, kneeling, or standing position, and in small one-person canoes. Despite Brown’s claim that “The Endless Summer” introduced surfing into Ghana, if viewers shift their eyes away from August and Hynson, they will see Ga youth of Labadi Village, near Accra, Ghana, riding traditional surfboards, which can still be found at some beaches, though most people now ride modern surfboards. The ability of Ga men, in the film, to stand on the Americans’ longboards illustrates their surfing tradition.

Africans also rode longboards, about twelve feet long, and used them to paddle several miles. English anthropologist Robert Rattray provided the best description and photographs of paddleboards on Lake Bosumtwi, located about 100 miles inland of Cape Coast, Ghana. The Asante believe the “anthropomorphic lake god,” Twi, prohibited canoes on the lake. Keeping with



"Showing various positions on *mpadua*" illustrates the type of paddleboards used for centuries by the Asante on Lake Bosomtwi, in what is now Ghana. (1923)

divine sanctions, people fished from paddleboards, called *padua* or *mpadua* (plural), and used them to traverse this five-mile (8.5 km) wide crater lake. While it is unclear if coastal peoples surfed these longboards, accounts and photographs illustrate that they paddled them a couple miles out to sea to anchored Western ships.

German merchant-adventurer Michael Hemmersam provided the first known record of surfing, which is problematic as he described a sport that was new to him. Believing he was watching Gold Coast children, who were probably Fante in the Cape Coast, Ghana area, learn to swim, he wrote that parents "tie their children to boards and throw them into the water," with other Europeans providing similar descriptions. Most Africans learned to swim when they were about sixteen months and with more positive reinforcement; such "lessons" would have resulted in many drowned children.

Later accounts are unambiguous. Describing the Fante of the Cape Coast and Elmina region in what is now Ghana, riding wooden surfboards, John Adam wrote in 1823, "[They] paddle outside of the surf, when, watching a proper opportunity, they place their frail barks on the tops of high waves, which, in their progress to the shore, carry them along with great velocity, . . . steering the planks with such precision, as to prevent them broaching to; for when that occurs, they are washed off, and have to swim to regain them." Children "of not more

than six or seven years of age, amuse themselves in this way, and swim like ducks." Likewise, in 1834, while at Accra, Ghana, James Alexander wrote: "From the beach, meanwhile, might be seen boys swimming into the sea, with light boards under their stomachs. They waited for a surf; and came rolling like a cloud on top of it."

There are also accounts of Africans bodysurfing. In 1887, an English traveler watched an African man named Sua, at home "in his element, dancing up and down and doing fancy performances with the rollers, as if he had lived since his infancy as much in the water as on dry land." As a wave approached, "he turns his face to the shore and rising on to the top of it he strikes out vigorously with it towards land, and is carried dashing in at a tremendous speed *after the same manner as the [surf-canoes] beach themselves.*"

Fishermen often surfed their six-foot-long paddleboards and surf-canoes weighing about fifteen pounds, with accounts describing both off the Cape Verde Islands, Ivory Coast, Congo-Angola, and Cameroon, with "Kru" canoes of Liberia being heavily documented. In 1861, Thomas Hutchinson observed Batanga fishermen from southern Cameroon riding surf-canoes "no more than six feet in length, fourteen to sixteen inches in width, and from four to six inches in depth" that weighed about fifteen pounds. Describing how work turned to play Hutchinson penned:

During my few days stay at Batanga, I observed that from the more serious and industrial occupation of fishing they would turn to racing on the tops of the surging billows which broke on the sea shore; at one spot more particularly, which, owing to the presence of an extensive reef, seemed to be the very place for a continuous swell of several hundred yards in length. Four or six of them go out steadily, dodging the rollers as they come on, and mounting atop of them with the nimbleness and security of ducks. Reaching the outermost roller, they turn the canoes stems shoreward with a single stroke of the paddle, and mounted on the top of the wave, they are borne towards the shore, steering with the paddle alone. By a peculiar action of this, which tends to elevate the stern of the canoe so that it will receive the full impulsive force of the advancing billow, on they come, carried along with all its impetuous rapidity.



"Dahomey—Kotonou—Negroes Diving to Catch Coins"

Two men on surfboards/paddleboards are seen in the top right corner of this early nineteenth-century postcard of Kotonou, in what is now the modern country of Benin. Throughout Africa, it was common for ship passengers to throw coins into the water and watch males dive underwater to retrieve them. The photograph perhaps predates the 1908 completion of Kotonou's harbor.

SURFING WAS A MEANS FOR OPENING UP ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES.

Surfing was a means for opening up economic opportunities. It allowed African youth to critically understand surf-zones so they could uniquely traverse them in surf-canoes, linking coastal communities to offshore fisheries and coastal shipping lanes. Atlantic Africa possesses few natural harbors and waves break along much of its coastline. The only way many coastal people could access the ocean's resources was by designing surf-canoes that sliced through waves when launching from beaches and were fast, agile, and maneuverable, allowing them to surf waves ashore.

Surfing was the intergenerational transmission of wisdom that transformed surf-zones into social and cultural places, where youth holistically *experienced* the ocean. Suspending their bodies in the drink and positioning themselves in the curl, they learned about surf-zones by *seeing* and *feeling* how the ocean pushed and pulled their bodies. Youth learned about wavelengths (the distance between waves), the physics of breakers, and that waves form in sets with several-minute intervals between sets. Importantly, surfing taught youth that to catch waves one needed to match their speed; something Westerners did not comprehend until the late nineteenth century. Documenting how surf-canoemen utilized childhood lessons, an Englishman noted that they “count the Seas [waves], and know when to paddle safely on or off,” often waiting to surf the last and largest set wave. In an age with few energy sources—when societies harnessed wind, animal, and, perhaps, river power—Atlantic Africans used waves to slingshot surf-canoes laden with fish or tons of cargo ashore, being



“Batanga Canoes”

The roughly six-foot-long dugout canoes that Batanga men surfed were smaller and lighter than contemporary surfboards. Mary H. Kingsley, *West African Studies* (London: 1901). Author's collection

FISHERMEN AND MARITIME MERCHANTS MADE SACRIFICES TO SURF-CANOES AND AQUATIC DEITIES WHO REWARDED THEM WITH SAFE PASSAGES AND PROSPEROUS VOYAGES.

the only people to bridle waves' energy as part of their daily productive labor. Surf-canoemen floated colonial economies, transporting virtually all the goods exported out of and imported into Africa between ship and shore from the 1400s into the 1950s, when modern ports were constructed.

During the 1400s, surf-canoemen introduced Europeans to the pleasures of surfing, since few Europeans at the time could swim well enough to surf. In 1853, Horatio Bridge provided an exaggerated account of surf-canoeing at Cape Coast, writing, "The landing is effected in large canoes, which convey passengers close to the rocks, safely and without being drenched, although the surf dashes fifty feet in height. There is a peculiar enjoyment in being raised, by an irresistible power beneath you, upon the high rollers, and then dropped into the hollow of the waves, as if to visit the bottom of the ocean." Some surf-canoemen attached a chair to the front of their canoes, where especially intrepid white passengers could sit.

Surf-canoemen knew Europeans feared drowning and being devoured by sharks the instant they fell into African waters. Using this knowledge, they inflated the tips received from passengers by engaging in nautical games of chicken, as Paul Isert observed on October 16, 1783, at Christianburg Castle, Accra.

In vain have Europeans tried to breast the breakers and to land in their own small pointed boats. These have almost always capsized. . . . The Blacks now started to prepare themselves to breast the breakers. The captain of the canoe made a short address to the sea, after which he sprinkled a few drops of brandy as an offering.

At the same time he struck both sides of the canoe several times with his clenched fist. He warned us Europeans to hold fast. The whole performance was carried out with such gravity that we felt almost as if we were preparing for death. An additional cause for alarm is that, having started to go through the breakers, they must often paddle back again because they had not timed it to the right moment. They are said to do this often deliberately in order to torment the Whites in the breakers for a long time, so that in acknowledgment of their great struggle they would be given a larger bottle of brandy. In a few minutes, however, we were safely across and our boat was on the sand.

As surfers must realize, these Ga surf-canoemen prolonged Europeans' time in surf-zones by pretending their timing was off, as "it is customary on" such occasions for "each passenger" to "make a handsome present" to the surf-canoemen.

Surf-canoes were sacred objects, carved with iron tools from sacred silk cottonwood trees, while the ocean remains a spiritual place. Tall and majestic, cottonwoods connected the heavens and earth, with some societies believing the souls of children waiting to be born resided within them. Surf-canoes had a gender that determined how they surfed waves, while the cottonwood's soul continued to dwell in surf-canoes, communicating with water spirits. The ancestral realm lay at the bottom of the ocean, whose waters were populated with spirits and deities.

Fishermen and maritime merchants made sacrifices

to surf-canoes and aquatic deities who rewarded them with safe passages and prosperous voyages. People from Senegal to South Africa and as far inland as the Dogon of Mali and Burkina Faso believed in deities who resemble mermaids, with Mami Wata, meaning "Mother Water" or "Mother of all Waters," being the most celebrated of these finned divinities. She is a benevolent protective spirit with great powers, including the ability to move between the present and future. She protects followers from drowning and pulls individuals who are swimming, canoeing, and surfing down into the spirit realm, revealing its mysteries to them, returning them to the surface with enhanced spiritual understandings, good health, and success, while making them more attractive. Waters possessing distinguishing characteristics, like surf-zones, whirlpools, and waterfalls, are the favorite abode of water spirits, including Mami Wata, with the sound of moving water echoing spirits' voices.

Like surfboard shapers, canoe-makers designed surf-canoes to better surf particular types of waves. There were hundreds of surf-canoes variations, with each distinct enough to warrant its own name. Design nuances were informed by local conditions, like the steepness of the beach and size, shape, and power of waves. Ga fishermen of Labadi used three types of surf-canoes along a couple miles of beachfront: the *Ali lele*, the *Fa lele*, and *Tfani lele*.

The Fante developed and disseminated the three-pronged surf-canoes paddle that resembles a spork. When paddled quickly, its three slightly-spread fingers increased the blade's surface area, as little water passed between them. The design also reduced resistance if the blade hit a wave during the forward stroke. The Fante traveled widely, ranging as far north as Liberia and

down to Angola, disseminating their surfing prowess and maritime designs. Indeed, the Ga adopted the Fante paddle during the 1700s, causing Bruce Brown, in "The Endless Summer," to problematically joke about cannibalism, saying when surf-canoemen come "paddling toward you, you think they're coming out with their forks to have you for dinner."

To the north, there were distinctive-looking Senegambian *pirogues*, with their protruding bows and aft sprints. These surf-canoes were apparently developed by Niuminka, also Niominka or Niumi, mariners living on the Djomboss Islands north of the Gambia River. They probably initiated this design, with Lebu (also Lébou) from the Cape Verde Peninsula and members of other ethnic groups making important contributions. Pirogues surf waves well and are particularly designed to ride the larger, steeper, hollow waves that break along the Senegambia's western-facing beaches.

The currents of the African diaspora forcibly transplanted enslaved Africans and their cultures in the Americas. There, Mami Wata and other deities found new waters to roam, and captives recreated aquatic traditions. Accounts indicate that, by the mid-1700s, enslaved Africans were surfing and surf-canoeing from South Carolina down to Brazil.

Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2018) and "Surfing Beyond Racial and Colonial Imperatives in Early Modern Atlantic Africa and Oceania" in Alexander Sotelo Eastman and Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee, eds., *The Critical Surf Studies Reader* (Duke University Press: 2017), 135-152.



Swimming as a Way of Life

For More Than 50 Years,
International Swimming
Hall of Fame Coach
JIM ELLIS has Transformed
Swimmers into Champions
by Strengthening Their
Pride and Conditioning
Their Community Spirit

PHOTO BY BURK UZZLE, COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL
SWIMMING HALL OF FAME

In the beginning... At the age of 7, something remarkable happened to a youngster named Jim Ellis. He went to the YMCA for his first swim lesson, and on that very same day he learned how to swim! “It was something I took to immediately,” said Ellis, now in his 70s. “I just loved being in the water. Floating around in the deep end of the pool is where I found freedom.”

Ellis grew to enjoy swimming so much that he dreamed of introducing others to the sport. At the age of 16 he became an instructor and continued his own education at a local community center in Pittsburgh near where he grew up. “I wanted something more, so I took certification courses, lifeguard classes, and water safety instructions. I later learned that if you could earn an American Red Cross certification, it was honored anywhere in the country, and if you were certified when you went off to college, you had a great chance of getting a paid position lifeguarding. Earning money for something I love made perfect sense, so I got my certification, and ultimately that led to me getting a job as a lifeguard.”

In 1971, Jim Ellis formed the Philadelphia Department of Recreation (PDR) Swim Team, and fielded his first competitive team in 1972. Originally located in West Philadelphia at the Sayre Recreation Center, the team later moved to the Marcus Foster Recreation Center in the Nicetown neighborhood of Philadelphia. Since its inception, PDR has provided youth and young adults, ages 5 and older, with access to competitive swimming to foster self-confidence, team-building, sportsmanship, responsibility, leadership and academic achievement. Ellis has coached swimming for over 50 years and his program has been instrumental in qualifying swimmers for the U.S. Olympic Trials since the early 1990s. Today, PDR is nationally recognized and considered to be the nation’s best African American swim team.

Jim’s passion for swimming and his achievements both in and out of the pool have earned him honors and accolades, from an induction into the International Swimming Hall of Fame to a Hollywood feature film (*Pride*, starring Terrence Howard) based on his illustrious life and career as the head coach of PDR. For Jim Ellis, swimming is a way of life. Victoria Prizzia sat down with Coach Ellis for an exclusive interview for

POOL magazine to discuss his philosophical approach and most memorable moments in swimming. When asked what he was most proud of throughout his Hall of Fame career, we were surprised to learn his greatest inspiration was to champion young individuals into becoming great citizens in their community, in addition to becoming great swimmers. Here is how he pursued that goal and continues to succeed today.

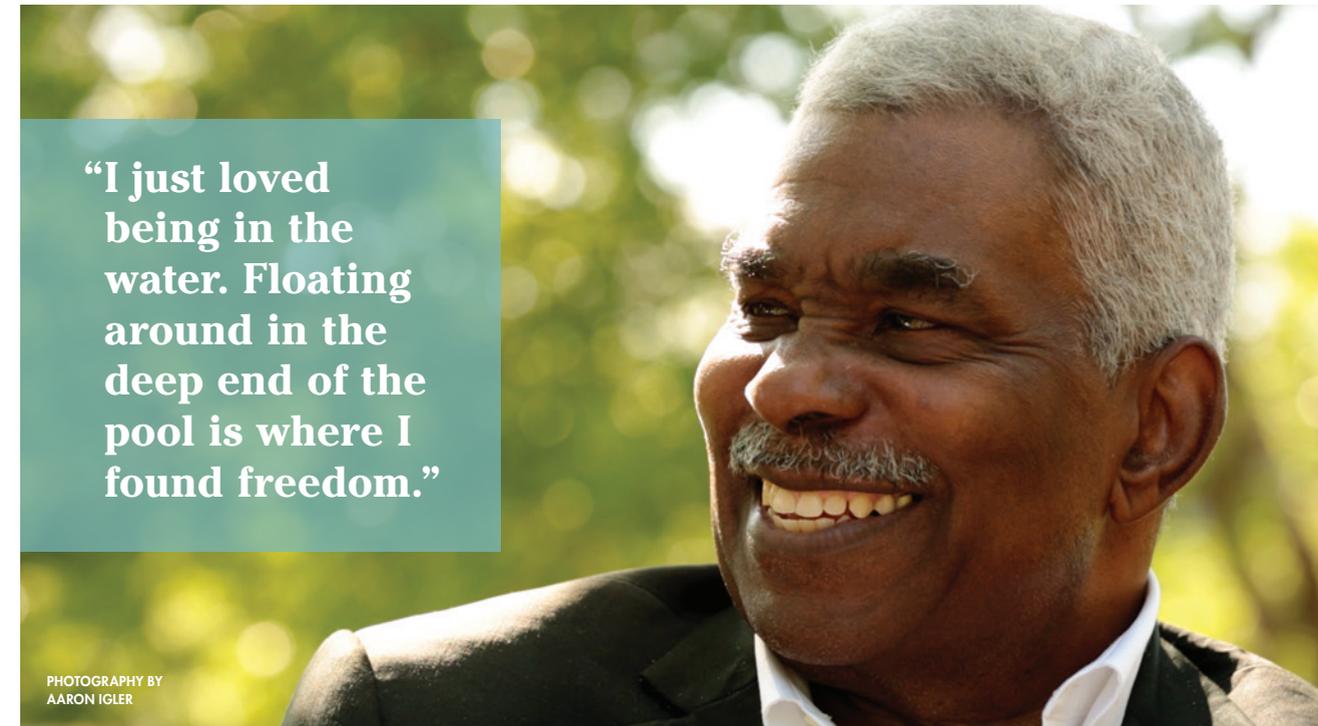
THREE KEY COMPONENTS TO SUCCESS

Building a strong foundation. “When teaching children how to swim, you must begin with a solid foundation by providing students and their families with a healthy, inspirational environment where you can build confidence for competitive swimming and, equally important, cultivate self-confidence in a youngster’s academic studies. Our goal from the start is to develop a well-rounded person: a great swimmer, a great student and a great individual. Essentially, our swimming program is as much about swimming as it is about community development.”

Over the years, Ellis has learned the best way to impact youth and their parents is with a philosophy that involves the entire family with swimming.

“The parents of our swimmers never just sit in the stands and watch. They must actively get involved if we are to achieve team success. So you’ll see family members on the pool deck helping out, traveling with our team to competitions, attending meetings and ensuring that their kids are keeping up with school. We learned to utilize swimming as a vehicle to broaden opportunities for youngsters outside of competition.

“Everybody’s not going to be a national level swimmer, so it became important for us to build a complete program for our young swimmers. We have always offered our students lifesaving, first aid and a certification program for lifeguarding. We open their minds to good jobs in good environments, and instruct them on the things they could do moving forward. Our goals are to grow more than an aquatics program. Our intention is to cultivate and grow a swimming community, and at the end of the day, that type of success is all-encompassing. It includes



“I just loved being in the water. Floating around in the deep end of the pool is where I found freedom.”

a strong foundation of programming, instructors, dedicated family members and well-rounded youth.”

Diversity, Inclusion and Representation. We asked Coach Ellis about the importance of diversity and inclusion as a key component to success. Decades ago his point of view may have seemed progressive, but with current day standards, society is starting to catch up.

“We started out as a one hundred percent African American team, but the appearance of our team gradually changed and changed and changed. Ultimately, we became a reflection of the demographics that make up the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia is not all Black. It’s not all white. It’s not all Hispanic or Asian. We are a bit of everything. That is the beauty of our city, and we are a true representation of Philadelphia. Our program became diverse before many others. We had white families from upscale neighborhoods, we had Black families from upscale neighborhoods, we had all mixes,

all socio-economic groups coming together for one idea, one concept, one dream.

“Everybody wants the same things, to swim as fast as you can, to have a good time and to get the best education that you can get. These are the fundamentals and it’s something that I’m very proud of. When we travel, we look like the neighborhoods we are from. We are a blended community of beautiful people. The color of your skin doesn’t mean you cannot do something. The color of your skin does not make you less than anybody else. Unfortunately, though, when it comes to the color of one’s skin, swimming, like everything else in society has a place in the civil rights movement. I tell kids today, the color of your skin does not make you a second-class citizen, nor does it mean you shouldn’t have access or opportunity to things. You must speak-up when you see inequity. Municipalities must provide communities with the things needed to live as healthy and equitable a life as possible, but safe access to clean household water and

public access to safe swimming water is still not the same in every community. There is still a need for equality in so many communities, especially those across the country with large populations of Black and brown people. My hope, like my expectation, is that we will get there.”

Finally, Victoria spoke to Ellis about living life and **achieving success with a strong sense of pride.**

“The members of our program have always gone into every situation with a deep sense of pride. Even in the program’s earliest days, we never went into a situation or a competition like we were less than anyone else. We went into a meet like we owned it. That was the mentality, a psychological approach to swimming and to living life that I promote. And that approach has taken us to the highest level of competition, including Olympic Trials and national championships, where we come in ready to compete in the top three in any competition. In the beginning years, there were never teams like ours, coming from where we came from with a pool that looked like the pools that we swam in. We didn’t have the very best facilities, but we swam like we did. We walked in like we did. We competed like we belonged at the top—and yes, we are qualified to contend for a place at the top.

“Our athletes have always been proud to be members of PDR swimming because they know the level of work it takes, both in the classroom and in the swimming pool. Our swimmers have always been fiercely driven and dedicated. They have done the things that Michael Phelps, Janet Evans and all of the other great swimmers have done. And like anyone else, they expect to achieve great success. This kind of pride has led to a lot of our kids being recruited by a number of the top swimming schools in the country. Elite coaches and athletic directors recognize our swimmers for their strong foundation, their relentless work ethic and that clearly visible way they all swim, with unwavering pride—pride in ourselves, our team, our families and pride in our community.”

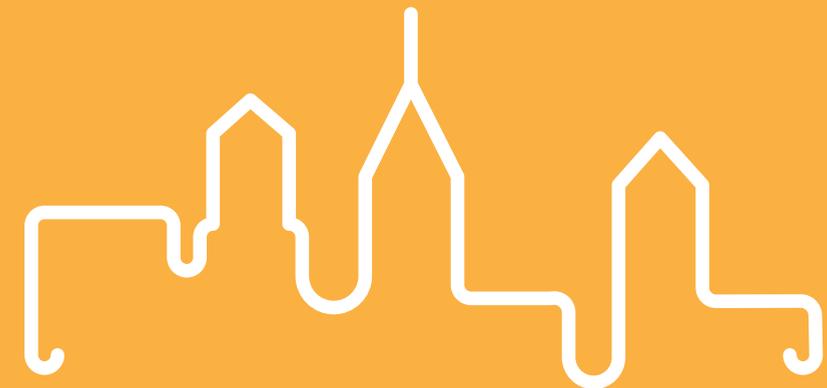
For Coach Jim Ellis, personal pride comes from everything he has done and hopes to do in the future. “I’m very proud of the fact that I had a 50-year career doing what I love to do most in life. I’m proud of the fact that so many families have opened their minds and their hearts to the philosophies we teach, and have trusted



PHOTO COURTESY OF PDR SWIM TEAM

me and my staff with helping to shape the lives of their children. As I look back on so many of the youngsters that have come through our program, I see all of the success they are having today as adults, and the contributions they’re making to society, and now their young children are swimming because of the foundation we helped to instill in them. This is my greatest sense of pride.”

Victoria left her conversation with Jim Ellis thinking an inspiring thought: In order for change to happen, you have to have people who are brave enough to do things as they have not been done before, without asking for permission to do it. And with this type of courage comes a tidal wave of pride!



WE CAN SWIM!



Come Swim With Us!

Founded in 2013, We Can Swim! is a student-run program offering free swimming lessons to underserved youth of almost any age, and specifically for those of the African American and Hispanic communities. This program was developed to directly combat the drowning rates in these populations, provide access to safe learning environments, and increase representation in the sport of swimming. We believe it is crucial that children learn these skills at a young age to stop preventable drownings and for everyone to take full advantage of the city pools every summer.

Where are lessons?

Pottruck Gym in
the Sheerr Pool
3701 Walnut Street
on the University of
Pennsylvania’s campus.

When are lessons?

Lessons are generally
held every Saturday
morning from mid-March
to the end of April and
are 40 minutes.

How do I sign up?

Registration begins
in February. Enroll at
www.wecanswim.org/
registration.



Email us at wecanswimpenn@gmail.com and
follow us on social media @wecanswimphilly.

Access to Pools, Resources Unlocks Our Kids' Potential

BY PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT
COMMISSIONER RANDY E. HAYMAN, ESQ.

Every 24 hours, the Philadelphia Water Department delivers about 230 million gallons of fresh, clear, life-sustaining water to the people who rely on us. Despairingly, on average, roughly 11 people will succumb to drowning in America in that same period.

Within that troubling statistic is an even more devastating reality, which the POOL exhibit helps to uncover: America's Black children are nearly six times more likely to drown than white children.

As the Water Commissioner here in Philadelphia, my day-to-day experience with water mostly comes down to ensuring we can continue to provide 1.6 million people with this precious resource, something that is essential for life.

Yet, when I step back to consider the disparities which can turn water from a source of life into a fatal threat, I see at the core of the problem a theme which ripples out into so many other areas of life where inequities cause harm: a lack of access.

At times throughout my life, I have heard remarks, made either jokingly or matter-of-factly, to the effect that "Black people cannot swim," or that they are afraid of water. As the academics contributing to the POOL exhibit will note, there is some truth in that; Black Americans are half as likely to know how to swim as white Americans are, according to the CDC.

A more revealing way to put that, however, is that people who have never had access to pools and swimming lessons and the other experiences that make jumping in the water a thing of joy may rightly be afraid of water



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAHAR COSTON-HARDY FOR THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT

and never learn how to swim—no matter their skin color.

Growing up in North St. Louis, I had the great fortune of having a father who not only taught me to swim but who also put me on a path that opened many doors. My dad, a high school principal for 49 years, and my mother, also a long-serving educator, were an integral part of the educational community, and they helped my sisters and I attain the best schooling possible. That meant we got to go to the John Burroughs School, which is to this day one of the best college-prep schools in the country. Named after a famous naturalist, the school would take kids out to a place called Camp Drey Land in the Ozarks every summer.

There, we would go out into the creek to swim and float around on rafts. It was a special experience. Being there as one of a few African Americans shortly after the school began desegregation efforts, I knew it was something not many of my friends at home would get to enjoy.

Of course, I was able to enjoy swimming at Drey Land because my father taught me to swim. One of the earliest stories I remember pertaining to my father and swimming was his tale of getting into "Good Trouble," as the late civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis would have called it, at Kansas University, in Lawrence, Kansas.

It was not easy being a Black college student in 1930s Kansas. In one anecdote, my father said they would give Black students an A in gym class, simply because they didn't want any of the Black people sweating on other students during sports like wrestling.

AMERICA'S BLACK CHILDREN ARE NEARLY SIX TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DROWN THAN WHITE CHILDREN.

In the face of that kind of treatment, they discovered a creative way to rebel. What they found out was that, if a Black person went into the pool, the school would incur the cost of emptying out the water and refilling it.

So as students, they would happen to fall in, just to make them refill this Olympic-size pool for swimming classes the next day. I loved that story. That was activism, at a personal level. Still, I also remember feeling a pang of fear for my father. How could he and his friends risk angering people, knowing what could happen?

Fairground Park Pool, where I learned to swim, is both a place of fond memories for me and a place that helped open my eyes to the history of racism that shaped St. Louis and the world around me.

Fairground was a good walk from my home. That was the sign that you were becoming a big boy, though not yet a teenager—when you could walk to the pool with a group of other kids, and you had to go through neighborhoods that weren't yours.

The other part of becoming a big kid? You had to jump in the deep end and show that you could swim across the pool. That was the deep-water test.

Those are my warm recollections of Fairground. Later, as a young adult, I saw pictures of the race riot that took place around Fairground Park and learned about the violence that took place, all because some white St. Louisans didn't want African Americans to swim at the pool when it desegregated in 1949. (See Jeff Wiltse's article in this magazine to learn more about similar events.)

Learning that there had been these riots at the Fairground pool made racism and segregation more palpable and real for me. It gave me a sense of the history of what people in St. Louis had been through.

With your eyes opened, you start to realize why neighborhoods are the way they are. People often try to put the blame on the individual or the community for the limitations they may have. But when you learn the history, and you see the way that people were treated and limited, how there wasn't access, then you are not amazed that some people don't know how to swim.

You can take that truth and apply it to many things in life. A person might not have gone to law school, but were they smart enough to have done so? Absolutely. A person may not have learned to swim, but did they have a pool? Did they have a coach beside them to show them the right way to dive? No, but they certainly have the ability to swim. That ability was never tapped into. Why? Because they didn't have access. We know that if you give Black people access to the right resources, we can win gold medals in the pool, like Simone Manuel.

You don't need to be an Olympian to reap the rewards of swimming though. So much about learning swimming is about growth: overcoming something you're afraid of. Jumping in. Learning new skills and tricks. Doing all of that until it becomes something fun that you love and you're proud of.

And that growth only comes with exposure to places and people that can give you that opportunity. Exposure to those experiences is what racism and segregation takes away from people. And it can leave scars that last for generations.

If you never have exposure to these things, and you only get to see yourself and those in your community in one light, you don't develop appreciation for all of the parts of yourself and what you have the potential to do and become.

That's why leveling access to pools, and swimming lessons, and beyond is so important. Our kids deserve to grow up unafraid of water and swimming and to actuate the strong potential that exists inherently inside them.

We know we have it in us. When you see young children playing together in the kiddie pool or at the beach, they do not care about race or what the other kids look like—they are just looking for someone to have fun with.

It's not until the adult world interjects ideas of racism and differences that illusory limitations are fostered. We can do better—and dialogues like the one started by the POOL exhibit are a crucial first step.



Two boys jump off diving boards at the pool in Pittman Park, Atlanta, Georgia, August 1974.

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THE POOLS WE ARE

BY SABIR MUHAMMAD

Have you ever seen a child look at a pool for the first time? No? Well, it is the subtlest magic. Their eyes widen, frozen in a soft gaze, and, for a brief moment in time, they simply can't look away. Can you remember the first time you looked at a large body of water? Did your heart quicken? Did you squeeze the hand you were holding a bit tighter? It feels like someone you've forgotten is reminding you that you've met before. There's something ancient about our connection to water, and it is the most obvious fact, yet one of our greatest mysteries. Evolutionarily, we all, literally, come from water. Civilizations have been defined by great bodies of water, and for hundreds of years, wars have been fought, laws have been written and stories have been told about this simple, tasteless and formless substance without which we couldn't survive.

We are inextricably bound to water, bodies of water, and pools are the tiny relatives of those larger bodies; fragments pooled together by our hands sustaining our connections. Yes, water not only supports our bodily functions, but also maintains our spirit. An auspicious reverence for water in every human culture permeates the most precious aspects of our human experience, from the birthing of children, to the sacrament of baptism, to the ritual washing of bodies passed.

Water impacts human life on such a magnificent scale that it is codified into our understanding of the world. Water is not only our biological source of life, but also an eternal human symbol. In art, water is a moody Gemini, at times representing peace and tranquility, and in other moments representing a foreboding danger. In literature, it represents transformation, allowing us to more fully understand the journey of the protagonist once she emerges from it.

My first encounter with a body of water was transformative as well. As a young child, I ran and jumped into a river without knowing how to swim. Struggling to stay afloat, I went under, surrendering to the swiftness of the river's current. Luckily for me, I was saved by my father, Sabir Sr., who was a swimmer. Growing up, my father was not allowed to swim in the public



Sabir Muhammad, of Stanford University, becomes the first Black swimmer to hold an American Record.

NICK WILSON/ALLSPORT

pool of his small, segregated Louisiana town, so he learned to swim in ponds and swimming holes.

On the other hand, my mother, Jessica, who grew up in College Park, a small city south of Atlanta, never learned to swim as a child. Had my father not been there that day, it is highly likely that both my mother and I would have drowned, because she would have undoubtedly tried to save me and failed. It is an unfortunate fact that children and families around the world drown nearly every day. ***Our unbridled human attraction to water requires guardrails; knowledge. We need water but we must learn to swim, and it is this body of knowledge that would dictate the course of my life.***

After nearly drowning, my parents set out to make sure that wouldn't ever happen again, and signed me up for swimming lessons at Pittman Park Pool in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Atlanta. Pittsburgh, named

for its similarities to the city in Pennsylvania, was one of Atlanta's Black working class neighborhoods that saw precipitous economic decline after desegregation due to a lack of investment and families seeking better housing and employment options. The Pittman Pool sits in the heart of Pittsburgh, and it is the largest outdoor pool in the city of Atlanta. It is Olympic sized; 50 meters long and 25 meters wide, and has a separate diving well, 20 meters long by 20 meters wide and 12 feet deep, with four diving boards. Pittman was the most fascinating structure I had ever seen, and the most water I had ever seen in one place.

After nearly 40 years, I can still recall the smell of the pool, a powerful aroma of chlorine, lotion and pool water drying on the hot pool deck. But it was not the smell that excited me. It was the sights and sounds coming from the other children around me. The pool deck was incredibly vibrant, with light-colored concrete floors

PITTMAN WAS MY FIRST LOVE AND IT CAPTURED MY HEART.

and walls reflecting sunlight in every direction. Never before had I ever seen so many other Black bodies, diving and splashing and enjoying the sun and water. I was surrounded by sharks and minnows, cannonballs, jack knives, goggles, giggles and freestyles of every variety. Pittman was my first love and it captured my heart.

Pittman was designed to accommodate hundreds of young bodies, and during those summers everyone from within a three-mile radius would go to Pittman. My first day at Pittman was a gauntlet of trials at every turn. Before I learned to swim, I had to learn the process of accessing the pool, which was a well-defined series of steps likely designed by a process engineer. First, I waited in line at the locker room. Second, the locker attendant passed me a metal basket for my belongings, and an elastic bracelet with a matching number made of brass. Then, I put my clothes into my basket, pulled up my swimsuit, and returned my basket full of clothes to the locker room attendant who would store them. Finally, I would shower and head down to the pool gates and form another line.

The pool gates, heavy-duty steel turnstiles, entry and exit, would only accommodate one person at a time. In a small office next to the gates was a lifeguard with a hand counter clicking with each turn of the turnstile. It was common for the pool to reach capacity, which meant you either waited for space to open up or reversed the process and came back later.

Despite my initial attraction to the water, and my inexplicable willingness to run full-speed into a river the previous summer, the specter of actual swimming lessons was too much for me at that first time. On the morning of my first lesson, the pool water looked too cold for my tiny frame, the morning dew still in place from the night before, and the thought of swimming in this vast urban ocean was a bit too daunting. So I did what any self respecting kid would. I tried to back out of the deal, negotiating an alternative plan with my mother. I told her we should go back home and come back later when it was warmer. She paid me no mind and pointed in the direction of my swim instructor, Ms. Lois, a beautiful, shapely woman with chocolate skin, a red swimsuit and

a warm smile that radiated in every direction. Ms. Lois coaxed me into the pool, pulled me into her bosom and helped me gain the comfort I needed to begin the process of learning to swim. After a few more lessons, it became my mission to impress her with my abilities, calling on her and showing her how I could swim like a tiger shark. Little did I know those beginning lessons would propel me on a swimming wave that I'm still riding.

After learning to swim at Pittman, I spent every summer of my life there until I was 19 years old. At Pittman, I secured my first job as a locker room attendant and my second job as lifeguard. There was so much to enjoy about Pittman, the games we played, and the lifelong friendships we forged. But, there were also many harsh realities of life that were equally immersive. I witnessed fights, melees of those refusing to be locked outside the gates on hot days, and it was not uncommon to open the pool some days to find the body of a night venturer seeking thrills. Another soul absorbed by the depths.

My time at Pittman had an incredible impact on the trajectory of my life. All of the income I earned in my life from age 14 to 25 came from pool related activities: cleaning pools, lifeguarding, teaching swimming and, eventually, winning races. The skills I developed as a swimmer led to a full swimming scholarship at Stanford University and took me to pools around the world as a professional swimmer. It was swimming that led me to the love of my life, Jenny, who also grew up swimming in Atlanta's pools. For me, swimming, in pools, has been a conduit to an ancient pastime and a passport to an extraordinary life.

At the time of this writing, millions of children around the country have missed a full year of access to swimming pools due to Covid-related restrictions. There are new cohorts of children who haven't learned to swim, and the realities of this will have significant impacts on public health statistics. Please donate to organizations like **SwemKids.com** who are working to make swimming accessible to those who need it most.



IMAGE COURTESY OF NILE SWIM CLUB

THE POWER OF THE NILE SWIM CLUB

BY KEVIN COLQUITT

Writing an article about the Nile Swim Club is a real challenge at best. How do I write about a legend? Can my words and thoughts compare to the many articles and documentaries that have recorded the rich history of this true gem in African American aquatic history?

First and foremost, this multi-generational organization has survived for 60 years. It began when three Yeadon community residents were denied access to the Yeadon Swim Club because of their race. This denial was not as blatant as the racial signs and limitations that were posted in our segregated southern states, of “Colored” and “White” sections and service. The thought was that we Northerners had overcome those challenges, because that segregated behavior did not exist here in the great northeastern United States. But, in contrast to general thought, the stark signs of racism and segregation were also entrenched in our culture and society. In the south, the signs were posted, and the residents and authorities lived and worked within those limitations. But the northern expression was disguised, subtle, not posted.

While African Americans worked and lived in these thriving and developing communities, many with developed professional talents and educational experiences aspired to experience the expanded suburban lifestyle over that of metropolitan life. Some Philadelphia professionals and executives found their life’s expression in Yeadon, in Delaware County, PA.

Some of these residents were corporate executives, high level industrial management, professional athletes, business owners and Yeadon entrepreneurs, many of whom either owned second summer homes or were able to travel with their families during the summers and holiday seasons. Nevertheless, in 1957, when residents Zoe Mask, Carson Puriefoy and Elmer Stewart, all third-generation descendants of slaves, went to the Yeadon

Borough Office to apply for their passes to the Yeadon Swim Club, they were told that their applications would have to be considered. It should be noted that these applications would have been approved and family passes issued on the spot if they had been white.

They accepted the guise of delay and left the office, but one of the applicants had to change his application and quickly returned to the office. It was on his return and inquiry that he discovered that all three applications were discarded in the trash, with no further thought of consideration. Even though there was frustration, hurt and disappointment from this experience, this rejection was the foundation for the creative, dynamic genius that caused the Nile Swim Club to take root. The club founders forged their frustration into the Nile Swim Club, the first Black-owned, administered, managed and staffed swim club in the region, later to be granted a Pennsylvania Historic Marker for being the first and only Black-owned swim club in the U.S.¹ (commissioned by the Yeadon Historical Commission in 2020).

Changes in swimming and integration have happened very slowly. Many of the shifts happened after World War II. One shift was initiated in 1950 when YMCAs embraced integrated swimming.² This action allowed the idea room to breathe. The Supreme Court decision on the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 also had a great impact on integration. Nevertheless, segregation in aquatic activities was still dominant in the municipal swimming areas throughout the 1950s. When, in 1957, the Nile Swim Club idea took root, it was based on equal access for all, designed to service the families of its community and be supported by memberships and fundraising activities throughout the year. It was not bound by political rule and municipal favor. The facility was maintained and held to the highest level of aquatic standards.

It should be noted that Yeadon was, at that time, an 80% white Republican community, with affluent African Americans constituting the remaining 20%. I was told that that 20% minority produced 80% of the per capita income, while the 80% majority represented 20% of the per capita income for the Yeadon Borough. Within the



DRONE IMAGE COURTESY OF NILE SWIM CLUB

THE FOUNDERS FORGED THEIR FRUSTRATION INTO THE NILE SWIM CLUB, THE FIRST BLACK-OWNED SWIM CLUB IN THE REGION

metropolitan areas like Philadelphia, these proportions and distributions are reversed.³

When the clerk retrieved the applications of those Black Yeadon citizens from the trash can, they realized their applications would never be considered. They then began garnering support from other families.

The circumstances and conditions were unique and unusual for the creation of the Nile Swim Club. Their first step was to create a non-profit corporation, and in February 1958 the Nile Swim Club of Yeadon was officially formed. They then created an organizational plan, set goals and objectives, then executed the plan! After the corporation was established, they located a parcel of land and arranged to purchase it, then designed and built the swim club. To finance this endeavor, they created a Certificate of Loan, which served as a founder's family membership. Each certificate cost \$250, or about \$2,260 in today's dollars.⁴

When compared to local affluent swim clubs of today, one club requires a \$2,000 annual dues payment and a minimum payment of \$600. Another local private swim club requires a \$1,390 annual payment and a minimum membership payment for each child under the age of 18. This means that a comparable membership at an equivalent club requires annual dues plus membership fees for the family that equate to approximately \$4,400 per season for a family of four. These comparisons indicate that the Nile Swim Club was as much a bargain in 1958 as it is today.

In April 1959, the Nile Swim Club of Yeadon made settlement on 4.8 acres of land in the Sullivan Tract, now known as Yeadon Community Park. In May 1959, they celebrated the groundbreaking for the Nile Swim Club, as shown in the photo at right.⁵

On the following page is a photo of the grand opening of the Nile Swim Club in 1959.⁶ Documentation only exists in newspaper clippings and firsthand reports due to an absence of scholarly research related to any African American, Black or Negro private swim clubs.

Over these past 50 years, the Nile Swim Club has been recognized in countless articles for its dedication and commitment to the community of Yeadon and the members of the club, and the club has been the subject of several video documentaries produced by SCRIBE, a local African American video production and education company.⁷ They were also part of an exhibition that highlighted swimming at the Philadelphia African American Museum, "Healing the Mind and Body."⁸ Through the decades, these families and their descendants have managed to maintain and elevate the Nile Swim Club through maintenance challenges and neighborhood shifts and changes. They managed to stave off a tax auction, and they safely opened and maintained their club during the first summer of the COVID 19 pandemic.^{9,10}

The next step in developing this article was a visit to the Nile Swim Club to meet with some of its members. This was done on July 15, 2020. My initial experience was my inquiring telephone call, which was answered by a friendly and professional young lady who forwarded my request for a meeting to Mr. Patterson. My follow-up call was with a young man who had permission to share Mr. Patterson's contact information. Both young people were accommodating and professional representatives of the Nile Swim Club.

My wife, Pat and I found our way to the swim club and parked in the nearly full parking lot. As we worked our way to the main building, I got a quick view of the



In May 1959, families celebrate the groundbreaking for the Nile Swim Club

pool and we entered the admission/reception area. My preconceived notions were based on my viewing the two documentaries which were done on the Nile Swim Club.

We entered the pool area and waited for Mr. Patterson in the shaded pavilion area attached to their concession stand and snack bar. Once we settled at a table, I took the opportunity to venture out, explore the pool area and get a feeling for the facility and the activities. The pool is an "L" shape, with one section of 4 lanes with varying depths of 3 to 5 feet, with each section roped off with buoyed ropes. The other section has varying depths of 5 to 11 feet, and a diving well with a fiberglass diving board mounted in the deep-water section. The lifeguards were attentive to the members and in total control of the facility. They, and the facility, had all the necessary equipment to attend to first aid needs. The children were full of summer sun and boundless energy. There was also a circular wading pool for young children. My wife, Pat, is a retired educator and very familiar with aquatic facilities. She has great childhood experiences of segregated swimming areas in Savannah, Georgia. She was very relaxed and comfortable. During my observation I noticed two tennis courts which were in

disrepair and a section behind the Pavilion which looked like a basketball court.

During this time of observation, Mr. Patterson entered the pool area and we met. I explained my interest and the nature of the project that I am working on. It was at this time that I asked him for his vision for the future of the Nile Swim Club. He told me that the Yeadon Borough Historical Commission was planning to dedicate the PHMC historical marker for the Nile Swim Club later this year. He also told me of their drive to increase their membership to 1,000 families by next year. They want to expand their services to their community by opening the pool to more families. He wants to raise funds to match the offer of the United States Tennis Association (USTA) to resurface and restore their tennis courts so they can offer the tennis experience of lessons and play to their families. He wants to make improvements to their pool and pavilion and to expand the facility by clearing the borders of their property, expanding their parking section and possibly building other sections for additional activities. He also gave me some contacts for additional documentation and possible archived photographs to support this article.



NEW YEADON SWIMMING POOL. Panoramic view of the more than one thousand who attended the opening of the \$100,000 Nile Swimming Club, Union and Lincoln avenues, Saturday. The place an ultra sports center has a pool of Olympic size, with a separate pool for diving and another for toddlers. It is blue-tile lined and set against a background of shade trees. Ultimate plans call for several tennis courts and a picnic ground in the all steel fence enclosed four-acre site. The club is private.

Photo from the Philadelphia Independent Newspaper

THE NILE SWIM CLUB ARCHIVE COLLECTION OF THE YEADON BOROUGH HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Mr. Patterson also shared some of their community activities. They partnered with the owner of the Brown Grocery Stores in a program to feed their neighbors by giving two bags of groceries to 100 families. They also created and run a program titled “No Child will Drown in Our Town,” in which they offer free swim lessons for the children in their area. I am honored to have this opportunity to share and document this information on this historic cultural landmark.

Editor’s Note: On May 22, 2021, Yeadon residents gathered to celebrate the official unveiling of a Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission marker, designating the Nile Swim Club as a historic landmark in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, along with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new basketball court.

Kevin Colquitt is a retired educator. He was a competitive swimmer in Philadelphia Public Schools, certified as an American Red Cross lifeguard at 15, swam 4 years on Howard University’s varsity team, was certified as an American Red Cross WSI at 19, later received SCUBA certifications through Advanced Open Water to Rescue Diver, and coached YMCA Age Group, Masters, and Special Olympics swim teams. Presently, he is researching and documenting African American aquatic and swimming history to dispel the myths, misunderstandings, misperceptions and generally bad stories that are in our public domain, which discourage Black people from pursuing interests in aquatics and swimming.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Information provided by The Yeadon Borough Historic Commission from the archives of the Nile Swim Club

² Christian Street YMCA Swim Team Competes in YMCA championships, 1950.

³ Commentary by Mrs. Donna Samuel, Secretary for the Yeadon Borough Historical Commission

⁴ From photo of the first “Certificate of Loan” issued by the Nile Swim Club Non-Profit Corporation, from the archive collection of the Nile Swim Club and the Yeadon Borough Historical Commission

⁵ Photo of Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Nile Swim Club taken in May 1959, part of the Nile Swim Club archive and the presentation for the Historic Marker for the Nile Swim Club

⁶ Photo of the Nile Swim Club pool published in the Philadelphia Independent Newspaper, July 18, 1959, part of the Nile Swim Club archive and the submission for the Historical marker

⁷ Documentary on the Nile Swim Club done by SCRIBE, the video media organization led by Mr. Louis Massiah

⁸ Information provided by Mr. Richard Watson, Archivist and Curator for The Philadelphia African American Museum

⁹ Philadelphia Tribune, “Nile Swim Club Map Out Plan to Stave Off Tax Auction,” August 2018

¹⁰ The Philadelphia Inquirer, “In This Sink-or-Swim COVID Year, The Nile Swim Club Wages a Heroic Summer Effort” by Ms. Maria Panaritis, July 2020



The club offers swim lessons, splash parties, basketball, tennis and aquatic fitness and other activities for community members of all ages from May–September.

In 1959, middle-class African American families living in the Philadelphia suburb of Yeadon founded a private swimming pool named the Nile Swim Club after several of them were denied membership at nearby swim clubs that had all-white memberships. “The Nile” quickly became an integral part of the social and recreational life of Yeadon’s African American community. The pool offered swim lessons and regularly hosted evening parties, synchronized swimming shows, community cookouts and dance lessons.

Sixty years later, the Nile Swim Club is still in operation, serving its membership and running “No Child Will Drown in Our Town,” a program that provides free swimming lessons to children in the community. During 2020, when all of Philadelphia’s public pools shut down due to issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the club instituted safety measures to keep its pool open, and also became a food distribution center for the needy. As a result, the Nile continued its long tradition as a vital haven for fun, exercise and social connection, especially for kids. In 2021, the Nile Swim Club was awarded a State Historical Marker as the oldest African American owned membership swim club.

“Back in 1957 or ‘58, when the founders applied to that other swim club and were denied, some folks would have said we could have went and marched, and protested, and forced them to make us become members. But our founders said, we’re not going to go that route. We’re going to raise our own money, we’re going to buy these four and a half acres of land, and we’ll have our own pool. And I take great pride in that. The fact that they said we’re going to have our own in our community was very powerful back in 1959.”

–Anthony Patterson, Sr., Board President, Nile Swim Club



DONATE TODAY!



The Tigershark Aquatic Association, a Philadelphia swim club, started in 1969 by Malachi and Olivia Cunningham.



Coach Malachi and Olivia Cunningham

Swimming with Pride in Philadelphia

The Cunninghams & The Tigershark Aquatic Family

In 1969, newlyweds and recent graduates from South Carolina State College (SCSC) with degrees in education Malachi and Olivia Cunningham established the Tigershark Aquatic Association. What started out as an inner-city swim team of nine boys from north Philadelphia grew over the course of 16 years to serve over 230 co-ed swimmers, Black and white.

Malachi and Olivia started the Tigersharks as a way to get boys and girls off the streets and away from the prevalent gang activity of the neighborhood. As part of the St. Joseph's Prep Community Recreation Program, the swim club included mandatory hour-long study sessions

that were followed by two hours of daily training. With academic achievement as a foundation of the Tigershark ethos, many of the Cunninghams' swimmers went on to college (some with swimming scholarships), with a majority earning degrees.

"The TigerShark program, with all that it involved, to teammates, to Libby and me and our daughter, was a safe haven."

As a 12-year-old, Malachi swam at the Connie Mack Recreation Center (coached by Mr. Dan Corbett) and participated in year-round swimming at Temple Area Pool. A fierce competitive swimmer, Malachi thrived to



Participants in We Can Swim! UPenn

“SWIMMING OFFERS SOCIALIZATION. IT OFFERS STRESS REDUCTION. I JUST WANT EVERYONE TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY, ACCESSIBILITY.”



The Tigershark Swim Team

eventually represent the North Branch YMCA, Christian Street YMCA and Vesper Swim Team in competitions throughout Philadelphia. He earned an athletic scholarship to SCSC.

In 1968, Malachi returned with Olivia to his home city to teach in the Philadelphia School District. Malachi would also return to his home pool to become the Director of Temple Area Pool, and to start the Tigersharks competitive swim club.

“The first group, we had to teach them what we wanted from them. We’re not talking swimming wise. We’re talking about our culture, and then they passed it on. They inspired one another. It’s just a marvelous feeling, when you see people helping one another to do the right thing.”

For close to two decades, Coach Malachi and Olivia worked all week in the classroom and devoted their weekends to practice, shared meals and competitive swim meets. These meets exposed their swimmers to a diverse world outside of the neighborhood. The Tigersharks swam in pools throughout the country, with opportunities to develop self-esteem and pride as they were exposed to and navigated environments that were very different from their own.

“Swimming offers socialization. It offers stress reduction. I just want everyone to have the opportunity, accessibility. I want the pools to be available, maintained and looking good.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS

Diversity in Aquatics

A NETWORK TO HELP SAVE LIVES

DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS (DIA) IS THE NATION'S LARGEST NETWORK OF ETHNICALLY DIVERSE AQUATIC PROFESSIONALS, PRACTITIONERS, RESEARCHERS, ATHLETES, AND ENTHUSIASTS, ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP SAVE LIVES. THE NETWORK'S FOCUS IS ELIMINATING THE DROWNING DISPARITY AMONG HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED AND UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS.

Since its founding in 2006, DIA has worked with various organizations and its members to develop programming that educates, promotes, and supports collaborative community engagement efforts amongst diverse aquatic professionals and organizations.

DIA members research, design and implement culturally and linguistically diverse programs and strategies to increase aquatic participation, promote healthy aquatic activities and to ultimately reduce drowning. Their programs target everything from building awareness of water safety and overcoming existing fears to training and working with aquatic professionals towards building knowledge and inclusivity at every level of aquatic activity. DIA also works with several organizations who are a part of the National Governing Bodies of Sports under the United States Olympic Committee to develop ways to highlight the benefits of aquatic sport and fitness to more diverse populations.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS

THE VISION OF DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS IS TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE THEIR OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER SAFETY EDUCATION, DROWNING PREVENTION PRACTICES AND AQUATIC ACTIVITIES. DIA WORKS COLLABORATIVELY WITH COMMUNITIES TO EMPOWER THEM THROUGH THE EDUCATION, PROMOTION, AND SUPPORT OF EFFORTS GEARED TOWARD REDUCING THE RISK OF UNINTENTIONAL DROWNING.

Through its partnership with the International Water Safety Foundation (IWSF), the organization has reached over 1 million families with the water safety message through its celebration of International Water Safety Day each year on May 15th.

“With DIA, we show the tree of life from learning to swim. And one of the things we say is... understanding the importance of learning how to swim can lead to a tree with many branches—into occupational opportunities, into school, but also saving life, lifesaving skills.”

—Dr. Angela Beale-Tawfeeq, Director of Education and Research for Diversity In Aquatics and a member of the American Red Cross Scientific Advisory Aquatic Council

DIA has also established an International Diversity in Aquatics Convention, where aquatic leaders from across the globe come together each year to develop solutions that address the global epidemic of drowning in historically excluded, underrepresented and vulnerable populations. During its convention, Diversity In Aquatics has taught over 1,000 children and adults the basics of water safety, swimming and the necessary skills needed to help save their lives and others from drowning.

“When we exclude communities [from aquatic opportunities], we’re not giving them information to be empowered, to start making choices. We want to empower our kids. Our kids should have every chance they want to be successful.”

—Dr. Miriam Lynch, a swimmer, coach and the Executive Director of Diversity In Aquatics

Through ongoing efforts like these, this growing organization is equipping historically excluded and underrepresented communities and vulnerable populations with the skills needed to be safe in the water and experience the physical and mental health benefits gained from aquatic activities. Their aim is to triple their outreach efforts by providing more opportunities to positively engage in aquatics, increase the number of diverse certified aquatic professionals and conduct classroom instruction focused on water safety. Everyone can—and should—be water safe and encouraged to participate in learn to swim programs!



Come get involved and learn more about Diversity in Aquatics. Visit us at diversityinaquatics.org or scan here to make a donation today!





PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON IGLER

Creating Hope and Experience

DR. ANGELA BEALE-TAWFEEQ

This article was excerpted with permission, from an original article written by Hadiyah Weaver for *The Philadelphia Citizen* publication.

When Dr. Angela Beale-Tawfeeq was 10 years old, she and her 11-year-old sister decided to try out for the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Diving Team—without knowing how to dive.

“My sister said, ‘Dive in and flap your arms like a bird, and you’ll come up,’” says Beale-Tawfeeq, who hadn’t had a single swim lesson. “So that’s what I did.” To their delight, the sisters, natives of North Philadelphia, made the team.

Beale-Tawfeeq went on to be coached by Jim Ellis, the founder of PDR, a Black competitive swim team founded in 1972, earned an athletic scholarship to Howard University’s swimming and diving program, and earned a PhD in Physical Education Teacher Education. She’s now an associate professor and Chair of the Department of Science, Technology, Education, Arts and Mathematics at the College of Education at Rowan University, and a member of the American Red Cross’s Scientific Advisory Board. Beale-Tawfeeq serves as Director of Education and Research for Diversity In Aquatics, the

nation’s largest network of ethnically diverse aquatic professionals, practitioners, researchers, athletes, and enthusiasts, all working together to help save lives. The network’s focus is eliminating the drowning disparity among historically excluded and underrepresented communities and vulnerable populations.

But no matter how strong her skills became or how many accolades she accrued, that very first tryout—and her increased awareness of the dire need to enable more kids to swim—made Beale-Tawfeeq determined to help novel swimmers, particularly those in the city.

The Lack of Access to Swimming Pools has a Lethal Cause and Effect in Current Day Society

“The most important thing to provide is access,” Beale-Tawfeeq says. “The whole idea of exposure and opportunity, and not being told they can’t, lets kids know they can do anything they put their mind to.”

GET INVOLVED OR LEARN MORE ABOUT DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS, VISIT WWW.DIVERSITYINAQUATICS.ORG

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, unintentional drowning among children between the ages of 1 and 14 is the second leading cause of death behind car crashes. For African American children between 5 and 14, the unintentional drowning rate is nearly six times greater than the rate for white children. A major problem within minority communities is the lack of access to swimming pools and swimming-related programs.

Beale-Tawfeeq mixes her personal history with the American history of pools, often referencing *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. The book, written by Jeff Wiltse, touches on how pools served as asylums for poor urban communities in the nineteenth century, whereas pools for the middle class were used for leisure. A majority of Philadelphians, specifically the poor, in the mid-1800s didn’t have indoor plumbing and weren’t able to afford bathhouses. They were often left with no other choice but to remain “dirty.” Wiltse says the social climate around swimming during this time reflected the tensions in American society.

The Realities of Social Injustice

“Pool use was divided along class lines—but not ethnic or racial lines—because city officials, reformers and the middle-class public viewed the working classes en masse as ‘the great unwashed,’” Wiltse writes. In response, reformers opened public bathhouses with the intention to provide working-class men and women a way to bathe; working-class males, however, had other motives—they began using the public baths for summer recreation.

Philadelphia was the most prolific early builder of municipal pools. The city operated nine pools in the late 1890s, six of which were located in economically deprived neighborhoods. Fast-forward to today, and the city oversees more than 70 indoor and outdoor swimming pools, though attendance at city pools isn’t as high as it was in the 1900s. The Inquirer reported

that in 1943, city pools admissions reached 4.3 million; in 2013, Philadelphia recorded less than a million swims.

Dr. Beale-Tawfeeq has plans to change that. She is devoted to increasing aquatic presence, awareness and economic strength in Philly. “As an African American female and physical education educator, I know the problems,” Beale-Tawfeeq says. “But I want to create hope, and solutions. And as a Delta woman,” Beale-Tawfeeq says, referring proudly to her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, “when I see a problem, I find a solution.”

Creating Hope & Solutions

Beale-Tawfeeq has taught thousands of children water safety. She developed her own program, A Stroke in the Right Direction, to teach water safety and social responsibility to children in minority populations. It’s a continuation of a collaborative water safety education program she taught while at Adelphi University. Since 2017, A Stroke in the Right Direction has collaborated with Masjidullah, a mosque in Northwest Philadelphia, on a summer camp teaching the fundamentals of water safety. Beale-Tawfeeq has also teamed up with Brannen L. Johnson’s (BLJ) Community Rowing, the only all-female, African American-owned boathouse in the country to provide lessons to help Black female students become confident rowers, and help them qualify for college scholarships.

As Beale-Tawfeeq continues to tread forward, she hopes to emphasize water safety training as a way to not only teach swimming, but activate healthy and economically impactful ways of life for Black and brown children. “With DIA, we show the tree of life from learning to swim,” Beale-Tawfeeq stated. “One of the things we say is...Understanding the importance of learning how to swim can lead to a tree with many branches—into occupational opportunities, into school, but also saving life, lifesaving skills.”

Democratizing Dialogue

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND FEARS?

BY DR. PAMELA E. BARNETT & DR. CARL S. MOORE

Carl was noticing a feeling of self-consciousness that he often felt in front of audiences of all white academics when discussing inclusive teaching. But inclusive teaching demands vulnerability, so he went for it and stated this to the group he was facilitating: “I have issues trusting groups of all white educators who want a “toolkit” for inclusive teaching so that they can perform what they deem morally right as opposed to truly valuing learning variation. It seems as if they want special tricks to teach learners who they have a deficit-based view of.” It was then that one of the faculty members in the group began to cry. She had good intentions and wanted to help, and would commit to having more of a “growth” mindset about learners. Even though uncomfortable, Carl’s honesty opened up dialogue about how a deficit-based mindset (seeing students as lacking, rather than as full of potential for growth) is a barrier to anyone who wants to be an effective teacher. Once the uncomfortable topic was out there, some white faculty admitted that they acted out of paternalism and lack of belief in students. They thought they believed in their students, but upon reflection they could see their deficit thinking. Carl’s fear was confirmed and there was nothing horrible about it. In fact, admitting his distrust and then listening (with the heart) about how it affected those in the group led to more substantive conversation.

Pamela was terrified, but said it aloud: “When I am talking about race in an interracial group like this, I feel

insecure, like I am being tested by the Black people in the group. Do I ‘get it’? Do I know my white privilege? Can I be trusted?” And then she was surprised to feel incredible relief when her colleague, a Black woman, confirmed that it was true: “You are right, Pamela! I am testing you. I don’t know if you are someone I can trust. I feel really vulnerable in this space too, because of the ways white women have disregarded me in the past.” Pamela’s fear was confirmed and there was nothing terrible or even surprising about it. Once our anxieties had been honestly articulated, we could see them for what they were: feelings that were to be expected given the culture we live in, a culture where people rarely talk completely honestly about race issues because of deep histories of racism, violence and hurt.

The authentic exchanges referenced, allowed by a mutual expression of vulnerability, have changed our lives in different ways. The honest dialogue gave Carl the opportunity to become more nuanced about the thinking of educators’ inclusive teaching dispositions and willingness to grow. The experience gave Pamela the courage, but also a strategy, for getting to more honest dialogue, particularly about race, but also class, sexual identity, political differences. Honest dialogue has enabled us both to grow from and take support from a decade-long relationship with an interracial group of educators and non-profit leaders in the Philadelphia area who are committed to social justice.

“I have issues trusting groups of all white educators who want a ‘toolkit’ for inclusive teaching so that they can perform what they deem morally right as opposed to truly valuing learning variation.”

(1)
Dr. Charles Rojzman (left), founder of Transformational Social Therapy (TST) and author of several books including *How to Live Together: A New Way of Dealing with Racism and Violence* (Acland Press, 1999) with the late Dr. Tchet Dorman (right), leader of the Philadelphia based Transformational Intergroup Dialogue movement.

(2)
Carl Moore (Ph.D) and Pamela E Barnett (Ph.D.), facilitating a diversity training for higher ed leaders. The Nelson Mandela quote on the screen behind them reads: “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

(3)
Transformational Intergroup Dialogue meeting in Philadelphia in 2019

(4)
A post training dinner with leaders and facilitators in the Philadelphia based Transformational Intergroup Dialogue movement.



How did we get to the point that we could say these things to each other? How can you participate in more democratic dialogue about the barriers to trust? How can you then participate in more democratic dialogue about the social justice issues that affect us all?

We are eager to share what we have learned from Dr. Charles Rojzman, the founder of Transformational Social Therapy (TST) and our teacher for over ten years now. Following Rojzman on Facebook is always fascinating. At least once a year we note that he is in Rwanda, working with Hutus and Tutsis, assassins and survivors, who must live and work together after genocide. Sometimes we find him in Colombia or France or the United States. Rojzman applies TST all over the world to help people turn from violence to productive conflict. They must if they are to bring collective intelligence to solve the problems that beset their communities. Our often legitimate fears, of physical and emotional violence, keep us separate and often perpetuating more violence. His methods create conditions for trust, the recognition of shared motivations, and the enactment of conflict without violence. Trust and shared motivation can enable organizations to meet the needs of diverse constituencies, and bring people on a team together to win.

The research tells us that trust builds in relation to the graduated escalation of risk, and trust is necessary if people will discuss difficult issues with honesty and courage. If one person is vulnerable, another person is more likely to be vulnerable. Over time, we share more and trust more. Anyone can use an “Articulating Hopes and Fears” exercise at the outset of a dialogue that has the potential to generate a great deal of conflict. The exercise asks participants in a dialogue to reflect on, and potentially express, the hope and vulnerability they feel as they anticipate discussing a social justice issue or aspect of social identity such as race, gender, class or sexuality. Critically, the exercise also asks that we invite people to reflect on how they feel about discussing with the particular people in the room.

In a structured situation, like a training or organization or team meeting, you can encourage people to write as freely as possible and without self-censoring on these questions. In a less structured situation, people who want to engage in a democratic dialogue about a hot topic can agree to take a minute to collect their thoughts. After approximately ten minutes of free-writing, you can invite people to share their hopes and fears, reassuring that no one will be called on, expected to speak up, or judged negatively for not sharing. In our experiences, there

How do you hope we will interact and discuss a hot topic with each other?
What do you hope to learn or gain?

What fears do you have about discussing a hot topic with the people in this room?

Who in the group are you most afraid to dialogue with? Why?

is always someone who will take the risk and initiate sharing. But if people are quick to name hopes but are too afraid to name their own fears, one could rephrase the questions with a little distance: “Why do people avoid discussing this hot topic with diverse groups?”

We often facilitate dialogue on race, and we know we’re on the way to something powerful when a white person says they are afraid of saying something biased, or being perceived as prejudiced or racist. We know we are creating something new in the group when a person of color says they are afraid of getting emotional being dismissed as angry or over-reacting.

Articulating our hopes is as important as the fears. For democratizing dialogue, you must harmonize the motivations. What do we hope to understand or address together? Our democratizing dialogue is affirmed when people say that we can only make good decisions for the group when we consider the needs of others, getting beyond our narrow self-interest. We need to hear and learn from each other if we are to do what is best for the community, whether it be a neighborhood, an organization or a team.

One of the profound things that happens with this *Hopes and Fears* exercise is that people are likely to share similar hopes and fears. If they did not have the courage to say it, someone else will and that makes them feel less alone with their own desires and concerns. It also sets the stage for depersonalizing much of what is expressed. The fearful thoughts and feelings are overdetermined because of histories of structural inequality. No one is untouched; we have to consciously unlearn stereotypes or biases or misunderstandings perpetuated by our culture, our media, our families. Once the hopes and fears are articulated, it is amazing to see how much more honestly and openly people discuss the issues.

OVER TIME, WE SHARE MORE AND TRUST MORE

We have seen many facilitators of dialogues about diversity issues set “ground rules.” We believe that is often a recipe for reticence. Instead of trying to regulate what people say, we rely on a framework and method developed by Dr. Rojzman. The framework helps us determine when we are engaged in conflict versus violence. The method only requires that people are present and accountable to ways in which they are “violent” to the group. Conflict always has constructive utility. If we want to reach collective intelligence, we need to hear the voices of people who see things differently, maybe even in ways that we find wrong or unpleasant. That can make us uncomfortable or even angry or hurt. But it is not dehumanizing to hear a radically different perspective on a hot topic. Violence is dehumanizing. It is helpful to have some definitions of violence, so that the participants in the democratic dialogue can be alert to when they are doing violence and experiencing violence.

Rojzman names “the Four Violences” as: attack (physical or verbal), humiliation, guilt and abandonment. Each one of the four violences is a form of dehumanization. Attack can entail name-calling and cruel accusations. Humiliation denigrates or belittles. It is a violence to blame someone for all wrongs, imposing guilt on them. Abandonment is the quietest form of violence, but equally dehumanizing. It occurs when we dismiss someone altogether, and render a person not worth our time, presence and or a response. Sometimes, when we fear others, we will pre-empt them by doing a violence ourselves. Consider a child who feels shame and deflects those feelings by teasing or bullying another child who they perceive as even more vulnerable. Such behavior is not unique to children. For example, we have been in meetings and forums where leaders who fear being dismissed or not taken seriously then ignore tough questions from audience members. This abandonment is common and pervasive.

In democratizing dialogues, it can be helpful to keep this framework of “the Four Violences” in mind, making the group collectively responsible for naming and interrupting violence when we see it. Someone might say something that offends, and we can take a minute to discuss whether it was conflict or violence. It’s a messy process, but it gives us a strategy for civic discourse.

We don’t try to make the speaker we disagree with feel humiliated; we know it is a violence to dismiss what people have to say and exit the conversation when it gets hard.

In 2019, all of us in the TST community in the Philadelphia area lost our leader, Dr. Tchet Dorman. Tchet was always the one bringing us together for TST informed intergroup dialogue. He was the one who would say the most honest thing to get things started, and to express the vulnerability and love we needed to move forward. In some of our earliest trainings with Charles Rojzman, we remember Tchet saying that he loved the racist and the homophobe and the sexist, because any such person was wounded, just as he was. He never lost faith in the principle that healing would come from vulnerability and engagement, versus dehumanization and abandonment.

We hope that those of you reading this will take some courage to express your hopes and fears in an effort to build a bridge between you and someone with a different experience, perspective and worldview from you, perhaps because of a different social identity. Our power and path to create conditions for a healthy and inclusive world is through each other.

Carl Moore and Pamela Barnett met in 2010 as students of Dr. Charles Rojzman, who was a visiting scholar at Temple University. They have worked together for years—officially as colleagues in Temple’s Teaching & Learning Center and as independent consultants and facilitators on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Dr. Carl S. Moore is currently the Assistant Chief Academic Officer at the University of the District of Columbia and Certificate faculty in Temple University’s Teaching in Higher Education Certificate Program, teaching faculty for USC’s Equity, and a workshop facilitator for the Online Learning Consortium. He is also a certified StrengthsFinder Coach and MBTI administrator. Carl frequently serves as a consultant on leadership, assessment, inclusive teaching, and faculty development. Over the course of his career, he has created and instructed a variety of face-to-face, hybrid, and online modes.

Dr. Pamela Barnett is the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at La Salle University. Her career and research in higher education have focused on advancing learning in the liberal arts for diverse student bodies. Dean Barnett began her career as a professor of English and African-American Studies at the University of South Carolina. Her earlier writings focused on the literature of political and social liberation in the 1960s and 70s, while her more recent intellectual work aims to advance diversity and inclusion in higher education.



AZIKIWE MOHAMMED (azikiwepphoto.com)

Multidisciplinary artist Azikiwe Mohammed is interested in constructing spaces of safety and welcome for people of color and for immigrants whose space is often threatened. According to *The New York Times*, “Mohammed’s visual universe is a realm devoted to everyday heroes and small acts of care.” His portraits, paintings, videos and installations explore the experiences and needs of people of color living in America and have received significant media attention.



CALO ROSA (calo1.com/murals)

Calo Rosa was born in San Salvador from a family of artists working in diverse media, including Brazilian percussion, graphic design, oil painting, and cake-making. After becoming frustrated with the exclusivity of the San Salvador gallery scene, he began to define his own street art style. His colorful pieces portray the vibrant Latin American culture, and mirror the sounds, roots, and forms of the urban-tropical lifestyle. He now lives and works in Philadelphia.



CATHLEEN DEAN, Black Cat Media Group (cathleendean.com)

Film producer, director, and photographer Cathleen Dean creates innovative work inspired by her experiences in South Florida. Dean’s surroundings help fuel her work, and her subjects, translated through her storytelling abilities, engage her audience to ask questions about their surroundings. Donations for the expansion of her film: *Wade in the Water: Drowning in Racism* can be made at: <https://gofund.me/30e99d0b>.



DYLAN B. CALEHO (dylanbeedoodles.artstation.com)

Dylan B. Caleho is a queer Black artist living in Philadelphia, working primarily on comics and editorial illustrations. A graduate of Moore College of Art & Design, Dylan was the recipient of a Moore Presidential Scholarship and a Visionary Woman scholarship, as well as an AMDG 1933 Foundation scholarship.



ED ACCURA (BlacksCantSwim.com)

Ed Accura is co-founder of the Black Swimming Association, which champions inclusivity, representation and diversity in aquatics in Britain. Accura is a London-born songwriter, producer, and rapper, raised in both the UK and Ghana. He is also the screenwriter and producer of both films in the *Blacks Can’t Swim* franchise, directed by award-winning filmmaker Mysterex (MO-AM), for which he also wrote the musical scores.



HOMER JACKSON (philajazzproject.org)

Homer Jackson, Director of the Philadelphia Jazz Project, is an expansive interdisciplinary artist with a background in teaching, curation and social service. His work is presented as installation, performance art, public art, video, and audio. He uses images, sounds, text, live performance, video, audience participation, and found objects to tell stories.



JAMES IJAMES (jamesijames.com)

Playwright, director and educator James Ijames has appeared regionally in productions at The Arden Theatre Company, The Philadelphia Theatre Company, The Wilma Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage, Mauckingbird Theatre Company, and People’s Light and Theatre. James’ plays have been produced by Flashpoint Theater Company, Orbiter 3, Theatre Horizon, Wilma Theatre (Philadelphia, PA), The National Black Theatre (NYC), Definition Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre (Chicago, IL).



LIZ CORMAN (lizcorman.com)

Throughout her adolescence, swimming provided a creative outlet by way of choreography, music editing, and costume design. As an undergraduate student-athlete, Liz took her first photography classes at a time when her competitive artistic swimming career was coming to an end. She found that her passion and knowledge of the sport translated to photography in unexpected and beautiful ways.



LOWELL BOSTON (uarts.edu/lowell-boston)

Lowell Boston is an animator, filmmaker and college professor who lives in Collingswood, New Jersey. Born in upstate New York, he discovered an interest in art from an early age. Pursuing a love of drawing, writing and works of the imagination, Boston attended University of the Arts as a double major in live-action filmmaking and animation. In 1991, he earned his MFA in Experimental Animation from the California Institute of the Arts.



MODUPEOLA FADUGBA (modupeola.com)

Modupeola Fadugba (born 1985 in Lomé, Togo) is a multimedia artist working in painting, drawing, and socially-engaged installation. With a background in engineering, education and economics, she comfortably inhabits the nexus of many disciplines. Her works explore cultural identity, social justice, game theory, and the art world within the socio-political landscape of Nigeria and our greater global economy.

Exhibit Highlights History of & Challenges for African Americans and Water Safety

BY CONNIE HARVEY

Summer. It's the time when even the busiest of people shift their thoughts to rest and relaxation, moving to one place in particular. The water.

Whether it is the ocean, a lake or the local pool, the water has long been the solution that provides a respite from the summer's heat and humidity.

Nowhere has this been truer than the local municipal pool. For decades, the water has provided a means for people to cool off, socialize and, for most, swim.

And for more than a century, the American Red Cross has been behind the scenes providing training programs for both lifeguards and swimmers alike. This training helps people enjoy the water safely, no matter where they find it. But the experience has not been equal among all Americans.

That's why the Red Cross participated in the development of the museum exhibit that launched at Philadelphia's historic Kelly Pool at the Fairmount Water Works. Titled *POOL: A Social History of Segregation*, the exhibit tells the story of the historic importance of pools within Philadelphia. It also shares the history and importance of pools in the lives of African Americans in the City of Brotherly Love.

Told through photographs, films, first-hand stories and other historical tools, the 4,700-foot platform at this National Historic Landmark, built in 1898, examines the

historic and contemporary implications of segregated swimming in the United States, especially after World War II.

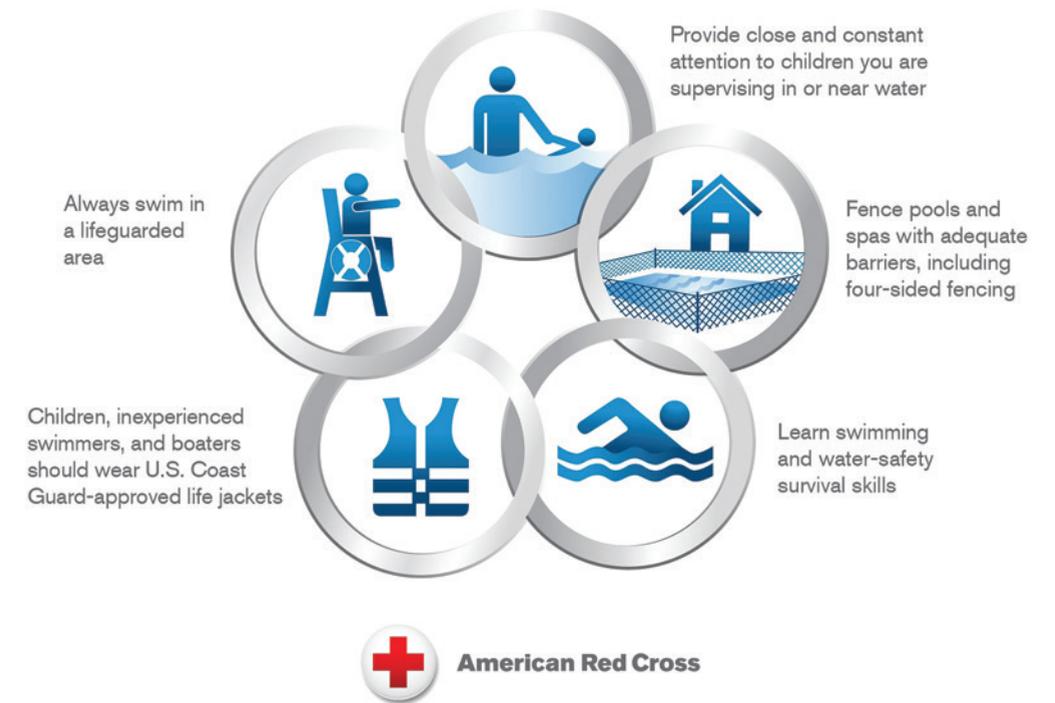
Many of the lessons learned from the exhibit were not surprising to experts who have examined the issue.

"I was not taught the history of swimming pools in the city," said Angela Beale-Tawfeeq, Ph.D., professor at Rowan University outside of Philadelphia and a member of the Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council, Aquatics Sub-council. "I learned as an adult that there is a long history involving African Americans and swimming. This exhibit captures a narrative that is inclusive of the historical connections of African Americans, civil rights, slavery and swimming. After all, we were a maritime people in Africa, having relationships to the oceans, seas and rivers."

Swimming is also an issue central to the Red Cross, which in 2014 upped its efforts to educate all Americans about swimming safety. It launched its Aquatics Centennial Campaign to honor the organization's 100th anniversary of adding drowning prevention to its mission. The campaign encouraged Americans to take swim lessons and otherwise improve water safety. Central to the campaign is increasing education to populations at greater risk of drowning, including African Americans.

Circle of Drowning Prevention

Layers of protection are essential to help prevent drowning. Plan ahead for aquatic activities:



One main concept—water competency—with three components is key to this effort. Water competency is a combination of knowing how to prevent drowning, having a basic set of water safety and swimming skills, and knowing what to do if something goes wrong.

The Red Cross Circle of Drowning Prevention is made up of five actions that all Americans, young and old, can take to reduce the chances that they experience a life-threatening situation due to a water-related accident. The links in the Circle of Drowning Prevention consist of:

- Provide close and constant attention to children you are supervising in or near water.
- Fence pools and spas with adequate barriers, including four-sided fencing.
- Learn swimming and water-safety survival skills.
- Children, inexperienced swimmers, and all boaters should wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets.
- Always swim in a lifeguarded area.

Always applying the links, or layers of protection, in the Circle can help reduce the chances that someone will find themselves in a situation where drowning is a possibility.

Water competency also entails having basic water safety and swimming skills. The Red Cross advocates five basic skills (in this sequence) that everyone should be able to perform:

1. Stepping into water over your head.
2. Returning to the surface, then treading water or floating for a minute to gather your bearings.
3. Turning around in a full circle to find an exit.
4. Swimming at least 25 yards to get to a safe exit.
5. Being able to get out of the water, including exiting without using the ladder if in a pool.

Being able to perform these skills in one environment, such as a pool, does not mean that they could be performed in another, such as a river with cold water and

“WE START WITH YOUNG CHILDREN, OPEN THE DOOR AND EXPOSE THEM,” SAID WILLIAM RAMOS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND CHAIR OF THE RED CROSS SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COUNCIL’S AQUATICS SUB-COUNCIL. “IT MAY START WITH LEARNING TO SWIM BUT OPENS THE CONVERSATION TO ‘I WANT TO LEARN TO SURF,’ ‘I WANT TO LEARN TO SCUBA DIVE,’ AND ‘I WANT TO ENJOY BOATING.’ ALL OF THESE OTHER ACTIVITIES OPEN UP THE GREAT BENEFITS AND ENJOYMENT OF WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES.”

a current or an ocean with waves. Children and adults should participate in swim lessons at least until they can achieve water competency in whatever environment they find themselves.

Even the most competent swimmers who follow all five actions in the Circle of Drowning Prevention could find themselves in a drowning emergency. That is where the Chain of Drowning Survival comes in, with these links:

- Recognize the signs someone is in trouble and shout for help.
- Rescue and remove the person from the water (without putting yourself in danger).
- Ask somebody to call emergency medical services (EMS). If alone, provide two minutes of care, then call EMS.
- Begin rescue breathing and CPR.
- Use an AED if available and transfer care to advanced life support.

Taken together, the Centennial Campaign, education on water competency, and the Circle and Chain have positively affected Americans’ attitudes toward swimming. More work, though, needs to be done to increase the comfort level and safety skills of African Americans with regards to water.

For example, a large majority of Americans know how to swim and the percentage of people who can swim has increased since 2014 (85 percent in 2020 compared to 81 percent in 2014). However, African Americans are significantly less likely to know how to swim compared to white Americans (61 percent vs. 89 percent) and the percentage of African Americans who said they knew how to swim actually dropped (from 70 percent in 2014 to 61 percent in 2020).

Those who do not know how to swim cite lack of access, fear, and lack of interest as top reasons why they never learned to swim as children. Not having an interest in swimming and fear are the primary obstacles for non-swimmers now that they are adults.

Experts agree that getting more African American children involved in swimming at a young age is key to increasing overall swimming knowledge in the African American community.

“We start with young children, open the door and expose them,” said William Ramos, associate professor at the Indiana University School of Public Health and chair of the Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council’s Aquatics Sub-council. “It may start with learning to swim but opens the conversation to ‘I want to learn to surf,’ ‘I want to learn to scuba dive,’ and ‘I want to enjoy boating.’ All of these other activities open up the great benefits and enjoyment of water-based activities.”

The goal of the Red Cross is to help close the gap around disparities and access to swimming. The organization is committed to building bridges and eliminating barriers in the African American community, thereby encouraging more parents to sign up their children, and themselves, for swim lessons and other water safety programs.

There is no better time than summer to make this happen.

Connie Harvey is the director of the Centennial Initiatives for Aquatics for the American Red Cross. She works daily to advance the Red Cross mission to prevent drowning with a focus on at-risk communities throughout the nation.

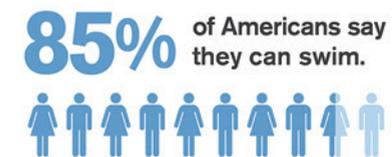
Chain of Drowning Survival

A person who is drowning has the greatest chance of survival if these steps are followed:

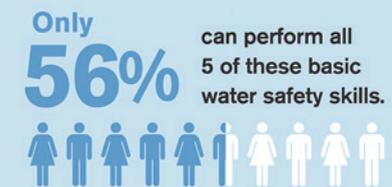


5 Skills to Save Your Life in the Water

Can you swim well enough to save your life?



But... only slightly more than half of Americans can perform all of the 5 basic skills that could save their life in the water.



1. Step or jump into the water over your head.
2. Return to the surface and float or tread water for one minute.
3. Turn around in a full circle and find an exit.
4. Swim 25 yards to the exit without stopping.
5. Exit from the water. If in a pool, be able to exit without using the ladder.

Source: Survey findings based on an online survey of 1,028 American adults conducted by the Red Cross on February 5–10, 2020



Charles Jackson French and his sister, Viola, are honored at a Creighton football game in Omaha, October 31, 1942.

The Story of **CHARLES JACKSON FRENCH**

A HERO FOR OUR TIME

BY BRUCE WIGO

On January 19, 2020, the United States Navy announced it was naming a new aircraft carrier after African American WWII war hero Doris “Dorie” Miller. The USS Doris Miller is seen as a belated salute to the contributions of African Americans in the military. But it is just a first step. This is the story of another hero of WWII who deserves to be remembered and honored too.

The world first heard his remarkable story on October 21, 1942, when U.S. Navy Ensign Robert Adrian was in the Hollywood studios of the NBC Broadcasting Company. He was there for a weekly radio program called *It Happened in the Service*. “For the past week,” the solemn sounding host began, “the prayers of the nation have been turned toward the Solomon Islands, a small group of strategic islands in the South Pacific. Right now, one of the greatest battles of history is raging there and in the waters of the surrounding islands, and here in our studio tonight is a gallant naval officer who has already tasted the fury of that Solomon battle, and who has had his ship blasted out from under him. But before we meet Ensign Robert Adrian, let’s listen to his story.”



Charles Jackson French was discharged from the Navy Nov. 13, 1941, but re-enlisted a month later after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

That was the cue for dramatic organ music and the sound of sirens and explosions. Amidst those cacophonous sounds came a calm voice announcing: “Abandon ship, all hands, abandon ship.” The actors then portrayed the events of Adrian’s experience as the junior officer on the bridge when it took a direct hit from a Japanese ship. He was knocked unconscious for a moment and when he came to he felt the ship turning on its side and sinking. Although wounded in his legs and with blast fragments in his eyes that clouded his vision, he managed to float over into the water with his life jacket as the ship sank below him. As he drifted, he saw the Japanese ships turn their searchlights and machine guns on the survivors.

Then he heard voices and found a life raft filled with badly wounded shipmates. Upon questioning the men, he found only one shipmate who had not been wounded. It was French, a Black mess attendant known only by his last name. When Adrian told the men that the current was carrying them toward the Japanese occupied island, French volunteered to swim the raft away from shore. Adrian told him it was impossible—that he would only be giving himself up to the sharks that surrounded them. But French responded that he was a powerful swimmer and was less afraid of the sharks than he was of the

Japanese. He stripped off his clothes, asked for help to tie a rope around his waist and slipped into the water. “Just keep telling me if I’m goin’ the right way,” he said. French swam and swam all night, 6 to 8 hours, and pulled the raft well out to sea. At sunrise, they were spotted by scout aircraft who dispatched a marine landing craft to pick them up and return them safely behind American lines.

When the dramatization ended, the host returned to the microphone: “And now standing here beside me is Ensign Bob Adrian of Ontario, Oregon. Ensign, yours was certainly an unusual rescue.”

“Yes, it was,” agreed Adrian. “And I can assure you that all the men on that raft are grateful to Mess Attendant French for his brave action off Guadalcanal that night.”

“Well, he is certainly a credit to the finest traditions of the Navy.”

Adrian was then prompted to give a patriotic enlistment appeal and to ask everyone at home to unite behind the war effort.

The next day, the Associated Press picked up the story of the “powerful Negro mess attendant who swam 6 hours through shark-infested waters, towing to safety a raft-load of wounded seamen.” The story reached Philadelphia and the War Gum Trading Card Company, which sold bubble gum with commemorative baseball-

129. Negro Swimmer Tows Survivors

After the sinking of the Destroyer "Gregory" off the Solomons, in October, 1942, a raft-load of wounded seamen from the stricken ship was towed to safety by a Negro mess attendant, known only as "French." With a young Ensign and weary seamen clinging to the overloaded raft's sides the frail craft started drifting seaward. It was then that the brave colored man stripped off his clothes and tied a tow-line around his waist. He braved shark-filled waters to bring the raft and its occupants to safety. After six hours in the water the powerful swimmer was sighted by a barge as he neared the shore and the seamen were taken off. The young ensign who reported the brave act had to be hospitalized, as a result of injuries sustained, and thus never learned the full name of the heroic swimmer.

This is one of a series of educational cards which come wrapped in packages of War Gum. Save to complete your collection.

Copyright 1942, GUM, INC., Phila., Pa. Printed in U. S. A.

Buy War Bonds and Stamps for VICTORY

The story of Charles Jackson French's valor was told in newspapers, on radio dramas, in comics, in World War II calendars and on this bubble gum card.

like cards depicting the war's heroes and events. The card, captioned as: “Negro Swimmer Tows Survivors,” was #129 in the 1942 set.

Then, on October 30, NBC revealed it had identified French through the Navy Personnel Bureau in Washington. He was 23-year-old Charles Jackson French, of Foreman, Arkansas. The revelation brought a passionate editorial reaction from the Pittsburgh Courier, one the nation's leading Black newspapers.

“All those who thrill to high HEROISM are paying tribute to a Black boy from Arkansas, who risked his life that his white comrades might live. We did NOT learn about this act of heroism...from the Navy Department. We learned about it almost incidentally, from Ensign Robert Adrian, white officer of the destroyer Gregory... when he broadcast over an NBC national hookup from Hollywood. He and other white Americans owe their LIVES to a Black man whom he identified as a 'mess attendant named French.' Mess attendants are none too highly regarded in the United States Navy. They are either Negroes or Filipinos and they are BARRED from service in any other branch of the Navy unless serving in a segregated unit. There is not much OPPORTUNITY for heroism in a ship's galley or an officers' ward room. But all the men on a ship are in DANGER in time of battle, no

matter where they are serving or what their skin pigment may be...Although Mess Attendant Charles Jackson French of Arkansas was not in a heroic job, he MADE a heroic job out of it. He who had been looked down upon as a caste man, frozen in status, suddenly was looked up to as a SAVIOUR.”

It also described what happened prior to Adrian's finding the raft—that French had found the raft floating and had swum around with it, piling “wounded white comrades upon it until it had almost sank.”

“All men honor bravery and LOYALTY, and today all America hails 'A Mess Attendant named French' who risked death that others might live. Americans like Mess Attendant French and Ensign Adrian, mutually undergoing danger to preserve American freedom for all alike, will make democracy a glowing reality in this country for future generations to enjoy.”

In time it was learned that Charles Jackson French stood 5'8” tall and weighed 195 pounds. He had been born on September 25, 1919, in Foreman, Arkansas. But after his parents died, he moved to Omaha, Nebraska, to live with his sister. On December 4, 1937, French enlisted in the Steward/Messman branch of the United States Navy—the only positions open to African Americans at the time. He was assigned to the USS Houston, the



A 1943 "True Comics" account of the valor of Charles Jackson French after his ship was sunk at Guadalcanal.

flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. As a Mess Attendant 3rd Class, his job was to serve meals to white officers and sailors, clear their tables and keep the mess "not a mess." While French was on-board, the Houston was stationed in Hawai'i and cruised the Pacific Ocean with stops in the Philippines, Shanghai, Australia and other exotic locations. After his four year commitment ended, French returned to 2703 North 25th St. in Omaha, Nebraska, in late November of 1941. But 4 days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, French re-enlisted as a Steward's Mate 1st Class. He joined the crew of the USS Gregory in March of 1942. Although stewards were a step up from mess mates, they were derisively labeled "seagoing bellhops" by the Black press. Their job was to man the white officers' mess and clean their quarters.

Back in the USA after the sinking of the Gregory, the "human tugboat" visited relatives in Foreman and received a royal welcome from citizens of all races in

Omaha. He appeared before enthusiastic crowds at the half-time of a Creighton football game, at war bond rallies, on a calendar and in newspaper comic strips. There was even talk of a Hollywood film.

In early 1943, Twentieth Century Fox released the hit film adaptation of the Broadway musical "Stormy Weather" with an all-Black cast. In June, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer brought to the big screen "Cabin in the Sky," another musical with an all-Black cast. "However," reported the Pittsburgh Courier, "Warner Brothers has it in mind to go all of the companies one better and screen-immortalize Messman French, the lad who swam through shark-infested waters, towing a raft of wounded sailors to safety after a Japanese sub had sunk their ship in the South Pacific."

Ensign Adrian had recommended Mess Attendant French for the Navy Cross. It was the second highest honor, just below the Congressional Medal of Honor,

FRENCH HAD RETURNED FROM THE WAR "STRESSED OUT" FROM SEEING TOO MUCH DEATH AND DESTRUCTION.

and it was the medal that had been awarded to Doris Miller. But all he received was a letter of commendation from Adm. William F. Halsey, Jr., then commander of the Southern Pacific Fleet. While the letter recounted many of the events accurately, it reduced the time Adrian said French towed the raft, "six to eight hours" to "more than two hours." Ensign Adrian was outraged, but the Gregory episode was complicated by the issuance of a posthumous Silver Star to Lt. Cdr. H. F. Bauer, the ship's commanding officer. Wounded and dying, the skipper had ordered Adrian and the signalman on the bridge to leave him and go to the aid of another crewman who was yelling for help. He was never seen again. By Navy standards, it would have been nearly unprecedented for a subordinate to receive a higher decoration for an act of heroism comparable to that of a superior. In addition to the Silver Star, a destroyer-minelayer was named the USS Harry F. Bauer in 1944.

French was probably manning his mop or carrying food trays on the USS Endicott when he heard the news. At the time, his destroyer was escorting convoys in the Atlantic theater, along the African coast and in the Caribbean. With the Endicott needing repairs in May of 1944, French was assigned to the USS Frankford, a destroyer that provided support from its 5" guns for the successful landings on D-Day, along with rescuing survivors of mined ships and downed pilots, and driving off enemy E-boat attacks. In August, the Frankford arrived in Naples, Italy, to support the invasion of southern France.

Little is known of French after the war ended and he was soon forgotten. But sometime after the Korean War, he was at a friend's home in San Diego and told his side of the story. One of those listening was Chester Wright, who repeated what French said in his book, *Black Men and Blue Water*. French told a story consistent with Adrian's account, but with a few twists. He laughed when he told how he almost peed himself when he felt the sharks brush against his feet, but guessed they weren't hungry for a scared Black man. As he told of the raft being rescued,

his mood changed from jovial to anger and tears. After the badly wounded men were taken to the hospital, French and the others were taken to a rest camp where authorities wanted to separate French because he was "colored." The white boys from the raft however, refused to have him separated. He was a member of the Gregory's crew, they said, and they were going to stay together. Anyone who thought different had better been ready to fight. There was a standoff that lasted some time, with the crew of the Gregory, all covered with oil and grime and looking like madmen, facing off against the masters at arms in their clean and pressed whites. Eventually, they realized the Gregory's crew meant what they said and backed down. As French told this part of the story, his shoulders shook and tears coursed down his cheeks as he told how the white boys had stood up for him.

According to Wright, French had returned from the war "stressed out" from seeing too much death and destruction. He was probably discharged with mental problems and left to fend for himself. He died on November 7, 1956, and was buried in the Fort Rosencrans National Cemetery in San Diego, an almost forgotten hero.

Charles Jackson French was a forgotten hero until April of 2021, when an online post about French from the International Swimming Hall of Fame caught the attention of Rear Admiral Charles Brown, the Navy Public Affairs Officer, who said the Navy will see if "it can do more to recognize Petty Officer French." Let's hope the naming of the aircraft carrier USS Doris Miller is just the first step in recognizing the contributions of more African Americans who have served our great country, especially the heroics and powerful swimming of Charles Jackson French—from a time when most African Americans were denied the opportunity to learn to swim.

Bruce Wigo, swimmer, former CEO of USA Water Polo, former CEO of the International Swimming Hall of Fame, historian and writer

INEZ “PAT” PATTERSON

The “Mermaid of Philadelphia” Swimming through Segregated Waters

BY MARILYN MORGAN WESTNER, PH.D.

Spirited and smart, Inez Patterson was a talented all-around athlete who dedicated her life to “breaking down barriers set up against Negro women in sports.” Known by friends as “Pat,” she earned national respect as a sportswoman and physical educator in the 1920s until her premature death in 1944. Patterson treated access to water and swimming instruction as a civil right. Throughout her life, as a competitor, instructor, administrator, and mentor, she created new opportunities for African Americans to swim. She prided herself in establishing swimming programs and teaching aquatic skills and water safety to Black children and adolescents. “If Miss Patterson can’t teach you, your case is hopeless,” one reporter from the Philadelphia Tribune quipped. Her accomplishments underscore the vital connection between safe access to water, personal empowerment, well-being, and social equity.

EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Born in Chester, Pennsylvania, on August 12, 1911, Inez Patterson was the first and only child born to Alice and Bartholomew Patterson. Early in her childhood, the family purchased a home in Elmwood, a respectable neighborhood in southwest Philadelphia. Her dad, who worked as a wharf builder, perished in a fire when Inez was only six. Her mother, a baker and esteemed member of the community, supported herself and her daughter by running a store and occasionally taking in boarders.

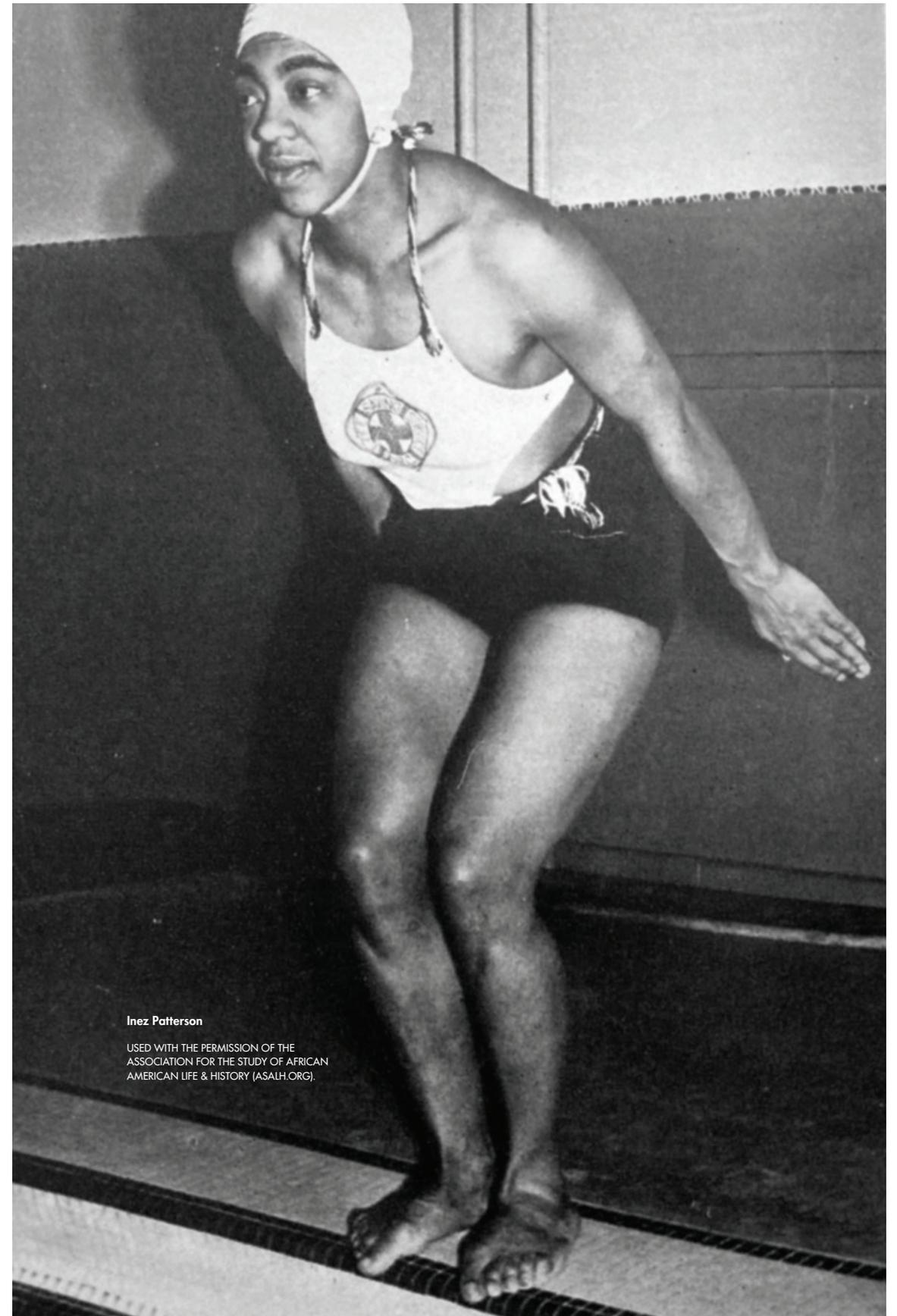
Alice encouraged her daughter to play sports and Inez quickly excelled at hockey, basketball, tennis,

and swimming. In summer, she swam at the McCoach Playground Pool—one of the few outdoor pools where Black Philadelphians could swim. When the Southwest Branch of the YWCA—the “Colored Branch”—moved to Catharine Street in 1922, Patterson practiced in its new Olympic-sized pool year-round. At both locations, Patterson refined her athletic skills and absorbed ideas about racial pride from her teachers. Those early pool experiences strengthened her association between swimming and social justice.

Growing up in Elmwood, Patterson attended West Philadelphia High School where she encountered—and defied—limiting stereotypes. She became the school’s only Black girl hockey player and established a record for the “round-arm basketball throw.” As a senior, she out-swam all contestants in the McCoach Playground Swimming Exhibition for Women and Girls, winning first place in six events and establishing a record for swimming 100 lengths of a 90-foot pool.

MAKING A POWERFUL SPLASH

After graduating from high school in 1928, Patterson worked for a year to save money for college. While serving as a physical education teacher and swimming instructor at several YWCA branches—Germantown, Southwest Philadelphia, and Orange, New Jersey—she also taught swimming at Wissahickon Boys’ Club and Fern Rock, a summer camp in New York. To further defray tuition, she won a scholarship from Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first intercollegiate Greek-letter sorority established by



Inez Patterson

USED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN LIFE & HISTORY (ASALH.ORG).

“Up to this time [1929] no colored girls had taken part in any of the swim meets. . . . The purpose of this event was to foster intercollegiate spirit among the students so, “Why shouldn’t I go?” I asked myself. Out of 500 girls present I was the only colored.”

INEZ “PAT” PATTERSON, 1934

African Americans. She entered Temple University in 1929.

Patterson embodied athleticism. Though she stood 5’4” tall, her powerful, well-defined muscles and confident, direct smile, gave her the gravitas of a taller athlete. During her four years at Temple, she set records in several sports. She co-organized, recruited players, and starred on the Quick Steppers and the Tribune Girls, two popular semi-pro, Black women’s basketball teams. The Philadelphia Tribune dubbed her “a track, hockey, and basketball luminary.” As a sophomore, she came in first at low hurdles and javelin during an interclass meet. Soaring over racial barriers as she did hurdles on the track, she became the first Black woman member of Temple’s All-Collegiate field hockey team. Patterson appeared to relish being the first—and sometimes only—Black player. By joining the tennis, volleyball, dancing, and swim teams, she helped integrate women’s sports.

DIVING INTO SOCIAL JUSTICE

The pool held a special place for Patterson, who the press called the “mermaid of Philadelphia.” But when she entered Temple, the university pool—like most at the time—practiced de facto segregation. She described, “When I first went up there (Temple) the class for colored girls for swimming was on Friday afternoon from four to five o’clock.” Instead of verbally protesting about the unfair schedule, she calmly denounced the color barrier in collegiate swimming through her actions. Patterson explained, “I refused to practice on Friday afternoons during the hour set aside for colored girls alone. I got around that by always being ‘too busy’ to do any practicing at that time, which made my swim practice fall on Mondays and Wednesdays when the other girls had supposedly exclusive use of the pool. And during that entire time, not a question was raised.” Despite the pool policy, Patterson recalled that none of her teammates challenged her right to swim alongside them.

BREAKING BARRIERS

In 1929, the University of Pennsylvania hosted an informal intercollegiate swim meet for women. “No colored girls had taken part in any the swim meets,” Patterson shared. Undeterred by the barrier, she took part during her freshman year. She recalled, “Out of 500 girls present I was the only colored.” Through her persistence and stellar athletic performance, Patterson helped erode the systemic racism that pervaded collegiate swimming.

Patterson’s experience at Temple made her determined to provide younger students with the opportunity she lacked. She knew that many girls of color in Philadelphia public schools wanted to learn to swim as part of their physical education requirement. Others who already knew how to swim wanted to compete as part of a high school team. Lack of access to a pool at their schools prevented both. But Patterson figured out a solution. While taking classes at Temple, she had continued to teach swimming and life-saving classes at the Southwest YWCA. She forged a partnership between the West Philadelphia High School’s physical education department and the Southwest YWCA. Then, with their support, she planned and helped launch the first swim club for Black high school girls in Philadelphia.

In “Girls in Sport,” a periodic column she wrote in 1929, she announced and promoted the swim club. She explained, “A club of this sort is unprecedented so it is up to you as students to make it a very desirable thing.” Encouraging girls to join, she provided four reasons: First, you have the honor of being a member of the first “Colored Swimming Club” in West Philly High; second, you will learn to swim if you are a beginner, and if you are advanced, you will learn life-saving; third, you will develop yourself physically; and fourth, you can gain athletic credit.

That same year, she co-organized the First Annual Swim Meet of the Wissahickon Boys’ Club, at which teams from several local clubs competed. As she continued

to teach girls swimming and diving at the YWCA, she used her column to encourage them. “We now have some young aspirants that show bright prospects in the swimming world.... I want to compliment these ‘little girls’ on their success and I hope they will continue in this comparatively new sport for women.”

SWIMMING, LIFE SAVING, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Teaching others to swim fueled Patterson, regardless of her location. While she vacationed one summer, a reporter in Virginia marveled that, in one day, Inez Patterson “taught two women and one man to swim and a score of swimmers fancy strokes. The way that girl can swim is nobody’s business.” After earning a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education from Temple in 1934, Patterson continued to take part in local and national sporting events.

In 1937, she accepted the position of Physical Director of the 137th Street YWCA in Harlem. At that esteemed location, she instructed girls of all ages in every level of swimming. Three times a week she led a “Tiny Tots” swim class for girls aged three to seven. She also instructed adolescents and young adults in competitive swimming and advanced life-saving techniques. As she taught and led programming, she continued her own education and earned widespread recognition for crossing racial barriers. When de facto segregation prevented her from being accredited, she helped organize a Red Cross-sponsored National Swim School for Negroes in North Carolina. Newspapers as far away as Atlanta and Chicago praised her for becoming the first Black woman to pass the qualifying examination of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation. Edwin Henderson, a pioneering teacher of physical education and NAACP leader who fiercely battled housing segregation, praised her for breaking “barriers that kept colored girls out of the May Day

Festival, the American Red Cross examiner’s course, and the Women’s Athletic Association swimming meet.”

Patterson devoted her life to teaching thousands how to swim and inspiring in them a love of the water. As an athlete, coach, and mentor, she battled discriminatory practices and opened opportunities for African Americans in swimming.

In 1944, Patterson died unexpectedly at age 32. One newspaper erroneously reported that she died from a nervous breakdown; but a ruptured pelvic abscess ended her life.

PATTERSON’S LEGACY AND INFLUENCE

In spite of her sudden death, Inez Patterson’s memory provided an inspiration for others. In 1987, Temple University acknowledged her role as a pioneering athlete and inducted her into its Athletics Hall of Fame. In 1988, Anne Marquess Garrott became the first Black swimmer to receive a Bob Douglas Hall of Fame Award for efforts to promote swimming to Black communities. Garrott recalled Patterson’s lasting influence on her life. She shared, “I had a mentor, a woman who had no family... Her name is Inez Patterson, and she was one of the best-educated Black women I ever met. She was also a powerful swimmer, and she broke a lot of barriers.”

Marilyn Morgan Westner, Ph.D., is a writer, cultural historian, and educator. Her work investigates social trends, cultural stereotypes, and discrimination throughout US history. She is especially interested in how the mass media shapes and perpetuates the social constructs of gender and race. For the past eight years, she has taught undergraduate and graduate classes, written case studies and articles, and led digital projects at Harvard Business School, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Harvard University. She earned a doctorate in American History from the University of Maine in 2007, while working as an archivist at the Schlesinger Library, Harvard University. Her first book, *Against the Tide: Stereotypes, Segregation, and Dreams of Glory in Endurance Swimming*, will be released in 2022.



DuSable Seahorses, full team, all levels, 1948

The Incredible Story of the DuSable High School Swim Team of Chicago, 1935-1952

BY ROBERT PRUTER

For some 15 years in Chicago, from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, the predominantly African American DuSable High School usually ranked as the second best swimming program in the Chicago Public High School League, behind Lane Technical High School. The 30-school league at that time had only three predominantly Black schools. DuSable's swimming achievements were looked on with pride by the city's African American community. The team's success in these years belied negative stereotypes and prejudices long held in American society concerning African Americans' supposed aversion to and inability to swim.

DuSable High opened its doors in the fall of 1935, in the heart of Chicago's Black South Side. The high school was built with a swimming pool, and its athletic department immediately instituted an ambitious swimming program under Coach William T. Mackie. The coach introduced a 10-mile swimming marathon for the swim team, in which each student swam so many lengths of the 60-foot pool every day until they reached $9\frac{3}{4}$ miles. Then, in the last quarter mile, they would compete in a race for their positions on the team. The 10-mile marathon program helped immensely to build a highly competitive swim team at the school. Reflective of the hard practices the coach put the team through, the team adopted the name Seahorses.

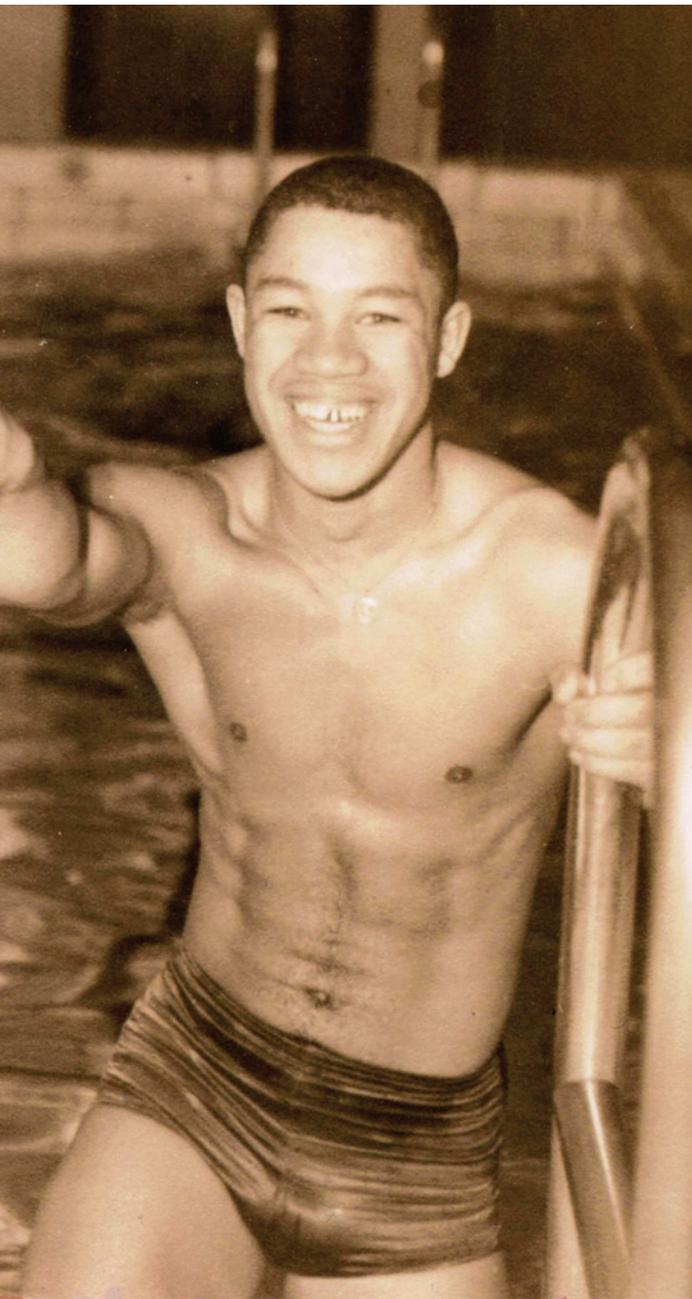
DuSable's success in swimming began with an undefeated dual meet season in 1935, beginning a streak of 53 dual meet victories that lasted until 1943. While a laudable achievement, DuSable never had a dual meet competition with the top area teams, notably Lane Tech in Chicago and New Trier in the suburbs. All the other

schools that competed against DuSable were essentially white high schools in the city, which, to their credit, overcame prevailing racist views of the day to swim against DuSable.

Racism in the Chicago Public League schools brought the issue of DuSable competing with largely white schools to a boil in November 1941. The Public League program was initially just two meets—in December and in April—with all the high schools in the city. Dual meets between schools were arranged by the schools on their own. But some coaches on the South Side felt the need for more regular competition and decided to form a dual-meet league. These coaches had resisted scheduling DuSable in the past and were not willing to let the virtually all Black school into the newly formed league. The Chicago Defender reported, "These coaches...don't want competition against Negro swimmers." A few weeks later, however, the Chicago Board of Education put an end to the "lily-white swim league," as the Chicago Defender headlined it. The Public League eventually formed dual-meet leagues throughout the city. DuSable competed in the Central Section league, usually being the only Black school.

DuSable was highly competitive with the white high school teams it did face. In February 1943, the team beat the Harrison team 42 to 24 for its 53rd straight dual-meet win. In the 1947-48 season, the school went undefeated in dual meets and won the Central Section title, yet in the city-wide meets Lane Tech was always dominant.

Lane Tech had emerged as a swimming power around



Eddie Kirk, national all-star, 1950

the same time as DuSable, under Coach John Newman. Lane was the technical school for the whole North Side, and by the early 1940s about 7,000 students attended the school, all male. Each year Newman had the pick of some 2,000 freshman boys enrolled in the swim classes. DuSable, by contrast, had local community enrollment boundaries, with a total enrollment of boys and girls of around 3,500 students, so there were hardly 2,000 boys in the entire school. This disparity in student numbers kept Lane Tech dominant in the city-wide meets.

DuSable's regular competition against predominantly white schools in the Central Section league, unlike in the early 1940s, showed no published reports of hostility or resistance from those schools. Most of the DuSable swimmers did not see any conflict or sense animosity. Commented DuSable star swimmer Eddie Kirk, "We knew them and they got to know us pretty well. It was just like a group of fellows getting together and swimming. Wherever I went...it seemed as though I was welcomed everywhere I went." On the other hand, Kirk's teammate, Floyd "Billy" Ray, when asked about whether he sensed any hostility at the white schools, said, "Oh yeah," and asserted that he heard names yelled at the team when their bus pulled up to the school, but added, "After we won the meet they didn't call us nothing."

The success in swimming that DuSable was experiencing in these years was not only due to the training regimen imposed by their coach. The swimmers he had were highly dedicated to swimming and augmented their in-school training outside the school. Team Captain Eddie Kirk, who worked as a lifeguard at the Wabash YMCA, said, "There were seven of us, and I was bringing the fellows to the YMCA pool at least three times a week, practicing, and that's what helped us along...because we were like doing double practice." Kirk and his teammates also got extra practice as members on the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) swimming team.

The DuSable swimmers in their practices and training were going beyond most of their competitors at rival schools, which not only helped the team become better swimmers, but undoubtedly helped to bond the team

together. "We worked together as a whole and did things together," related Kirk, "And as time went on the team got stronger and stronger."

For the 20-yard Public League city-wide meet in December 1949, DuSable was peaking as a team and had its best-ever opportunity to overtake the Lane Tech team. DuSable was loaded. The Chicago Defender understood that DuSable had a genuine chance of ending Lane Tech's 14-year string of 20-yard titles. The day before the finals, the Chicago Defender ballyhooed DuSable's chances with a sizable story and a large headline, "DuSable Girds to Upset Lane in Tank Meet." Lane Tech qualified seven individuals and one relay team for the finals, compared to DuSable's five individuals and two relay teams.

Thus, the two teams were evenly matched for the finals—and clearly DuSable was posed for an incredible upset—but the mainstream papers did not take notice, asserting that Lane was favored to continue its string of titles. Lane did indeed win the meet, but it was the closest outcome ever in Lane's string of victories, with Lane Tech edging DuSable by just five points, 46 to 41. Now belatedly, the theme of the mainstream dailies was that DuSable had been a genuine threat to take the title from Lane. Said the Herald-American, "DuSable put a scare in the Lane seniors." Said the Chicago Daily News, "[The Lane Tech] squad was hard pressed by DuSable to win their title."

DuSable's results in the 25-yard meet in the spring of 1950 were not too shabby either, with the school taking second with 33 points to Lane Tech's 45 points. Eddie Kirk that year took home the only medal the school ever won in the state meet, winning the individual medley in the annual March meet. The 1949-50 school year, thus represented the high-water mark of DuSable's achievement in swimming, so to speak.

With the 1950-51 school year, DuSable had another successful season, taking the Central Section for the fourth consecutive year. A bit more glory was rendered to DuSable with the publication of the Amateur Swimming Guide in early 1951. Eddie Kirk was named to the 1950 All-American interscholastic team, the first African

American in the country to get named to the team. The 1951-52 season marks the last time DuSable garnered any kind of league-wide achievement in swimming, when it took second to Lane Tech in the annual 20-yard meet. Thereafter, DuSable High was no longer a factor in the city-wide swim meets. The decline accelerated, according to DuSable swimmer Floyd "Billy" Ray, who said, "After DuSable's basketball team went downstate to play in the championship game in 1954, none of the students wanted to swim; they wanted to play basketball."

During the years of DuSable's tremendous success in the Chicago Public School League program, it was only a story in the Chicago Defender. The Defender recognition was typical of the day, in which African American publications were dedicated to telling their readers the achievements and exploits of African Americans. The Chicago mainstream papers did not seem to notice the story—a story that dramatically disproved the prejudices of the day regarding African Americans and swimming. DuSable swimmer Donald Clark said, "There was some kind of belief that African Americans could not swim, I think the success we had at DuSable disproved that." The basic truth that comes out in this story is that DuSable swimmers succeeded not only because they had a good coach, but because they worked harder than opposing teams, practiced more, and learned more in off-school hours.

Lastly, the story of the DuSable swim program should be understood in the context of sport history, which in its narratives on race has been long devoted to the strictly empirical "recovery" of the missing history of African American achievement. The DuSable swim program and the great athletes, now deemed "recovered," thus constituted an important legacy of African American achievement in swimming history that we should forever remember and recognize.

Robert Pruter is a long-time sport historian who has a particular interest in the history of high school sports and early amateur sports as they relate to women and African Americans.



FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

Swimming with Science

BY JESSE SMITH

In the fall of 1900, a 17-year-old boy went to a Boston doctor with a sinus infection. As part of his examination, Dr. Carolous M. Cobb learned that the teenager had been diving into the “swimming tank” of a neighboring town. Dr. Cobb treated the patient for acute ethmoiditis and warned him to avoid the tank. But the teen didn’t agree that the tank water caused his infection, and he ignored the doctor’s advice. So the young diver went back into the tank and, sure enough, his infection returned. It was only after a third attack that the teenager agreed to avoid the swimming tank, after which his sinus infections disappeared for good.

Dr. Cobb recounted his treatment of the swimming patient in a 1908 article, “The Menace of the Swimming Tank,” for the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. According to the article, the 17-year-old was just one of many patients who came to Dr. Cobb with sinus and ear infections they developed after visiting communal swimming tanks and pools. The Boston doctor didn’t blame pool operators for these infections; he believed they used the “utmost care” in keeping their facilities clean. The problem was that, by design, many people shared a pool and a pool’s water quality was compromised as soon as one person entered it. For Dr. Cobb, “The mystery of it is not that people infect the nose, throat and ear by this contaminated water,” he wrote, “but that they insist on putting their heads under



FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

CITIES SUCH AS BOSTON AND PHILADELPHIA FIRST BUILT RIVER BATHS FOR THEIR CITIZENS.

it.” The behavior of swimmers puzzled Dr. Cobb. “They would not put their heads under the water of an ordinary bath tub in which they had taken a bath,” he continued, “and yet the bath tub is thoroughly washed after each bath, while the swimming tank is only washed, or rather has the water changed, once or twice a day.”

In 1908, Dr. Cobb was part of a small but growing group of U.S. physicians and scientists concerned about the health risks of swimming pools. Today we recognize swimming pool water as a relatively safe (if sometimes smelly) category of water. But for Dr. Cobb and his peers, pool water was a new and mysterious object of scientific inquiry. It was clearly unlike the river and ocean waters where most people historically swam; once used, it also differed from the water that flowed out of pipes and hoses to fill pools.

Three developments intersected to shape scientific research on swimming pool water at the start of the 1900s. The first, grounded in the germ theory of disease, was the emergence of bacteriology as a distinct disciplinary field dedicated to the examination of disease-causing microorganisms. The second was a broadening acceptance of physical and chemical treatment of drinking water. And the third was a U.S. pool craze that saw more people plunging into pool water every year.

The United States did not invent the swimming pool. But beginning in the 1860s, northeastern U.S. municipalities began building public facilities for bathing that would ultimately evolve into popular spaces for watery recreation. Cities such as Boston and Philadelphia first built river baths for their citizens. These were wooden tanks built out into natural bodies of water; in warm months, urban residents could simultaneously be relieved of summer heat and wash their bodies. Gaps in the sides and bottoms of the tank allowed river waters to flush the baths.

In 1884, Philadelphia built the country’s first municipal in-ground pools for neighborhoods far from the city’s riverbanks and river baths. In Philadelphia and other U.S. cities, residents enjoyed dips in the baths and pools, but the backers of these facilities had one goal in mind: hygiene. They viewed the public facilities as spaces where people who lacked indoor bathing facilities could clean themselves, which they believed would in turn improve the broader health of the city.

The germ theory of disease upended these Victorian reformers’ plans for municipal pools. While dipping into river or pool water once seemed to be a reasonable way to rinse one’s body, new knowledge about disease-causing bacteria and viruses at the end of the 1800s doomed baths’ and pools’ functions as sites for cleaning.

Some cities responded by building public showers, where poorer residents could rinse under water that immediately flowed away.

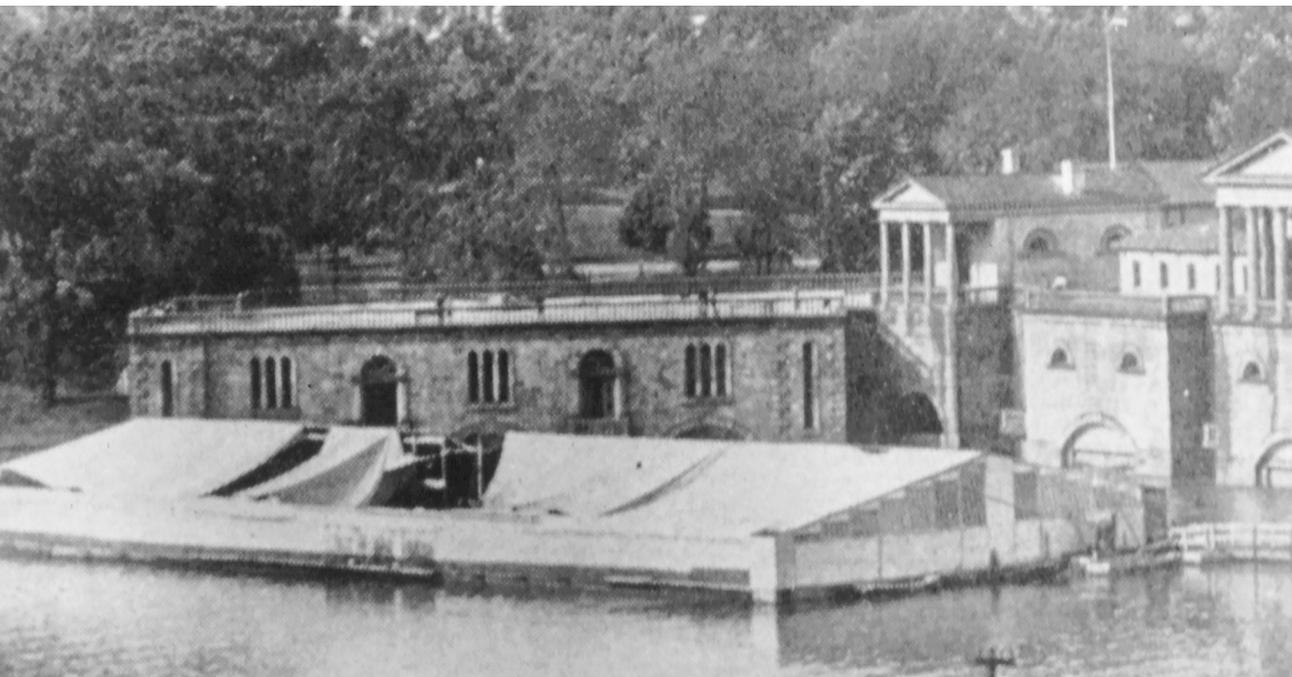
But the germ theory didn’t doom pools altogether. As historian Jeff Wiltse describes in *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, new interest in physical fitness at the turn of the 20th century refashioned pools as spaces of bodily vigor. In an increasingly industrial economy, middle-class urban men turned to bicycles, weights, gymnasiums, and swimming pools to avoid the perceived masculine softening associated with urban life and office work. Colleges and universities built indoor swimming pools for their students. And reformers argued that pools were likewise useful for maintaining their vision of a proper social order by providing the poor with opportunities to expend physical energy they might otherwise direct toward vices such as gambling or drinking.

Pools also persisted because their natural alternatives were increasingly seen as health risks. “The ‘Ole Swimmin’ Hole’ of our boyhood days is doomed,” wrote Severance Burrage, a Purdue University Professor of Hygiene and Sanitary Science, in 1909. “The favorite spot in pond or stream to which we used to go after school for a good swim and play, with no thought for the microbe in the water nor the bathing suit for our bodies, is, for the boy of today almost unknown, and for the boy of the future will be but an unrealizable dream,” Burrage wrote. “The streams and ponds,” he lamented, “have become polluted to such an extent that it is dangerous for the boys to bathe therein.”

Burrage’s article, “Hygiene of Indoor Swimming Pools, with Suggestions for Practical Disinfection,” was one of many efforts in the early 1900s to reconcile knowledge of the dangers lurking in dirty water with the public’s

desire to swim. Across the 1910s and 1920s, researchers attempted to quantify and qualify the health risks of pools, and to determine which pool management practices would best protect swimmers. Pool researchers looked to emerging practices of analysis and treatment for drinking water in their management and understanding of pool water. Borrowing from this field seemed reasonable: As Burrage noted, “While bathers do not swallow the water intentionally, it is next to impossible to avoid getting some water into the nose and mouth, which would ultimately reach the intestinal tract.” Like a growing number of municipal water treatment facilities of the period, many pool operators filtered their water through sand that removed matter impairing a pool’s clarity or smell. Brown University in 1910, for example, continuously filtered its pool’s water, so that an equivalent of the pool’s total volume was filtered every day. But while this practice preserved the aesthetic qualities of the pool water, it did little to address the pool’s bacteriological dangers.

To understand just what was living in pool water, researchers such as Burrage conducted multi-day examinations of pool waters. Many turned to new guidelines from the American Public Health Association. In 1905, that group published *Standard Methods of Water Analysis*, the broadest and most detailed collection of guidelines for the physical, chemical, and bacteriological examination of water. Researchers of pool water tailored these guidelines to the particularities of both swimming pools and swimmers. For Burrage and his peers, this meant analyzing pool water over multiple days as more and more bodies used the facilities. Burrage himself analyzed the indoor Purdue University pool over a period of several weeks. In one trial, he tested the pool water just after it had been filled on a Monday morning



This 1893 image depicts a floating bathing barge (left) in the Schuylkill River at the Fairmount Water Works. Unlike indoor pools of the period, which were drained and refilled to maintain water quality before the use of physical and chemical treatments, such baths drew on a river's natural flow to flush away water.

FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

and found it contained 560 bacteria per cubic centimeter. By that evening, the bacteria count had risen to 6,100. And by Wednesday evening, just before the pool was emptied, cleaned, and refilled, the bacteria count had grown to more than 60,000 per cubic centimeter.

Other research on pool water in this period revealed a wide variety of approaches to the operation and maintenance of swimming facilities. The diversity of these practices complicated researchers' efforts to understand the health risks of pools, but it also further distinguished pool water as a distinct object of scientific inquiry. In 1912, for example, a physical education teacher in New York City named Wallace Manheimer surveyed 35 institutions with pools around the city. Manheimer learned that some pools were refilled six times per week, and some not at all. Sources of water included municipal supplies, wells, lakes, rivers, and creeks. Nineteen of the

35 used filters to clean their pool water. The facilities also varied widely in their policies for encouraging swimmers to shower before entering a pool.

But while the operations of pools in the early 1900s varied, the researchers of pool sanitation were unified in one significant respect: they all had faith in the power of chemical disinfectants to significantly reduce the bacteriological dangers of pool water. In this regard they borrowed again from practices emerging in drinking water treatment, specifically the growing popularity of chlorination. At Purdue University, Burrage found that sprinkling chloride of lime on the school's pool reduced the bacteriological count to almost zero. At Brown, a 1909 experimenter put hypochlorite of lime in a cheesecloth bag, dragged it across the university's pool, and found that it reduced the number of bacteria in the water from 500 per cubic centimeter to zero in just one hour. In 1912,

a chemist at the University of Wisconsin recommended the use of hypochlorite of lime to treat lake water the school drew to fill its pool.

Applying chlorination to swimming pool water was an effective treatment, and an economical one as well. In 1913, two Harvard sanitation instructors articulated such a benefit in the *American Physical Education Review*. The instructors, John Bunker and Melville Whipple, described the case of the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, where "it was estimated that the cost of draining the tank, cleaning, heating fresh water and refilling with about 25,000 gallons of city water was \$9.70. This was done twice each week."

"With the application of chloride of lime on every other morning," Bunker and Whipple continued, "in the proportion of twenty pounds per million gallons, giving 0.8 part per million of available chlorine, it was found that one filling of the tank each week was sufficient, and that a decided improvement in the bacteriological content resulted at all times." And compared to the cost of a total refilling, chlorine was cheap. Bunker and Whipple wrote it could be purchased in bulk for three to four cents a pound.

Swimming pools at universities such as Purdue, Brown, Wisconsin, and Harvard were convenient research sites for university-based scientists interested in swimming pool water. They also represented model research sites for these scientists, and social categories of class and education infused their work. Writing for the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* in 1914, Columbia University's Wallace A. Manheimer offered a taxonomy of swimming pools. These included collegiate pools, association pools that charged admissions, and free pools open to the general public. Manheimer argued that collegiate pools offered the best conditions for research. They were highly managed and thus "far more amenable to control than those found in any other group." These college pools also had "an intelligent clientele" with staff on hand to "insure obedience to the rules of cleanliness." For Manheimer, public pools in contrast were free-wheeling spaces that required better management to encourage swimmers to shower before and after swimming and to remind them of "the importance of emptying the bladder before entering the pool."

Manheimer encouraged the administrators of public swimming pools to adopt the chemical disinfection techniques then being tested and developed in college and university pools. And over the next few years, as swimming pool water was codified as a distinct category of water subject to its own standards and practices, it shed the explicit class and education dimensions that animated the research behind it. In 1918, the American Public Health Association established a Committee on Swimming Pool Standards; two years later, the Conference of State Sanitary Engineers established a similar committee within its organization. Later, the two committees combined their efforts and in 1927 issued standards for the physical, chemical, and bacteriological qualities of swimming pool water.

The use of chlorination and the popularity of swimming pools grew in tandem. According to a 1932 report from the U.S. Public Health Service, the number of public pools increased from 67 in 1900 to 540 by 1931; it also found more than 3,200 public and private pools in cities with more than 5,000 people, and identified pools at a majority of colleges and universities.

Describing these trends in swimming pool sanitation in 1932, Frank Shaw, a sanitary engineer with the Public Health Service, credited both scientists and pool operators for advancing the safety and sanitation of swimming pools. "It is believed that with proper operation of the pool, proper treatment of the water, including sterilization, and examination of bathers to eliminate those having infections," Shaw wrote, "the probability of contracting a disease in the pool is remote."

By then, pools had arrived. And with it, pool water as a distinct category of water, subject to its own analysis and maintenance. From a bacteriological and scientific perspective, swimming had been made safe.

Jesse Smith is a research curator at the Science History Institute, where he develops exhibitions on the history of science and researches collections in the subject. He earned a Ph.D. in the History and Sociology of Science from the University of Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in a variety of publications including *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

Making Waves

BLACK SURFERS AND DEMAND FOR INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE WATER

AN INTERVIEW OF RHONDA HARPER BY NAJI ALI

"I was 15 in 1984. So if I'm trying to be a pro-surfer in 1984 and go to Hawaii with a hope chest full of surfing magazines, I can go through each one of my magazines and not see anybody like me. And I learn how to surf there, and I now want to be pro. Who am I going to? Because in the magazines, there's no one.

"So who I am now is who I needed when I was young and I had that vision of, 'I want to be this person. I want to be this surfer. I want to be a pro surfer.' So that's who I try to be right now for all of my girls. It doesn't matter what stage you're in, whether you're in your beginning stages or you're in your latter stages of your career, we try to facilitate whatever need that is.

"And that is the birth of Black Girls Surf, because we knew that just by the numbers alone, we knew there was a need out there. And then you start connecting. We put our IG together, and then women were just coming from all around the world."

RHONDA HARPER, FOUNDER OF BLACK GIRLS SURF



“So who I am now is who I needed when I was young and I had that vision of, ‘I want to be this person’.”

RHONDA HARPER



Visionary, activist, surfer and founder of Black Girls Surf, Rhonda Harper has been working diligently to change the culture of surfing for women and girls, while creating a platform that unites people. Harper’s love affair with surfing, however, is not a typical one. As a child, Harper would walk a couple of miles from her home to a predominantly white community pool to swim laps, despite feeling unwelcome. At the age of 10, her family moved to California where the realities of being a person of color were far from idyllic and, at the time, beaches remained segregated (until the 1960s). Although she loved

the ocean, she didn’t get on a surfboard until she was 15 years old, when her parents sent her to live with her sister who was attending a university in Hawai’i, on Oahu’s North Shore. It was there that Harper bought a secondhand surfboard and taught herself to stand up and ride a wave. From that point on, she was in the water every chance she could get, riding her board and feeling free.

At the age of 18, Rhonda moved back to California. One afternoon, when she returned from the beach to the parking lot, she found someone had written “Go home” with a racial slur on her car with surfing wax.

That incident, coupled with the fact that surfing has long been a white-dominated sport, inspired her to change the look of surfing. While working in the fashion industry in Los Angeles, Harper came up with a surf brand tailored toward Black surfers and named it Inkwel, after Inkwel Beach, one of the few beaches open to Black people during public segregation.

In 2014, Harper founded Black Girls Surf, to help girls and young women of color become elite surfers and compete on a professional level. Today, with locations in the United States, Africa, Jamaica and Brazil, Black Girls Surf is an inclusive organization that works to further the future of females in surfing. Its goal is to ensure that anyone who has ever wanted to surf is given the chance to learn, along with the opportunity to get an education (via its sponsorship programs).

Rhonda spoke with Naji Ali for an interview that aired on *Crossing the Lane Lines*, Ali’s podcast series. They discussed the paddle-outs (a spiritual symbol of surf culture that pays tribute to the life and legacy of those who have passed) following the death of George Floyd. Ali asked Harper if she thought white surfers understood what Black surfers have had to endure and if taking part in the paddle-out was more of “a movement or a moment” within this community? Harper replied, “This remains to be seen. I tend to look at things from one surf season to another (March through September marks a season in the sport), and if something like this can last from one surf season to the next, I think it is a movement.” She went on to say, she sees it now as a trend and she believes it’s genuine.

Crossing The Lane Lines is dedicated to giving voice to the Black swim community, featuring coaches, swimmers, authors and activists.

Says Ali, “I learned to swim [at age 43] because I wanted to actually swim in open water. When I was 13 years old, I had a summer job in San Diego, where I grew up, at a place called Scripps Institute of Oceanography. And I worked with a marine biologist.

“I remember that day being incredibly clear. It was very, very hot. And 20 miles out, the water was literally flat and glassy, never happens that far out in the ocean. And I had to know, because I’ve swum out in the ocean

many times, and even on the good day and stuff, I’m going to have to deal with something.

“And I remember after they had caught two tuna, one of the crew members decided to strip down to his shorts and go for a swim. So, he jumps off the side. They start swimming around and he’s doing the crawl. He’s doing backstroke, he’s doing a little breaststroke and some butterfly and then he climbs back up. And it’s telling off, and keep in mind, I’m 13 years old, and I’m fascinated. I’m watching this, I’d never seen this before.

“And I run up to him and I said, ‘Oh, wow, that’s really cool. I’m wondering if you could teach me that.’ The guy puts on his arm around me and he laughs and says, ‘Oh, kid, Black people don’t swim.’ And everybody on the boat laughed. And I just walked off. And I never brought that situation up for 30 years. I didn’t say anything about it to anyone.

“Fast forward to 2008, and I’m watching the second night of Michael Phelps trying to capture his eight gold medals. And it was the men’s four by 100-meter relay, the greatest men’s relay ever ran in the Olympics, as we all know... What fascinated me most about that whole race was the third leg of that relay, when a young man from North Carolina State, Cullen Jones, jumped in the water. First African-American I’d ever seen swim at the Olympics in my life.”

Naji Ali is a Black open water swimmer and coach who has made it his mission to create an environment where access to swimming is the norm, not a barrier. Learning to swim at the age of 43 sounds uncommon for most people, but it was better late than never for Ali. “I was determined that I wanted to swim,” Ali said. “I didn’t care what it would take. I was going to do it.” Ali’s podcast series, *Crossing the Lane Lines*, amplifies a diversity of voices into the public space outside the exhibition doors. Visitors to POOL are invited to sit down, look out at the Schuylkill River, and listen to Ali and his guests.

To hear the full interview between Naji Ali and Rhonda Harper visit: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/making-waves-Black-surfers-demand-for-inclusion-diversity/id1524804967?i=1000494161335>.

Follow @BlackGirlsSurf for more insight into their community.



KELLY NATATORIUM PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

The Arc of a Much-Loved Structure with Amazing Bones

“Treasured spaces have eternal life through reinvention—but reinvention must be respectful and connected to the spirit of the original creation.”

CARL SMITH, CITY WATER, CITY LIFE

A water spirit has always hummed through the columns, decks, walls and the sleepy-eyed windows of the Fairmount Water Works (FWW) throughout its more than 200-year-old history. Initially inspired and then conceived as the means to supply an abundance of Schuylkill River water to the ever-growing populace of early 19th century Philadelphia, it exemplified the civic pride and can-do attitude of a young nation. Frederick Graff, Philadelphia’s chief engineer, was charged with designing and overseeing the construction of the country’s first large municipal pumping and reservoir system that would sluice water into the homes and businesses of citizens, while astounding the country and the world with its breathtaking beauty. In 1815, when the FWW began pumping water from the Schuylkill River, city leadership proved that the construction of a technological wonder of its time was not beyond their imagination or their recognition of their civic responsibility to provide drinking water to their citizens.



Swimmers at The Kelly Pool, Fairmount Water Works, Philadelphia, PA, 1962
 FAIRMOUNT WATER WORKS AND THE PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT COLLECTION

Throughout the 19th century, the FWW enthusiastically endured a number of iterations in its operations and structure to adjust to the continued growth of the city and to adapt to the need for newer technologies that respected the tidal nature of the river itself. The FWW took these modifications in stride, replacing its steam-powered pumps and boilers with waterwheels and, ultimately, with turbines. The FWW itself expanded along the riverbank to accommodate these technologies, its active footprint growing from the original Engine House into the Old Mill House and finally, with the construction of the Fairmount Dam, adding the New Mill House, linked to the mound of the dam to take advantage of the seemingly boundless supply of water welling behind the spillway.

By the end of the 19th century, the pollution from industries and sewers rendered the Schuylkill River undrinkable, with cholera and typhoid epidemics becoming an ongoing occurrence. Because the FWW lacked available land to expand to add newer, early 20th century technologies such as filtration and chlorination, the FWW closed as a drinking water facility.

But the FWW was an iconic structure, always beautiful and much beloved by citizens. The FWW was reopened in 1911 as a public aquarium, another inspired innovation for its time, bringing fish and other aquatic creatures, and even seals for a short period, to the people—perhaps the first real pivot of the structure to embrace a dedicated environmental education mission.

When the aquarium closed in 1962, the Kelly Pool opened in the FWW's New Mill House with funding from the Philadelphia Kelly family—an adaptive reuse of a section of the building, despite the presence of columns

in the swimming lanes. But there were always more inherent challenges with the FWW, since the structure itself was designed to flood. It was meant to mingle with the Schuylkill River. The pool—the site of the September 2021 exhibition at the FWW, *POOL: A Social History of Segregation*, was closed in 1972 following damage by Hurricane Agnes.

It is in the New Mill House of the FWW where the arc of the physical history of the site intersects with the bigoted history of the U.S. The POOL exhibit focuses a much-needed lens of the impacts of systemic racism as demonstrated by non-equitable access to public pools. The team at the FWW Interpretive Center, who are the hosts of the exhibit, have embedded in their educational ethics a commitment to engaging and educating disinvested residents and youth in environmental advocacy since the Center's opening in 2003. The POOL exhibit has allowed the team to tackle this issue in a completely visceral way in the space once occupied by Kelly Pool.

When the FWW began operations in 1815, slavery was a heralded institution in the U.S. Beloved public works weren't really created for everyone. Slaves were not meant to be the recipients of its public health benefits or beauty. Slaves provided the labor and economic engine to enable these benefits to flow to the U.S. white population, enabling a generally thriving white populace.

It's hard to get your head around this when you gaze at the fabulous FWW with its amazing bones. We think about the U.S. as this incredible nation, able to achieve unparalleled accomplishments. And yet, at the same time, to be ignorant of the value, preciousness and goodness

of all human life seems an appalling thing. Yet this fact is interwoven into the fabric of our universal histories and within the history of the U.S. most persistently. Institutional dehumanization has roots deep in the past, and it reverberates into the present. History is linear and forever connected.

The POOL exhibit examines this theme through assumed, simple opportunities: swimming, water access and water confidence, i.e., the faith one has to be immersed in water and not expect to drown. Even today, many urban kids from Black and brown communities do not know how to swim. POOL presents these topics through many voices and their stories. The expectation is that we will do something about it.

The FWW Interpretive Center has at its core the promise of reaching the youth of our disinvested communities—to engage and teach and recruit our

city's children to become stewards of our environment at a minimum, and future scientists and engineers and planners as its aspiration. To maximize these goals, new modifications to the FWW facility are planned that include more exhibits and educational technology, large learning spaces near the water and on the water, and pop-up exhibits and events to celebrate and use every square foot of the FWW.

Come to the POOL exhibit. Learn more. Be a supporter of this incredible structure and the FWW Interpretive Center mission to connect all children to our rivers and streams.

Joanne Dahme is the former Deputy Commissioner for Communications and Engagement, Philadelphia Water Department. She is currently a Senior Advisor at the The Water Center at Penn and the owner of Mayfly Communications. She is also on the Board of the Fund for the Water Works, which is supporting and thrilled by the POOL exhibit.



Known as The Kelly Natatorium or Kelly Pool, the indoor swimming pool at the Fairmount Water Works opened in 1961 as an Olympic training facility. Years prior, the indoor space housed the Philadelphia Aquarium, which was installed in 1911 in the space once occupied by machinery used to pump water through the Fairmount Water Works. John Kelly, father of famed actress Grace Kelly and a three-time Olympic gold medalist in rowing, funded the indoor pool project. It then became a public pool, but was only open for a few years. In 1972, the city closed the pool after it was damaged by flooding from Hurricane Agnes. An outdoor public pool, also named after John Kelly, is now operating on the Fairmount Park grounds.

THE MAKING OF POOL EXHIBITION

THIS 4,600 SQUARE FOOT EXHIBITION IS MORE THAN FIVE YEARS IN THE MAKING. KAREN YOUNG, VICTORIA PRIZZIA AND JAMES IJAMES TEAMED UP WITH A DIVERSE CREATIVE CONSORTIUM OF ARTISTS, ACTIVISTS, ATHLETES, MEDIA MAKERS, RESEARCHERS AND SCHOLARS TO TAKE THIS CRITICAL PROJECT FROM CONCEPT TO FRUITION. FOR THE LOVE OF SWIMMING!

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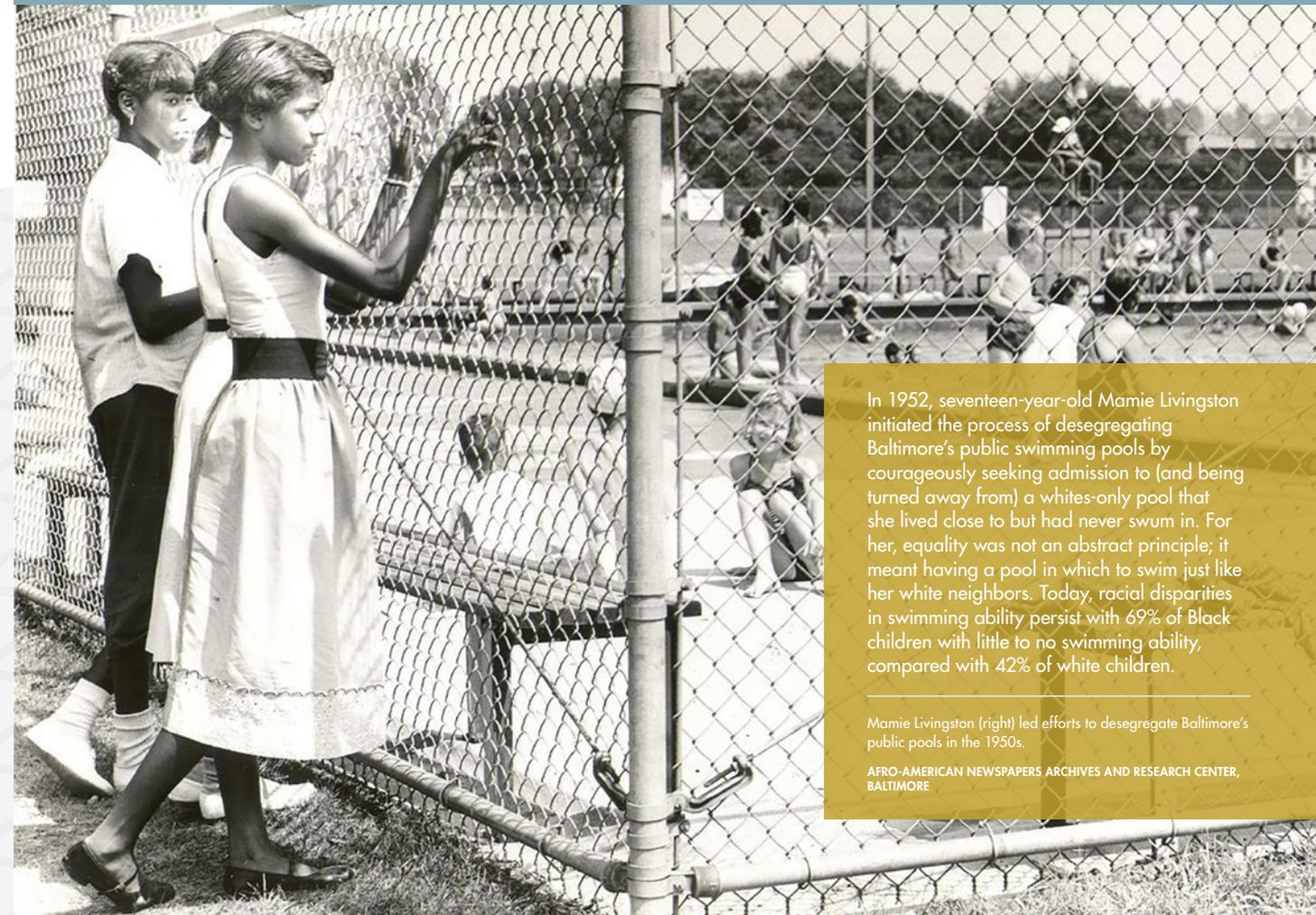
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In 1952, seventeen-year-old Mamie Livingston initiated the process of desegregating Baltimore's public swimming pools by courageously seeking admission to (and being turned away from) a whites-only pool that she lived close to but had never swum in. For her, equality was not an abstract principle; it meant having a pool in which to swim just like her white neighbors. Today, racial disparities in swimming ability persist with 69% of Black children with little to no swimming ability, compared with 42% of white children.

Mamie Livingston (right) led efforts to desegregate Baltimore's public pools in the 1950s.

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1969
Fred Rogers and Francois Clemmons, the Black actor who played Officer Clemmons, soak their feet together in a backyard kiddie pool on the television show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FRED ROGERS FOUNDATION



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