

3 Little Liberia *The African American Agricultural Colony in Baja California**

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IN 1917, GOVERNOR ESTEBAN CANTÚ of Baja California hired James Littlejohn, an African American contractor, to build a highway connecting Ensenada and Calexico.¹ For Littlejohn, who already knew Spanish from his days working on the Northern Guatemala Railroad, and other African American businessmen from Los Angeles, this initial contact with Governor Cantú spurred a unique and promising business opportunity focused on social change through agricultural development. Although the initial members were mostly from Los Angeles, the community later boasted participants from throughout North America, including members of the elite “Black Wall Street” of Tulsa, Oklahoma. By May 1917, Littlejohn and other middle- and upper-class African Americans had “already gone to [Baja] and [were] doing well,” because they had found a way to “get in on the ground floor in the development of this rich country” by forming the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company.²

For these African Americans, agriculture on the border had the possibility of changing racism in the United States. Even though many of the men and women who founded the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company were not farmers, blacks in the United States since slavery had viewed land ownership and agricultural work as a means to attain prosperity and racial growth.³ For years agriculture functioned as the language and the avenue for less privileged people to participate and have a voice in an increasingly materialist society. In the West, wheat and citrus were emerging as major agricultural products in the early twentieth century. Border areas of Baja California at the tail end of the Mexican Revolution were overwhelmingly rural and open. These African Americans planned to enact social change through mass production, while also connecting with their international neighbors and growing the local economy. These community organizers described Mexico as a land of opportunity, especially with Baja California’s emerging wheat and citrus

*This chapter is an expanded version of a paper the author originally presented at the Fifty-Fifth Annual Conference of the Western History Association, Portland, Oregon, October 21–24, 2015.

production coinciding with southern California's growing markets.⁴ In addition, the border could act as a semipermeable barrier, preventing oppression in the United States while allowing the flow of people, goods, and ideas.

James Littlejohn moved from Los Angeles to Mexico as a colonist and member of the board of directors of the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company, the organization in charge of the agricultural community. The *Los Angeles Times* nicknamed the colony Little Liberia, but, although some colonists used the moniker, the name misrepresented the community because the colony was not modeled after Liberia and the goals were much larger than the name suggests.⁵ Rather than sharing the Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA's) aim of repatriating the black diaspora to Liberia in Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, Little Liberia organizers planned to remain directly connected to the United States to enact social reform through participation in international agricultural trade. Liberia, a US protectorate, represented what Garvey hoped would be a port of entry to black recolonization of the African continent. The Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company and the UNIA had a few similarities, including plans for international trade and selling stock to blacks, and some Little Liberia members were also members of the UNIA. However, Little Liberia's goals were inherently tied to the border and agriculture, while Garvey focused on his Black Star shipping line and organizing a global black nationalism.⁶ Whereas Garvey's movement spread worldwide, Little Liberia remained local; its entire membership came from the United States and Canada. Although Little Liberia had members from all over North America, the community initially focused largely on the West Coast. This was, in part, due to its location in the Santa Clara Valley of Baja California. Roughly 40 miles outside of Ensenada, 55 miles from San Diego, and 180 miles from Los Angeles, the colony was close enough that most of the original organizers could travel from their homes in California to the colony in one day.

Agriculture initially dominated the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's business plans.⁷ The long history of African American farm labor likely influenced the organizers' decision to focus on agriculture. Since the beginning of black slavery in the United States, many blacks in the South worked as agricultural laborers. For decades after emancipation, blacks used their farming knowledge and expertise to start agricultural communities throughout the country in an effort to seek economic and social freedom. Members of these communities regarded land ownership as a means for advancement. Some, such as Nicodemus, Kansas, grew into prosperous towns. Although many of these

communities began with the intention of remaining separate from the Jim Crow South, their members inevitably experienced injustices because oppressive political, economic, and social systems existed throughout the United States.⁸ Little Liberia colonists looked to move past this oppression by moving to Mexico. Unlike these other communities, however, the goal of Little Liberia was not growth through land ownership but rather growth through production and sale of cash crops.⁹ The decision to foster agricultural development in Little Liberia was inherently tied to the culture of the South. Hugh Macbeth, one of Little Liberia's top organizers, recognized this importance when he mentioned that the colony was looking for "the best colored farmers the South has produced."¹⁰ Since many of the colony's founders and directors were not farmers, they looked to blacks who already had experience working in agriculture. Colony leaders believed southern-trained farmers or their children would make ideal colonists because they had training and planting knowledge, albeit with different crops.¹¹ James Littlejohn and other organizers began recruiting colonists from California's Imperial Valley, since many farmers there already grew the fruits, vegetables, and wheat that the community would be producing.¹² Early on, a few black Southern California farmers experienced success, and this bolstered the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company's claims of rich and fertile land that could be profitable in the right hands.¹³

Little Liberia organizers replicated aspects of farming in California and in the South. In the early twentieth century, farms in the West, particularly in California, were typically small and owned individually or were large cooperative ventures. Little Liberia organizers planned for two hundred families to purchase farmland in five-, ten-, fifteen-, twenty-, or forty-acre plots. Although Little Liberia largely acted as a cooperative company, the breakdown of land by smaller plots replicated southern planting styles. By March 1918, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company had over twenty-five thousand acres to distribute in these smaller plots.¹⁴ Hugh Macbeth stressed in 1921 that "it is not our purpose to establish this colony as a retreat for poverty-stricken Negroes" but that Little Liberia was geared toward blacks who had savings and therefore could buy land through the company at low interest rates. Unlike the black agricultural communities in the Midwest and West, Little Liberia was not a haven for every African American looking for work.¹⁵ Although in some ways different from other black uplift efforts in the early twentieth century, especially in its border crossing and cross-racial cooperation, the company's focus on using middle-class wealth as a means for social advancement was in line with racial uplift ideology.¹⁶

Originally Little Liberia's economic focus centered on crop agriculture, although there were prospects for mining and raising livestock too. Colony organizers' goals initially relied heavily on the sale of their excess produce to Southern California. (Their primary market was in Mexico.) They surmised that their wheat, citrus, nuts, and other crops would eventually impact the state economy in California in addition to growing the economy in Baja California. They believed that the economic growth in Baja California, clearly visible in the United States through market influence, would prove that African Americans could prosper outside the purview of oppressive US social and economic systems. This would also show that systematic oppression existed and drastically effected blacks nationwide. Second, by becoming economically successful and influential, Little Liberia would also change US stereotypes and negative assumptions about blacks.¹⁷

To accomplish these goals, colonists needed to reside outside of the United States, in a country with good agricultural opportunities. The colony needed established trade routes, close proximity to the United States, and an atmosphere that welcomed black Americans. Santa Clara Valley seemed an ideal distance and location to colonists, as it was roughly fifty-five miles from San Diego, and thus located near local markets in Baja California as well as Southern California.¹⁸ Baja California agriculture was growing at this time, was efficient relative to other agricultural productivity in Mexico (e.g., similar to other agricultural production based on irrigation in northwestern Mexico), and was becoming the most important aspect of the state's economy.¹⁹ In situating their colony across the border to the south, Little Liberia leaders also had something else in mind. "The Mexican people and the colored people are brothers," one newspaper reported. "They will always stand shoulder to shoulder in fair and square treatment to all men and will always oppose race prejudice wherever found."²⁰ This idea of kinship was tied to the history of blacks migrating to Mexico in search of freedom during the antebellum period. Mexico had abolished slavery by 1820, providing full citizenship for former slaves and refusing to return runaway slaves to the United States. This act led to the formation of many black colonies in Mexico. These colonies, in addition to blacks who had been brought to Mexico as slaves, added to an existing cornucopia of ethnic groups and peoples in Mexico, and the relationship between these was complicated.²¹ Even so, Mexico's history of openness to African Americans may be why Little Liberia organizers felt that Mexico was a place where "a Negro is respected the same as a white man."²² There "a man is a man in spite of the color of his skin," it was said in the US black press.²³ This view largely ignored the complex

national and local racial and ethnic divisions and tensions in Mexico and specifically Baja California at the time, but it does help explain why the colonists settled in Mexico rather than Canada or a more remote part of the United States.

In the decades after the Mexican Revolution, the national rhetoric focused on racial inclusion even though many blacks and Indigenous peoples in Mexico were impoverished and discriminated against. This language of racial inclusion, at least initially, extended to Little Liberia colonists, in part because colony leaders approached settling Mexican land not only as an opportunity for economic advancement but also for the overall improvement of all colony members. Some Mexicans, including many local Baja and federal officials, agreed to partner with African Americans rather than with other foreigners because they, like US blacks, had experienced oppression and economic displacement from those foreign investors and invaders.²⁴ For instance, Governor Cantú mentioned in 1918 that he was interested in the new colony because Mexicans had become frustrated with people from other countries who simply wanted to use Mexico for its resources. He spoke of Little Liberia's members as "builders" looking to "come to dwell with us and grow up with the country."²⁵ The Mexican government regarded developing the agricultural area in northern Baja California as vitally important because, after the Mexican Revolution, vacant northern lands were vulnerable to US invasion. Opening land to communities that were willing to increase the population and help improve the area without taking it over became a viable solution.²⁶ Little Liberia colonists were so successful in connecting with their neighbors that, in 1920, "Mexican officials . . . expressed a desire that the Lower California Company put in many thousands of Colored settlers in the peninsula," the *Chicago Defender* reported.²⁷

The existence of the colony in Mexico, and the community members' reasons for living there, set Little Liberia apart from other black agricultural communities focused on racial uplift. Little Liberia colonists viewed the US-Mexican border as an irreplaceable part of their community experience. The organizers engaged with the border as a malleable entity, sometimes solid enough to keep out oppression, but other times fluid enough to allow the movement of goods, ideas, and social connections. This permeable border could allow an exchange of ideas, people, and goods from Los Angeles to the Santa Clara Valley, which might remain throughout the life of the colony while preventing oppression from seeping through. Many tales of the US-Mexican frontier describe this type of connection between towns on either side of the border, particularly when those towns existed prior to the creation of an international border and

conversion of the border into a physical entity. But those connections often occurred between communities across a relatively small geographic space, which makes Little Liberia's community that bridged almost two hundred miles unique.²⁸ This was rooted in the fact that these African Americans thought about the border differently than others did, particularly with the possibilities of creating communities spread across greater distances.²⁹

All these prominent African Americans noticed the possibility for growth across the border in an area that some people at the time overlooked. The colony was specifically designed and advertised as a cross-racial community with the goal of social change. This idea may have stemmed from the multiethnic Los Angeles community where the board of directors resided, which often had African Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans living in the same neighborhoods.³⁰ Although for years white US industrialists had looked to Mexico for land and labor, they did not reach out to the local people or improve the local economy.³¹

Little Liberia's ranches in the Santa Clara Valley were bordered by the Sonoran Desert to the east and chaparral and coastal scrub (of the Pacific Ocean) to the west. Although some parts of Baja California could be dry and arid, other areas received a decent amount of water for growing crops. The colonists believed that the Santa Clara Valley was prime agricultural land because a 1913 agricultural report claimed that the Laguna Hanson Mountains, located roughly fifty-five miles from Ensenada, made the area a viable prospect for agricultural communities.³² Unlike most mountains in the Peninsular Range, the Laguna Hanson Mountains have plateaus at high altitudes.³³ Mountains in Southern California have peaks that direct rainwater to streams that ultimately lead to a large body of water, such as a lake or the Pacific Ocean. The report claimed that the basins at the top of the Laguna Hanson Mountains instead allowed rainwater to soak into the mountain, eventually becoming groundwater available for wells and agriculture.³⁴ During this time in Southern California, irrigation technology was essential to aid in large-scale crop production. In the Santa Clara Valley, the groundwater ideally allowed for agriculture with less reliance on advanced irrigation methods. This is a key reason why the colonists proclaimed Baja California to be superior farmland to Southern California and therefore an ideal site for them.

Rumors of mineral, gem, and oil deposits in the area added to the solid opportunities for wheat and citrus production. Residents on islands in the Gulf of California, southeast of Little Liberia, claimed to have discovered high-grade oil in late December 1919 and early January 1920. Petroleum officials assessed the islands and the adjacent lands for oil.³⁵ Miles

Henderson, a prospector from Redlands, California, also arrived in Baja California in December 1919 to search for an area to set up a copper mine in the Santa Clara Valley, which he planned to do within six months.³⁶ Edward J. Sullivan, a Los Angeles businessman, in October 1921 completed a survey that claimed the existence of rich oil deposits, copper, and gold in Baja California.³⁷ Regardless of these surveys and speculation, Little Liberia did not become an oil or mineral producer, but the existence of these claims means other people outside of the colony were looking to Baja California, and the Santa Clara Valley in particular, for economic gain.

In March 1918, the Los Angeles African American newspaper *California Eagle* ran a full front-page article praising the land and the goals of the community. Charlotta Bass, editor of the *Eagle*, black community leader, friend of many Little Liberia community members and organizers, and later a Little Liberia stockholder, chronicled many of the colony's activities in this and other articles.³⁸ In March 1918, colony leaders claimed a previous owner had already started cultivating the land, which meant that the colonists had a foundation to build on.³⁹ The land was composed primarily of two adjacent ranches totaling almost 22,000 acres: Santa Clara at 8,762 acres and Vallecitos at 13,031 acres.⁴⁰ The colony boasted a broad range of possible crops; its boosters claimed that any crops that could grow in Southern California would also grow in the Santa Clara Valley. The *Eagle* article listed wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, lemons, walnuts, and fruit of all kinds as possible cash crops. These also happened to be crops grown in California, and therefore the crops had existing established markets. The article claimed that grass was so abundant that cattle, hogs, goats, chickens, turkeys, and other livestock could graze with no significant impact on the landscape.⁴¹ "It is estimated," colony leaders maintained, "that outside of the tillable land 5000 head of cattle can be raised on the grazing lands, which the year around has a luxuriant growth of grass." Wheat, however, was the main product. Profitable and in demand in the United States, wheat was an ideal commodity because it could grow in large quantities on the ranches. As of 1918, Little Liberia colonists had planted four thousand acres of wheat, and they had made plans for incubators for chickens, a nursery, a dairy, and a store that could sell goods to colonists at as close to cost as possible.⁴²

Little Liberia celebrated many milestones and held many events within the first three years of its existence. By December 1919, the colony had grown enough to warrant a shipment of over a thousand dollars' worth of equipment to assist in the first major plowing of the land.⁴³ This may be because Theodore Troy, the president of the company and one of the men working the land, had declared that there would be an above

average wheat yield that year, claiming that Little Liberia was aiming to produce the largest wheat crop ever in the Santa Clara Valley.⁴⁴ In May 1920, the company office reported that the company would “harvest more wheat in the next sixty days than will be harvested by all of the Colored Farmers in the state of California.” By that point, colonists already purchased two-thirds of the area’s available land.⁴⁵ A plowing contest also began in early 1920, and ensuing results were claimed to break all Baja California plowing records; the hope was for a bumper crop due to ideal rains. This increased crop was especially important because, earlier that year, the owner of the largest flour mill in Ensenada informed the colony that his mill would buy all the wheat the colony produced that year (up to \$100,000 worth). Two years after the colony began, it had already begun selling to local businesses in Baja California. In addition to wheat at the local mill, in January 1920 James Littlejohn organized a pork carnival and slaughtered at least 150 hogs to make ham, bacon, hogshead cheese, chitterlings, lard, cracklings, and pork sausage. He also sold hundreds of pounds of fresh pork to people in La Pazinas Valley, twelve miles north of the Santa Clara Valley.⁴⁶ The colony seemed to be bursting with success in 1920, which was visually apparent with the groundwork being laid for a two-story, ten-room cottage by a Los Angeles contractor. All of the newspaper coverage of Little Liberia and the outward signs of prosperity there pointed to an economic project on its way to increased growth that could have led to economic improvement for colonists.

However, much of this newspaper information appears to be incorrect or misleading, a case of boosterism. Although independent studies had been released before the colony’s creation, members of the board of directors in 1927 began to question the portrayal of the colony as an agricultural paradise when the area could, in fact, be relatively dry in a given year. Although the mountains may have provided extra groundwater for agriculture, this water did not exist without consistent rainfall, and Baja California went through a drought in the early 1920s. Wheat and citrus require a consistent water supply, so the land was not nearly as productive as articles in 1919 and early 1920 claimed, which led to increasing debt for the colony. In addition, the skyrocketing agricultural prices that developed due to World War I demand reversed after the war ended, and the resulting decline hit agriculture the hardest out of any other sector of the economy. Later articles in the black press did not explain the changes in the US and global economies or agricultural output, but rather continued to portray the Santa Clara Valley as an agricultural paradise that consistently would be able to produce crops that could be sold for a good price. The main deception, the truth about the inconsistent water supply, was

not public knowledge until years later, when many other problems that plagued the colony revealed themselves.⁴⁷

Despite oncoming problems, the colony prospered enough that it expanded to the East Coast in 1919, when the company opened an office in New York.⁴⁸ By 1921 the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company had begun to sell stock nationwide, and it eventually had stockholders throughout the United States and as far away as Canada.⁴⁹ Shares started at a dollar, with a minimum of ten shares and a maximum of ten thousand shares available per person. Initially, 250,000 shares of stock were available, one share for every ten dollars of estimated company land value. Thus, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company valued its landholdings at \$2,500,000.⁵⁰ The company guaranteed dividends of no less than 5 percent per year; purchasing stock was easy because advertisements in the *California Eagle* and *Chicago Defender* included a form for mail orders.⁵¹

The community also began attracting colonists from beyond California. By early 1920 community members also hailed from Texas and Wisconsin, and in 1922 a group of affluent African Americans from Tulsa joined the community. These eleven black entrepreneurs, with a total net worth of five million dollars, visited offices in Los Angeles and caravanned south to Baja California with colony organizers, Ensenada officials, and even Mexican president Álvaro Obregón himself.⁵² Later another caravan left Bristow, Oklahoma, to bring more settlers, feed, and equipment to support these colonists.⁵³ The new members brought an influx of cash and new energy to the colony. The most prominent African American of the new group, J. B. Key, took over as president of the board of directors when Theodore Troy fell ill.⁵⁴ Although Key's finances may have helped the colony initially, he also began looking to start other communities, in Tampico and San Luis Potosí in 1923, and may have been using his position in the colony to try to solidify connections in Mexico.⁵⁵ Tampico and San Luis Potosí were located at the heart of the Mexican oil belt, and relations between the United States and Mexico at this time were strained, particularly over Mexico's natural resources. Key's endeavors caused a backlash that included African Americans being barred at the US-Mexican border. Although the Mexican government later claimed any detained Little Liberia colonists had been stopped accidentally, resultant negative press coverage might have prevented some African Americans from investing in the community. This was the first publicly known problem involving a member of the colony.

These border problems, however, did not stop Little Liberia's leaders from attempting to develop the colony further and move into other

economic opportunities. Starting in 1923, Little Liberia began to expand beyond agricultural production. Perhaps an increase in funds from the Oklahoma African Americans now involved in the community or from stock spurred this change. Or perhaps it was the lower-than-expected yield of their crops or the economic downturn in the agricultural sector. Along with continuing agricultural work, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company focused on new plans to become a tourist destination by building additional roads, a hotel, a sanatorium, and a bank. The sanatorium and bank, established in Ensenada, would be co-owned by Mexicans and African Americans.⁵⁶ From this point forward, the company consistently looked for additional options besides farming for economic advancement, and many of these ideas included cross-racial cooperation with Mexicans.⁵⁷ For a time, Baja California officials and the Mexican government reciprocated this eagerness for collaboration. President Obregón often connected with the colonists, and Hugh Macbeth reciprocated by requesting that the US government officially recognize Obregón's presidency, which President Harding had refused to do.⁵⁸ But Obregón's successor, Plutarco Elías Calles, actively acted against the colony and supported new legislation in 1926 requiring all African Americans to obtain special passports before entering Mexico.⁵⁹ An increase in Chinese and Japanese immigration also meant heightened border security and increased uneasiness about racial integration in Baja, which added to existing tensions. Difficulties with immigration into Mexico would be the first of many problems that would ultimately cause the downfall of the colony.

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The colony fully and publicly began to fall apart in 1927. Surprisingly, the depressed global agricultural prices that defined the 1920s and contributed to the Great Depression was not the main culprit. Rather, it was mismanagement, illegal land purchasing procedures, and mishandling of funds and debt. Articles in the *California Eagle*, under the headline "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company" and written by members of the Little Liberia board of directors, told the public about the various problems within the colony.⁶⁰ When some money raised in Los Angeles in a car raffle for the bank and sanatorium was not delivered to the company and the car for the raffle was not delivered to the winner, directors and stockholders of the company called for an audit.⁶¹ The company had not exercised an audit since its inception, and the information in this audit became the point around which the colony collapsed. The audit uncovered that Hugh Macbeth had used company funds to pay for expenditures not related to the colony or had withdrawn excessive money for colony-related trips.⁶² Macbeth was also accused of

lying to the board of directors, and at one point he was concerned enough about the backlash from the audit and subsequent press coverage that he appeared at a board meeting with two police officers. In addition, the audit and subsequent board meetings revealed the incompetence of the board, with one member admitting that the directors had simply fallen into line or “acquiesced” to projects without fully investigating them.⁶³ This mismanagement and mishandling of funds, regardless whether a single individual or several were culpable, highlights the fact that Little Liberia did not collapse just because of a downward trend in agribusiness but also due to difficulties within the colony itself.

The final blow to the colony came with the public realization that the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company did not in fact own the land that it had been selling to colonists. Although lawyers from both sides of the border had looked at the land documents prior to their completion, the purchase was still not in accord with Mexican law.⁶⁴ Due to Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, only Mexican citizens could officially own land, so any foreigners needed to buy land through a Mexican citizen trustee.⁶⁵ In the case of Little Liberia, the Mexican trustee for purchasing land acted only for the board of directors, not for the land company itself. Consequently, it was determined that the land was owned by the seven men on the board of directors and not by the company as a whole. This meant that the company had no legal authority to redistribute the land, which it had been doing for ten years. With this in mind, President Calles seized the land.⁶⁶ By the end of 1927 the land company went bankrupt, with over \$78,000 in debt, a sum equivalent to \$14,000,000 today.⁶⁷

After Calles deemed the land purchase invalid, many of the prominent members of the community returned to the United States. James Littlejohn, Theodore Troy, and Claudius Troy were the only members of the colony who had applied for Mexican citizenship, so they were the only people eligible to retain ownership of the land.⁶⁸ Littlejohn and his wife were the only colonists who remained in Mexico. They kept full possession of the Santa Clara Ranch and continued to work the farmland, hiring local residents as hands. Littlejohn also opened the James Littlejohn Motel, which catered to African American tourists.⁶⁹ Littlejohn lived the rest of his life in Ensenada but maintained his connections across the border. In 1952, *Ebony* Magazine published a four-page article on Littlejohn, “Ensenada’s Lone Negro,” after he was named citizen of the year by the city. As in previous years, when the colony was still operating, he occasionally attended church in Los Angeles and kept in touch with Los Angeles culture and politics through US newspapers. He preferred to live

in Mexico, though, *Ebony* reported, because there he “never had trouble because of his race.”⁷⁰ He was able to remain connected to Los Angeles, keep his identity as an African American, work as a farmer, and yet avoid US racism by living in Baja California. Even though the colony as an entity did not eventually succeed at enacting widespread social change through massive crop sales in the United States, James Littlejohn’s life in Baja California hints that perhaps parts of the dream of Little Liberia were attainable at an individual level. Littlejohn became an important person in Ensenada. Although Little Liberia did not create any broad, lasting changes in race relations in the United States, much less its economic system, the dream of social change through mass production in the borderlands itself is reason to reflect on this unique community.

NOTES

1. “Rancher Likes America but Prefers to Live in Mexico,” *Ebony*, October 1952, 88.
2. “Gov. Esteban Cantu of Lower California a Man of the Hour,” *California Eagle*, May 12, 1917.
3. For more information on black farmers and land ownership, see Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
4. “Baja,” “Baja California” and “Lower California” are synonymous terms. In the early twentieth century, “Lower California” was used commonly in the United States to refer to what we now call Baja California. I use mostly the latter term to avoid confusion with the lower part of the US state of California, better known as Southern California.
5. Delores Nason McBroome, “Harvests of Gold: African American Boosterism, Agriculture, and Investment in Allensworth and Little Liberia,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, ed. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 156.
6. For more information about Marcus Garvey and Black Nationalism, see Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
7. Later, colony organizers attempted to open a co-owned Mexican and African American bank, a hotel, and a sanatorium in Ensenada, wanting to attract tourists from the United States and further connect with their community neighbors in Baja California. However, even with these other projects underway in 1923, Little Liberia was still, first and foremost, a black agricultural community in Mexico with very specific economic and cultural goals.
8. A primary reason why African Americans looked outside of the South for other options in the decades after emancipation was the existence of the Black Codes, and later Jim Crow laws, in the South, which permeated all aspects of life there. Although Jim Crow was a national system, it was much stronger in the South, and many African Americans saw migration to agricultural communities in places like Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Indiana, and states farther west as a means of simultaneously leaving this oppression behind and starting a new economic venture. These communities were precursors to black agricultural communities formed after 1900, such as Little Liberia and Allensworth, California. For more

information on post-Reconstruction black rural communities, see Stephen A. Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977); Leroy Meyers, “Land of the Fair God: The Development of Black Towns in Oklahoma, 1870–1907” (master’s thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2016).

9. A main reason that production, rather than land ownership, was Little Liberia’s focus could have been because colony members initially could not own the land outright. Because the 1917 Mexican Constitution forbade foreigners from owning Mexican land, the Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company purchased the land through a third party. In order to own the land fully, the colonists needed to obtain Mexican citizenship, which was not a goal for most of the colonists.
10. Macbeth, a high-profile lawyer from Los Angeles, was the secretary of the board of directors until the colony’s last few years. He later became well known in the Los Angeles black community for defending black boxers in a lawsuit against the Hollywood Legion Boxing Stadium, proving that they had been barred from fighting because of their race. “Rites Held for Famed Attorney,” *Chicago Defender*, November 3, 1956.
11. “Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico,” *California Eagle*, October 22, 1921. Main crops in the South included tobacco, cotton, and rice, whereas in the West there was a higher focus on wheat, nuts, fruits, and vegetables.
12. The economy of California’s Imperial Valley was largely based on agriculture, and in the late 1910s and early 1920s there were hundreds of black agricultural workers there. For more on California agribusiness, and agriculture in the Imperial Valley in particular, see Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900–1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014).
13. “Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico”; “Turning the Soil in Santa Clara,” *California Eagle*, January 3, 1920; “Santa Clara Land Campaign to Open in Imperial Valley,” *California Eagle*, February 14, 1920. The main voice of support was R. M. Massey and his son Dewey Massey, both from Rivers, California. In 1920 R. M. Massey publicly announced that he would be purchasing more land due to high production numbers. Littlejohn’s primary aide in the search for farmers was a veteran Imperial Valley farmer who had already purchased forty acres of land in the colony for himself.
14. “Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land,” *California Eagle*, March 30, 1918.
15. “Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico.”
16. Racial uplift ideology focused on possibility of middle- and upper-class African Americans using their financial status to better conditions for the entire race. For more on racial uplift ideology, including its limits and gender dynamics, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
17. One of the main fallacies that Little Liberia colonists were attempting to correct was that the dearth of African American advancement in the United States indicated a racial deficiency. African Americans contended with an economic ceiling in the United States, a ceiling that was used in an argument that blacks were less intelligent, ill-fitted for business, and a less developed people. Economic, political, and educational opportunities were far less prevalent for blacks in the United States than for whites. Little Liberia organizers saw the community as an opportunity to display what African Americans could accomplish as a race.

18. "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico."
19. By 1964, agriculture in Baja California was the most important part of the Mexican economy; the state's agricultural per capita productivity was higher than agricultural productivity elsewhere in Mexico. For more information on the importance of agriculture and livestock in Baja California, see David Allen Henderson, *Agriculture and Livestock Raising in the Evolution of the Economy and Culture of the State of Baja California, Mexico* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1964), 58–60; Sterling Evans, "Baja and Beyond," this volume, chap. 7.
20. "Lower California Organization No Joke," *California Eagle*, February 7, 1920.
21. In Mexico, especially in the northern part of Baja California, in addition to black, Spanish, Indigenous, and mixed-race people there were also Russians, Chinese, Arab, and Japanese immigrants, and the population included Mennonites, Mormons, and Jews.
22. Theodore W. Troy and Hugh E. Macbeth, "Why Not Settle in Mexico," *Chicago Defender*, August 20, 1921, 13.
23. "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1918.
24. This is especially important in the context of the Mexican Revolution, since oppression and economic displacement were key factors in the beginning of the rebellion against the dictator Porfirio Díaz.
25. "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race," 15.
26. For additional information on race in Mexico around the time of Mexican Revolution, see John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For more information on the relationship between Americans, the US Government, the Mexican Government, and the issue of land, see John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
27. "Harvest Big Wheat Crop," *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1920.
28. For examples of cross-border communities, community making, and state making, see Geraldo L. Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Rachel St John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
29. One of W. E. B. Du Bois's most often-cited ideas is double consciousness, which explains that African Americans in the United States unconsciously think two ways, both as Americans and as blacks. As Americans, the colony's directors perceived the border as a protective wall against systematic inequality. As blacks, the members saw no problem with keeping community ties back in Los Angeles. Space, theoretically, was not an issue.
30. For more information on race in Los Angeles, see Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
31. For more information on industrialists in Mexico, especially filibusters, see Joseph Allen Stout, *Schemers and Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848–1921* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002).
32. "Lower California Flashes," *California Eagle*, April 13, 1918.
33. The Peninsular Range is a set of maintains that runs from Southern California through Baja California, beginning south of the Sierra Nevada.

34. A similar example of this occurrence is the difference between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains. The Rockies, like the mountains in Southern California, are tipped mountains that do not create well sources of water, and therefore the surrounding areas are not very suitable for agriculture. The Appalachian Mountains, however, are basin-tipped, which is a large factor in the fertile nature of some areas of Georgia and Virginia.
35. "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara."
36. Ibid.
37. "Harvest of Gold Awaits in Lower California Says L.A. Man," *California Eagle*, October 12, 1921. Sullivan also claimed that British and American agents were competing for rights to the land.
38. Bass ran the *California Eagle* for decades, and although this was early in her career she had already emerged as an important leader in the black community in the West. Bass later ran for vice president under the Progressive Party ticket in 1952. In her memoirs, Bass noted that she and Troy shared "hopes and ambitions to build a great city in which [African Americans] had a stake for themselves and posterity." Although she was most likely talking about a city in the United States, this ambition reveals itself in Little Liberia and the push to make it a viable option for black economic growth. Charlotta A Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C.A. Bass, 1960).
39. "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land"; "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico." Under a previous owner in 1917, the Vallecitos crop had sold for \$57,502.80, which if they used every acre of the property for wheat production, the yield would have been just over four dollars an acre. Without taking into account materials, start-up costs, fluctuating crop yield and market prices, as well as money needed to build homes and feed and clothe families, based on the same crop prices for the Santa Clara acreage, it would have taken roughly four years for colonists to break even on the property purchase. Taking into account all other factors, it would most likely have taken much longer, but colony organizers did not openly mention the amount of time it would take to break even on property purchases.
40. "Plan Little Liberia in Old Mexico." Not for reproduction or distribution
41. In 1921 a revised list of crops appeared. Hugh Macbeth said, "The company has made a study of its agricultural and horticultural possibilities and is convinced that the best results will be secured by growing livestock and such crops as walnuts, deciduous and citrus fruits, alfalfa, potatoes and melons." This implies that the colonists either did not have as much agricultural experience and information as initially advertised, or they were changing their plans for crops based on the drought that began in 1920 and the agricultural economic downturn in 1921. Ibid.
42. "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land"; "Mexico Offers Land to Members of Race." Not for reproduction or distribution
43. "President Troy Moves into Mexico," *California Eagle*, December 6, 1919.
44. "The Furrows Are Flying in Lower California," *California Eagle*, December 13, 1919. Troy had worked in real estate in Los Angeles prior to moving to the colony and joining the board of directors. His two sons, Owen and Claudius, both spent time in the community, accompanied by their families.
45. "Harvest Big Wheat Crop."
46. "Turning the Soil in Santa Clara."
47. J. H. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company," *California Eagle*, March 11, 1927.
48. "Lower California Notes," *California Eagle*, July 26, 1919.

49. This stock was authorized by the corporate commissioner of the State of California. See "Opportunities in a New Country," *California Eagle*, October 1, 1921; "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?," *Chicago Defender*, November 12, 1921; "Lower California Stock Campaign Breaks All Records," *California Eagle*, October 15, 1921; "Cactus Kate III' Makes Trip to Lower California," *California Eagle*, October 29, 1921.
50. "Opportunities in a New Country."
51. "Why Not Invest Your Money in Lower California?"; Troy and Macbeth, "Why Not Settle in Mexico." For similar US and Canadian investment and boosterism for the Yaqui Valley of Sonora, Mexico, see Sterling Evans, "Yaquis vs. Yanquis: An Environmental and Historical Comparison of Coping with Aridity in Southern Sonora," *Journal of the Southwest* 40 (Autumn 1998): 363–96.
52. "Oklahoma Delegation Visits Los Angeles," *California Eagle*, May 20, 1922.
53. Ibid.
54. "Colored Millionaires En Route to Mexico City," *California Eagle*, May 27, 1922.
55. "Mexican Anti-Negro Propaganda Exposed," *California Eagle*, March 3, 1923.
56. "\$100,000 Negro Sanitarium to Be Established in Mexico," *California Eagle*, May 12, 1923. These new plans were primarily for buildings in Ensenada, since the sulfur springs there were known for their healing properties.
57. "To Have Benefit for Lower California Sanitarium," *California Eagle*, August 17, 1923.
58. "What the International Community League Is Doing to Encourage Immigration and Development by Negroes," *California Eagle*, January 6, 1923. Álvaro Obregón took power in 1920 via a military revolt and was in office until Plutarco Calles was elected to office in 1924. As of January 1923, the US Government had not officially recognized Obregón's presidency.
59. McBroome, "Harvests of Gold," 169.
60. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company."
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. "Launch Big Drive for Lower California Land."
65. Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution states, "Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican companies have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, and their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions for the exploitation of mines or of waters. The State may grant the same right to foreigners, provided they agree before the Ministry of Foreign Relations to consider themselves as nationals in respect to such property, and bind themselves not to invoke the protection of their governments in matters relating thereto; under penalty, in case of noncompliance with this agreement, of forfeiture of the property acquired to the Nation."
66. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company."
67. McBroome, "Harvests of Gold," 170. For present-day monetary value conversion, see MeasuringWorth, <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>.
68. Stevens, "War Declared on Lower California Mexican Land and Development Company."
69. Wendell P. Alston, *The Negro Travelers' Green Book* (New York: Victor H. Green, 1956), 70; "Mexican Rancher: Ensenada's Lone Negro Male Is Hamlet's Leading Citizen," *Ebony*, October 1952, 86.
70. "Rancher Likes America But Prefers to Live in Mexico," 88.