

CITY OF OAKLAND

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## *AGENDA REPORT*

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**DATE:** 5/2/19  
**TO:** City Councilmembers and Members of the Rules and Legislation Committee  
**FROM:** Councilmember Noel Gallo  
**SUBJECT:** Renaming Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

Councilmember Noel Gallo recommends that the City Council adopt:

### **RESOLUTION RENAMING NICOL PARK TO GWEN JACKSON PARK**

### **SUMMARY**

Councilmember Gallo strongly supports the renaming of Nicol Park located on the corner of Nicol St. and Coolidge Ave as Gwen Jackson Park per the process established by Res. No. 77967 to honor the life and contributions of Gwen Jackson to the City of Oakland.

The resolution "Gwen Jackson Park" fulfills the criteria and intent of the naming program to honor citizens who have made exemplary contributions to the residents of Oakland as set forth in City Council Resolution No. 65024 C.M.S

### **OUTCOME**

The legislation will mandate the City Administrator, Public Works and Department of Parks and Recreation of the City of Oakland to carry out all appropriate and necessary procedures with the renaming of Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park and placement of sign(s) or plaque(s) and on any city records to that effect on per Res. 65024 C.M.S.

### **LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

City Council Resolution No. 65024 C.M.S., the adopted procedure for designating official names for municipal (public) facilities in the City of Oakland, allows memorializing a living person only under special circumstances such as "overwhelming belief (public opinion) that the designee would probably be honored for that facility post-humously" and "the honoree has given extraordinary service to the City or the community."

On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Office of Councilmember Noel Gallo received a letter from the 21X/Y NCPC group requesting the Councilmember's support to rename Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park. The group very pointedly understood that per City Council Resolution No 65024, no park shall be renamed if already named after an individual. Through thorough research it was clear that Nicol Park had not been named after any other individual and therefore could be named after long-time resident, community member and Nicol Park founder, Gwen Jackson.

Gwen Jackson, who died July 2018 at age 80, dedicated herself to improving our community to the last day of her life. She initiated the work that transformed Nicol Park from a vacant lot to the children's playground it now is, first by holding community events in the park and then leading the effort to secure grants that funded the play structure, colorful tiles, mural, and planter boxes that now grace the park. For years Ms. Gwen ran free summer Saturday programs for children, with arts, drama, science discovery, and play. Many in our community have been involved – adopting the park, keeping it clean, planting and watering flowers, helping with the summer program, providing toys and art supplies. None of this would have happened without Gwen Jackson's vision, leadership and optimism.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST**

Neighbors from the 21X/Y NCPC came together after the death of Gwen Jackson in 2018 to rename the park that Ms. Jackson founded. They met with each other and over the course of a few months conducted research and outreach for the renaming of the park. The purpose of the research was to ascertain whether Nicol Park was specifically named in honor or memory of a family or person, to determine whether we could proceed with our proposal to change the park's name. The research process included phone conversations with local historians and several hours at the Oakland History Room looking at Block Books, Directories and newspaper microfiches. Their research concluded that Nicol Park is not itself directly named after a family or individual. As recently as 1910, there was a residence on the corner that now contains the park. When the park was created, it was evidently just given the name of the street it was on, for convenience and they could therefore proceed to name the park Gwen Jackson Park.

Per the process established by resolution 65024 to designate name of public facilities, the constituents of 21X/Y NCPC presented to the Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (OPRAC) on March 29, 2019. The OPRAC approved of the renaming of the park given the group's extensive research of the park's history and the moving presentation on Gwen Jackson's life and contributions to the community and City of Oakland.

### **COORDINATION**

This report and legislation have been reviewed by Department of Park and Recreation.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The funds for the manufacturing and associated costs to place the sign will be fundraised by the group of constituents from the 21X/Y NCPC.

**SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

**Economic:** No direct economic opportunities have been identified.

**Environmental:** There are no impacts to environmental opportunities associated with this report.

**Social Equity:** This resolution intends to promote social equity by memorializing a person of the community who was a local resident of the Oakland community.

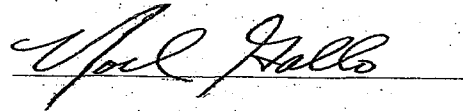
**CEQA**

The renaming of an existing public park is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Mar Velez, Office of Councilmember Noel Gallo at (510) 238-6126.

Respectfully submitted,

Councilmember Noel Gallo, District 5



Prepared by:  
Mar Velez, Office of  
Councilmember Noel Gallo, District 5

**Attachments:**

- A – Proposed Resolution
- B – OPRAC Report
- C – Interview Log
- D – 2001 Oakland Tribune Article
- E – Nicol Park Name History

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*Amir Canjan*  
City Attorney's Office

## OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_ C.M.S.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER NOEL GALLO

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### RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE RENAMING OF NICOL PARK TO GWEN JACKSON PARK

**WHEREAS**, Nicol Park is located on the corner of Coolidge Avenue and Nicol Avenue in Council District 5; and

**WHEREAS**, Ms. Gwen Jackson initiated the work that transformed Nicol Park from a blighted vacant lot known for drug dealing, to the children's playground used today by children in the community. Ms. Jackson first held community events in the lot and led efforts to secure grants that funded the play structure, colorful tiles, mural, and planter boxes that now grace the park; and

**WHEREAS**, for years Ms. Gwen ran free summer Saturday programs in the park for children, with arts, drama, science discovery, and play; and

**WHEREAS**, Ms. Gwen Jackson dedicated herself to improving our community to the last day of her life. Even though she did not have much, she was determined to contribute, and to provide local children with opportunities she herself had lacked. Ms. Gwen served on local boards, and founded FACE (Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange), offering free tutoring and classes in sewing, arts, drama, and cooking; and

**WHEREAS**, Gwen Jackson died in July 2018 at age 80; and

**WHEREAS**, with this renaming, the neighbors and friends of the park honor her and the difference she made in the neighborhood. Many in the community have been involved – adopting the park, keeping it clean, planting and watering flowers, helping with the summer program, providing toys and art supplies. None of this would have happened without Gwen Jackson's vision, leadership and optimism; and

**WHEREAS**, Joanne Jasson and members of the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council 21 X/Y, Friends of Nicol Park, neighbors, and community members from City Council District 5 came together to commemorate the life and contributions of Ms. Gwen Jackson by renaming Nicol Park to 'Gwen Jackson Park'; and

**WHEREAS**, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission unanimously endorsed the staff recommendation to rename the park at its regular meeting on March 29, 2019; and

**WHEREAS**, the renaming of the park is in keeping with the criteria listed in Resolution No. 65024 C.M.S. on Designating Official Names for Municipal Facilities and Resolution No. 56600, Procedure for Designating Official Names for Park and Recreation Facilities in the City of Oakland; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**: That the Oakland City Council finds and determines that the renaming of Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park is consistent with City Council Resolution Nos. 65024 C.M.S. and 56600 C.M.S.; and be it

**FURTHER RESOLVED**: That the Oakland City Council directs the City Administrator to proceed with the designation of Gwen Jackson Park and the placement of sign(s) or plaque(s) to that effect.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA,

PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES - FORTUNATO BAS, GALLO, GIBSON MCELHANEY, KALB, REID, TAYLOR, THAO AND  
PRESIDENT KAPLAN

NOES -

ABSENT -

ABSTENTION -

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
LATONDA SIMMONS  
City Clerk and Clerk of the Council of the  
City of Oakland, California

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**CITY OF OAKLAND**  
**Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development**

**TO:** C.N.E. Corbin, Chair, Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission  
**FROM:** Gail McMillon, Parks, Recreation & Youth Development  
**DATE:** March 29, 2019  
**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION TO MAKE A RECOMMENDATION ON RENAMING NICOL PARK TO GWEN JACKSON PARK**

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**SUMMARY**

Staff received a request from Kate Chaplin on behalf of NCPC-21xy, neighbors, and community members from City Council District 5 "Upper Peralta Creek" neighborhood for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission to make a recommendation to the City Council Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee on renaming of Nicol Park located at the corner of Nicol Street and Coolidge Avenue, in honor and memory of Ms. Gwen Jackson (1937-2018), to Gwen Jackson Park. City Council Resolution No. 65024 (*See Exhibit A*) notes that honorific naming is appropriate when the honoree "initiated or contributed major time to the establishment of the project" or, has given "extraordinary service to the City or the community". This request and proposal has the full support of Councilmember Noel Gallo, District 5 (*See Exhibit B*).

**FISCAL IMPACT**

If the park renaming is authorized by the Oakland City Council, the community would like to replace the park sign with a newly designed sign reflecting the new park name. Fundraising efforts will be provided by community members or they will seek funding to request a grant from the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation to assist with replacement of the sign. The cost to retain the existing sign and replace only the name board will be provided by the Oakland Public Works Department.

**PROJECT / PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The requested project would rename Nicol Park in honor and memory of Ms. Gwen Jackson who led the effort to transform a vacant lot into the usable playground that is Nicol Park today (*See Exhibits C, D, E*). Naming the park after Gwen Jackson creates the opportunity to share the story of the impact she had on the park and the surrounding community. It would send a positive message to the neighborhood that residents who get involved and work to make things better for the community are honored. One community member wrote, "She provided me with a valuable living lesson on the power of persistence and a courageous heart."

Nicol Park was little more than a vacant lot, primarily used for drug dealing. Ms. Jackson began hosting community events, barbecues and activities for children, and engaged drug dealers to help keep the park clean and usable. Her consistent and generous presence changed the atmosphere and the drug dealers moved away. Ms. Jackson led neighbors in applying for grants to fund the play structures, mural, tilework and planter boxes that turned the site into the playground for children it now is. Ms. Jackson felt there was more to do. Every summer, she offered Saturday programs of art, drama, music and science discovery for neighborhood children free of charge. The day before she died, she was at the park, sharing her time, laughter, and love with the children.

### **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

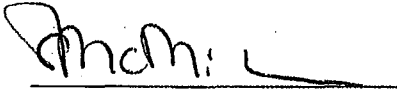
City Council Resolution No. 65024 cautions against changing the name of a facility already named for someone else. Extensive historical research indicates that the park's current name is that of its street, and not any family or individual. Neighbors extensively researched the history of Nicol Park and can attest that the park is *not* named after a person or family (*See Exhibit F*). Block Books from the Oakland History room confirm that, as recently as 1910, there were buildings on the lots on Nicol Avenue where the park currently stands. When the buildings were taken down and the empty lots turned into a park, the City undoubtedly named the park after its street, for convenience. Nicol Avenue has been in existence before the park was built and the park given the name of the original tract. Research back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was unable to identify any person or family likely to have been the owner.

Even though Ms. Jackson came from a life of poverty and struggle, she looked for how things could be better and what she could do to make that happen. She persisted in her determination to improve her community and provide local children with opportunities she herself had lacked. As community letters and testimonials, newspaper articles, and a documentary film attest, longtime resident Ms. Gwen Jackson gave unceasingly to the neighborhood and community in multiple ways (*See Exhibit G*). She served on local boards, founded a community center offering neighborhood children free after-school programs. She brought a park back to life and was determined to improve others' lives and offer opportunities she hadn't had. It was Gwen Jackson's leadership and vision that transformed a neglected vacant corner lot into the actively used children's playground that serves the neighborhood today, with a play structure, lovely tile walls, a mural and planter boxes. In addition, Ms. Jackson ran a free children's activity program every summer Saturday, offering crafts, games and her own love and wisdom for years. Ms. Jackson's contributions to the Upper Peralta (aka "Upper Fruitvale") neighborhood constitute the "unique or civic circumstances" as noted in City Council Resolution No. 65024.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission make a recommendation to the City Council Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee to rename Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park.

Respectfully submitted,



Prepared by: Gail McMillon  
Office Manager

/s/ Dana Riley

Approved by: Dana Riley  
Assistant Director

- ATTACHMENTS:
- Exhibit A – *City Council Resolution No. 65024*
  - Exhibit B – *Statement of Support from the Office of Councilmember Noel Gallo*
  - Exhibit C – *Newspaper Article: Fruitvale's Gwen Jackson (4 pages)*
  - Exhibit D – *Trust for Public Land Article: New Playground for Oakland*
  - Exhibit E – *Newspaper Article: About Face, funds and staying alive*
  - Exhibit F – *History of Nicol Park's Name*
  - Exhibit G – *Testimonials for Renaming Nicol Park for Gwen Jackson (5 pages)*



OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

RESOLUTION No. 65024 C. M. S.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER \_\_\_\_\_

*[Handwritten signature]*

RESOLUTION APPROVING AND ADOPTING A PROCEDURE FOR DESIGNATING OFFICIAL NAMES FOR MUNICIPAL (PUBLIC) FACILITIES IN THE CITY OF OAKLAND

WHEREAS, the City Council Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee of the City of Oakland has conducted a review of the procedure by which the City Council selects appropriate names for municipal facilities in the City of Oakland, other than Parks and Recreation facilities; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has directed that an official procedure be established for designating official names for public facilities in the City of Oakland; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council herewith approves and adopts the following procedure for naming public facilities in the City of Oakland:

1. Any individual or entity may initiate a proposal to name or rename a public facility in the City of Oakland.
2. All requests for naming and renaming public facilities in the City of Oakland shall be transmitted to the Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee, including requests by:
  - (a) individuals and public officials;
  - (b) clubs, civic groups, or neighborhood organizations;
  - (c) public agencies or governmental entities.
3. Any request to name or rename park and recreation facilities shall be referred to, or may be initiated by, the Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (OPRAC). The recommendation of the OPRAC shall be referred to the Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee.
4. The Rules and Procedures/Legislative Committee shall review all requests and recommend an appropriate name to the City Council. Special consideration will be rendered based upon the following criteria:
  - (a) a geographical area of the City or a significant historical event;
  - (b) an individual philanthropist, family, or estate name;
  - (c) unique or civic circumstances;

Exhibit A

- (d) memorialization of a living person, only under special circumstances as follows:
  - o the honoree contributed half or more of the cost of a major facility;
  - o the honoree initiated or contributed major time to the establishment of the project;
  - o overwhelming belief (public opinion) that the designee would probably be honored for that facility post-humously;
  - o if no other individual now living has, or is likely to have, greater public support for being honored at this specific site;
  - o the honoree has given extraordinary service to the City or the community;
  - o the honoree has attained national or international prominence and achievement.

Upon approval, the City shall limit its recognition of an honoree to one facility or portion thereof. Further, facilities named for a specific individual should rarely be renamed, although the City Council could be flexible in renaming facilities originally named for geographical areas, etc. A public hearing shall be conducted by the City Council prior to the official designation of any name for a public facility.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, DEC 1 1987, 19\_\_

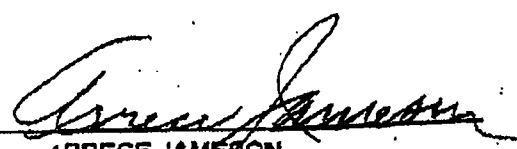
PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:  
 HASKELL

AYES— BAZILE, CANNON, ~~HASKELL~~, GILMORE, MOORE, OGAWA, RILES, SPEES, and PRESIDENT WILSON , - 8

NOES— NONE

ABSENT— CANNON, - 1

ABSTENTION— NONE

ATTEST:   
 ARRECE JAMESON  
 City Clerk and Clerk of the Council  
 of the City of Oakland, California

From: "Gallo, Noel" <[NGallo@oaklandca.gov](mailto:NGallo@oaklandca.gov)>  
To: JOANNE JASSON <[joannejasson@comcast.net](mailto:joannejasson@comcast.net)>, "Velez, Mar" <[MVelez@oaklandca.gov](mailto:MVelez@oaklandca.gov)>, NCPC Beats  
21X-Y <[ncpc21xy@gmail.com](mailto:ncpc21xy@gmail.com)>, "Chavez, Mayra A" <[MChavez@oaklandca.gov](mailto:MChavez@oaklandca.gov)>  
Date: February 25, 2019 at 11:00 AM  
Subject: RE: Park Rename: Request NGallo Support

Hi Joanne,

The Councilmember fully supports the effort to rename the park after Gwen Jackson. Please let me know what the next steps are and how CM Gallo's office can be helpful in this important effort.

Thank you,

Mar

# EAST BAY TIMES

Community News

## Fruitvale's Gwen Jackson busily tends to her 'Unfinished Business'

By **MARK HEDIN** | [mhedin@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:mhedin@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News Group  
PUBLISHED: March 3, 2017 at 10:03 am | UPDATED: March 3, 2017 at 10:33 am

OAKLAND — Nearing 80, Fruitvale's Gwen Jackson says, "I don't know how many more years God has for me on this Earth, but I would like to make it more fruitful."

Her track record of community work in Fruitvale is such that she was singled out for honors during Black History Month with an event at Peralta Hacienda.



Gwen Jackson says she'd like to help kids learn how to use their hands to do sewing and other fashion projects, using the skills she picked up in community colleges. But her home, she says, is too small to make that possible right now. (Photo by Alex Pergament)

Included in the program was a screening of "Unfinished Business: The Lives of Gwen." Afterward, she and filmmaker Jonathan Hoffman took questions from the audience about her life and hard times and accomplishments as a neighborhood activist.

"It was about me, so I didn't think anybody'd be interested. But we had a packed house, and it went over very well," Jackson said later in an interview.

Her focus is on helping provide for the young people in her world. For almost 10 years, she ran a community center that she founded in a house at Coolidge and Brookdale avenues. It offered kids — and seniors too, she added — classes in computer skills, gardening, bike repair and cooking.

"We were open every day; the city gave us a grant" that allowed them to pay rent and keep the lights on, she said. Around 2006, though, she had to give it up because of health issues and "I didn't have anybody to take it over," she said.

It was there that filmmaker Hoffman first encountered her. He was a graduate student at UC Berkeley doing field research for his dissertation, looking at racial and ethnic relations and neighborhood change in Oakland; he wrote in an email.

That first meeting was on the porch of the center. Soon, he was working there as a volunteer, teaching after-school video production classes.

"I couldn't have imagined that we'd end up working on a film project that would span more than a decade and evolve into a feature-length documentary. Nor could I have known that it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship," he wrote.

But it did. "She's an inspiration to me and countless others lucky enough to know her," he wrote. The film he has made about Jackson is a work in progress; he hopes to have a final cut this summer. In the meantime, he has screened rough cuts at the Oakland International and black film festivals, and in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore.

The film seemed to energize her, he said. "I really feel good in my body now," she said.

Jackson ran away from her Atlanta home when she was in seventh grade. She stuttered and said she felt ashamed and discouraged about her educational prospects. So she began working, mostly as a cook or housemaid in the homes of white people, she said.

In 1965, she came west with a man but the relationship did not last and she was back on her own. With lessons learned from her mother of "how not to be wasteful, and take care of our surroundings," she worked as a cook at a convalescent home and attended Laney and Alameda colleges, where she coordinated the first black student union and volunteered for the Black Panthers meal programs.

California, she said, "has been a dream for me. I was able to go back to school."

She earned an associate degree and a fashion art certificate and took workshops in grant writing. Jackson has not been able to use her fashion training, but she would like to start programs to share her knowledge with youngsters, she said. She has material and sewing machines, but no space to welcome students.

Her one-bedroom apartment is too small, she said. Jackson did manage to show some young people how to make blankets, though, and a large one they completed is on view at Peralta Hacienda.

The health care system has her feeling grateful, too. She credits MediCare and the Center for Elder Independence at the Eastmont Mall for keeping her healthy, and her church, Kingdom Builders at 7272 MacArthur Blvd., for supporting her, too.

"I want to go out there and learn to take what I already know and minister to help the community," she said. "There's a lot I would like to do."

But she has some other things going in the meantime.

A block up the street from her Fruitvale home, tiny Nicol Park sat neglected. "They had drug-selling, and people were afraid to go use the park," Jackson recalled. "That was a few years back. The park had gone down. Me and some seniors got together, and we started barbecuing and asked the drug dealers if they would keep the park clean and keep the paraphernalia out. And after a while, they left.

"My vision is to keep the park alive by having events and activities so they won't come back. We would love to have some assistance," Jackson said.

The city's department of Parks and Recreation provided a \$500 grant "so that we could have a little money to do the planning," she said.

"We had lunch for the kids and outreach for them so they would have something to do," she said. She oversees programs there from April to August.

"What we are trying to do is get people more involved in the neighborhood. People who would volunteer, people who would do community work," Jackson said.

"We would like to get some money to give older kids — middle-schoolers — a stipend for keeping the park clean. We'd like to get more participation and outreach to let people know what's going on.

"I'm 79. There's just so much I can do!"

+++++

THE  
TRUST  
FOR  
PUBLIC  
LAND

## New Playground for Oakland (CA)

January 11, 2001  
California

OAKLAND, CA—Oakland City Councilmember Dick Spees and Dr. Harry Edwards, Director of Oakland's Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, joined Fruitvale community leaders to cut the ribbon today on the newly rebuilt Nicol Park. The dignitaries were joined by students from Fruitvale Elementary School, their parents, other residents of Fruitvale, as well as representatives of the Trust for Public Land and the community group, Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange (FACE).

After the ceremony and performances, the playground was swarmed by children who later lined up for food that represented the diversity of the community—dim sum, fried chicken, Vietnamese spring rolls, agua frescas and cake.

The rebuilt playground is the second project of the Trust for Public Land's (TPL) Bay Area Community Parks and Playgrounds Program. The first project is the newly rebuilt Lincoln Playground in Oakland's Chinatown. TPL and the City of Oakland worked together to choose potential project sites. Nicol Park was chosen because it was in great need of improvements and served a low-to-moderate income community.

TPL secured funding for park improvements through the San Francisco Foundation and other sources and conducted a community design charette to come up with a design for a new play structure.

"We are very grateful to the San Francisco Foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and our other supporters for their generous funding of this project," remarked Garlen Capita, Program Manager for the Trust for Public Land.

EXHIBIT D

The Trust for Public Land held two community design workshops at Nicole Park. Members of the community were encouraged to give their feedback and ideas for the park design. The community's vision for the park was incorporated into a master plan for the new park design. TPL also held two workshops with students of Fruitvale Elementary School, and a second community design day to finalize the master plan for the new Nicol Park.

At the ceremony, TPL awarded Gwen Jackson, the Executive Director of FACE, TPL's first annual Bay Area Park and Open Space Stewardship Award. The \$500 cash gift and framed certificate was given to Jackson for her long-term work with the Fruitvale community to improve Nicol Park.

The Trust for Public Land is a national, nonprofit land conservation organization that works nationwide to conserve land for people. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 1.2 million acres of land including the creation or revitalization of hundreds of urban parks. In the San Francisco Bay Area, TPL has protected more than 20,000 acres including the King Estates Park and Skyline Ranch in Oakland.

<https://www.tpl.org/media-room/new-playground-oakland-ca>



## The Oakland Tribune, California – News Archives

### About FACE, funds and staying alive

April 11, 2002 - **Section:** Local

THE FRONT YARD AND FENCE are invitations to come inside and find out what's going on. Fliers, brochures and signs are posted everywhere. Information about child rearing, earthquake preparedness, parental stress. One flier is in Vietnamese, another in Cambodian. As I rang the bell at the **Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange (FACE)** community center on Coolidge Avenue, a woman came up the steps to get a brochure about a class she wanted to take.

"Let's go in here where we both can sit down," said Gwen Jackson, FACE executive director. A retired cook with gray dreadlocks and a smooth copper-colored complexion that belies her age, she has earned the title of neighborhood dynamo. She led me through the front room where dresses and coats hung on a clothes rack. The organization collects donated clothing and gives it away. It offers art classes, cookie baking, after-school tutoring and sewing classes for children.

FACE is about as grassroots as an organization can get. It grew out of an effort to reclaim Nicol Park, the little square of open space that is the only park in the area. Blighted and overgrown, it belonged to the drug dealers.

"The street was an open drug market," said Jackson. Eventually, the community couldn't stand it anymore. Neighbors established a phone tree and whenever they saw dealers out in cars or on bicycles, they called each other and the police. In 1998, they adopted the park.

"It was something we all could do," Jackson explained.

At first it was as simple as a group of grandparents going to sit in the park. And then the children began to come. "The little kids couldn't believe they could use the park. It had never been a park for them."

The adults even asked the people selling drugs to help them keep the park clean. "People knew them. Some of them were children of people in the neighborhood. They were pretty cooperative. Even drug dealers want a clean park for their children."

Neighborhood artists helped the children paint a mural at the park, and the Trust for Public Land funded its restoration. Last year, the spruced-up little park, complete with a bright yellow, green and blue jungle gym and newly planted grass, was officially reopened.

It sounds like an urban neighborhood story with a fairy-tale ending. And most urban neighborhood stories don't have fairy tale endings. The victim of the city's first homicide of the year was shot across the street from the park. Jackson worries the park could revert to what it was.

"We have to keep programs going in the park and keep it alive. If we leave it alone, it will go back. It wouldn't take much for that to happen."

On April 20, FACE will sponsor an Earth Day celebration. Neighbors will clean the perimeters of the park, including the streets leading to Fruitvale Elementary School. They will finish up with a party in the park with food cooked by neighbors and singing and dancing performed by neighborhood children.

And there's always another challenge. The funding that covers the rent at the FACE center runs out this month. Jackson and the FACE advisory board have been fund-raising and looking for other sources of funding.

"I've written seven grants and haven't gotten a yes yet," she said. Expressing the classic dilemma of nonprofits, Jackson said grant writing and fund raising have taken her away from program development. "What I've discovered is you can't really do this with volunteers. You need a staff."

Jackson emphasized the neighborhood campaign is not a one-woman operation. "The biggest thing I did was to be consistent. To just keep on it and keep on it."

The park and the neighborhood children have become her mission.

"The kids are not exposed to things. That's why they go wrong. There is so little for them to experience. I think as old as I am, I am just realizing what I can do in my life. How many young people will die before they realize their own potential? Or go to jail? They know they can do more than what people are expecting them to do," she said.

Jackson pulled out a picture of a smiling girl in a bright green skirt. "She made that herself. She was very proud," Jackson said.

As she walked me to the door, she saw a bag of coffee mugs and glass containers someone had left on the porch while we were talking inside. "Oh, look what they donated. This will be very nice for someone."

*Brenda Payton's column appears on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.*

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## **Nicol Park – History of the park’s name**

March 2019

### **Overview:**

Nicol Park is located at the Northwest corner of Coolidge Ave. and Nicol Ave.

The purpose of this research was to ascertain whether Nicol Park was specifically named in honor or memory of a particular family or person, in order to determine whether we could proceed with our proposal to change the park’s name. The research process included phone conversations with local historians and several hours at the Oakland History Room looking at Block Books, Directories and newspaper microfiches.

### **Conclusion:**

Nicol Park is not itself directly named after a family or individual. As recently as 1910, there was a residence on the corner that now contains the park. When the park was created, it was evidently just given the name of the street it was on, for convenience.

### **Research Detail**

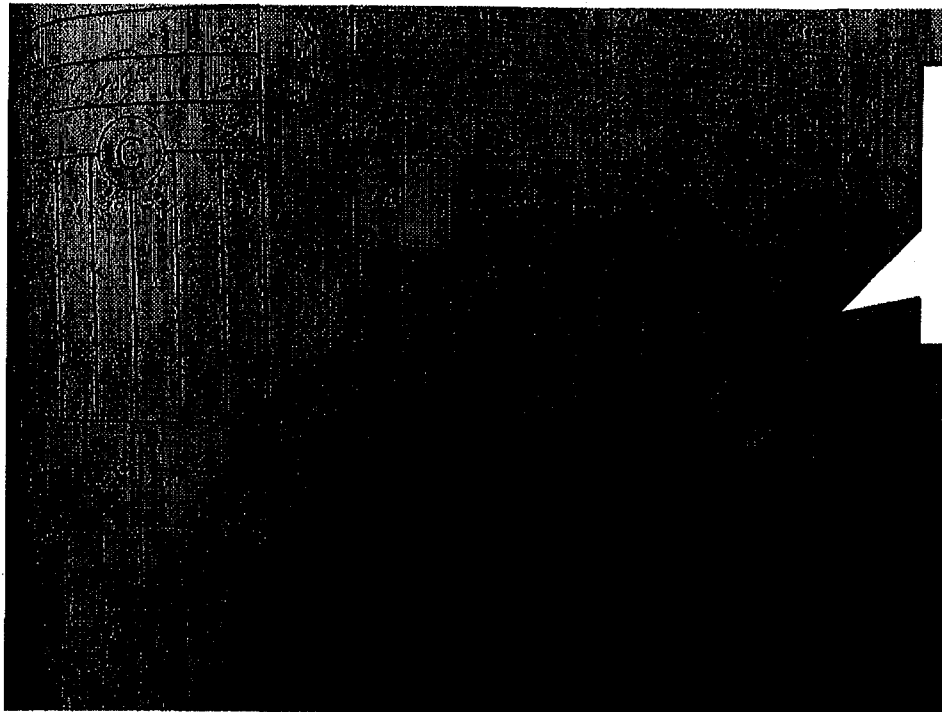
The primary source for local history is a booklet by “Quentin”, an Oakland librarian, now deceased. Per City Historian Betty Martin and also local historian Dennis Evanosky, that booklet has no definitive information about Nicol Ave. It merely states that it is, “a street in the de Wolf tract, 1891” (ie a part of the tract filed by William de Wolf in 1891).

In subsequent conversation with local historian Dennis Evanosky, he speculated a Nicol family at some point owned and maybe lived on that nearby hill. But he advised there is no mention of them in the 1870 or 1880 census data. This was later re-affirmed by our direct research in city directories and block books going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> c at the Main Library. The “Nicol Tract” appears in 1900 and 1910 information, but no specific family or owner could be found. Dennis Evanosky reported that he had done extensive research into the de Wolfe family hoping to find someone with a first- or family-name of “Nicol”, to identify origin similar to Capp or Schuyler or Alice streets, but was unable to find anything.

Our direct research in the City Room of Oakland’s Main Library included review of Directories and Block Books going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Directories: 1870, 1875, 1910 – these listed persons with the last name of “Nicol” but, as noted previously by local historians, there was no visible connection between any of them and this property.
- Block Books: 1889 (Brooklyn), 1899, 1902, 1908, 1910
- Newspaper records searching on “Nicol” going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Block Books indicate that residences stood on the site of the current Nicol Park (see image below). While Nicol Avenue was in existence in 1899, there was no park until sometime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems fairly clear that the Park was simply given the name of its street, and the origin of its name is equally murky. One block book mentions a “Nicol Tract”, however there is no Nicol of that era who shows up or could be connected to this area as owner of this land. And any mention of individuals named Nicol did not proliferate, i.e., there is no indication that any family remains who might be connected, even to Nicol Avenue.



The 1910 Block Book  
showing residences at  
the site of the current  
Nicol Park, at the  
corner of Nicol &  
Peralta (now Coolidge)  
Avenues

# OAKLAND DISCOVERY CENTERS

2521 High Street  
Oakland, CA 94601



March 9, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I had the pleasure of working with Gwen Jackson at the Summer Saturday events she held at Nicol Park over the years. The Discovery Center would provide hands on activities to youth stomp rockets, motorized fans, balloon cars, bubble wands and simple musical instruments. Ms. Jackson was always enthusiastic about the projects we brought, and she wanted to learn as much as she could about each activity. She was always hospitable, greeting everyone who walked by and conversing freely and openly with them with her carefree persona. Working beside her I came to know Ms. Jackson as a staunch community organizer who played an integral part in getting Nicol Park renovated, making it safer and friendlier for the neighborhood children. She was a hard worker and her dedication to organizing various community members and organizations to provide services and activities such as arts and craft, science, videography, to the neighborhood youth was admirable. Her tireless work to help her community by creating positive community events at Nicol Park will be missed. With the renaming of Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park the City of Oakland can honor the years of hard work she dedicated to the community and the people she cherished.

Sincerely,

Dawn Samaniego  
Program Coordinator  
Oakland Discovery Centers

## **Testimonial for Renaming Nicol Park for Gwen Jackson**

**November 2018**

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to request that Nicol Park be renamed for my friend and community leader Gwen Jackson. I believe that this is a fitting honor and recognition for a woman who was truly committed to making our community richer for the children living here.

I first met Gwen 2 years ago, after her friend Joanne Jasson asked for support at a community meeting. I agreed to help transport Gwen and her supplies each summer Saturday morning to Nicol Park for the children's summer camp that she and Joanne hosted.

Each Saturday morning for the past 2 summers, I would arrive at Gwen's Nicol St. apartment, and load Gwen, her walker, and her supplies into my van. I'll never forget the first time Gwen walked out of her apartment with her little crock pot full of hotdogs she'd cooked for the children. Her dedication and enthusiasm were clear in that moment. Each week, she provided snacks, art supplies, games, and most importantly, love for the children in the neighborhood.

These past 2 summers, up until the day she died, I witnessed Gwen's devotion to the children of our community. The last time I helped her up to the park, there were several toddlers playing there as we arrived. Gwen was so delighted to see them. She spoke to the children and their parents so lovingly as I set up the art supplies and snacks for the day. As I made to leave, she opened her arms and said, "Come give me a hug!" I did, of course, and as I walked away, she thanked me for my help. I left feeling loved and appreciated, as I did every Saturday after having time with Gwen.

She worked hard to get the planter boxes at Nicol Park rebuilt, and had grown many plants outside her small apartment in anticipation of the day we could bring them to the park for children to plant.

Sadly, Gwen didn't live to see the plants placed in the boxes, but on the first Saturday after her death, I carried the plants to the park, where a group of 8 children were waiting for her. I explained to the children that Gwen was gone, and that I had come to plant the flowers in her honor. The children asked to help, and were delighted to hear me talk about her love for the community. "I miss her already," said one young girl.

The flowers Gwen started are thriving in the new planter box. I speak to them every time I drive past the corner park, and smile when I think of Gwen.

Please do me and our community the favor of granting this request. I can think of no more perfect way to honor someone who lived her last day sharing her love with the children of her community.

Sincerely,

Austin Vaile  
3320 Bona St.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
auvaile11@gmail.com

Exhibit G

## Testimonials for Renaming Nicol Park for Gwen Jackson Peralta Hacienda Board of Directors & Staff

**Ben Glickstein** [bglickstein@gmail.com](mailto:bglickstein@gmail.com) – Oct 30, 2018

**Member of Board, Peralta Hacienda**

Gwen Jackson was a true champion of the importance of parks and play in East Oakland. She transformed Nicol Park into a place that was all too rare in the city: a haven for children to play and feel safe. She also blessed nearby Peralta Hacienda Park with the same effective leadership and vision. The community knew Gwen as the true force behind a safe, clean Nicol Park. It would be a beautiful tribute to her to rename the park in her honor. It would also send a message to other residents of Fruitvale that locals who get involved for the betterment of the community are honored for their contributions.

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**Inshirah Berakah** <[inshirah@peraltahacienda.org](mailto:inshirah@peraltahacienda.org)> - Oct 30, 2018

**Education Program Director, Peralta Hacienda**

I will never forget the day that I met Ms. Gwen, she was escorting Ben Glickstein, who is now board president at Peralta Hacienda, into our neighborhood. I lived right around the corner from the Peralta Hacienda on Salisbury. One afternoon, I happened to be getting something out of my car, and looked up to see an elderly African-American woman with a walker, coming down the hill with a young white man, as they approached they both greeted me warmly, and Gwen asked me if I had ever been into the museum. To which I replied that I had not, they asked if I was interested in participating in a neighborhood tour docent program. I had always loved history, and was on maternity leave from a teaching job, so I had availability. I decided to take them up on the offer, and participate. Her dedication to bringing more people from the community into the organization, paid off. Many of the people who went through the training are still involved, and doing the work that she started. From my position as a community tour leader, I went on to work with Peralta's summer camp a few years later, and as the director of educational programs full time this year! Peralta isn't just a job to all of us, its a really a big diverse extended family, and Ms. Gwen was like a fairy godmother that day, strolling down my street with her silver walker, handing out blessings to those who were ready to receive. Everytime I saw her she made me laugh with her sharp wit, and she inspired me greatly with her committment to the neighborhood. I want to do for others what she did for me, create a supportive space, for a community that loves and looks out for one another.

~Inshirah

+++++

**Dale Hagen** [hagendm@sprynet.com](mailto:hagendm@sprynet.com) – Nov 7, 2018

**Board Member, Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park**

I met Gwen Jackson 20 years ago while assisting her with financial systems as the non-profit I volunteered with was the fiscal sponsor for a youth programs grant she had garnered. While meeting weekly on financial issues, I also had an opportunity to see the programs Ms. Jackson developed for neighborhood youth. Sometimes she would be using her own experience, such as when she used her fashion sense and sewing skills to teach fashion design, sewing, and the repair and repurposing of donated clothing. Other times, she would identify a need in the community and seek out the resources and volunteer expertise required, such as the computer lab she developed from used computers and

Exhibit C

student volunteers to provide basic computer training and computer access for students without computers in their home.

Ms. Jackson also served on the Board of Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park and provided our decision-making a stronger community focus, challenging us to expand the vision of our programs to better connect with community members as both program participants and neighborhood leaders.

Her passion to help the youth of the community led her to re-animate Nicol Park, a small pocket park on the corner of Nicol and Coolidge Avenues. From a weedy wasteland, Ms. Jackson began park clean-ups, pushed for new play equipment, and organized regular children's programs. These provided play equipment along with her presence and neighborhood volunteers to make the park a safe space for families to play and enjoy.

Of the many people I have met in the Fruitvale community who have welcomed, impressed, or awed me, Gwen Jackson is someone who readily comes to my mind when I am looking for inspiration. Her determination to improve her community and help young people, along with her willingness to step out on the path towards a goal without necessarily having the route all planned out in detail or all resources already in hand, inspires me when I am approaching a daunting task. She provided me with a valuable living lesson on the power of persistence and a courageous heart.

I can think of no more fitting tribute to Ms. Jackson's life and impact on her community than to re-name the park she brought back to life after her. I support renaming Nicol Park to Gwen Jackson Park

Sincerely, Dale Hagen  
*Board Member, Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park*

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Holly Alonso – [hollyalonso@earthlink.net](mailto:hollyalonso@earthlink.net) – Nov 8, 2018  
**Executive Director Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park**

"We are all part of something larger." Gwen Jackson

**First encounters:**

I first met Gwen at Nicol Park. A neighbor at Peralta Hacienda had told me about Gwen, who had a youth program up the block, and that I had to meet her. To my amazement, she was voicing the very premise that I was basing my work on at Peralta Hacienda, that knowing our history can transform our community. She showed me images of early Fruitvale's houses and dairies. I had never seen these images—she had done research on neighborhood history at the Oakland History Room in the main library. She found it liberating to see beyond the problems that surround us in the present, to realize that "We are all part of something larger." From that moment on, we became friends and colleagues, and she supported me in all that I was doing at Peralta Hacienda.

**Nicol Park:**

Gwen had staked out Nicol Park, a pocket park on Coolidge, which had been taken over by drug dealers, making it inhospitable for children. Day after day, just sitting there, with her provisions for kids' activities, she lasted out the drug dealers and they left. She would laugh about how this gentle but persistent approach defeated them. But the striking thing is, she never condemned them and said she

Exhibit A



had been just like them at one point in her life. Nicol Park became the focus of her goal to help the community.

**Background:**

Gwen had a legacy of poverty and lack of education from her childhood in the South, one of a family of fifteen children. All her adult life, she had hidden the fact that she couldn't read and earned her living as a cook. She pursued an Associate of Arts degree at Laney College to develop her extraordinary design abilities, especially with fabric, which again, didn't require literacy.

Then, in her sixties, responding to a flyer for adult literacy, she studied and became fully literate. She immediately began writing grants to buy supplies for her youth programs. She became an avid reader. She talked about often about how much the discovery of the world of books meant to her. She kept on her door "Never, never, never, never, never give up," adding two extra nevers to Winston Churchill's famous exhortation. She was an inspiration to me and to many others.

**Collaboration with Peralta Hacienda:**

After my initial encounter with Gwen, our Americorps VISTA volunteers Susan Fauman and Cassidy Pucket helped Gwen with her program, and we saw each other often to talk about how to help youth in the neighborhood.

Gwen became a board member at Peralta Hacienda, a voice that grounded discussions in neighborhood concerns, yet soared with her unique imagination. She also helped launch our first educational programs with me, coming day after day to paint and quilt with the children in the neighborhood.

She was a firm believer in the importance of the arts: That learning to express yourself through the arts is crucial for kids who had been through trauma and were acting out, because they could express themselves in non-violent positive ways. Doing arts activities builds skills; because their art is praised, it gives them confidence, creating a positive feedback loop.

After 9/11, Gwen created a huge quilt with the children that we exhibited at Peralta Hacienda's museum. It was a source of pride to all the youth who had painted their own original squares. She led Story Circles with me for the kids that were hilarious and fun, animated by her own wonderful sense of humor and her positive encouragement of the children. The way she related to the children, and offered direct, simple activities outdoors in the midst of where the children congregated, was a model for me ever after.

**Oral History Exhibits:**

We interviewed Gwen for our first community stories exhibit, Faces of Fruitvale, and her story was shown on a photopanel for the opening of the Peralta House Museum of History and Community to the public in 2001. In her art, which as reproduced on the panel, she made clear the way The Middle Passage on the slave ships lives on in the present in the minds of African Americans. The was a revelation to many who saw the exhibit.

She participated in other public oral history activities at the park, leading the way in breaking the silence about her own childhood sexual abuse, overcoming intense personal pain in doing so, and helping to create a safe space for others to tell their stories. In her subsequent work with youth, Gwen was particularly aware of and concerned with young girls that showed signs that they were victims of sexual abuse.

Gwen participated in three oral history interviews, leaving her mark on the historical record. The two later interviews were with StoryCorps, one in SF and one at Peralta Hacienda. The last interview was for Peralta Hacienda's exhibit on the effects of incarceration in Fruitvale, entitled "Home and Away." Again, Gwen contributed a unique account, telling about her repeated incarceration in the South, and the cycle of poverty, where you were forced to have a "hustle" to survive because decent employment was barred to African Americans, and then were incarcerated for those illegal activities. She was in and out of jail more than 20 times, starting in her early teens. She described the jails populated by only black women who had to pick cotton during the day—"just like slavery," as she said. Once, a police officer let her go in exchange for sex in the back of the police car. She was 14 at the time. She made a collage about her prison experience, particularly focusing on women's experience in prisons, that was exhibited as part of the exhibit, and is held in our archives and will soon be available online.

That Gwen overcame stigma and shame to share painful stories for the benefit of others, and for our understanding of our shared history, is one of the most important contributions she made. She worked with Jonathan Hoffman, a sociologist from UC Berkeley who came to Peralta Hacienda in connection with his research on African American neighborhoods that had become more diverse. He and Gwen became colleagues and friends. He made a documentary film about her work in the community and her personal journey, called "Unfinished Business: The Lives of Gwen." He flew her to Washington DC for Obama's inauguration. We showed the film at Peralta Hacienda last year, followed by a wonderful Q and A/community dialogue, and it was also shown at a festival of African American documentary films.

Gwen's constant refrain was that she had more to tell. At the end of her life, until the very last week, she was still working to record her history on a small Zoom microphone I had provided for her to do this.

#### **Disability:**

Gwen's story was also one of disability. She injured her knee as a teen, and no health care was available to poor African Americans in the South at that time. This meant that Gwen spent her whole adult life disabled. She walked with difficulty, using a rolling gait to compensate for the knee that had been injured, using a cane or a walker. In her mid-seventies, she finally had a knee operation that repaired the knee, and had a very difficult psychological adjustment at that late date. She questioned how her whole life had been limited by the disability, yet could have been fixed if the resources had been there in society. It was the only time I have seen Gwen undergoing a real psychological crisis—but she came out of it with renewed energy, and soon was at Nicol Park again, offering arts activities and food to neighborhood young people, and keeping the park safe.

#### **Community Center:**

Gwen's exceptional generosity extended to people of all cultures and races. She gave her warmth and energy to all of Fruitvale's diverse young people. She founded F.A.C.E. (Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange) to embody that idea, and started her own educational and community center near the corner of Nicol and Coolidge, with Peralta Hacienda's help as fiscal agent.

She offered all kinds of educational activities, and brought in many resources for the kids. The community center was exactly what the neighborhood needed, but sustained funding was hard to find, and it had to close after a few years.

Gwen also advised me on an National Endowment for the Arts grant to Peralta Hacienda to research the role and potential of traditional arts in the community. True to form, she had a lot to offer! She had

started a co-op years before to sell traditional arts by people in the community called Many Hands from Many Lands. She filled me in about that experience, and we hope to start such a co-op at Peralta Hacienda which brings traditional artist together.

**Character**

Finally, Gwen's character is the key. She was so positive, so warm, so loving and giving, so brilliant and imaginative, and so searching and open. The seeds she sowed continue to spread far and wide, through all the programs at Peralta Hacienda that she helped with; her board service; the film, oral histories and exhibits that tell her story; the experiences that youth had in her community center; through turning Nicol Park around and making it a haven for neighborhood youth, and through each personal interaction she carried out. It seems fateful that the last time I saw Gwen was the day before she died, in Nicol Park, doing exactly what I had seen her doing when I met her for the very first time 19 years earlier: Leading kids' activities at Nicol Park. To name Nicol Park after Gwen Jackson is the absolute right thing to do, and will inspire others to follow her outstanding example.

If you have any further questions, please call or email me (email is quickest!):

Holly Alonso, Executive Director  
Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park  
Cell: 510-833-1171  
Email: hollyalonso@earthlink.net

Exhibit G

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## INTERVIEW LOG

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**Project Title:** MacArthur Corridor

**Interviewee:** Gwen Jackson

**Interviewer:** Katy Kaminski

**Interview Date(s):** April 22, 2004

**Location:** 2811 Nicol Ave, Oakland CA

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The Interviewee: Gwen Jackson is a long-time Oakland resident and activist. She was born in Atlanta in 1937. She went to work at a young age without finishing high school. She moved to Oakland in 1964 where she worked doing housekeeping, cooking, sewing and yard work until an old injury made it necessary to stop doing physical labor and pursue an education. With limited reading ability and math skills she enrolled in the fashion design at Laney College, and then College of Alameda. During this time she was active in the Black Student Union on campus and their activities in Oakland. After graduating with an AA degree, without having received a high school degree, she participated in political activities and community organization with the Oakland Community Organization, the Oakland Reconciliation Forum, and volunteering to work at the polls. She took classes at the Women's Business Initiative, but unable to follow her dream of owning a fashion design business, she developed her skills to work with the community and children. She started her work with children at the St. Paul Church of God in Christ day care center, but expanded her own activities to include more community outreach. Her desire to help the community and the children led her to open a community center with a generous grant from the County Supervisor's office, found a community organization Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange, and participate in a neighborhood group of grandmothers raising their grandchildren. When doors were closed on Gwen Jackson because limited education, she found her skills in community work, and she found her calling working with local children.

The Interviewer: Katy Kaminski is an anthropology student at Mills College. She is working on a senior thesis on the topic of race, class, gentrification, and advertising in her West Oakland neighborhood.

**Interview description:**

**Interview content:**

**Recording notes:**

**OAKLAND LIVING HISTORY PROGRAM**  
**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

KK: Katy Kaminski, interviewer

GJ: Gwen Jackson, interviewee

Interview 1, Side 1

KK: *This is Katy Kaminski interviewing—*

GJ: Gwen Jackson.

KK: *It's April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 and we are in her home on Nicol Avenue.*

*First off—to give us an idea of who you are now, can you briefly talk about when and where you were born?*

GJ: I was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1937 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, and I left there in 1964, and I came here and—let's see, I'm trying to—wow, that's a long time to think back that far. Actually, I lived on—when I came here I lived on Seminary in East Oakland—close to International Boulevard. My—I started working as a cook, which has been what I did. Domestic work and cooking. That's what I did. So, maybe you could ask me some questions, if you need anything.

KK: *Okay. What did you know about Oakland before you moved here?*

GJ: I didn't know anything about Oakland. I'd never heard of it before. I came out here with a man.

KK: *Was your move well planned?*

GJ: No. No, he came and I came behind him. It wasn't really planned. So, I mean was it (static)—might as well. It was something different.

KK: *Did you know you were going to live on Seminary Avenue?*

GJ: No. None of that. No. None of that. But his parents was living in that area. So, we—that's why we went there because his parents lived there.

KK: *I'd like to talk a little bit more about the neighborhood when you first moved.*

GJ: This neighborhood?

KK: *No. Seminary Avenue.*

GJ: Seminary Avenue?

KK: *What was it like?*

GJ: What was that area like at that time? Hmm. In fact, I think about it sometimes when I pass there—that actually on the corner is Seminary and International Boulevard it was a liquor store, and they sold a lot of different stuff, but mostly it was liquor. And the house that we lived in was right behind the liquor store. So, it was really close to the corner. And, you know, it really wasn't as bad—I don't remember it being bad. You know, the people—I didn't—that during that time there were as many homeless people on the street. You know, people hanging around—like they are now. You know, people that are homeless, with the carts and things. I didn't see any of that then. Come to think of it. I hadn't thought about that. And, it was pretty friendly. You know, the people in the neighborhood was pretty friendly. And, you know, I just, as I said—I came out following a man. And worked until—which really is not very interesting, you know—just ordinary stuff, you know.

And—let's see—about all—and then when I left Seminary, I—where did I move? Eighth Avenue. Eighth Avenue—that was Eighth Avenue. Anyway, I stayed over there quite a few years. I went to school over there. I started going to Alameda College. Actually, I never even went to high school. I went to elementary school in Atlanta, and I graduated from elementary school. And I never—I went to high school, but I didn't like school because I couldn't read, and I couldn't—didn't know numbers and stuff. So, I just dropped out of school and did something that I liked, and then that was work, which I knew how to do. So, I went to work. You know and, what my mama had taught me was how to work—you know, how to do a good job cleaning and cooking and all of that. So that's what my skill was when I left home and it was—I was, about like, twelve years old,

but I was a big girl as always. I could pass for older than that. And, coming out here was just—ah—kind of like—something else to do that I hadn't did—you know—and that's what I did. I just did it. I didn't have any children or anything like that. And me and my family wasn't very close, you know. So it didn't matter that I—you know—I wouldn't think about staying around them because we wasn't close anyway. So, anyway, you know, and I had already done some traveling between that time to visit my family in other places—like New York, Chicago, Boston, stuff like that. And I knew I didn't like those places. I mean, I liked them but New York was too cold in the wintertime. And I never forget, when I left there it was June and it was still ice on the ground. I thought that was the awfulest thing. And I said no—I have—I know why people say, "I love to visit New York and not stay there." So you need to have some money to live nice in New York, you know, because it's so cold that everything's so extreme, you know.

So, and out here it was—used to be—kind of mild mannered, and the rent was reasonable and stuff like that. But, actually, the house that I had on Eighth Avenue is where when I started to school—'cause I started going to Alameda College because I decided that I wanted to go get my GA and—ah—my high school diploma, but when I went to Alameda College, I didn't—I found out that a lot of stuff that I didn't know that I wished I did knew, and that I really couldn't do math and do English and all of that because I didn't have the basics to do it. So, I—when I finished Alameda College, I had a Grade Point 3.5, but all of my grade points came through the arts, you know. I majored in fashion design—doing clothes. And so, we had to take a lot of art classes and sewing classes. And so, I got out of there with my AA because of that, you know, because I still don't know math and English like I would like to.

But I do plan to—since the computer came along, I know quite a lot more than I did—because of the computer. And—but I would definitely intend to get my GA—I would like to. I was just looking at something. They was showing of some stuff in the paper about the SAT test. You know, and I was reading some of the questions that they had in there, you know, and I was just thinking—I said, "Wow!"—you know because they was just like questions, questions to—where you have to figure one—figure the answer to something, you know. And, that's reading, you know. You have to know how to read and understand reading to do that.

But now at this age, I know what my problem is, you know, as far as doing it. But, like now, I enjoy working with the community and working with the kids, and I enjoy just being able to be there for the young kids, you know. Because I think that a lot of the things that I went through as a young person that caused me not to be able to read



and those kind of things—that my parents were illiterate, and they asked what they taught you. They taught you skills—you know—how to do things. So they couldn't teach other stuff, but they could teach you those things, and they did a good job at that.

And so I never really learned and that's why I said like now, if I can be any kind of assistance to helping the young people get a better start—you know—that if it is just being there, just sitting up there in the park with them, you know, it's good. So, but I think that everything that happened to me then as a young woman and as a child and as a teenager and all of that, had something to do with now. You know, because I don't think that I would be here now if I hadn't experienced that. And I feel like if I'd a had children that I wouldn't have the compassion for children—young people—that I do now. You know, because I'd probably be tired of them. People say, if you had children of your own, you wouldn't want to be bothered with them 'cause they're so much trouble. But when it's something—you know—I know that it's in my heart because it hurts me when I see something and I see it for me, you know—I see it because myself—I see myself in that a long time ago. So, and like at the park up there, it just really hurts my heart that something—that the kids get killed and they fight up there around the park. They haven't been dead in the park, but a few people around the park have got killed and just some bad things happening, you know and when I got involved in the community I wanted to—we was part of the Home Alert, which the Home Alert is—Do you know what the Home Alert is?

KK: *I don't. Actually, I had some questions—more questions about when you lived at Seminary.*

GJ: Yes. Okay. You can do that. Well, I mean, when I'm talking, will the woman edit it, or whatever she do when she transcribe it?

KK: *I'm gonna pause it. [recorder is stopped; interview resumes] Okay, you were talking about your neighborhood here, now—how it's been. Thinking back to when you lived on Seminary Avenue, do you remember kids fighting and any violence? Do you remember anything like that happening?*

GJ: No. I don't remember anything like that happening in that time that I stayed over there. I stayed over there about—I guess, maybe, about three years. Maybe a little longer, we stayed there. And then we left there and went to—we moved to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and then it

begins to see a difference in—like—they way—like—something like they might have now—like a lot of apartment complexes—stuff going on—you know. And then I began to hear things about the different apartment complexes—you know. And then they—you begin to hear about people saying that other people—like—low income and they're bringing the property values down—you know. And the people that lived—that didn't have apartments, you know like, say maybe the older people, that's either selling their home or moving or whatever. They—usually they would start—would build a complex or build something else so that they could house more than just one family. So then it started. I remember it being more visible. Now I'm not saying that it didn't happen down there, but I just didn't see it. Because at the time when I was just coming in there, I was absorbed with a whole lot of things—you know—that went on that I was dealing with during that time. So, I didn't see this. If this was happening, I didn't see it.

*KK: Okay. So, when you lived on Seminary then, did you know your neighbors? Were you involved with the community?*

*GJ: Did I know my neighbors? Ahh—yes, I knowed them. I didn't get involved in the community. I was mostly working and the neighbors—say, maybe a block around, I knew them. I mean I knew them—some of them—by just waving at them and sometimes we would have a party on the weekend. And they would come. So, yes, I knew them pretty well.*

*KK: And then, what about when you moved to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue then. Did you know people more or less?*

*GJ: No, I didn't know the people more or less. We were just looking for a place for ourselves, and that's why we moved over there. In fact, it was a friend of his mother that had a place. So, we moved over there.*

*KK: Now, you talked about the apartment complexes. Can you tell me a little more about those?*

*GJ: Ahh—the apartment complexes. Ahh, actually, one of them—I think a couple of them—I went—they were kind of like the one that I remembered hearing something about first, which is about a block from where I was living at. And I would hear things—you*

know—about things happening—people getting shot and they were selling drugs, and they were just even—they would—ahh—knock peoples' doors down—you know—to go in and rob people or to abuse them or whatever. And I would hear things like that—you know. Actually, I was just saying, I thought about that—that happened to me at a place where I was staying at.

*KK: When you were living down there on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue?*

GJ: No. Actually, this was later. Actually, me and the fellow that I came out here with broke up. So I was looking for me a place, and this place that I moved in—it happened to me. Someone in the building—there was just a lot of apartments, and they said low income people. And they broke into the people that lived there—some of the people that lived there—just beat the door down, and I was in there when they did it.

*KK: Where was this?*

GJ: This was on Grove. Well, it was first Grove Street, which is Martin Luther King, I think—now. And where is that corner at? That was Grove. But no, you know—I think, that's kind of far away—that's not it. That's not Fruitvale. So, maybe that's kind of far away. That's past Grand Avenue. I mean—on the other side of Grand Avenue—that time, when our relationship was over that I found a place on my own and that's how I got over there. But I ended up coming back over here—you know—later—to find a place. In fact, the police told me, "Lady, you need to get out of this place. It's not for you." You know.

Let's see, where did I go after that? Now, you want to—I'm trying to think of some more things.

*KK: Oh, can I ask you more questions about going to school and living on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue?*

GJ: Going to school—hmmm. Well, actually, I didn't go to school. You mean, to elementary school or later school?

*KK: Oh, no, when you were at College of Alameda.*

GJ: When I went to College of Alameda? That was back in 1970.

KK: *And you were living on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue? No?*

GJ: No.

KK: *Where were you living at that time?*

GJ: I don't remember.

KK: *Oh. That's okay.*

GJ: I'll remember. I'll think about it. I know the places that I've lived, but I'm trying to remember where I was living in 1970. I think it was 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

KK: *Eighth Avenue. Okay.*

GJ: Yes.

KK: *And that was immediately after you had lived on Seminary Avenue.*

GJ: No.

KK: *No.*

GJ: No. That was after this place where I moved on Grove Street. I think, Grove Street? Yes, it was after that, because I remember that I moved two or three times after I broke up with this man. And they were just like transition places until I got this place over here, and that's when I was deciding what I was going to do. I was going to go back to school and all of that. And then, this place—the rent was cheap. Seventy dollars a month, it was—for a two bedroom apartment. That was good. It don't happen like that any more.

And, actually, yes—that's when I started going back to school and during that time, and I started—I have always liked clothes. I have always have liked to do things—to take things and make them over—you know. I like—I don't know—I guess I got that from my mother because that's what she did, and she did it out of necessity. You know, she used to take things and make them over again and all that, and I hated it because I didn't like—because the kids used to say, "Home made stuff." And I just took up that

habit from her. And I didn't know, when I went back to school, that's what—I just slipped into that—you know. And I found out that it was something that I liked.

*KK: So you were sewing before you decided to go back to school?*

GJ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was sewing.

*KK: Was that a job that you took?*

GJ: No. Well, it was kind of like a job—like, I would do some alterations for people, you know—things like that. But in a job in a place? No. Not at a business. No. I just did it on my own. Because I could do it, and people knew I could do it. So they would ask me to do it for them. So, that way it was a job or a side part-time job, because my—the skills that I had is what I had got from my mother, which was cooking and cleaning and doing the gardening and all that stuff. Those were the skills that I had. And so I—ahh—

*KK: Well, what was it like to be working as a cook or a maid or doing sewing? What was that kind of job like at that time?*

GJ: Well, it wasn't too cool. It wasn't—ahh—I think what helped me get over it more was the fact that my parents—my mother had taught me how to work and how to like what I do and do a good job at it, and it didn't matter what it was. So, that is what made me never been fired off a job, and—but the jobs have—some of them have been—I mean, the communication with the people that you work with—they haven't all been good, but I have always known how to—like my momma used to say that you can get—what did she say?—that you can get more flies with honey than you can with—something like that. And I always thought about that and the fact that being—that you can get more from people by being sweet, than by being bitter and I just took that from her. You know, that she was actually a person that everybody liked her in the neighborhood, you know. And they would just come, and she'd be sitting out on the porch or at the window, and they would just come and just sit there and talk to her—you know. I used to hate that, too, because everybody wanted to talk to her, you know. I couldn't talk to her. I hated that. But, actually, I'm turning into her. I'm turning into my mama.

*KK: Well, that can't be a bad thing.*

GJ: No. It's not a bad thing. It's not a bad thing. No, it's not.

KK: *When did you decide you wanted to go back to school?*

GJ: Well, I had been wanting to go all along. I had been wanting to go back to school. But, I have always been—like—afraid, because I was afraid that I couldn't pass the tests or whatever and at Alameda, they told me that I didn't have to take any tests. And so, I just went. And I had been putting it off for a long time. I couldn't think that I could do it and work too, and all of that, and so I found out all about programs where I could get help.

And then, my health started to deteriorate. I had got an old injury—along time ago, when I was sixteen. I got an old injury. And it began to limit what I did—like standing up cooking and all of that stuff like that. So, I got some assistance through rehab to retrain myself. And so, they helped with that.

KK: *What was that?*

GJ: Rehabilitation. Where they rehab—you know. I call it rehab. It's kind of like what they do now for people who have drugs and people who have disabilities, and things. You know, they try to reprogram what you have learned so that you can be able to get some other kind of job.

KK: *So, is it through the state or the government?*

GJ: The state. It's through the state. Yes, through the state. Through—here—that was after I got here. I didn't do that before I came to California.

KK: *Why did you choose College of Alameda?*

GJ: Well, actually, it choosed me. I was going to Laney before.

[telephone rings; recorder paused; interview resumes].

KK: *Okay. So, you first went to Laney College? Is that what you said?*

GJ: I went to Laney College. Actually, I had been trying to fit in to other places. I went to night school while I was working, at Berkeley. What do they call it? Berkeley Evening School, or something like that—taking sewing. And I went there for a while, and then I went to—ahh—where did I—what other place I went to—I can't remember, but it was—like evening classes after school. And I also—I decided that I wanted to take the whole thing after I found out that they said that they would help me. And so, that's when I enrolled in Laney. I knew that they had an extensive design program, which I had checked out. And I started going there. And then, Alameda—they was just building the colleges out there in Alameda, and they wanted to take the fashion arts department from Laney and take it to Alameda. So, that's why I went with them. They choosed me to go out there. So, I was one of the group that went out there.

And it was really a good experience, because—like I said, I had only went to elementary school as a girl and that was really bad, because I had a speech impediment and I couldn't read, and it was really bad. It was a bad experience. So, when I went back to Alameda, it was really good. I really did enjoy being in school. And then I started getting involved in the community—the Black Student Union, and I volunteered for the Black Panther Party and other kinds of organizations—cultural organizations. And—ahh—

KK: *Were you working at the time?*

GJ: I was doing part-time work. Yes. I was doing part-time work. I was working like—through someone I met at the school that had a little shop, and I was doing some work for her—like sewing and staying in the shop while she would go places, and we got to be friends and stuff like that.

KK: *And that was someone that you had met through school.*

GJ: Through school.

KK: *Good luck.*

GJ: Yes, because she was kind of like me, only she had—we was about the same age, but she had went—she has her vision together more. She had been working on it, and so she had rented this little place on Market Street. And so, that's how I got involved with her.

KK: *Ahh—can I ask you a little bit more about your student activities?*

GJ: At Alameda?

KK: *Yes. Yes. Well, what sort of—what were the first activities that you got involved with when you first started?*

GJ: The first activity I got involved with there was—let's see—it was actually the Black Student Union—the Alameda Black Student Union.

KK: *And was this in 1970?*

GJ: It was in 1970 or '71. I'm not sure—I'll keep thinking about that. I'm not too sure, but I think it was 1970. Yes. Okay. No—no, no, no, no, no. Yes, that's right—1970. God, all these years—they just seem to—and when you start trying to think about it, you know. Oh, that's true.

KK: *What did you with them? What sort of activities were they doing?*

GJ: Well, actually, they were concerned with the Black activities at the school. They did outreach in the community. We did fundraising for the Black Panther Party. The feed the—what did they call it? I forget what the—to feed the hungry—the breakfast program that the Black Panthers had during that time, and we'd raise money for that, and we would go and buy food, and take it to the Black Panther Party office. And, just things like—we had a—Black Renaissance, over there, which I participated in. In fact, I was the coordinator of the Black Student Union at that time. And we planned the first event that they had at Alameda College. Hmm. I forgot about that. And we called it the Black Renaissance, and we had people, and kids and all of that—that had did artwork and just had them brought it to the student lounge, and we had a big food and all of that. My brother cooked the food and all of that for it. And it was really the first time that I've been experiencing something like that. No, it wasn't easy 'cause I had a fashion show at Laney, they had a fashion show there.

[Doorbell rings]



[tape is paused; Interview resumes].

*KK: So, when you got involved with the Black Student Union, was that your first—sort of—community involvement?*

*GJ: Yes, other than that fashion show that I was involved in and that was a community, I mean that was a Laney—they had a—kind of like a event booked. It was a musical thing, and they had a whole program and I was just involved in the program. Actually, one of my friends that I knew, she was organizing it. She was also a singing entertainer. She was going to school there too. So she organized it and we had a fashion show, and that is how I got involved in that. So, and then I found out I was going to Alameda. And I think—yes—I think that was the first time that I had began to get involved in the community.*

*KK: You said that you had done outreach work, was that just the fundraising?*

*GJ: The fundraising and also—ahh—like, when we would volunteer to work at different events that that organization has that we believed was a good cause. The Black Panther was one of them at that time. And we would volunteer to do outreach and we would try to get the young people to go to school and to do—like, reading—you know, and to volunteer. But whatever the Black Panther Party and other organizations that—but, we—the Black Panther Party and the Black Student Union, which they had things—they had things going on in the school, like tutoring—that people needed—special help and stuff like that. They did things like that. I'm trying to remember some of the other things that we did.*

*KK: Do you remember any of the organizations that the Black Student Union supported? Where did you do your volunteer work?*

*GJ: I did it at—actually, it was at the Black Panther's building that they had, which was in East Oakland? I think it was close to International Boulevard and 25<sup>th</sup>, I think—close to that. Oh wow, I remember that.*

*And we would go over there and do whatever we needed to do—tutor someone or play with kids. They had child care for the people that were working in the organization and going out and doing things. And we would take care of the kids and stuff like that. Just things that we could do. It wasn't no lot of political stuff, you know. It*

was just basic stuff. And, ahh—and they were doing a lot of things, you know. I don't know whether you know about the Black Panther Party, but they were very involved with politics themselves, and we were just involved in their domestic part of it. Which were like feeding the kids, and like when they would place where—we would have time to give them their lunch in the morning you know. Give them they breakfast in the morning give them a lunch or something like that. Just stuff like that, but we wasn't involved in the head of the political party, you know, like some of the stuff they were doing in Sacramento, and a lot of stuff like that.

*KK: How did you feel like the community felt about these things that you were doing?*

*GJ:* Well, I don't think that they—I don't there was—I think the community— because what we were doing was—at that time was very—it was controversial because it was giving the Black Panther Party— giving them clout by what they were doing. And so, the people in the city and actually even the FBI, you know because they was the most wanted. They was up as the most wanted, you know. And they wanted to suppress the Black Panther Party what they was doing because they felt that it was making too many radicals out of black men, you know. They didn't like that. So, that's part was very controversial. Just being involved with them really was very controversial. As I said, people in the community knew that they were doing something good. So, the only kind of bad reaction that we got was from out of the community, as far as the Black Panthers was concerned it came from the system was the only thing that the static that we had was through the system. It wasn't to us personally it was to the Black Panthers as a whole. We kept feeding the kids, playing with the kids and all of that and nothing ever happened to us. But we would hear on TV and stuff like that was the political stuff about them carrying guns and—you know, stuff like that—they're going to Sacramento. You know, all this different stuff like that. They were involved in that part, but nobody—everybody in the community that I know thought they were doing a good thing.

*KK: How did you feel? How did you feel being involved with the group on this level and seeing on TV all the bad things that were—*

*GJ:* Ahh, I thought the same thing. You know, I thought it was good—I thought that even though there was some negative stuff happening through the process that they were going through that sometime you need to make static. You know, sometimes—like—well, it's not now, but a few years ago, I was thinking that—like, what they call the baby boomers

now. But back in that time when they were out there and they were—you know, they were getting involved and they were closing up what they called picketing, sitting-in. And all, I mean—everybody—all the kids were involved, you know, with everything. So that could be one of the reasons why the community looked at the Black Panther Party different than the system did, because all the young people were involved. You know, they didn't care. You know, they didn't care about what the parents thought—the parents had lied to them for years. They allowed them going through changes and over in San Francisco. They were traveling. They'd get in what they call these little bugs—the busses and they would just get together and go through you know—and support—support. Actually, the—a lot of the Black Panther's money came from those kids and their parents that had money. It came from them because they supported what they was doing. In fact they had one of the most expensive places that they lived in down by the lake. If you go around the lake there this tall building that was up there. They was living up there and they in they penthouse. They were living in the penthouse. They didn't want them to get killed so they wanted to put them up high so that it would take some time to get to them so they could protect them. You know 'cause it was.

But, that was a lot. I mean people were involved with those things. There were a lot of things going on. Now there's a lot of things going on because of the war. One thing that's bad about this war is that people didn't they didn't wait as long as they waited to get involved with the other one you know, cause the system kept trying to shut the people down.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

Side 2

*KK: So, you were talking about your involvement with the Black Panther party and their community stuff that they did.*

GJ: Their community organization?

*KK: Yes, you mentioned the breakfast for the kids, and you mentioned fundraising, and you mentioned child care. Were there any other specific things you were doing for them?*

GJ: No. No I don't think so no.

*KK: How long were you involved with them?*

GJ: I was involved as long as I was in school. So—like—three years.

*KK: —And after you were done with school, did you continue with them?*

GJ: Well, I thought—I think there was a lot going on and I began to get involved—I'm trying to think of—when did I start to get involved with the other organizations that I was involved with—like the Oakland Community Organization or the Oakland Conciliation Forum that I went to? They were just like beginning and I went to the training and stuff because I wanted to get involved with the community. But on the side, I was still trying to create something for a business. You know, I wanted to start my own business. That's what I wanted.

*KK: Was this while you were in school?*

GJ: While I was in school. While I was in school.

*KK: What were you wanting to do with your business?*

GJ: I wanted to go into fashions. I wanted to do pattern-making. Actually, I wanted to do custom design. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to because a lot of people, like myself, during that time, we were full figure and they didn't have the styles that they have now. So, that was why I started changing clothes around then because I was young and the clothes that they had in my size in the store were too matronly. So I started changing them around, and that's how I got hooked into that—redesign, I call it—redesign. And so, I wanted to custom make clothes for people, and I also wanted to redesign things for people that they wanted to keep—like heirlooms—like I did a woman—her mother had a fur coat, and she wanted to make a hat and a little stole out of it. So, it was something that was an heirloom that she could keep forever and give it to her kids, if she wanted to. So, I wanted to do things like that, you know. So, that's what I was basically doing a little bit of as I go and was still working and was still doing part-time work in the convalescent hospital. So, here in the Fruitvale area really. And—ahh—

KK: *Well, you just mentioned the hospital that you did part-time work with. When were you doing that?*

GJ: Well, actually, I did that before I started going to school. That's where I was working at. But after I started going to school, I started doing it part time. I was a chef-cook there before. But then, after I started going to school, I just did part time, and so during that time, that was the only time that I had to do—I had to do part-time, you know, because I was going to school, and I was still trying to—let's see was I involved?—hmm. I'm trying to figure out—ahh—I'm trying to figure out—ahh—where I—when did I—oh—I'm trying to figure out when did I do—start doing these other—getting involved in these community things that—hmm. Why don't you ask me a question because I'm trying to think of something and it's not coming.

KK: *Okay. So, while you were in school you were taking classes, and you were working part time, and you were involved with the Black Student Union. Correct?*

GJ: Umhmm. Yes.

KK: *What was it like to be doing all of those, all at once?*

GJ: Well, I really didn't think anything of it. I just did it and—like, when we were going places and having picnics and things and the Black Student Union, they, we used to ahh—there was always something going on and we could do outings with the kids or feeding the kids or they would have the tutoring or something like that, which I didn't do, but they just took the kids, while the other ones did it, you know. And so...

KK: *And then, how did you fit your plans for business —how did that fit into everything you were doing?*

GJ: Well, it didn't seem to fit. It didn't seem to fit at all. It was something that I really wanted to do. Actually, I still want to do it, you know. But, actually, when I started working with closer with the children in the community, and I began to get older that I began to find satisfaction in being there for the children—trying to do something with them.

So, no, it didn't fit. It still hasn't fit, but still, I have training and I did a lot of things that relate to fashion. I took business courses downtown—several of them. And

they didn't work because of my not having the skills I needed before. You know, that's when I began to find out that these things that I didn't learn in elementary school, and by not going to high school, and actually, by not having my GED—that it was affecting everything else that I did. So, getting involved in the community was something that gave me satisfaction, and I didn't have to worry a whole lot about skills—to do it, you know.

But, being involved in the community gave me a lot of skills also. And, you know and you know, and they would work with you in workshops and stuff like that, and so you didn't have to worry about the numbers and all of that other stuff that you did, you know?

*KK: Okay. So after you were done with school, what were you doing afterwards? Did you get a job related to—*

*GJ: Ahh—no, I still kept doing part-time work, and I started to—'cause it was in 1974, when I got my degree from Alameda, and then I started getting involved in the community. I started taking—like the Oakland Community Organization—when they started, I thought that what they was doing was good, you know, and I wanted to get involved in it. So, I got involved in that, and then the Oakland 'conciliation Forum—they started their organization, and what they was doing was they started out help the police with people that had—like—little petty things happening to neighbors—you know—the people was calling the police. So, they wanted to create an organization to get people to 'conciliate—to get people to be better neighbors to each other. So, I got involved in that and went to some workshops and learned that. And then—I don't remember now.*

*KK: Well, can I ask you—where were you living at that time?*

*GJ: Where was I living at that time?*

*KK: At Eighth—*

*GJ: Eighth Avenue—still at Eighth Avenue.*

*KK: And you mentioned the Oakland Community Organization. What were they doing that you liked so much?*

GJ: They were doing some of the same things that the Black Panthers was doing. They were working with the children—tutoring. They was even writing grants to low income housing, which they do have, several of them now—low income housing in the area that they did. And working on like crime and in fact, that was the first time I seen our City Council, del la Fonte. He was volunteering there.

KK: *Really? And this was 1974?*

GJ: Yes. He was volunteering and now he's City Council. President of the City Council. But anyway, hmmm...

KK: *Were you working a lot in your immediate neighborhood when you were doing these things with the Oakland—*

GJ: No, I wasn't. I was in more like the area—actually, they were down at—where were they? Was it 50th? No, it wasn't that far out. It was where the office was—they used to have their workshops—things like that—at that office. But they did do political stuff, like campaigning for certain things—initiatives and stuff like that. And we got out and campaigned and picketed and marched and all of that. We did all of that.

KK: *So, were you a voter at this time—when you were involved with them?*

GJ: Ahh, was I a voter at that time? When did I register to vote? Y'know, I think we did—'cause I think—yes. I think that was—did I start voting at Alameda? Did we have a voting club at Alameda? I don't remember, really, when I started the voting. It seemed like I did it forever, because right after I started, I started volunteering to work at the polls. And I always liked that because you see all your neighbors. You know, I loved seeing everybody I hadn't seen for a long time. So, I got hooked on that, and I've been doing it for I don't know how many years—about twenty years, probably.

KK: *So, this was after you had gone to school.*

GJ: That was after I had gone to school. Yes. That was after.

KK: *So, when you were involved with the Oakland Community Organization, you've mentioned that you were doing some campaigning?*

GJ: Yes, we did campaigning for initiatives and things—for propositions and stuff that was coming up for people to vote on. And we did that and we had rallies to educate the people and all of that.

KK: *Are there any particular issues or candidates that you remember really well?*

GJ: During that time? Oh, let's see...No. I really don't. The only thing that would make me remember that is if I went back to the office. They've got pictures and things that show the past, over the years. I can't remember any of the initiatives.

KK: *Okay. So how long were you involved with them?*

GJ: I was involved with them for—maybe about nineteen—oh, hmm—I'm trying to separate the times and the years—I didn't think it would be this hard to remember stuff. Uhhh—

KK: *Were you living on Eighth Avenue the whole time that you were with them?*

GJ: I lived on Eighth Avenue for a long time, yes.

KK: *Well, what about in reference to the other one that you mentioned—the Oakland Reconciliation Forum. Were you working for both of them at the same time?*

GJ: Was I working for both of them at the same time? Yes, I think—kinda—'cause all of 'em wasn't full time. I think they was kind of together, like this—yeh—kind of together, and I think during that time I was also taking some other kind of classes, like business classes and the women's initiative program that's downtown now. I took classes there—the “WISE”—that's what it was. And then I was doing several things, you know, at the same time.

KK: *The Oakland Community Organization—was that a paid position?*

GJ: No, now of them was paid. It was volunteer.



KK: *Did you have a job that you were doing at the time?*

GJ: I had a job. I was also receiving aid from General Assistance at that time. And I think that was after I had been in school. And I was supposed to be preparing myself for a job, you know. And I think I got General Assistance, which was about fifty dollars every two weeks, or something like that.

KK: *How did you feel receiving General Assistance and doing all the volunteer work? What was that like for you?*

GJ: Well, I didn't feel bad about it because to me it was a stepping stone, you know. And I still feel—even though right now, my only income is SSI, which is disability—and I always feel that even though—I mean—I haven't been able to make it materialize in years, that it was always a stepping stone to something else better, you know. That's the only way I could think, you know. So, that's what I always thought, and I always felt that you always give something back. And I think that's come from my parents, too, because they was always givers themselves. They didn't have a whole lot to give, but they gave themselves, and they fed other people if they needed it, you know and stuff like that. And so, I never felt that—I always—it's always been low income—I've always felt that finances, and then when I began to learn my lack in education—where I really did lack, I think that that has been a lot of the hindrance of a lot of the things that I would liked to have accomplished, because I couldn't use my education—or use my education to help get those things I needed. Even after I went to school, I wasn't able to learn those things, and—but I still feel that I can learn.

KK: *It's never too late.*

GJ: No, I don't feel like it's too late. I feel like I can learn 'em and even be involved in—if I don't have my own design in the fashion business that I can benefit other fashion designers. So, I still haven't given up on anything, you know—and that's what keeps me motivated and keeps me alive and keeps me—of course, the young people keeps me knowing that they are not what people say they are, you know. 'Cause they say I was a lot of things too. So, I know that if it was true for me, it can be true for them, you know. So, that's what keeps me going and keeps me being involved in the community is the

young people and how they relate to me—like, when I was here—the young people, they were selling drugs—I mean, they were doing all kinds of things in this building. And none of them ever bothered me. And this was back in '90—in '92, I think. And when I was here—and I stayed here through three times they had to evict everybody in the apartments but me, because of drugs. I never had any problems with the young people, you know. I think they broke in my car one time and got the battery, but I never felt any fear from them. And I think maybe it's because I felt like that they were big at that time—that I was them a long time ago. So I didn't feel any fear from them, you know.

*KK: Does that come from your work with the Oakland Reconciliation [Board]? Do you think that might have had an effect?*

GJ: I don't know. I hadn't thought about that. I don't think so. I think it came from my own childhood—that I—I wanted to see the young people benefit. I wanted them to have more choices, you know, which I didn't feel that I had any choices at that time. And I think just by exposing them to stuff, you know—like we have artwork, and we let 'em plan, and we let 'em do this and do stuff—just exposing them to stuff, you never know what they might use it for.

*KK: You mentioned that you had done childcare with the Black Panther Party. Did you continue working with children when you were with the Oakland Community Organization or any other organization?*

GJ: No, nothing but when I got involved with in this church. I had forgotten about it altogether. That was—I got involved in this church in 1977, I think. And, ahh—

*KK: What church was it?*

GJ: It's called St. Paul Church of God and Christ.

*KK: And is that in this neighborhood?*

GJ: It's in this neighborhood. Wait, wait, wait, wait—let me see. It's on 20<sup>th</sup> and East 20—no, it's not in this neighborhood. It's over by 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Fruitvale area, but that's

when I started taking classes for child development—ah, what they call it? Yes, child development.

*KK: The church offered classes?*

GJ: No, I took them at Merritt.

*KK: Oh, okay—and you used what you learned there to work with children?*

GJ: To work with child care—with the kids, yes.

*KK: Why did you decide to go into child care?*

GJ: Because of the affiliation with the church. And I had got involved with the church and joined the church, and it was something different—something I hadn't tried yet. So, I tried that.

*KK: How did that work out for you?*

GJ: It didn't work out too well, but I liked the family part. I liked it because—and that was during the time I was beginning to stop doing a lot of socializing with men because of bad relationships. So, that's when I started getting involved with the church, and then it was kind of like a family to me. So, I liked that part of it.

*KK: Did you do any other community work with them or were you just working with the kids?*

GJ: I was just working with the kids. That was really one of the things that I because—it didn't work out too well, because I wanted to see more outreach in the community, and they wasn't doing it. I mean, they had the child care, but that was about all. I wanted to do some more involvement in the community, because during that time that's over on 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I'm going to have to look at the map and see if it's in there—and see what they call that area. I think that district goes with Lake Merritt, I think. I'm not sure. But, things began to happen—like drugs and all around us—drugs and selling drugs on the corners and things like that began to start happening along in that time.

KK: *About when was that?*

GJ: That was—like—'80—'81, '82, '83, '84, '85—it just started happening more and more each year.

KK: *Where were you living at that time?*

GJ: I was living on 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and then I moved. Let's see, when did I move back to Fruitvale? I moved back to Fruitvale—no, I didn't. I moved to East Oakland on 85<sup>th</sup>, and I stayed there one year, and then I moved here.

KK: *After?*

GJ: I got all the way back here. Yeh. So, I left 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and then I went to East Oakland, and I stayed there for a year, and then in '85, I came here to live here.

KK: *Okay. Can I go back and ask—when you were involved with the church, you said you wanted to do more outreach, what did you mean? What did you want to do?*

GJ: Well, I think that the church—at that time, I was seeing people that needed really help, you know. The people needed help going to them, rather than waiting for them to come to the church. And that's what I wanted to see. I wanted to see the church go to the community more—to get involved in the community—to find out the needs of the community more, you know. And they wasn't doing it. They was praying for the community, which is good, but I thought that they should be out—that we should be out in the community.

KK: *Were you able to get out into the community on your own at that time or did you join another community group?*

GJ: Let's see, what did I do after that? I came here and that's when I started to—you know, I think—I'm trying to think back now—I think that all of—okay, they things that I did—ah, well, I'm trying to remember the things that I did from—because I got into my first involvement in this neighborhood, it was in 1996, we started the Home Alert, and then, at that time, drugs was just sold—I mean, they was everywhere, they had a drive-up

drugstore, I called it—an illegal drugstore right out there. They'd just drive up and get it and go on, you know. And then, I mean, it was every place, and I began to see - for a while nobody got involved—especially in this neighborhood. In fact, it seemed like nobody was getting involved in any of the neighborhoods. And they was just letting it go on, you know.

So, that's when the Home Alert group—they was about dealing with the crime after the crime happened. And I didn't like that because we had some kids getting killed. I mean, they was kids. They wasn't even through with being teenagers yet. And I didn't like that, you know. I didn't like just throwing everybody in jail and not having some kind of alternative or something, you know. So, that's why we wanted to start, within the Home Alert group, I decided that I wanted to be a part of the solution rather than part of the problem, you know—straightening out the problem after. And then that's how I started getting involved with the Community Health Academy, which was an organization that works in the community. And it was the—oh, what was the name of the organization right now down the street here—the Community—oh, wow, what is the name of that organization? The Spanish-Speaking Unity Council—that's what it was. I started getting involved with them.

*KK: Was this about—you mentioned 1996—was this all at the same time?*

*GJ: Yes, that was all at the same time that—I think, that I started—because these other times that I got involved, it didn't go very far with them, and then I was also trying to do my own business, and I was taking classes for that and all of that stuff. And, but after the drugs got so really bad in this area and everything, that's when I started getting involved in the community more. And sitting on boards and things like that to see, "What could I do from the inside, rather than calling the police every time something happened?" I didn't like that and I still don't like that, and that's how I started the FACE organization that we call Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange, and that was why I wanted it because a lot of the people in the community were so diverse and they were shutting off themselves from each other, and then they was letting the drug dealers come in and do anything they wanted to do.*

So I wanted to start an organization that would be inclusive to everybody. And then the first thing I had to do, I found out that I had to learn how to get to these peoples of other cultures, and I didn't have a language—I couldn't speak to them. And the only way I knew how to speak to them was through love, you know—speaking it and you

people—how stereotype is—Asian people, you know, like to be to themselves—their own culture. So, they don't want to be bothered with you. And I found out all that's a lie, you know. People are just waiting for you to reach out, you know. And that's the way it has been for me, you know. You reach out to people, they'll have their hand be there, you know. You reach out to them, and I found that out to be true.

And I think even though I haven't accomplished what I wanted to in my fashion design, and in my business and all of that, I still feel that I've accomplished something, and I still feel that that is a tool that I still have. I'm working with my hands, you know. And I feel—in fact, when I opened the Center—when we got a grant through the county—they gave us a \$40,000 grant, and we opened this building around here for after school for the kids to have a bike program and a cooking program and a gardening program. And we had just outreach for the young people, and that's what I really liked. I felt that that was very fulfilling to me, I'm sure. And then I could teach the kids sewing and design, you know. So, that's what I really felt like my call was for. I said, "Oh, wow!" I was thinking it was for my own business, but it's for me to teach children—kids—you know. And I'm coming to find out that they loved it. A lot of them had never even seen a machine. But they were so clothes-oriented, you know. They wanted all these designer clothes and stuff. And then, I'd tell them, "Yes, you all can design your own clothes, you know." And it—still, it was really hard to get them to really understand, because they wanted designer-made. They don't want to design their own clothes.

KK: *Make their own designer.*

GJ: Yes, that's right. That's right. That's right. So, I learned that fulfillment from doing a lot of things for the community. And this little boy—I'll never forget—it was a little boy,

have—and so she wanted me to call the police, and so I called the police, and they gave her a translator on the phone so she could communicate. And then we just fell in love with each other, you know. In fact, she gave me that fruit basket. She's always feeding me and stuff like that. And her family—I just love the whole family. So, I just started

Actually, one Cambodian lady up at the park— I started sitting up at the park  
and took me by the arm and pulled me down to her house. And come to find out, her son  
had left, and he was—had got lost, and he couldn't find his way back home—he didn't



know, just smiling and these different things. And that's the way it started. You know, that's the way it started.

and we took the machines up to the park one weekend and took some fabric up there and some manikins. And this boy wrapped a design on this manikin that I wouldn't know where in the world—and he had never even seen a manikin or a piece of fabric in a piece like that before—

[telephone rings; GJ continues while telephone rings]

GJ: —and it just amazed me.

KK: *So, all of this work—was it with FACE?*

GJ: With FACE and with—what was the name of it? What was it called? It was called—oh, wow, I can't remember—the grandparents—it was called AGAIN —AGAIN, which was Grandparents Raising their Grandkids, and, actually, I got involved with them because my niece in Chicago was, and still is, hung up on crack, and she had these kids, and so I took 'em and brought 'em down here. So, that's how I got involved in that program. And it was called AGAIN—and actually, all of them that was involved in it was grandparents, and they was raising their children's children because their children were on crack. And that's when it began to really get bad, you know. It was getting bad. So, they was trying to come up with ways that they could help the young people—help the kids that was being affected by this drug. So, let's see, what else—

KK: *Well, you mentioned a community building up the street.*

GJ: Yes. It was 2935 Coolidge Avenue—right up here at Fruitvale, and we got these bonds in the year 2000 from the Supervisor, Keith Carson's office, to open the building, and that's what we did, and we stayed there until last year—October 16<sup>th</sup>—we were there, because I got sick, and I didn't have anybody to run the place, and so, we closed it down.

KK: *When did you open it?*

GJ: We opened it January 1, 2001.

KK: *And you mentioned that you got some money from the city or the—*

GJ: Yes—through the—it was the county—through the Supervisor, Keith Carson's office. They, actually, they handled the money—some of it anyway—the city and also the county and different ones they have money for—outreach in the community—for people that's doing outreach in the community.

KK: *Did you have to apply to get that?*

GJ: I had to apply, yes. Actually, they were very good. They came and helped me write the grant and everything.

KK: *What was that like?*

GJ: That was exciting. It was really exciting. The whole thing was really exciting. And we had our grand opening and everybody came, and you know, it was really, really nice. It was really good. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed working with the people. But what I really wanted to do at this age that I am now—I wanted to create a place for the children. But I wanted the young people, like yourself, to do it. I wanted to do the class for the design and sewing, and you know, like that—and go out and raise money to keep money coming in to the organization. But I wanted the young people to do it, you know. I didn't want to do it, because I know that there is just so much that I can do. So, actually, I did get some young people in. They did—they came in. We were only doing our programs through volunteers, and so, nobody ever got paid in any of this. And they came in and they brought their staff. They did the bike program, they did the gardening program, and they would take the kids on trips and things around the town and go to beaches and stuff like that, which was really good. And they would teach them bike safety and how to fix their bike and how to even make bikes. And they would be there for a while, and they would make their own bikes, you know. So that was really exciting. And we also had computer classes there that we taught twice a week—computer class. And we had sewing class twice a week. And we had tutoring and—homework and tutoring there. They did that.

KK: *Were any of the schools—like the local schools—involved with the community center?*

GJ: Yes—Fruitvale School. The kids came from Fruitvale School down there—after school—they would get out and they would come down to the place where they got tutoring and after-school training, and we would give them that, and on certain days, they

would have the bike program. Certain days, they had a cooking program, in which they'd show them how to make cookies and stuff like that. And all—the cooking one—she was a volunteer. She was a cook in the area. She was a baker, and she volunteered to teach the kids how to make cookies and cakes and stuff like that. So, that was good.

But, I kind of feel like that if we could have been there longer, that we could have made a big difference. And during the time that I was sick, a few people got killed in the neighborhood, you know—got shot on drugs, and people got broke in—I mean, it was robberies and stuff like that, and I thought, “Oh, God, I can't handle this, you know. I can't handle this.” And so, when I got sick, I knew that if I had of tried to keep the building, that it wouldn't be doing nothing but the rent going up. You know, just keep owing the man. And so we didn't owe him anything then, and so I told him—I said, “I have to this close up, because I don't have nobody to run the place.”

And that's where I am now. I have a few people come over sometimes and use the computer if they want to learn something or if they want to go on the Internet. Even the kids—the bigger kids that come—if they want to do their projects or something on the computer, I let them do that. And go to the park, and do outreach there. We have a bulleting board up there that we try to keep information on about what's going on in the community and what's available for the people in the neighborhood. So, I'm still doing that, and I'm hoping that that's what this one Saturday is for—we is just going to—whenever something is going on in the community just let the people know what it is, and try to get them involved in it, you know. And the biggest problem that I have now is getting it out—getting the information out, you know—in the community. Because sometimes you need—and that's what I liked about the Health Academy—that when I got—

[End of Interview 1; End of Tape 1, Side 2]

# Nicol Park on upswing for kids

## Fruitvale activists got city's help

By Cecily Burt  
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — For a long time, Nicol Park wasn't the kind of place that attracted kids — or law-abiding adults, for that matter.

The city removed unsafe playground equipment years ago, and the benches that remained attracted drug dealers rather than residents looking for a spot to sit and chat.

### Inviting to kids

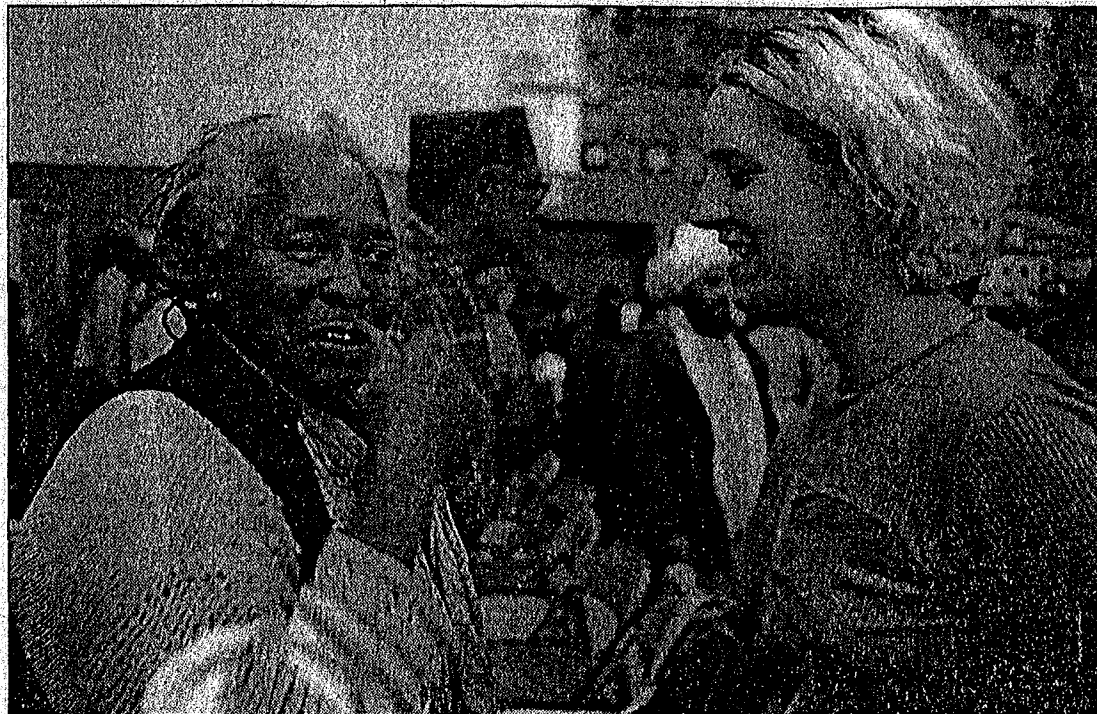
Neighbors and police took care of the drug dealers. And now the Trust for Public Land has taken care of rebuilding the playground, planting trees and installing a message kiosk, picnic tables, a barbecue pit and raised beds for plantings by the community.

There's also a new mural, created by Fruitvale Elementary students and local artist Xochitl Nevel-Guerrero.

For the bargain rate of \$110,000, plus sweat equity from the East Bay Conservation Corps, the small park has become a place where kids go, rather than walk past.

### New program

"This park is absolutely essential to the community," said



SEAN CONNELLEY — Staff

Gwen Jackson (left), community activist and executive director of Fruitvale Appreciating Cultural Exchange, shares a laugh Wednesday with Susan Fauman after the Nicol Park ribbon-cutting was moved indoors. Jackson and other residents were instrumental in reclaiming Nicol Park from drug dealers, and now the park has a new playground, picnic tables and other amenities for the neighborhood to enjoy.

Oakland Councilmember Dick Spees (Montclair/Laurel). "From a parks standpoint, this community is the most impacted areas of the city. It has the fewest parks and needs the most help getting green space, especially for children."

The blustery, rainy weather put a damper on the planned outdoors ribbon-cutting at the park Wednesday. But spirits were high at Fruitvale Elementary, where the event was relocated.

The Trust for Public Land "adopted" the park as part of its Bay Area Community Parks and Playground Program. Funding came from the San Francisco Foundation and the Walter and Evelyn Haas Jr. Foundation, as well as city of

Oakland community development block grant monies.

Lincoln Square Park in Oakland's Chinatown was the first park to be refurbished under the new program two years ago. Next up is Bertha Port Park, next to the West Oakland BART Station, and a half-acre of vacant land at Willow and 13th streets.

Nicol Park was chosen because the area has the fewest parks for its population, even though it has the largest number of children under the age of 12, said Mary Menees, the trust's public affairs manager.

### Reclaiming the land

The little park once was a house lot, but the house was torn down long before anybody

can remember, and certainly well before the trust bought the land. Nicol Park was a thriving community gathering place back in the 1970s, with flea markets, community gardens and a playground, but it fell into disrepair in the late '70s.

It stayed that way until neighborhood activists, lead by Gwen Jackson, began staging community events at the park several years ago, which served to reclaim the park from the drug dealers. The community's participation was integral to Nicol Park being chosen for the funding, said Garlen Capita, program manager for the trust's urban parks program.

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## **Nicol Park – History of the park’s name**

March 2019

### **Overview:**

Nicol Park is located at the Northwest corner of Coolidge Ave. and Nicol Ave.

The purpose of this research was to ascertain whether Nicol Park was specifically named in honor or memory of a particular family or person, in order to determine whether we could proceed with our proposal to change the park’s name. The research process included phone conversations with local historians and several hours at the Oakland History Room looking at Block Books, Directories and newspaper microfiches.

### **Conclusion:**

Nicol Park is not itself directly named after a family or individual. As recently as 1910, there was a residence on the corner that now contains the park. When the park was created, it was evidently just given the name of the street it was on, for convenience.

### **Research Detail**

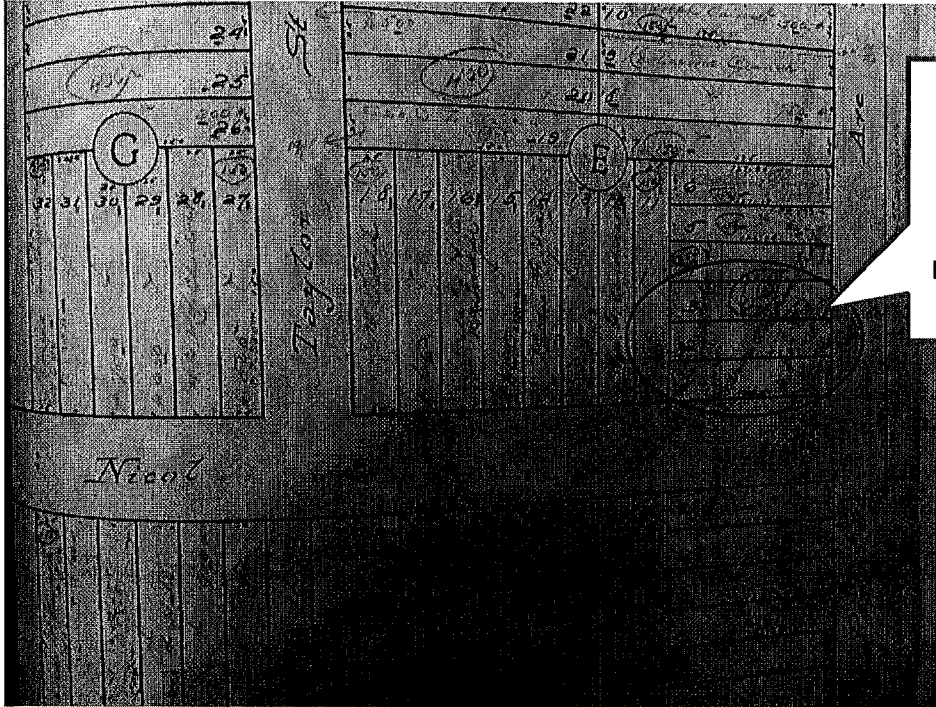
The primary source for local history is a booklet by “Quentin”, an Oakland librarian, now deceased. Per City Historian Betty Martin and also local historian Dennis Evanosky, that booklet has no definitive information about Nicol Ave. It merely states that it is, “a street in the de Wolf tract, 1891” (ie a part of the tract filed by William de Wolf in 1891).

In subsequent conversation with local historian Dennis Evanosky, he speculated a Nicol family at some point owned and maybe lived on that nearby hill. But he advised there is no mention of them in the 1870 or 1880 census data. This was later re-affirmed by our direct research in city directories and block books going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> c at the Main Library. The “Nicol Tract” appears in 1900 and 1910 information, but no specific family or owner could be found. Dennis Evanosky reported that he had done extensive research into the de Wolfe family hoping to find someone with a first- or family-name of “Nicol”, to identify origin similar to Capp or Schuyler or Alice streets, but was unable to find anything.

Our direct research in the City Room of Oakland’s Main Library included review of Directories and Block Books going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Directories: 1870, 1875, 1910 – these listed persons with the last name of “Nicol” but, as noted previously by local historians, there was no visible connection between any of them and this property.
- Block Books: 1889 (Brooklyn), 1899, 1902, 1908, 1910
- Newspaper records searching on “Nicol” going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Block Books indicate that residences stood on the site of the current Nicol Park (see image below). While Nicol Avenue was in existence in 1899, there was no park until sometime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems fairly clear that the Park was simply given the name of its street, and the origin of its name is equally murky. One block book mentions a “Nicol Tract”, however there is no Nicol of that era who shows up or could be connected to this area as owner of this land. And any mention of individuals named Nicol did not proliferate, ie there is no indication that any family remains who might be connected, even to Nicol Avenue.



The 1910 Block Book showing residences at the site of the current Nicol Park, at the corner of Nicol & Peralta (now Coolidge) Avenues