

ONE LONG-TIME RESIDENT of the Monterey Peninsula vividly recalled the first and now internationally famous Monterey Bay Blues Festival: “Those 14 men that started it were standing on that stage. Most were retired military. They looked so good in their uniforms. Those gentlemen looked like kings as they crossed that stage. The pride in giving that first festival you just knew they were going to succeed—to keep the blues alive means something about our history, our beginning. But from the first and through the years the festival wasn’t just black. Martín Puentes and Sam Karas—they were a part of it from the beginning. What they wanted was to have a festival for scholarships, grants that helped the community. It was a joy to behold. It was military, civilians, locals, it was a community of people, there were Caucasians, blacks, Spanish—it is and was open.”<sup>1</sup> This observer might have been describing the city of Seaside itself. In spite of enormous social and political pressure to separate by race in America at mid-twentieth century, Seaside, perhaps like many other military communities across the country, found a way to integrate peacefully. This book is the story of how, and why, that happened.

The story of Seaside, California, is entwined in the history of how World War II and developments in the postwar decades transformed much of California and the West. It is also a story of how a small California community, nestled between a massive military installation on one side and upscale resort destinations and historic Monterey on the other side, was reshaped by the U.S. Army at Fort Ord into a minority-majority, military community that struggled to incorporate the best ideals of the civil rights movement at midcentury. The story of Seaside is part and parcel of the story of the development of the American West, which was never the wild, independent frontier of American imagination but always dependent on, and an integral part of, federal investment and design.<sup>2</sup>

The forces that swept through California from the 1950s through the 1990s—significant growth of a diverse population and the consequences of social, economic, and cultural changes—manifested themselves in Seaside like so many other cities and suburbs in the Golden State. However, unlike other California cities during the second half of the twentieth century, the civil rights struggles, racialized local politics, and the movements of people in and out of Seaside were dramatically affected

by the city's symbiotic relationship with the military, and by association with the federal government, which make it possible to understand race relations and urban/suburban development in new ways. The example of Seaside, and other military towns directly affected by federal mandates for integration, demonstrates that policies of contact, integration, and assimilation coupled with a vigorous civil rights movement in the civilian population, can indeed shape values and behavior in exceedingly positive ways, and do not necessarily lead to neoconservative backlash.<sup>3</sup> Seaside's history tests new racial formation theory, which attempts to explain the failures of decades of policies that attempted to rectify social and racial injustice.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, as was the case in Seaside, and perhaps in other communities in the United States, both military and nonmilitary, those policies worked.<sup>5</sup>

Seaside is a community of about 35,000 people located on the Monterey Bay, but unlike the affluent communities of Pebble Beach, Carmel, and Monterey the presence of the huge military training base at Fort Ord altered the trajectory of its history in fundamental ways. Although Fort Ord was established adjacent to the tiny subdivision of Seaside in 1917, it was during the buildup to World War II and the impact of Fort Ord in the postwar era that changed everything about the character of the subdivision, from its incorporation as a city to its fundamental role in the civil rights movement. Yet, Seaside was among many places that have been overlooked by historians and other social scientists seeking to explain the complex history of the last half of the twentieth century in California. This book attempts to rectify that oversight.

On the one hand, as new scholarship on race and urbanization shows, the federal government actively colluded with cities to sustain inequality by refusing home loans to people of color generally and blacks in particular.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the military, an arm of the federal government, became the most progressive and integrated institution in the country after a series of policy decisions during and after World War II that culminated in the desegregation of the armed forces by the time of the Korean War.<sup>7</sup> Rank, not race, came to determine status within the military, unlike in American society generally. Moreover, policies about racial integration applied to life on and off base so that military families—black, white,

Hispanic and Asian—shared an experience far different than their civilian counterparts in the 1950s and 1960s, most of whom lived in isolation from one another in cities and suburbs throughout the country. For military personnel and their families, racial barriers were challenged head-on, which meant that military families, as well as those who lived alongside them in military towns across the country, experienced a new model of living and working together that showed integration working to the benefit of all, in spite of hysteria to the contrary. Although this may be harder to discern in huge metropolitan military centers such as San Diego, smaller towns such as Seaside offer a novel and more nuanced way of understanding the military impact on race relations in the development of town life at midcentury.

In California, institutionalized racial barriers to housing, marriage, and voting were already challenged successfully in the courts by the 1950s, although customized racial boundaries remained in place well into the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Still, California had a long history of diversity in its cities, suburbs, and rural areas that went beyond the boundaries of black and white. An enormous literature on the West and California emphasizes that above all, California cities and suburbs incorporated a jumble of people of color that included Asians, Mexicans, and Africans, along with Anglo Americans. Although the cities and towns of California and the West were often the sites of racial violence and conflict, they were also places where multiple communities of color lived side-by-side in ways that they did not in most eastern and midwestern cities and towns in the early half of the twentieth century. Sometimes but not always, these communities found ways to build coalitions with one another to achieve specific ends.<sup>9</sup>

What became the most progressive racial policy in the country under the auspices of the U.S. military had a much greater chance of success in California than at other bases and military towns in the United States because the civil rights movement in California was less focused on overturning restrictive Jim Crow legislation of the type that characterized the American South than with implementing laws that were already in place. The new military policy affecting race relations during the 1950s and 1960s was consistent with rather than in defiance of California law, which was increasingly liberalizing in favor of integration and fairer treatment of

minorities.<sup>10</sup> Although there are plenty of studies on the economic impact of the military on large municipalities in California in the years during and after World War II, such as Roger Lotchin's work on San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, few studies look at smaller towns and cities attached to military bases, and fewer still analyze the impact of integration on military town development.<sup>11</sup>

Most importantly, the "long civil rights movement" that black women and men were engaged in throughout the country was bolstered by their association with the military at Fort Ord. Fort Ord gave black men secure employment, and as career officers or high-ranking enlisted men, they achieved a status that they could not have found in any other institution or organization in the country at that time.<sup>12</sup> Black women, who were traditionally the leaders in civil rights throughout the West, gained both prestige and security by association as officers' wives that enabled them to become even stronger and more successful as activists and leaders. Base life provided everything from affordable food, clothing, and other necessities through the commissary, to health care, giving African American military personnel advantages in daily life that African Americans not associated with the military simply did not have. Seaside was a poor community compared to other Monterey Peninsula towns, but its connection to the base gave its residents a measure of security that cushioned them from the harshest effects of economic racism.

I argue, first and foremost, that the military was responsible for the creation of the town of Seaside by fundamentally altering the demographics of Monterey County so that Seaside became home to a critical mass of soldier families, mostly black but also Asian, white, and multi-racial, many of whom were career military personnel. Seaside became a minority-majority city on the Monterey Peninsula, amidst communities that were predominantly white, in a relatively brief period of time following World War II. Most importantly, these soldiers and families of all races had experienced the full impact of integration in their lives on base over time, and were poised to challenge segregation off base as well, not as racial blocs, but together, as an interracial community.<sup>13</sup> They shared values associated with being part of the military such as a high regard for authority, law and order, patriotism, and belief in family. According

to one analysis of attitudes between soldiers, both careerists and those who served for only a short term and undergraduate students of the same age, “Whether black or white, soldiers are twice as likely as undergraduates to claim that they get along with other races . . . those in the military give more conservative responses than civilians . . . and are more likely to adhere to traditional family values.”<sup>14</sup> However, the same studies showed that military people of all races had more liberal views when it came to issues such as poverty, viewing poor people as “victims of circumstance” rather than responsible for their own condition.<sup>15</sup> These and other attitudes characterized large numbers of Seasideers at midcentury. It was a population that was centrist, politically progressive, and family oriented, but also one primed to challenge racist practices at every level and to fight social inequality.<sup>16</sup> Most important, it was a population that included large numbers of career military people of all races, including whites and especially blacks, not just those who had served for the duration of World War II and then left for civilian life.

This work contributes to a small but growing literature on military towns, which rightly focuses on the twentieth century when the military challenged the edifice of American race relations. Two books on race relations and military towns—*Homefront* by Catherine Lutz and *Black, White and Olive Drab* by Andrew H. Myers—examine the impact of the military on town life in the years during and after World War II. Lutz argues that the impact of the military was overwhelmingly negative, especially for women living on and near bases, and had harmful repercussions for American society generally. Myers on the other hand, argues that the military was a mostly positive force, modeling equality for the citizens of Columbia, North Carolina, but also facing enormous resistance by a population determined to retain segregation and second-class status for blacks.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that both Lutz and Myers focus on military towns located in the American South, a region most resistant to racial integration. There are no similar analyses of military communities in the American West.

Beth Bailey and David Farber looked at the ways that the military presence exacerbated an already complex racial dynamic in Hawaii, but they limited their study to a specific moment during World War II.<sup>18</sup> This

book calls for a more nuanced view of the military that focuses on the context outside of large urban areas or the American South. The military certainly brought crime and drugs to its base towns and created a culture that was both violent and exploitive for women, both nationally and internationally. However, military life in the United States at midcentury offered people of color, particularly blacks, opportunities to participate as equals in American life. In terms of gender, the military bolstered and empowered black women who were wives of officers to leadership roles on and off base even more than their female counterparts elsewhere in the West. This is not to say that the military was the only factor in the way Seaside developed, but it is to argue that the common experience of long careers in the military among so many Seaside residents had a profound effect on the political evolution and cultural makeup of the town, leading to a political culture of inclusivity.

Military historians who analyze the history of blacks in the armed forces and the process of desegregation tend to juxtapose the experiences of military personnel in the urban North and South and have almost completely ignored installations in the West, even in California where a number of the most significant bases were located, and where race was not a simple divide between blacks and whites but also included Mexicans, other Hispanic peoples, and multiple Asian communities.<sup>19</sup> They also tended to focus either on the period before or immediately after World War II. Polly J. Smith studied the effects of desegregation in the 1960s in three military towns and argued that the policy of the military did indeed have a powerful effect on neighborhoods, creating far less segregated spaces than in nonmilitary towns within their respective regions.<sup>20</sup> She did not fully analyze the evolution of any one of these towns over time, however, nor did she expand her analysis into the later decades of the twentieth century. This study of Seaside traces its development over the entire course of the twentieth century and focuses on how diversity of population, influenced by military life, led to more than crime, drugs, and prostitution, but to a body politic that was remarkably inclusive.

This work on Seaside also contributes to emerging literatures on urban space and race relations, particularly in California. "Cities of Color," a term coined by Albert M. Camarillo in 2007 describes the outcome of

urban segregation for people of color, including Mexicans, that forced communities of color into the least desirable areas of cities.<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon also is well documented in recent literature on racial segregation as it was embedded in both federal policy and in the American mind.<sup>22</sup>

This study takes that understanding a step further by showing how federal policy can also be used in powerful ways to effect change in exactly the opposite direction. Armed with a fiat from the highest levels of the military, base commanders not only integrated housing, schools, and all facilities on base, but were ordered to do the same off base as well.<sup>23</sup> Although this could not bring about major changes in restrictive housing or segregated schools in big municipalities like San Diego or San Francisco, for example, the power of the federal government at Fort Ord fundamentally (and rapidly) altered Seaside, and even the Monterey Peninsula as a whole.

New scholarship on race relations in urban California focuses as much on coalition building among groups as on the conflicts that ensued over other issues related to housing segregation, for example.<sup>24</sup> Most recently, Charlotte Brooks examined the two major metropolitan centers of Los Angeles and San Francisco in her analysis of the efforts of Asians and Asian Americans, once the most discriminated racial group in California, as they became, with the full complicity of whites, a middle-class “model minority.” She demonstrated, through an analysis of housing issues, the pivotal role that Asian Americans played in challenging segregation, and the effects this had on civil rights for others, especially for blacks in California.<sup>25</sup> Shana Bernstein’s analysis of the multiracial nature of the civil rights movement in Los Angeles also focuses on complex relationships among Jews, Mexicans, Asians, and blacks.<sup>26</sup> Yet, coalition building among minorities in the West could be difficult to achieve, as George Sánchez, Mark Brilliant, and Matthew Whitaker argue with regard to California and Arizona, respectively.<sup>27</sup>

The example of Seaside adds a new dimension to this literature by showing how the military policy of integration contributed to the weakening of group identity formed solely on the basis of race or ethnicity, and how it strengthened ties between individuals; in fact, in Seaside it was difficult to get racial or ethnic groups to vote together as a self-interested

bloc. Even so-called well-organized black groups such as the Ministerial Alliance and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) could not control their constituents, and almost every issue, large or small, contained individual members of all races and ethnicities, including many multiracial families. This was in stark contrast to civil rights efforts in other parts of California and the West.<sup>28</sup>

This work benefited from the substantial literature created by historians and sociologists of urban America who brought to light the “urban crisis” that characterized many eastern and midwestern American cities in the post-World War II period, which led to the establishment of an isolated “underclass” of mostly blacks “left behind” by the gains of the civil rights movement.<sup>29</sup> Foremost among historians, Thomas J. Sugrue demonstrated that once prosperous cities such as Detroit experienced severe decline in the form of high unemployment, poverty, and serious physical deterioration as early as the 1950s. Among the multiple causes for the increase in urban poverty and blight was the abandonment of cities by white and black elites who found jobs, homes, and opportunity in the emerging surrounding suburbs.<sup>30</sup> Sociologists such as William Julius Wilson focused on Chicago to demonstrate how and why the inner city became both impoverished economically and a center for drug use and crime. Like Sugrue, Wilson suggested multiple factors contributed to the problem, not the least of which was racism. However, he also emphasized the devastating impact in terms of loss of community spirit when more affluent African Americans moved out of the inner city in the 1960s. He attributed high crime; female-headed, fatherless households; and the prevalence of drugs to this exodus of middle-class blacks, as well as to businesses and industries increasingly relocating in suburbs, severely limiting employment opportunities for blacks who had no access to transportation systems.<sup>31</sup> The literature that explores where these black middle-class elites (and their white counterparts) fled *to* is mostly limited to examinations of all-black or all-white towns and suburbs.<sup>32</sup> However, this study of Seaside offers an alternative possibility. Seaside attracted people of all races who were striving toward middle-class life, who valued diversity, who had learned from military life that diversity and inclusion could be a good thing, not something to fear. These were also career military people,



dependent on the base for everything from food to health care. It made no sense to leave when the base was literally next door.

Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton argued that it was the continuation of segregation in housing practices based on race, in spite of civil rights legislation that outlawed racially restrictive covenants in housing, which were as important as racism and class divisions in creating a black urban underclass, isolated from opportunities and values that characterized American life in the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Beryl Satter most recently has taken that argument further, suggesting that “contracts of sale” were routinely used to exploit blacks struggling to attain home ownership and middle-class status in Chicago. Contracts, or deeds of sale, were not mortgages, but only installment loans. They were used to finance homes for people who, because of their race, would not qualify for a regular mortgage. Those individuals may have believed they were paying off a mortgage, when actually they were only paying high interest, without receiving equity in their homes. They were also not protected from foreclosure if they missed a payment, which happened all too often.<sup>34</sup>

This analysis of Seaside provides a different view of the complexity of the story of black and minority communities. Seaside did not develop into an all-black ghetto like parts of Oakland, parts of Los Angeles, parts of southwestern cities such as Phoenix, or even northern urban centers such as Detroit, primarily because it was a place that middle-class blacks came to, rather than fled from, even when it was ravaged by the crack cocaine epidemic and the dark side of military life that included prostitution and the establishment of bars. Unlike other predominantly black suburbs and towns, Seaside boasts expansive ocean views and a climate warmer than neighboring communities. Black middle-class families (along with middle-class whites, Asians, and Latinos) stayed in Seaside and established many social organizations patterned after those both in predominantly black urban and suburban areas, and also in white, Asian, and Latino suburbs such as fraternities and sororities, celebrations of Mardi Gras and Debutante Balls, a tennis club, churches of every denomination, Latino dance, Buddhist festivals, and music festivals—famous ones such as the Monterey Blues and Jazz Festivals that began this book, which gave Seaside both stability and pride of place.<sup>35</sup>

Seaside, Carmel, Pebble Beach, Monterey, Carmel Valley, Marina, Sand City, and Del Rey Oaks, although distinctive communities, make up the mosaic that is the Monterey Peninsula in Monterey County. They share resources, government, history, and people. Seaside's story cannot be told outside of the context of its Peninsula neighbors, beginning with its native people and seventeenth-century Mexican roots, and extending through the twenty-first century. Chapter 1, explores Seaside's earliest history as part of the larger local and regional landscape and within the state and national context. It is an analysis of how and why Seaside's first residents and planners grappled with identity as chance and circumstance presented alternatives to the idea of Seaside as a resort destination adjacent to the famous Hotel Del Monte, and then as the poorer subdivision of the City of Monterey where the white working class and people of color began to make homes during the Great Depression.

Chapter 2 focuses on the demographic transformation of the 1930s and 1940s and how that regional identity broke down and became localized.<sup>36</sup> New populations of mostly military personnel drove Seaside residents to push to incorporate as a city with an identity intertwined with that of Fort Ord, and increasingly, with growing numbers of minorities, particularly African Americans. It was during this period that conflict arose between federal housing policies that specifically excluded all people of color and the military's need to invest in a town that was home to many of its new black officers and high-ranking enlisted men. The military population began to dominate Seaside in the wake of World War II and was, above all else, a diverse mixture of people. But unlike the other Peninsula cities whose populations were largely drawn from other parts of California, albeit by way of southern Europe, Asia, Mexico, and the Midwest, Seaside residents, both black and white, came mostly from the American South and Southwest. This gave Seaside a distinctive cultural affinity with these sections of the United States, expressed in everything from religion to culture and social life, but without the overt Jim Crow practices that affected nonmilitary towns settled by southern whites, such as Phoenix.<sup>37</sup> The city that emerged after World War II had the distinct stamp of both the military and the American South, and also incorporated new groups

of Asians from the Philippines, China, and Japanese American returnees from American internment camps, as well as immigrants from Mexico.

Chapter 3 explores the consequences of city building in the context of socioeconomic marginalization and racial inequality that marked the state and the country at midcentury. In this era, 1956–1970, Seasiders felt the full effects of the policy to desegregate the military. It was also during this time that policy makers at the local level took full advantage of the federal government’s efforts to rectify discrimination in housing and were able to utilize federal funding from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to create infrastructure and to raze and redevelop large parts of the city. It was during this period that Seasiders also coped with the serious consequences of the Vietnam War. By the end of the decade of the 1970s, Seaside elected its first black mayor and would continue to elect blacks and Asians to the city council along with whites. They did this not as racially organized voting blocs but as an integrated citizenry.

Chapter 4 investigates Seaside’s communities of color that included large numbers of middle-class officers and high-level enlisted men and their families. They were committed to life in Seaside, rather than abandoning the city when it was possible to do so as they achieved higher socioeconomic status. It was their leadership and dedication to Seaside that led to full integration in housing and neighborhoods, public spaces, businesses, and in the faculty of the public school system. Seaside women and men, white, black, Asian, and shades of brown, almost all of whom had military affiliations, worked together across racial lines to meet the highest goals of racial equality and inclusion at every level of economic, social, and political life. Their immense successes were based in no small part on their collective experience as middle-class military people who shared a common culture as part of Fort Ord.

In the decades of the 1980s and early 1990s, Seasiders coped with economic uncertainty and crisis, and the high crime that came with military life and the epidemic of crack cocaine into California, even as they continued the process of city building. Chapter 5 puts the issue of crime in perspective, as it was never as overwhelming as media reports presented. This chapter also traces the development of African American culture in Seaside that had an impact all over the region, and beyond. City events

and celebrations that emerged from the black middle-class community of Seaside had the effect of defining Seaside as an African American enclave even though blacks never made up more than 29 percent of the city's population. The Monterey Bay Blues Festival, held in June, and the Monterey Jazz Festival, held in late September are examples of attractions that continue to draw the best musical talent and visitors from around the world. At the same time, Japanese, Filipinos, and Vietnamese contributed their own cultural events to Seaside city life. Numerous city events and activities initiated in these years served as the glue that held Seaside's of diverse nationalities and ethnicities together, all under the common bond of the military.

By the end of the 1990s, the direction that the city had been moving in for forty years abruptly shifted. Fort Ord closed as an active training base in 1994. Large numbers of Latinos without connection to the military settled in the city and changed the demographics overnight. Development took off as real estate formerly owned by the military and federal government became available for civilian use. Chapter 6 documents these changes and examines a significant identity shift as Seaside's struggled with the notion of what it meant to be a multicultural city without Fort Ord.

Seaside's relationship with the military makes it unusual, but at the same time, the story of Seaside is part and parcel of the story of American town life in the twentieth century and into the new millennium. The first Chairman of the Seaside Human Rights Commission, Sherman Smith, who was a former army officer, Tuskegee Airman, and a leader in the civil rights movement who helped desegregate the all-white Ord Terrace neighborhood in Seaside, and who was the first African American to serve on the Board of Monterey Peninsula College, had this to say about his city in an editorial for the newspaper, *Citizen Observer*, in 1968:

We here in California pride ourselves on our liberal and progressive attitudes, but every time a Negro-American or a Mexican American is refused a job because of his ancestry, every time a Japanese American is turned down in their attempts to move into a new neighborhood, we are as guilty of prejudice and discrimination as the Klan. The difference is one of degree, not of kind. We in Seaside have a special problem, and a special opportunity. Our population

is one of the most cosmopolitan in the State, we have a tremendous variety of racial, ethnic and cultural strains, all of which have been woven into our way of life. When a newcomer arrives from the East or West, one of his first chores is to become accustomed to our street names, because so many of them are of Spanish derivation. Our challenge is to see that this new way of life [is] the truly American way of life . . . in which each man is accepted on his own merit . . . or rejected on his own shortcoming . . . not because of his color or his accent, or by the name he calls his God.<sup>38</sup>

With these words, Smith expressed the ideals of the early civil rights movement and the commonly shared sense of responsibility that African American residents of Seaside were committed to even as their counterparts in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, Phoenix, and elsewhere fled from black neighborhoods and cities. Middle-class blacks in Seaside together with other proponents of civil rights, most of whom had military ties, created a new politics of inclusion and a commitment to place that effectively shaped the city throughout the twentieth century and serves as a reminder that integration can work to make change in ideas about race.