resents only a slice of the booming beach population in the South. Texas's barrier islands, a stretch of Gulf Coast between Gulf Shores, Ala., and Panama City, Fla., South Carolina's Grand Strand, and North Carolina's Outer Banks have all registered dramatic growth spurts in the last decades—a reflection of and reaction to the allure of the South's diverse and attractive coastline.

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Beaches, Black, Jim Crow Era

During the first half of the 20th century, and especially in the years following World War II, America witnessed a veritable rush to the sea. Advances in transportation and the changing relationship between work and leisure compelled growing numbers of Americans to venture to the coast for pleasure, relaxation, and extended vacations. Southern states, in particular, experienced a steady growth in tourism-related industries, due in no small measure to hundreds of miles of pristine beaches the region possessed. Cities and states devoted resources to the development and upkeep of public beaches, while private developers turned once-forbidden coastal areas into summertime playgrounds for middle-class Americans. By the 1950s, summertime youth beach culture both reflected and shaped changing concepts of gender and encouraged greater sexual expression.

Not coincidentally, beaches also became one of the South's most racially segregated spaces, where white privilege and black exclusion were most pronounced and where racial boundaries violently policed. As African Americans fought for civil rights (among them, the right to equal access to public beaches), city and state governments employed every tool imaginable to prevent integration and preserve racial privilege. Many of them scrambled to sell coastal properties and public resorts to private, racially discriminatory groups or, when that failed, simply closed public beaches. African Americans' efforts to desegregate beaches led to some of the era's ugliest acts of racial violence, and the proliferation of private clubs and resorts and neglect of public facilities, like the rise of private educational academies, offer a telling reminder of Jim Crow's legacy in the South today.

But the exclusion of African Americans from whites-only beaches tells only

part of the story of leisure in the Jim Crow South. Behind the color line, black southerners struggled, often against great odds, to develop and defend beaches of their own. As early as the 1890s, small enclaves of wealthy African Americans worked to develop private, exclusive resorts. In 1892 Charles Douglass, son of the famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, facilitated the acquisition of a small stretch of shore along the Chesapeake Bay's western shore and founded Highland Beach. In the coming years, many of Washington's and Baltimore's "aristocrats of color" purchased lots and built summer homes there. Many pointed to this and other burgeoning summer resorts, such as Michigan's Idlewild, as symbols of African American initiative and achievement in the face of Jim Crow. "Even such small enterprises as a successful watering resort swells the heart with pride," the prominent black intellectual Kelly Miller said, and "show how earnestly we all long for political, economic, and social structure built upon our own foundation." But these early black resorts also reflected the growing class segregation of black America and the social and cultural alienation of upper-class blacks from the working poor. Highland Beach residents, for example, worked hard to maintain their exclusivity and prohibited beach access to the general public.

Throughout the early 20th century, there remained, for the vast majority of African Americans, few places for relief from the summertime heat. Few southern cities allocated separate beaches or parks for black citizens, and those that did located them in remote, inaccessible, and environmentally hazardous areas, places that often bred crime, confirmed white stereotypes, and reinforced blacks' feelings of inferiority. Enterprising African Americans struggled to fill this void and capitalize on segregation. In the early 1900s, Washington, D.C., African American businessman and shipping magnate Lewis Jefferson purchased a Potomac riverside resort and refurbished it into the modern amusement park Washington Park. This and other, smaller-scale ventures abounded across the South and became popular destinations for families otherwise excluded from white places of public amusement. By the early 1930s, black southerners claimed small stretches of shore as their own across the region, often on black-owned coastal property or in remote, undeveloped areas. Other black beaches developed alongside white resorts and became places of pleasure and rest for the crews of laborers and domestic workers who serviced white vacationers' needs.

But while many black beaches remained shrouded behind the color line and rarely aroused any opposition, others elicited white hostility and inspired efforts to scuttle and suppress. In Norfolk, Va., a city virtually surrounded by water, African Americans were prohibited from swimming on any of the

city's beaches. Throughout the 1920s, black leaders petitioned the city to provide them with a beach of their own, but each attempt to designate an area for black recreation was met with vocal and sustained resistance from nearby white residents who deemed African American pleasure seekers a nuisance and a threat to their property value. In 1926 a group of black investors converted a swimming hole near Salem, Va., into a "colored bathing beach" and "first-class resort." The beach aroused considerable opposition from white citizens and county officials, due in part to its close proximity to a popular white resort. Three days before its scheduled opening, an anonymous band of assailants bombed the dam upstream and vandalized the newly built facilities. On Mon Louis Island, in southern Alabama, black coastal property owner Harry L. Moseby rented out his beach to churches and other groups for weekend picnics and barbecues in the summer months. But, by the 1930s, he and other black coastal residents contended with deep-pocketed whites in search of desirable coastal property for summer homes and dedicated to driving—by threat, by courts, or by force—"undesirables" from the coast. A group of white neighbors first intimidated, and then swindled, Moseby into signing away his rights to host parties on his property.

Beach segregation in the Jim Crow era was not unique to southern shores, as evidenced by the 1919 Chicago Race Riot, which was sparked by the drowning death of a young African American boy after he accidentally swam across an invisible color line in the waters of Lake Michigan. Nor was white resistance to the fruition of separate black beaches and resorts a southern phenomenon. In 1925 the Pacific Beach Club in Huntington Beach, Calif., an exclusive resort for African Americans, burned down under suspicious circumstances just months before its completion. Across the country, white strategies to drive African Americans from the beach and monopolize desirable coastal property stemmed not only from fears of interracial sexual intimacy and declining property values but moreover from unease over African Americans' enjoying themselves, by themselves, and over blacks' efforts to lay claim to the cultural currency of leisure. As black Charlestonian Mamie Garvin Fields put it, "Really, certain whites didn't like to think you had leisure to do anything but pick cotton and work in the field. Just generally, if you were black, you were not supposed to have either time or money, and if you did, you ought not to show it."

But in the face of legal and extralegal obstacles, intimidation, and the threat of violence, black southerners continued to circumvent Jim Crow, carve out desirable coastal space for pleasure and entertainment, and utilize leisure in the service of racial uplift and reform. North of Jacksonville, Fla., Abraham Lincoln Lewis, founder and president of the Afro-American Life Insurance Company,

founded American Beach in 1935. In the coming years, families purchased lots and built summer homes there, and hotels, nightclubs, and restaurants that catered to the large summer crowds sprouted up. By the 1950s, American Beach became a hub on the rhythm-and-blues summer circuit and a destination for African American celebrities. Numerous other beaches, such as Atlantic Beach, in Horry County, S.C., Riverside Beach, outside of Charleston, S.C., Sea Breeze, in New Hanover County, N.C., and Carr's and Sparrow's Beaches, outside of Annapolis, Md., also attracted growing numbers of African American families in the 1950s and early 1960s, playing host to picnics, barbecues, dances, sporting events, and musical performances and fostering the growth of seasonal businesses such as food stands and do-drop inns.

While visitors to American Beach danced to the sounds of Duke Ellington, James Brown, and Ray Charles, at others they swayed to the sounds of spirituals. In 1923 Methodist Episcopal bishop Robert E. Jones purchased nearly 300 acres of beachfront property along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and founded the Gulfside Summer Assembly, the nation's first permanent African American religious resort. It was rumored that, in purchasing the property, Jones passed as a white man. Regardless, Gulfside's survival in the Jim Crow South was due, in large part, to the slightly more racially tolerant attitudes of Gulf Coast whites and to the seemingly nonthreatening nature of a religious resort. Not simply a place to escape from the hardships of life, the resort became an important center in the racial uplift and interracial cooperation movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Gulfside hosted a variety of groups, including training institutes for ministers and teachers, Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls Camps, recuperative retreats for "tired mothers" each summer, and an industrial training school for impoverished young black males throughout the year. Gulfside camps enforced strict regimentation of daily activities and preached the productive and uplifting use of leisure time. Alongside camps and institutes, Gulfside also hosted middle- and upper-class black families from New Orleans and the surrounding area, who vacationed at the resort throughout the summer. In the succeeding years, 30 additional buildings were constructed on the grounds, including cabins, classrooms, and a 1,000-seat auditorium. Each summer, Gulfside hosted an annual Song Fest that brought an interracial (though segregated) crowd to the beach to listen to choirs and glee clubs from black colleges and universities across the South. Indeed, the different types of black beaches that came of age in the mid-20th century both reflected and gave expression to the class and cultural diversity of black southerners as a whole.

Despite the rise of these and other beaches and resorts, southern black communities continued to suffer from dire recreational inequality and a striking

absence of safe and healthy places of play. In the 1950s and 1960s, local and national civil rights activists often drew attention to the patterns of white privilege and black exclusion along southern shores, and its deleterious effects on community life and childhood development, to underscore the fiction of "separate but equal." To counter their claims, city and state governments developed "colored" beaches, swimming pools, parks, and campgrounds. The early 1960s witnessed an unprecedented number of black beaches under development in communities large and small, especially in the aftermath of wade-ins at white beaches by civil rights activists. After a group staged a wade-in at a segregated beach in Carolina Beach, N.C., in 1961, for instance, city officials attempted to placate black community leaders with promises of increased funding and upkeep of the "colored-only" Freeman Beach.

Following passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, though, governments ceased funding most of these public facilities, some of which had blossomed into important centers of community life, and they quickly fell into disrepair. Beginning in the 1970s and to the present, many historically black beaches and coastal communities have fallen prey to developers in search of property to build golf courses and resorts for middle- and upper-class vacationers and to the skyrocketing property taxes that accompanied the rise of vacationing and tourism along the coast. In places such as Virginia Beach, Va., the sandy soil that had long sustained African American farmers became a valuable commodity, and black property owners were targeted by developers seeking to acquire coastal property at below-market values. The steady demise of American Beach, which as a result of development on all sides is today a shell of its former self, has drawn national attention and calls for preservation. Its residents' ongoing struggle to fend off rapacious developers and their political allies was fictionalized in John Sayles's 2000 film *Sunshine State*.

The fight for safe, attractive, and accessible beaches played an important, if often unheralded, role in African Americans' long freedom struggle. The disappearance of black beaches in the modern South symbolizes the ironic consequences of desegregation, while the persistence of patterns of racial privilege along America's coasts and of recreational inequality in southern black communities speaks to the failure of civil rights reforms to confront a history of economic and environmental injustice.

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