

VISUAL STUDIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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SPRING 2026 EVENTS

ENDLESS SUMMER SEMINAR



Black California Dreamin': Stories of Claiming Space at America's Leisure Frontier

Alison Rose Jefferson, M.H.C., Ph.D.

Independent Historian and Heritage Conservation Consultant

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

12:30-2:00pm PT

SOS 250

Co-sponsored by the Caltech Program in Visual Culture

Join a program with publicly engaged independent Historian and Heritage Conservation Consultant Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson where she will share stories about how African Americans during the Great Migration and Jim Crow era from the 1900s to 1960s created recreational and relaxation spaces at Southern California beaches and inland places. In the process sometimes, they were able to form community and created business projects at these sites. These stories are drawn from her recent book, *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era* and other work. She will also share how some of these stories at beaches are being used in contemporary public history remembrance and public policy actions. Some of the many photographs Dr. Jefferson has unearthed from these places she will discuss in her presentation are visual evidence which communicate knowledge and understanding of the varied relationships associated with them. As leisure was gaining centrality as part of the American Dream, Black Californians were working to make it an open, inclusive reality for all. African Americans fought for dignity, equal access and the full range of human experiences and fulfillment in exploration of California's offerings as they contributed to the state's development and the broader freedom rights struggle in the United States.

Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson is a publicly engaged independent historian and heritage conservation consultant. She has worked extensively to elucidate and re-center the African American experience in California history, heritage conservation efforts, civic memory, cultural tourism, and the American identity. She is the author of the award-winning book *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era* (2020). She is currently the coordinator/ editor and historian consultant for the "African Americans and the National Park Service, 1872-1965" study project with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and the National Park Service. Other Public History projects she has lead illuminating and amplifying knowledge of the African American experience, include undertakings in Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Long Beach, among other places. Learn more about Dr. Jefferson's work at her website, alisonrosejefferson.com.

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Image: L to R: Grace Williams, Albert Williams, Mary Mingleton, Willie Williams (no relation) enjoying themselves at the Santa Monica Beach area at Bay Street (controversially sometimes called the "Inkwell"), 1926. Shades Of L.A. Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Collection.

