



HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Confronting Racism

Untold stories

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Matthew Liddi/Telegram-Tribune

Michael Pitchlyn said his skin color and dreadlocks have led to problems with SLO police.

People of color speak out

People of color speak out

By Dave Wilcox
Telegram-Tribune

The stories are seldom told, the storytellers say, because it's often easier to brush aside subtle remarks or walk away from confrontations:

■ One young man said he was harassed by San Luis Obispo police at a doughnut shop late one night because he was black and wore his hair in dreadlocks — the general description of a holdup suspect police were seeking.

Michael Pitchlyn said when he tried to call his mother, the officer taunted him. The incident defused, said Pitchlyn, when he asked for the officer's name and badge number.

■ Fearing thugs were following her downtown, a 75-year-old black woman called police, but said she settled for a ride home from a stranger because the officers didn't take her seriously.

■ A Cuesta College instructor said she was

walking home from a concert with friends of various races one night when a truckload of drunken men started shouting racial epithets at the group. Fighting ensued and one man was prosecuted for hitting her.

"The system worked," said the college instructor, Ginger Baber, who organized a forum Wednesday night at San Luis Obispo's Springfield Baptist Church.

But, she added, it did so grudgingly.

Billed as an opportunity for "people of color" to share experiences, about 70 showed up at the forum to relate snapshots of living in San Luis Obispo.

Kaie Cebulla, who grew up in San Luis Obispo, said she was raised to ignore racist incidents.

"You always just leave it alone and don't make a big deal of it," she recalled.

"I'm glad things are open enough to speak about it."

Baber said she felt such a public forum was necessary now not only because of the rioting in Los

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Racism

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Angeles and elsewhere, but to shed light on irritating day-to-day incidents locally — being ignored by store clerks, having insults shouted by passing motorists, being stopped by police for little reason other than the color of one's skin.

She hears "little things that make me know everything isn't wonderful" in San Luis Obispo, said Baber.

Among those incidents was the arrest, trial and conviction of a friend, Daraus Tyson, on a charge of public drunkenness.

Tyson claimed he was wrongly arrested, and said Wednesday night that San Luis Obispo, as a community, denies racism exists.

"This is a good place," said Baber, "but it's only as good as you perceive it to be."

Perceptions offered Wednesday night revealed an increasing wariness that minorities — particularly blacks — are subject to insidious harassment because of their race

ed to some of the concerns voiced by urging anyone with complaints to communicate them.

He said officers make mistakes, but allowing hostility to fester will only worsen the situation.

He took credit for working to open lines of communication since arriving five years ago, and cited as a successful example of those efforts the peaceful reaction in San Luis Obispo following the Rodney King verdicts.

About 75 people marched without incident down the middle of Higuera Street during Farmers Market to protest the verdicts, said Gardiner.

"We are here to service a diverse community," he said.

Others said a stronger Human Relations Commission is needed to effectively deal with problems spawned by racism.

"Sorry, but you're impotent," 30-year resident Narika Phillips said, directing her comment to commission members present at the forum.

Chairperson Marion Wolff acknowledged that the commission's powers are limited, and suggested citizens should pressure the city to give it

that minorities — particularly blacks — are subject to insidious harassment because of their race.

"I feel like somebody took a big baseball bat to a mirror and just shattered it," said Toni Wynn, referring to her belief that few of the problems illustrated existed in San Luis Obispo.

Police Chief Jim Gardiner responded

that the commission's powers are limited, and suggested citizens should pressure the city to give it some teeth.

The exhortation wasn't only to ordinary citizens: Among those attending the forum Wednesday night were Mayor Ron Dunin and Council members Peg Pinard and Bill Roalman.



Participants in a forum Wednesday night on race issues in San Luis Obispo heard stories of problems encountered by minorities. Matthew Liddl/Telegram-Tribune

This article from the San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune was published on May 28, 1992, as rioting took place in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the wake of the acquittal of the police officers who were recorded beating unarmed black man Rodney King. This forum at Springfield Baptist Church in San Luis Obispo was an opportunity for dialogue surrounding issues of systemic racism locally. Many of these same issues are still pressing concerns 28 years later, here and around the country.

Juneteenth Celebration

The NAACP of San Luis Obispo County are observing Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19th that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free.

You can learn more on the NAACP of San Luis Obispo County's [website](#).



Online Research Workshop



Elsie Louis was the granddaughter of Ah Louis

Are you looking for new ways to learn about local history and research while our institutions are closed? Join Laura Sorveti, Cal Poly Special Collections and Archives, and Kaylee Scoggins Herring, History Center's Collections Manager, for a FREE Zoom meeting on July 7, 2020, at 6 pm.

We'll be discussing the various ways to learn about our county's history from your very own home, with time for your questions at the end!

Signups will be available soon, check out our [webpage](#).

Tour the Dallidet Adobe

We are giving virtual tours of the Dallidet Adobe every Thursday at 1:00 pm.

The Dallidet family lived in San Luis Obispo from the 1850s through the 1950s. Hear their stories while visiting the family home.

If you've never visited the home, or if it's been awhile, this is the perfect opportunity.

Please register by noon on Thursday, and we will email you a Zoom invitation to join that week's tour.

[Click here for more information or to register](#)



Looking for more to do?

- Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#). In addition to our regular Theme Monday and Throwback Thursday posts, we'll now be posting every weekday with photos from our collection that will inspire activities you can try in your very own homes.
- Take a [virtual walking tour](#) of historic San Luis Obispo. These video series feature short vignettes about significant local landmarks.

If you have any ideas of content you'd like to see, share it with us! And if you enjoy what we share with you, and if you are able to, would you please consider [supporting us](#)?

Thank you for being a part of our community. Everybody stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Thomas Kessler
Executive Director

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