



News Release

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Allensworth Exhibit: 100 Years of the California Dream Portrayed in Historic Exhibits Traveling Across California

SACRAMENTO – The centennial celebration of Allensworth State Historic Park, one of the first towns founded, financed and governed by African Americans, was kicked off with the unveiling of a historic exhibit in the State Capitol Museum rooms in February.

That historic exhibit is now traveling California with the following schedule:

- April 4 – 30 San Bernardino County Government Center, 385 N. Arrowhead Avenue, San Bernardino, CA
- May 15 – October 5 California African American Museum, 600 State Street, Los Angeles (Located in Exposition Park at the corner of Figueroa Street and Exposition Blvd, west of the 110 Freeway.)

The 22-panel exhibit, “Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream,” was commissioned by the California African American Museum (CAAM) in Los Angeles. The exhibit is co-sponsored by California State Parks, CAAM, and the California Legislative Black Caucus.

The town of Allensworth, located in Tulare County, was a visionary settlement established and operated by African Americans in 1908. It was founded by Colonel Allen Allensworth, Professor William Payne and three other enterprising African American men, and developed as a showplace for civic engagement, culture and ideas.

The settlement thrived economically based on retail trade, its level farmlands, county roads, and the Union Pacific rail line. Community life was vibrant with churches, schools, a library, general store, theater, symphony orchestra and numerous civic organizations.

Allensworth began its decline in 1914 when the Santa Fe railroad moved its stop from Allensworth to the nearby town of Alpaugh. Col. Allensworth’s death, that year, a drought, poor crops and a failing water supply became hopeless obstacles.

Despite its slow decline over the decades of the 20th century, Allensworth became “the town that refused to die.” In the 1970s the State of California, recognizing the historical

significance of Allensworth, purchased 240 acres of the original town and surroundings, establishing the Col. Allensworth State Historic Park.

“As the caretakers of Col. Allensworth State Historic Park, we are very pleased to be working in partnership with Senator Ridley-Thomas, the Black Caucus and the California African American Museum to tell the important story of Allensworth’s impact on California history and culture,” said Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks. “This past year the future of Allensworth was threatened. Today, it is a pleasure to look forward at this centennial, knowing Allensworth is protected and to dream of the possibilities before us.”

“The vision for Allensworth was a thriving municipality where African Americans functioned independently from, yet cooperatively with, the wider society to achieve self-respect, self-sufficiency, self-determination and prosperity,” said Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, (D-Los Angeles) Chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus. “We still share much of his vision today as we work toward a greater realization of the California Dream.

“Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Allensworth represents a significant moment in time and the California African American Museum is thrilled to have had the opportunity to organize an exhibition about this community,” said Charmaine Jefferson, executive director, California African American Museum. “Our mission is to research, preserve and interpret the history, as well as the art and culture of African Americans with a special emphasis on Californian and Western history. It is particularly fitting, then, that through this exhibition the history and lessons of Allensworth are never forgotten,”

“For the first time, the exhibit highlights the impact Allensworth had across California and its many diverse communities,” said Susan Anderson, historian and Allensworth exhibit curator with the California Community Empowerment Foundation. “From controversial legislation to innovative education pioneers and the role of Buffalo Soldiers in California’s development, this exhibit widens our understanding of Allensworth’s influence, and how it resonates today.”

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