

I have waited until now to comment on the Bruce's Beach Task Force's work. I wanted to learn about the substance of its findings on the tragic events surrounding early Manhattan Beach African-American residents Willa and Charles Bruce whose Manhattan Beach resort and property was wrongly taken by the City of Manhattan Beach in the 1920s. First I wanted to get a sense of the task force's general direction, leadership and its broader recommendations. Now I want to thank each Bruce's Beach Task Force member for your dedicated service to our city and our community. You are part of our city's history now. I thank you for your valiant efforts to document, preserve and illuminate the rich and nearly hidden Black history we have here in town. I thank you for your presentation on February 25, 2021. A tremendous amount of accurate and official history was uncovered and presented to the public. Your dedicated research about and service to our town is tremendously appreciated by so many including me.

However, I believe the Bruce's Beach Task Force presentation was partly whitewashed. By general appearance, many I have spoken to feel the same and are alarmed of what may be an on-going cover up of some facts while illuminating, rightfully so, others. I do not believe this was the intent of the hard working task force members. I have spoken with many of you over the months and your on-going alarm over the direction of the task force was not lost upon me. I am very grateful to each of you who approached this without political aim. We must move forward from where the task force recommendation will apparently deliver us. Time is of the essence.

Like many who have contacted me, I witnessed what I considered the suppression of some of the public's questions proposed to the Bruce's Beach Task Force panel during the presentation. Questions that were submitted in writing during the Zoom session were very conveniently ignored. In fact there was a long silence after only several questions were asked and answered. The audience could easily surmise that there were no more questions from the public. There were. Plenty. A panelist on a number of occasions asked if there were more questions and was told there were none at the time. But there were more from others including from a number of people I know. Questions were ignored. Why? It subsequently became clear the City of Manhattan Beach was not addressing all the questions asked by the public during the Bruce's Beach Task Force's Zoom presentation. What was the fear? I was stunned to witness this.

In one question that was presented, the panel leaders were asked about how the State of California and then subsequently [in 1995] the County of Los Angeles received the Bruce's Beach land from the City of Manhattan Beach. The panel and staff indicated they did not know the answer. Surprising to me because Council member Steve Napolitano served on city council from 1992-1995. I clearly remember because I voted for him in part because he used Spike Lee's film name "Do the Right Thing" as one of his campaign themes.

I was taken aback that Mr. Napolitano didn't share firsthand 1995 knowledge of the Bruce's Beach land transfer or how the 1995 city council, perhaps, continued to hide the history of the Bruce's Beach property by transferring it to another government entity namely the County of Los Angeles. History is not complete without all the facts and I was disappointed this line of

questioning was not addressed with more seriousness when presented. Without full transparency we risk a continuation of the 1920s cover up still in 2021. We should fully uncover the history of the taking of the Bruce family's property which was done under false pretense while using racism and eminent domain. We have to hear it no matter how painful it is.

The Bruce's Beach Task Force event presented during 2021's Black History month reminded many of us that we have arrived at a clear 180 degree turn from the Kumbaya moments of the initial meetings in the summer of 2020 when it was obvious that our Manhattan Beach city officials and citizens were in clear agreement that we must fully expose and understand the history of this tragic legacy and determine appropriate remedies. Some suggestions seemed easy, for example, Peck Street (named after George Peck, Manhattan Beach's co-founder) was proposed to be renamed by a councilmember. More innovative actions appeared to be possible. In the summer of 2020, all things Black and equitable and fair was on the table for discussion in Manhattan Beach. Poof! I feared it would be a check-a-box moment and then we would move on. It's happening. The Bruce's Beach Task Force, to meet its full mission, must still gather and present all the facts and all the answers to even harder questions. This is necessary to arrive at a more complete and accurate history of Bruce's Beach and all government misdeeds or activities associated with it.

Sadly the Bruce's Beach Task Force presentation gave no indication that this task force would be allowed to make hard recommendations outside of placing art in the sand. This would be a small lateral movement from 2006 when, as mayor, I led our city council to rename the park to Bruce's Beach. Most of us know that was not an easy task. However 15 years later we are now talking primarily about the sanctioning of art to commemorate Bruce's Beach. Imagine asking a strong Black entrepreneurial woman like Willa Bruce what art she would like seen on or near her property taken by the City of Manhattan Beach? Really? That's where we are as a city? 21st century, all inclusive, Manhattan Beach must demand and receive better.

During the Bruce's Beach Task Force Zoom meeting I could sense an awkward tension and there seemed to be extreme caution to try to stay away from the hard truths regarding ALL, especially contemporaries that were involved with the ongoing cover up of what occurred with Bruce's Beach in the 1920s, 1950s, 1970s and 1990s. Many past City of Manhattan Beach leaders are still here in town or readily reachable via email and we must not let their knowledge of this subject matter go undocumented. How can our city move forward without a full truth and reconciliation moment as it pertains to Bruce's Beach? We must face each other and ask this question now. We must.

Since 2020 I've been working with Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn, whose governing jurisdiction holds the original Bruce's Beach land between 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> The Strand, Manhattan Beach. Supervisor Hahn has pledged to do the right thing and has reached out directly to the Bruce family's immediate descendant. The City of Manhattan Beach should join with Supervisor Hahn and jointly commit to doing what's just, equitable and significantly meaningful in reference to Bruce's Beach. The Bruce's Beach Task Force journey has led this 2021 Manhattan

Beach City Council to a point where it cannot simply place new works of art on the sand and move on. Thank you Bruce's Beach Task Force for illuminating this fact.

Finally I stress high appreciation for and applaud the dedication and hard work of the Bruce's Beach Task Force. However I feel saddened by the stories that some of you shared with me which showed that you truly believed you were really trusted to find the truth only to face what is described as governmental and internal resistance and disappointment. I stand with you all and value the historical Bruce's Beach truths you uncovered and we will continue our march to uncover many more. It was my repeated promise made to my dear friend Bob Brigham, whose thesis was a solid basis from which the Bruce's Beach Task Force pulled historical facts. I promised Bob this in the early 1990s and it is my promise to you and the City of Manhattan Beach now in 2021.

Mitch Ward

Former Mayor and Councilmember, Manhattan Beach

2003-2007, 2007-2011

Comments are downloadable here:

<https://mitchward.com/BrucesBeach/BrucesBeachTaskForce2021Presentation.pdf>