

# RON DELLUMS

## 47th MAYOR OF OAKLAND

### Growing up in Oakland Point/ Prescott

"When I was growing up in West Oakland, California, a constant part of our environment was the sound of the freight and passenger trains rolling along the nearby rail lines. The heavy rumble of the freights underpinned the industrial character of our neighborhood. The more elegantly pitched noise of the passenger trains promised that there existed a larger world beyond." Excerpt from *Lying Down with the Lions* by Ron V. Dellums and H. Lee Halterman, Beacon Press, 2000.

Ron Dellums became the 47th Mayor of Oakland on January 1, 2007. Born in Oakland in 1935, he grew up in an 1880 Victorian house near 10th and Wood Street, still standing only three blocks from here. Mayor Dellums attended two schools in West Oakland, St. Patrick's School and McClymonds High School, and graduated from Oakland Technical High School in North Oakland. He later worked as an after-school recreation director at Lafayette Elementary School in West Oakland. Dellums graduated from U.C. Berkeley with a masters degree in social welfare and directed youth and employment programs in Hunters Point.

Many residents of West Oakland held jobs related to transporting of goods and people because of the proximity to shipping and rail services. Dellums' father, Verney Dellums, was a longshoreman and his uncle, C.L. Dellums, was one of the leaders and organizers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Dellums served on the Berkeley City Council from 1967 to 1970. He was the first African American from Northern California elected to Congress in 1970. As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he represented California's 9th Congressional District for 27 years. He is known for his anti-Vietnam War and anti-Apartheid initiatives, among other important legislation.

Dellums grew up in the racially mixed working class neighborhood surrounding Bertha Port Park, which was hard hit by the Depression. War industries, including shipyards and military bases, offered jobs to local residents during World War II. African Americans, many of them from the South, were attracted to the West Coast. Most of these newcomers arrived by train at 16th and Wood Street and settled nearby.

Housing segregation made it difficult for African Americans to move out of West Oakland, and three and four families were often crowded into what had been single family homes. Many families even lived in garages and Dellums can remember hearing "the sounds of family life floating out of curtained garage windows" and savoring the scent of "down home cooking oozing through the cracks of garage doors." Although his career took him across this country and the globe, Ron Dellums remained connected to West Oakland through his friends and relatives. The health and well-being of West Oakland residents have benefitted from his leadership.



Mayor Dellums and Oakland school children



West Oakland Neighborhood Map, adapted from The Oakland Museum Search Map website: [http://collections.museumca.org/search\\_map.jsp](http://collections.museumca.org/search_map.jsp).

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For more information on the history of Oakland's waterfront, visit the Oakland Main Library History Room and the Oakland Museum of California.



Chase and Pine Streets, 1934  
Photo by Wilson Ellis, 1934, courtesy of Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey



Chase and Pine Streets, 2008  
Photo by Marilyn Snow

### West Oakland neighborhoods: What's in a Name?

Oakland Point/Prescott is the area bounded by 7th Street, West Grand Avenue, Mandela Parkway and the former Oakland Army Base. One of the oldest and most intact nineteenth century neighborhoods in California, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area was known as Oakland Point. The name Prescott came from the local school, named after William H. Prescott, eminent 19th century historian (the town of Prescott, Arizona is also named after him.)

South Prescott, the area between 7th and 3rd, Peralta and Mandela Parkway is the surviving remnant of a larger neighborhood of workers' cottages below the tracks near the Southern Pacific yards and shops.

In recent times, the area acquired the nickname "Lower Bottoms" from an African American community in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, also located at a low elevation close to the waterfront. A local effort, the Village Bottoms Cultural District, seeks to retain and promote Black culture in the neighborhood.

"Dogtown" is the nickname given to the area bounded by Mandela and Hollis near 32nd and 34th Streets. In both areas, Victorian homes are being revived, warehouses converted to artist live/work spaces, and industrial sites rebuilt with new lofts.

"Ghosttown" is another nickname, this one for the area roughly south of the MacArthur Maze, bounded by MacArthur, Martin Luther King, and San Pablo. The area is also called Hoover/Foster after local schools. McClymonds and Clawson also take their names from neighborhood schools.

Oak Center is the neighborhood between 10th and 18th Streets and Union and the I-980 Freeway. Several City Landmark homes are located in Oak Center, which is a designated historic district.

### More Oakland History

To learn more about Oakland Point, see the reverse side of this marker and check out the others listed below. Look for a wayfinding sign at the northeast corner of 8th Street and Mandela Parkway.

- **C.L. Dellums and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters** in front of the Amtrak Station at 2nd and Alice Streets
- **Early railroad and military employment centers for Oakland Point/Prescott residents** on north side of 7th Street, east of Maritime Street
- **African American musical influences and the 7th Street music scene** on 7th Street and Mandela Parkway in the BART parking lot