BUCHANAN MALL
MEMORY WALK

HARLEM of the WEST
THEN and NOW
My grandfather came out here from Illinois. They hoboed, him and his brother, at the turn of the century. There was no Harlem of the West at the time. It originated in the Barbary Coast. That’s where Jimbo got his first restaurant. And they allowed us to integrate down there and have our music. Other parts of town were segregated.

– SAM PEOPLES

A lot of the musicians who came to play in San Francisco were not allowed to stay there. What would happen after the gig you’d come back to Jimbo’s. Jimbo’s Bop City didn’t even open till two in the morning. They would come down and jam, you know, the rest of the night.

– LEWIS WATTS
After Pearl Harbor, the shipyards in Hunters Point, Oakland, and Vallejo converted to wartime and needed people to work. Word went out across the country. People came here from all over. Especially in African American communities, they came from Texas and Louisiana. They brought their musical taste with them.

– LEWIS WATTS
A boy last week in San Francisco told me, 'I've got no country, I've got no flag.' And he's only 16 years old. They were tearing down his house because San Francisco is engaging in, as most of other cities are engaged, in something called urban renewal, which means moving Negroes out. It means Negro removal. The Federal Government is an accomplice to this fact!

– JAMES BALDWIN
1963 interview by Kenneth Clark

It was dilapidated...it needed to be redeveloped, but not to the point of tearing the spine out and killing our community. I felt cheated... they took our culture away.

– SAM PEOPLES

My name is Samuel Leland Peoples. My father’s name was Sam. And I have a son named Sam also. My father was born right there on Scott and O’Farrell Street in a house, 1925. When my father was in the union, it was a black Union. It was called five ten.
Charles Unger

The music was already here, evolving in ways that never happened in other cities. It was a big cauldron of sounds from Africa, Europe, South America and Asia.

By the time Harlem of the West came about in the late '30s and '40s, there was a cultural mixing you just didn’t find in other places.

Domingo Balinton

When my father first came here from the Philippines, he and my mom looked for housing all over San Francisco. I lived at 1131 Buchanan between Golden Gate and Turk. My house was a two-story Victorian with a garage. We stayed in that house until 1943.
My family moved to San Francisco in 1964. I remember someone said, do you wanna go to the Black area of San Francisco? I said, sure. So I went on a Friday night in 1964. And it was jumping, it was incredible. Everybody was dressed to the nines. It was crowded, you know, the streets, sidewalks, and everybody was having a great time. I'll never forget that.

Fillmore Street was a mecca. You had Winterland. Then you had Smacks, the first drive-in place where you could get fast food. We had movie theaters. That was '47, '48, '49. All this is before redevelopment came in, demolished a lot of those areas, and left them dormant for many, many years.

My mother had a bar. That's where everyone went when they got off work, everybody went when they were looking for a job, everybody went when they were hungry. She was a dynamic figure that had respect in the Fillmore.

– MAURICE

– NORBERT REDDING
When we play and we share our art, that is really love. I know that sounds kind of corny, but it's kind of like being at peace with oneself. You understand that it's a little deeper than a job, a gig or some notoriety. There is some healing to it.

My mom always shopped and ate and did everything in upper Fillmore. I always felt like there was some kind of invisible line. Like I felt like I needed to make sure they knew I wasn't going to steal anything. It is a beautiful part of the city, and like anybody else, I can be here. So many people that I know have moved from San Francisco, so this has become a place where people can come back and get together.

– ERICKA SCOTT