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“An escape to the wilderness; a shelter from the storm”

-Dani Newsum

In 1922, during the climax of American racial segregation and inequity, two black entrepreneurs, Denverites E.C. Regnier and Roger Ewalt, met to utilize an economic opportunity west of the Mississippi River in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. After months of construction, the Lincoln Hills, a summer sanctuary for African Americans during the 20th century, was established in Gilpin County, providing necessary refuge and economic salvation for thousands of African Americans seeking protection, welfare, and mountain amenities in the western United States. For 44 years, Lincoln Hills assisted in laying the foundation for increased racial equality in Colorado, helping spark civil rights movements, and breaking the barrier of the American culture of Jim Crowism. In addition to its influence on civil rights, the mountain resort served as a safe haven for all and a spiritual center of peace and hope for Black Americans during a time of intense political division and pervasive white supremacy, a testament to the prevalent, color-based hierarchy of privilege. The sanctuary guided thousands of African American families towards a life of political success, financial increase, and educational opportunities for many. What initially began as a hallmark of American entrepreneurship, the Lincoln Hills evolved into a physical representation of the American Dream—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—for Black Americans. Consequently, the Lincoln Hills changed the perspective of the state and built a bridge between the culture of contempt and racial equality by increasing the cultural diversity in Colorado communities.

Jim Crow and the “Color Line”

In the early decades of the 20th century, Colorado was predominantly governed by white supremist political organizations and figures, resulting in a chronic period of unjust policy, racial oppression, and dangerous environments for the African American community. During the 1923 election, Benjamin Stapleton was elected Denver Mayor due to his strong association with the Ku Klux Klan. “The following year, the Klan reached the zenith of its power and influence in the Centennial state.”

It gained control of the Republican party which resulted in an unprecedented number of KKK affiliated elections in November. Klansmen occupied the governor's office, represented the majority in both houses of the legislature, and held substantial statewide offices. Cross-burnings and public parades with hooded figures were a frequent sight in the early 1920s. With the added injustices of color segregation and prohibited suffrage for black men, Colorado began a lasting history of hate groups that prevented cultural acceptance and diversity; however, this did not affect the impact African Americans had in the construction of Colorado. Denver was home to a large population of “colored” homeowners. From 1900-1929, the Denver Republican reported that the black
population had almost doubled, a majority of whom were domestic servants and/or physical laborers seeking greater opportunities in the West. Despite these opportunities Denver presented, black homeowners were not allowed to buy and live where they chose—Denver was a segregated city. In what is now East Denver, a "Negro District" was established where a majority of the African American population resided. Dani Newsum, a civil rights attorney and historian of African American history, states that, "Blacks who attempted to buy homes outside the "Negro District" were often met with threats and acts of violence."

**Early Development**

The Lincoln Hills resort was situated along South Border Creek between the small towns of Rollinsvilles and Netherland. E.C. Regnier and Roger Ewalt intended to market Lincoln Hills as a vacation resort and summer sanctuary for middle-class African Americans living in Denver, other areas of Colorado, and beyond. During the 1920s, Colorado real estate was also experiencing the damaging effects of discrimination. Ewalt and Regnier faced scrutiny from white landowners for their business proposition and experienced unjust treatment when locating a suitable area for the Lincoln Hills. After two months of construction and battling with the state, 470 lots were purchased, some for as low as $25. While a majority of plot owners were from Denver, some hailed from "New York to California and points-in-between." Pastor G.L. Prince, a respected member of the African American community of Denver, addressed the Lincoln Hills Company in a letter providing his endorsements and opinions of such a resort. Lincoln Hills, near Denver, where I have purchased 4 lots and where I have visited on different occasions, offers many unique advantages to our group:

1. A beautiful spot for camp, or cabin or fine summer home.
2. A cool, invigorating summer climate which is the finest known tonic for people who have had a hard year of work.
3. A large tract of land containing 2 miles of trout stream, beside 4 creeks and fine lake stocked with trout.
4. A railroad and 4 auto roads from Denver to the resort.
5. A summer colony where lots are being sold at such a very low price that buyers will make money on the lots even if they never use them themselves.
6. A place where our race can show to the Nation a constructive piece of work, in the upbuilding of a great National gathering place for health, recreation, education and uplift.

In its beginning years, Lincoln Hills became a weekend escape for thousands of African Americans across the nation.

At the time, there were only three other resorts catering to "Black Americans in the United States, Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, MA, Idlewood in MI, and American Beach on Amelia Island in Fl," all of which were east of the Mississippi River. The South lacked such resorts due to its totalitarian approach to racial discrimination and the harsh realities it presented for African Americans. This national trend of black safe havens carried on throughout the nation, offering a center of spiritual rejuvenation, peace, and most importantly, safety, which many other areas of the nation could not provide at the time. Black mountain resorts gained immense popularity throughout the 20th century, as the resources and advantages offered there could be found nowhere else in the United States.

Outside the mountain amenities of the resort, the storm of racial discrimination magnified. The KKK continued to control the Colorado government through the 1920s and 1930s, which further escalated hostility toward black communities. A shelter from the storm provided momentary refuge to the "hurricane" of systematic racism that raged beyond the beauty of the resort. Although violence and political tension spilled across the state, the remarkable story of Lincoln Hills continued.

**A Vibrant Heart**

Wink's Lodge, also known as Wink's Panorama, was at the core of the Lincoln Hills resort. The six-room inn was built by Obrey "Winks" Hamlet and his first wife, Naomi. Hamlet spent his summer months in 1925 constructing the beautiful three-story lodge with an interior wrap around porch that overlooked the South Border Creek and...
Rocky Mountains. Completed in 1928, the lodge became one of few full service resorts to cater to African Americans. Winks was an accomplished businessman in the Five-Points neighborhood of Denver. Along with the six rooms he rented in the panorama, Winks built 25 cabins on the Lincoln Hills resort available to friends, families, and customers. Hamlet added on a tavern, honeymoon cabin, a tin house, and a three plex cabin. The lodge became the vibrant heart of the Lincoln Hills in its early years of success.

Wink’s Panorama hosted famous Black Americans during the 1930s. Newsum recounts that “Some of the brightest lights of the Harlem Renaissance—musicians, poets, novelists, essayists—visited the mountain retreat. After performing in some of Denver’s renowned but segregated jazz clubs, some of the most celebrated African American musicians of the time, including Count Basie, Lena Horne, and Duke Ellington, headed to Lincoln Hills.” Denver’s hotels were segregated at the time and even off-limits to the most famous African American figures. However, at the Lincoln Hills, they found welcome, food, shelter, spectacular scenery, and even other performance venues—Wink’s Panorama.

Jess Dubois, stepson of Obrey Hamlet, said, “Together with the cultural interaction and stunning natural beauty, fresh air, and a level of freedom rarely found at this time, it is no surprise that Wink’s Lodge became the place to be for black people from all walks of life.”

Camp Nizhoni
African American children also suffered from the extreme racial oppression that swept Colorado in the early-to-mid 20th century. As their parents were restricted from most mountain retreats, Black American children were also denied entry to many summer programs and “excluded from many recreational and service organizations, like the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).” In 1925, Camp Nizhoni was established by the Denver Phyllis Wheatley Branch on the Lincoln Hills resort, and it became a place African American girls could call their very own.

Nizhoni, a Navajo word for beautiful, catered to girls of all ages, ranging from 8-17 years old. The camp offered a diverse amount of activities to the attending girls. As Frances Mozetta recalls in Memories of Camp Nizhoni, “We identified and collected wildflowers; went on scavenger hunts; learned to make bedrolls and blankets; and even to cook breakfast over an outdoor fire.” Nizhoni became a shield from the sting of segregation and racism for many campers who primarily hailed from Denver, but others were from rural regions of Colorado, and even out of state.

When the sun began to fall behind the Rocky Mountain wall, the campers of Nizhoni would gather around the campfire and sing. One of those many songs was “Nightfall on Nizhoni”:

- Night on Camp Nizhoni’s Falling
- Night on Camp Nizhoni’s Falling
- Nature’s Lulling All to Rest
- And We Pray that God Will Help Us Be
- That Which We Count on Best

For nearly 20 years, Camp Nizhoni provided a summer sanctuary for thousands of girls. “We would not want to leave. We had so much fun away from the city and hatred,” recalls Jennie Rucker who attended the camp in the 1930s. Most importantly, the summer camp became a symbolic representation for the African American community that happiness and peace was attainable in the beautiful Rocky Mountains of the Centennial State.

Breaking Barriers
Colorado and the United States began to plant the seeds of racial change. World War II helped accomplish what decades of protest and advocacy by African Americans and other races had not been able to successfully do. Newsum asserts, “Hitler’s white supremacist horrors, the critical role played by the United States in the defeat of Nazi Germany, and the war service of thousands of Americans of color helped transform the unquestioned white supremacist assumptions held by many white Americans into beliefs that many would come to consider un-democratic harbingers of strife and war.”
Those seeds of racial change sprouted locally and nationally; barriers of racial injustice and discrimination that created a white supremacist culture of contempt began to slowly crumble as a revolution of civil rights reform began to find a foothold in the 1950s and 1960s. Newsum contrasts the rise of the mainstream Civil Rights Movement with the decline of resorts like Lincoln Hills, “But in 1945, no one knew that as a consequence, the days of institutions like Lincoln Hills that had been built in part to provide sanctuary from the slings and arrows of exclusion, were numbered.” Change was afoot in Colorado, the seeds planted after World War II would slowly begin to bear fruit. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act outlawed racial segregation and discrimination, which included country clubs and resorts that only catered to the white race. As a result, many affluent African Americans joined larger, integrated facilities. One year later, in 1965, Obrey Hamlet “Winks” passed away, and the property of Wink’s Lodge was sold to an independent buyer. With the “vibrant heart” of Lincoln Hills sold, many lost interest in owning property at the resort, but the legacy of the sanctuary would not end.

The Lincoln Hills is now under development by a new age of African American entrepreneurs. In 2007, Matthew Burkett purchased the property in Gilpin County and developed the land into a fly-fishing resort. Burkett says, “I wanted to pay homage to the African American Entrepreneurs of the 1920s, and we have redeveloped Lincoln Hills into a fly-fishing resort which highlights the tradition of Wink’s Lodge and the resort communities that were there.” Breaking the barriers of racial injustice, the summer sanctuary helped establish the principles of financial freedom, political engagement, and educational opportunities for thousands of Black Americans that would be the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement to come.

Conclusion
During its 44 years of operation, the Lincoln Hills evolved from an economic opportunity into a cultural oasis that offered the American dream for many oppressed blacks in Colorado. It combined the values of vision, equity, justice, and community to help break the barriers of racial injustice and Jim Crowism that controlled Colorado in the early-to mid-20th century. After the seeds of racial change sprouted and a revolution of civil rights acts were enacted, the Lincoln Hills closed; however, the legacy of the resort continues. It truly was an escape to the wilderness, a shelter from the storm.
Justina Ford: Just Another Physician?
Kylee Wilson

4 Lohse, Justina Ford.
6 Lohse, Justina Ford.
7 Lohse, Justina Ford; “Justina Ford, MD.” Colorado Women's Hall of Fame.
8 Hansen, “Dr. Justina Ford.”
12 Lohse, Justina Ford.
13 “Justina Ford, MD,” Colorado Women's Hall of Fame.
14 Riley, High Altitude Attitudes.
16 Lohse, Justina Ford.
17 “Our Coloradans Then,” Our Community Now.
18 Riley, High Altitude Attitudes.
19 Lohse, Justina Ford.
20 “Our Coloradans Then,” Our Community Now.
21 Riley, High Altitude Attitudes.
23 Riley, High Altitude Attitudes.
25 Yongli, “Justina Ford House.”
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31 Lohse, Justina Ford; “Our Coloradans Then,” Our Community Now.
33 Our Coloradans Then,” Our Community Now.
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Mohamed Ibrahim

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National History Day in Colorado

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary. “Palo Alto University Professor Christine Blasey Ford rises to give an oath prior to her opening statement.” Photograph. Wikimedia Commons.

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