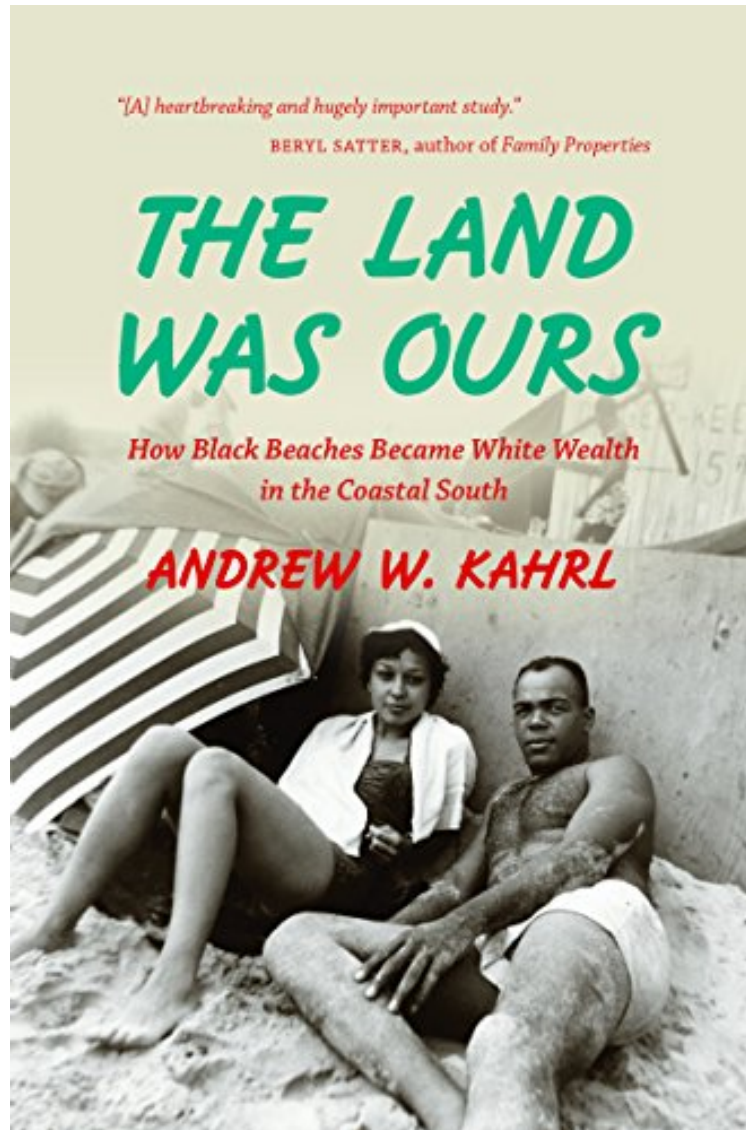


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The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South

Andrew W. Kahrl

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Andrew W. Kahrl : The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South
before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Land Was Ours:
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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderfully written and does the important work of revealing the

...By Brandi Locke Wonderfully written and does the important work of revealing the history of African American leisure culture and civil rights grounded in tons of archival research. A beautiful read, I look forward to reading more from this author. 17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Unrevised History By J.B. This is an accurate historical treatise on the role beachfront property played in the black community's quest for summer leisure pleasures in America's era of public segregation. The book shows how the land originally came into the possession of black families and the circumstances under which the land came into the possession of white sectors of society and were ultimately transformed into real estate that were beyond the reach of the black community. The circumstances in question included unethical, unfair though often legal, and sometimes vigilante methods. The role of ignorance and misplaced trust in unscrupulous officials in effecting this transformation is also described. I am particularly impressed with the thoroughness of the author's research. I can attest to this through personal experience as it pertains to Washington, D.C., the city of Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland, and northeastern Virginia where I enjoyed Carr's and Sparrow's beaches, the Potomac River, and Highland Beach in my youth. A sibling can also attest to the factual aspects of this same transformation as it pertains to some parts of Florida. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand the true nature of black middle class and poor life in segregated America during the period from 1936 through 1956, which is the span of time in which my personal experiences coincide with many of the names and places in the book. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Poor coastal engineering leading to land erosion and poor development ...By Paul Maginley As professor Kahrl points out towards the end of his book, possession of land was important to freed blacks and it validated their conception of freedom in a powerful manner. His book details examples of black ownership of coastal lands and describes the ultimate fate of such lands. The outcomes appear to be universally tragic. Kahrl focuses his study on black owned beachfront properties along the East coast-Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and beaches of the Gulf coast where Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana meet. These areas commonly experience brief success then are eventually taken over by white interests or are destroyed through financial collapse or from environmental change. Whatever pleasure derived from them by their original black owners all falls tragically short. So how are such lands taken over by white interests? The ways are manifold: We see predatory lending and usurious rates; we see property tax manipulations; we see coastline engineering leading to uncontrolled erosion; we see gained entries into private lands through the use of partition sales; and when all else fails, there is always the white mob. This latter option surprisingly was sparingly used, but that was because it wasn't necessary. Getting hold of a private beachfront spot was a way for Northern negroes to escape the burdens of race. The northern cities had no Jim Crow, but still their black citizens had to endure daily indignities and were forced into crowded and overpriced parts of town, which could be expanded only vertically. Interestingly enough, black families of means sought similar exclusivity in vacation spots as white families did. Their concept of vacationing was one of escaping Jim Crow and equally one of escaping the black masses. Beachcombers when approaching these private lands would walk into physical barriers which reached into the sea. As we read the book, it becomes clear how short lived many of these ventures were for both black owned as well as white owned lands. Fads change. Dollars get directed elsewhere. Poor coastal engineering leading to land erosion and poor development of septic systems causing the mixing of water and sewage along with storm destruction all take a toll. It would have been a stronger study, I think, if Professor Kahrl had explored the concept of private ownership of coastal lands in a general way. Is it, or should it be ethical to be allowed to own beachfront property to begin with? Shouldn't all beaches be declared accessible to the public in our relentlessly capitalistic nation? Beach lines are notoriously unstable with hurricanes and storms. The sand erosion resulting from the development of levees and from cutting off inlets; the lack of community septic systems all argue against private ownership. But still we have to give Andrew Kahrl four stars for addressing a topic which had been hitherto ignored. This book finds its way into the space-restricted library.

The coasts of today's American South feature luxury condominiums, resorts, and gated communities, yet just a century ago, a surprising amount of beachfront property in the Chesapeake, along the Carolina shores, and around the Gulf of Mexico was owned and populated by African Americans. Blending social and environmental history, Andrew W. Kahrl tells the story of African American-owned beaches in the twentieth century. By reconstructing African American life along the coast, Kahrl demonstrates just how important these properties were for African American communities and leisure, as well as for economic empowerment, especially during the era of the Jim Crow South. However, in the wake of the civil rights movement and amid the growing prosperity of the Sunbelt, many African Americans fell victim to effective campaigns to dispossess black landowners of their properties and beaches. Kahrl makes a signal contribution to our understanding of African American landowners and real-estate developers, as well as the development of coastal capitalism along the southern seaboard, tying the creation of overdeveloped, unsustainable coastlines to the unmaking of black communities and cultures along the shore. The result is a skillful appraisal of the ambiguous legacy of racial progress in the Sunbelt.

[A] heartbreaking and hugely important study.--Beryl Satter, author of *Family Properties: The Land Was Ours* reminds us that in the Sunbelt South, the rise and fall of Jim Crow, the struggle for civil rights, and the exploitation of

ecosystems were fundamentally related processes that shouldn't be treated in isolation. That reminder, combined with fascinating, evocative evidence and Kahrl's ability to deftly tell a complicated story, make this a significant book that should be widely read.--American Historical The Land Was Ours shows the importance of coastal capitalism to the development of the Sunbelt South. It also provides a valuable new prism for viewing and understanding the region's growth and the politics of its people. Scholars in many modern U.S. specialties, including African American history, southern history, environmental history, and business history, will find this book engaging and stimulating.--Journal of American HistoryA fine reminder and exploration of the idea that place matters when tracing the contours of racial changes in American society and landscapes.--Journal of Social HistoryArtfully captures the complexities of black community formation as African Americans sought to tame and commercialize the natural coastal environment and negotiated complex and changing structures of racial discrimination, segregation, and exclusion in the Jim Crow and Sun Belt souths.--Southern SpacesAbout the AuthorAndrew W. Kahrl is assistant professor of history and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.