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Carol Lynn McKibben. *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. xii + 334 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8047-7699-8.

Reviewed by Liz Throop

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In *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town*, Carol Lynn McKibben traces the effect of President Harry Truman's Executive Orders 9980 (regulations governing fair employment practices within the federal establishment) and 9981 (establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces) on the history of the town of Seaside, California, adjacent to Ford Ord, California. Through a thorough examination of archives, scholarly literature, and extensive interviews, McKibben persuasively argues that Seaside developed an ethnically integrated civic society primarily because the military provided a model for equality between different ethnic groups from 1948 on. She demonstrates that Fort Ord's presence created structures of interaction, both on and off base, that recognized talented individuals regardless of ethnicity and, interestingly, gender.

McKibben begins, in chapter 1, by tracing the history of Seaside from its occasional use by local Indian tribes through its pre-Fort Ord days. Seaside, like many of the communities in the Monterey Bay area, started as a Spanish mission and quickly became an agricultural center owned by Spanish families. Ultimately, those families sold land to a European American corporation after the Gold Rush and the county became almost completely European American. Seaside, in the late 1800s, was largely a tourist destination. Indeed, McKibben cites a 1910 real estate agent's brochure that extolls the virtues of Seaside: "'Seaside is the recognized hub of Central California's scenic grandeur,' the newsletter from the MRS [Monterey Realty Syndicate] claimed, 'where new surprises await the tourist or resident, with an inexhaustible fund of wholesome recreation and association with all life's fancies'" (p. 20). Seaside's physical beauty, in fact, is a constant (indeed, repetitive) theme of the book. Given that, as McKibben shows throughout the book, the poor and disenfranchised had been consistently prevented from access to amenities in the wealthier cities in Monterey Bay, the eventual full integration of Seaside is remarkable. In prewar Seaside, we see an increasingly multiethnic population: Dust Bowl

refugees, southern Europeans, Mexicans, Japanese, African Americans, and Filipinos were working the canneries or were fishing. While there was tension, there was also intermarriage.

And then Fort Ord was built. Chapter 2 outlines the struggles that Seaside faced as the base was built and then expanded. At the outbreak of World War II, newly opened Fort Ord used Seaside as target practice. As the war went on, however, Fort Ord grew quickly, bringing money and people, some of whom permanently settled in this place with its "spectacular ocean views" (p. 43). As the town's size increased from 2,500 to 10,000 from 1940 to 1946, civic structures were put in place based in part by the shared experience of war: "Its residents may have had differences among themselves but in the aftermath of war, they shared the trails, travails, and tribulations of military life, many of them firsthand, as they reshaped this community at mid-century" (p. 44). Following the informal desegregation of troop ships during the demobbing process at the end of the war,[1] Executive Order 9981 put into practice a contested stance of integration of all the armed forces. Truman's insistence on providing parity for all individuals in the armed forces paved the way for an already culturally diverse Seaside governed by a variety of people rather than the prewar power structure of European American leadership.

Executive Order 9981 meant, for Fort Ord, that base housing (for instance) was organized by rank, not ethnicity. This meant that African American officers and their families were living next door to European American officers and their families. This pattern was replicated in Seaside, in ways that were not seen in other military towns, in large part because of Seaside's (and California's) long standing habit of cultural diversity. People were used to making friendships quickly, and, McKibben argues, this created the opportunity for people to see the poor as victims of circumstance rather than morally depraved. Since military personnel became familiar with the life stories of a variety of people, regardless of culture, a relatively socially liberal stance developed toward equality and justice. This perspective reached into politics and Seaside's governance, as "interacting across racial divides was a norm they learned in the military and an expectation many carried out in politics and in daily contact within their multiracial city, whatever their personal racial beliefs or values" (p. 83). Indeed, McKibben points out that Seasiders worked on actions rather hearts and minds, and that was the military's intent: "The military was not trying to change hearts and minds so much as rules and behavior. However, there was great power in changed rules and behavior in and of itself that may have led more quickly to changes in hearts and minds as a result" (p. 88). McKibben's characterization of Executive Order 9981—that it was about behavior, not about belief—is important, and it contains a truth we would be wise to heed today.

Seaside's development from the 1950s through the 2000s is traced in great detail in chapters 3-6. What McKibben shows, through her painstaking recounting of all of the major political, social, and cultural events in the town and in the county, is that Seaside developed in the way that it did because President Truman ordered an integrated military. Seasiders were able to seize on the moment in 1948 because they had already (whether deliberate or not) created a society more culturally diverse than any other military town. It was coincidence that began Seaside's trek toward a true American ideal of civic society—a mosaic of cultures and traditions respected by all in the town, with a diverse group of political representatives voting their conscience rather than with ethnic power blocs. Finally, the story of Seaside is what the story of America should have been—and still might be.

A couple of caveats are worth noting, however. Readers who are sticklers for correct punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage are likely to

find this book somewhat irritating. Commas are placed in odd places, common words are misspelled, and run-on or incomplete sentences are not unusual. McKibben's somewhat more perplexing quirk is the characterization of Seaside as "beautiful," "gorgeous," "a place of great natural beauty," "spectacular," with "sweeping" or "gorgeous" or "great ocean views." While Seaside is, in fact, amazingly beautiful, the appearance of superlative descriptors on nearly every page is distracting. It is almost as though McKibben has to point out that the non-European Americans who settled in Seaside had excellent taste. This is not a point that needed to be made; it strikes me as, in fact, a bit racist.

That being said, McKibben has produced a well-researched addition to the scholarship of ethnicity and the military and has shown that our American ideals can be realized in everyday life.

Note

[1]. My late father, a chief petty officer by the end of his navy hitch, was also a musician; he often related incidents in which segregation rules were flouted by musicians who simply wanted to jam together in down times on the ships. He also reported that conditions of troop ships returning veterans of the Pacific conflicts were so crowded that de facto segregation (and some attendant violent riots) took place.