

# California beach seized from Black family in 1924 set to be returned to descendants

The land could be worth millions today.

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• 6 min read

A stretch of beachfront land in Southern California that was seized from a Black family 97 years ago is set to be returned to their descendants.

Black couple Willa and Charles Bruce purchased land on Manhattan Beach in 1912, making them among the first Black landowners in the city. But 12 years later they were forced off their property as it was seized by the city.

On Tuesday, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to return the property to the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce.

The Bruces bought the first of two ocean-view lots for \$1,225, a property that could now be worth millions.

They built a resort known as Bruce's Beach to serve Black residents, making it one of the few beaches Black residents could use due to segregation. The Bruces and their customers were harassed and threatened by their white neighbors, including the Ku Klux Klan, the county board of supervisors said in a news release.

In 1924, the city of Manhattan Beach used eminent domain to force the couple off their land to turn it into a park. The city seized the property in 1929, however, it remained vacant for decades.

Following Tuesday's vote, the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office will file a report within 60 days with a plan and timeline to return the property to the Bruce family.

The Los Angeles County Lifeguard Training Headquarters is currently located on the land. The county will have to address plans for the county to either lease the property from the Bruce family or relocate the lifeguard facility.

The council also voted to sponsor Senate Bill 796, which was introduced last week, and is necessary to transfer the property. When the property was transferred from the state to the county in 1995, it restricted the county's ability to transfer the property. This legislation would lift the restrictions and allows the county to hand over the property to the Bruce family. There is a hearing set for the bill April 27.

"This was an injustice inflicted upon not just Willa and Charles Bruce, but generations of their descendants who almost certainly would have been millionaires if they had been able to keep this property and their successful business," Los Angeles County District 4 Supervisor Janice Hahn said. Hahn's district includes the Manhattan Beach property to be returned to the family.

"When I realized that the county now had ownership of the Bruce's original property, I felt there was nothing else to do but give the property back to the direct descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce," she added.

"I hope that other cities, other counties, and other states will see what we are doing here," Hahn said after the vote. "And I hope that they will be inspired to look at their own histories and identify opportunities to begin to repair and make amends for injustices like these."

Anthony Bruce is one of the family's last living direct descendants and said his family was robbed by the land seizure.

"It was a wrong against the Bruce family," Anthony Bruce told Los Angeles ABC station [KABC](#). "I think we would be wealthy Americans still living there in California ... Manhattan Beach probably."

"I want people to take away from this that there is justice and that you have to pursue it and your family can find peace for some of the wrongs that were committed against them in the past," he added.