



Idlewild: A Path to America's Aspirations and Diversity

Introduction

Idlewild, Michigan stands as a testament to the resilience and determination of African Americans who sought to create a space where they could flourish free from the constraints of racial segregation. As we approach the 250th anniversary of America's founding, we reflect on the themes of America250MI - unity, freedom, and democracy - and how Idlewild embodies these ideals, much like the vision Langston Hughes articulated in his poignant poem, "Let America Be America Again." Langston Hughes was a frequent vacationer to Idlewild and is honored with a Library of Michigan Literary Landmark, which also included other notable literary figures and frequent vacationers including Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, and W. E. B. Du Bois

Idlewild was more than just a resort; it was a dream made manifest, a place where African Americans could experience the liberties promised in Hughes' vision of America. It was a place where "Liberty is crowned with no false patriotic wreath." Where the community could thrive and where equality was not just a concept, but a lived reality.

As we uplift Idlewild, we also uplift the spirit of America250MI, which aims to commemorate our nation's history and the American Revolution's role in Michigan's history. Idlewild's story is a microcosm of the larger American narrative—a story of striving for a dream amidst adversity, of seeking a "homeland of the free" as Hughes described.

Idlewild, historically known as the "Black Eden," serves as a profound example of the African American pursuit of the American Dream amidst systemic barriers and stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of the African American community. As we approach America's 250th anniversary, reflecting on Idlewild through the lens of the America250MI themes—Unfinished Revolutions, Power of Place, We the People, American Experiment, and Doing History—coupled with the poignant insights of "Let America Be America Again," offers a unique opportunity to celebrate, examine and reconsider the narrative of American progress and inclusivity.

Unfinished Revolutions

Idlewild's founding in 1912 was a revolutionary act of defiance against the segregationist policies of the era and continues to represent an "Unfinished Revolution" in the quest for racial equality and social justice. Established during an era when African Americans were systematically denied access to many

vacation resorts, Idlewild was more than a mere retreat. It was a testament to resilience and self-sufficiency. It provided a sanctuary where African Americans could experience leisure and freedom denied to them elsewhere. This community continues to live and symbolize the ongoing struggle for civil rights and the revolution for racial equality, echoing Hughes' call for America to live up to its promise of freedom and equality for all. A struggle the poem powerfully encapsulates with its call for the America that "never was" but "must be."

Power of Place

The "Power of Place" has always been vividly embodied in Idlewild. This location has served as not only a geographical haven, but also a cultural stronghold where African Americans could express themselves freely during the segregation era. It was a place where the community celebrated achievements, fostered economic empowerment, and nurtured cultural developments. Today, Idlewild invites reflection on how environments shape racial and social dynamics, encouraging a deeper understanding of the places that hold America's collective histories. The Power of Place is palpable here, where the natural beauty and the spirit of those who gather continue to inspire.

We the People

"We the People" in the context of Idlewild underscores the diverse narratives that compose the American story. This community was built by and for African Americans who, despite facing pervasive discrimination, dared to dream of equality and opportunity. This continues today. Idlewild's arc of history challenges us to expand our definition of "the people" in America's founding ideals, as Hughes lamented the broken dream that "never was America to me" and yet holds onto the hope for the dream yet to be. Yet it was a microcosm of America, where individuals from all walks of life came together to energize a vibrant community. This theme resonates with Hughes' vision of a nation where "every man is free"—a dream still being realized today.

American Experiment

Idlewild illustrates the "American Experiment" through its continued existence as a microcosm of African American enterprise and cultural flourishing within a segregated society. The community tested the ideals of democracy and capitalism, showing that African Americans could create thriving economies and vibrant cultures under adverse conditions, and is endeavoring to do it again. This experiment continues as we evaluate how well America has lived up to its promise of providing liberty and justice for all its citizens.

Doing History

"Doing History" involves recognizing and preserving the narratives of places like Idlewild. As America250MI encourages us to delve into historical contexts, Idlewild serves as a critical ongoing case study for understanding the complexities of race, leisure, and resistance in American history. It

demands a reconsideration of historical narratives to include stories of resistance, resilience, and reinvention, aligning with Hughes' vision of reclaiming the American dream. It's about "Doing History," not just recounting it. The poem serves as a reminder that history is made by the hands of the "poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME"—those who built and continue to shape America.

An important anchor for America250

Supporting and promoting Idlewild within the framework of America250MI and through the lens of "Let America Be America Again" allows for a poignant reflection on the past and a hopeful gaze towards a more inclusive future. It serves as a reminder of the ongoing journey toward fulfilling America's foundational promises—a journey that Idlewild has both symbolized and propelled. We not only remember a place of historical and current significance, but also rekindle the commitment to the ever-evolving American narrative, striving to finally make America the land it has promised to be.

Blair Evans

Lake County Merry Makers
Idlewild, MI