

A Brief History of the San Leandro History Book Project

.Some time in the fall of 2005, City Manager John Jermanis decided to commission a book on the history of San Leandro¹ to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the library.² Mr. Jermanis approached Library Services Director David Bohne to work on the project with him.³ They hired⁴ Eric Simons, the son of a long time library employee,⁵ to write a book of the history of San Leandro.

.According to the documentation available, the book was originally envisioned as a continuation and rewrite of “A Garden Grows in Eden,”⁶ a book that tells a positive, if incomplete, history of San Leandro in a semi-chronological way. The San Leandro History Book would have 10 chapters and explore the history of San Leandro from its beginnings.⁷ It would be a comprehensive history of San Leandro that would “be in used the schools and also in our museum's school program.”⁸ “The purpose of the book [would be] to promote our sense of community and appreciation of the past.”⁹ It would “be written in a friendly, narrative style.”¹⁰

¹Conversation with San Leandro City Manager John Jermanis, 6/23/06, conversation with City of San Leandro Public Information Officer Jane McCrea, 7/11/06.

²E-mail from Jane McCrea to all members of the City Council & others, 6/29/06.

³Conversation with City of San Leandro Public Information Officer Jane McCrea, 6/29/06

⁴Though there was no contract with the writer actually signed, there was a purchase order for \$15,000 approved on 11/1/05. The PO was for “History of San Leandro Book Project - Professional Services for the San Leandro History Manuscript, authorized by Eric Simons in accordance with quote/payment schedule.” The funds came from the book and media acquisitions account at the San Leandro Public Library.

⁵Conversation with San Leandro City Manager John Jermanis, 6/23/06, conversation with City of San Leandro Public Information Officer Jane McCrea, 6/23/06

⁶Conversation with San Leandro City Manager John Jermanis, 6/23/06; E-mail from Jane McCrea to all members of the City Council & others, 6/29/06.

⁷Letter to David Bohne from Eric Simons 10/3/05; San Leandro History Book Draft Chapter Outline, 10/17/06; History of San Leandro Book Project, Payment Schedule, 11/3/05; Purchase Order 45407

⁸Library-Historical Commission Minutes, 9/20/06

⁹*Id.*

¹⁰*Id.*

.The outline that Eric produced included a portion of a chapter, out of ten chapters, on “racism in the 1960s and 1970s, how it played out and how the situation has changed for the better.”¹¹ He proposed to interview Brian Copeland and quote “his optimistic last lines, about how he still lives in San Leandro today, and how much it has improved.”¹²

.He presented the outline to John Jermanis and David Bohne, who said that they did not want the information about racial discrimination in San Leandro included in the book.¹³ The author tried to convince them that this was a positive story about San Leandro, but they would not budge.¹⁴ While Eric had been very clear about how flexible he was about having the book edited by Jermanis and Bohne,¹⁵ he would not write a book that excluded that information.¹⁶ He expressed that to Jermanis and Bohne and several days later the San Leandro History Book project was cancelled.¹⁷

.The City does not dispute that the book was cancelled (at least in part) because it contained material on housing discrimination in San Leandro in the 60's and 70's. Indeed, in her letter to the city council, Public Information Officer Jane McCrea specifically states that the book contained more “social history of the city that was intended” and that instead of focusing on marketing the city, he “wanted to include a chapter on race issues in San Leandro in the 60s and 70s, as well as considerable information about Brian Copeland’s personal experiences.”¹⁸ McCrea seems to realize that it would be improper to write a comprehensive history of San Leandro and not explore this issue, so she claims that the book was supposed to be comprehensive.¹⁹ That is contradicted by the minutes of the Library-Historical Commission meeting for Sep. 20, 2005.

.Both Jermanis and Mc.Crea have given multiple reasons as to why the project was cancelled. One persistent theme is that the book was supposed to be a “puff” history, the type of publication that the Chamber of Commerce would put out, and only highlighting positive things about San

¹¹San Leandro History Book Draft Chapter Outline, 10/17/06

¹²*Id.*

¹³ Conversation with Confidential Source; *White Washing History*, by Brian Copeland <http://www.sanleandrobytes.com/archives/002400.html>

¹⁴*Id.*

¹⁵e.g. Letter to David Bohne from Eric Simons 10/3/05

¹⁶Conversation with Confidential Source; *White Washing History*, by Brian Copeland <http://www.sanleandrobytes.com/archives/002400.html>

¹⁷Conversation with San Leandro City Manager John Jermanis, 6/23/06

¹⁸E-mail from Jane McCrea to all members of the City Council & others, 6/29/06.

¹⁹*Id.*

Leandro.²⁰ This raises the question of why the City believes it can write a history, one that will be used in schools, that white washes its own history of discrimination and then use that history in San Leandro schools.

.Other patently false justifications for cancelling the project are the allegation that the author wanted to write the book in a novelized form,²¹ which is contradicted both by the outline and Bohne's assertion that the book would be written in a "friendly" manner and that he was unwilling to make the editorial changes (on issues beyond racial discrimination) than the city wanted. Once again, this is contradicted by the willingness he expressed in writing in having Jermanis and Bohne be part of the whole writing process.

.When questioned about this project, Mr. Jermanis was very defensive. He said that the book did not have a budget - despite the fact that a purchase order for \$15,000 had already been issued. Jermanis claimed that the book was not a history at all, despite the fact that he himself said the book was a continuation of "A Garden Grows in Eden." The information provided by Ms. McCrea is also contradicted by the minutes of the Library-Historical Society and other written evidence. It's worth noting that the official history of San Leandro on the City's website²² omits any information about the history of racial discrimination in San Leandro.

²⁰*Id.*; Conversation with San Leandro City Manager John Jermanis, 6/23/06, conversation with City of San Leandro Public Information Officer Jane McCrea, 7/11/06.

²¹Conversation with City of San Leandro Public Information Officer Jane McCrea, 6/29/06

²²<http://www.ci.san-leandro.ca.us/slcityhistory.html> as of 8/16/06