From its beginnings Glen Echo Amusement Park enforced a strict segregation policy, allowing only whites to enter and enjoy the park grounds. Decades later, in the summer of 1960, this unfair treatment was challenged by a group of brave individuals united by the common goal of equality and justice for all people, regardless of their color or creed. Their actions that summer would forever change Glen Echo Amusement Park’s policy and would mark a milestone in their own personal lives.

The Leg Work

Following the integration of the armed forces in 1948 and the desegregation of American public schools during the 1950s, a cohort of activists sought to spread the principle of equal access to an array of businesses. Modeling themselves on the sit-ins and pickets of Greensboro, NC, local activists encouraged the non-violent protest of segregated public transit services and retailers beginning in the spring of 1960. Thus began a decade of locally inspired change.

The District of Columbia began to integrate, starting with the school system in 1953. Suburban communities in Maryland and Virginia did not follow suit. By 1958, Montgomery County Public Schools were forced to bus African American students to integrated DC pools, while white students continued to take advantage of places like Glen Echo Park’s Crystal Pool.

A group of concerned residents, concentrated in the local community of Bannockburn, began to lobby for county-wide accommodation laws and protested the use of public funds for programs at the segregated, privately owned Glen Echo Park.

In the spring of 1960, a group of students - many from Howard University - organized themselves as the “Non-violent Action Group” (NAG) and began protesting Northern Virginia lunch counters, restaurants, & department stores. During the summer of 1960, they came to Glen Echo Amusement Park. The Bannockburn residents would prove a willing ally during the summer of 1960, a summer of change.

Carousel Sit-in

On the evening of June 30, Laurence Henry, a twenty-six year old Howard University student, led approximately two dozen NAG members and two high school students on a protest of Glen Echo Amusement Park. After the high school students were turned away at the park’s entrance, Henry and others rushed the carousel where they were confronted by state-deputized security guard Frank Collins. Their confrontation, a microcosm of American race relations, was captured by radio reporter Sam Smith.
A Community United

Following the arrest of five of the carousel protesters, Laurence Henry announced that NAG would picket the park until integrated. They were soon joined by sympathetic Bannockburn residents. For the remainder of the park’s season, local residents picketed alongside NAG members in hopes of changing the amusement park’s policy.

Visions of a Brighter Future Achieved

At the park’s close on September 11, 1960, the protesters dispersed and vowed to return. Civil disobedience then sparked political maneuvering.

Bannockburn resident and newly appointed assistant to the Secretary of Commerce, Hyman Bookbinder, sought assistance from US Attorney General Robert Kennedy in February 1961. Kennedy threatened to have the federal government revoke the lease upon which the trolley ran.

Such maneuvering, in addition to the summer protest, led to the March 14, 1961 announcement that the park would open its doors to any patron, regardless of their skin color.

The Park Today

Though the amusement park shut its doors permanently in 1968, the park today is as vibrant as ever as an artist community with some amusement park flare. There is something here for anyone and everyone.

Don’t discriminate. Don’t discriminate. Segregation’s got to go-go-go! Segregation’s hate, so take it off the gate; Oh segregation’s got to go.

The original carousel still operates and the trolley tracks are also still around though the trolley car no longer operates on it. Visitors can sit on the same animals the protesters sat on and walk in their footsteps along the tracks as they did over 50 years ago.

The Picket Anthem

This song below was a common tune sung by the picketers outside of Glen Echo Amusement park. Sung this song to the tune of “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad,” the lyrics are as follows:

“We are picketing Glen Echo and our cause is just; We’ll be picketing Glen Echo till segregation’s bust.

Can’t you see Jim Crow’s a-dyin’. Unwanted in the USA; And there won’t be any cryin’ when he’s passed away.

Don’t discriminate. Don’t discriminate. Segregation’s got to go-go-go! Segregation’s hate, so take it off the gate; Oh segregation’s got to go.

Open up your doors Glen Echo, open up your doors to all-all-all-all! Open up your doors Glen Echo, segregation’s wall must fall.

So sing out: fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o-o-o-o fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o. Segregation’s got to go!”

Though the amusement park shut its doors permanently in 1968, the park today is as vibrant as ever as an artist community with some amusement park flare. There is something here for anyone and everyone.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™
**Activity 2 – Palo Alto Battlefield**

United States and Mexican troops clashed on the prairie of Palo Alto. The battle was the first in a two-year long war that changed the map of North America. In the early hours of May 8, 1846, General Mariano Arista led his 3,200 men onto this field. The Mexican general positioned his cannons on the roadway to block the U.S. advance. He also placed lines of infantry and additional artillery across the prairie. Arista capped his mile-long battle line with his cavalry. Using this formation, Arista hoped to outflank and crush the approaching U.S. Army.

General Taylor arrived at Palo Alto around midday on May 8. As U.S. troops marched out of the cover of mesquite thickets at the northern edge of the field, they paused to entrench their supply train. When this was done, they advanced to within 700 yards of the Mexican lines. The stage was set.

When the Mexican cannon began firing, U.S. troops assumed battle formation, but did not advance to engage Mexican forces. General Taylor feared a charge would leave his supply train vulnerable to attack. The general decided to hold his infantry and cavalry in a defensive formation and rolled his artillery forward to respond.

Taylor’s use of 18-pound siege cannons was significant. The guns were originally intended for duty at Fort Texas. The devastating fire of these huge guns tore at the Mexican lines, causing numerous casualties. By contrast, Mexican artillery was much less effective and frequently fired short of the U.S. lines.

Arista attempted to answer the devastating effects of Taylor’s artillery by sending cavalry troops against the right flank of the U.S. line. General Anastasio Torrejón’s lancers swept across the western edge of the field, but soon became bogged down by the uneven ground and dense growth.

By the time the charge reached its destination, the U.S. 5th Infantry had positioned itself to repel the attack. Torrejón’s horsemen regrouped and attempted an attack on the U.S. supply train. Torrejón’s charge was turned back again. This time Taylor’s light artillery provided support against the charge.

Torrejón’s withdrawal permitted U.S. forces to move forward along the road. Taylor’s continued concern for the supply train and a grass fire that erupted in the middle of the field prevented a full advance. As heavy smoke from the fire brought shooting to a halt, the U.S. advance resulted in little more than a rotation of the battle lines.

When the smoke cleared, the U.S. artillery resumed its devastating fire on the Mexican lines. Mexican artillerymen responded by directing their guns at the U.S. artillery, hoping to bring relief from the assault. The tactic met with limited effect but did strike one heavy blow Taylor’s force. One round from the Mexican artillery mortally wound Samuel Ringgold, the mastermind behind the U.S. light artillery.
As Mexican troops continued to fall, General Arista ordered a second cavalry charge. This time the attack was against the U.S. left flank. Once again, the U.S. light artillery showed its strength.

U.S. cannoneers quickly re-positioned their cannons and spoiled a series of attacks on the U.S. supply train. Captain James Duncan's fire was so effective that he was able to advance his guns across the field. Only a concerted counteract by the Mexican cavalry halted his push forward.

At 7 p.m. the fierce, four-hour cannonade came to an end. Mexican forces had depleted their ammunition and withdrew to the southern edge of the field. With darkness approaching and the ever-present concern for the safety of his supply train, General Taylor retired as well. U.S. forces set up camp behind their lines and prepared to resume fighting the following morning.

Mexican troops had delayed the U.S. advance and maintained their siege of Fort Texas but the Battle of Palo Alto had clearly favored Taylor's forces. The constant pounding from U.S. 18-pounders and efficient use of light field pieces had inflicted heavy Mexican casualties. Arista's army suffered 102 killed, 129 wounded, and 26 missing. U.S. casualties numbered only 9 killed, 44 wounded, and 2 missing.

These casualty figures prompted General Arista to reject a second day of battle at Palo Alto. After spending much of the night burying their dead, Mexican forces withdrew early the next morning to Resaca de la Palma. The two armies would clash here for second time. This battle Taylor and his men would win decisively.

*Material adapted from National Park Service, “Palo Alto Battlefield” (https://www.nps.gov/paal/learn/historyculture/paloalto.htm)*
“Slave Narratives,” online exhibit by Museum of the African Diaspora
(http://moadsf.org/salon/exhibits/slave_narratives/flash.php)

Excerpt from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano:

“The first objects which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast were the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and awaiting its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their countenances differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. As well as the multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow. No, I no longer doubted my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

“When I recovered a little, I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board. They were receiving their pay. ... I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining its shore. But I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; for I was soon put down under the decks. There I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life. ...The stench... the stench. The closeness of the place, the heat of the climate, the number of us forced to live in those conditions with scarcely room to turn, almost suffocated us. ... I was soon reduced so low that, happily for myself, it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck. And because of my extreme youth, I was not put in fetters.

“One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together, ... preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea. Immediately, another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was like me suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example. ... There was such a noise and confusion amongst the white people on deck as I never heard before, to get the boat out to go after the slaves. However, two of the wretches were already drowned. But they did get the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting...to prefer death to slavery.

“In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I now can or want to relate, hardships caused by, inseparable from this accursed trade... that caused, still causes so many of us... to prefer death to slavery. Death... to slavery.”