Jim Crow in the City: Spatial Segregation in Columbus, Georgia, 1890-1944

by

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Abstract

Between 1890 and 1944 thousands of African Americans moved to Columbus in

search of greater economic and social opportunities. Despite Jim Crow laws and the

threat of violence, African Americans built a thriving black community, largely separate

from white public life, that affected the city's geographic development. Using city

directories, census data, Sanborn maps, and oral histories, this thesis tracks the changes in

Columbus's spatial patterns. As geographic segregation in the city increased, African

Americans created their own discrete community within the city through the development

of two black neighborhoods, Liberty and West Highlands. Race, not class, organized

Columbus's black population. Columbus's growing black middle class lived on the same

blocks as its poorest black citizens. As the separation between black and white grew in

the city, Columbus's black businesses relocated from the central business district to black

neighborhoods. Black businesses that served the black community thrived and helped

transform Liberty and West Highlands into a mixed residential-commercial area.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

In an interview during the 1970s, Samuel P. Charleston reflected on his family's experiences moving to Columbus, Georgia. Although not educated herself, his mother Sarah A. Gaines Charleston "saw the need for it" and wanted her children to be able to go to school. [1] Sarah "felt that traveling around from place to place…would prevent her children from getting a proper education. And so she decided to just move the family here to Columbus."[2] As a result, Samuel and his six brothers and sisters were able to gain an education at Columbus's black Fifth Avenue School. After completing the ninth grade, Samuel graduated from Morris Brown College in 1928. African Americans like the Charlestons came to Columbus looking for opportunities; they found them to a limited extent as they also faced the harsh segregation of the Jim Crow South.

Between 1890 and 1944 Columbus was a thriving New South city. During this time period, the city experienced significant economic growth and city expansion. Columbus's population increased from 17,303 in 1890 to 53,280 in 1940 as both whites and blacks moved to the city from the surrounding countryside. Columbus developed its public transportation, education, sanitation, and electrification systems. However, the majority of these improvements were aimed at Columbus's white citizens. [3] Between

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[1] Becky Matthews, "Interview of Samuel P. Charleston," January 23, 1975, General Oral History Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[2] Matthews, "Interview of Samuel P. Charleston."

[3] John S. Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia 1828-1978* (Columbus: Columbus Sesquicentennial, Inc., 1978), 83-5 and 90; Lynn Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time: A History of the Lower Chattahoochee*

1890 and 1944, segregation increased in cities across the South.[4] This thesis examines how race, and in particular segregation affected the spatial development of one medium-sized Southern city through business and residential patterns from 1890-1930.

Historians have looked at various Southern cities to determine large patterns of development. Howard Rabinowitz argues that race is the defining characteristic of Southern cities. He writes that Southern cities established the patterns of segregation that expanded in the countryside. Rabinowitz is less concerned with the history of individual cities than with how they deal with the "Negro question," but argues that Southern cities' responses to African American citizens shaped the city development. Rabinowitz focused on five capital cities: Montgomery, Atlanta, Nashville, Raleigh, and Richmond. Although these Southern cities vary by size, age, growth rate, region, economic structure, and demographic makeup, they all moved from excluding blacks, to separating them from whites, back to exclusion. It is this pattern, according to Rabinowitz, that distinguishes them from northern or western urban areas.[5]

David Goldfield similarly emphasizes the importance of race on Southern cities because it created a "biracial society" in which blacks and whites occupied different hierarchical status and geographic space.[6] Goldfield writes that historians cannot

River (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 149 and 159; [3] Faye Jensen, "'Let Us Not Be So Far Behind': Columbus, Georgia, and the Struggle of a New South Town" in Paul Cimbala and Baron Shaw, eds. *Making a New South: Race, Leadership, and Community after the Civil War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 39; and Joseph Mahan, *Columbus: Georgia's Fall Line "Trading Town"* (Northridge, California: Windsor Publications, 1986), 108.

[4] Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) argues that 1890 marks a turning point from de facto to de jure segregation, 331.

[5] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, xiv, 3, 17, and 330.

[6] David Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 3.

understand Southern cities without understanding the South. Region affected Southern cities' development because urban areas in the South were originally markets for the staple crops from the rural areas around them. As a result, the South had a rural model of urbanization where the city cannot be separated from the countryside. Economic subordination in addition to a biracial society and reliance on staple crops defined Southern urbanization.[7] Goldfield stresses the continuity of Southern urban history by pointing to the colonial and antebellum periods especially as the major moments for Southern cities. He argues that the early periods of Southern city building set patterns that continued through later stages. Goldfield writes that Southern cities did change to an extent during the Civil War and World War I, but the antebellum period established the cycles of race, region, and economic dependence that pervade his explanation of Southern city development.

Louis Kyriakoudes built off of Goldfield's ideas about regionalism in *The Social Origins of the Urban South*.[8] He agrees that the urban-rural relationship in the South made southern cities unique. Where Goldfield sees the influence of rural ideals on the urban South, Kyriakoudes contends that Southern cities affected the countryside just as much through a series of pushes and pulls. Rural ways culturally dominated cities, which in turn reinforced rural ideas and countries. However, Kyriakoudes argues that migration and population is the defining characteristic of Southern cities. Kyriakoudes supports Goldfield's assertion about rural people living in Southern cities by pointing to cycles of migration. The push of rural crises and pull of urban jobs created a cycle of

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[7] Goldfield, *Cotton Fields,* 3, 8, 79, and 141-2.

[8] Louis M. Kyriakoudes, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

interdependence. Southern cities had unique population characteristics because the vast majority of municipal citizens came from rural areas within the region. The South did not experience the same influx of immigrants that the North and West did. Southern cities grew because of internal regional migration. Kyriakoudes argues that it is this demographic difference and intense rural-urban relationship that defines Southern urbanization.[9]

Thomas Hanchett provided a unique framework for understanding Southern cities. Hanchett argued that Southern cities were sorted out first in a patchwork pattern and then in sectors.[10] Hanchett argues that economic and technological changes fundamentally shaped southern cities. Industrialization created new classes with a desire for separation which led to increased racial and class segregation. Hanchett believes that Charlotte serves as a good example of Southern cities because if illustrates the same sorting-out patterns seen in other cities. Charlotte has at different times been a coastal trading hamlet, railroad town, and preindustrial center. This unique history gives Charlotte something in common with most Southern cities.[11] As Southern cities expanded, they reorganized and sorted out into different sections of the city. According to Hanchett, decentralization, neighborhood formation, and suburbanization are reactions to industrial changes and the resulting tension they created in society.[12] Despite growing separation between African

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[9] Kyriakoudes, *Social Origins,* 2, 114, and 157-9.

[10] Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 8.

[11] Ibid*,* 184, 258, and 260.

[12] Ibid, 3-4, 10-12, 90, and 259.

American and white areas, in the early twentieth century there were not strict lines differentiating a white side of town from a black one.

This work builds upon Hanchett's sorting-out theory by looking at Columbus, a medium-sized Southern city. Chapter One examines African Americans' reaction to segregation in Columbus. As whites pushed them out of public life using laws and municipal policies as well as the threat of violence, blacks developed their own schools, churches, and other cultural institutions. Using state laws, city codes, city directories, newspapers, the 1926 city plan, and voter registration records, Chapter One examines the legal and extralegal factors affecting African American community development in Columbus. Black people had their own "colored Columbus" that was largely separate from the larger city even though it was contained within its borders.[13]

The development of black neighborhoods was an additional facet of African American community building. Chapter Two looks at Columbus's black residential patterns in the city as a whole by plotting black houses identified in various city directories on a map of Columbus. The 1907 Sanborn map provides a closer look at individual blocks and properties, while comparing census data with directories gives a more complete view of African American daily life in Columbus. Between 1890 and 1944 Columbus had two distinct areas of black settlement: West Highlands in the north and Liberty in the south. As the Liberty Neighborhood became increasingly black and grew in size, the West Highland Neighborhood decreased in size and varied in its proportion of black to white residents. This chapter also provides an analysis of home ownership and persistence patterns in the city.

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[13] "Eighth Anniversary Issue," *Columbus Times*. May 23, 1931. Columbus Times Newspaper Collection, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia.

Chapter Three explores how black businesses contributed to African American community development in Columbus. City directories made it possible to identify and track black businesses over time as well as create maps of their locations. The geography of Columbus's black business district changed as black businesses came to rely on black customers. The often found pattern of a separate black business district evolved during this time period into pockets of black owned businesses located in core African American residential areas. By 1930s, the majority of Columbus's black businesses were located in Liberty, for example, solidifying the connection between black residential and commercial spaces in the city.

All three chapters rely on oral histories from African Americans living in Columbus before 1930. Their stories detail black daily life during Jim Crow, covering such topics as segregated schools, racism, black businesses, and employment. Additionally, Columbus city directories spanning the time period between 1894 and 1931 are key sources for every chapter. These directories list the city's churches, lodges, schools, businesses, and residences that year. Because they denote race, the directories help track changes in Columbus's black institutions. Both chapter two and three further use the directories as the base information to map Columbus's black residences and businesses. The underlying 1907 Sanborn map adds to the study of Columbus's black community by providing specific details about the individual properties.

Creating "Colored Columbus"

Everyday Life Behind the Color Line

In the 1928 souvenir program for the Georgia State Association of Physicians, Dentists, and Pharmacists, "Colored Columbus Welcome[d]" professionals to their city.[14] In May of 1931, Columbus's only black newspaper, the *Columbus Times*, printed a special eighth anniversary issue which also referred multiple times to "Colored Columbus."[15] Although both the souvenir program and newspaper refer to the city without adding "Colored," this distinction demonstrates how African Americans were at the same time a part of Columbus and separate from it. As in other Southern cities, race organized Columbus. While the "color line" dominated almost all aspects of African Americans' daily lives, blacks combatted white control by building their own cultural institutions. In response to the restrictions of Jim Crow, African Americans formed their own "Colored Columbus" within the larger city. Between 1890 and 1944 race divided Columbus by black and white through racial codes, violence, city planning, and increased segregation.

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[14] *Georgia State Medical Association of Physicians, Dentists, and Pharmacists, May 14, 1928, Souvenir Program*. Alfonso Biggs Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[15] "Eighth Anniversary Issue," *Columbus Times*. May 23, 1931. Columbus Times Newspaper Collection, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia.

Several historians identify race as a defining feature of Southern cities. In his seminal work *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, David Goldfield argued that Southern cities can only be understood through a regional framework. He pointed to three characteristics of Southern cities: a strong connection to rural areas and especially agriculture, race, and what he calls a colonial economy. According to Goldfield, Southern cities created a biracial society, "one white, one black – separate and unequal."[16] Howard Rabinowitz in *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* also argued that race divided Southern cities. According to him, whites and blacks in conflict over the effects of emancipation and reconstruction started a new pattern of race relations in Southern cities that would then define the entire South. As both whites and blacks moved to cities in growing numbers, they had to confront questions of how society would be organized. Rabinowitz argued that their "decisions concerning jobs and housing would affect…all aspects of urban life."[17] According to Rabinowitz, Southern cities shifted from excluding blacks completely to separating them from white public life.

Both Don H. Doyle in *New Men, New Cities, New South* and Thomas Hanchett in *Sorting Out the New South City* argued that the pattern of race relations in Southern cities were affected by economics.[18] According to Doyle, white urban business leaders developed racial policies "in which white supremacy was maintained by new measures of segregation enforced by episodic violence."[19] Hanchett agreed that city leaders sought to retain their power. He argued that it was whites' desire to retain their position at the top

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[16] Goldfield, *Cotton Fields,* 7.

[17] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations,* 3.

[18] Don Harrison Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1990).

[19] Doyle, *New Men,* 261.

of the social pyramid amid Southern industrialization that increased their desire to completely separate themselves from blacks.[20] This chapter provides a case study of how Columbus, a medium-sized Southern city, confirms some trends in black community development. Segregation in the city increased and divided the city between two distinct communities: one white and one black.

Histories of Columbus rarely discuss race's impact on the city and have largely ignored African Americans. In 1929 Louise DuBose presented the history of the city primarily through biographical sketches of city leaders, all of whom were white businessmen.[21] This study, in contrast, examines the contributions and daily life of Columbus's black citizens between 1890 and 1944. Both John Lupold and Joseph Mahan centered their histories on Columbus's economic past. Lupold and Mahan emphasized Columbus's position as a trading town. While Lupold focused on the economic growth and city expansion brought on by Columbus's Progressive government, Mahan instead related the stability that Fort Benning brought to the town. Lupold only briefly mentioned Columbus's first black high school and Civil Rights activist Primus King.[22] Roger Harris in *Our Town: An Introduction to the History of Columbus, Georgia* provided the most emphasis on Columbus's black history. However, his approach highlighted only a couple of African American figures. Harris's work focused more on Columbus's present than its past.[23] Although biographies of Horace King, Eugene Bullard, and Ma Rainey provide

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[20] Hanchett, *Sorting Out,* 239.

[21] Louise Jones DuBose, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1928* (Columbus, Georgia: The Historical Publishing Co., 1929). DuBose also published under the pseudonym Nancy Telfair.

[22] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia*; Mahan, *"Trading Town."*

[23] Roger Harris, *Our Town: An Introduction to the History of Columbus, Georgia* (Columbus: Historic Columbus Foundation, 1992).

insight into prominent local black figures, they offer little insight into the life of the majority of Columbus's population.[24] In contrast to these histories of Columbus, this study looks at the contributions and daily life of Columbus's black citizens between 1890 and 1945.

In the 1890s, Columbus was a thriving New South city and a leading industrial center in the Chattahoochee Valley. The city had multiple mills and a thriving steamboat-powered river trade on the western side of the city.[25] Large textile mills dominated the local economy. In 1890, mill workers made up at least 25 percent of the white population.[26] A hub for the Central of Georgia Railway was located in the eastern part of Columbus, and a second industrial center developed around the train depot. As the city expanded, wealthy whites moved to the north of the city, uphill from downtown. In the 1890s, Columbus had streetcar suburbs in Rose Hill, Wynnton, East Highlands, and Wildwood Park.[27] Columbus's black population consistently increased in the decades following the Civil War as African American freedmen moved to the city looking for greater opportunities. The majority worked labor-intensive unskilled jobs.[28] Other Southern cities experienced similar population booms as both white and black Southerners left sharecropping for manufacturing jobs.[29]

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[24] John S. Lupold and Thomas L. French, Jr., *Bridging Deep South Rivers: The Life and Legend of Horace King* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Craig Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); and Sandra Lieb, *Mother of the Blues: A Study of Ma Rainey* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

[25] Lupold, 16.

[26] Harris, *Our Town,* 38.

[27] Ibid, 20.

[28] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,"' 30; Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 48.

Columbus's Progressive city government, which came to power during the 1890s, developed a permanent fire department, professionalized their police department, built a new jail and police headquarters, replaced wooden bridges with steel ones, built sewers, and paved and curbed streets.[30] In 1901, the city created its first Municipal Water Works to build a citywide sewer system and pump in clean drinking water. In 1895 Columbus created a free public kindergarten for white children and in 1903 developed one for black children.[31] The Chattahoochee River changed from being an important transportation center to a hydroelectricity producer.[32] Although Columbus's population increased each decade since its founding except for the Civil War years, 1920 marked an increased rate of city expansion. After World War I, Columbus experienced exponential economic growth and city expansion. Bibb Mill's growth made it the largest Southern textile operation. Both Bibb City Mill and the Eagle and Phenix Mill developed their own mill villages.[33]

Columbus's black population increased after the Civil War as African American freedmen moved to the city looking for greater opportunities. They lived in small huts in the Bottoms, the area roughly located at the bottom of Wynnton Hill along Tenth Avenue on the outskirts of town, and worked labor-intensive unskilled jobs.[34] By 1890 African

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[29] For more about the connection between the rural South and urban migrations see Kyriakoudes, *Social Origins.*

[30] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 83.

[31] Ibid, 83-5.

[32] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia*, 90; Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time,* 159.

[33] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'"39.

[34] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'" 30; Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 48.

Americans made up approximately 15 percent of the Southern urban population.[35]

Columbus's number of African American residents grew consistently throughout the Jim Crow Era and made up a significant proportion of the city's population. *Figure 1* demonstrates the relative increase in Columbus's black and white populations from 1880 through 1930. The total number of blacks in Columbus increased overall, and by 1930 African Americans made up approximately one third of Columbus's population. [36] Blacks comprised a similar proportion of the population in other Southern cities in 1930. Atlanta, Nashville, and Richmond were also about 30 percent black in 1930. Both Memphis and Birmingham were 38 percent black, Jackson was 40 percent, and Charleston and Montgomery were each 45 percent.[37] According to Bernadette Pruitt, "hundreds of thousands [of African Americans] settled southern metropolitan areas like New Orleans, Memphis, Birmingham, and Jackson" and "left rural communities for small towns, industrialized rural areas, and medium-sized cities throughout the South."[38] Although smaller in total population, Columbus contained a similar proportion of black to white residents as other Southern cities.

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[35] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations,* xiii.

[36]Information derived from various editions of the census. 1880 U.S. census, Muscogee County, Georgia, population schedule, Columbus, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 16, 2016, http://ancestry.com. 1900 U.S. census, Muscogee County, Georgia, population schedule, Columbus, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 16, 2016, http://ancestry.com. 1910 U.S. census, Muscogee County, Georgia, population schedule, Columbus, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 16, 2016, http://ancestry.com. 1920 U.S. census, Muscogee County, Georgia, population schedule, Columbus, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 16, 2016, http://ancestry.com. 1930 U.S. census, Muscogee County, Georgia, population schedule, Columbus, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 16, 2016, http://ancestry.com.

[37] Bernadette Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2013), 13.

[38] Pruitt, *Other Great Migration*, 3.

Columbus Total Population

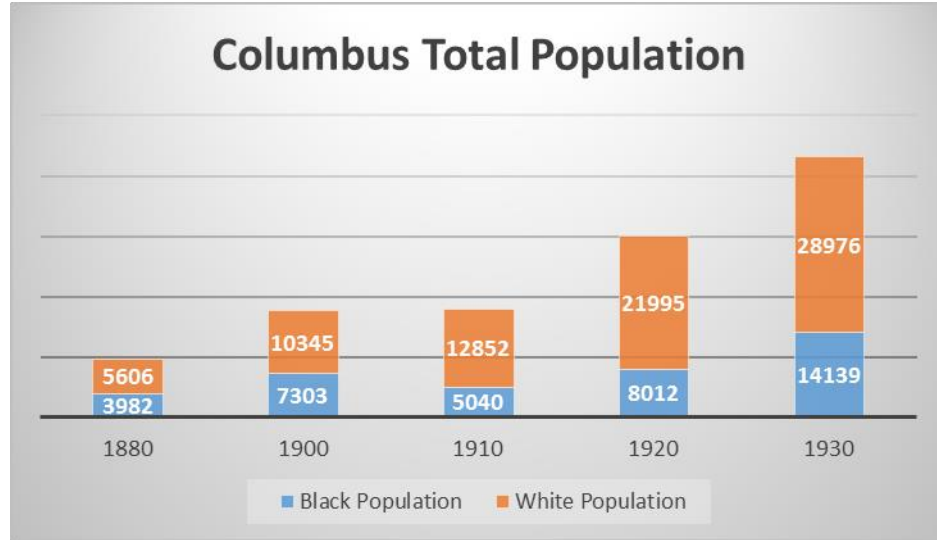| Year	Black Population	White Population
1880	3982	5606
1900	7303	10345
1910	5040	12852
1920	8012	21995
1930	14139	28976

■ Black Population ■ White Population

Figure 1. Total Population of Columbus, 1880-1930.

African Americans migrated to cities like Columbus because urban life offered black people greater opportunities than the countryside. Cities gave African Americans access to cultural institutions and provided a greater chance for employment. However, whites restricted African Americans from entering public places, such as parks. Because cities had denser populations, African Americans and whites frequently interacted. Despite this physical closeness, urban whites were dedicated to maintaining a hierarchical society based on race. White property owners created new black sections of town by stopping African Americans from purchasing land or homes in certain areas while opening possibilities in others.[39]

Despite the presence of a small black elite and growing middle class, the majority of African Americans in Columbus at the turn of the twentieth century were unskilled,

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[39] Hanchett, *Sorting Out,* 145.

working class people.[40] W. E. B. Du Bois pointed out that "among this people there is no

leisure class…here ninety-six per cent are toiling; no one with leisure to turn the bare and

cheerless cabin into a home."[41] The poorest blacks in Columbus were laborers, porters,

draymen, and drivers across the city living in slums the same time that middle class

African Americans occupied nice homes with some public amenities mere blocks away.[42]

Economic discrimination meant that whites restricted most African Americans to

unskilled and low-paying jobs.[43] In 1900, Stewy Thomas lived with his wife, parents, and

six children in a small two-room house on Sixth Avenue. Four of the nine family

members worked as laborers.[44] The Thomas family was typical of African Americans in

Columbus. Most worked in factories, at the port, or other places in the city doing labor-

intensive work for many hours a day. They received less pay than their white

counterparts and performed more dangerous jobs.[45]

When Robert Passmore was eighteen he left his family's farm for a mill job in

Columbus. At first, he became employed at the Columbus Mill but soon left because

"they wasn't paying nothing. They were only paying eight dollars and a quarter a week. I

could make more money than that."[46] By 1926 he found a better paying job working at

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[40] 1900 U. S. Census.

[41] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), 145.

[42] Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 9.

[43] Juguo Zhang, *W. E.B. Du Bois: The Quest for the Abolition of the Color Line* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.

[44] 1900 U. S. Census.

[45] 1900 U. S. Census.

[46] Vernon Presley, "Interview of Robert Passmore," March 6, 1988, Southern Mill Workers Oral History Collection, Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia.

Swift Manufacturing Mill, and he stayed there until he retired in 1971. In an oral history

interview, Passmore recounted his experience working in Swift Mill as an extractor

running water out of the dye. "It was hard work" from 6:30 in the morning until 6:30 at

night. There were only certain tasks that blacks were hired to do.[47] According to

Passmore, at Swift Mill they could work in "the dye house, opening room, warehouse,

boiler room, and picking room."[48] Passmore's experience was typical of black

millworkers. "In many mills, the dirtiest and heaviest work went to black men" who were

excluded from most production jobs; black women had even fewer opportunities in mill

work. [49] Sweepers and laborers comprised most of the black manufacturing employees

Columbus.

The Southern system of discrimination and Jim Crow laws dominated African

American life in the South during the early twentieth century. After *Plessy v. Ferguson*

legalized segregation in 1896, white leaders used Jim Crow laws to "regulate, separate,

isolate, and subjugate" African Americans.[50] They sought to restore the antebellum

power structure with whites at the top of the social order and African Americans firmly

on the bottom.[51] Whites used Jim Crow to limit the black community's ability to

challenge the existing racial and political hierarchies. Almost all aspects of life reinforced

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[47] Presley, "Interview of Robert Passmore."

[48] Ibid.

[49] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Mill Cotton World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 66.

[50] David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 58.

[51] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'" 41

this separation as whites upheld racial attitudes marketed as Southern tradition.[52] Whites

used segregation to restrict African Americans to separate and unequal economic

opportunities as well as public spaces.[53] In 1894, Columbus only had one public park,

Lincoln Park to the north of the city, that was open to African Americans.[54] Racism set

blacks apart from whites along a strict color line within Southern cities.

Powerful whites used political and legal restrictions to systematically enact Jim

Crow. After 1890 the South transitioned from de facto to de jure segregation.[55]

Segregation was in practice before 1890, but new laws gave the separation of races a

legal justification. Whites used all levels of American government to enforce black

subjugation in the South.[56] An 1891 statewide law legalized streetcar segregation, which

allowed whites to restrict African Americans' access to public transportation.[57] Further

local ordinances legalized segregation and determined where African Americans could

live, kept them out of public places like parks and libraries, and limited their use of basic

city facilities and services. Even Columbus's supposedly Progressive city government

failed to provide African Americans the same amenities as white citizens.[58] In 1891 the

City Code for Columbus mandated that black and white schoolchildren "shall always be

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[52] David Brown, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 181.

[53] Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities*, 145.

[54] *Columbus, Georgia City Directory* (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1894).

[55] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations,* 331.

[56] Lawrence Hanks, *The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment in Three Georgia Counties* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 17.

[57] John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 16.

[58] Ibid, 110.

kept separate and distinct from each other."[59] This same code gave the mayor and

aldermen the right to use the city's poll tax to pay for education according to whatever

apportionment they saw fit.[60] Jim Crow laws effectively pushed African Americans out

of the public sphere and shut them out of the white world in the early twentieth century.[61]

Several Jim Crow laws in Columbus were aimed at silencing African Americans'

political voices.[62] In 1877 Columbus passed a commutation tax which effectively

eliminated blacks' ability to vote in city elections, specifying that "Every non-property

holder who wished to register to vote for mayor and council had to pay a two dollar

commutation tax, supposedly for street repair."[63] Very few African Americans could

afford to pay that much. City requirements of separate polls for whites and blacks in

1891, the introduction of statewide all-white primaries in 1900, and Georgia's literacy

tests beginning in 1908 continued the process of disfranchisement.[64] These combined

measures were so effective that in 1917 Columbus only had six black men registered to

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[59] *New Charter of the City of Columbus, Georgia Declaring the Rights and Powers of Said Corporation and for Other Purposes Together with Ordinances Adopted, July 1, 1888 to July 1, 1891* (Columbus, Georgia: John S. Stewart, City Printer, 1891), 29.

[60] Ibid, 29.

[61] Robert Cassanello, *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 2.

[62] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'" 42. Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 96. See also David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: H. Holt, 1993), 280.

[63] Faye Lind Jensen, "Power and Progress in the Urban South: Columbus, Georgia, 1850-1885" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1992), 172.

[64] *New Charter of the City of Columbus*, 12.

vote: Willis C. Carter, R. H. Cobb, Moses Green, George Lindsey, J. T. Shepherd, and S. W. Yarbrough.[65]

White city leaders in Columbus developed an additional way to pressure African American voters through circulating voter lists. The 1914 amended version of the *Code of the City of Columbus* specified that it was the Clerk of Council's duty to maintain and distribute a list of voters in the city.[66] Among the required information for the voter list were the individual's race and ward. The 1917, 1924, and 1935 voter lists reflect this municipal rule.[67] All three voter lists have separate sections for black and white voters, making it easy to determine the number of African Americans registered to vote. The 1917 list is the only one that listed wards, but all three included the names and addresses of everyone who was registered. These lists were published and distributed throughout Columbus. Whites, potentially including members of the Ku Klux Klan, could easily find where black voters lived and threaten them and their families if they decided to vote. Despite this potential for violent coercion, significantly more African Americans in Columbus were able to register to vote in 1924 and 1935 than in 1917.[68] In 1924 women were allowed to vote, partially accounting for the increase in blacks registered to vote.

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[65] *List of Registered Voters, City of Columbus, Georgia for General Election, 1917* (Columbus, Georgia: City Printing Co., 1917), 42. Alva C. Smith Collection, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia

[66] *Code of the City of Columbus, 1914 Including the Charter as Amended, Rules of Council, and Laws and Ordinances to July 1, 1914* (Columbus, Georgia: G. H. Howard Gilbert Printing Col, 1914), 22.

[67] *1924 List of Registered Voters*, 42; *Alphabetical List of the Registered Voters of Muscogee County, Georgia, May 4, 1924* (Columbus, Georgia, 1924), 138-148. Alva C. Smith Collection, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia. And *Alphabetical List of the Registered and Qualified Voters of the City of Columbus, Georgia* (Columbus, Georgia: Standard Printing Co., 1935). Alva C. Smith Collection, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia.

[68] Information compiled from *1914 List of Registered Voters*, *1924 Alphabetical List of Registered Voters*, and *1935 List of Registered and Qualified Voters*.

White elites wanted to make sure African Americans stayed in their prescribed place, and used violent coercion, disenfranchisement, economic pressure, and legal restrictions to ensure they did. African Americans took advantage of the few resources or opportunities to challenge systematic racism in the South.[69] Whites used lynching and other forms of white supremacist terrorism to punish African Americans who whites thought did not know their place or challenged those in power.[70] Georgia led the nation in number of lynchings with an unprecedented peak around the turn of the twentieth century.[71] Whites lynched an estimated 196 blacks in Georgia's Cotton Belt between 1880 and 1930.[72] In 1896 a white mob in Columbus lynched two black men in broad daylight in the middle of downtown. Angry whites in Columbus shot Jesse Slayton and Will Miles, charged with rape, and hung them from a tree on Broad Street.[73] The very real threat of lynching deterred African Americans from challenging the status quo.[74] The accepted and public nature of racial violence was one way that whites implemented Jim Crow laws and imposed the white-dominated social hierarchy.[75]

The city of Columbus was not isolated from the violence. On June 1, 1896 a white mob entered the Columbus jail. They dragged two African American men, Jesse Slayton

[69] John Inscoe, *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 9.

[70] Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Race Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2.

[71] Zhang, *W. E. B. DuBois,* 21; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 131.

[72] Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 107.

[73] Kyle Clason, *Images: A Pictorial History of Columbus, Georgia* (Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Company, 1986), 112.

[74] Brown, *Race in the American South,* 201.

[75] Ibid, 2.

and Will Miles, from the prison. The crowd of white men beat and hanged Slayton and

miles at the corner of Eleventh Street and Broadway in the middle of town in broad day

light. A photo taken at the scene was turned into a postcard as a brutal memento of the

moment.[76] Tragically, Slayton and Miles were not the only African Americans lynched in

Columbus. Both Joseph Hardy and William Cornaker were lynched in 1909 near

Talbotton Road in the northern part of the city. In 1912, whites lynched four more blacks

in the Columbus area: Burrell Hardaway, John Moore, Gene Harrington, and Dusky

Crutchfield.[77]

One of Columbus's most tragic lynchings happened in the summer of 1912. Two

boys, one white and one black, were playing together with a gun when it went off. On

June 20, 1912, young white boy Cedron Land was killed in this tragic accident. His black

playmate, Teasy McElhaney, was arrested and charged with murder.[78] Cedron Land's

family of prominent Muscogee County planters felt that McElhaney was not punished

harshly enough for the death of their child and took justice into their own hands. On

August 14, 1912 Teasy McElhaney was "taken from [the Columbus] courthouse by a

mob and lynched."[79] The mob of angry white men were careful to travel just beyond the

city limits before killing the child, thus barely staying outside of police jurisdiction and

the chance of immediate legal reprimand for their actions. Eventually, Cedron Land's

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[76] Clason, *Images,* 112. Bill Winn, "1896 Lynching Remembered at 11th Street and Broadway." *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, June 2, 2015.

[77] Alva James-Johnson, "John Land Atones for Ancestors' Involvement in 1912 Mob Lynching." *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer.* August 13, 2014. Bill Winn, "Mob Violence Led to Deaths of Many Blacks," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer.*

[78] Bill Winn "Incident at Wynn's Hill," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer,* January 28, 1987. "'It's Murder Says Coroner' Concerning Death of Cedron Land, Small Boy Shot Sunday" *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer,* July 2, 1912.

[79] "Taken from Courthouse by a Mob and Lynched" *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer* August 14, 1912.

father and uncles turned themselves in to the Columbus police for McElhaney's brutal murder, but all three men were acquitted by an all-white jury in Columbus.[80] African Americans could not escape the violent reminders of how precarious their "place" in the city was and just how vulnerable they were to white vigilantism.

Escalating violence against blacks in the region affected Columbus's Thomas family. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Thomases "were a locally prominent, upper-middle class, African-American couple…in an exclusively white neighborhood," Rose Hill.[81] John Harris Thomas, a successful businessman, lived in a large house with his dress designer wife Amelia Cantey and their four daughters.[82] John and Amelia became understandably worried about their family's safety after the 1907 Atlanta race riot. In 1907, the "the family moved to Washington D. C., to escape mounting racial tensions that threatened the safety of Columbus' African-American population."[83] The fear of violence as well as lack of opportunities prompted some black Southerners, the Thomas family included, to leave cities like Columbus for those in the north.[84]

The visible presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Columbus also affected African Americans living in the city. Columbus had a history of Klan violence dating back to Reconstruction. George Ashburn, a prominent Radical Republican, was murdered in

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[80] Bill Winn "McElhaney Lynching" *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, January 28, 1987.

[81] National Register of Historic Places, Alma Thomas House, Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia, National Register #20091020.

[82] Charles T. Butler, "Alma Thomas (1891-1978)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 21 May 2013, Web, 13 April 2016.

[83] National Register of Historic Places, Alma Thomas House.

[84] For more discussion of African Americans leaving the South for northern cities see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010). See also *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Columbus in 1868. Even though the Ku Klux Klan took responsibility for the crime, white city leaders made no arrests.[85] In 1915 William Joseph Simmons and his followers met at the top of Stone Mountain in Georgia, where they began the Second Ku Klux Klan.[86] Throughout the 1920s, Georgia was "a major Klan stronghold."[87] According to William Mugleston, Columbus in 1920 had 400 to 500 Klansmen, who met in the armory above police headquarters.[88] Both the Columbus mayor and chief of police were reported to be supporters of the Klan. Not everyone in Columbus supported the Ku Klux Klan. The *Enquirer-Sun* in particular was noted for its vehement criticism of the Klan and its activities. In response the Ku Klux Klan staged a parade past the offices of the *Enquirer-Sun* in downtown Columbus in 1921.[89] In 1922 the local chapter emphasized their connections to the government and presence in the Columbus by publishing a newspaper article arguing "that General Pike Klan No. 29 has the utmost respect for our City Officials and Police Department. And we wish to specially make known our willingness to assist the officials in any way."[90] The General Pike Klan No. 29 made it clear that they saw Columbus as their city. African Americans would undoubtedly have recognized the threat that the Ku Klux Klan posed in Columbus, especially during the early 1920s due to the elevated levels of violence.

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[85] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'" 31.

[86] Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

[87] William Mugleston, "Julian Harris, the Georgia Press, and the Ku Klux Klan," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (Fall, 1975): 284.

[88] Ibid, 286.

[89] Ibid, 287.

[90] "Local Ku Klux Pass Resolutions," May 24, 1922. Ku Klux Klan Vertical Files, Columbus State University Archives. Columbus, Georgia.

The 1920s also ushered in a new phase for Columbus's municipal government. In 1922 the city changed from a mayor and aldermen system of government to a commission and city manager. This reduced the power of ward bosses in different sections of the city and firmly established Columbus's Progressive government.[91] The new government wanted to further improve and beautify the city. In 1926 John Nolen published a plan for the city of Columbus in which he recommended that Columbus build a main thoroughfare system with regional roads, more parks and schools, a civic center with a city hall, museum, library, and auditorium. Nolen also wanted Columbus to improve downtown and the industrial communities by instituting zoning regulations.[92] The city successfully instituted many of Nolen's suggested changes. Nolen also laid out a proposal for Columbus's future development that revealed the city's dedication to segregation. Nolen included a call for increased industrial use of a traditionally black part of town between Sixth and Tenth Avenues as well as the city's black cemetery.[93] Nolen's strategies would effectively take control of black property and redevelop it for powerful white industrialists' use. Nolen also called for a new zoning plan, eventual relocation of the black cemetery, and more green space through increased playgrounds and parks. He proposed expanding eighteen white playgrounds and two of Columbus's three black playgrounds by a small amount.[94] The majority of Nolen's recommendations would benefit Columbus's white citizens more than, and at the expense of, its black ones.

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[91] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 94.

[92] John Nolen, *City Plan of Columbus, Georgia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Square, 1926), 6.

[93] Ibid, 6.

[94] Ibid, 16-17.

African Americans established their own cultural and community institutions.

These places helped combat some of the inequalities of daily life in the Jim Crow South,

as whites treated African Americans like they were "a problem" in society.[95] Cities

increased in importance as they became the center of black intellectualism, politics,

entertainment, social organizations, and business.[96] Because whites denied them access to

their facilities and institutions, African Americans established their own churches,

fraternal societies, and schools.[97] Church played an important part in African American

life during the early part of the twentieth century as churches were the religious and

social center of African American communities. In 1900, blacks in Columbus belonged to

one Presbyterian, seven Methodist, and eight Baptist churches.[98] African American secret

fraternal societies also served important community functions. Columbus had nine

African American fraternal societies in 1900 including a Masonic lodge and the Colored

Knights of Pythias.[99] In 1900, the International Order of Twelve provided members who

paid their dues a certain amount of money "per week when sick" as well as a visit from

the order's doctor. [100] If a child died, the order would also provide money to the parents

"to assist them in defraying the funeral expenses."[101] Societies like the International

Order of Twelve, which met every month, provided social opportunities as well as mutual

[95] Du Bois, *Souls,* 4.

[96] Brown, *Race in the American South,* 10. See also Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 8-9 and 27.

[97] Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 50.

[98] *Columbus, Georgia City Directory* (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1900).

[99] 1900 City Directory.

[100] "International Order of Twelve Constitution, By-Laws and Rules of Order of the Maids and Pages of Honor," Gilbert Printing Company, Columbus, Georgia, 1900, 4. International Order of Twelve Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[101] Ibid, 4.

financial aid for members.[102] Several black organizations in Columbus were prestigious

groups that marked individuals as belonging to Columbus's group of black elites. For

example, on January 25, 1929 Dr. Thomas Brewer founded Columbus's So-C-25 Club.

This exclusive society limited membership to twenty-five black businessmen.[103] Formed

on October 5, 1931, The What Not Club's "chief objective was for cultural and literary

attainments."[104] This group only offered membership to fourteen of Columbus's "most

outstanding women."[105] Clubs in Columbus played a vital role in offering social and

entertainment options to the city's black community.

Whites exercised the most control over African American cultural institutions

through public schools. Although Columbus's black schools had black teachers and

principals, the members of the city's board of education and superintendent were all

white. The majority of white Southerners did not believe that education was important for

white children, let alone black ones, and many children within Columbus had to work to

help support their families.[106] White Southerners believed that educating African

Americans would increase dissatisfaction in society. Du Bois wrote that "education

among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and

revolution of dissatisfaction and discontent," pointing out that whites feared educated

African Americans and their potential to revolt against the established Jim Crow

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[102] Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 55.

[103] "Negro Clubs and Organizations," Alva C. Smith Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Thomas O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling: Public Education in Georgia, 1900-1961* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), 6.

system.[107] Whites were determined to limit the African Americans' ability to gain a quality education. Politicians at federal, state, and local government levels gave economic resources for education to whites and strictly controlled what amount of public funds went to black schools.[108] White schools received 90 percent of government funds for schools, so African American communities had to provide local schools with buildings and equipment, libraries and school supplies, and any maintenance and cleaning.[109] In Columbus, black principals had an average salary of 492 dollars in 1894, about a third of their white counterparts'. African American teachers earned roughly half the pay that white ones did. [110] African American teachers in black schools worked in smaller and older buildings with fewer supplies, were paid less money, and taught more students per person than their counterparts in white schools.[111] Powerful whites wanted to reduce public investment in African American education.

Genie King attended Fifth Avenue School as a child. Every morning she would get up early and help "prepare breakfast for [her] sisters and brothers and get them ready for school"[112] before she also left their home on Fifth Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets. One of the things she remembered most about her education was the vocational training Fifth Avenue School offered. "We did laundry and we cooked and we

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[107] Du Bois, *Souls,* 34.

[108] Doyle, *New Men,* 288; Brown, *Race in the American South,* 194.

[109] Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 144-145.

[110] 1894 City Directory, 20-22.

[111] Doyle, *New Men,* 276.

[112] Becky Matthews, "Interview of Genie King," January 15, 1975, General Oral History Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

sewed – the girls, and the boys took carpentry and blacksmith."[113] Because of the limited

occupations accessible to African Americans at that time, according to King these skills

were preparing black students "for the needs of the time."[114] Samuel Charleston also

attended Fifth Avenue School. Charleston told his interviewer that "it was always felt that

we had the leftovers or the inadequate supplies" but that most African Americans in the

city "felt that was the only way [to get an education], and they wanted to make the best of

it."[115] Because Columbus did not have a black high school until 1930, most students did

not go beyond the ninth grade.

African Americans living in Columbus during the early twentieth century faced

many challenges. Whites restricted blacks' economic, political, and social power through

Jim Crow laws, disfranchisement, and segregation. Although black people did resist the

white supremacist power structure, anyone who stepped outside of his or her prescribed

place risked retaliation from angry whites. Seeking greater economic opportunities,

African Americans left the countryside to work in Columbus's factories or prosperous

river trade. A rising black middle class in the city created a new elite class of doctors,

teachers, and business owners. African Americans in Columbus built their own schools,

churches, libraries, and relief organizations. They settled into three main sections of the

city where they created their own distinct black culture. Despite the harsh nature of

everyday life for blacks in the Jim Crow-era South, African Americans in Columbus and

other cities successfully built their own rich communities and public life behind the color

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[113] Matthews, "Interview of Genie King."

[114] Ibid.

[115] Matthews, "Interview of Sam Charleston."

line. Chapters Two and Three examine in greater detail how African Americans created

"colored Columbus" through black neighborhoods and businesses.

Race and Residence

The Geography of Segregation in a New South City

Race further organized Columbus through the development of black neighborhoods. In 1985, Joseph Mahan conducted an African American Historic Resources Survey inventorying historic African American structures throughout Columbus, Georgia. In his "Overview" of the project, Mahan argued that "in 1936 the southeastern portion of the original City of Columbus had become an area inhabited primarily by black people. This included the section east of Second Avenue, south of Sixth Street and east of Third Avenue south of Ninth Street."[116] Mahan correctly identified this area as predominantly black and the "tendency on the part of black people to withdraw from other areas and congregate in the lower portion of the old city" as early as 1897.[117] However, his decision to base his survey on "buildings listed then [in 1936] as homes or business that were found to be extant" caused him to overlook a significant part of Columbus's black residential patterns.[118] This chapter tracks the development of Columbus's two predominantly black neighborhoods: the West Highlands neighborhood and the Liberty neighborhood.

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[116] Joseph Mahan, "Overview." 1975. African American Historic Resources Survey. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

While the pattern of geographic segregation in Columbus did not always have

clearly defined lines separating black neighborhoods from white ones, race was one way

that the city was organized. Despite some individual African Americans living in white

neighborhoods and the presence of multiple mixed race neighborhoods, there were

sectors of Columbus that were dominantly African American residences. Even though

black and white residents of Columbus came into close contact with each other

throughout their daily routines, the layout of the city reinforced the idea that there should

be separate spaces for different races as Columbus conformed to the pattern of urban

development in industrializing Southern cities established before the Civil War.[119] During

Jim Crow, black neighborhoods in Columbus became more distinct even as the people

living on these blocks continued to change addresses.

Reasons for city development, including the creation of residential and

commercial districts, have been highly debated as sociologists and urban planners have

attempted to identify the underlying forces and processes affecting land use in cities. In

the 1920s Ernest Burgess and Robert Park theorized that cities grew in concentric circles

around a central business district with residential zones spiraling out of it.[120] Sector

theory modified this idea by emphasizing the importance of transportation routes, such as

railways, in urban development because they created a second central zone for other

concentric circles.[121] Both the ring model and sector theory have been replaced by a

newer model theorizing that neighborhoods developed in response to economic and

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[119] For patterns of urban development of cities established before and after the Civil War see Jesse Oscar McKee, "The Residential Patterns of Blacks in Natchez and Hattiesburg and Other Mississippi Cities" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1973), 134.

[120] Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 19.

[121] Homer Hoyt, *The Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Print Office, 1939), 8.

political changes within cities. Historians have drawn on this literature, looking at how social factors impacted physical environments, and arguing that wider changes, not just in transportation and industrialization, sorted out cities.[122]

One factor that influenced urban development in New South cities was segregation. Urban historians have shown how race and occupation determined residential patterns in several large cities during Jim Crow. As cities grew, boundaries between neighborhoods became more and more distinct as African Americans resided on one side of town and whites chose to live elsewhere. Whites emphasized what they saw as biological supremacy while African Americans encouraged racial pride, leading to an increase in segregation in Southern cities. Thomas Hanchett, for example, argued that segregation in Southern cities did not originally have clear-cut lines between white and African American spaces.[123] His study revealed that "by the 1920s, Charlotte had clearly sorted out into a city of separate neighborhoods sharply defined by race and class."[124] Black neighborhoods early on did not arrange themselves by class, in 1912 primarily middle-class African Americans lived in the streetcar suburb Washington Heights.[125] In *A Sense of Place*, Lynne Feldman similarly revealed a class distinction in African Americans' residential patterns. Smithfield, Columbus's emerging black elite and middle class suburb, "allowed the black residents particularly to remove themselves physically

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[122] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: Technology Press, 1960), 10; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 8; and Stuart Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century American Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 14.

[123] Hanchett, *Sorting Out,* 8.

[124] Ibid, 203.

[125] Ibid, 140-141.

and psychologically from the broader society" which included poor blacks.[126] John

Dittmer's study of Georgia cities revealed a sharp difference in west Atlanta where lower

class African Americans lived and the old fourth ward that became the heart of

Atlanta.[127] Augusta and Savannah had similar distinctions.[128] Unlike these larger cities,

Columbus did not have black suburbs based on class. Instead, members of Columbus's

black middle class lived on the same blocks in the same neighborhoods as working class

blacks.

Historians have utilized geospatial data, including maps, in order to study

segregation in Southern cities. However, their studies primarily focused on the period

after 1920. In "Racial Segregation in Small North Carolina Cities," Howard J. Sumka

used Sanborn insurance maps of four cities in North Carolina. Sumka relied on the maps

to provide comparative locations and expansion of African American households. Sumka

focused on a later period from 1927 through 1957 and argued that African Americans

living in North Carolina cities were concentrated in large, connecting neighborhoods.[129]

Thomas Hanchett similarly used maps to determine the physical boundaries and changing

topography of Charlotte, North Carolina over several decades. He argued that the

landscape of segregation in Charlotte developed over time in three distinct phases and

used the maps to chart changes in dominantly African American neighborhoods.[130]

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[126] Lynne Feldman, *A Sense of Place: Birmingham's Black Middle-Class Community, 1890-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 2.

[127] Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 12-3.

[128] Ibid, 10-11.

[129] Howard J. Sumka, "Racial Segregation in Small North Carolina Cities," *Southeastern Geographer* 17, no. 1 (1977): 58-75.

[130] Hanchett, *Sorting Out,* 3.

Although these studies help identify African American neighborhood geographic development within the city overall, they imply more stability than was present in Columbus as the city's black neighborhoods constantly evolved and changed within their own boundaries.

The 1907 Sanborn map; Columbus city directories from 1900, 1906, 1910, 1916, 1921, 1925, 1931; and the 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 issues of the census form the basis of this study of Columbus's black neighborhoods.[131] All Columbus city directories contain an alphabetical list of all the streets within the city during that year. This list of streets then provides the name of the head of household for every building on that street in numerical order. The directories distinguish whether an individual is black by placing a (c) for "colored" or (*) next to their name. This information made it possible to calculate which blocks in 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 had predominantly African American residents by calculating the ratio of white to black residents. Blocks that were 25 to 49 percent black were color-coded pink, blocks that were 50 to 75 percent black were color-coded green, and blocks that were 76 to 100 percent were color-coded orange. These maps were then used to identify changes in Columbus's African American residential patterns overall from 1900 to 1930.

This chapter uses four blocks as case studies for how individual blocks within these larger areas evolved. Because black neighborhood development is larger and more defined in the Liberty neighborhood on the southern side of the city, three blocks in this

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[131] 1900 city directory. *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1906); *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1910); *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1916); *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1921); *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1925); *Columbus, Georgia City Directory*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., 1931).

section of Columbus form the basis of analysis. The Rainey Block, Rogers Block, and Spencer Block, all named after prominent or long-time residents, are all located in Liberty. The Rogers Block's boundaries are Ninth Street in the north, Eighth Street in the south, Seventh Avenue in the east, and Sixth Avenue in the west. The Spencer Block is bounded by Eight Street in the north, Seventh Street in the south, Third Avenue in the west, and Fourth Avenue in the east. The Rainey Block is located between Ninth and Eighth Streets and Fourth and Fifth Avenues. The King Block is on the northern side of the city in the West Highlands neighborhood, located along Nineteenth Street in the north, Eighteenth Street in the south, Robinson Avenue and part of Hamilton Road in the east, and Gorman's Alley in the west. All four blocks consistently had a significant percentage of black residence from 1900 to 1930.[132] Comparing the directories spaced approximately five years apart made it possible to track black residential persistence rates by denoting which individuals persisted on the blocks and for how long.

The block case studies make additional use of the 1907 Sanborn map of Columbus to identify the physical characteristics of these blocks. The 1907 Sanborn map provided a detailed image of Columbus in the early twentieth century. Fifty-three sheets – each of them highly detailed on a scale of fifty feet to one inch – provide detailed depictions of individual blocks and buildings. An index map serves as a key to put the map (and the city) together. As befitted a map intended for fire assessments, the Sanborn Map Company included urban features such as water utilities and information about residential, commercial, and industrial properties across the city. The map used color coding as well as various symbols throughout in order to show location, property type,

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[132] 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 city directories.

building material used, and relative size and spacing of buildings and streets in

Columbus. The 1907 Sanborn map depicts windows, doors, road width, the number of

floors or stories, stable locations, street names and numbers, block thickness,

thoroughfare width, population, prevailing winds, property boundaries, if the building

had a shingle or metal roof, if the property was fireproof, and whether the building's

frame was made of wood, brick, or iron.[133]

The 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses provide additional insight to

Columbus's spatial patterns. The censuses for Columbus denote the street and house

number for every individual. They also list individuals' names, relationship to the head of

household, race, gender, age, marital status, birthplace, occupation, industry, and whether

they own or rent their residence. The various versions of the census made it possible to

track home ownership and identify patterns among African Americans on all four blocks.

The census data of these case studies also provide a representative sample of black

workers in Columbus.

In 1900, Columbus had two distinct areas of the city where a majority of African

Americans lived, one in the south and one in the north. Named for the historic Liberty

Theater, the Liberty District in southern Columbus was larger and more predominantly

black.[134] Although a few blocks as far west as Second Avenue had multiple African

American residents, the blocks on Third and Fourth Avenues were the farthest west in

this portion of the city to have more black than white households. The Liberty

neighborhood extended as far north as Eleventh Street, as far east as Ninth Avenue, and

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[133] Sanborn Map Company, "Insurance Maps of Columbus, Georgia 1907," map, 1907.

[134] JRA Architects, Inc. and KPS Group Inc., *Liberty District Master Plan, Columbus, Georgia* (Columbus Consolidated Government, 2004).

south to Fourth Street. The blocks on the western portion of this developing neighborhood had on average a lower ratio of black to white residents. The blocks that were the most predominantly black in 1900 surrounded the railroad. The smaller, asymmetrical West Highlands neighborhood on the northern side of the city was bound roughly by Twenty-Fourth Street in the north, the Chattahoochee River in the west, Seventh Avenue in the east, and Fourteenth Street in the south. West Highlands is so named because it extends roughly to the west of the East Highlands neighborhood bound by Talbotton Road in the north and Tenth Avenue in the east.[135] A greater proportion of these blocks, especially the western- and southern-most ones, had between 25 and 49 percent black residents. Less than half of these blocks were over 75 percent black.[136]
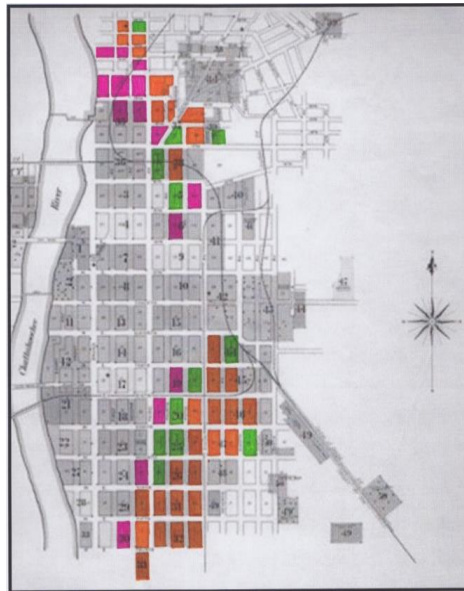

Figure 2. 1900 Black Residences by Percent Population.

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[135] John Lupold, Tina Rust, and Allison Slocum, "Neighborhood Map," Midtown, Inc., Columbus, Georgia; http://www.midtowncolumbusga.org/midtown-living/neighborhoods-historic-districts/ accessed April 5, 2016.

[136] Information derived from the 1900 City Directory.

The Rogers Block, bounded by Eighth Street, Ninth Street, Sixth Avenue, and Seventh Avenue, was approximately 80 percent black in 1900. Figure 3 above shows the 1907 Sanborn map section for this block.[137] The image of the Rogers Block is color-coded to designate which households are black and which are white. Maroon dots represent black residents, while blue dots mark white residents. Buildings without any dot were listed as vacant in the 1900 city directory. The Rogers Block reveals a common theme in African American residential patterns in Columbus. The majority of black residents throughout the city lived in small, shotgun type houses located on small lots relatively close to their neighbors. Shotgun houses were long, narrow rectangles, often spaced closely near other houses of the same type. They were so named because if a person shot a gun straight through the house, the bullet would pass through every room. Most only had three rooms with no hallway. Double shotgun houses were simply two shotgun style houses that shared a wall, essentially fitting two different families into separate sides of the same building. White property owners built these houses specifically for low income workers in urban areas, and African Americans lived in most of them. They were smaller than the other buildings and spaced closer together. Residents of these houses cooked "on a wood stove in the rear room. The two front rooms, lit at night by oil lamps, served as living and sleeping rooms, heated in winter by a fireplace in the wall between them."[138] At least thirty of the black residences on the Rogers Block were either single- or double-shotgun houses.[139]

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[137] 1907 Sanborn map sheet 46, 1900 City Directory.
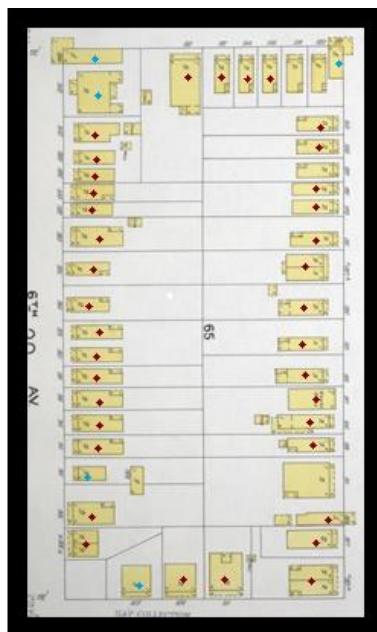
[138] Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard*, 8.

Figure 3. Race of Residents, Rogers Block, 1900.

A closer look at the Spencer Block, along Eighth and Seventh Streets and Third and Fourth Avenues reveals the physical disparities between black and white houses in Columbus around the turn of the twentieth century. The majority of the white houses on the Spencer Block were substantially larger than the black ones. For example, if combined the two African American houses as 310 and 312 Eighth Street were combined into one dwelling, it would be roughly equal to the white house directly next to it at 314 Eighth Street. Overall, the white households on this street had larger lot sizes with more structures than the black ones. Two of the white households had stables located on their property behind their houses, others had coops, outdoor kitchens, or wells.[140] The differences between white and black households exemplified in the Spencer Block in 1900 held true for other areas in Columbus.

[139] Sanborn map sheet 46.

[140] 1907 Sanborn map sheet 25. Once again, blue dots represent white households and maroon ones represent black ones.
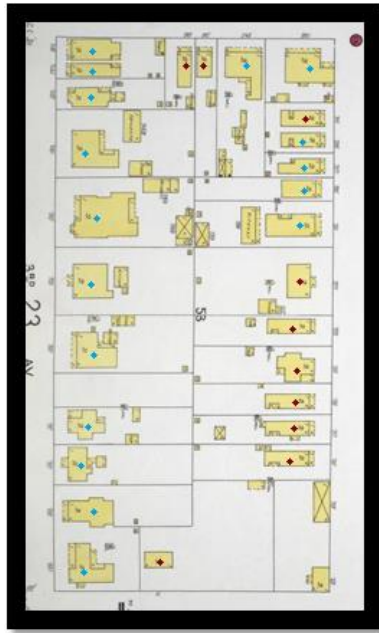
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Figure 4. Race of Residents, Spencer Block, 1900.

The Rainey Block in particular shows the dual residential and commercial nature of Columbus's black neighborhoods. In 1900, three out of the four street corners on the Rainey Block were marked "S" for sales instead of "D" for dwelling. 800 Fourth Avenue served as the residence for the white W. T. Hall household as well as a grocery. 422 Ninth Street was also a white-owned grocery store. Multiple blocks in Columbus between 1890 and 1930 had white businesses on their corner streets. 800 Fourth Avenue continued to be a white-owned business in the predominantly black Liberty neighborhood, but Mrs. A. M. Brown operated the grocery store in 1930. That same year, however, the other four businesses on the Rainey Block were black-owned, including Toles Undertaking Company at 837 Fifth Avenue, Spencer's Millinery at 420 Ninth Street, and Ninth Street

Drug Store. The building at 422 Ninth Street contained multiple black businesses, such as a dentist, music teacher, and insurance salesman.[141]
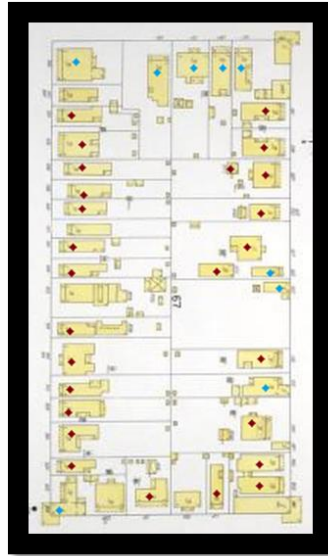

Figure 5. Race of Residents, Rainey Block, 1900.

The King Block shows how whites maintained segregationist ideals of the separation of blacks and whites even when inhabiting the same block. Bounded by Nineteenth Street, Eighteenth Street, and Gorman's Alley in the north, south, and west respectively, the King Block had two streets defining its eastern border: Robinson Avenue and Hamilton Road. These two roads connected on Block Four to form a slight angle on the eastern side of the block. In 1900 only blacks lived on Robinson Avenue and solely whites lived on Hamilton Road. As the name of the street changed, so did the racial makeup of its residents. This pattern of racial division on the King Block continued for the next couple of decades. Although some whites lived in the same type of houses as African Americans, black citizens of Columbus frequently had smaller and more cramped

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[141] 1900 City Directory; 1930 City Directory. 1907 Sanborn map sheet 20.

dwellings with less access to amenities than their white counterparts. Even when residing

on the same blocks, whites often sought to separate themselves from blacks by claiming

street corners, forming clusters, and staying on one side of the block as much as possible,

confining African Americans to the other side.[142]

Figure 6. Race of Residents, King Block, 1900.

Between 1900 and 1910, the spatial pattern of West Highlands changed

significantly. Except for a few outlying blocks, Twentieth Street was the new northern

boundary. To make up for this lack of housing farther north, African Americans

expanded south to Thirteenth Street along Sixth Avenue. The western border was again

the Chattahoochee River, while Seventh Avenue bounded the area in the east. The

geography of Liberty changed very little. In 1910, this area was bounded by Eleventh

Street in the north, Third and Fourth Street in the south, Second Avenue in the west, and

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[142] 1907 Sanborn map, sheet 37; 1900 City Directory.

Ninth Avenue in the east. The blocks continued to be concentrated around the railroad. The individual blocks in both the northern and southern neighborhoods became predominantly black at an increasing percentage. In 1910 there were fewer blocks that were only 25 to 49 percent African American. At the same time, the number of blocks that were 50 to 75 percent and 76 to 100 percent black increased. Columbus's housing became increasingly segregated in 1910 although there were still several blocks on which blacks and whites in the city lived side by side.[143]

Figure 7. 1910 Black Residences by Percent Population.

The majority of people living in Liberty and West Highlands in 1910 rented their homes. Nine white families were renters on the Spencer Block while eight rented homes on the King Block. In 1910, the Rogers Block had no white people. Of the seven white

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[143] 1910 City Directory.

households on the Rainey Block, six rented. Only three white individuals owned their

homes on the Spencer Block, and two people owned their homes on the King Block. The

low rate of white home ownership on these blocks in 1910 could be due to whites' desires

to move to more permanent housing in a white neighborhood as they were able to.

However, the percentage of whites who owned their own homes on the Spencer and King

Blocks, at one out of every three white people and one out of every four respectively, was

much higher than the rate of black home ownership. In total, ninety-seven black families

living in the sample blocks of Liberty and West Highlands rented their homes.[144]

The Rainey Block had the highest rate of African American home ownership. The

rate of black homeowners on this block almost matched that of white ownership on the

sample blocks with one out of every four blacks on the Rainey Block owning a home.

Only one in every thirteen black families of the Rogers Block, one in every seventeen on

the Spencer Block, and one in fourteen on the King Block could own their own homes.

Of the five African Americans listed as owning their home on the Rainey Block in 1910,

two of them also owned businesses. Jason Allen, a tailor, lived with his wife Hennie at

810 Fourth Avenue. James Young, a shoemaker, also owned his own home at 806 Fourth

Avenue. In 1910 Mary Lou Jones owned her home at 822 Fourth Avenue. She inherited it

from her father-in-law, a contractor and painter, who owned the home in 1900. Mary Lou

Jones's daughter, a music teacher, and her son, a brick mason, contributed to the

household income. African Americans that did own their homes often had greater

financial stability than their neighbors that rented. They made up a growing black middle

class in Columbus of businesspeople, home owners, and professionals who were "less

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[144] 1910 U. S. Census.

economically dependent on whites for their livelihood."[145] The greater financial security that came to these families from being the proprietors of their own businesses and additional supplemental incomes gave them a greater ability to afford to own a home in Columbus than African Americans employed in another way.

Gertrude "Ma" Rainey was one of the many black homeowners on the Rainey block in this period. Known as the "Mother of the Blues," Rainey was raised in Columbus and began her career in the city in 1900 at the age of fourteen. "A pioneer on the black entertainment circuit," Rainey traveled across the United States giving performances.[146] Like other black homeowners, she experienced greater financial freedom and less economic dependence on whites in Columbus; accordingly, Rainey bought her family a house in 1920 using the proceeds from her career as a singer. Her two-story frame house at 805 Fifth Avenue was the "only house that she ever owned." [147] Although Rainey did not officially move back to Columbus until 1935, her mother and other family members occupied the house. Rainey resided in the Liberty neighborhood of Columbus until her death in 1939.[148]

One of the best examples of the relationship between home-ownership and Columbus's growing black economic elite was William Henry Spencer. Spencer, who lived in Liberty, was the principal of Columbus's black schools and one of the city's leading black citizens. In 1912, Spencer hired Columbus's Dudley Lumber Company to

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[145] Fon Louise Gordon, *Caste and Class: The Black Experience in Arkansas, 1880-1920* (Athens, Georgia: University Press of Georgia, 1995), 4

[146] Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 15.

[147] National Register of Historic Places, Gertrude "Ma" Pridgett Rainey House, Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia, National Register # 19921118.

[148] Lieb, *Mother of the Blues*, 47.

build his family home at 745 Fourth Avenue. Standing a full story higher than its nearest

neighbors, the two-story Spencer house had a full-length porch and three chimneys and

sat on the southwest corner of Eighth Street and Fourth Avenue. The home was larger

than most of the other buildings on the block and had two bedrooms downstairs and five

upstairs, one for each of Henry's children. The large house also had a formal entrance

and parlor, dining room, kitchen, and back hall, as well as two bathrooms. Although an

exceptional family home, it "befitted one of Columbus Georgia's most respected black

citizens."[149] Even though the majority of African Americans in Columbus rented small

shotgun houses, families like the Spencers were able to build grander, customized homes.

By 1920, Columbus's Liberty neighborhood in the south had expanded once

again. This neighborhood was bound in the north by Eleventh Street, the south by Third

Street, the east by Second Avenue, and the west to Tenth Avenue. As African Americans

moved to the blocks in this area, whites left. In 1920, twenty-seven of the blocks in this

area were at least 76 percent black. Four blocks were between 50 and 75 percent black,

while only one block was between 25 and 49 percent black. Although the black

neighborhood in the southern part of Columbus shifted a few blocks, the true change

between 1910 and 1920 was the higher concentration of African American residences in

this area. By contrast, the black neighborhood in the northern part of Columbus decreased

in size. The Chattahoochee River no longer bounded this area in the west. Instead, the

first blocks to have a significant black population was Second Avenue. Seventh Avenue

in the east, Thirteenth Street to the south, and Twenty-Third Street in the north were the

other limits of this area. The core area surrounding Talbotton Road continued to be

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[149] National Register of Historic Places, William Henry Spencer House, Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia, National Register #19780523.

predominantly African American, but the ratio of black residences to white ones on the blocks of the periphery decreased.[150]

Figure 8. 1920 Black Residences by Percent Population.

In 1920, Ed King along with his wife Lucy, daughter Saddie, and son Primus moved from 408 Nineteenth Street to 416 Nineteenth Street.[151] The family of four relocated to a new rental property "because it was a larger house, more convenience, rather than being richer."[152] The King family "was kinda poor," and even as a child Primus King had to work instead of go to school.[153] In order to support his family, Ed King worked as a laborer in the picker room of a cotton mill. Lucy King supplemented

[150] 1920 City Directory.

[151] Paul A. Davis, "Interview of Primus King, Civil Rights Leader," July 16, 1979, General Oral History Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia. 1920 U. S. Census.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

this income through "laundry, such as washing the white folks' clothes" from home.[154] As a young boy, Primus worked as a water boy at the same mill as his father; when he was older, Primus worked as a chauffeur and butler for a rich white family in Columbus.

The King family had experiences similar to other African Americans living and working in Columbus, Georgia between 1900 and 1930. The majority of African Americans worked low-paying, labor intensive jobs. African American women living in Columbus in 1920 had fewer employment opportunities than African American men. Black women were much more likely to be listed with no occupation in the 1920 census than men. It is unclear, however, if this unemployment was an error or omission in the census or because they could not or did not wish to find employment. Many of the black women without listed employment had young children. If other household members were making enough money to support the family, these African American women may have chosen to take care of their own homes and families rather than seek employment. The majority of black women in Columbus living on the Rogers, Spencer, and King Blocks worked from their own homes. Lucy King, along with forty-four other women on these sample blocks, worked as a laundress. Other black women were seamstresses or dressmakers. One woman worked at home as a hairdresser. Working from home allowed these women to contribute to the financial stability of their families. Most of the female heads-of-household in Columbus in 1920 worked from their homes.[155]

The next most common type of work for African American women in Columbus in 1920 was working for white families in some domestic capacity. Twenty-eight black

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[154] Ibid.

[155] 1920 U. S. Census

women worked as cooks for private families. Others were maids, nurses, and laundresses. Although many of the black women working from home had white customers, those listed as working for private families would travel every day to their employers' houses to complete their mainly domestic duties. There were also a significant number of black women who worked as maids, waitresses, and cooks for white hotels scattered across the city or as janitors for churches, laundries, and doctors' offices. Those women who managed to find employment in the various mills in Columbus engaged in the same type of work as sweepers or cleaners. A small number of black women in Columbus worked in downtown businesses as saleswomen, elevator girls, or milliners. The most educated black women could find work as teachers at one of the black public schools.[156] In 1920, black women in Columbus had few viable employment options.

Black men in Columbus had a greater number of occupations and industries recorded in the census than their female counterparts. In 1920, five male residents were self-employed as barbers, grocers, or shoemakers. These blocks also had black professionals with four ministers and the principal, William Henry Spencer. Others were pressers, blacksmiths, draymen, janitors, porters, plasterers, carpenters, cooks, watchman, glaziers, drivers, newsboys, waiters, or clerks. The majority of men in these skilled or semi-skilled positions worked for white businessmen in Columbus. Most of the African American men living in Columbus were restricted to labor-intensive jobs. Most black men worked odd jobs, such as in the cotton mill, wood yard, grain mill, iron works, junk yard, and at the railroad yard.[157] Their jobs required few trained skills. Sixteen black men living on the King Block in 1920 worked for the cotton mills in Columbus. African

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[156] 1920 U. S. Census

[157] Ibid.

American laborers who worked in the city's mills had to travel through predominantly white neighborhoods in order to reach the western part of Columbus where the mills were located.[158]

By 1930, most African Americans in Columbus lived in Liberty on the southern side of the city. Twenty-seven of the thirty-seven blocks bounded by Eleventh Street in the north, Third Street in the south, Second Avenue in the west, and Tenth Avenue in the east were at least 76 percent black. As the Liberty grew more important, West Highlands declined. In 1930 the neighborhood had only sixteen blocks with a significant African American presence. The neighborhood was also confined to a smaller area bound by Twenty-Third Street in the north, Thirteenth Street in the south, Second Avenue in the west, and Sixth Avenue in the east. Instead of a contiguous area, the neighborhood in 1930 was split into two sections, one along Fifth Avenue and the other along Third Avenue.[159]

The sample blocks in both the Liberty and West Highlands neighborhoods had similar persistence rates and experienced nearly constant change. Few black residents lived at the same place for very long. In a comparison across the 1900, 1906, 1910, 1916, 1921, 1925, and 1931 Columbus city directories, a total of 203 families on the Rogers Block, 128 on the Spencer Block, 155 on the Rainey Block, and 143 on the King Block were listed only once. This means they stayed a maximum of six years at that residence. Census data indicates that for the majority of individuals moved more often than that as there are multiple discrepancies between the heads of household listed in corresponding

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[158] 1920 U. S. Census; 1920 City Directory, 38; Sanborn Map, Sheets 25 and 47.

[159] 1930 City Directory.

censuses and directories. Over 80 percent of African Americans living on these blocks moved after being listed once. [160]
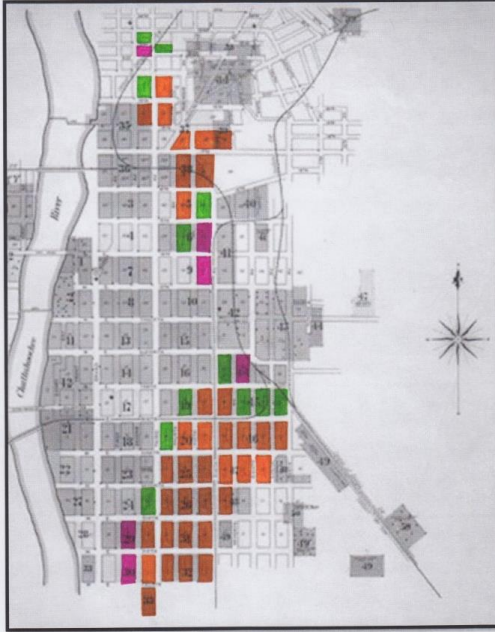

Figure 9. 1930 Black Residences by Percent Population.

For example, George and Mollie Rogers lived in the Liberty neighborhood at 811 Seventh Avenue with their daughter Selina. George was a waiter and owned a cook shop. Mollie and Selina helped supplement the family's income by taking in laundry at home.[161] The couple rented their home in 1900 and 1906, but by 1910 they owned it. The 1930 census valued the Rogers' home at $2500.[162] After George died, Mollie took in boarders. Even though Mollie remained in the same location, she had different boarders in 1930 than in 1920. Other middle class blacks, like George and Mollie Rogers, were

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[160] 1900, 1906, 1910, 1916, 1921, 1925, and 1931 Columbus City Directories.

[161] 1910 U. S. Census; 1910 City Directory.

[162] 1900, 1906, and 1910 City Directories; 1930 U. S. Census.

more likely to stay at the same address multiple years. Columbus's black working class, on the other hand, almost always moved in the hopes of finding better or cheaper housing. Even though Liberty became more predominantly black, the neighborhood was constantly changing as African Americans moved into and out of the district. Despite a growing geographic manifestation of Columbus's black community development, the majority of African Americans' lives in the city were far from stable.

Between 1890 and 1944 Columbus followed similar patterns of residential segregation that McKee observed in his study of Mississippi cities.[163] Southern cities established before the Civil War initially had much more contact between blacks and whites. These cities, like Columbus, were characterized by salt-and-pepper settlement in which both black and white households were dispersed throughout the city. However, with the advancement of Jim Crow laws, housing in Columbus became more segregated. Whites and blacks largely stopped living next to each other or on the same blocks. Instead, streets and railroads separated the races into distinct areas. This process in Columbus resulted in the formation of two predominantly black neighborhoods. As Liberty became an increasingly larger and more concentrated center of black life in Columbus, West Highlands diminished in importance. The individual blocks contained a great deal of instability as only a small proportion of African Americans either wanted or were able to afford to stay in the same place for multiple years. When they moved, they did so for better economic opportunities or better housing. Persistence and home ownership patterns reveal that those who did settle in Columbus's black neighborhood were part of a growing elite. It was this class of African Americans that had the resources and stability to create a "Colored Columbus."

[163] McKee, "Residential Patterns."

However, these areas did not develop into prime residential areas for black residents. After World War II, both West Highlands and Liberty became less important as residential centers. As Columbus's city limits expanded, African Americans gained opportunities to move east and south as more housing became readily available. Macon Road became the new dividing line between white and black housing in the city. When black residents left Liberty and West Highlands, the land was reclaimed and re-used largely for commercial and industrial interests. Although the Liberty Theater, Ma Rainey House, and Spencer House were well-preserved, much of the original Liberty District was demolished in the 1980s as the buildings reached a state of dilapidation. In 2003, however, Columbus's Consolidated Government began a plan to return Liberty District to its historic usage as a combination commercial, entertainment, and residential district.[164]

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[164] *Liberty District Master Plan*, 5 and 13.

The "Golden Age" of Black Business in Columbus, Georgia

In 1922, Primus King "got tired working for other folks and wanted to be [his] own boss."[165] Although perhaps better known for his Civil Rights activism, King was also a preacher and businessman in Columbus, Georgia for over thirty years. King, like many other black businessmen in Columbus around that time, was a barber. He bought his shop on Seventeenth Street for eight dollars from Claude Austin, who also ran another store at the same location. He "wanted to see if a man can make it if he trie[d]" to depend on himself rather than his previous white bosses.[166] Primus King, like other black business owners in Columbus, affected the spatial development of the city through his economic contributions and decisions. King's barbershop on Seventeenth Street, well outside Columbus's traditional downtown central business district, reflected the changing spatial pattern of black businesses. The geography of Columbus's black business district was fundamentally different in the 1930s than it was in 1890. Whereas Columbus's black business district was located within the city's central business district in 1890, by 1930 the majority of Columbus's black businesses left downtown for the Liberty neighborhood.

In the historiography of black businesses, scholars writing in the 1970s were often responding to Affirmative Action measures and sought to justify why federal aid should

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[165] Davis, "Interview of Primus King, Civil Rights Leader."

[166] Ibid.

or should not continue to go to black businesses.[167] Overall, these works argued that

black businesses have historically been unable to compete with white ones and were

largely unsuccessful. Franklin Wilson traced these failures to customer bases. He argued

that black businesses relied predominantly on black patronage while white ones relied on

both white and black customers, giving them greater economic stability.[168] Roy Lee

traced African Americans' limited entrepreneurial success to industries that "were

traditionally ignored by white business."[169] Black businesses that did develop did so

because they required high levels of interaction between business owners and customers

which white businessmen were unwilling to provide for black customers.[170] Lee and

Wilson argued that segregation provided a boost to African American businesses by

protecting them from white competition.[171]

In *The History of Black Business in America*, Juliet Walker argued that comparing

black businesses to white ones minimizes their importance.[172] In this first comprehensive

history of black businesses, Walker wrote that racism and a chronic lack of government

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[167] See especially Robert J. Yancy, *Federal Government Policy and Black Business Enterprise* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974), 7 and 117. Franklin D. Wilson, *The Ecology of a Black Business District: Sociological and Historical Analysis* (Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Papers, Wisconsin University, 1975). Walter B. Weare *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).See also Roy Lee, *The Setting for Black Business Development: A Study in Sociology and Political Economy* (Ithaca: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1973), xv.

[168] Lee, 13. Wilson, 16-17.

[169] Lee, 13.

[170] Wilson, 6.

[171] For further discussion of how segregation opened new business opportunities for African Americans due to a lack of competition with white businessmen, see Yancy, *Federal Government Policy,* 13-18.

[172] Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

support, not a failure to compete with whites, characterized black business development.[173] She further argued that despite laws discouraging black business participation, whites pushing blacks out of trades, government inaction, and racism, that "African-Americans have a history of business participation in America."[174] Walker emphasized the constraints that Jim Crow laws put on black businesses, asserting that "blacks were being forced into a separate economy."[175] African American business people's struggles with segregation and competition with white businesses encouraged black entrepreneurs to emphasize their ties to the black community and provide each other with racial self-help.[176]

The majority of black business history places too much emphasis on one specific industry or business.[177] Overly focusing on these individual parts often makes it hard to understand the big picture of black business and black business district development. Writing only about barbers, insurance companies, or hair care products ignores the contributions that other types of black businesses made. These works give the impression that only one variable changed, as opposed to a continuous evolution. This study, in contrast, will examine black businesses as a whole in one specific city: Columbus, Georgia. Looking at black entrepreneurship as a whole in one city clarifies the larger

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[173] Ibid, xviii.

[174] Ibid, xviii.

[175] Ibid, 187.

[176] For more discussion of how black businesses changed in the 1890s see Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 147.

[177] For barbers see Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line* and Douglas Walter Bristol, Jr., *Knights of the Razor: Black Barbers in Slavery and Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). For insurance companies see Robert Weems, Jr. *Black Business in the Black Metropolis: The Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

geographic patterns in black business district development as it shifts from being part of the larger central business district to part of combined residential and commercial black neighborhoods.

Columbus city directories from 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 provide information about businesses within the city.[178] These years encompass the so-called "Golden Age" of black business during which they experienced a significant amount of growth in number, success, and variety.[179] Each city directory has a section devoted specifically to businesses and professionals in Columbus. This section groups individuals or businesses according to profession. The categories are arranged alphabetically, with the individual businesses within them similarly ordered. This allows black businesses in Columbus to then be grouped by industry: service, retail, manufacturing, entertainment and education, and professionals. [180] The business section of each city directory includes either the business name or owner and address. The city directories also highlight the importance of race in Columbus. The 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 Columbus city directories make it possible to track African American business ownership in the city because each one denotes whether a business has either a black or white owner. The earliest city directories designate race by including a *c* for "colored" after African Americans' names.[181] In 1910 the publishers made it even easier to determine if an

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[178] 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 City Directories.

[179] For a more thorough discussion of the "Golden Age" see Walker, *History of Black Business,* 182-224. Walker calls this period the "Golden Age" both for the number of black businesses that developed in this period, but also for their success. She points to these years as the origin for most large black corporations.

[180] For a breakdown of which categories were included in what industries, see Figure 17.

[181] Information derived from the 1894 and 1900 City Directories.

individual was black by including an asterisk (*) before his or her name or business.[182]

By compiling a list of black businesses for each year, the city directories can be used to

track if businesses moved from one location to another in Columbus and which

businesses were successful.

One of the intended uses of the Columbus city directories, according to its

publishers, was to assist people in making economic decisions. The classified lists and

business directory formed a buyers' guide for the city by showing what goods and

sources were available and "assist[ing] in selection of most reliable and satisfactory firms

to deal with."[183] The street directory showed the exact type of business, including the race

of its owner and its location, so that consumers could make informed purchases. The city

directories were also useful for business owners. They could help potential entrepreneurs

decide what area of town would be best for their business by allowing them to see what

businesses or residence types were located in the area as well as determining basic

information about their competition in Columbus.

Each directory also included advertisements at the front and back of the directory

as well as on each page along the top, bottom, outside edges, and in the middle of the

page in the case of the 1921 Columbus city directory. This level of advertising, according

to the 1931 directory publishers, made them the "most effective and the most economical

method of reaching all the people all the time."[184] These advertisements allowed certain

black businesses to provide additional information to their customers. For example, John

Shepherd included more specific information about the type of painting work he did by

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[182] 1910 City Directory.

[183] Information derived from the 1931 City Directory, 469.

[184] Information derived from the 1931 City Directory, 467.

buying a quarter-page advertisement at the end of the 1900 Columbus city directory. It read "Painter and Glazier also Graining and Kalsomining, shop no. 110 Thirteenth Street, Columbus, GA, Contractor for Painting, Dwellings, Stores etc. all Contract."[185] The directories indicated that businesses had an advertisement on one of the pages by printing it in bold, providing an additional way for these businesses to stand out.

This chapter utilizes the information compiled from the city directories to create maps of black businesses in Columbus in order to analyze the development of its black business districts.[186] This project used the chosen city directories to create a list of black businesses for each year. This list was then used as the basis for a map of those businesses, one for each year. These maps focus on the core of Columbus where the majority of black businesses and the black business district were and not the periphery, although there were black businesses located in the northeastern part of Columbus. The map may also underrepresent the full extent of black entrepreneurship in Columbus because the city directories, while a valuable source of information, potentially underestimate the extent of black businesses in Columbus. The business section of the directories does not include African Americans who worked at home, such as taking in laundry or sewing clothes. As a result, the entrepreneurship of black women in Columbus may especially be underrepresented. [187]

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[185] Information derived from the 1900 City Directory, 435.

[186] For a more in-depth explanation of mapping businesses from city directories see Susan M. Yohn, "The Primacy of Place, Collaborations, and Alliances: Mapping Women's Businesses in Nineteenth Century Brooklyn." *Journal of Urban History* 36, no.4 (2010): 413. See also Mills, *Cutting Along,* 150-151. For historians using similar methods see Don Harrison Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

[187] 1907 Sanborn map, Index sheet.

Mapping makes it possible to identify the black business district in Columbus in a way that a mere list of businesses is cannot. Unlike the directories, maps make it clear in what part of the city black businesses were located and which streets and blocks are in proximity to one another. This methodology allows for the creation of maps that identify Columbus's black business district from 1894 to 1931. In *The Ecology of a Black Business District*, Franklin Wilson provided these qualifications for a black business district: "conceptually, the definition of an area as a B. B. D. [Black Business District] has essentially two complementary elements: first, the concentration of black businesses in a specific area of the C. B. D. [Central Business District] or some other section of the city; and second, a large proportion of the clientele attracted to the area are black."[188] For these reasons, the areas focused on in the rest of this chapter contain a statistically significant proportion, i.e. high levels of concentration, of black businesses within Columbus. However, it is important to note that all of these areas also had white businesses. African Americans in Columbus were not participating in an economic vacuum. Although certain areas in the city did not have any black businesses, most black businesses were in close proximity to white ones: often beside, across the street from, or on opposite sides of city blocks from them. Columbus's black businesses did not exist in isolation but instead came into close contact, and often competition, with white ones.

By 1890, Columbus, Georgia was a thriving medium-sized manufacturing city. The Panic of 1873 reduced Columbus's major economic diversification as the resulting depression reduced trade and some businesses relocated to Columbus. However, this depression only affected certain large, predominantly white, manufacturers as none of the

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[188] Wilson, *Ecology of a Black Business District,* 4.

cotton mills in the city closed.[189] Columbus experienced massive growth throughout this time period, particularly in the 1920s, both in population and land annexation through urbanization and migration. The majority of industries in the city were tied to cotton, and most people, including African Americans, worked for the city's largest mills in some capacity. However, Columbus was more than just a typical mill town. There were a number of small businesses that contributed to the economic development and health of the city. Despite their contributions, histories of Columbus largely ignored African Americans.[190] Although not the overwhelming majority of business owners, African Americans made up a significant and growing portion of self-employed workers in Columbus.

Although there were black businesses before the 1890s in Columbus, from 1894 to 1931 black businesses in Columbus grew at an increased rate. In 1894 black businesses in Columbus made up 6.7 percent of total businesses in the city. By 1931 black businesses in Columbus increased by approximately 177 percent, with 169 black businesses accounting for 7.9 percent of the overall total. There were also a greater number of business types by 1931. The directories revealed African American participation in 13 business categories in 1894 and 37 in 1931.[191] In 1928 Edwin J. Turner, a prominent black physician in Columbus, reflected on the vitality of the city's black businesses in a Keynote Address for the Georgia State Medical Association of Physicians, Pharmacists, and Dentists. He reported that "wonderful opportunities exist for

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[189] Jensen, "'Let Us Not,'" 38-9.

[190] Harris, *Our Town*. Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia.* Nancy Telfair, *History of Columbus.*

[191] 1894 and 1931 City Directories

the establishment and successful development of almost any line of Negro business" and

that Columbus had "plenty of business enterprise which are too numerous to mention –

all doing well."[192] Turner then went on to list some of the business types, promoting the

successes of the city and providing a brief glimpse of the impact these businesses had.

Dr. Turner was proud of the thriving nature of these black businesses and the services
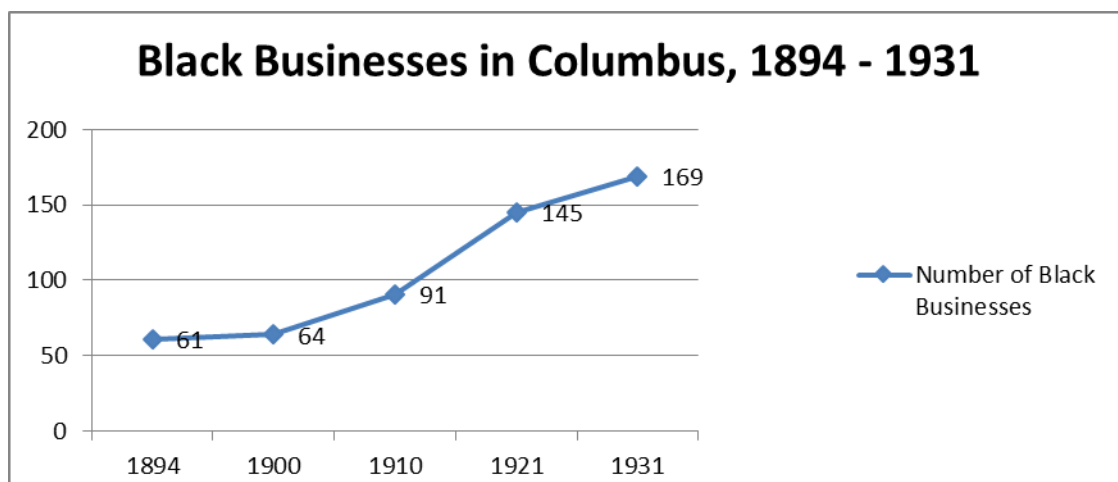
they provided for the black community.

Figure 10. Black Businesses in Columbus. Information derived from the 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 City Directories.

In 1894 Columbus had a total of 61 black businesses. Almost half of these

businesses involved manufacturing or creating goods, including a painter, dye works, and

blacksmiths. The most common profession for African American business owners in

1894, however, was shoemakers, with a total of seventeen throughout the city. These

manufacturers played a significant role in Columbus because they competed with white

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[192] Edwin J. Turner, "Keynote Address of Welcome," *Georgia State Medical Association of Physicians, Dentists, and Pharmacists*, *May 14, 1928, Souvenir Program*. Alfonso Biggs Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

businesses. One of the most successful manufacturers in Columbus was John Shepherd, listed as a painter at 110 Thirteenth Street in 1894. He remained a painter at this address until at least 1910, and could afford to place an advertisement in the 1900 Columbus city directory. He moved his business to Seventeenth Street by 1921, and was no longer working in 1931.[193]

The next largest industry in 1894 Columbus was service, made up of barbershops and restaurants. In 1893 Amos Sherald came to Columbus. He originally found work in Swan's drug store as a janitor but had dreams of becoming a barber. By 1898, Sherald was able to save enough money to go into business with his cousin Harry Marion. That year they opened Marion & Sherald Barber Shop at its original location on Dillingham Street with two chairs, one for Marion and one for Sherald. "Their next location was Tenth Street between First and Second Avenues" near the Springer Opera House and across from the old Muscogee County courthouse.[194] Marion & Sherald moved again in 1904 to 1021 First Avenue near other black businesses. There, they employed six profession barbers, a manicurist, and a boot black. In the following years, Sherald Barber Shop expanded its services to include dry cleaning and alterations as well as selling drinks, newspapers, magazines, and records.[195] Barbers, like Primus King and Amos Sherald, continued to be important parts of Columbus's black businesses, as barbers frequently ranked as one of the highest percentages of categories within the service industry. Columbus had several retailers, comprised mostly of grocers in 1894. There

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[193] 1894, 1900,, 1910,, 1921, and 1931 City Directories

[194] Amos Sherald, "100 Year old business still gives fine service," *Columbus Times*, December 22, 1998.

[195] Bill Winn, "The city's oldest black business?" *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer.* March 14, 1995.

were only four professionals listed in that year's city directory, three physicians and one druggist.[196]
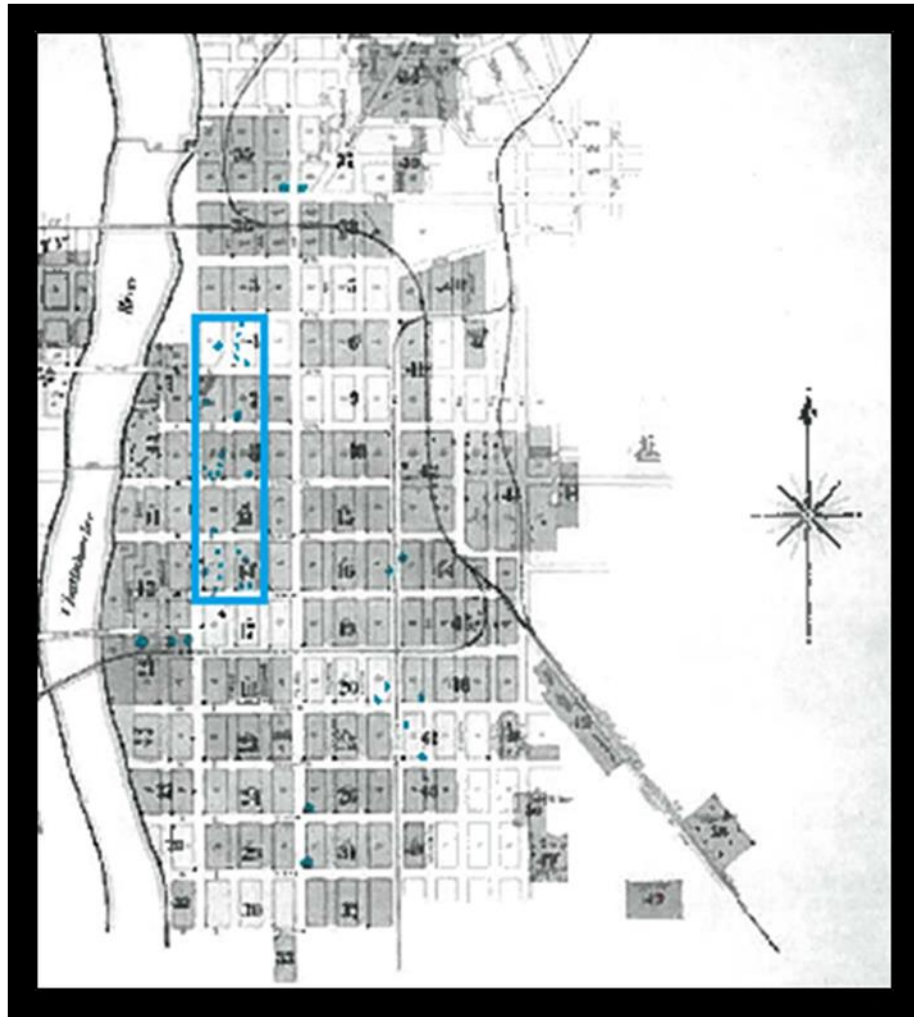

Figure 11. Black Businesses in Columbus, 1894. Information derived from the 1894 City Directory.

In 1894 Columbus had an identifiable black business district. Half of all black businesses in Columbus in 1894 were concentrated along nine blocks along both sides of First Avenue, from Tenth Street in the south to Fifteenth Street in the south. These blocks were within Columbus's main business district. In the 1890s, the courthouse was at the

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[196] 1894 City directory.

center of the city. An individual only had to walk up to three-quarters of a mile north of this building along First Avenue to go past the majority of businesses in Columbus. Even though the black business district in Columbus was concentrated over nine blocks, the majority of businesses within this larger group were situated along the 1000 blocks of First Avenue, totaling eight in all. The 1400 block of First Avenue also had a higher proportion of black businesses within this district, having six. The black business district in 1894 contained a variety of black businesses including most of the barbers, blacksmiths, and restaurants. All three physicians and the druggist were located along First Avenue. Only four of the shoemakers had businesses in this area. Although the black second-hand goods store and cigar retailer were in this area, none of the black grocers were. [197]

In the 1890s, the courthouse was at the center of Columbus. The largest mills and other manufacturing centers developed along the banks of the Chattahoochee River on the western part of town. Walking north from the courthouse along First Avenue, a person would pass the majority of downtown businesses in Columbus. First Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh Streets contained many white businesses including the Springer Opera House, groceries, boarding houses, barbers, and a large marketplace as well as three black-owned businesses, consisting of one restaurant and two retailers. The two shops were next to each other in the same building but surrounded by a white boarding house on one side and a white drug store and home on the other. The black restaurant was across the street and was part of a contiguous section of brick buildings. The 1100 block had no black businesses directly on First Avenue; instead, it contained two white churches and various government buildings. The 1200 block had one black

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[197] Information derived from the 1894 City Directory.

barbershop in between a large stable and carriage house on one side and "negro tenements" on the other.[198] There were a couple of black businesses on the 1400 block of First Avenue, but they were near more tenements.[199] In the 1890s, Columbus's black businesses were surrounded by white-owned businesses or cheap housing. These black businesses were on the outskirts of the central downtown business district.

By 1900 Columbus had 64 black businesses. Manufacturers, and in particular shoemakers, continued to make up the largest percentage of African American business owners. Seven black shoemakers were located at the same address in 1900 as they were in 1894. Alfred Holloway, W. Carter, H. R. Davis, and W. H. Luke were also at the same location in 1910.[200] Although the total number of manufacturers remained relatively stable between 1894 and 1910, the categories of professions within this industry expanded to include upholsterers, cabinetmakers, harness-makers, and dressmakers. The number of black retailers remained the same in 1900 as in 1894, but the distribution was different. In 1900, there were four grocers, two butchers, and two businesspeople selling fish. The total number of African American businesses in the service industry decreased from 1894, as there were no black restaurants listed in the 1900 Columbus city directory. This statistic could be related to changes in customer base as black businesses shifted from serving whites to serving the black community. Certain service industry businesses could have been vulnerable to this transition if there were not enough African Americans in the city capable of sustaining them. Columbus's black professionals experienced the

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[198] Sanborn Map Company, "Insurance Maps of Columbus, Georgia, 1895," map, 1895, Sheet 16, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/sanborn/CityCounty/Columbus1895/Sheet16.html.

[199] 1895 Sanborn map, Index Map, Sheet 10, Sheet 16, Sheet 17, Sheet 20, and Sheet 21, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/sanborn/CityCounty/Columbus1895/IndexMap.html?Welcome.

[200] Information derived from the 1894, 1900, and 1910 City Directories

most rapid growth. By 1900, professionals made up almost a quarter of all of Columbus's

black businesses. Columbus gained ten black nurses as well as a dentist and an
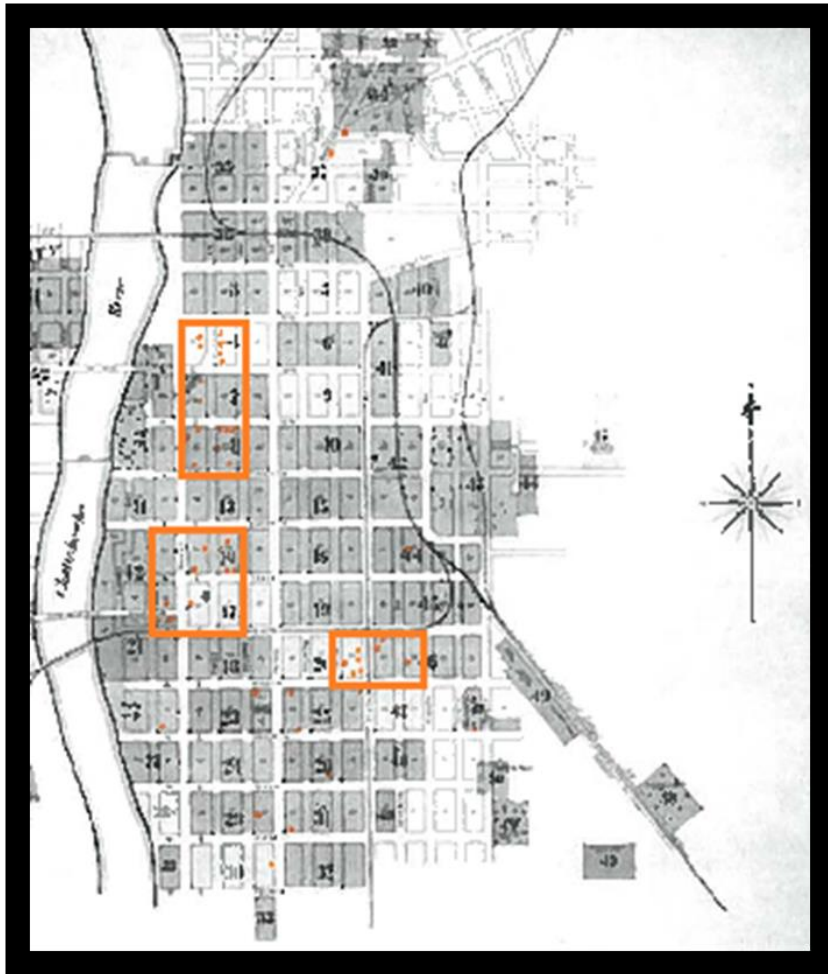
undertaker.[201]

Figure 12. Black Businesses in Columbus, 1900. Information derived from the 1900 City Directory.

Columbus's Central Business District surrounding First Avenue remained

important geographically for black businesses in 1900, accounting for approximately 52

percent of black businesses within the city. However, instead of one contiguous black

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[201] Information derived from the 1900 City Directory.

business district, the concentration along First Avenue was interrupted, as there were no black business districts between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets on First Avenue. Black businesses along Broad Avenue and Dillingham Street, to the west of First Avenue, contained an increasing percentage. One third of Columbus's black professionals, most of its service industry, and at least two-thirds of the manufacturers were located in the Black Business District within the larger Central Business District in 1900. In 1900 Columbus's black businesses were also heavily concentrated around the 800 blocks of Sixth Avenue, located in the southeastern part of the city along the Central of Georgia Railroad line. These included four nurse/midwives, one grocer, and one seafood retailer, and accounted for about 11 percent of Columbus's total black businesses. This second centralized area of black businesses was an early indication of lasting changes in the geography of Columbus's black business district. [202] These blocks continued to be particularly important to the city's black business community.

Between 1900 and 1910 black businesses in Columbus increased by 42 percent, reaching 91 in all.[203] The black retail sector experienced the most significant growth. In 1910, retailers accounted for the greatest percentage of Columbus's black businesses. Of these, grocers were the most important as this category alone comprised almost 30 percent of all black businesses. Grocers continued to make up the largest occupation type in 1921 and 1931. By 1910 Columbus had Price's Normal and Industrial School and two boarding houses at 1026 and 1022 First Avenue, respectively owned by Mamie Jackson and Dinah Stewart, which targeted only black customers. Despite the overall expansion of black businesses and retail in particular, by 1910 the number of African Americans

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[202] Information derived from the 1900 City Directory.

[203] Information derived from the 1900 and 1910 City Directories.

who owned manufacturing businesses had decreased significantly. There was less than half the number of manufacturers in 1910 as there had been in 1900. Half of the shoemakers, all of the dressmakers and harness makers, and half of the blacksmiths were no longer in business. Although more African American manufacturers went out of business by 1910, white-owned small manufacturing businesses across Columbus also decreased. Changes in transportation and clothes-making left most manufacturers unable to compete with large mills or manufacturing agencies. The number of black professionals in the city also decreased, as the 1910 *City Directory* listed no black nurses. However, the increase in businesses aimed specifically at black customers shows the increasing success of entrepreneurs who focused on the needs of Columbus's African American community.[204]

In 1910, 46 percent of black businesses in Columbus continued to be contained within the city's main business district centered along First Avenue. However, within this larger area, 19 businesses were on the 1000 blocks of First Avenue and 11 were on the 00 blocks of Tenth Street, making up 20 percent of total black business within the city. The vast majority of black businesses in the service industry were located in these areas. They included multiple cook shops, clothes cleaners, barbers, insurance agencies, and tailors. Several shoemakers and blacksmiths also conducted business on these blocks. This section of the black business district contained grocers, produce shops, shoe shops, and general merchandise businesses. This section of town also had individuals or institutions

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[204] Information derived from the 1910 City Directory.

that specifically served Columbus's African American community, including physicians, druggist, black boarding houses, and a black newspaper.[205]
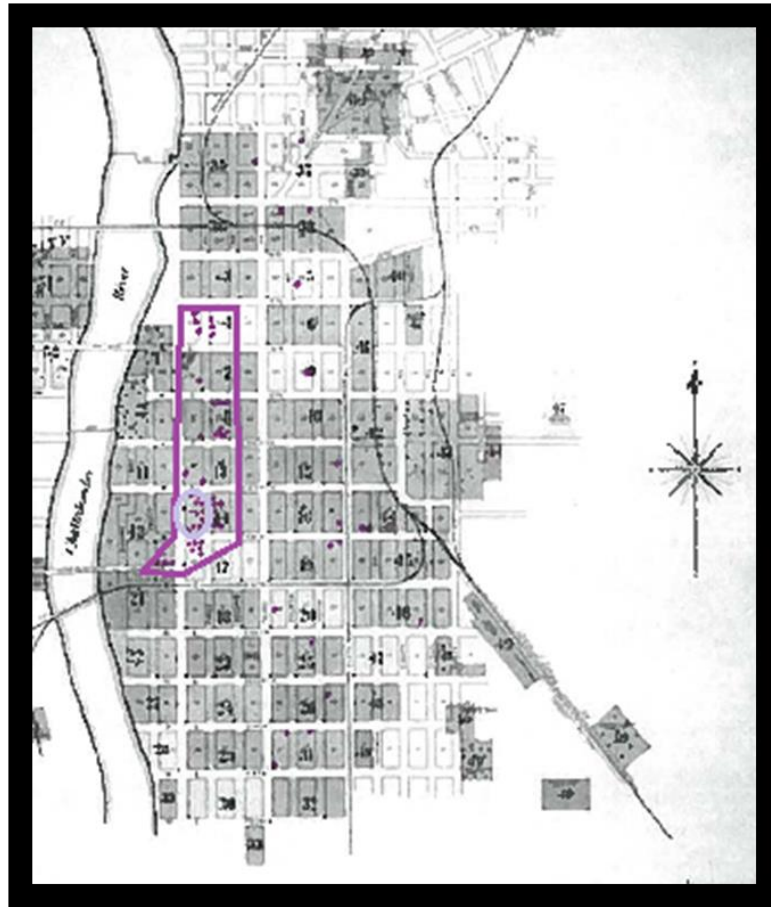

Figure 13. Black Businesses in Columbus, 1910. Information derived from the 1910 City Directory.

One reason that the 1000 blocks of First Avenue and 00 blocks of Tenth Street were so heavily concentrated is that multiple businesses shared the same buildings. For example, three physicians and one druggist shared business space at 20 Tenth Street. A barber and a clothes cleaner and presser shared 1021 First Avenue while a dentist and insurance agent were right next door, sharing 1021½. 1026 First Avenue doubled as a

boarding house and shoe manufacturing center. 1033½ had three black businesses: a

newspaper, tailor, and insurance agent. The high concentration of businesses in this area

indicates that African American entrepreneurs viewed it as a desirable location for their

businesses. This pattern also suggests that sharing buildings or office space was one

strategy that allowed African Americans in Columbus to begin and continue running

businesses. Black businesspeople shared space in other parts of the city, but most

examples in 1900 come from First Avenue or Tenth Street. [206]

By 1920, Columbus had grown significantly. World War I ushered in a new phase

of economic opportunity in the city, especially with the establishment of Fort Benning to

the south of Columbus.[207] Between 1910 and 1921, the population of the city increased

51 percent, totaling 31,125.[208] Black businesses in Columbus experienced the greatest

amount of growth between 1910 and 1921 with an almost 60 percent increase across the

city.[209] The overall ratio of black businesses in certain industries remained similar to the

breakdown in 1910, but the sheer number of black businesses reached 145. Although the

number of African American manufacturers and professionals did increase in 1921, they

did so by a very low percent. Columbus's true black business growth came from services

and sales. Black retailers in Columbus increased by about two-thirds, and made up more

than a third of total black businesses. Grocers once again experienced the most expansion

overall, accounting for 42 black businesses.[210] The number of service industry businesses

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[206] Information derived from the 1910 City Directory.

[207] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 91.

[208] 1910 U. S. Census.

[209] Information derived from the 1910 and 1921 City Directories.

[210] Information derived from the 1921 City Directory.

almost doubled, making it the largest black business sector. Of service businesses, restaurants, clothes cleaners, and insurance companies grew the most. In particular, J. L. Sconiers, an undertaker located on Ninth Street, was "very prosperous."[211] In 1916 he founded one of Columbus's most successful black businesses, Sconiers Funeral Home, and later ran Columbus's only black-owned bank, Laborers Savings and Loan Company. The three-story Sconiers building became a landmark of black success in the city as it eventually housed black insurance companies, professionals, and a public meeting hall.[212]

As black businesses exponentially expanded in 1921, there was the highest concentration of black businesses within one area of Columbus of any time from 1894 to 1931. [213] There were 39 businesses within an area of four blocks. The block containing businesses along 1000 First Avenue, City Market, and 00 Tenth Street alone had 27 businesses. The majority of businesses within this area catered to an African American clientele. These included a billiard hall, dentists, an attorney, physician, hairdresser, barbers, insurance agents, grocers, and restaurants. One third of all black service providers in Columbus in 1921 were located in this area. 1025½ First Avenue continued to be an important building as it contained twelve black businesses. The rest of Columbus's black businesses in 1921 were spread in clusters across the city, one in the north and a few small ones in the south.[214]

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[211] *Souvenir Program*, 9.

[212] 1921 Columbus City Directory and 1931 City Directory.

[213] Information derived from the 1921 City Directory.
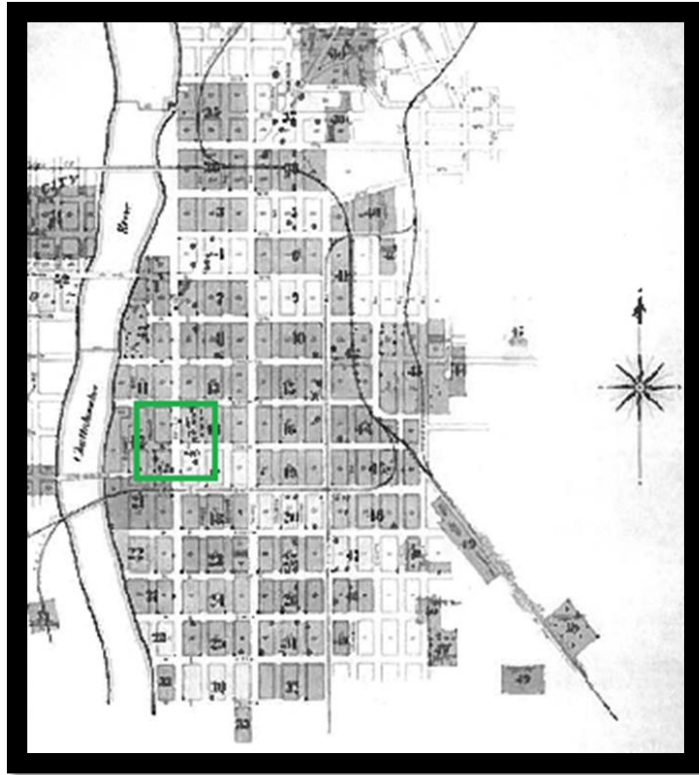
[214] Ibid.

Figure 14. Black Businesses in Columbus, 1921. Information derived from the 1921 City Directory.

By 1931, the growth rate of black businesses in Columbus slowed; the city had an additional 24 black businesses, for a total of 169. The total number of black manufactures, retailors, and service providers all decreased from 1921 to 1931. Entertainment and education, however, experienced more than a 550 percent increase, going from three businesses in 1921 to 20 in 1931. One such business was Columbus's first black theater, the Liberty Theater, which opened in late April 1925. With seating for 600 people, the Liberty Theater quickly became "the major place in Columbus for black audiences" to be entertained. [215] In addition to showing movies, the Liberty Theater hosted live performances of singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, big band

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[215] National Register of Historic Places, Liberty Theater, Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia, National Register #19840522.

performances, vaudeville acts, and dramatic readings. By 1931 Columbus also gained a

black hotel and golf course. The number of professionals in Columbus once again

experienced massive growth, going from 15 in 1921 to 52 by 1931. This increase

included two pharmacies on Ninth Street: the Ninth Street Drug Store, owned by Richard

Pierce, and Coffee's Drug Store. Columbus also gained another black physician, Dr.

Willis T. Ayers, who practiced medicine at 1436 Fifth Avenue. In 1920, professionals

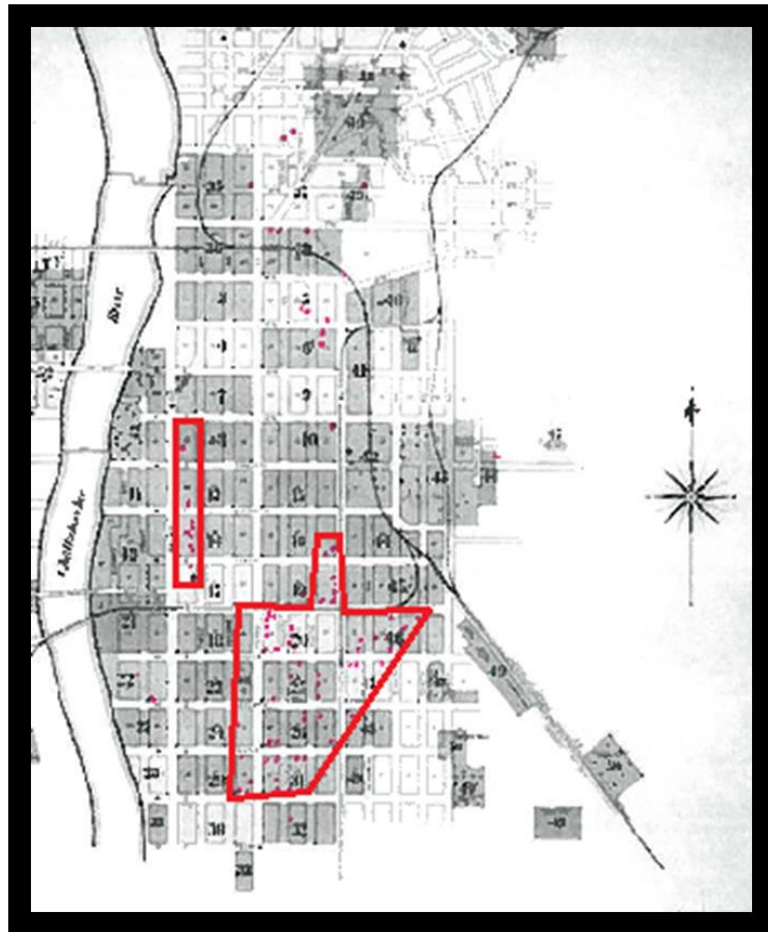made up 30 percent of businesses in Columbus and were the greatest proportion of black

businesses.[216]

Figure 15. Black Businesses in Columbus, 1931. Information derived from the 1931 City
Directory.

[216] 1931 City Directory.

In 1931, relatively few black businesses remained in Columbus's previous black business district. There was a small cluster of businesses that remained in the 1000 block of First Avenue, mainly the physicians and clothes cleaner, but the number of black businesses in this block decreased to a mere eight. The vast majority of black businesses in 1931 were located on the south side of the city, but they were dispersed across a much larger area than previous years. They did not form a contiguous line on a single street. Instead, these black businesses began as far west as the eastern side of Second Avenue and went as far east as Ninth Avenue. Most stayed between Fifth Street and the railroad tracks along Ninth Street, but some businesses continued along Sixth Avenue as far north as Tenth Street. Many were located near street corners near clusters of other black businesses. These businesses were more closely intertwined with residences. One of the best examples of the relationship between black homes and businesses in 1931 was the physician Edwin Turner. Dr. Turner's practice was out of his home at 519 Tenth Street.[217] This transition in business location corresponded to demographic growth as African Americans were the predominant residents of these neighborhoods. This relocation of the black business district reveals that the district responded to changes in customer base by moving closer to their intended consumer. There was no longer one single defined black business district.[218]

There are several possible economic and social explanations for the changing spatial pattern of Columbus's black business district. One of the most likely factors affecting the shift was African Americans' access to credit. The R. G. Dun & Company's

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[217] *Souvenir Program*, 10. 1931 City Directory.

[218] Information derived from the 1931 City Directory.

Mercantile Agency Reference Book contains a list of manufacturers, merchants, and other businesses in Columbus. [219] Beside each business, the *Mercantile Agency Reference Book* lists a credit rating, comprised of a combination of estimated pecuniary strength and general credit. These ratings range from High, Good, Fair, and Limited, and from less than 500 dollars to over one million.[220] Though the *Mercantile Agency Reference Book* did not explicitly supply the race of businesses, the names of proprietors was cross-referenced with the 1931 Columbus city directory to identify 21 black businesses.[221] Of these, only J. H. Carter's grocery store had high credit, valued approximately 20,000 to 35,000 dollars.[222] Even though Carter had the highest credit and most pecuniary strength of any black business in Columbus, his credit score of SE2 was far from the top score in Columbus. No black businesses in Columbus qualified for good credit, but four had fair. Seven businesses, including Toles Undertaking Company, which was the oldest black business in Columbus in 1930, had limited credit.[223] The *Mercantile Agency Reference Book* also included several businesses, Sconiers included, that had no listed credit report. The R.G. Dun Company noted that "The absence of a Rating, whether of capital or credit, indicates those whose business and investments render it difficult to rate definitely."[224] Potential creditors would have to send an inquiry to the R. G. Dun Company in order to

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[219] R. G. Dun & Co., *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book (And Key) Containing Ratings of Merchants, Manufacturers, and Traders Generally*, September 1930, vol. 250.

[220] Ibid, 1.

[221] R. G. Dun & Co., 19-20. 1931 City Directory.

[222] R. G. Dun & Co., 19.

[223] R. G. Dun & Co., 19. "Snap Shots Here and There about Colored Columbus," *Columbus Times*, May 23, 1931, 8. *Columbus Times* Newspaper Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[224] R. G. Dun & Co., 1.

receive a more detailed explanation of the individual's credit. The majority of black

businesses, including Coffee's Drug Store, had a general credit of less than 500 dollars.

Because most black businesses in Columbus had relatively poor credit and little

pecuniary strength, it would have been more difficult for them to get loans and extend

credit to customers. [225] African American business owners' lack of credit could have

made it financially infeasible to afford expensive downtown locations.

More black business owners may have chosen to leave downtown due to changes

in transportation. Despite the presence of a few streetcar suburbs, Columbus was

primarily a walking city for the majority of its African American residents in the 1890s.
[226] The city limits extended approximately one mile from the center of town to the north,

south, and east.[227] In 1900, there was one black harness maker, indicating that individuals

in the city still relied on horses for transportation.[228] The 1920s were a decade of

exponential growth for Columbus. In 1922 Fort Benning became a permanent

installation, boosting the city's economy and causing a housing boom that in turn

expanded the city limits and pushed African Americans to certain parts of Columbus.[229]

Because the city was much larger in both population and geographic size in 1931,

customers would have to travel farther to reach downtown black businesses than they did

in the 1890s, making them less convenient. There were nine black businesses involved

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[225] Brown, *Race in the American South*. 184.

[226] Harris, *Our Town,* 20.

[227] 1895 Sanborn map, Index Map.

[228] Information derived from the 1900 City Directory

[229] Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia,* 91 and 97. Mahan, *"Fall Line,"* 108.

with automobiles in 1931, where there had been none in 1921.[230] Enough people were

driving cars in the late 1920s in Columbus to make it profitable for multiple black

businesses like garages, repair shops, and gas stations to cater to them. However, the

majority of African Americans in Columbus did not have access to cars and instead relied

on walking for transportation.

Early black businesses, especially those in the service sector, competed with

white ones for white customers. In *Knights of the Razor,* Douglas Bristol documented

how black barbershops dealt with Jim Crow. He argued that prevailing racist ideas about

germs meant that white customers began to choose white service providers.[231] As black

entrepreneurs lost white customers, their only option for continued financial success was

to appeal to black customers. The *Columbus Times* reported in 1931 that "more than 100

industries furnish[ed] Colored Columbus with employment."[232] According to an

advertisement by the Merchants and Mechanics Bank, Columbus ranked second in

Georgia for the "number of wage earners and wages earned."[233] African Americans in

Columbus by 1931 had accumulated enough purchasing power to support the city's black

businesses economically. At the same time, segregation increased the demand for

services in the black community. African Americans could continue to shop at some

white businesses, especially retailers; but "blacks' patronage of barber and beauty shops,

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[230] Information derived from the 1921 and the 1931 City Directories.

[231] Bristol, *Knights of the Razor,* 149.

[232] "More Than 100 Industries Furnish Colored Columbus with Employment," *Columbus Times*, May 23, 1931, 5. Columbus Times Newspaper Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

[233] "Columbus Is Forging Ahead," *Columbus Times*, May 23, 1931, 5. Columbus Times Newspaper Collection, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

restaurants, mortuaries, entertainment centers, taverns, hotels and motels, and certain types of professionally oriented establishments was severely restricted."[234] The most successful black professionals, entertainment organizations, and certain retail and service businesses were able to meet African Americans' demands for such amenities.

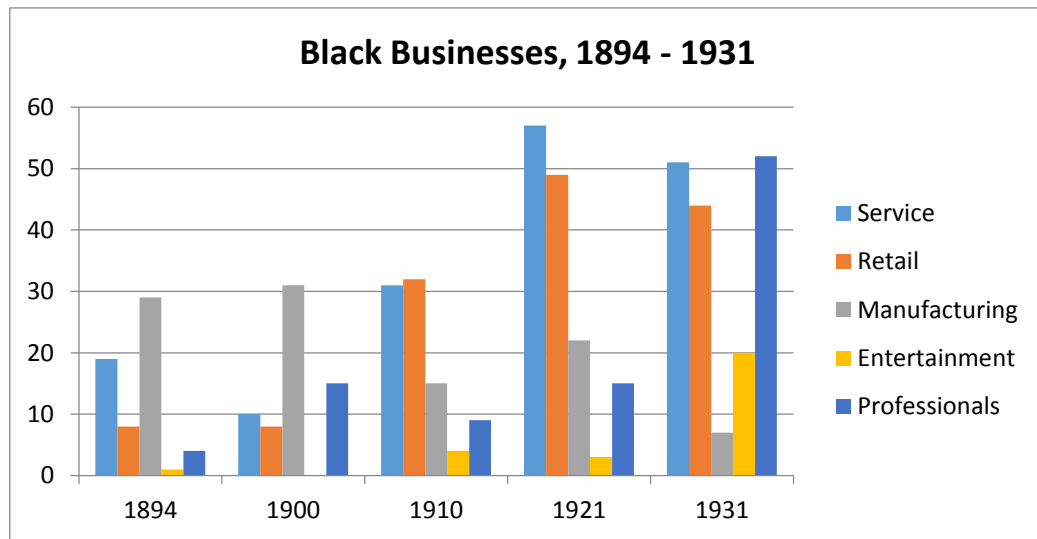**Black Businesses, 1894 - 1931**

Figure 16. Black Businesses by Industry in Columbus, 1894 – 1931. Information derived from the 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 Columbus city directories.

The overall changes in Columbus's African American involvement in particular industries were related to those in customer base. Despite the continued success of individual manufacturers, the overall number of black manufacturers in Columbus decreased and the industry went from comprising approximately half of the African American businesses in the city to less than five percent, as they became unable to successfully compete against white manufacturers.[235] The significance of black retailors as an industry also varied, but the number overall increased. For the most part, black

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[234] Wilson, *Ecology of a Black Business District,* 16.

[235] Lee, *Setting for Black Business,* 98.

retailers continued to compete with white businesses for customers, accounting for the decrease in the 1920s. However, by 1931 neighborhood grocers were the most common black business type by far. Although the number of black businesses involved in the service industry between 1894 and 1931 fluctuated, in 1931 they made up approximately one third of all black businesses in Columbus. Where black barbers, tailors, shoeshines, and clothes cleaners would have served white customers as well as black ones in 1894, only African Americans would have patronized black hairdressers, insurance companies, beauty shops, and funeral homes. By 1931, Columbus had a thriving black entertainment and education sector, comprising twenty businesses that served only African Americans in the city. Black professionals in Columbus experienced the most significant growth between 1894 and 1931. In 1894, Columbus only had four black professionals; by 1931 this number had increased to 52. Black professionals went from being one of the smallest industries in 1894 to the largest in 1931, and relied directly on Columbus's African American community to stay profitable.[236]

Service	Retail	Manufacturing	Entertainment	Professional
Ambulance	Automobile	Basket maker	Billiards	Attorney
Barber	Bicycle	Blacksmith	Boarding House	Clergy
Beauty Shop	Butcher	Cabinetmaker	Hotel	Contractor
Bootblack	Cigar	Coal	Moving Pictures	Dentist
Clothes Cleaner	Fish	Dressmaker	Newspaper	Druggist
Cook Shop	Fruit	Dye Works	Saloon	Embalmer
Confectioner	Gas and Oil	Harness maker	School	Laboratory
Funeral	Meats	Painter	Club	Midwife
Hairdresser	Millinery	Plasterer	Hall	Mortician
Insurance	Produce	Shoemaker		Nurse
Masseur	Second-hand	Soft Drink		Physician
Restaurant	Shoes	Watch Repair		Undertaker
Shoeshine	Wood Yard	Upholsterer		
Tailor				

Figure 17. Types of Businesses within Each Industry.

[236] Information derived from the 1894, 1900, 1910, 1921, and 1931 City Directories.

The evolution of Columbus's black business district was directly related to black businesses' emphasis on serving the city's black community. As Columbus grew, the city developed increasingly segregated neighborhoods, creating concentrations of African Americans in two specific areas.[237] Moving near black neighborhoods made economic sense because the rent was often cheaper in these areas and it allowed black businesses greater access to their consumer market. Although some black businesses had always been located relatively close to black homes, by 1931 most black businesses had left the centralized downtown business district for dispersed locations across black neighborhoods.[238] As the large black neighborhood to the south of the city increased in importance, black businesses relocated there. When the northern neighborhood began losing its proportion of black residents near the upper end of the central business district, black businesses also left the area. The black business district spatial pattern mimicked African American's residential patterns in Columbus.

Black businesses in Columbus experienced dramatic change and growth during the Golden Age. Where they were integrated into Columbus's central business district in 1894, by 1931 most black businesses were dispersed among black neighborhoods. The geographic location of Columbus's black business district reinforced the idea of a separate identity and community for African Americans in the city. Segregation led to the development of cities within cities with boundaries drawn along the color line as African

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[237] See chapter 2 of this thesis for more about neighborhood development in Columbus.

[238] The 1895 Sanborn Map indicates "negro tenements" across the street from the 1894 location of two black businesses on First Avenue. In 1895, these businesses were also close to white homes near the central business district. Additionally, a significant number of black businesses in 1900 were located in a growing black neighborhood on the southeastern side of the city. Information derived from the 1931, 1900, and 1894 City Directories.

Americans successfully created communities and a public life of their own. As the city

changed shape, so did the black business district.

Conclusion

Although Fort Benning came to Columbus in 1918 during World War I, it was not until after World War II that it began to have a major impact on the city. Fort Benning became, and continues to be the city's largest employer.[239] In the beginning, Fort Benning was organized along racial lines like Columbus, with black and white soldiers eating and sleeping in different places and performing different types of work. This changed when President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948 that mandated desegregation of the military.[240] Fort Benning's forced desegregation was part of a new phase of Columbus's development through the slow end of Jim Crow. The patterns of segregation established during the 1890s provided the basis for many of the major changes to the city after World War II. The Civil Rights Movement would end legal segregation and have a lasting impact on the city.

The period between 1890 and 1944, when the Civil Rights Movement began in Columbus, marks a crucial period in Columbus's city development. Race thoroughly divided the city into a white Columbus and a separate "Colored Columbus." Jim Crow laws kept African Americans from taking part in public life by ensuring they could not

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[239] John S. Lupold, "Columbus," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 30 March 2004, Web, 16 April 2016. See also Beryl I. Diamond, "Fort Benning," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 10 March 2003, Web, 16 April 2016.

[240] Executive Order 9981 of July 26, 1948, Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces. 13 FR 4313. http://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981a.htm

use city-owned properties like libraries and parks. A cumulative poll tax restricted

blacks' ability to vote while city planning in Columbus favored the interests of white

citizens over black ones and further entrenched patterns of segregation. The majority of

African Americans in Columbus worked labor intensive, low-paying jobs in a limited

number of occupations. Any black person who stepped out of what whites considered

their "place" in the city risked being lynched. Despite these challenges, African

Americans developed a vibrant community separate from white Columbus through

churches, fraternal societies, social clubs, and schools. The black neighborhoods and

businesses built under Jim Crow restrictions changed greatly when segregation ended.

On July 4, 1944 Primus King walked into the Muscogee County Courthouse in

Columbus to cast a vote in the Democratic Party's primary election. King was part of a

new rising black middle class in Columbus that was not satisfied with the status quo and

wanted more than incremental change. After a police officer pulled him away from the

courthouse, King walked three blocks to his lawyer's office and began the process of

suing the Democratic Primary Party for $5,000 for denying him his right to vote.

Columbus's black community provided support for King. The Citizen Committee, along

with area churches, and the local chapter of the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), "raised more than $10,000 to fight the case,

paid of all lawyers and the transportation."[241] King won his suit and as a result eliminated

the all-white primary in Georgia and "eliminated the legal barriers that had stood in the

way of black Georgians' right to cast ballots in state and local elections."[242] King's court

case was a key moment in the end of segregation in Columbus.

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[241] Davis, "Interview of Primus King, Civil Rights Leader."

Even as Columbus's black citizens made political gains, the city's neighborhoods remained separated between black and white. Throughout the 1940s, Columbus expanded geographically. Liberty began to contain fewer permanent residents and became a more commercial area of town. African Americans in the city took advantage of new housing opportunities and moved east and south. Both Liberty and West Highlands lost prominence as the center of black life in the city. As Columbus's black neighborhoods declined, so did the black businesses within them. The end of segregation unfortunately led to the demise of many businesses that prospered under Jim Crow by providing services to the black community. Desegregation meant that African Americans would have access to white service providers. At the same time, black businesses lost their prime location near black customers as new neighborhoods sprang up across the city.

After World War II, Macon Road became the new dividing line between the races in Columbus. In 1957, Cross Country Plaza, the suburban first shopping center in Columbus, opened at the intersection of Auburn Avenue and Macon Road. [243] By 1965 an indoor shopping center, Columbus Square Mall, debuted on Macon Road, further solidifying the areas hold on retail shopping. By the mid-1960's these new retail establishments bridged the color line in the city by serving both black and white customers. Instead of being separated by "white only" and "colored" sections, the different races once again mingled in the same place with equal access to consumer goods. Sadly, this process hastened the demise of many black businesses in Columbus.

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[242] Craig Lloyd, "Primus E. King (1900-1986)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 30 July 2013. Web. 31 March 2016.

[243] Tony Adams, "Resale Retailer 2nd and Charles Landing at Cross Country Plaza," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, August 31, 2015.

The Civil Rights movement created legal equality which worked to erode Jim segregation

and allowed African Americans to begin to chip away at the racial barriers of Jim Crow.

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89

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